

Angela Brazil

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# The Leader of the Lower School



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# The Leader of the Lower School

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BY ANGELA BRAZIL

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LONDON: BLACKIE & SON, Ltd., 50 OLD BAILEY, E.C.

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A SUCCESSFUL CLIMB

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# **The Leader of the Lower School**

**A Tale of School Life**

**BY**

**ANGELA BRAZIL**

Author of "The Youngest Girl in the Fifth"  
"A Pair of Schoolgirls" "The New Girl at St. Chad's"  
"A Fourth Form Friendship" &c.

*ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN CAMPBELL*

BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED  
LONDON GLASGOW AND BOMBAY

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## Contents

	CHAP.	Page
	I. GIPSY ARRIVES	<a href="#">9</a>
	II. THE <i>QUEEN OF THE WAVES</i>	<a href="#">21</a>
	III. GIPSY MAKES A BEGINNING	<a href="#">31</a>
	IV. A MASS MEETING	<a href="#">44</a>
	V. A PITCHED BATTLE	<a href="#">55</a>
	VI. AMERICAN FUDGE	<a href="#">68</a>
	VII. GIPSY TAKES HER FLING	<a href="#">80</a>
	VIII. DAISY FORGETS	<a href="#">96</a>
	IX. GIPSY GROWS ANXIOUS	<a href="#">108</a>
	X. THE MILLIONAIRESS	<a href="#">122</a>
	XI. GIPSY TURNS CHAMPION	<a href="#">137</a>
	XII. A SPARTAN MAIDEN	<a href="#">150</a>
	XIII. A LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION	<a href="#">162</a>
	XIV. MOUNTAINEERING	<a href="#">173</a>
	XV. A SCHOOL MYSTERY	<a href="#">187</a>
	XVI. A FRIEND IN NEED	<a href="#">204</a>
	XVII. A TANGLED STORY	<a href="#">215</a>
	XVIII. GIPSY AT LARGE	<a href="#">226</a>
	XIX. THE UNITED GUILD FESTIVAL	<a href="#">241</a>

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## Illustrations

	Page
A SUCCESSFUL CLIMB	<a href="#">Frontispiece</a> <a href="#">177</a>
THE LOWER SCHOOL FIND A LEADER	<a href="#">50</a>
"GIPSY GENERALLY RESPONDED WITH SPIRIT"	<a href="#">118</a>
AN INTERVIEW WITH MISS POPPLETON	<a href="#">188</a>
"HE PAUSED AND PEERED AT GIPSY"	<a href="#">230</a>

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## THE LEADER OF THE LOWER SCHOOL

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# CHAPTER I

## Gipsy Arrives

ONE dank, wet, clammy afternoon at the beginning of October half a dozen of the boarders at Briarcroft Hall stood at the Juniors' sitting-room window, watching the umbrellas of the day girls disappear through the side gate. It had been drizzling since dinner-time, and the prospect outside was not a remarkably exhilarating one. The yellow leaves of the oak tree dripped slow tears on to the flagged walk, as if weeping beforehand for their own speedy demise; the little classical statue on the fountain looked a decidedly watery goddess, the sodden flowers had trailed their heads in the soil, and a small rivulet was running down the steps of the summer house. As the last two umbrellas, after a brief and exciting struggle for precedence, passed through the portal and the gate was shut with a slam, Lennie Chapman turned to her companions and heaved a tragic sigh.

"Isn't it withering?" she remarked. "And just on the very afternoon when we'd made up our minds to decide the tennis championship, and secured all the courts for the Lower School. I do call it the most wretched luck! I'm a blighted blossom!"

"We'll never persuade the Seniors to give us all the courts again!" wailed Fiona Campbell. "They said so emphatically that it was only to be for this once."

"I believe they knew it was going to be wet!" growled Dilys Fenton.

"You don't think if it cleared a little we might manage just a set before tea?" suggested Norah Bell half hopefully.

"My good girl, please to look at the lawn! Do you think anyone in her senses would try to play on a swamp like that?"

"It's getting too late in the year for tennis," yawned Hetty Hancock. "Don't believe we shall get another game at all. We'd better resign ourselves."

"Resign ourselves to what?" asked Daisy Scatcherd.

"Why, to leaving the championship till next summer, and to not going out to-day, and to sitting stuffing here and moaning our bad luck, and feeling as cross as a bear with a toothache--at least, that's how I feel: I don't know what the rest of you do!"

"I should like to have gone home with the day girls," sighed Dilys Fenton.

"No, you wouldn't!" snapped Norah Bell. "You know it's jollier to be a boarder; we do have some jolly times, even if it does rain. You can't expect it always to keep fine, and as for----"

"Oh, Norah, don't preach! We must have our growls--it lets off steam. I think it's the wretchedest, miserablest, detestablest, most altogether sickening afternoon that ever was--there!"

"If only something would happen, just to cheer us up a little!" said Lennie Chapman, opening the window rather wider and putting her head out into the rain.

"What do you want to happen?"

"Why, something exciting, of course--something interesting and jolly, and out of the common, to wake us up and make things more lively."

"You'll fall out of the window if you lean over like that, and that would be lively, in all conscience, if you were picked up in fragments. Come in; you're getting your hair wet."

"Let me alone! I shan't! I say, what's that? There's a cab turning in at the gate; it's coming up the drive!"

Five extra heads immediately poked themselves out of the window regardless of the rain, for the Juniors' sitting-room commanded an excellent view both of the carriage drive and of the front steps.

"It is a cab!" murmured Dilys excitedly.

It certainly was a cab, just an ordinary station four-wheeler, with a box on the top of it, bearing the initials G. L. painted in large white letters. As the vehicle came nearer they could see a girl's face inside, and--yes, she apparently caught sight of the row of heads peering out of the window, for she smiled and turned to somebody else who sat

beside her. There was a grinding of wheels on the gravel, the cab drew up at the steps, the door opened, and out hopped a dark-haired damsel in a long blue coat. She gave one hurried glance at the window, smiled again and waved her hand, then vanished inside the porch, where she was instantly followed by her companion, a middle-aged gentleman, who carried a bag. The cabman began to take down the box, and the sound of the front door bell could be heard plainly--a loud and vigorous peal, forsooth--enough almost to break the wire! The six Juniors subsided into their sitting-room. Here, at least, was something happening.

"Who is she?"

"Where's she come from?"

"Is she a new girl?"

"Haven't heard of anybody new coming. Have you?"

"She looks jolly."

"I hope she's going to stay."

"I say, let's go downstairs and ask if anyone knows anything about her," said Hetty Hancock, suiting her action to her words, and hurrying out of the room with her five schoolmates following close at her heels. But nobody knew; not even the Seniors could give the least information. Indeed, the six who had seen the newcomer from the window had the advantage, for none of the others had witnessed the arrival. The girls were consumed with curiosity. A scout, who ventured ten steps into the forbidden territory of the front hall, came back and reported that talking could be heard in the drawing-room.

"A big, deep voice, like a man's, and Poppie's saying 'Yes'. I daren't stop more than a second; but somebody's there, you may be sure of that. And the box is standing in the vestibule too."

"I believe she's come to stay!" said Dilys.

"The cab's waiting at the door still, though," objected Norah Bell. "She may be going back in it."

At tea-time Miss Poppleton's accustomed place was empty, and speculation ran high among her pupils. All kinds of wild rumours circulated round the table, but there was no means of verifying any of them, and the girls were obliged to go to preparation with their curiosity still unsatisfied. At seven o'clock, however, when the Juniors had finished their work and trooped back to their own sitting-room, they found the mystery solved. In front of the fire, warming her hands between the bars of the high fender, and looking as comfortably at home as if she owned the place, stood the stranger who had skipped so quickly out of the cab that afternoon. She was a girl who, wherever she was seen, would have attracted notice--slim and erect and trim in figure, and a decided brunette, a real "nut-brown maid", with a pale olive complexion, the brightest of soft, dark, southern eyes, and a quantity of fluffy, silky, dusky curls, tied--American fashion--with two big bows of very wide scarlet ribbon, one on the top of her head and one at the nape of her neck. She smiled as the others entered, showing an even little set of white teeth, and four roguish dimples made their appearance at the corners of her mouth. She seemed to have assumed proprietorship of the room so entirely that the Juniors stopped short in amazement, too dumbfounded for the moment to do anything but stare. The stranger stepped forward with almost an air of welcome and, dropping a mock curtsy, announced herself.

"Glad to make your acquaintance!" she began. "Miss Poppleton said she'd introduce me to the school, but I guessed I'd rather introduce myself--thought I'd do the thing better than she would, somehow. I don't like stiff introductions--I'm not at all a starchy sort of person, as I dare say you can see for yourselves; and I prefer to make friends after my own fashion. My name's Gipsy Latimer, and I'm American and British and Colonial and Spanish all mixed up, and I've travelled half round the world, and been in seven different schools, and I was fourteen last birthday, and I arrived here this afternoon, and I'm going to stop on a while, and I just adore cricket, and I detest arithmetic in any shape, and I'm always ready for any fun that's on the go. There! I've told you all about myself," and she curtsied again.

The girls laughed. There was something decidedly attractive and breezy about the newcomer. Her dark eyes danced and twinkled as she spoke, and there was an unconventional jollity in the very high-pitched tone of her voice, and an infectious merriment in her dimples.

"What did you say your name was?" asked Hetty Hancock, by way of making the first advances.

"That's right--fire off your questions! I've been at seven schools before this, and everybody starts with the same catechism. I'm ready to answer anything within reason, but perhaps I'd best take a seat while you're at it. No, thanks! I prefer the table--always like the highest place, you see! I've sat on the mantel-piece before now. Yes, I said my name was Gipsy--G--I--P--S--Y."

"But it's not your real name, surely?"

"You weren't christened that?"

"Only wish I had been! No, my godfather and godmothers didn't know their business, and they went and gave me the most outlandish, sentimental, ridiculous, inappropriate name you could imagine. You might try a dozen guesses, and you'd never hit on it. Don't you want to guess? Well, I'll tell you, then--it's Azalea."

"Azalea--why, I think that's rather pretty," ventured Lennie Chapman.

"Pretty enough in itself, perhaps, but it doesn't suit me. Do I look like an 'Azalea' with my dark hair and eyes? They should have had more sense when they christened me. Why, an Azalea ought to be a little, pretty, silly thing, with blue eyes and pink cheeks and golden hair--all beauty, you know, and no brains, like this girl! What's your name? You're more an Azalea than I am."

"I'm Barbara Kendrick!" gasped that flaxen-headed member of the Upper Third, not quite knowing whether to be flattered or offended.

"There you are--not a bit like a Barbara! Nothing in the least barbarous about you. I think there ought to be a law against naming a girl till she's old enough to choose for herself. Well, as I told you, I was christened Azalea, but everybody saw from the first it didn't fit. 'She's a regular little gipsy!' Dad said; so they called me Gipsy, and Gipsy I mean to be. I made Dad tell Miss Poppleton so, and enter me Gipsy on the school books. I wasn't going to start in a new place as Azalea."

"So you've been to school before?" said Dilys Fenton.

"Rather! I told you I've been to seven schools--three in America, two in New Zealand, one in Australia, and one in South Africa. This is the first English school I've tried."

"Seven--and you're only fourteen! Why, you must have been to a fresh one every year!"

Gipsy nodded.

"You're just about right there. Never stayed more than two terms at any of them. No--they didn't expel me! I tell you, I'm an absolute miracle of good behaviour when I like. It was simply because Dad and I were always moving on, and whenever he went to a fresh place I had to go to a fresh school. You don't think I'd let him leave me in America when he was going to Australia, do you?"

"Haven't you got a mother?" asked Barbara Kendrick.

"Shut up, you stupid!" murmured Dilys Fenton, giving Barbara a nudge.

Gipsy rolled her handkerchief into a tight ball, and unrolled it again before she replied.

"I've nobody in the world but Dad," she answered, and there was just a suspicion of huskiness in her voice. "He's never gone far away from me before, but he's starting to-morrow for South Africa, and I'm to stop here till he comes back. He says it won't seem long. I hope I'm going to like it. I've only been three days in England, and you're the first English girls I've spoken to. Dad said England ought to feel like home, but it's a queer kind of home when one's all alone. Tell me what this school is like. Is Miss Poppleton nice? She gushed over me before Dad in the drawing-room, but she looks as if she could be a Tartar, all the same. I've had a little experience with schoolmistresses. I can generally take their measure in five minutes. She's got a sister, hasn't she--a Miss Edith, who showed me my bedroom? I expect I shall like her. Have I hit the mark?"

The girls looked at one another and laughed.

"Just about," said Fiona Campbell. "Poppie's temper varies like the barometer. One day she's at 'set fair', and calls everybody 'dear', or 'my child'; and the next she's at 'stormy', and woe betide you if you so much as drop your serviette at dinner, or happen to sneeze in the elocution class! Miss Edie's ripping! She doesn't teach much--only one or two classes. She does the housekeeping, and sees we keep our clothes tidy, and change our wet stockings, and all that sort of thing."

"And how many are there of you? Remember, I've been dumped down here at a day's notice, and I know absolutely nothing at all about the school yet. Is it a big one?"

"Twenty boarders and seventy-two day girls--that's ninety-two, and you'll make the ninety-third. There are eight Senior boarders, and they've got a sitting-room of their own, with a carpet on the floor. We, the common herd, are only

provided with linoleum, as you see."

"Eight from twenty leaves twelve! You're not all here."

"No; two of us are practising, and the kids have half an hour with Miss Edith before they go to bed."

"Shouldn't mind half an hour with Miss Edith myself. By the by, are you keen on Fudge here?"

The girls stared.

"I don't know what you mean," returned Hetty Hancock rather stiffly. "What is Fudge?"

Gipsy threw out her arms in mock horror.

"Shades of Yankee Doodle!" she exclaimed. "These benighted Britishers have actually never heard of the magic name Fudge! Why, in the States it's a word to conjure with! I've known some girls who absolutely lived for it."

"You haven't told us what it is yet. Is it a game?"

Gipsy laughed till she nearly collapsed off the table.

"A game? No; Fudge is candy--the most delicious adorable stuff you ever tasted. Get me a pan, and some sugar, and some milk, and some butter, and I'll make some for you this instant. How you'll bless me!"

"Don't I wish you could!" sighed Norah Bell. "But we're not allowed to make toffee except on the 5th of November. They let us have a pan then, and we boil it over this fire."

"We'll have a pan of our own here," said Gipsy cheerily. "I'll go out and buy one to-morrow. I can't exist without Fudge."

"But we aren't allowed to go out and buy things," exclaimed the girls in chorus.

"Do you mean to tell me we mayn't go on the least scrap of an errand if we ask leave?"

"Not if you ask ever so!"

"Why, that's dreadful! I can't be boxed up like that. I'd as soon be in prison. I'm afraid you'll find me walking out on my own sometimes."

"You'll get into an uncommonly big scrape if you do!"

"Dad warned me I'd have to be very prim and proper in England," said Gipsy, looking serious, "but I didn't know things were as bad as that. I'll begin to wish I hadn't come here. Oh dear! we were going right through to Chicago if we hadn't been shipwrecked, and I love America."

"Shipwrecked!" shrieked the girls. "Do you mean to tell us you've been in a real wreck?"

"Only just come from it," replied Gipsy calmly. "A very wet, cold, unpleasant affair it was, too! Especially in only one's nightdress! Every rag of clothing I possessed went to the bottom. Dad had to rig me out again at Liverpool. That's why I've come to this school in such a hurry. Dad lost his papers, and had to go back to South Africa, and he wouldn't take me with him this time. So you see I've been sprung upon you suddenly--an unexpected blessing, you might call me."

"Oh, do tell us about the wreck!" implored Hetty Hancock. "I've never in all my life met anybody who'd really and truly been shipwrecked."

"All right! Come and squat by the fire. I'm tired of the table, and prefer the floor for a change. Please don't expect anything extra blood-curdling, for you won't get it, unless you'd like me to romance a little. Where do you want me to begin? All my adventures in all the places I've lived at? That's rather a big order. You'll have to be contented with a piece. Here goes!"

But as Gipsy's descriptions, though graphic, were not of a remarkably lucid character, it will perhaps be well to omit her version of the story, and, for a better understanding of her independent, whimsical little self, give a brief account of her previous career in a separate chapter.

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## CHAPTER II

### The "Queen of the Waves"

INTO the fourteen years of her life Gipsy had certainly managed to compress a greater variety of experiences than falls to the share of most girls of her age. She had been a traveller from her earliest babyhood, and was familiar with three continents. Her father was a mining engineer, and in the course of his profession was obliged to visit many out-of-the-way spots in various corners of the globe. As Gipsy was all he had left to remind him of her dead mother, he never could bear to be parted from her for long, and he would generally contrive to put her to school at some place within tolerably easy reach of the vicinity of his mining operations. In the holidays he would sometimes take her up to camp, and Gipsy had spent long delightful weeks in the hills, or the bush, sleeping under canvas, or in a log cabin or a covered wagon, and living the life of the birds and the rabbits as regards untrammelled freedom.

She had grown up a thorough little Colonial, self-dependent and resourceful, able to catch her own horse and saddle it, to ride barebacked on occasion, and to be prepared for the hundred and one accidents and emergencies of bush life. She had taken a hand at camp cookery, helped to head cattle, understood the making of "billy" tea, and could find her own way where a town-bred girl would have been hopelessly lost. The roving life had fostered her naturally enterprising disposition; she loved change and variety and adventure, and in fact was as thorough-hearted a young gipsy as any black-eyed Romany who sells brooms in the wake of a caravan. At her various schools she had of course learnt to submit to some kind of discipline, but her classmates were Colonials, accustomed to far more freedom, than is accorded to English girls, and the rules were not nearly so strict as in similar establishments at home.

After a year spent in South Africa, Mr. Latimer was prepared to return to America, and, wishing to do some business in London *en route*, had booked passages for himself and Gipsy on the *Queen of the Waves*, a steamer bound from Durban to Southampton. Gipsy was an excellent sailor, and thoroughly enjoyed life at sea. She would cajole the captain to allow her to walk upon the bridge, or peep inside the wheelhouse; or persuade the second mate to take her to inspect the engines, or teach her flag-signalling on the upper deck: and wheedled marvellous and impossible stories of sharks and storms from the steward. The voyage had passed quickly, and until the headlands of the north coast of Spain were sighted had been quite uneventful.

"Only a few days more, and we shall be in port," said Mr. Latimer, looking through his pocket telescope at the outline of Cape Finisterre. "I think we may congratulate ourselves on the splendid weather we've had the whole time."

"We mustn't boast too soon," returned Captain Smith. "There are some ugly clouds gathering, and I shouldn't be surprised if we had a rough night of it in the Bay. What would you say, Gipsy, if we had the fiddles on the table at dinner?"

"Those queer racks to keep the plates from slipping about? Oh, I'd love to see them on! I've never been in a big storm. The wind may just blow, and blow, and blow to-night. The old sailor who sits on the top of the North Pole can untie all the four knots in his handkerchief if he likes."

"Don't wish for too much. One knot will be quite sufficient for us if we're to get across the Bay in comfort. You'll tell a different tale by to-morrow morning, I expect."

As the captain had prophesied, the dark clouds gathered quickly, and brought both a squall and a shower. The vessel was entering the Bay of Biscay, and that famous stretch of water was already beginning to justify its bad reputation. Gipsy had the satisfaction, not only of seeing the racks used at dinner, but of witnessing half the contents of her plate whirled across the table by a sudden lurch of the ship. The rolling was so violent that she could not cross the cabin without holding tightly to solid objects of furniture.

"I'm afraid we're going to have a terrible tossing," said Mr. Latimer, as he bade Gipsy good night. "Mind you don't get pitched out of your bunk. We're having bad weather with a vengeance now."

"The old sailor on the North Pole has untied all four knots," said Gipsy to herself, as she lay awake listening to the blowing of the gale. It was indeed a fearful storm. The vessel was tossed about like a cork: one moment her bows would be plumped deep in the water, and her stern lifted in mid-air, with the whirling screw making a deafening noise overhead; then all would be reversed, and the timbers seemed to shiver with the effort the ship made to right herself.

Gipsy found it impossible to sleep when her heels were continually being raised higher than her head, and sometimes a sudden roll would threaten to fling her even over the high wooden side of her berth. Everything in the cabin had fallen to the floor, and her boots, clothes, hairbrush, books, and indeed all her possessions were chasing one another backwards and forwards with each lurch of the vessel. The noise was terrific: the howling of the wind and the

roaring of the waves were augmented by the creaking of timbers, the clanking of chains, and an occasional crashing sound that appeared to come from below, where the cargo had broken loose, and was being knocked about in the hold.

For an instant there seemed to be a lull; then, as if the storm had been waiting to gather fresh fury, a tremendous sea swept down upon the ship, dashing across the decks with a roar like thunder. Gipsy hid her face in her pillow. It would pass, she supposed, as the other waves had passed, and they would steam on as before. Then all at once she sat up in her berth. The great throb, like a pulsing heart to the vessel, that had never ceased day or night since they left Durban was suddenly still. The engines had stopped working. A moment afterwards her father burst into the cabin.

"Gipsy, child!" he exclaimed. "We must go on deck! Here, fling this coat round you! No, no! You can't wait to dress! We've sprung a bad leak, and the captain says we must take to the boats. Hold tight to my arm, and be a brave girl!"

It was with the utmost difficulty that the pair made their way up the lurching stairs on to the deck. Here the wind was furious, and would have blown them overboard had they not clung to the railings for support. In the fitful gleams of moonlight Gipsy could see towering waves rise like great mountains, and fall against the ship. The sailors were already lowering the boats, and she could hear the sound of the captain's speaking-trumpet as he shouted his orders above the noise of the storm. Were they indeed to trust themselves to the mercy of that terrible sea? Gipsy watched with alarm as the first frail-looking boat was successfully launched on the seething water.

"Have I time to fetch my papers?" asked Mr. Latimer, as the captain came in their direction.

"No; only to save yourself and your child," was the hasty reply. "Come at once; the vessel is filling fast, and may settle even before we can get off her."

When Gipsy afterwards recalled the various events of that night, she decided that the most dreadful moment of all was when, with a lifebelt fastened round her waist, she was lowered over the ship's side. Both the vessel and the lifeboat were so pitched about by the enormous waves that it was a perilous passage; for a few seconds she swung in mid-air, with only blinding foam and spray around her. Then there was a shout, she was grasped by strong hands from below, and drawn down into a place of comparative security. In another minute her father had followed her, and was seated by her side. The captain waited till all the boats were launched and he had seen the last of his crew off in safety, and he had scarcely left the deck himself and taken his place in the lifeboat before the doomed vessel heeled over, and with no further sign or warning disappeared into the depths.

All night long, through the cold and darkness, the little party was tossed upon the surface of the swirling waters; but towards dawn the storm abated, and when day broke, the sea, though still running fast, was sufficiently calm to enable the sailors to make some use of their oars. They put up a signal of distress, and waited anxiously, hoping that some passing vessel might notice them, and stop to pick them up. Hour after hour went by. Cold, hungry, and drenched to the skin, Gipsy tried to be brave, and to bear patiently what she knew must be endured equally by all. The sun rose high, and shone down warmly upon them, but there was still no sign of either land or a ship. It was long past noon when one of the crew, with a jubilant shout, pointed eagerly to a tiny black streak of smoke on the horizon, which they knew must issue from the funnel of some distant steamer. With frantic energy they waved jackets and handkerchiefs, to try to attract the attention of those on board. Would they be seen, or would the ship pursue her course without noticing the small speck far away on the water? There was a minute of horrible uncertainty, then: "They've sighted us!" yelled the captain. "They're turning her about and putting her back!"

"Thank God we're saved!" exclaimed Mr. Latimer.

The rest seemed like a dream to Gipsy. She could remember afterwards that she was helped by two sailors up the companion way of a tall liner, and that she saw a long row of excited passengers staring at her over the railings; then all became a blur, and when she came to herself she was lying on a couch in a strange cabin, with her father and a doctor bending over her.

"She only fainted from exhaustion," she could hear the doctor saying. "We'll soon have her all right again. Ah, here comes the beef tea! A few hours of sound sleep will make all the difference. When she wakes, you'll find she's almost herself again."

Five days later found Gipsy seated at breakfast with her father in the coffee-room of a Liverpool hotel, none the worse for her adventures. The liner that had picked up all the survivors of the ill-fated *Queen of the Waves* had been on her way to Liverpool, and Mr. Latimer decided to make a brief stay there, to secure new clothes for himself and Gipsy, and to gain time to make fresh plans for the future. Though he had fortunately been able to bring a certain sum of money away with him, all their other possessions had gone down with the wrecked vessel, and it was this loss which he and Gipsy were discussing as they drank their morning tea.

"It was distinctly awkward to be left with nothing in the world but a nightdress that I could call my own!" laughed Gipsy. "Wasn't it funny on the *Alexia*? People were ever so kind in lending me things, but they didn't fit. Mrs. Hales' skirt swept the deck, and Mrs. Campbell's jacket was miles too big for me. I must have looked an elegant object when we reached the landing stage! I don't wonder you bundled me into a cab in a hurry, and drove straight off to an hotel. Yes, it's decidedly unpleasant to lose one's clothes."

"If it were only clothes we'd lost, Gipsy, I shouldn't mind, but it's a far more serious affair than that. All my valuable papers are gone, child! You don't realize yet what that means. It makes such an enormous difference to my affairs that for the next few years it may entirely alter the course of my life."

"What do you mean, Dad?" asked Gipsy quickly, for her father's tone was grave.

"What I say. The loss of those papers will necessitate a complete change of all my plans. Instead of our going on to America, I shall be obliged to return to South Africa at once."

"More voyaging! All right, Dad; I'm game for another wreck, if you are! It'll seem rather funny to go back to where we've just come from, won't it?"

Mr. Latimer was silent for a moment or two.

"Gipsy!" he said at last, "I've got to break the news to you somehow. I've decided not to take you back with me to the Cape. I want to go up-country, into some rather wild places, places where you couldn't possibly come to camp. You'd be far best at school here in England."

"Dad! Dad! You're never going to leave me behind!"

"Now be sensible, Gipsy! Remember all I've lost. Your passage would be a quite unnecessary expense; schools are better, too, over here, and you'd have more advantages in the way of education than in South Africa. It can't be helped, and we must both try to make the best of it. I'll not be gone long, I promise you that. Then I'll come back to England again and fetch you. For goodness' sake don't make a scene!"

Gipsy blinked hard, and with a supreme effort contrived to master herself. Her knockabout life had taught her self-control and sound common sense in many respects, and she was old enough to appreciate the expediency of the altered plans.

"What school am I to go to?" she asked rather chokily.

"I spoke to Captain Smith about it, and he recommended one at a place called Greyfield. He said his niece used to be there once, and liked it. I'm going to take you to-day. We must get the 11.40 train."

"So soon! Oh, Dad! couldn't we have just one more day together?"

"Impossible, Gipsy! I want to catch the mail steamer for Cape Town to-morrow. This wreck has been a great disaster to us. But there!--things might have been worse, and I suppose I shall manage to pull my affairs round in course of time. It's no good crying over spilt milk, is it? When one's castle comes crashing down about one's ears, there's nothing to be done but to set one's teeth firmly, and try to build it up again."

"If only I could help you, Dad! Couldn't I help the least little atom of a scrap out there?" pleaded Gipsy wistfully.

"You'll help me best by stopping here in England, and making yourself as happy as you can."

"All right! I'll try to be a Stoic! Only--we've never been six thousand miles apart before, and--well, it will seem queer to be left all alone in a country where I simply don't know one single soul."

It was owing to the course of events just narrated that Mr. Latimer, obliged to choose a school in a hurry, had, on Captain Smith's recommendation, selected Briarcroft Hall, and, taking Gipsy to Greyfield, had arranged to leave her in Miss Poppleton's charge until such time as he could come again and fetch her. How she got on in her new surroundings, and how her independent Colonial notions contrasted with more sober English ways, it is the purpose of this story to chronicle.

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## CHAPTER III

### Gipsy makes a Beginning

BRIARCROFT HALL was a large private school which stood on the outskirts of the town of Greyfield, close to the border of the Lake District in Cumberland. It was a big, rather old-fashioned red-brick house, built in Queen Anne style, with straight rows of windows on either side of the front door, and a substantial porch, surmounted by stone balls. Years ago it had been the seat of a county magnate; but as the town began to stretch out long, growing fingers, and rows of villas sprang up where before had been only green lanes, and an electric tramway was started for the convenience of the new suburb, the owner of Briarcroft had retreated farther afield, glad enough to escape the proximity of unwelcome neighbours, and to let the Hall to a suitable tenant. As Miss Poppleton announced in her prospectuses, the house was eminently fitted for a school: the situation was healthy, yet conveniently near to the town, the rooms were large and airy, the garden contained several tennis courts, and there was a field at the back for hockey. Visiting masters and mistresses augmented the ordinary staff of teachers, and Greyfield was well provided with good swimming baths, Oxford Extension lectures, high-class concerts, art exhibitions, and other educational privileges not always to be met with in a provincial town. On the other hand, the country was within easy reach. Ten minutes' walk led on to comparatively rural roads, and within half an hour you could find yourself beginning to climb the fells, with a long stretch of heather for a prospect, and the pure moorland air filling your lungs.

Miss Poppleton, the Principal of the school, irreverently nicknamed "Poppie" by her pupils, was a double B.A., for she had taken her degree in both classics and mathematics. She was a rather small, determined little lady, with a bright complexion, sharp, short-sighted, greenish-grey eyes, which peered at the world through a pair of round rimless spectacles, but seemed nevertheless to see everything ("too much", the habitual sinners affirmed!), what the girls called "an enquiring nose", grey hair brushed back quite straight from a square, "brainy"-looking forehead, and a mouth that had a habit of pursing and unpursing itself very rapidly when its owner was at all irritated or disturbed in mind. She was a good organizer, a strict disciplinarian, and a clever teacher--everything that is admirable, in fact, in a headmistress, from the scholastic point of view; and her vigorous, intellectual, capable personality always made an excellent impression upon parents and guardians. By the girls themselves she was regarded in a less favourable light: the very qualities which gave her success as a Principal caused her to seem distant and unapproachable. Her pupils held her in wholesome awe, but never expanded in her presence; to them she was the supreme authority, the "she-who-must-be-obeyed", but not a human individual who might be met on any common ground of mutual tastes and sympathies.

Miss Poppleton had a younger sister, whose name did not appear on the prospectuses, and who took a very back seat indeed in the school. Among intimate friends Miss Poppleton was apt to allude to her as "poor Edith", and most people concurred in a low estimation of her capacities. Certainly Miss Edith was not talented, neither would she have shone in any walk of life requiring brains. She was the exact opposite of her sister--tall, with big, round, blue, surprised-looking eyes, a weak chin, and a mouth that was generally set in a rather deprecating smile. She held a poor opinion of herself, and was more than willing to fill a secondary place; indeed, she would have been both alarmed and embarrassed if called upon to take the lead. For her elder sister she had an admiration and devotion that amounted to reverence. She cheerfully performed any tasks set her, and was perfectly content to be a kind of general help and underling, without attempting the least interference with any of the arrangements. Critical friends sometimes hinted that Miss Edith's position at Briarcroft was hardly a fair one, and that Miss Poppleton took advantage of her good nature and affection; but Miss Edith herself never for a single instant entertained such a disloyal notion, and continued to sing her sister's praises almost *ad nauseam*. Among the girls she was a distinct favourite; her patience was endless, and her good temper unflagging. What she lacked in brains she made up for in warmth of heart, and though she faithfully upheld discipline, she was apt somewhat to tone down the severity of the rules, and indeed sometimes surreptitiously to soften the thorny paths of the transgressor.

Four resident mistresses and a certain number of visiting teachers completed the staff at Briarcroft Hall. The greater proportion of the pupils were day girls, and the boarders, though they gave themselves airs, were decidedly in the minority. Such was the little community into which Gipsy was to be launched, and where for many months to come she would have to make and keep her own position.

Gipsy started with the most excellent intentions of exemplary behaviour, and if her conduct, regulated according to American codes, hardly harmonized with Briarcroft standards, it was more her misfortune than her fault. On the first day after her arrival she betook herself to the Principal's study, and after a light tap at the door, entered confidently with a breezy "Good morning". Miss Poppleton looked up from her papers in considerable surprise. Her private room was sacred to herself alone, and unless armed with a most warrantable errand nobody ever ventured to disturb her.

"Who sent you here, Gipsy?" she enquired rather sharply.

"Nobody," replied Gipsy, quite unaware of having given any occasion for offence. "I only came to ask leave to run out and buy a pan, and some sugar, and a few other things. I reckon there's a store handy, and I wouldn't be gone ten minutes. There's heaps of time before nine."

Miss Poppleton gasped. She had grasped the fact, at the beginning, that Gipsy was likely to prove an unusual pupil, but she had not anticipated such immediate developments.

"What you ask is perfectly impossible," she replied. "The boarders here are never allowed to go out alone to do shopping."

"So some of them told me last night, but I didn't believe them. I thought they were ragging me because I'm new, and I'd best ask at headquarters," returned Gipsy. "I wouldn't lose my way, and I'm accustomed to taking care of myself. I'd engage you'd find you could trust me."

"That's not the question at all, Gipsy. I cannot allow you to break school rules."

"Not just this once?"

"Certainly not. If I made an exception in your case, the others would expect the same privilege."

"Is that so?" said Gipsy slowly. "It seems a funny rule to me, because in Dorcas City we might always go to the store if we reported first."

"You're not in America now: you'll have to learn English ways here, and English speech too. You must make an effort to drop Americanisms, and talk as we do on this side of the Atlantic."

Miss Poppleton's tone was rather tart, and her mouth twitched ominously. Gipsy's eyes twinkled.

"I'll do my best," she answered brightly. "I picked up a few words from the other girls last night that I didn't know before. There was 'ripping' for one, and--what was the other, now, that caught on to me? Oh, I know!--'rotten'. I won't forget it again."

Miss Poppleton's face was a study.

"Of course I don't mean slang words like those. The girls had no business to be using them. You must copy the best, and not the worst."

"I guess it will take me a while to learn the difference."

"You'll have to expunge 'guess' and 'reckon' from your vocabulary."

Gipsy heaved an eloquent sigh.

"I'll make a mental note of what I've got to avoid, but I expect they'll slip out sometimes. But about that pan, please! Might the janitor go out and buy it for me? I can't make any Fudge till I get it, and I reckon--that is to say, I mean to teach those girls to make Fudge. They've not tasted it."

Miss Poppleton glared at her irrepressible pupil with a glance that would have quelled Hetty Hancock or Lennie Chapman, but Gipsy did not flinch.

"They've actually never tasted Fudge!" she repeated, with a smile of pity for their ignorance.

But Miss Poppleton's patience was at an end.

"Gipsy Latimer, understand once for all that these things are not allowed at Briarcroft. While you are here you will be expected to keep the rules of the school, or, if you break them, you will be punished. Leave my study at once, and don't report yourself here again until you are sent for."

Gipsy left the room as requested, but she stood for a moment or two on the doormat outside, shaking her head solemnly.

"It's a bad lookout!" she said to herself. "I'm afraid there are breakers ahead. That's not a very difficult matter to foresee. She's got a temper! I've not had any previous experience of English schools, but it rather appears as if this one's run on the lines of a reformatory. If I don't want to get myself into trouble, I shall have to lie low, and mind what I'm doing. Well, I've sampled the teachers, and I've sampled the boarders. Now for the day girls and my new Form!"

Gipsy had already made the acquaintance of the elect twenty who were to be her house companions, but that was a comparatively slight affair compared with the ordeal of her introduction to the school as a whole. In spite of her outward appearance of sangfroid, she felt her heart thumping a little as she marched into the large lecture hall for "call over". It needs a certain courage to face seventy-two critical strangers, and her past experience had taught her that a new girl on her first day is like "goods on approval", and has to run the gauntlet of public opinion. She tried to look airy and unembarrassed, and talked desperately to Lennie Chapman, who had been told off to "personally conduct" her to her Form; but all the same she was conscious that she was the observed of all observers. It was only natural that the little, erect, dark figure, with its bright eyes and big scarlet hair ribbons, should attract attention. Gipsy was about as different from the ordinary run of British schoolgirls as a parakeet is from a flock of pigeons; and the others were quick to note the difference.

"I say, who's that foreign kid?" enquired Madeleine Newsome, a member of the Fifth, pausing in a friendly quarrel with a Form mate to take a quick, comprehensive survey of the stranger's personal appearance.

"Can't say, I'm sure," responded Emily Atkinson, "but we'll soon find out. Hello, you kid, what's your name? And what part of the globe do you spring from?"

"She's Spanish and American and New Zealand and South African and several other things, and she's been shipwrecked dozens of times," began Lennie Chapman, who was prone to exaggerate, and liked to act showman.

"Let her speak for herself," interrupted Madeleine bluntly. "I suppose she understands English, doesn't she? What's your name, kid? Don't stand staring at me with those big black eyes!"

But here Gipsy's momentary bashfulness took flight. Seven schools had taught her to hold her own, and she was soon imparting information about herself with a volubility that left no doubt of her acquaintance with the English tongue. Other girls hurried up to listen, and in less than a minute she was the centre of a crowd, answering a perfect fire of questions with a beaming good humour and a quickness of repartee that rather took the fancy of her hearers.

"She's sharp enough, at any rate," commented Mary Parsons. "Not very easy to take a rise out of her, I should think."

"Awfully pretty, I call her," responded Joyce Adamson. "Those big red bows are immense in more ways than one."

"She's not the sort to play second fiddle evidently," grumbled Maude Helm a trifle enviously. "New girls oughtn't to have such cheek, in my opinion. When I was new----"

"Oh, yes! We all remember how you stood looking black thunders, and no one could drag a single word out of you, not even your name! Can't see where the sense came in! I like a girl with plenty to say for herself."

"This one's got enough, at any rate!" snapped Maude. "She talks away like a Cheap-Jack. Now if I were----"

"Hold your tongue, can't you? I want to hear what she's saying."

"What Form's she in?"

"I believe Poppie's put her in the Upper Fourth."

"Hush! Here's Poppie herself!"

As the Principal stepped upon the platform and rang the bell, the girls hastily scurried to their seats, deferring further catechism of their new schoolfellow till eleven o'clock. Gipsy's name had been placed on the roll call of the Upper Fourth, so as a member of the Lower School she marched in the long line that filed from the lecture hall to the right-hand wing of the house. The preliminary part of her ordeal might be considered successfully over. Schoolgirls are quick to take likes and dislikes; with them, first impressions are everything, and a few minutes are often sufficient to decide the fate of a newcomer. By the end of the day Gipsy had won golden opinions; her whimsical humour and free Colonial manners, however unfavourably they might impress Miss Poppleton, pleased the popular taste, and except by an envious few she was pronounced "ripping". Even Helen Roper, the head of the school, condescended to notice her.

"Hello, you new girl!" she said patronizingly, "you may join our Needlework Guild if you like. You've got to subscribe a shilling, and promise to make a garment every year. They're sent to the hospitals, you know."

"Thanks," replied Gipsy, not too utterly overwhelmed by the honour. "I'm a bad sewer, but I dare say I'd manage to cobble up something."

"Then I'll put your name down, and you can bring me the shilling to-morrow. Have you got a camera? Then I expect you'll like to belong to the Photographic Guild--the subscription's a shilling for that too. Remind me to give you a card

of the rules if I forget."

"You'll do!" whispered Lennie Chapman, who had watched over Gipsy's introduction with anxious interest. "If Helen Roper's spoken to you, you're sure to get on. You'll join the Guilds, of course? There's the Dramatic as well, and the Musical, and the Athletic."

"If they want a shilling for each, it will soon run away with one's pocket-money," laughed Gipsy.

"Why, yes, so it does, but then one has to join. It is the thing to do."

"I don't mind the subscriptions if the Guilds are fun."

"Well--um! I can't say they're very much fun for us. We're only Lower School, you see, and we don't get a look-in."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, of course it's all in the hands of the Sixth. They arrange everything. We mayn't so much as express an opinion."

"No, it's really rather too bad," said Hetty Hancock, joining in the conversation. "We Lower School aren't fairly treated. The Photographic Guild spent all the society's money on a gorgeous developing machine last term, and no one's allowed to use it except the Committee."

"But aren't any of the Lower School on the Committee?" asked Gipsy.

"No, we're not counted 'eligible'. We vote, but we may only elect members of the Sixth. And the Sixth just have it all their own way."

"How monstrously unfair!"

"It's just as bad in the Dramatic," continued Hetty, airing her grievances. "The Sixth arrange all the casts, and of course take the best parts for themselves, and only give us Juniors little, unimportant bits."

"But don't the Lower School act plays by themselves?"

"They haven't, so far; you see, it's always been one big Society. But I can tell you we've grumbled when our subscriptions have all gone to buy wigs and costumes for the Sixth."

"But why do you let them?" protested Gipsy.

Hetty shrugged her shoulders.

"How are we going to prevent it, when we've no voice in the matter? I told you the Committee arrange everything. We're supposed to be allowed to give our views at the General Meeting, but it's the merest farce--the Sixth won't condescend to listen to us."

"I'd make them listen!" said Gipsy indignantly.

"You'd better try, then!" laughed Hetty. "It's the Annual Meeting of all the Guilds on Friday week. We have to elect officers for the year. I should like to see you tackle Helen Roper!"

Gipsy turned away without further comment. Her past experience of schools had taught her that it was unwise to begin by criticizing well-worn institutions too soon. During the next few days, however, she asked many questions, and by diligently putting two and two together managed to arrive at a tolerably accurate estimate of the general state of affairs. The result caused her to shake her head. Though she said little, like the proverbial parrot she thought the more, and her thoughts gradually shaped themselves into a plan of action. At the end of a week she faced the situation.

"Look here, Gipsy Latimer!" she said to herself, "there are abuses in this school that need reforming. Somebody's got to take the matter up, and I guess it's your mission to do it! I don't believe it's ever occurred to those girls to make a stand for their rights. They may support you, or they may call you an interfering busybody for your pains; you'll have to take your chance of that. With your free-born democratic standards, it's impossible for you to sit still and see things go on as they are. This annual meeting's your opportunity, so you'd best pluck up your courage and nerve yourself for the fray."

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## CHAPTER IV

### A Mass Meeting

A LARGE school is a state in miniature. Quite apart from the rule of the mistresses, it has its own particular institutions and its own system of self-government. In their special domain its officers are of quite as much importance as Members of Parliament, and wield an influence and an authority comparable to that of Cabinet Ministers. Tyrannies, struggles for freedom, minor corruptions, and hot debates have their places here as well as in the wider world of politics, and many an amateur "Home Rule Bill" is defeated or carried according to the circumstances of the case. At Briarcroft Hall there had hitherto existed a pure oligarchy, or government of the few. The Sixth Form had jealously kept the reins in their own hands, and, while granting a few privileges to the Fifth, had denied the slightest right of interference to the Lower School. So far, though the Juniors had grumbled continually, they had never taken any steps to redress their grievances. Here and there one of them would offer an indignant protest, which was treated with scorn by the Seniors, and things would go on again in the old unsatisfactory fashion.

Gipsy, with the unbiased judgment of an entirely new-comer, had formed her opinion of the Briarcroft code, and deeming reform necessary, set to work to preach a crusade. She expounded her views to Hetty Hancock, Lennie Chapman, and a few other sympathizers, and organized a plan of campaign.

"What we want to do is to combine," she announced. "It's not the slightest scrap of good a few single girls going and airing their woes to the Sixth. They're not likely to listen. If we could show them that the whole of the Lower School is one big united body, pledged to resist,—well, they'd just have to give way."

"All the lower Forms feel the same," said Hetty. "I was speaking to the Third about it this morning."

"How are we going to begin?" asked Lennie.

"We must call a mass meeting of Juniors, and put the thing to them fairly and squarely," said Gipsy. "Explain what we want, and draw up a programme of what we mean to do, then see if they'll give their support."

"Best lose no time about it, then. I'll post up notices at once, and we'll have a meeting at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon in the play-room. It's no use letting the grass grow under our feet. Have you a pencil and a scrap of paper there, Lennie? Give them to me, and I'll make a rough draft. How will this do, do you think?"

"A Mass Meeting of all Members of the Lower School will be held in the Junior Play-room on Wednesday at 2 p.m. prompt. Business: To consider the question of readjusting the Management of the various Guilds.

"Speaker: GIPSYLATIMER."

"First rate!" said Lennie. "I'll help you to make some copies. We must pin one up on the notice board of each Junior classroom, and one in the dressing-room. It'll make a stir, and no mistake!"

"Rather!" chuckled Hetty. "Gipsy, you're an Oliver Cromwell!"

"You might add: 'Chairman, Hetty Hancock', then I guess it will do," said Gipsy, scanning the scrap of paper.

As Lennie had prophesied, the announcement caused a great stir throughout the Lower School. Excited girls crowded round the notices discussing the question, and for that day the talk was of nothing else. Gipsy had rather taken the popular fancy; and though a few considered it impertinence on the part of a new girl to offer any criticisms on existing institutions, all were anxious to hear what she had to say on so absorbing a topic. At 2 p.m. on the Wednesday, therefore, the play-room was crowded. Juniors of all sorts and conditions were there, from the tall girls of the Upper Fourth to giggling members of the Third, and small fry of the First and Second, who felt themselves vastly important at being included in the proceedings. The instigators of the movement were determined that the meeting should be held in strict order. They had placed a table to serve as a platform, and arranged benches that would accommodate at least a part of the audience.

"Lennie, you make them take their seats properly," commanded Hetty; "big ones at the back, and little ones in front: those First Form kids can sit on the floor. Don't stand any nonsense with the Third. Now, Gipsy, are you ready? Then we'll mount the platform."

Hetty had been studying up her duties as "Chairman", and was anxious to do the thing in style. She had prepared her speech carefully beforehand.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she began glibly, "at least, I mean girls and fellow members of our Junior School, my pleasant business this afternoon is to introduce to you the speaker, Miss Gipsy Latimer. Though she is a newcomer amongst us, I'm sure we all realize that by her wide experience of American and Colonial schools she is particularly fitted to speak to us on the subject in hand. She has had the opportunity of studying the working of other Societies and Guilds, and she will no doubt be able to offer us many valuable suggestions. I will not take up the time of the meeting by any further remarks, but will at once call upon the speaker to address us."

Hetty sat down, consciously covered with glory. Her own Form cheered lustily, and even the unruly Third appeared much impressed. The little girls in the front row were staring round-eyed and open-mouthed with admiration. Gipsy rose slowly, took one long, comprehensive glance over her audience, then in her clear, high-pitched tones began her crusade:

"Girls! I'm afraid most of you will think it's rather cheeky of me to have taken the matter up when I've only been ten days or so at Briarcroft, and I'd like at the very start to apologize for what really must look to you like a piece of cocksure presumption. I think you'll all allow, though, that it's a pretty true saying that 'outsiders see most of the game'. I've been examining your institutions pretty carefully since I came, and it seems to me the game's all in the hands of the Sixth. There are five separate Guilds in this school--the Needlework, the Photographic, the Dramatic, the Musical, and the Athletic. I made enquiries about all of them, and I find that though the Juniors contribute the bulk of the subscriptions, they haven't the least voice in the arrangements. Now, in the countries I've lived in, such a state of affairs would be denounced as tyranny pure and simple. I reckon a school ought to be a democracy, and every member who joins a society and pays a subscription has a right to have some say at least in the way the subscriptions are to be spent. If they don't, it's 'taxation without representation', a bad old mediaeval custom that it's taken some countries a revolution to get rid of. I put it to the meeting--Are you willing to sit down and be tyrannized over by the Sixth? Do you mean to go on paying your shillings, and never getting the least advantage or satisfaction out of any of the Guilds?"

An indignant roar of "No, no!" came from the audience. Gipsy had stated the case very clearly. It was what the Juniors had all felt, but had never fairly voiced before. They wanted to hear more.

"Go on! Go on!" they cried eagerly.

"There are at present ninety-three girls in this school," continued Gipsy. "Twenty-two are in the Fifth and Sixth, and seventy-one in the lower Forms. Just compare those figures! Twenty-two Seniors and seventy-one Juniors! Why, our majority is simply overwhelming. Now, for an example let us take the Dramatic Guild. At a shilling a year a head, the subscriptions of the Upper School amount to PS1, 2s., and those of the Lower School to PS3, 11s. I asked how last year's funds were spent, and found the whole went in hiring Pompadour wigs and other things that were worn by the Sixth. Only three Juniors took part in the performances, and they were actually obliged to provide their own costumes, because there was no money left to buy materials. Now, I ask you, is such a state of affairs to be tolerated any longer?"

"No!" shrieked a chorus of voices.

"The Dramatic Guild is no exception. All the other societies are equally bad. The funds ought to be applied to the general good; and if they're only spent on a few, I call it misappropriation of a trust. In America and in the Colonies our watchword was always 'Liberty'; and we took care that all got their rights. Are you Briarcroft girls going to let this injustice go on, or will you all join together and make a stand for fair practices? In the name of Liberty, I ask you!"

As Gipsy warmed to her subject her brown eyes flashed and sparkled, and the whole of her dark face seemed afire with enthusiasm. She looked a convincing little figure as she stood there, urging the rights of her schoolfellows, and hardly a girl in the room but was carried away by her arguments. Instinctively the Juniors felt they had found a leader.

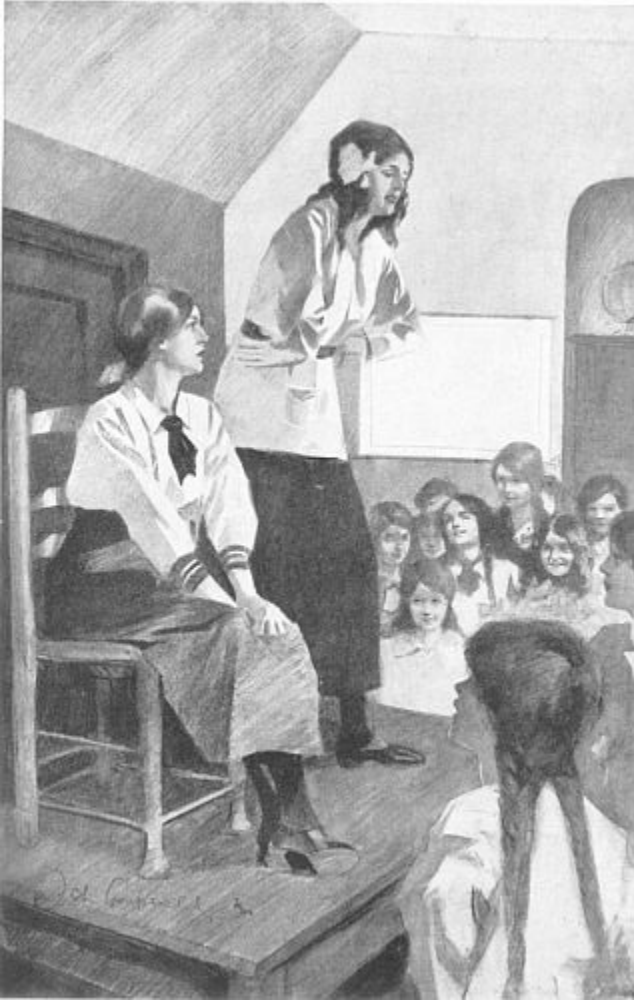
"I put it to the meeting. Are you ready to combine and stand together? Those who are in favour, kindly hold up their hands."

Such a clamour arose from the play-room that the noise drifted upstairs to the ears of the Seniors, who sat all unconscious of the rebellion that was being preached below. With memories of Wat Tyler, Hampden, Oliver Cromwell, the Seven Bishops, and other famous champions of the commonweal fresh in their minds from their history books, the girls were ready to take any measures suggested to them. There was scarcely a dissenting voice. Enthusiasm fires enthusiasm. Gipsy's speech seemed an inspiration, and everybody was agog with interest.

"She's right!"

"We've been kept down too long!"

"I always said it was monstrously unfair!"



THE LOWER SCHOOL FIND A LEADER

"The Seniors will have to give way!"

"We'll get our rights now!"

"I wonder nobody thought of it before!"

The talk burst out on all sides, for every one was eager to have her own say, and discuss the matter with her neighbour. Even the First Form children had followed the arguments, and were as keen as anybody. Gipsy calmly counted the upraised hands, then rang a bell for silence.

"I may take it, then, that the motion is carried by the general consent of the meeting," she continued. "We're agreed that some stand ought to be made against the aggressions of the Seniors. Now, the next question to be considered is what we mean to do, and how we're going to do it. It seems to me that we ought to have something very definite to work upon. What I propose is that a picked few of us go as delegates to the Sixth, and ask for something that has always been refused before. If, as I expect, they say 'No', then we shall have a just ground of complaint, and we'll use it as a text at the Annual Meeting to demand a new arrangement of the Guilds. Four of us ought to make up the deputation. I'm willing to go for one, and I think I can promise for Hetty Hancock and Lennie Chapman. Who'll volunteer to be the fourth?"

There was a moment's silence. It was all very well to shout rebellion in chorus, but the old tradition of awe for the Sixth still oppressed the Juniors, when it came to the point of openly bearding the lions in question.

"I will!" said a voice from the back row.

It was Meg Gordon, a member of the Upper Fourth, a rather nice-looking girl of about Gipsy's own age. Meg had listened with closest attention and wholehearted agreement, and was prepared to embrace the cause with the zeal she considered it deserved. If called upon to do so, she would have been ready even to face Miss Poppleton herself.

"Good!" replied Gipsy. "Then we'll make up a test case. If it's refused, then we draw up a statement of our grievances, and what we want reformed, and present it at the General Meeting. If that's also refused--" (Gipsy paused a moment to let her words take due effect) "then we show our teeth!"

"What's our programme then?" shouted one of the Lower Fourth.

"I'll tell you. If the Seniors have shown themselves unworthy of our confidence, they don't deserve our support in any respect. Instead of voting to elect them as officers, we'll withdraw our subscriptions, and found a separate system of Guilds for the Lower School alone."

The boldness of Gipsy's suggestion almost took away the breath of her hearers. To break loose from the hard regime of the Seniors and form a system of self-governing societies among the Juniors had never occurred to anybody at Briarcroft before. The idea was splendid in its magnitude.

"It seems to me we've got the game into our own hands if we like," continued the speaker. "Nobody can force us to subscribe to societies of which we don't approve. We'll insist on a referendum of the whole school, and see how the result turns out. Are you all ready to combine on this point? Those in favour, please say 'Aye'."

"Aye! Aye! Aye!" arose from all sides.

"Well spoken!"

"Hurrah for the Junior School!"

"Three cheers for Gipsy Latimer!" shouted Hetty Hancock, jumping up agitatedly from her chair, and nearly falling over the edge of the platform in the heat of her enthusiasm.

"Hear, Hear!"

"Hip, hip, hip, hooray!"

The excitement was intense. Gipsy's oratory had been quite spontaneous and unaffected, and like most genuine things it carried conviction to its hearers. In the midst of a babel of voices the big bell rang for afternoon school. The girls fled to their various classrooms, discussing the matter on their way upstairs.

"It's the best idea I've ever heard!" declared Meg Gordon. "Gipsy Latimer's a trump! I'll support her in anything she proposes."

"I wonder we never thought of such a thing before," said Cassie Bertram.

"Yes, to think of our having stood the Sixth for years, and never making a move!"

"I think it ought to have come from some of us, though," objected Maude Helm. "Gipsy's quite a new girl, and it's rather cheek of her to try and foist her American notions upon us, as if we didn't know anything."

"Oh, you shut up! Why didn't you suggest it yourself?"

"I'm rather of Maude's opinion," said Alice O'Connor. "I agree with the thing in principle, but I don't like it coming from a new girl."

"New girls oughtn't to run the whole show," added Gladys Merriman.

"Oh, you three! You'd find fault with an angel! For goodness' sake don't get up these petty little jealousies, and spoil the whole affair. What does it matter if Gipsy's new? Everybody has to be new some time. She's shown she's capable of a great deal more than most of us are."

"And she knows it too, doesn't she just?" sneered Maude. "The way she stood on that platform and talked!"

"It's sheer nastiness on your part, Maude Helm, to try and belittle her! You won't get much glory for yourself by sticking pins in other people; and I can tell you, if you're going to set up in opposition to Gipsy, you've no chance. I'll undertake there's hardly a girl in the Lower School now who won't side with Gipsy Latimer!"

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## CHAPTER V

### A Pitched Battle

GIPSY ran upstairs to the classroom with a feeling of intense satisfaction. So far all had gone well. She had succeeded in arousing a spirit of righteous wrath and resistance throughout the Lower School, and a desire to combine for the general welfare. There was a certain exhilaration in the discovery that she was thus able to sway the minds of her companions. She had been popular in other schools, but she had never had a chance such as this. To do Gipsy justice, however, she thought far more of the cause she had taken up than of her own popularity. "Fairness" was her watchword, and wherever her lot had been cast she would have come forward as the champion of any whom she considered unfairly treated. A girl of decided ability, her knockabout life had in many ways made her old beyond her years, and she had that capacity for organization and power of making others work with her that belong to the born leader. Having constituted herself practically head of the movement, she assumed the further conduct of affairs, and at four o'clock held a small committee meeting with Hetty Hancock, Lennie Chapman, and Meg Gordon, her three self-elected coadjutors. As the result of their consultations they presented themselves next day in the Sixth Form classroom, at the identical moment when Miss Giles had just retired, and the members of the Sixth were still engaged in putting away their books.

"Hello, you kids! What are you doing here?" exclaimed Doreen Tristram. "Just you quit, and be quick about it, too!"

"Kids, indeed!" retorted Hetty Hancock. "Not much kids about us, I should think. We're all turned fourteen."

"Are you really? What a magnificent age! I'm glad you've enlightened me, for I should certainly have classed you among the babes!" returned Doreen sarcastically.

"Define a kid!" drawled Esther Hughes, putting on her pince-nez to regard the intruders.

"Everybody knows a kid means a First or Second Form-er, sometimes a Third, but never, never a Fourth Form girl!" burst out Lennie Chapman indignantly. "Why, I'm taller than you!"

The Seniors giggled.

"Merely a difference of opinion, my child," said Ada Dawkins. "Now, according to our standard, every member of the Lower School is a kid, even if she were six feet in height! Our superiority lies in brains, not inches! All Juniors are kids, you are a Junior, therefore you must be a kid. *Quod est demonstrandum!*"

"And kids aren't allowed to poke their impertinent young noses into our Form room," said Doreen Tristram. "I told you before to quit!"

"Do you want to be turned out by brute force?" added Gertrude Harding. "It would be an undignified exit, I'm afraid."

Despite the threat, none of the four delegates budged an inch.

"You say what we're here for," whispered Meg, nudging Gipsy.

Thus urged, Gipsy opened her campaign:

"We're all four members of the Photographic Guild, and we've come to ask for the developing machine. Some of us in the Fourth want to use it."

"In-deed! I dare say you do!"

"Don't you wish you may get it, that's all!"

"Cheek!"

"Look here--clear out of our classroom!"

"Not until I've asked a few questions," returned Gipsy firmly. "Is the developing machine the property of the Photographic Guild?"

"I suppose it is," grudgingly admitted Ada Dawkins.

"Then why aren't all members allowed to use it?"

"Because we're not going to have it spoilt by kids' meddlesome fingers. That's the reason, and a very good one too!"

"The Juniors pay their subscriptions as well as the Seniors, so they've a right to everything that's the common property of the Guild," persisted Gipsy.

"No, they haven't!" snapped Helen Roper, the head girl. "Nobody but members of the Committee has a right to anything. If you think we're going to let you Juniors come interfering, you're just mistaken, and the sooner you undeceive yourselves the better."

"We only want our rights."

"Rights? You've got no rights! It's privilege enough for you to be allowed to belong to the Guild at all."

"A great privilege to pay our shillings!"

"You're allowed to vote, you know," put in Lena Morris, who possibly had heard a hint of what was brewing in the Lower School. "You can elect any of us as officers that you like, for any of the Guilds."

"And much good that is, when you all play into one another's hands!" burst out Gipsy. "Who gets the best parts in the Dramatic and the Musical, I should like to know? Who votes the prizes in the Sports?"

Helen Roper turned rather red. The difference in the qualities of the prizes offered to Seniors and Juniors in the last athletic contest had been so marked as to call forth comment from the mistresses.

"That's nothing to do with it," she faltered rather lamely. "If you Juniors have any complaints to make, you must make them at the Annual Meeting."

"We're going to," said Hetty Hancock grimly.

"Then in the meantime keep to your own quarters, and don't intrude yourselves where you've no business," commanded Doreen Tristram angrily. "Do you intend to take yourselves off peaceably, or must we eject you?"

"Thank you, we'll go now. We've found out all we want to know, and it hardly reflects to your credit."

So saying, Gipsy and her confederates stalked away with what dignity they could muster.

Once outside the door they tore along the passage and downstairs to the Junior dressing-room, where, collecting all available members of the Lower School, they promptly held an informal indignation meeting.

"Only what everyone expected!" said Dilys Fenton.

"Trust the Sixth not to give in a single inch!"

"They've been asked heaps of times before."

"Then it adds another nail to their coffin," declared Gipsy. "We've tried them fairly, and they've refused to act fairly. We'll give them one more chance at the meeting to-morrow, and if they won't accept our terms--then we'll break loose and be off on our own. Are you all agreed to that?"

"Rather! We'll stand no nonsense this time."

"Kids, indeed! We'll show them what kids can do."

"They'll get on pretty badly without the kids."

"We'll soon let them find that out!"

If the Seniors had received any warning of what was in the wind, they did not take the matter seriously. From time immemorial the Juniors had always complained, and no notice had ever been taken of their complaints. As Juniors themselves the Sixth had grumbled at former head girls and mistresses, but now that they had reached the elect position of the top Form, they had reversed their old opinions. It had always been the tradition of Briarcroft that all authority should be vested in the Seniors, and they saw no reason why it should be changed. A mere outburst of temper on the part of a few Juniors was nothing: it had happened before, and would no doubt happen again; it was as much the province of Juniors to grumble as of Seniors to rule. But they reckoned without Gipsy. That any girl of her age should be capable of welding the shifting dissatisfaction of the Lower School into one solid mass of opposition had never occurred to them. So far no Junior had exercised any particular influence over her fellows; it had been each for herself, even in clamouring appeals for privileges, and the upper girls looked down on the "kids" as a noisy, selfish,

troublesome crew, to be kept well under, and not worthy of very much consideration.

The Annual Meeting of the Guilds was to take place on Friday, 15 October, at three o'clock, in the lecture hall. It was held every year on the Friday nearest to the middle of October, and by old-established custom the last hour of the afternoon was allowed to be devoted to it. The mistresses were never present, and the girls, under the superintendence of the monitresses, were permitted to make any arrangements they thought fit, so long as they did not interfere with the ordinary school rules. Though the meetings had begun in good faith, as representative assemblies for all alike, they had degenerated into a merely formal statement of accounts by the Committee, which the general rank and file were expected to pass without comment, and an election of officers chosen almost entirely from the monitresses. There were favourites, of course, among the candidates, but their number was so limited that they did not even take the trouble to canvass for votes, each one feeling nearly sure of being elected to fill one, if not more, of the numerous posts in the many Guilds. The Fifth, having secured certain privileges denied to Juniors, were content if a few of their number were chosen to supply minor vacancies, and rarely interfered with the main direction of affairs.

On the Friday afternoon, therefore, the Upper School strolled carelessly into the lecture hall, and took their seats with the air of having a perfunctory business to perform which they would be glad to get over. The Juniors, on the other hand, were in a ferment of excitement: their opportunity had arrived, and they intended to make the most of it; even the youngsters of the First Form were grim in their determination to resist. The proceedings began in the ordinary time-honoured fashion. Helen Roper read a report for the previous year, and a statement of accounts. The latter, having been audited by Miss Poppleton and found correct, was passed without demur, and the head girl then went on to announce the list of candidates for the various offices. She rattled off the whole in a rather supercilious, casual manner, and she finished with the usual formula: "If any member of the Society has an objection to raise or a suggestion to make, kindly put it before the meeting now, that it may be discussed before the voting begins."

She paused for a moment with a bored air, expecting to hear the old grievances, and to squash them in the old summary fashion. The thing, to her, was a mere farce, to be gone through as speedily as possible. The eyes of all the Juniors were turned upon Gipsy, and Gipsy stood up.

"In the name of the whole of the Lower School I have an objection to raise and a suggestion to make," she began, in her clear, high-pitched voice. "We Juniors consider that we are unfairly treated in many ways in the Guilds, and we demand that a certain number of us should be eligible to serve on the Committee, to look after the rights of our own Forms."

Helen Roper stared at Gipsy as if she could hardly believe the evidence of her own ears, and the Seniors gasped with astonishment. The impudence of the proposal seemed to them beyond all bounds.

"I'm afraid it's not exactly the province of Juniors to sit on the Committee," returned Helen, with a sarcastic smile. "You can hardly expect us to comply with that demand."

"Cheek!"

"Sit upon her!"

"We can't allow this kind of thing!" murmured the indignant Seniors.

"A Guild is supposed to be formed for the common benefit of all concerned," continued Gipsy. "And I contend that every member who pays a subscription has a right to fair representation."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Juniors.

"Well, you are represented. You can vote for any candidate you like," snapped Helen.

"But it is not fair representation when the candidates are obliged to be chosen from the ranks of the opposite camp. We want candidates of our own, to look after Lower School interests."

"We'll have them too!" squeaked a shrill voice from the ranks of the Third Form.

"You're not going to get it all your own way!" yelled another.

"We're tired of tyranny."

"Order! Order!" commanded Helen; then, turning to her fellow monitresses, she held a brief whispered consultation.

"Stop it at once!" "Put it down firmly!" "Don't stand any nonsense from them!" "Show them who are their betters," was the hasty advice given, and she turned again to the excited Juniors.

"What you ask is impossible," she said imperiously. "The Guilds have gone on very well in the past, and they'll go on very well in the future. We promise that the interests of the Juniors shall be looked after, but the general management must remain as before. You can sit down, Gipsy Latimer."

But Gipsy did not sit down.

"I've made a fair request, and you've refused it," she continued calmly. "All that remains for me to do now is to appeal to the whole school. We Juniors have held a meeting amongst ourselves, and have decided that, if we're denied our just rights, we'll withdraw our subscriptions and found Guilds of our own. Am I voicing the public opinion?"

"Yes, yes!" roared the Juniors.

"Put it to the vote!"

"Have it in black and white!"

"We'll settle it to-day!"

Gipsy's ultimatum was so utterly unexpected that the Seniors looked at one another as if an earthquake had occurred. They had imagined it was all "bluff" on the part of the younger girls, and that they were quite incapable of enforcing their demands. This sudden mutiny was a crisis such as had never risen before.

"Hadn't we better yield a point, and let them have one or two candidates of their own?" suggested Lena Morris hastily.

"Certainly not! It would be the greatest mistake to give way. Leave me to deal with them," said Helen, and turning on the Juniors with flashing eyes, she poured forth her scorn.

"Guilds of your own, indeed! Nice Guilds they'd be! Why, the meetings would be bear gardens. What do you know about how to conduct a Society? When I was a Junior I trusted to the wisdom of the Seniors, instead of listening to every newcomer who talked frothy nonsense. I tell you, it is the monitresses who are your best friends, and who can decide what's good for you. Are you going to change the whole of our Briarcroft organizations at the bidding of a girl who has only been in the school ten days?"

The latter part of Helen's argument appealed to a few who were jealous of Gipsy's influence, but the greater number broke out in indignant protest.

"Friends indeed!"

"Pretty friends!"

"Tyrants, more likely!"

"We'll see about bear gardens!"

"We won't be sat upon by a clique!"

These and other remarks were shouted in reply. Some of the excited girls scrambled up and stood on their seats; each began to talk to her neighbour, and the noise swelled till it grew into a general roar of: "A referendum! Give us a referendum!"

Helen rang the bell for silence, and, when some sort of order was restored, once more faced the turbulent Juniors.

"Do I clearly understand what it is you want to put to the vote?" she asked, frowning.

"Yes! Yes! Tell her again, Gipsy!"

"I may be a new girl," said Gipsy, "but the others have chosen me to speak for them, so I'm their lawful delegate. What we want to vote about is a question of separation. Are we Juniors to keep on in the old Guilds, or start Guilds of our own?"

"It will have to be a referendum of both Seniors and Juniors," replied Helen sharply.

"That's only fair. This is a public Annual Meeting, and we want to do everything in order."

Helen conferred again with her own Form. By all rules of general meetings, it was impossible to refuse a referendum if called for. They were obliged, therefore, to submit with the best grace they could, and to deal out the voting papers.

"Those in favour of union with the present Guilds kindly put a nought, and those in favour of separation a cross,"

commanded Helen. "Any paper with anything more on it will be disqualified. Girls! I make a last appeal to you to remember our old traditions, and to resist these innovations. Be loyal to your monitresses!"

"Old traditions are sometimes bad traditions," exclaimed Hetty Hancock, metaphorically flinging back the gauntlet. "We're ready to obey our monitresses on questions of school rules, but we're not Saxon serfs. Fair play is a jewel! We Juniors haven't had it yet, and we mean to get it. Girls! Be loyal to the Lower School!"

The Juniors snatched their voting papers with hot eagerness, and for a moment or two there was a silence in the room, while the necessary noughts or crosses were being registered. The Seniors were feeling decidedly blue, but for appearances' sake they kept up a show of confidence.

"I think one of us is entitled to help to check the counting," said Hetty, as the papers were collected and handed to the monitresses.

"Oh, certainly! Please come and satisfy yourselves," returned Helen bitterly.

So the votes were counted by Lena Morris and Ada Dawkins on behalf of the Seniors, and by Hetty and Gipsy on behalf of the Juniors. The latter had not doubted the result, but to the Upper School the figures were startling:

Separation	65
Union	<u>28</u>
Majority for Separation	37

Only six of the younger girls, therefore, had voted for the old regime, and the victory of the Lower School was complete. A mad scene of triumph ensued. The Juniors clapped and cheered, and waved their handkerchiefs in the exuberance of their enthusiasm; and as the discomfited Seniors beat a hasty retreat, the meeting broke up amid the roar of exultant hurrahs, and an impromptu chorus started by Gipsy and taken up by a dozen jubilant voices:

"Rule, Britannia! Britannia rules the waves!  
Juniors never, never, never, will be slaves!"



## CHAPTER VI

### American Fudge

THE events narrated in the last chapter had made an epoch in Briarcroft history. Henceforward the Lower School meant to manage its own affairs, and it set to work at once to settle things upon a firm basis. Needless to say, Gipsy was the heroine of the hour. Except for a half-dozen who envied her popularity, the girls recognized that the revolution was entirely owed to her suggestion, and they were ready to acknowledge her as their leader. She took her honours modestly. Having accomplished what she had aimed at, she was quite ready to retire from the position of dictator until some other good cause needed a champion. After several meetings and much discussion, the Juniors decided that instead of founding a number of separate societies for photography, athletics, acting, &c., they would institute one united Guild, which should include all the various forms of school activity, to be covered by one subscription, payable each term.

"It will be far better than dividing things up," said Hetty Hancock, "because sometimes we want to spend more on one thing than on another, and it's awkward to have to vote the funds of the Photographic Society over to the Dramatic, or vice versa. I think we should manage all right this way. We must elect a Committee, of course, and officers. For President, I beg to nominate Gipsy Latimer. She deserves it."

"Yes! Gipsy! Gipsy!" agreed the girls.

But Gipsy shook her head, and like Oliver Cromwell waved away the tempting offer of a crown.

"No," she said firmly; "I've only been a fortnight in the school, and I don't feel up to the post. Better choose someone as President who understands Briarcroft ways better than I do. I suggest Dilys Fenton. She's the oldest girl in the Upper Fourth, and from what I hear she's been here one of the longest. I'll serve on the Committee, if you like, and be of any use I can, but you want an old-established Briarcroft-ite as President. I don't know any of your arrangements yet about cricket or tennis, and I should always be making mistakes."

The wisdom of Gipsy's remarks appealed to the girls. It was certainly more suitable to choose as President somebody who understood the school ways. They appreciated the motive of her refusal, however; and her generosity in thus standing aside made her, if anything, more popular than before. They insisted upon electing her to the post of Secretary.

"You can keep the accounts, and read aloud the minutes of the meetings, and all those sorts of business things better than anybody," declared Hetty.

"If I don't happen to forget which country I'm in, and add things up as cents and dollars, instead of pence and shillings!" laughed Gipsy.

"We'll soon pull you up if you do, never fear!"

Now that her crusade was successfully accomplished, Gipsy settled down to enjoy life at Briarcroft as well as the limited circumstances permitted. She had already made several warm friends among both the boarders and the day girls. Meg Gordon in particular was inclined to accord her that species of hero worship often indulged in by schoolgirls. She brought offerings of late roses or autumn violets from home, and followed her idol about the school like a love-sick swain. She would sit gazing at Gipsy during classes in deepest admiration, and was ready to accept her every idea as gospel. Meg was rather a curious, abrupt girl in many ways, and though she had been a year at Briarcroft, had hitherto kept very much to herself. Her sudden and violent devotion to the newcomer caused no little amusement in the Form. She was promptly nicknamed "Gipsy's disciple", and subjected to a certain amount of teasing on the score of her attachment.

"You agree with every single thing Gipsy says," laughed Norah Bell. "I believe if she declared the trees were pink and the houses green, you'd uphold her!"

"Do you wear her portrait over your heart?" enquired Daisy Scatcherd facetiously.

"It was a very bad snapshot you got of her," remarked Ethel Newton.

"It certainly didn't do her justice," returned Meg, taking the matter quite seriously. "I'm going to have a new camera for my birthday, then I'll try again. But no snapshot could make Gipsy look as sweet as she really does."

"Not to your love-lorn eyes!" giggled the girls.

"Meg's a perfect joke at present," said Ethel Newton to Daisy Scatterd. "She copies Gipsy slavishly, even to doing her hair the same, and those two big bows of ribbon don't suit her in the least, however nice they look on Gipsy."

"And yet she's rather like Gipsy, just like enough to be a kind of pale copy--an understudy, in fact."

"You've hit it! Understudy's the very word. She's absolutely forming herself on Gipsy."

Curiously enough, Meg Gordon really bore rather a marked physical resemblance to the object of her worship. She was slim, and dark, and about the same height, and though she lacked Gipsy's vivacity of expression, a stranger might quite possibly have mistaken the one girl for the other. It was perhaps just as well that Gipsy had one such devoted ally, for there were a few malcontents in the Form who were not at all ready to accept her with enthusiasm. Maude Helm had taken a dislike to her from the first, and had allowed her prejudice not only to blind her to Gipsy's good points, but to cause her to try to influence others in her disfavour. It is rarely that anybody succeeds in doing a public service without making any enemies, and Gipsy was no exception to the rule. According to Maude's code, she had violated every tradition of school etiquette by pushing herself, a newcomer, into a position of prominence; and that she had conferred a real benefit upon the Lower School by her championship went for nothing.

"It's sickening, the way everybody truckles to her," declared Maude to a few of her particular chums. "I vote we stick out, at any rate, and don't let her have everything her own way. We don't want the school Americanized to suit her fancy."

"No; Miss Yankee will have to find out we're not all ready to lick her boots!" grumbled Alice O'Connor.

"Glad she wasn't chosen President of the Guild, at any rate," remarked Gladys Merriman. "If she puts up for anything else I shall oppose her. There are other people in this Form quite as capable of taking the lead as she is, if they only got the chance."

"Yourself not excepted, I suppose!" snapped Mary Parsons, who happened to overhear. "You forget Gipsy refused the Presidency voluntarily."

"Clever enough to see it would pay her best!" sneered Gladys. "She evidently knows how to get round the Form."

"Gladys! How mean you are! Well, you can't do Gipsy much harm by your nastiness, that's one comfort."

"It only makes me like her all the more," broke out Joyce Adamson, who had strolled up to take Mary's arm.

"All the same," said Mary to Joyce, as they walked away, "I believe those three would do Gipsy a bad turn if they got the chance."

"But could they?"

"Easy enough. Gipsy's anything but a favourite with the monitresses after this Guild business, and they'd be only too delighted to drop on her if they found a reasonable excuse."

"So they would, and Gipsy's hardly what you call a bread-and-butter Miss!"

"I should rather think not! She's ready for any amount of fun. She's bound to come into collision with Helen Roper sooner or later. I shall give her a hint that she'd better look out."

Gipsy was getting along famously in the Upper Fourth. Though some of the work was rather different from what she had been accustomed to in her former schools, she was a bright girl, and managed to fill up her deficiencies with tolerable ease. In one or two subjects she was actually ahead of her Form, and in all practical matters she had a mine of past experience to draw upon. She approved of her Form mistress, Miss White, adored the Swedish drill mistress, tolerated the German governess, and detested the French master. For Miss Edith she was disposed to reserve a very warm place in her heart, but she frankly disliked Miss Poppleton.

"There are headmistresses and headmistresses," she said. "Of course one expects them to stand on a pillar above the common herd, but some of them condescend to peep down below. Now Poppie doesn't. I'd as soon think of going to the man in the moon, and telling him I felt homesick or headachy or worried about anything, as I should to her. Much she'd care! She'd tell me not to report myself till I was sent for! Now at Dorcas City Miss Judkins was just a dear! We all went and told her our woes, and she comforted us up like a mother. We might go errands, too, if we asked leave first, and we made Fudge on the play-room stove about three times a week."

"You're always talking about Fudge!" giggled the boarders in whom these confidences were reposed.

"So'd you be if you'd once tasted it, I guess. It was real mean of Poppie not to let me buy that pan. We used to have

good times candy making when I was out West," said Gipsy, relapsing into Americanisms at the remembrance of past delights in the States.

"Wish you could make some here, Yankee Doodle! I haven't had even a chocolate drop for three days," declared Lennie Chapman.

"Poppie never said I mightn't borrow a pan," returned Gipsy reflectively. "It would be a pity for you not to see Fudge made. I call it neglect of your education. I believe it's my solemn duty to try and teach you," and her eyes twinkled.

"A duty's a duty," urged Lennie with a disinterested air.

"It's a cruel rule that we may only buy sweets once a week," remarked Dilys Fenton.

"More honoured in the breach than in the observance," added Hetty Hancock.

"I'm not going to break any rules," said Gipsy. "There's no law against borrowing, at least none that I've heard of. It's a good motto to do what you want until you're told not to. Ta ta! I'm off on a foraging expedition. Expect me back when you see me. I'm going to put my powers of persuasion to the test."

"You mad thing! Don't get into too big a scrape; Poppie can make herself nasty!" called Hetty.

"Don't worry yourself! I'll keep carefully out of Poppie's clutches," returned Gipsy, as she banged the door of the Juniors' sitting-room.

"She'll get into a row with Poppie yet, though," said Dilys; "she's far too free and easy for this school. Did you see how Poppie glared at her this morning in maths.?"

"Yes, but Gipsy didn't mind. She takes Poppie very lightly."

"She'll go too far some day," returned Dilys.

How Gipsy managed to wheedle the cook nobody ever discovered, but she returned in a short time triumphantly carrying a tray.

"Got all I wanted!" she announced. "A pan, and milk, and sugar, and even a bottle of vanilla. Can't you clear a place on the table? The thing's heavy."

A number of willing hands swept away books, needlework, and other impedimenta. It was evening recreation hour, so nearly all the Junior boarders were collected in the room. They viewed the interesting preparations with pleased anticipation.

"There!" said Gipsy, putting her burden down with a slam. "I reckon if any of you care to learn how to make American Fudge, now's your chance! Positively the last opportunity! By the by, 'reckon' is one of the words Poppie said I'd got to avoid, but it slipped out. I'll be more careful next time."

"Does Poppie know you've got these things?" squeaked Aggie Jones, a ten-year-old from the First Form.

"She's a trump if she let you!" echoed Pamela Harvey, of the Lower Second.

"You kids mind your own business!" said Hetty Hancock hastily.

"Poppie never said I mightn't have them, which amounts to the same thing," replied Gipsy calmly. "She hasn't given me a list of school rules, so I can't break them till I know what they are, can I? There's a law in most countries that a dog's allowed a first bite free. Well, this is going to be my first bite. Do you want to join this cookery demonstration, or not?"

"Rather!" said Lennie Chapman, "if you'll take the responsibility."

"And let us taste some of it afterwards!" added Daisy Scatterd.

"I'd never be so mean as to eat it all myself. I'll share it round evenly to the last crumb. Now, if you want to help, you may measure out three cupfuls of sugar, and three-quarters of a cupful of milk. Now this tablespoonful of butter. Yes, that's all, thanks. Somebody pull that fender away, please; I want to get to the fire."

Stolen waters are sweet, and schoolgirl nature is the same the whole world over. The Junior boarders all had more than a suspicion that Gipsy's cookery was unauthorized, but who could resist the attractions of toffee making?

"I hope it's a sort that goes cold quickly, and won't take till next morning to harden," said Dilys Fenton. "Last 5th of November I think we didn't boil ours quite long enough, and we really couldn't wait, so we ate it soft."

"You boil this till it threads from the spoon, and then you beat it with a fork till it creams," murmured Gipsy, with her head over the pan.

"Let me stir!" begged Pamela Harvey.

"You mustn't stir it. That's the secret of good Fudge-making, not to stir at all while it's boiling. It makes it coarse-grained if you do."

"Won't it burn, though?"

"It doesn't out in U.S.A. But then we make it on stoves, you see. I can't guarantee it on an open fire. By good rights it ought to have pieces of hickory nut in it, but it won't taste bad without."

"I'd call that fire fierce for ordinary toffee," commented Lennie Chapman.

"I'm sure I smell something," sniffed Dilys Fenton.

"Oh, it's burning!"

"Gipsy! Stir it!"

"It's boiling over!"

"Take it off, quick!"

Half a dozen eager hands snatched at the pan, but it was too late; the sugary compound rose like a volcano and overflowed into the fire. A wail of lament came from the disappointed girls.

"I knew it would!" protested Lennie.

"Oh, it's made an awful smell! Open the window, somebody!" shrieked Gipsy. "If we don't mind, Poppie'll nose it out, and come poking up. Oh! Good gracious!"

Gipsy might well exclaim, for there, just behind them, stood Miss Poppleton herself. She had been walking along the passage, and attracted by the smell of burning, she had opened the door quietly to ascertain the cause. There was a moment of awful silence. Eleven sinners felt themselves most horribly caught.

"Who brought these things here?" demanded Miss Poppleton, eyeing the tray and its paraphernalia.

"I did. I got them from the kitchen," answered Gipsy. "We always made Fudge in the schoolroom in Dorcas City," she added, with a spice of defiance in her voice.

"You won't here!" returned Miss Poppleton grimly. "Take those things back to the kitchen at once. You will stay in from hockey to-morrow, and learn a page of French poetry. Each of you others" (glaring at the crestfallen circle) "will copy fifty lines of *Paradise Lost*, and bring them to me before Thursday. If you can't be trusted, I shall have to send one of the Seniors to sit with you in the evenings."

With this awful threat she departed, having first seen the exit of Gipsy with the tray.

"I knew Gipsy was bound to get into a scrape sooner or later," groaned Dilys.

"And we're in too, worse luck!" wailed Daisy Scatterd. "Fifty lines is no joke!"

"It's ironical of her to choose *Paradise Lost* when the Fudge had just boiled over!" said Hetty. "She doesn't like Gipsy, it's easy enough to see that."

"Here's Gipsy back. Well, my child, what do you think of your 'first bite', as you call it? Poppie didn't see your privileges! You'll have the pleasure of learning a whole page of French poetry to improve your mind, instead of playing hockey to-morrow!"

"I don't care!" said Gipsy, with an obstinate set to her mouth. "She may give me anything she likes, to learn. When folks are nice to me, I'll keep any number of rules; but when they begin to bully me, I just feel inclined to go and do something outrageous. I'm afraid there's not much love lost between Poppie and me."

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## CHAPTER VII

### Gipsy takes her Fling

WHEN the novelty of her introduction to Briarcroft had somewhat faded, and the excitement of the Lower School mutiny had subsided, Gipsy began to find the life more than a trifle dull. She had an adventurous temperament, and her roving life had given her a taste for constant change and variety, so the prim regime of the English boarding school seemed to her monotonous in the extreme. She chafed against the confinement and the regularity of the well-ordered arrangements.

"I feel as if I were shut up in a box!" she declared. "How can you all go on every day so contentedly with this 'prunes and prism' business? When I was at school up-country in Australia the mistress used to notice when we got restless, and take us for a day's camp into the bush. The day girls would bring horses for us boarders to use (everybody rides out there), and off we'd go, each with our picnic basket on our saddle, and have the very jolliest good time you could imagine. It worked off our spirits, and we'd come back to lessons as fresh as daisies and as meek as lambs."

"You get hockey here," objected Dilys, who generally stood up for Briarcroft institutions.

"Not enough of it," sighed Gipsy. "I like hockey, but it's nothing to a day's riding."

"Did your headmistress ride too?" enquired Lennie.

"Rather! Miss Yorke was Colonial born, and could have sat a kangaroo, I should think! She was a different article from Poppie, I assure you."

"Can't imagine Poppie controlling a fiery steed," giggled the girls.

"I should like to see you on horseback, Gipsy," said Hetty.

"I'd be only too glad to accommodate you, my dear, if you'd provide the gee-gee. I can tell you I'm just yearning for a canter."

"Nothing but a clothes horse here," remarked Dilys facetiously.

"Or the colt in the meadow beyond the hockey field," said Lennie.

"The colt! Of course I'd forgotten the colt!" exclaimed Gipsy rapturously.

"You'd never sit that wild thing! You'd have to ride him bareback. Even your wonderful cleverness can't do everything, I suppose!" said Gladys sarcastically.

"I can ride bareback," returned Gipsy. "It's nearly as easy as with a saddle."

"I'd like to see you catch him first."

"That's perfectly possible--he wears a halter. Do you dare me to do it? How many chocolates will you give me if I do?"

"A dozen, and a whole boxful if you ride him round the field."

"Then I'll show you a little prairie practice this afternoon. I haven't lived in the Colonies for nothing!"

"Don't, Gipsy, don't! It's too dangerous!" besought Hetty and Lennie.

"She won't really--it's all brag!" sneered Gladys.

"Is it indeed, Miss Gladys Merriman? Just wait till this afternoon, and I'll undeceive you."

"I'll wait to buy the box of chocolates, though," sniggered Gladys.

None of the girls really believed that Gipsy was in earnest, yet they sallied forth to the hockey field that afternoon with a certain amused anticipation. The news had been spread abroad in the Lower School, so the Juniors had assembled ten minutes in advance of their ordinary time on the chance of witnessing what Hetty called "the circus-riding". The hockey ground was divided from the meadow by a strong wooden paling, on the farther side of which the colt, a shaggy, ungroomed, raw-boned specimen of horse-flesh, was feeding.

"It is as frisky as--well, as a colt!" said Mary Parsons. "You'd better not try to catch that creature, Gipsy."

"It'll pretty soon kick her off if she does!" said Alice O'Connor. "Well, Gipsy? Going to turn tail at the last minute? You'd best give in!"

"Rather not!" returned Gipsy. "When I'm dared to do a thing, I do it--or have a good try, at any rate. If I'm not galloping round the field in ten minutes, you may count me done. Hetty, you keep time!" And without stopping to listen to any more remonstrances, she climbed over the palings.

She had brought some bread with her, and she walked very gently towards the colt, holding out her bait, and making a series of chirruping sounds calculated to win its confidence. The rough little creature paused in its task of tearing the grass, and eyed her doubtfully. It had been petted, however, by the boys at the farm to which it belonged (a fact of which Gipsy was well aware when she accepted Gladys's challenge), and had a marked partiality for such dainties as bread, sugar, and carrots. Though Gipsy was a stranger, it evidently considered she was familiar with horse language, and encouraged by her chirrups it advanced cautiously, rolling its eyes a little, and sniffing suspiciously. Gipsy stood still, and without moving a muscle let it come quite near and inspect her. She held the bread on the palm of her left hand; her right hand was ready for action when necessary.

The row of girls leaning over the palings watched in dead silence. Summoning up its courage, the colt stretched out its nose to take the tempting bread. Gipsy let it get the coveted morsel well within its lips, then seized the halter with her left hand and the long chestnut mane with her right, and with a sudden agile bound and scramble flung herself across its back. It was so quickly and neatly done that the bystanders held their breath with admiration. Gipsy's horsemanship was evidently no idle boast, if she could perform so difficult a feat of gymnastics with such comparative ease. Meantime the colt, astonished and enraged at finding a burden on its back, was trying buck-jumping, and Gipsy had to cling to mane and halter to keep her seat. At this critical moment the Seniors and the mistresses arrived on the scene. Miss Poppleton's amazement and horror at finding one of her pupils mounted on the back of an unbroken colt were almost too great for words.

"Stop her! Stop her!" she gasped wildly. "Oh, for pity's sake, somebody stop her!"

But as it was certainly in nobody's power to stop her, Gipsy had to take the consequences of her own foolhardy act. The colt, after an amount of kicking and plunging, stood for an instant stockstill, then, rolling its eyes, set off at a furious gallop round the meadow. That Gipsy managed to stick on to its back even she herself afterwards confessed was almost a miracle, but she kept her seat somehow. Up and down the field fled her steed in furious career, till, tired of galloping, it changed its tactics and stood still and kicked, when Gipsy seized the opportunity of sliding to the ground. She just escaped its hoofs as, relieved of her weight, it scampered off to the farthest limit of the boundary fence. Very dishevelled and rather bruised and shaky, she picked herself up from the muddy spot where she had fallen, and limped back to the palings. The girls cheered. They couldn't help themselves, even though Miss Poppleton was present.

"She's as good as a cowboy!" exclaimed Lennie.

"Or a circus rider!" added Hetty proudly.

"Well done, Gipsy!"

"Bravo!"

Miss Poppleton, however, did not share the popular enthusiasm, and received her adventurous pupil with a scolding instead of congratulations.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Gipsy Latimer," she said sternly. "It's a mercy you were not killed. Understand once for all that I forbid such mad proceedings. If you have hurt your leg you had better go indoors. The sooner you learn that these are not Briarcroft ways, the better. This is a school for young ladies, not young hoydens!"

Slightly abashed, Gipsy beat a retreat to the house, where Miss Edith, who had been an agitated spectator from the linen-room window, bathed the wounded leg, put arnica on the bruises, and comforted the sufferer, while she proffered good advice.

"It was very naughty of you, you know, Gipsy dear!" she said in her kind-hearted, deprecating manner. "I don't know anything about riding, but it looked most dangerous, and of course, if Miss Poppleton said it was wrong, it was wrong. My sister is always right. Please remember that. Why, child, you're all trembling! I'll make you a cup of Bovril, and you must lie down on your bed for an hour. And promise me faithfully you'll never do such a foolish, silly, mad thing again! We want to hand you over to your father in good health when he comes to fetch you, and he'd blame us if you were hurt."

"He knows me only too well," twinkled Gipsy. "But there--I'll promise anything you like, dear Miss Edith! Yes, the bruises feel better now, and the Bovril would be delicious. And you're a darling! Let me give you one hug, and I'll lie down like a monument of patience, though I don't feel the least scrap ill."

While the Seniors, with whom Gipsy was out of favour, viewed her escapade with lofty contempt as a madcap proceeding, the Juniors regarded her as an even greater heroine than before. Gladys Merriman redeemed her promise, and brought the box of chocolates she had offered, and Gipsy with strictest impartiality handed them round the Form till they were finished.

Gipsy had certainly established her record for horse-breaking, and though, according to Miss Poppleton, it was scarcely a lady-like accomplishment, there was hardly anyone in the Lower School who did not admire her prowess.

"You're like the girl in the cinematograph who tracks the villain to his mountain retreat, or finds the hero, bound with cords, lying in the brushwood, and then rides off post-haste to inform the sheriff. She always catches a wild-looking horse, and gallops full speed!" laughed Dilys.

"I wish we'd a cinema camera!" sighed Hetty. "We might have taken some gorgeous records this afternoon for the Photographic Society. No one even got a snapshot."

"Your own faults, not mine! You should have brought your cameras!" returned Gipsy.

"We never thought you'd really do it."

"Is that so? Well, when I allow to do any special thing, I guess I admire to see it through!"

"Oh, you Yankee!" roared the others.

Though the girls laughed at her Americanisms and Colonial ways, and often teased her about them, Gipsy continued as great a favourite as ever, she took all the banter so good-temperedly, and returned it so smartly. There was always a delightful uncertainty also as to what she would do next, and the prospect of an exciting interlude by "Yankee Doodle", as she was nicknamed, was felt decidedly to relieve the monotony of the ordinary Briarcroft atmosphere. Not that Gipsy really ever meant to behave badly; but, accustomed as she was to the free-and-easy conduct of her up-country Colonial schools, she found it almost impossible to realize that what would have been tolerated there with a smile was in her new surroundings counted a heinous crime. The silence rules and the orderly march in step from classroom to lecture hall filled her with dismay. She appeared to expect to be allowed to tear about the passages, talking at top speed, even in school hours, and many were the admonitions she incurred from indignant monitresses.

"A fine model you are for the Lower School!" said Doreen Tristram sarcastically one day. "Can't even walk decently in line, and prance about for all the world like a monkey tied to a barrel piano!"

Doreen had taken the defection of the Juniors much to heart, and could not forgive the leader of the opposition.

"Thanks! I wasn't aware my movements were so original!" retorted Gipsy. "There's method in my madness this time, though. I was trying to dodge Miss White, and dash upstairs to get my *Hamlet*. I've forgotten the wretched thing, and if I go to class without a book, Poppie--h'm! I mean Miss Poppleton" (as Doreen's eyebrows went up)--"will want to know the reason why."

"I expect she will," returned Doreen dryly. "And serve you right too, for forgetting! No, I shall not allow you to go and fetch it. I'm here to keep order, not to help you out of scrapes."

The Upper Fourth, under Doreen's superintendence, had just filed from its own classroom to attend a Shakespeare lecture by the Principal. The girls were a few minutes early, and in consequence were drawn up like a small regiment in the corridor to wait until a previous class was over and they could enter the lecture hall. Waiting is often dull work, and Gipsy had considered herself a public benefactor in seeking to enliven the tedium of her form mates. Doreen's notions on the subject of discipline did not appeal to her.

"But I can't go to the Shakespeare lesson without my *Hamlet*," she remonstrated. "Suppose I'm asked to read?"

"You should have thought of that before!" snapped Doreen. "Be quiet, Gipsy Latimer; if you speak another word I shall report you!"

Gipsy refrained from further unavailing speech, but her active brain was by no means silenced. I do not think anybody but herself would have dreamed of doing what followed. The outer door of the corridor was standing open, and when the monitress's back was for the moment turned, Gipsy slipped out into the playground. On the opposite side of the quadrangle stood the open window of her classroom, ten feet or so above the ground. The wall of that part of

the house was thickly covered with ivy, and in less time than it takes to tell it she was scrambling up with as much agility as the monkey to which Doreen had unfeelingly compared her. A few girls who happened to be standing near the door and witnessed her achievement gasped audibly, but I verily believe Gipsy would have been back before she was missed, had not Maude Helm officiously chirped out:

"Oh, I say! Look at Yankee Doodle!"

Naturally the monitress did look, and fled into the courtyard in pursuit of the runaway. Her outraged face, upturned from below, greeted Gipsy as that irrepressible damsel reappeared at the window waving her *Hamlet* in triumph.

"Gipsy Latimer, go back down the stairs!" commanded Doreen.

"No, thanks! It's shorter this way, and saves time," returned Gipsy, dropping her book first, then swinging herself out of the window. She came down the ivy quite easily, picked up her *Hamlet*, smoothed its cover, which had suffered in the fall, and flitted back to her place in the corridor, just as the lecture room door opened to let out the Third Form and admit the Upper Fourth. Doreen followed grimly.

"You needn't think you're going to play these tricks with impunity," she said. "You'll report yourself to-morrow at the monitresses' meeting at four o'clock. We'll see what the head of the school has to say to you!"

"Delighted, I'm sure! I've got my *Hamlet*, anyhow," chuckled naughty Gipsy, as she disappeared into the lecture hall.

On this occasion I am afraid she was not altogether innocent of cause of offence, and had taken a distinct pleasure in defying Doreen. Perhaps she thought, on maturer consideration, that she had gone a trifle too far, for she turned up at the monitresses' meeting with a countenance sobered down to the requirements of so solemn a convocation.

"Gipsy Latimer, you are here to report yourself for insubordination," began Helen Roper with dignity. "Do you realize that monitresses are officers in this school, and that their authority is only second to that of the mistresses?"

Gipsy took a clean handkerchief from her pocket, and, unfolding it ostentatiously, blinked hard.

"I realize it now," she answered, with a something in her voice that might have been either laughter or tears; "I'm afraid I was very ignorant before."

Helen glared at her suspiciously. Was that a twinkle in the dark eyes? But no; Gipsy was looking grave in the extreme.

"The monitresses must be obeyed," continued the head of the school. "Every girl at Briarcroft knows that, and anyone who deliberately disobeys incurs the penalty of being reported to Miss Poppleton."

The corners of Gipsy's mouth were drooping; her face had assumed an expression of abject penitence.

"Please don't do that to me!" she pleaded humbly. "Remember how badly I've been brought up! If I'd been at Briarcroft all the time, instead of other schools, and had had the advantage of the monitresses, I might have been different."

"I expect you would," said Helen freezingly. "And you'll please to remember that now you're here, you'll have to conform to our standards."

"I know I'm a heathen. I'll be only too grateful to be taught better," murmured the subdued voice that was so strangely unlike Gipsy's usual sprightly tones.

Lena Morris turned away to hide a smile. She was possessed of a strong sense of humour, and moreover had a sneaking liking for Gipsy.

"Mind you do as you're told next time, then," commanded Helen. "I'll excuse you this once, but if it happens again, I warn you that I shall send you straight to Miss Poppleton. You may think yourself very lucky to be let off so easily. You can go now."

Gipsy's big brown eyes looked like two wells absolutely overflowing with gratitude and humility.

"Thanks so very immensely much! It's far more than I deserve!" she sighed, and, flaunting the clean handkerchief, beat a hasty retreat.

The monitresses would have been edified if they could have seen the war dance she executed in the passage as soon as the door was shut.

"Couldn't have kept my face a moment longer!" she choked to one or two friends who were waiting for her. "Oh, you should have seen me as the penitent! I think I did the thing rather neatly."

"You mad hatter! I wonder Helen didn't see you were shamming," said Hetty.

"No, no! She's been improving my mind and showing me the path I ought to walk in. How would you like me if I turned out a first-class prig?"

"It couldn't be done. Come along, you wild gipsy thing! Do you want the monitresses to come out and catch you? You'll get into a really big scrape some day if you're not careful."

"Some people are born wise and proper, and some are born otherwise. I'm one of the otherwise! It's my misfortune, not my fault," laughed Gipsy, as Lennie and Hetty dragged her forcibly away.

Gipsy's wild spirits were undoubtedly liable to lead her beyond the bounds of propriety, and both mistresses and monitresses were inclined, justly or unjustly, to suspect that she was at the bottom of any mischief that cropped up in the school. One incident, though shrouded in mystery, was generally laid by Miss Poppleton as a sin to her charge. In the upper corridor, not very far from Gipsy's dormitory, hung a long chain which sounded a fire bell. The boarders at Briarcroft were instructed in fire drill, though a night summons was generally only given in summertime, as Miss Poppleton was afraid of the girls catching cold. Gipsy had read the printed card of "Directions in case of Fire", and had examined the chute with intense interest.

"I'd just love to go sliding down it out of our bedroom window," she exclaimed. "It would be almost as much fun as tobogganing."

"Rather freezing work on these sharp nights. There was ice on the puddles this morning," said Dilys. "No fire-drill practice for me, thank you! I prefer to stop snug in bed."

"You've no spirit of adventure in you," returned Gipsy.

"I've got sound common sense instead, and that's what you don't possess, Yankee Doodle!"

"All the same, that summons is going to come off, by hook or by crook!" said Gipsy to herself. "It would be a kindness to the school to give it a chance to see whether it's prepared for emergencies. Gipsy Latimer, I guess you'll have to be the philanthropist! But you've no need to flaunt your noble deed. 'Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame', in fact."

If Gipsy, before she went to bed that night, contrived to tie a long piece of string to the bell chain in the passage, and to secure the other end to her bedpost, she did not blazon the fact abroad, and the string was so neatly laid against the edges of skirting board and under mats that nobody happened to notice it. At 3 a.m., when the whole of Briarcroft was wrapped in deepest slumbers, there suddenly came the great *clang-clang* of the fire bell, resounding and echoing through the quiet house. Everybody woke in a hurry, and the head of each dormitory at once switched on the electric light and assumed command. The well-trained girls dipped their towels in water and put them over their mouths, threw the red blankets from their beds round their shoulders, and lined up along the corridor. Miss Lindsay was already there, and gave the command to march, and away trooped the boarders downstairs and out of the front door on to the lawn, where they ranged themselves to be counted. The light streaming through the front door revealed a strange sight--all the girls in night gear, with their scarlet blankets trailing on the ground. The juveniles were clasping dolls and other treasures, and some of the others had caught up big sponges in their confusion. The whole exit had only taken about a hundred seconds from the sounding of the bell, and if Gipsy was last, and clutched a roll of string in her hand, nobody remarked the circumstance.

There followed a hurried enquiry among the mistresses as to the whereabouts of the fire, and the discovery that no fire existed. Miss Poppleton hastily gave the order to return, and the boarders trooped back shivering to the dormitories, not a little disconcerted to have been disturbed for nothing on a chilly night in November. The Principal made every enquiry next day as to the source of the alarm, but she could discover nothing. Dilys Fenton was able to assure her that when she had switched on the light in No. 3 Dormitory Gipsy Latimer had been asleep, and she had been obliged to shake her violently to awaken her, so it was quite impossible that Gipsy could be responsible for the practical joke. The occurrence made a great excitement among the boarders. For days they talked of scarcely anything else.

"It was over too soon, and they didn't use the chute after all," said Gipsy disconsolately.

"Gipsy! you never--you couldn't-- Oh, surely----!"

But Gipsy's brown eyes looked such absolute mirrors of innocence that even Hetty's suspicions were laid to rest.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### Daisy Forgets

THOUGH Gipsy was accustomed to try to enjoy herself in any place where circumstances chanced to fling her, and though she had contrived to settle down fairly happily at Briarcroft, she nevertheless thought often of her father, far away on the opposite side of the Equator. He must long ago have arrived at the Cape, and it was high time that she received news from him, telling her of his whereabouts. Every morning she looked out anxiously for the post, but day after day brought the same disappointment. She was the only boarder who had no letters, and she often felt her isolated position keenly when she saw her schoolmates tearing open their welcome budgets. It would be nice, she thought, to have a mother and brothers and sisters to write to her, and a home to go to in the holidays. In her roving life she could not remember a real home; a log hut for a few weeks in a mining camp had been the nearest approach to it.

"But I've Dad, and he's better than a whole family; and it's fun to go about the world with him, though I do live mostly at hotels when I'm not at school," she said to herself. "I'm not going to worry my head. Dad will send me a letter as soon as he possibly can, I know. He's not in the least likely to forget me."

So she tried to comfort herself, but every day she looked out wistfully for the postman--how wistfully nobody but Miss Edith ever noticed. It was growing towards the end of November, and already the boarders were beginning to talk of the holidays. The evening recreation time was devoted to the making of Christmas presents; even the little girls were busy embroidering traycloths and constructing pincushions. Gipsy began to work a pair of slippers for her father, a rather lengthy proceeding, for she was not clever at needlecraft, and was apt to pull her wool too tightly, having to unpick her stitches in consequence. There was no particular hurry in her case, though, for it was impossible for her to dispatch the parcel in time for Christmas when she did not know where to address it. If there was a forlorn look in the brown eyes sometimes when others talked about home, they twinkled again so readily that her schoolmates never realized she could feel lonely, and a stranger in a strange land. To them she appeared the very epitome of fun and happy-go-lucky carelessness, and they would have been surprised indeed if they had known what a very sore heart she carried occasionally under her outward assumption of jollity.

Daisy Scatterd's birthday fell on the last day of November. Daisy, though she merited her nickname of "Scatterbrains", was rather a favourite among the boarders, so she came off very well indeed in the matter of presents. Her home people had also remembered her, and many interesting parcels arrived for her during the course of the morning. Between four and half-past, in the afternoon, she was taking a run round the garden in company with a few friends, when she spied the postman walking briskly up the drive.

"I expect he's got something more for me," she exclaimed, and dived under the laurels to take a short cut to the drive and intercept him.

"Give me the letters, please! It's my birthday!" she said breathlessly.

"Only three this afternoon, missy! Don't know whether any of 'em's for you or not," said the man, laughing.

"Let me see! Yes! yes! I'll take them, please. It's all right."

Not sorry to save the extra walk to the house, the postman departed. He was late, and had a long round before he could return home. Daisy was looking eagerly at the letters. One, a thin foreign envelope, was addressed to Miss Gipsy Latimer, and that she thrust hastily into her coat pocket; the other two were for herself. They both contained postal orders, which elevated her to such heights of satisfaction that she never gave a thought to the letter she had stuffed in her pocket: indeed, in her excitement she had put it away so automatically that the incident faded from her memory almost as soon as it happened. She rushed into the house in a state of great exultation, to ask Miss Edith to take charge of her orders, and put them away safely.

"A whole pound! Isn't it lovely? I shall buy a new camera, or perhaps a bookcase like Hetty Hancock's; or I want a bracelet watch most fearfully badly, and I expect I'll get some more money at Christmas that I could put to it. What would you advise, Miss Edith?" she chattered.

"Wait till you go home and consult your mother," said Miss Edith. "What a cold you've got, child! You oughtn't to have been running about the garden. And this coat is much too thin. You must wear your thick one now. Put this away in your wardrobe, to take home at Christmas."

"Mother said I needn't take my autumn clothes back with me," objected Daisy. "It only crams up my boxes. She said they might as well be left here."

"Very well. I'll put it away in my big cupboard until the spring. Here are some cough lozenges, and I shall rub your chest to-night with camphorated oil. Go and sit by the fire, and mind you don't get into draughts."

"I've got all my birthday letters to answer," replied Daisy, as she tripped gaily away. "I don't particularly want to go out again."

Miss Edith folded the coat neatly, placed a packet of camphor balls with it to keep away moths, and laid it with a pile of similar garments inside a large cupboard in the linen room. It never struck her to look in the pockets, so the letter so longed for and expected lay upstairs in the dark, and Gipsy waited and hoped, and hoped and waited, all in vain.

To forget her troubles she threw herself with enthusiasm into the working of the Dramatic Section of the Lower School Guild. The Juniors intended to act *The Sleeping Beauty*, and she had been chosen as the wicked fairy, a part which she rehearsed with much spirit. She was unwearied in her efforts at arranging costumes, constructing scenery, and coaching her fellow performers in their speeches. She soon had the whole play by heart, and could act prompter without the help of the book—a decided convenience to those whose memories were liable to fail them at critical moments.

Though the Guild comprised a number of separate societies, it lacked one feature which Gipsy considered it certainly ought to possess. Briarcroft had no school magazine, and not even among the Seniors had one ever been suggested.

"Yet it's really a most necessary thing," urged Gipsy. "How else can one give notice of coming events, and reports of what has taken place? It's such fun, too! Why shouldn't we steal a march on the Upper School and start one of our own?"

"There's the expense, my child, for one thing," replied Mary Parsons, who was treasurer of the United Guild. "The subscriptions don't go very far when we want to buy so many things with them. I'm sure they wouldn't run to printing."

"I never intended having it printed. I know that would be beyond us."

"Perhaps we could have it typed," suggested Fiona Campbell, whose father was a journalist. "Dad always sends his articles to a typing office, and it looks just as good as printing when it's done."

"I don't think the Guild could afford even that," said Mary. "The costumes for the play will about clear out the funds for this term, and next term, you know, we voted to buy a developing machine."

"It was mean of the Seniors to stick to all the properties of the other Guilds! They might have given us something," put in Norah Bell.

"Trust them! They wouldn't part with so much as a twopenny music sheet!" said Gipsy. "But about the Magazine; it needn't cost us anything. My idea was to ask Miss White to lend us the duplicator, and we'd make a copy for each Form. They could be lent round and round. If we liked we might put in a few illustrations. You're good at drawing, Fiona."

"That certainly sounds more simple," said Dilys. "And the Mag. would be ripping fun. We'd have articles and poetry and stories and reviews and all sorts of things."

"Would it be a monthly?" enquired Hetty.

"I should say about twice a term would be enough," said Gipsy. "It would be difficult to get contributions if you had it too often."

"We couldn't duplicate the illustrations," objected Fiona, whose mind was already turned to things artistic.

"No; each Form would have to provide its own pictures for its own copy. That would make it all the more interesting. There'd be no two quite alike."

"And we could even have advertisements, and a kind of Exchange and Mart!" exclaimed Dilys, who was immensely taken with the idea. "It would just suit the First and Second; they're always trading white mice or silkworms with one another."

"We'll add a Beauty Bureau, with hints about the complexion, if you like," suggested Gipsy demurely.

The others laughed, for Dilys was rather vain of her appearance, and kept many bottles of toilet requisites upon her portion of the dressing-table.

"Best call a general meeting of the Guild; then we can propose the thing, and have it carried through in proper

order," said Hetty. "I believe it will catch on. Gipsy, you write out some notices and pin them up in the classrooms."

"A GENERAL MEETING

of the

UNITED GUILD

Will be held on THURSDAY at 4 p.m. in the  
Dressing-Room.

Business:--To discuss the proposal of starting  
a Lower School Magazine.

All members are particularly requested to attend."

So ran the Secretary's notice, and the girls who read it were only too eager to respond to the invitation. They felt that Gipsy stirred things up at Briarcroft, and were ready to listen to anything fresh she might have to suggest. As Hetty had expected, the idea was received with enthusiasm, and when Gipsy propounded her scheme in detail, everybody cordially agreed, and the motion was carried unanimously.

"There's one principal matter to be settled," said Dilys, who, as President, occupied the post of chairman. "We've got to choose an editor."

"Then I beg to propose Gipsy Latimer," said Meg Gordon, rising hastily.

"And I beg to second the proposal," said Hetty Hancock.

"Gipsy! Yes, Gipsy!" exclaimed the girls, and a forest of hands went up.

"You'll have to take it, Gipsy," urged Hetty. "You're the most suitable of anybody. It's a new thing in the school, so it's best managed by a new girl. We should none of us understand how to do it. Besides, you suggested it. The whole plan of it is yours."

"Right-o, if you think I'm 'the man for the job'," agreed Gipsy.

Though she had not canvassed for the post, Gipsy was delighted to get the editorship. Running a magazine was work that exactly suited her. She was sure she could make it a success, and she looked forward with immense satisfaction to issuing her first number. A name had yet to be chosen, and after much debate it was decided to call the new venture the *Briarcroft Juniors' Journal*.

"That'll quite cut the Seniors out of it," said Meg Gordon. "We don't want them to get any of the credit."

"And 'Juniors' Journal' has a nice juicy kind of sound," said Daisy Scatcherd.

"A juicy journal would be a new departure--it suggests oily words and honeyed speeches!" laughed Hetty.

By general vote, the first number was to be issued a week before the end of the term, so Gipsy had to set to work in earnest in her capacity of editress, inviting contributions from likely members, and settling the various departments of her magazine. She intended to conduct it on the lines of a real publication, and to keep separate pages for Sports and Pastimes, Reviews of Books, Nature Notes, How to Make Things, Handy Recipes, Puzzles, Competitions, and Letters from Correspondents, as well as matter of a more original literary character. It was rather a big order, but Gipsy's ambitions soared high; she felt it was a chance for the Lower School to shine, and she spared no trouble to make her scheme a success.

There was very little time for all this, but she worked systematically, apportioning the departments among different girls, and making them promise to write certain things. Joyce Adamson, who was "great" on hockey, was told off for "Sports and Pastimes"; Ethel Newton, a day girl, who lived a few miles away quite in the heart of the country, undertook the "Nature Notes"; Meg Gordon's fertile brain could be trusted to invent puzzles and competitions; neat-fingered Norah Bell contributed an article on "How to make Paper Boxes"; and Gipsy herself undertook the "Library Shelf" and "Answers to Correspondents". Fiona Campbell provided some dainty illustrations, and her example was emulated by members of other Forms, who were also invited to submit articles, stories, nature notes, and puzzles. Gipsy, with the oligarchy of the Seniors fresh in her memory as a warning, did not wish the Upper Fourth to monopolize the Magazine by any means, and the younger girls were strongly urged to try their 'prentice hands at the art of

composition. She herself was busy with the opening chapter of a serial, in which she intended to set forth all her adventures in the Colonies, embroidered by the aid of her imagination. Fortunately Miss White was kind, and, sympathizing with the idea of a magazine, allowed the duplicator to be used in its production, so that Gipsy was able to strike off six copies, for the First, Second, Lower Third, Upper Third, Lower Fourth, and Upper Fourth respectively. Each Form undertook to produce its own cover, the younger children being helped by the drawing mistress, who was much interested, and allowed a special afternoon to be devoted to the purpose. The designs were painted on brown paper, and varied from sprays of flowers to conventional patterns, according to the taste of the Form, though each bore in large letters the same inscription: *Briarcroft Juniors' Journal*.

It was a proud day for Gipsy when she completed her arrangements, and all the six copies were ready in their artistic covers. The contributors had really done their best in the brief time at their disposal. There were two or three short stories, an article on pet dogs, some recipes for sweets and toffee, including Gipsy's favourite American Fudge, and quite a long page of nature notes, the latter being contributed mostly by the day girls. Gipsy had not had time to write any book reviews, but she had enjoyed herself over the answers to correspondents. She had posted up a notice inviting letters when first the scheme for the Magazine was accepted, and quite a budget had been delivered at the "editorial office" --otherwise her school desk. Some were couched in rather a facetious vein, but she answered them as if they were intended to be serious, sometimes with a comic result. A correspondent who signed herself "Honeysuckle" had enquired: "Can you tell me how to stop my feet from growing any bigger? I take fives in shoes and I am only eleven." To which Gipsy replied: "You are evidently eating too much, Honeysuckle! Limit your diet to water and crusts, and abstain from sweets, cakes, and toffee in any form. You will then probably stop growing at all in any direction, either up or down."

Gertie Butler, of the Lower Third, had blossomed into poetry, and had composed an "Ode to the Magazine", the opening lines of which ran:

"Hail, literary gem of Briarcroft Hall!  
Thou com'st to be a blessing to us all".

The exchange column was voted "ripping", and resulted in the transfer of several families of white mice, some foreign stamps, a variety of picture post-cards, and other treasures. The first instalment of Gipsy's serial, "The Girl Pioneer of Wild Cat Creek", was so thrillingly exciting that its readers could hardly wait for the second chapter, and pressed the authoress for details of "what was coming next"; but as Gipsy had not made up any more, they were obliged to curb their impatience. Altogether the Magazine was a brilliant success; and if it lacked anything in composition and grammar, it made that up in other ways. Miss Poppleton, who examined a copy, expressed her entire approval, and the teachers greatly encouraged the girls to persevere and continue this new branch of the Guild. The Seniors affected to ignore the whole affair.

"But that's just put on," said Hetty Hancock. "They know all about it. I saw Helen Roper and Doreen Tristram sneak into our classroom yesterday when no one was there, at dinner-time. The Mag. was lying on Miss White's desk, and they took it up and began to read it. They simply shrieked with laughing."

"What cheek! Let them write one of their own then!" exclaimed the indignant editress. "I'll undertake to say it wouldn't be half as interesting as ours!"

"Not one ten-millionth part as nice. Ours is just too scrumptiously ripping!" agreed Hetty.

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## CHAPTER IX

### Gipsy grows Anxious

GIPSY spent the Christmas holidays at Briarcroft. Miss Poppleton went away to Switzerland, to refresh her tired mind with the winter sports; but Miss Edith stayed behind, to count linen, and superintend workmen who were making some alterations in the bathrooms. She and Gipsy managed to enjoy themselves in a quiet manner, but the latter hailed the return of her schoolfellows with considerable relief. The house seemed so big and silent and lonely without its usual lively crew of boarders, and the dormitory with its empty beds oppressed her. Miss Poppleton came back more brisk and bustling than ever, and was at once immersed in the business of interviewing parents and rearranging school affairs, and in the thousand and one cares that always occupied her at the beginning of term.

When about ten days had gone by, and Briarcroft had settled down into its ordinary routine, she sent a message to Gipsy to report herself in the study. Gipsy obeyed with a feeling of considerable apprehension. Miss Poppleton's manner towards her, never very gracious, had been markedly cold since the Christmas holidays. For some reason she was evidently much out of favour. She tapped more deferentially at the study door, and entered less confidently than she had done on the morning after her arrival. A term at Briarcroft had taught her many lessons. The Principal was seated at her desk, studying an account book, and to judge from the jerking movements of her mouth, she was in a state of mind quite the reverse of amiable.

"Gipsy Latimer," she began uncompromisingly, "I've sent for you to enquire if you've heard anything at all from your father?"

Gipsy shook her head silently. It was such a sore subject that she could hardly bear to speak about it.

"It's a most extraordinary thing!" commented Miss Poppleton. "Since the day he left you here, he has never written a line either to me or to you. I don't like the look of it at all. Did he tell you where he was going?"

"Back to Cape Town," replied Gipsy briefly.

"Did he leave you any address?"

"No; he said he would be going up-country into a very wild place, but he would write when he got to the Cape."

"Has he any friends at Cape Town who would know of his whereabouts?"

"Not that I know of."

The barometer of Miss Poppleton's face seemed to fall still lower.

"This won't do at all!" she said, frowning. "When your father brought you, he paid for you up to Christmas, but no more. Now, the rule of this school is that fees must be paid in advance at the beginning of each term. I don't make an exception for anybody. Where are your fees for this term, I should like to know?--to say nothing of the holidays you spent here!"

It was such an utterly unanswerable question that Gipsy did not attempt a reply.

"I had a girl left on my hands like this once before," continued Miss Poppleton, "and I said then it should never happen again. Have you any relations in England?"

"Not one!"

"Or friends who could take charge of you?"

"I know absolutely nobody in England."

"Who are your relations, then? Surely you must have some in some portion of the globe?"

"Not any near ones. We have some cousins in New Zealand, at a farm right up in the bush."

"Where did your father come from? Hadn't your mother any relations?"

"Father was born in New Zealand, but his grandfather came out from England. Mother was an American, from Texas, I believe. Her mother was Spanish. I never heard about her relations. She died when I was a baby, and we've always been travelling about ever since I can remember."

"Humph! That doesn't look well. Had your father no permanent address, then, where letters would always be forwarded to him?"

"I never heard him say so."

Gipsy stood with her little brown hands pressed hard together, and her mouth set tightly while she answered this unwelcome catechism. Miss Poppleton might have pitied the sad look in the dark eyes, but she went on bluntly:

"I'm afraid it's only too evident he wants to get rid of the burden of your education. We've got to trace him somehow. It's all very fine for him to leave you here and desert you!"

Gipsy's face turned crimson, and the big sob that had been gathering in her throat nearly choked her for a moment.

"Father would never desert me!" she gasped at last. "He promised faithfully he'd come back and fetch me. Oh! you don't know Dad, to say that. I'm afraid something's happened to him--out there!"

She did not tell Miss Poppleton how she had hoped against hope, and lain awake at night wondering, and searching her mind for any possible solution of his silence, but she looked such a forlorn little figure that in spite of herself the Principal slightly relented.

"Well, Gipsy," she said more kindly, "I'm afraid it looks a bad business. I'm sure you understand that it would be impossible for me to keep on my school if pupils did not pay their fees. I can't afford to be kept waiting. In your case, however, we'll let matters stand for awhile, and see if we hear from your father. In the meantime I might write to your cousins in New Zealand. It will take three months, though, before I can get a letter back."

"More," sighed Gipsy. "They only go down to the town once a month for letters, and not then if the river's in flood. They live in such a wild place--right up in the bush."

"At any rate they're your relations, and ought to be responsible for you," snapped Miss Poppleton. "If the worst comes to the worst, I could send you out to them through the Emigration Society. It's a very awkward position to be placed in--very awkward indeed. You're absolutely sure you know of nobody, either in England or at the Cape, who could give information about your father?"

"No one at all. I didn't know anything about Dad's business. I was at school, and he used just to come and fetch me for the holidays," confessed Gipsy sadly.

Miss Poppleton shut her account book with an annoyed slam.

"Well, there's no further help for it at present. We must see what turns up. Of course, I can't pretend to keep you here indefinitely. Give me the address of your cousins in New Zealand, and I will write to them to-day. That seems the best we can do. The whole thing is most unfortunate."

Gipsy dictated the address as steadily as she could, then taking advantage of Miss Poppleton's brief "That will do; you may go now!" she fled to the most remote corner of her dormitory and sobbed her heart out. There she was found later on by Miss Edith, who came to put away clean clothes. Poor Miss Edith was generally torn in two between strict loyalty to her sister and the promptings of her own kind heart. She knew the cause of Gipsy's trouble well enough. She sat down beside the forlorn child, and comforted her as best she could.

"I wish Dad would write! Oh, he can't have forgotten me! I wish I'd anybody to go to; I haven't a soul nearer than New Zealand!" wailed Gipsy.

"You mustn't make yourself so miserable, Gipsy dear!" said Miss Edith nervously. "I'm sure Miss Poppleton will keep you here for a while, and perhaps your father will write after all. My sister will do everything that's right--she always does. Oh, don't sob so, child! She'll see that you're taken care of. Do try to cheer up, that's a dear! You must trust Miss Poppleton, Gipsy. There, there! You'll feel better now you've had a good cry. Wash your face in cold water, and take a run round the garden. It's a good thing it's Saturday!"

Gipsy didn't feel equally confident of Miss Poppleton's benevolence, but she gave Miss Edith a hug, and took her advice. She had not lost faith in her father, only his silence made her fear for his welfare. She was aware of the many dangers of life in the rough mining camps where his work lay, and shuddered as she remembered his tales of attacks by desperadoes, skirmishes with natives, or perils of wild beasts. Almost directly, however, her naturally cheerful and hopeful disposition reasserted itself. She knew letters sometimes miscarried or were lost, or perhaps her father might have been ill and unable to write.

"He'll let me hear about him somehow," she said to herself. "I must just try and be very patient. Dad desert me! Why,

the idea's ridiculous. And I've a feeling I'd know if he was dead. No! He's alive somewhere and thinking of me, and it will all come right in the end. His very last words were: 'I'll soon be back to fetch you!' I mustn't let folks at the school think I don't believe in Dad. That would never do! I'll show them how I can trust him!"

True to her intention of vindicating her faith in her father, Gipsy, after the first outburst of tears, took a pride in concealing her feelings, and preserving at least an outward appearance of calm confidence. It certainly needed all her courage to face the situation, for there were several circumstances which rendered it peculiarly trying. Miss Poppleton, with whom she had never been a favourite, snapped at her more frequently than before, and was harder to please as regarded both lessons and conduct. Gipsy often felt she was treated unfairly, and received more than her due share of blame for any little occurrence that cropped up.

A great many small things contributed to make her feel her position. Her morning glass of milk, which all the boarders and some of the day girls took in the pantry at eleven o'clock, was knocked off, as were all concerts and lectures where there was a charge for admission. It was not pleasant, when the other boarders were taken into Greyfield, to have to stay behind for the sake of the price of a ticket and a tram fare. She had long ago spent all her pocket-money, and there was no more forthcoming. Not only was she denied such luxuries as chocolates, but she was not even able to pay her subscription to the Guild, which, by the new arrangement, was due at the beginning of each term. The Committee, who knew the reason and sympathized with her, ignored the matter; but poor Gipsy, as Secretary, felt her deficiency very keenly when she made up the accounts. She was a proud, sensitive girl, and the knowledge that she alone, of the whole Guild, had not rendered her dues to the Treasurer was a bitter humiliation.

It was not in regard to the Guild alone that she was hampered by lack of money. During the spring term the girls at Briarcroft were accustomed to get up a small bazaar in aid of a home for waifs and strays. They were already beginning to work for it, and Gipsy, who would gladly have helped, made the unpleasant discovery that it is impossible to make bricks without straw, or in other words that she had no materials. Each Form generally took a stall, so one afternoon there was a little informal meeting of the Upper Fourth, to discuss what contributions could be relied upon.

"I vote that each girl undertakes to make a certain number of articles; that would be far the easiest, and then we should know how we stand," suggested Alice O'Connor. "We'll draw up a list, and write it down."

"Need we do it quite that way?" said Hetty Hancock. "Wouldn't it be enough if each promises to do what she can?"

"Why? It's much better to nail people."

"Well, you see, it mightn't suit everybody. There's one girl I know who perhaps really couldn't undertake to make several things. We don't want her to feel uncomfortable."

Gipsy was not in the room at that moment, so Hetty was free to give her hint.

"If you mean Gipsy Latimer, I don't see why we should spoil the bazaar to spare her feelings!" returned Alice bluntly.

"I don't want to spoil the bazaar. I only thought we might do it some other way that wouldn't hurt her pride."

"What nonsense! People oughtn't to have such ridiculous pride!" expostulated Gladys Merriman. "I think Alice's idea is a good one. I'll vote for it if sh proposes it properly."

"But surely you wouldn't like it yourself--" began Hetty.

"Hush! Here's Gipsy!" said Dilys hastily.

Neither Alice nor Gladys bore any special love for Gipsy, and they were not particularly desirous to spare her the unpleasantness of an open confession of her inability to make her contribution. Perhaps it was with a spice of malice that Alice rose immediately and offered her suggestion.

"Each girl could surely undertake at least three articles--that ought to be the minimum--and as many more as she's capable of doing," she said in conclusion.

There was a moment's pause in the room. On the face of it, Alice's proposal was excellent. Everybody felt it ought to be carried out, but many shared Hetty's motive in objecting to it. It was Lennie Chapman who saved the situation.

"I beg to propose an amendment," she put in quickly, "that, instead of each girl promising things separately, we may be allowed to form ourselves into working trios. Three of us could promise a dozen articles between us, to be made just as we like, all stitching at the same piece of embroidery if the fancy took us--just joint work, in fact. We'd spur each other on in that way, and get far more finished than if we did it singly."

"Excellent!" commented Dilys. "Who votes for the amendment?"

It was carried by half the Form, much to Lennie's relief. She and Hetty promptly proposed to form a trio with Gipsy, and were thus able to rescue her from rather a difficult position.

"But I haven't even a skein of embroidery silk!" sighed Gipsy afterwards to them in private.

"Never mind! Hetty and I can get the silks, and you shall do some extra work to make it square. We shall be exactly quits in that way. You can do all the painting part, too, on those blotters; you paint far better than either of us. My flowers are always scrawny, and yours are lovely. There's an enormous advantage in working threesomes!"

"Yes, for me!" said Gipsy gratefully.

There are some unworthy natures who cannot resist the temptation of kicking anyone who is down. It was very quickly realized at Briarcroft that Gipsy was in ill favour at headquarters; and though most of the girls were sorry for her, with a certain number her changed fortunes undoubtedly lessened her popularity. Maude Helm never lost an opportunity of a sneer or a slight, and could sometimes raise a laugh at Gipsy's expense among the more thoughtless section of the Form. Gipsy generally responded with spirit, but the gibes hurt all the same.

"When are you going to get some new hair ribbons, Yankee Doodle?" asked Gladys Merriman one day. "Those red flags of yours are looking rather dejected."

"The American turkey's losing its top-knot," sniggered Maude tauntingly. "It doesn't soar up aloft like it used to do! Been a little tamed by the British lion!"

"If you imagine a turkey to be the crest of the United States, you're a trifle out," said Gipsy scornfully.

"I'd take to a pigtail if I were you," tittered Maude. "It only needs one ribbon!"

"If you were me, then I suppose I'd be you--and, yes, it might be necessary to change my style of hair-dressing," retorted Gipsy, with a glance at Maude's not too plentiful locks.

Some of the girls giggled, and Cassie Bertram murmured: "Rats' tails, not pigtails! Or even mouse tails!"

Maude scowled. She had not intended the laugh to be turned against herself.

"I wouldn't wear limp, faded red bows at any price," she commented, banging her desk to close the conversation, and stalking from the room.

"That Gipsy Latimer's too conceited altogether! I should like to take her down a peg," she confided to Gladys, as the pair walked arm-in-arm round the playground.

"Well, so you do, continually!" said Gladys.

"That's only by the way. She deserves something more for her American cheek. I'm going to play a trick on her, Gladys. It'll be ever such fun! Listen!"

The two girls put their heads together, and laughed as Maude whispered her plan; then they both scuttled up to the empty classroom, and abstracting Gipsy's atlas from her desk, carried it downstairs to the lost-property cupboard, and hid it carefully under a pile of books.

"She won't find that in a hurry!" chuckled Maude.

"There'll be a fine to-do when she misses it," said Gladys.



"GIPSY GENERALLY RESPONDED WITH SPIRIT"

"People who suffer from 'swelled head' just deserve a little wholesome medicine, to cure them of thinking too much of themselves. Now she's editor of the Magazine, Yankee Doodle's unbearable, to my mind. There are others in the Form who can write stories as well as herself."

"Yours about the brigands was lovely!" gushed Gladys obediently.

"Well, I don't boast, but I flatter myself it wasn't the worst in the Mag. I don't call it fair that everything should be in the hands of one girl, and she a foreigner, as one might say! I'll talk to you again about this, Gladys, for I've got an idea I mean to exploit later on. Come along now, there's the bell!"

That afternoon the Upper Fourth had a lesson with Miss Poppleton on "The Work of our Great Explorers". The class was held in the lecture hall, and each girl was required to bring with her an atlas, a blank book for drawing charts, a notebook, a pencil, and indiarubber. Gipsy's desk was not always a miracle of neatness, but she understood its apparent confusion, and could generally lay her hand in a moment upon anything she wanted. This afternoon, however, she rummaged for her atlas in vain. She turned books and papers over and over in her futile search, till the desk was in a chaotic muddle.

"Where's my atlas? Who's had my atlas? It was here yesterday!" she asked agitatedly.

"Really, Gipsy Latimer, I don't wonder you can't find your things in such an untidy desk!" remarked Miss White. "You must stay after four o'clock and put your books in order. Be quick, girls! Ada is waiting. Are you ready? Then take your places and march!"

Miss White hurried off to give a botany demonstration to the Lower Fourth, and the Upper Fourth filed downstairs to the lecture hall under the superintendence of Ada Dawkins, monitress for the time in place of Doreen Tristram, who was absent with influenza.

As the Form stood waiting for a moment or two in the corridor before entering the lecture hall, Maude Helm began ostentatiously to count her belongings.

"Pencil--indiarubber--map book--notebook--and atlas. I've not forgotten anything!" she said in a particularly audible whisper.

Ada Dawkins heard, and it reminded her of her duties. She was anxious to show herself a zealous monitress.

"Have you all brought your things?" she enquired authoritatively. "Face about into line, and hold them out so that I can see."

The single file of girls wheeled round into a row, each exhibiting what she carried. Ada passed along like a commanding officer inspecting a regiment, and immediately pounced upon Gipsy.

"Where's your atlas, Gipsy Latimer? How is it you're the only one to forget? Been taken from your desk? What nonsense! Things don't lose themselves. If you were tidy, you'd be able to find your books. No, I'm not going to accept any excuses. You all know what you want for the lesson, and it's your own fault if you come without it. Lose two order marks for leaving your atlas behind, and a third for arguing! Will you never learn that the monitresses have some authority here?"

Very much snubbed, poor Gipsy went into the lecture hall, to be further rebuked by Miss Poppleton later on for the lack of her atlas. It was only after a long hunt that she discovered her missing book in the lost-property cupboard.

"I've a very shrewd guess who put it there, too!" she remarked to Hetty Hancock. "Maude and Gladys were giggling something to Alice O'Connor, and they all looked at me and simply screamed."

"You don't mean to say they've played a low, stingy trick like that upon you?"

"I'm almost sure."

"Then they're mean sneaks! If ever I catch them at such a thing again, I'll spiflicate them!"

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## CHAPTER X

### The Millionairess

"HEARD the news?" enquired Barbara Kendrick one afternoon towards the end of February, lounging into the Juniors' recreation room with a would-be casual air, and whistling a jaunty tune which she fondly hoped was expressive of superior indifference to news of any kind. Two girls sitting reading by the fire closed their books, and three at the table, who were in the agonies of three separate games of patience, temporarily laid aside their cards.

"No; what's up? Anything decent?" asked Norah Bell.

Barbara strolled leisurely to the fireplace, and spread her hands to the blaze. Being a member of the Third, and having a most interesting piece of information to communicate, she did not intend to make it too cheap, and wished to excite the curiosity of the Fourth Form girls before she vouchsafed to enlighten them.

"Oh! something I heard just now downstairs. I was passing the Seniors' door, and Allie Spencer came out and told me."

"Well?"

"She said it concerned your Form."

"Why us particularly?"

"What's going to happen?"

"Is it anything worth knowing, or not?"

"Really, that depends how you take it," said Barbara, enjoying herself.

"Look here, kiddie, you get on and tell us!"

"Gee up, stupid!"

Barbara paused, prolonging for one more blissful moment the joy of tantalizing her audience; but in that moment her chance was lost, for the door opened suddenly, and in burst Hetty Hancock, like a tempestuous north wind, proclaiming without either hesitation or reserve the important tidings.

"I say, isn't it a joke? There's actually a new boarder coming to-morrow."

"New girls seem to choose odd times to come nowadays," said Lennie. "Why didn't she wait till the half term--it's only about two weeks off?"

"Perhaps she's been shipwrecked, like I was," suggested Gipsy.

"Not a bit of it! She doesn't come from far. Her home's only about ten miles off, I believe. Her name's Leonora Parker."

"Parker! Parker! Surely not the Parkers of Ribblestone Abbey?" commented Norah Bell.

"I really don't know."

"But I know!" put in Barbara Kendrick, delighted to score at last by her superior information. "They are the Parkers of Ribblestone Abbey."

"Then they're most enormously rich people."

"Yes, millionaires! And Leonora's the only child."

"So she's an heiress!"

"Rather--an heiress of millions."

"You might call her a millionairess, in fact," chuckled Gipsy.

"Good for you, Yankee Doodle!"

"I say, it's rather a joke her coming here, isn't it?" said Norah Bell. "A millionaire's daughter! I wonder what she'll be

like?"

"Sure to have the best of everything," said Daisy Scatcherd; "the loveliest dresses and the most expensive hats."

"She won't be able to wear anything but her school 'sailor' here!" commented Dilys. "You needn't imagine she'll come decked out with diamonds, Daisy."

"She'll have absolutely unlimited pocket-money."

"And be able to buy chocolates and walnut creams by the pound!" added Barbara enviously.

"Wonder what Form and what dormitory she'll be in?"

"Well, at any rate I shan't be the last new girl," said Gipsy. "I'm glad to retire from the position."

"Yes, Yankee Doodle. Your little nose will be quite put out of joint."

"A millionairess at Briarcroft! Doesn't it sound magnificent?"

"What a set of sillies you all are!" said Dilys. "I'm not going to make any fuss over Leonora, even if she can buy chocolates by the pound. I'll wait and see how I like her before I give my opinion. She mayn't be nice at all."

In spite of Dilys's attitude of aloofness the others could not help anticipating with the keenest eagerness the advent of a fresh fellow boarder. The personality of the "millionairess", as they nicknamed her, was a subject of much speculation, and a whole row of noses was flattened against the panes of the Juniors' sitting-room window to witness her arrival. The glimpse the girls got of her was distinctly disappointing. She wore a tweed coat and skirt, and the orthodox Briarcroft "sailor", with its narrow band and badge.

"I thought she'd have come in a velvet coat and a big picture hat full of feathers!" said Barbara, with rueful surprise in her tone.

"I never dreamt she'd drive up in only a station cab!" said Norah Bell. "Why didn't she arrive in her own motor?"

When Leonora was introduced by Miss Poppleton to her schoolfellows at tea-time, she certainly did not answer the expectations which had been formed of her. She was short and rather squat, with heavy features and nondescript eyes and hair.

"A most stodgy-looking girl," whispered Hetty. "I don't take to her at all. She's not one half as nice as Gipsy. By the by, where is Gipsy? I haven't seen her since four o'clock."

Gipsy came in just then, and took her seat at the table, looking cold and rather dejected.

"Where've you been?" whispered Hetty.

"Arranging my new room. Didn't you know? I've been moved out of our dormitory to make way for Leonora. Miss Edith carried all my things upstairs this morning."

"How sickening! Is that girl to have your bed?"

"Of course."

"And where are you put?"

"In that little box-room on the top floor. The boxes are all piled at one end, to make room for a camp bed."

"You don't mean it? Well, I didn't think Poppie was capable of such a horrid piece of nastiness."

"There's no other place for me at present. I may be extremely grateful to have that attic, so I'm informed. You forget I'm a charity girl!" said Gipsy bitterly.

Poor Gipsy was smarting sorely from a brief conversation she had had with Miss Poppleton. The Principal had reminded her in very plain terms of her dependent position, and had questioned and cross-questioned her as to whether she could remember any possible clue by which her father's whereabouts might be traced. Gipsy had already told all she knew, so the fresh catechism only seemed to her like the probing of an old wound. She felt so utterly helpless, so unable to offer any suggestions, or any way out of the difficulty. But she stuck tenaciously to her faith in her father.

"Dad promised to come back for me, and he will!" she said, with a gleam in her dark eyes.

"I'm afraid I know more of the world than you do, Gipsy, and it looks bad--very bad indeed!" replied Miss Poppleton, with a dismal shake of her head. "Some men are only too anxious to cast off their responsibilities."

Even Miss Edith, kind as ever though she was, seemed to take a gloomy view of the case.

"I'm sorry, dear--very sorry!" she said, as she introduced Gipsy to her attic bedroom. "I don't like to have to turn you out of your dormitory--and I'm sure Miss Poppleton doesn't either! But, you see, we're obliged to put Leonora there--and there's no other place but this. If your father hadn't behaved so queerly, of course it would have been different. I'm very sorry, Gipsy--it's hard on a girl to be left like this. I wonder he could have the heart to do it. And it's hard on my sister too. She has to think of ways and means. Dear, dear! what an amount of trouble there is in the world! And you're young to have to begin to feel it. There! I've made you as comfortable as I can here, child. After all, you'll be downstairs most of your time."

When Miss Edith had gone away, Gipsy sat down on the one chair in her room, with a blank, wretched feeling that was beyond the relief of tears. It was not that she minded a camp bed in the least, and she had often slept in far rougher places than her new attic; but the change seemed the outward and visible sign of her forlorn circumstances. Both Miss Poppleton's uncompromising remarks and Miss Edith's well-meant sympathy hurt her equally, for both expressed the same doubt of her father's honour. Not until that afternoon had Gipsy thoroughly realized how utterly alone she was in the world. Every other girl in the school had home and parents and relations, while she had nobody at all except a father who had--no, not forgotten her! that she would never allow; but for some strange, mysterious reason had been kept from communicating with her.

Gipsy had too generous a nature to bear Leonora any grudge for having taken her place in the dormitory. She even volunteered to give some valuable hints to the newcomer, knowing by experience the thorns that were likely to beset her path. Leonora, however, did not seem at all afflicted by many things which would have been most trying to Gipsy. She went her own way stolidly, without reference to her schoolfellows' comments, good or bad. This attitude did not satisfy Briarcroft standards, and by the time she had been there a week she had been weighed in the balance of public opinion and found decidedly wanting. She was the exact opposite of what the boarders had expected. Far from being liberally disposed, and inclined to spend her superabundant pocket-money for the good of her companions, she appeared anxious to take advantage on the other side. She readily accepted all the chocolates and caramels that were offered her, but made no return; and if she bought any sweets she ate them herself in privacy. She appropriated other girls' hockey sticks, books, or fountain pens unblushingly, but had always an excuse if anyone wished to sample her possessions.

"She's the meanest thing I ever met in my life," said Lennie Chapman indignantly one day. "She borrowed my penknife three times this morning, and when I asked her what had become of her own, she said it was such a nice one, it seemed a pity to use it."

"She spoilt my stylo. yesterday," complained Norah Bell, "and she never even offered to buy me another."

"She's greedy, too," said Daisy Scatcherd, swelling the list of Leonora's crimes. "When I handed her my box of candied fruits, she picked out the very biggest!"

"How piggie!"

"And yet she's plenty of pocket-money."

"Oh, yes, heaps, as much as she likes to ask for."

"I don't see what's the use of being a millionairess if you're a miser at the same time!" remarked Dilys scornfully.

A girl who receives everything and dispenses nothing is never popular among her companions, so it was scarcely surprising that Leonora won no favour. A few mercenary spirits, encouraged by the reputation of her millions, made tentative advances of friendship, but rapidly withdrew them on the discovery that it was likely to prove a one-sided bargain.

"I wouldn't be friends with her if she owned the Bank of England!" declared Lennie. "I think she's too contemptible for words."

"By the by, girls," said Dilys, "it's Miss Edith's birthday on the 1st of March. Aren't we Junior boarders going to get up anything in the way of a present? I know the Seniors are giving her one."

"Rather!" said Fiona Campbell. "I'd stretch a point for Miss Edie if I was on the verge of bankruptcy. I vote we open a subscription list. I'm good for half a crown."

"I expect most of us are," replied Lennie, taking paper and pencil to write down names. "Except Leonora Parker!" she added with a laugh.

"Don't you think she'll give?"

"Not generously."

"Oh, she'll have to!"

"I declare, we'll make her for once!" said Dilys indignantly. "She shan't sneak out of everything."

"I don't see how you're going to make her."

"The millionairess won't fork out unless she feels inclined, I can tell you that, my child."

"Just you leave it to me. I'll manage it by fair means or foul."

"Won't a subscription list make it rather awkward for Gipsy? You know she can't give anything," whispered Hetty Hancock to Dilys.

"Not at all, the way I'm going to do it. I'll take care of Gipsy, you'll see--make it easy for her, but nick in Leonora for more than she bargains."

"You're cleverer than I thought you were."

"Ah, you haven't plumbed the depths of my genius yet, my good child. Now when Leonora----"

"Hush! Here she comes."

The millionairess walked to the fireplace, and stood leaning over the high fender, sharpening a cherished stump of lead pencil.

"We're getting up a subscription," began Dilys, opening the attack without further delay. "It's to buy a present for Miss Edith's birthday. You'd like us to put your name down, wouldn't you?"

"Well, I'm not sure," replied Leonora cautiously. "What are most of you giving?"

"Half a crown," replied a chorus of voices.

"I've been at Briarcroft such a short time," demurred Leonora. "Perhaps it would really be better if the present came from you, who are all old pupils."

"There's something in that," said Dilys. "Both you and Gipsy Latimer have only been here a little while, so it would be more appropriate, after all, to leave you both out of it, and let it be an old girls' gift. Lennie, do you hear? You're not to put down either Gipsy or Leonora, however much they beg and pray."

"Right-oh!" said Lennie rather sulkily. She thought that Dilys, in her delicacy for Gipsy, was sparing Leonora too much. But Dilys gave her a withering look, which so plainly implied: "Trust me to mind my own business" that she began hastily to hum a tune.

"Perhaps you'd like to give Miss Edith something on your own account," suggested Dilys craftily to the millionairess.

"Exactly. It would be far better than my joining with the rest of you," agreed Leonora, jumping at such an easy way out.

"Tell me what it's to be, then, and we'll ask Miss Lindsay to order it."

"Oh! I can get it myself, thanks."

"We're not allowed. All shopping has to be done through Miss Lindsay. I should suggest a book."

"I dare say that would do. There was one of yours that Miss Edith was looking at yesterday."

"Do you mean my small 'Christina Rossetti'? All right. Lennie, put down that Leonora Parker wants to order a copy of Christina Rossetti's poems."

Thus cornered, Leonora was obliged to consent. Dilys's little book was a shilling edition--not ruinous, certainly, to the purse strings; so comparing that with a subscription of half a crown she considered she had escaped cheaply.

"You've let her off too easily," grumbled Lennie afterwards, as she added up her list. "It's a shame the richest girl in the class should give the least."

"I haven't finished with her yet, my friend--I've only begun!" chuckled Dilys. "Let me go to Miss Lindsay."

Dilys had a deep-laid scheme, which she considered too good to be divulged at present, but which she hoped would be the undoing of Leonora. She went to the mistresses' room with the subscription list, and handed the collection of half-crowns to Miss Lindsay.

"Would you please order a Russia leather blotter for Miss Edith?" she said. "We've decided on that, unless you know of anything she'd like better. Leonora Parker would like to give her a separate present, quite on her own account."

"Indeed?" said Miss Lindsay, who had not yet grasped the new pupil's economical tendencies. "Then I suppose she wishes it to be something handsome?"

"She mentioned a copy of Christina Rossetti's poems, but she said nothing about the price," returned Dilys stolidly.

"Christina Rossetti's poems? Then she must surely mean that beautiful illustrated edition that we were talking about at tea-time yesterday. I remember Miss Edith said how immensely she would like to see it. No doubt Leonora made a mental note of it. It was a kind thought of hers, which Miss Edith will appreciate, I am sure."

"Is the edition expensive?" enquired Dilys casually.

"Fifteen shillings net, but of course to Leonora that is a mere nothing--no more than sixpence to most girls. Still, perhaps I'd better send for her and ask her."

"She's having her music lesson," put in Dilys quickly.

"The order ought to go off at once, if we are to have the presents in time for the 1st of March," said Miss Lindsay, glancing at the clock. "I must write now to catch the post. I think I may venture to send Leonora's commission without consulting her. She must certainly mean the illustrated edition, and in her case we really need not trouble to consider the question of the price."

Dilys went away, rubbing her hands with satisfaction.

"Serves you right, Leonora Parker!" she chuckled to herself. "Your little effort at economy is going to cost you rather more than you bargained for. Miss Lindsay's an absolute trump. I hate mean people who hoard up their money and keep it all for themselves."

She confided her success to the others, but exacted a promise of strict secrecy.

"We'll simply say Miss Lindsay has sent for the book," she advised. "I believe Leonora would be capable of countermanding the order if she knew the amount of the bill. It will be a surprise for her later on."

"And a ripping joke for us!"

"It's Miss Lindsay's fault, though. She named the edition."

"Oh, yes, of course! We understand that, my dear girl!"

The presents arrived by return of post, just in time for Miss Edith's birthday--a splendid blotter of delicious-smelling leather, and the edition of Christina Rossetti's poems, a large and handsome volume full of beautiful illustrations. Miss Lindsay brought them into the Juniors' sitting-room, and showed them to the delighted girls.

"It was so nice of you, Leonora dear, to think of giving such a lovely gift to Miss Edith all on your own account," she remarked; "so thoughtful to have fixed upon the very thing she wanted. You meant this edition, of course? I knew I could hardly be mistaken. Miss Edith will be particularly pleased that a new girl should show such appreciation. The pictures are perfect gems. We'll wrap the book up again in its various papers, and you must hide it carefully away until to-morrow. Would you like to give me the fifteen shillings now, or will Miss Poppleton stop it out of your allowance?"

Leonora's face was a study. Blank amazement struggled with disgust, and for a moment she seemed almost tempted to deny all responsibility for having given the order. Pride, however, at the sight of the sneer at the corners of Dilys Fenton's mouth, came to her rescue. She knew the girls had tricked her, and she was determined not to afford them the satisfaction of an open triumph.

"Thank you very much, Miss Lindsay, for getting the book," she replied calmly. "I'll give you the money now, please. I'm glad it's the edition Miss Edith wants," and taking her parcel, she sailed from the room, without deigning to

glance at the others.

"Done her this time!" chuckled Dilys. "It'll do her good to shell out for once."

"She took it awfully well, though! Perhaps on the whole she wasn't altogether sorry. Miss Edie's such a dear, anyone would want to give her nice things who'd got the money," sighed Gipsy, whose own offering was limited to a little pen-and-ink drawing of the house.

"She's not so bad on the whole, though she isn't liberal in the way of sweets," remarked Daisy Scatterd.

"You greedy pig!" said Dilys. "We don't want her to keep us provided with chocolates. As long as she's fair, that's all I care about. I think it's sickening to try and truckle to her because she's so rich. If you wanted to get anything out of her, I'm glad you were disappointed. 'Give and take' and 'Share and share alike' are the best mottoes for school."

"Thanks for the sermon!" said Daisy sarcastically.

"I don't care if you do call it preaching!" retorted Dilys. "When first Leonora came, some of you made such a ridiculous fuss over her, I was quite disgusted. A girl ought to be judged on her own merits, not by what her father's got. If she shows herself ready to take a fair part in everything, and be of some service to the school, then I'll approve of her, and not till then."

"Hear, hear!" cried Hetty Hancock.



## CHAPTER XI

### Gipsy turns Champion

EACH Form at Briarcroft had its own teacher, but in addition there were a certain number of visiting masters and mistresses who came out from Greyfield to give lessons at the school. A few were popular, some were tolerated, and one or two were cordially disliked. Among those who had the ill fortune to encounter strong opposition was Fraulein Hochmeyer, the singing mistress. She was a most conscientious teacher and a clever musician, but so intensely German in both accent and methods that she offended the British susceptibilities of her pupils, and inspired more ridicule than respect. Poor Fraulein meant so well, it was really very hard that her efforts did not meet with better results. She treated her classes exactly as she would have dealt with similar ones in Germany; but what might have pleased apple-cheeked, pig-tailed Gretchens did not at all suit the taste of the Briarcroft-ites, particularly the members of the Lower School. They refused even to smile at her heavy Teutonic jokes, mocked her accent, rebelled at the numerous German songs they were expected to learn, whispered, giggled, and talked during the lesson, and generally made it extremely difficult for her to keep order. In vain she alternately pleaded, conciliated, flustered, fumed, and even threatened. The girls would not behave seriously, and though they did not deign to laugh at her attempts at humour, they treated her as a joke. As she was decidedly stout and rosy they nicknamed her "German Sausage", and made fun of her almost to her face.

A part of Fraulein Hochmeyer's system of voice production which her pupils much detested was learning the proper position of the mouth. It was of course a most important and necessary part of the lesson, but owing to the way it was enforced the silly girls turned it all into ridicule. Fraulein would stand upon the platform giving a practical demonstration to show how the lips must be well drawn back, revealing the teeth parted about the third of an inch, so as to offer no obstruction to the free passage of the voice; and she would require her pupils to stand at attention with their mouths thus fixed before beginning the preliminary exercises.

"We look like a set of grinning imbeciles!" complained Lennie Chapman, "with Sausage for the arch-lunatic of us all. I wish to goodness we had a decent English teacher! I don't like these foreign ways."

"You'd like it still less if you were turned into a pattern pupil like me!" grumbled Gipsy. "I hate making an exhibition of myself."

Gipsy, being an apt copyist, was able to set her mouth at exactly the right angle, and in consequence her approving teacher would frequently beckon her on to the platform with the invitation:

"Dear friendt, com here and show ze ozers how you do open ze mouz."

The letters "th" were an impossibility to Fraulein's German tongue, and the girls giggled continually at the "z's" that replaced them. Gipsy was not at all proud of being forced to set an example to the class, and would ascend the platform with an ill grace, and look the reverse of flattered at the encouraging pats that were bestowed upon her shoulders. Really Fraulein had the kindest heart in the world, and tried, in her heavy fashion, to be on excellent terms with her pupils, but she did not in the least comprehend the mind of the British schoolgirl.

"She treats us exactly as if we were kindergarten babies!" sneered Hetty Hancock. "I don't know how German girls of our age would enjoy her silly jokes, but I think she's a rotter!"

"And she's so sentimental!" hinned Daisy Scatcherd. "I nearly had a fit when she began to troll out that love song, with her hand laid touchingly on her heart."

"That sort of rubbish may go down in the Fatherland, but it doesn't here."

The girls had waxed restive at many of the *Lieder* which they were obliged to learn, but when Fraulein turned up one morning with a volume of songs of her own composition, their discontent verged towards mutiny.

"Ze original vords are, of course, in German," explained Fraulein, "but I have had a translation made for you by a friendt of mine, and it is sehr gut. Ze first it is a cradle song. Now, I ask has any girl in ze class got at home a leetle, leetle brozer or sister?"

"I have," volunteered Mary Parsons bluntly. "A brother."

"And how old?"

"Six months."

"Ach! Zat is beautiful! You shall sing zis song to ze leetle baby in ze cradle, vile you rock him gently, gently, till he sleep!" and Fraulein gazed ecstatically at Mary, as if calling up a mental picture of her sisterly attention.

"He'd soon squall if I did!" grunted Mary to her neighbour, who exploded audibly.

"You, who are not so all-fortunate as to have a baby in ze home, must sing it to ze child of a neighbour," went on Fraulein, evidently determined that the value of the lullaby should receive a practical trial.

"And what are we boarders to do?" enquired Lennie Chapman ironically.

"Sing it to the cat!" whispered Hetty, whereat the bystanders tittered.

"You've stumped her there!" murmured Fiona.

Fraulein certainly for a moment looked a little at a loss, but she soon recovered her presence of mind.

"Vait till ze holidays, zen you sall see!" she returned with an engaging smile. "I shall now sing von or two of ze lieder to you, to show you vat zey are like."

The music of the songs was beautiful, that was allowed by even the most unappreciative of the girls. There was a joyous lilt and a true melody about them that put them high in the rank of composition, and the accompaniments played with Fraulein's delicate touch were harmonious and suitable. The words, unfortunately, were childish in the extreme, and more fit for youngsters of five than girls of eleven to fourteen. Even the members of the Lower Third turned up supercilious noses. They were further marred by Fraulein's accent, and when she unctuously rendered

"Hush, my baby, sweetest, best,  
Little mousie's gone to rest",

as

"Hosh, my baby, sveetest, best,  
Leetle moozie's gone to rest",

a ripple of mirth passed round the class.

Having gone through one or two as specimens, Fraulein selected the lullaby and set the girls to work at it. I am afraid that, instead of doing their best, they only sang in mockery. Fiona Campbell made a pretence cradle of her arm, and rocked it for Mary Parsons' benefit; and Gipsy put an amount of sham sentiment into her execution calculated to convulse the others. At the end of the lesson the class trooped away in a state of frank rebellion.

"Really, this is too much!" protested Dilys Fenton. "We can't be expected to sing her silly songs."

"It's just baby nonsense!" exclaimed Norah Bell.

"The music's pretty," said Joyce Adamson.

"Oh, yes, the music--but look at the words!" scoffed Gipsy, turning over the pages of the new copies. "Did you ever see anything so absolutely idiotic in all your life as this?"

"Old hare's little son  
Is up to good fun,  
And skipping and prancing  
He's bent upon dancing.  
Just see how he spins  
On his dear little pins!"

"It's an affront to ask us to learn such rubbish!" declared the outraged girls. "We shall really have to speak to Poppie about it."

"Yes, a good idea! Let's complain to Poppie."

"If she'll listen."

"She's not generally so ready to hear our grievances."

"Well, something will have to be done, for we can't go on week after week with this baby stuff. It's like turning back to one's ABC. I declare we'd more sensible songs when I was in the Kindergarten."

"I'll take my book home, and perhaps I can get my mother to write a letter to Poppie about it," suggested Mary Parsons.

"You! Why, you're the one who's to sit serenading over your infant brother's cradle!"

"Perhaps Sausage will bring a doll to school next week and make us practise with it in turns! She'd be quite capable of it," sniggered Maude Helm.

Nobody plucked up sufficient courage to interview Miss Poppleton on the subject. It is one thing for schoolgirls to growl, and quite another to venture to remonstrate with the Principal about the lessons. Miss Poppleton was not an approachable person, and except in extreme cases her pupils did not venture to get up deputations. Gipsy voiced the opinions of the class, however, in airing their grievances to Miss Edith, and gave her an animated account of their special bug-bear, the new song book.

"Oh, dear me, Gipsy! I'm very sorry!" said Miss Edith, puckering up her forehead anxiously. "I'm afraid you girls behave very badly in the singing class. You ought to have more respect for Fraulein Hochmeyer. I hope Mary Parsons' mother won't write about it. It puts Miss Poppleton in a most awkward position when parents make complaints. We don't want to change our singing mistress, Fraulein's system of voice production is so very good. She was a pupil of Randegger, I believe. There's no other first-class teacher in Greyfield either except Mr. Johnson, and he doesn't take half the trouble with his pupils that Fraulein does. I wish you girls would try to appreciate her more."

Gipsy screwed up her mouth and looked humorous in reply.

"But she's a beautiful character, if you only knew!" urged Miss Edith. "She's so simple and kind-hearted; and she works so hard! She has an invalid father to keep. He's quite dependent on her, I believe. They live in lodgings in Greyfield. I'm sure I'm often sorry for her, going about to her pupils in all weathers. It's too bad of you girls to make such fun of her! She's a stranger in a strange land, poor thing, with no friends here, and her living to make. Girls are a thoughtless set, as I've found out long ago. You might try to have a little more consideration for her, Gipsy. Just imagine yourself in her place, and fancy you were teaching a class of German girls! Yes, as I said before, I'm sorry for Fraulein Hochmeyer. She has a hard time of it."

Gipsy said nothing, but she retired with ample food for thought. It had never struck her before to take the view of Fraulein that Miss Edith had just presented. The little foreign peculiarities and eccentricities had excited her mirth, but she had quite missed the sterling good qualities that lay underneath them. "A stranger in a strange land, with no friends here!--I know what that means!" muttered Gipsy to herself. "It's brave of her to work to keep her father! Don't I just wish I--" but here she sighed, for the unuttered wish seemed so entirely hopeless and futile.

After revolving the matter carefully, Gipsy made up her mind that Fraulein Hochmeyer deserved to be helped instead of hindered.

"Though how I'm to do it when she insists on forcing those absurd baby songs upon us, I can't tell. Stop! I've an idea. Oh, I don't know whether I can, but I mean to have a jolly good try! No time like the present. I've half an hour before tea." And furnishing herself with pencil and paper, she ran up to her attic, and was soon puckering her brows in the agonies of composition. As the result of that and several other half-hours of work, she covered two pages of foolscap; then, seeking out Miss Edith, she unfolded her scheme and begged for help.

"I'm afraid you'll think it fearful cheek of me," she began, "but you see the trouble at present in the singing class is that we all abominate those silly little songs. They really sound foolish for girls of our age. Of course Fraulein's composed them herself, and the tunes are very nice. Do you think she'd mind changing the words? It wouldn't matter to her what we were singing so long as the music was the same, would it? But it would make all the difference to us. I made up a few verses that go with the tunes just as well. They're here, if you don't mind looking at them," and Gipsy modestly unfolded her manuscript. "This one's instead of

"Old hare's little son  
Is up to good fun."

I've called it 'The End of the Term'

"Now classes are done  
And vacation's begun,  
Of fun and of leisure  
We'll have our full measure.  
For it's hip, hip, hooray  
For a long holiday!"

"So to lessons goodbye,  
While to pleasure we fly.  
No rules now need bind us,  
All care's cast behind us.  
For it's hip, hip, hooray  
For a long holiday!"

Then there's one instead of that dreadful

"Little Freddie had run to his nurse,  
Because his poor headache was worse,"

continued Gipsy. "I've called it 'Briarcroft'.

"There's a school near the edge of the fell,  
That all of us girls know full well,  
For at Briarcroft Hall  
There's a place for us all,  
And the tale of its fame we would tell.

*Chorus*

"So hurrah! for the dear old School!  
We'll make it a general rule  
That we Briarcroft-ites  
Shall stand up for its rights,  
And be true to the dear old School!"

"There are teachers we love and revere,  
And customs and ways we hold dear.  
Give a clap for each one,  
And a cheer when you've done,  
For all who have worked with us here.

*Chorus*

"So hurrah! for the dear old School!  
We'll make it a general rule  
That we Briarcroft-ites  
Shall stand up for its rights,  
And be true to the dear old School!"

"Very creditable, Gipsy. Really not at all bad," commented Miss Edith.

"I know they're not up to much," said Gipsy apologetically, "but oh! Miss Edith, I believe the girls would much rather sing them than the other words. They're about the school, you see. I daren't ask Fraulein myself; do you think you could?" and Gipsy turned quite red at the boldness of her own suggestion.

"It might be a good idea. Give me the paper, and I'll see what I can do."

"Oh, thanks so much! I hope Fraulein won't be offended."

Miss Edith's gentle tact could often accomplish things where other measures might have failed. Nobody ever heard how she explained the situation and persuaded Fraulein Hochmeyer to adopt the alterations, but before the next singing lesson all the obnoxious song books were collected and Gipsy's versions, neatly printed by hand on slips of paper, were pasted over the old words of the two songs in question.

"I hear you not like to sing about hares and babies?" commented Fraulein. "So! It must be all about school? Yes. You have among you von who can write in verse" (nodding cheerily to the abashed Gipsy). "My friendt, you shall make for us some more verses to suit ze ozer songs!"

Having determined to act as Fraulein's champion, Gipsy tried her utmost to sway popular opinion in favour of the luckless singing mistress. It was a far harder task, though, than she had anticipated, and put her powers of leadership to a severe test. It had been easy enough to induce the Juniors to stand up for their own rights, but it was considerably more difficult to make them realize anybody else's claims to consideration.

"Do let's be nice to her!" pleaded Gipsy. "She's really a very decent sort on the whole. She can't help being a foreigner and talking with a queer accent."

"Why, you were the first to make fun of her last week," objected some of the girls.

"I know, but it was rather horrid. Her story's quite romantic, don't you think?"

"Can't see much romance about our homely German Sausage!" giggled Daisy Scatcherd.

"Put a bunch of forget-me-nots in her hair, and she'll look a heroine!" tittered Norah Bell.

"Yankee Doodle, when you ride a hobby you ride it to death! What's induced you to take such a sudden and violent affection for the Sausage?"

"You'll be standing perennially on the platform now, holding your teeth like a dentist's advertisement, to show us how to 'open ze mouz!'"

"I wish you'd revise the schoolbooks and cut out the difficult parts!"

"Go on! Rag me as much as you like. I don't care!" retorted Gipsy sturdily.

"I've brought this picture of a sausage," piped one of the smaller girls. "I'm going to pin it on to the piano. She knows we call her 'Sausage'! She'll be in such a rage!"

"You little horror!" said Gipsy, seizing the picture and tearing it into shreds before the eyes of its enraged owner.

On the whole, though her championship was treated as a joke, Gipsy's influence had a beneficial effect, and the general behaviour in the singing class began steadily to improve. Her Briarcroft songs were appreciated, and the girls sang them lustily and trolled out the chorus with vigour. The tunes were very catchy and bright, and everybody seemed constantly to be humming them, in season or out of season.

"Your 'Hurrah! for the dear old School!' has got in my brain, Yankee Doodle," said Mary Parsons. "It haunts me all day long, and I can't get rid of it."

"We'll sing it in the lecture hall on the last day of the term. Poppie'd be quite flattered," said Hetty Hancock.

"With a special cheer for Fraulein Hochmeyer, then!" added Gipsy.

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## CHAPTER XII

### A Spartan Maiden

THE Spring Term was passing rapidly, and Gipsy had now been nearly six months at Briarcroft. It felt a very, very long time to her since the first evening when she had introduced herself in so sprightly a fashion to her fellow boarders, and had given them a graphic account of the shipwreck. The old Gipsy of last October and the new Gipsy of the present March seemed like two different people, with a whole world of experience to divide them. The well-conducted regime of Briarcroft had had its due effect, and had considerably toned down her unconventional Colonial ways; while the trouble through which she was passing, like all seasons of adversity, had made her older and more thoughtful than before. There was still no news of any kind from her father, and no answer had yet been received from the cousins in New Zealand. Miss Poppleton's manner towards Gipsy hardened a little more each week that mail day arrived and brought no solution of the problem where her school fees were to come from. At present her attitude was that of grim acceptance of a most unwelcome burden. She was not actively unkind, and no doubt thought she was behaving very generously in keeping Gipsy at Briarcroft at all, but in a variety of small ways she made the girl feel the humiliation of her position.

To poor Gipsy the difficulties appeared to accumulate more and more. The clothes which her father had bought for her in Liverpool were fast wearing out, and there seemed not the slightest prospect of renewing any of them. In a school where the girls were always well, if simply dressed, it was not pleasant to be the only one in worn skirts, washed-out blouses, patched boots, mended gloves, and faded hair ribbons. Gipsy had never before been stinted in either clothing or pocket-money, and it hurt her pride sorely. But in spite of her shabby attire she looked a distinguished little figure, with her straight, upright habit of carriage, and quick alertness of manner. The sadness in her dark eyes gave her a new dignity, and though a few girls might pass ill-natured remarks about her clothes, her general prestige in the school remained the same. There was an individuality about Gipsy which marked her out, and raised her above the ordinary level. She was full of original ideas, and had a persuasive way of stating her views that invariably won her a following. The girls were becoming accustomed to consult her on any important topic, and tacitly if not openly regarded her as the Captain of the Lower School. With some the fact that she was "down on her luck" invested her with a flavour of romance, more especially as she was very reserved on the subject.

"I never dare ask Gipsy a word about her father," said Hetty Hancock. "She shuts up like an oyster if one throws out the faintest hint."

"Do you think she still believes in him?" queried Mary Parsons.

"Rather! And I admire her for it. She's shown splendid spirit all this time, and never once given in. She's a real Spartan."

"Yes, Gipsy's as game as can be," commented Dilys. "She never looks beaten, however hard Poppie snubs her, and Poppie's just abominable sometimes."

"I'm often dying to help Gipsy," said Hetty. "But one can't help her. She'd be desperately offended if one offered to lend her pocket-money, or anything."

"You'd better not try! No, I believe Gipsy's pride wouldn't let her borrow so much as a yard of hair ribbon, however badly she needed it."

"Rather different from Leonora, who borrows everything she can persuade people to lend her."

"Don't speak to me of Leonora! I rue the day she came into our dormitory. She snores at night till I have to get up and shake her. We call her 'Snorer' now, instead of 'Leonora'. I wish Poppie'd put her in the attic, instead of Gipsy."

"Trust Poppie not to banish the millionairess! She's ever so proud of having her at the school."

"H'm! Her company's a doubtful privilege, in my opinion."

"Yet Poppie had the cheek to suggest that we ought to make her a Guild officer."

"No! Did she?" exclaimed the girls. "It's not Poppie's business to interfere in our affairs. We'll manage them for ourselves, thank you! We've got rid of the Seniors, and we're not going to let her dictate what we must do."

Under Gipsy's fostering care the various branches of the United Guild had prospered exceedingly. She was a most zealous and enterprising secretary, sparing no trouble to make things a success, and capable of organizing all kinds of

new departures. She had got up a photographic exhibition, and collected quite a nice little show of snapshots, neatly mounted on brown paper, and pinned round the play-room. She persuaded Miss White to allow the Form to start a museum in an empty desk that stood in a corner, and spurred on the day girls to bring specimens for it of birds' eggs, stones, pressed flowers, and any curiosities with which they would consent to part. She made a neat catalogue of the exhibits, with the names of the donors, and then broached a scheme for a series of museum lectures; but at that even her staunchest adherents turned tail.

"Got too many irons in the fire already to find time to write learned papers on Natural History, Yankee Doodle," objected Lennie. "One would have to cram it all up out of the encyclopaedia, and that's too hard work for this child!"

"Wait till we have a museum anniversary, then we'll appoint you curator, and you shall spout for the occasion," suggested Hetty.

A sketching club among the artistically disposed members of the Lower School met with some response, especially as it developed into a monthly competition. Gipsy boldly begged some attractive prints from the drawing mistress to serve as prizes, and, having chosen a subject to be illustrated, pinned up the various attempts, signed with pseudonyms, and took the voting of the whole of the Juniors to decide the awards--an exciting occasion which everybody considered worthy of repetition. Gipsy's restless, energetic temperament was her salvation at this particular crisis of her career. If she had allowed herself to brood over her troubles, she would have been wretched indeed; but by throwing herself heartily into schemes for the general good of the community she succeeded in being, if not exactly happy, at any rate a useful and cheerful addition to the school.

The Sale of Work took place in March, and though she had not a single penny to spend on it, she contributed excellent service in other ways. She was indefatigable in assisting to arrange stalls, write programmes, or do any of the necessary drudgery that a bazaar always entails. Even the Seniors acknowledged her helpfulness, and Helen Roper admitted that "if one wanted a thing done quickly, Gipsy Latimer was worth a dozen of those other kids". In the matter of the Sale of Work the hatchet had been buried between the Upper and the Lower Schools, and both co-operated to make the affair a success. Now that the rights of the Juniors were fully established, and their claims to consideration recognized, Gipsy was only too pleased to help the older girls, and ran about holding step-ladders, handing tacks, fetching articles wanted, and generally doing odd jobs. Encouraged by the conciliatory attitude of the Seniors, she ventured to propose a scheme suggested by her foreign experience.

"Why shouldn't we turn the tea-room into a cafe chantant?" she said. "We should get far more money in that way than if people only went in for refreshments. Charge them an admission, and then tea extra. They'll stay far longer, and take more things, if music and singing are going on all the time. It's really better than a separate concert, too, because you can't always get people to go to the concerts, but hardly anyone can resist tea at four o'clock."

After talking it over, the Seniors were graciously pleased to adopt Gipsy's idea, and began to draw up a programme for the cafe chantant. Their struggle of the past had taught them a lesson in fair play, and they therefore proposed to admit a certain number of Juniors as performers, instead of, as formerly, keeping the whole thing in their own hands.

"I've put you down for two solos, Gipsy Latimer," said Helen Roper magnanimously. "What would you like to sing?"

Gipsy thought for a moment before she replied:

"I wonder if it would be possible to borrow a banjo? I used to play one out in America, and I know some very pretty Creole songs, and one or two Spanish ones."

"My brother has a banjo that he'd lend, I'm sure," said Lena Morris.

"Good! We'll rig you out as a Spanish gipsy," agreed Helen. "There are lots of things in our dramatic property box that would come in. You'd look the part no end!"

"I'll send the banjo this evening, so that you can practise it," volunteered Lena.

Naturally the afternoon of the bazaar was a great event at Briarcroft. Stalls had been put up in the lecture hall, and were prettily draped with muslin, while the walls of the room were decorated with flags, festoons of laurel leaves, and Chinese lanterns hung from wires stretched across the platform. The flower stall was a particular success, with its great bunches of daffodils, narcissus, violets, and other spring blossoms, and pots of tulips, lily of the valley, and hyacinths. Leonora had for once risen to the occasion. She had written home to her mother for contributions, and Mrs. Parker had responded generously, sending a quantity of beautiful flowers and pot plants to be sold, and lending some of the finest palms in her conservatory to help to deck the room.

By three o'clock everything was in order for patrons, and really the arrangements reflected great credit upon the Committee. All the stalls were well laden with articles. Some of the Seniors had been busy making beautiful things. Doreen Tristram, who was taking lessons in china painting, brought some charming little teacups and saucers, painted with sprays of flowers. Helen Roper sent some excellent woodcarving, and there was every description of needlecraft--traycloths in fine drawn threadwork, doilys, cushions, tea cosies, nightdress cases, table centres, and other dainty bits of embroidery. By the appointed hour, groups of parents and friends began to arrive, and the hall was soon full. The Lady Mayoress of Greyfield had consented to open the sale, and made an excellent speech, explaining the object for which the money was being raised, and urging the claims of the home for waifs and strays. She herself set a good example by purchasing a number of articles at various stalls, and the visitors followed suit liberally.

The girls hovered about, picking and choosing what they should buy, according to the state of their purses or their individual tastes. A novel feature, much patronized by the Juniors, was a Surprise Packet table. All kinds of tempting little articles were wrapped up in gay tissue paper, and purchased somewhat on the system of "buying a pig in a poke", an arrangement that at any rate afforded great amusement when the parcels were untied. The stalls soon began to exhibit a welcome bareness, and the stall-holders felt the fullness of their bags with satisfaction. Towards four o'clock everybody showed a tendency to migrate in the direction of the cafe chantant. This had been arranged in the largest of the classrooms. Tea was served at small tables while a concert proceeded, the guests being expected to retire after about ten minutes, so as to make room for others.

Helen Roper had got together quite a good programme. Irma Dalton, a Second Form day girl, a dainty, fairy-like child, gave a graceful performance of step dancing, Doreen Tristram played the violin, and there were piano solos and songs from other members. Everyone acknowledged, however, that Gipsy was the star of the occasion. She was dressed specially for her part in a kind of half-Spanish costume, with a red skirt, a black velvet bodice over white sleeves, and a muslin fichu trimmed with lace. Her rich dark hair was allowed to hang loose, and a gold-embroidered gauze scarf was twisted lightly round the top of her head, the long ends falling below her waist. She wore sequin ornaments and a quantity of Oriental bangles, which enhanced the fantastic effect, and gave her the appearance of a true Romany. She was not at all afflicted with shyness, and performed her share of the entertainment with a zest that charmed her audience. Her southern songs, with their crooning refrains, seemed to bring visions of moonlit lagoons and the luscious scent of tropical flowers. She accompanied herself quite prettily on the banjo, and had a stock of encores ready to meet the demands for a further exhibition of her skill. She was such a success that her fame spread over the bazaar. People came into the cafe chantant specially to hear her, and everyone was asking who that bonny, gipsy-looking girl was that sang the charming Creole melodies.

"We've taken exactly three times the money by the refreshment room that we did last year," said Helen Roper, counting up the gains afterwards.

"It was a ripping idea of Gipsy's to add the music!" said Hetty Hancock, always anxious to put in a good word for her friend.

"Yes, I'll give Gipsy the credit that's due to her," allowed Helen. "She's worked hard over this affair, and behaved more decently than I expected. I think she's improved. She's not nearly so perky and cheeky as when she first came. She may turn out quite a nice girl yet."

"Wonders will never cease! Praise for Gipsy from Helen Roper!" gasped Hetty to Lennie Chapman.

Gipsy, in her editorial capacity, wrote a most vivid report of the bazaar for the *Juniors' Journal*, putting in a variety of grand words and flowery turns of speech calculated to impress her readers. She had taken special pains with this number of the Magazine. The chapter of her serial story was longer and more exciting than ever; under the heading of "Our Library Shelf" she had reviewed several books; she had written a leading article on the tennis and cricket prospects for the forthcoming season; and by ceaseless urging had kept her contributors, who were apt to slack off, up to the mark in respect of literary matter. Fiona Campbell had been persuaded to illustrate Norah Bell's storyette; Blanche Russell had sent an account of a winter holiday ski-ing in Norway; the Exchange and Mart had been fuller than ever of offers of silkworms, garden plants, and miscellaneous possessions; and Gipsy had appended a catalogue of the Museum, with an appeal for more donations of specimens.

"Our journal now seems a going concern, and a well-established feature of the Lower School; it is earnestly to be hoped that everyone will make a supreme effort to ensure its success, and that more members will take their share in swelling its pages. Criticisms and suggestions are freely invited, and will be discussed at the General Meeting to be held next Friday, 21 March, at 4 p.m., in the dressing-room."

So wrote Gipsy, and thought no more about the matter. This portion of her editorial address, however, was seized upon by several of the girls, and led to results which she had certainly not expected.

"Wants criticisms, does she?" said Maude Helm. "Well, I'll guarantee she'll get them for once."

"And suggestions too!" giggled Gladys Merriman. "She's had it her own way too long. The fuss people made about her at the bazaar was absurd."

"You weren't even asked to sing at the cafe chantant, Gladys!" commented Alice O'Connor.

"There's been far too much of this favouritism lately. It's time somebody took the thing up, and others had their fair turn. I was speaking to Leonora about it, and she quite agreed with me."

"Yes; Poppie gave a strong hint she'd like Leonora pushed to the front rather than Gipsy."

"Poppie barely tolerates Gipsy."

"I agree with you there. She'd rejoice to see her shelved."

"Well, look here, we've no time to stand gossiping. If anything's to be done, we'd best go and canvass among the kids."

It was exactly at this crisis that Meg Gordon returned to school. She had been absent since the week before Christmas, when her brother had developed measles. She herself had caught the infection, and one after another various brothers and sisters had sickened with it, so that for about three months the whole family had been in quarantine. In her case the old adage "absence makes the heart grow fonder" was undoubtedly true. She came back more devoted to Gipsy than ever, ready to hang upon her words, and yield her somewhat the same fealty as a squire of the Middle Ages rendered to the knight to whom, by the laws of chivalry, he was bound. It was well for Gipsy to have so firm an adherent, for her present position in the school caused her to be greatly in need of staunch friends.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### A Leader of the Opposition

GIPSY had called the General Meeting of the Magazine department of the Guild because she honestly wished her journal to be a representative organ for the whole of the Lower School. A member of each Form was on the Committee, but she thought suggestions would probably be offered by others, and could then be discussed and settled by popular vote. At four o'clock on the Friday afternoon all the Juniors flocked to the dressing-room, for there was a whisper abroad that changes were in the wind, and that it behoved everybody who had an interest in the subject to be present and take sides. Dilys Fenton, as President of the Guild, opened the proceedings with a few introductory remarks; then Gipsy, as editress, read her report on the Magazine.

"Members are invited to suggest any fresh features that they consider would be advantageous for the forthcoming summer term, and to offer any criticisms on the past number." So she concluded.

"I think we may all declare ourselves perfectly satisfied with this report," commented Dilys. "Our editress has worked hard, and the *Journal* is a unique success, which speaks for itself. Personally I can suggest no improvements, but members are of course invited to give their opinions."

There was a moment's pause, then Maude Helm stood up.

"Our lady chairman and fellow members!" she began airily, "I am glad to have this opportunity of raising a protest against an abuse which I consider is beginning to creep into our Guild, and which, unchecked, may be liable to lead to very serious results. You will remember that this Guild was founded in consequence of the very unjust and unfair treatment of the Lower School by the Seniors. This tyrannical attitude of the monitresses had been long resented by the Juniors, and though one new girl happened to seize upon the matter and voice the discontent, it was felt in many quarters that her action had been given undue prominence, and that the real credit belonged to those who had slowly and surely influenced the general opinion. These members, though they stood aside and waived their claims to gratitude, anxious only for the welfare of the Lower School, feel strongly that the whole conduct of the Magazine should be now revised and placed upon a more representative basis. I am not wishful to disparage the work of one who has no doubt done her best for the *Journal*, but I should like to suggest that there are others among us equally capable of undertaking office, and, if they had the chance, of running the affair with possibly even greater success. It seems to me undesirable for one person to take everything upon her shoulders, and as a question of fair play I beg to propose that the editorship should be changed for each issue of the Magazine, with a standing provision that nobody be elected more than once in twelve months."

If a bombshell had suddenly exploded, some of the girls could not have been more surprised. Dilys Fenton stared at Maude as if marvelling at her amazing impudence, Hetty Hancock flushed pink with annoyance, and Meg Gordon's eyes sought the face of her idol. A few of Maude's following clapped vigorously, notably Leonora, and there was an echo of support among some of the younger ones. Gipsy, though she had been quite unprepared for such a mutiny in camp, bore the attack with admirable coolness and self-possession.

"I may perhaps be allowed to state," she remarked calmly, "that any office which I hold at present was not self-sought, but was given me as the result of the general vote. To the members themselves, therefore, I appeal, if they consider they've anything against me."

"Maude's perfectly right!" interposed Gladys Merriman, rising hastily. "This Magazine business has been a 'one man show' all along. Nobody else has had even a look-in. It's been 'Gipsy Latimer' from beginning to end."

"Oh! Oh! Who's had a story in every number?" cried a voice from the back.

"The editress oughtn't to be allowed to monopolize the chief parts!" called out Alice O'Connor.

"She didn't!"

"How can you say so!"

"Go it, Alice! Pitch it strong! I'm with you!"

"Order! Order!" commanded Dilys. "This question must be discussed from both sides. We'll take one at a time, please."

"Maude! Let Maude speak, then!" shouted a band of sympathizers from the opposition.

Maude, who had waxed warm, was only too ready to speak, and seized upon the opportunity.

"I want to know," she demanded aggressively, "why one girl expects to take the top seat in this school, and dictate what's to be done all round? Newcomers used to be kept in the background, but it seems all that's changed now. However, if new girls are the fashion, Leonora Parker's newer still, and why shouldn't she be editress?"

"Because she couldn't!" piped somebody.

"Who's that says she couldn't?" shouted Gladys.

"Give her a chance to try!" called out Alice O'Connor.

"Likely!"

"You want to try yourself, I suppose!"

"Look here, we don't want everything turned topsy-turvy to suit a few like you."

"Order! Order!" cried Dilys again--a very necessary command, for the members were growing excited, and instead of stating their proposals in the orthodox, conventional language which they prided themselves upon always using at meetings, were descending to personalities.

"Oh, do let me speak! I'll give it them hot!" begged Hetty. But Meg Gordon had already caught the President's eye, and began:

"If this is to be a representative meeting, it's time some reply was made to Maude Helm's insinuations. The main object of Maude's remarks seems to be to cast a slur upon Gipsy Latimer, and to imply that she's taken an unfair advantage in coming to the fore. Every girl in this room knows that Gipsy Latimer refused the Presidency of the Guild, and only accepted the editorship because it was forced upon her. Did any one of those who are so ready to run the Magazine now it's started think of originating it? Of course they didn't! It was Gipsy, and Gipsy alone, who suggested the idea, drew up the plan, asked for contributions, and made the thing the success it is. There isn't another girl at Briarcroft who could have done it, or if there is, why didn't she? Where's your gratitude? Gipsy got us our own Guild, and the *Journal's* the organ of the Guild. She's the only one who's really qualified to be editress. I ask you, do you think anyone else could do it equally well? No, you know very well they couldn't, and wouldn't take the trouble either!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted a number of voices, as Meg stopped from sheer lack of breath.

"I thought this meeting was to be conducted in strict order!" sneered Maude. "I made a proposal a while ago, and instead of its being allowed to be seconded and put to the vote, everybody began to talk separately. I beg to propose again that the editorship of the Magazine be changed each time, and nobody be eligible for office again within twelve months."

"And I beg to second the proposal," cried Gladys.

"Those in favour, kindly signify!" said the President.

"Put it to the ballot!" suggested Alice O'Connor eagerly.

"No, we'll have a show of hands," returned Hetty grimly. "We want to know which among you are answerable for this business. In all common sense, how do you suppose a magazine can be run properly with a different editress each time? But it's evidently a question of Gipsy Latimer versus Maude Helm as leader of the Lower School. Which will you choose, girls?"

Several hands that were on the point of going up wavered at that, and went down again. Maude was not a general favourite, and though she had contrived to raise a spirit of envy against Gipsy, nobody was anxious to claim her as a leader.

"I suggested Leonora as editress," corrected Maude, rising angrily. "Miss Poppleton herself proposed it!"

But at that there was a scornful laugh. Maude had made a fatal mistake. Miss Poppleton's championship, far from being a recommendation, was exactly the reverse. The girls resented her interference in their private concerns, and did not intend to allow her the least voice in their councils.

"We don't want Poppie's pet, thanks!"

"She's not going to manage our Guild for us!"

"We can make our own choice!"

So few hands went up in favour of Maude's proposal that its rejection was obvious at once. Meg Gordon started up immediately with a counter motion.

"I beg to propose that Gipsy Latimer continue to be editress until the end of the summer term."

"And I beg to second that motion," agreed Lennie Chapman heartily.

This time the hands went up in earnest, and there was no doubt about the majority.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted Gipsy's supporters, turning in much triumph upon the opposition as the meeting broke up. Maude and her friends, finding the point carried, had no more to say, and were obliged to drop the subject. Leonora affected a sublime indifference.

"I'm sure I didn't want to be editress. I can't think why they suggested it," she said, in her stolid, bored fashion.

"To carry favour with Poppie, and spite Gipsy!" declared Lennie Chapman. "I don't blame you: they made you a cat's-paw, that's all."

"It's a victory for Gipsy, but I'm sorry it's happened at all," fretted Hetty. "It's annoyed her dreadfully, and I believe she's ready to throw the whole thing up and resign office."

"That she can't and shan't and mustn't do! We won't allow her!"

The struggle made a great sensation in the Upper Fourth. Some of the girls openly twitted Maude with her defeat, an unwise and ungenerous proceeding which bore ill fruit. Maude was not a girl to let bygones be bygones; she turned sulky, brooded over her grievances, and bore Gipsy a deeper grudge than ever. She was determined that she would not let the latter go entirely unscathed, and looked about for some further opportunity of flinging a dart.

"I'll pay her out somehow--see if I don't!" she grumbled to her chum Gladys. "Wish I could think of some really good way!"

"I know!" cackled Gladys suddenly. "It's only struck me this second. Oh! It's an inspiration! No, I daren't tell you here, with all those kids about eavesdropping. Come outside into the playground, and I'll explain. Have you any used South African stamps in your collection? Good! Then it's as simple as ABC."

"What are the Triumvirate up to?" asked Lennie Chapman a few days later. "I'm absolutely certain they've some mischief brewing."

"Do you mean Maude, Gladys, and Alice? I call them Korah, Dathan, and Abiram," said Dilys. "They're always hatching plots of some kind. I suppose they've a fresh grievance against the Guild."

"I believe they'd like to start a rival magazine of their own."

"Let them, then! There's no reason why they shouldn't. We should have a chance to prove who's the best editress. But I don't believe they'd take the trouble when it came to the point. They only make a fuss because they enjoy growling."

"I can stand growls, but Maude's apt to stick in pins as well. I should like to find out what she's evolving just at present."

Maude kept her secret well, however, and even Lennie's watchful eyes could discover nothing beyond the ordinary schoolgirl nonsense that generally went on among the three chums. She decided that she must have been mistaken after all.

March, with its boisterous winds, was passing fast away, and an early spring was bringing on green buds, and opening out venturous blossom on pear and plum trees. It was the first time Gipsy had seen an English spring, and she enjoyed the experience. The thrushes and blackbirds which carolled all day in the Briarcroft garden especially appealed to her.

"They're little plain birds to look at, but they just sing their hearts out," she said. "I learnt Browning's piece about the thrush when I was at school in Australia, and I always wanted to hear a real English one. I don't wonder he was enthusiastic about it."

March had arrived like the traditional lion, but went out like the orthodox lamb, and the 1st of April was ushered in by most appropriate showers. The time-honoured festival was kept up in rather a languid fashion at Briarcroft. The

Upper School discountenanced it as childish and foolish, but a few of the Juniors indulged in jokes at one another's expense. These were mostly confined to the First and Second Forms, and the Upper Fourth as a rule scorned them equally with the Seniors.

On this particular morning the girls had just taken their places in their classroom, and were waiting for Miss White, when Maude handed Gipsy a letter, with the casual enquiry: "I say, Yankee Doodle, is this meant for you?" It was a thin foreign envelope, and bore a South African stamp, and it was addressed to "Miss Latimer, Briarcroft Hall, Greyfield, England". Gipsy glanced at it at first idly, then seized upon it as a starving man clutches at food. Her heart was beating and throbbing wildly, and her shaking, trembling fingers could scarcely tear it open. Was it at last the news for which she had been yearning, craving, sickening for so many weary, weary months? It was not her father's writing, but it might possibly contain tidings of him. She could scarcely control her violent excitement; her cheeks were white, her lips were quivering, and she drew her breath with little, short, painful jerks. In frantic anticipation she dragged the letter from its envelope, and unfolded it. It was only a single sheet of foreign paper, and it bore but one sentence:

"First of April; nicely sold!"

For a moment Gipsy gazed at the words without really comprehending their meaning. Then it dawned upon her that she was the victim of a most cruel hoax. The revulsion of feeling was so great, and the disappointment so intense, that she gave a little, sharp, bitter cry, and, leaning forward over her desk, buried her head in her arms, and sobbed audibly.

"What is it, Gipsy? What's the matter?" enquired her neighbours.

"Read it! Oh, how could anybody?" choked Gipsy.

Hetty Hancock seized upon the sheet, which had fallen to the floor, and after one brief glance at its contents turned upon Maude with blazing eyes.

"I never thought much of you, Maude Helm, but I didn't believe even you could have invented such a detestably mean, dastardly trick as this. You deserve to be boycotted by every decent girl in the school."

"It was only a joke," blustered Maude. "Everyone expects to be taken in to-day."

"It's a wicked, heartless joke--the cruellest thing you could have thought of--and you knew it, and did it on purpose!"

"How could you, Maude? It's hateful!" came in a chorus from the other girls. "We'll tell Miss White!"

"Well, I'm sure it's not so dreadful, and it was Gladys who thought of it, too!" protested Maude, finding popular opinion against her.

"Don't try and put it off on Gladys, though one of you is as bad as the other. Girls, I'm not going to speak to Maude Helm or Gladys Merriman for a week, and I hope nobody else will either!" thundered Hetty.

Lennie Chapman and Meg Gordon were trying to comfort Gipsy, and make her take heart of grace again, but she had suffered a severe shock, and controlled herself with difficulty. She sat up, however, as Miss White came into the room.

"Don't tell her!" she whispered huskily. "What's the use? It would only make a fuss, and I hate fusses. The thing's over now, and I'd rather try and forget it. Maude needn't be proud of such a poor joke!"

"What a stoic you are!" returned Meg admiringly.



## CHAPTER XIV

### Mountaineering

EASTER was drawing very near, and the school was to break up for more than three weeks. Gipsy, to her intense delight, had been asked to spend the holidays with the Gordons, and Miss Poppleton had graciously allowed her to accept the invitation.

"We had meant to ask you for Christmas," said Meg, "and Mother had even got as far as writing a letter to Poppie; then Billy broke out in spots, and the doctor said we might all have taken the infection, and we must stop in quarantine. It was a horrible nuisance. I felt so savage! But we couldn't invite you to come and share measles! We're all looking forward most tremendously to your visit. I'm so excited I can hardly wait till the end of the term!"

After six months spent entirely at Briarcroft, Gipsy felt that the idea of a change was most welcome and exhilarating. She liked Meg, and wanted to see her home surroundings. The two younger sisters, Eppie and Molly, she knew already, as they were in the Lower Third and Second Forms, and she had always set them down, in school parlance, as "jolly kids". The rest of the family she hoped would prove equally interesting.

Poor Gipsy heaved many a sigh as she packed her box. Her outfit seemed such a very shabby one with which to go a-visiting, and she hoped Mrs. Gordon would not feel ashamed of her guest. At the last moment Miss Edith, looking rather guilty and self-conscious, popped hastily into the bedroom and thrust a small parcel into her hand.

"It's a little present, Gipsy dear," she said nervously, "just some new hair ribbons and a pair of gloves and a tie. You've no need to tell Miss Poppleton or anybody that I gave them to you. Don't thank me--I'd rather you didn't! I do hope you'll enjoy yourself, you poor child!"

"Oh, Miss Edie! If a letter should happen to come for me from South Africa while I'm away, you'd send it on, wouldn't you?" asked Gipsy wistfully.

"I'd bring it myself, at once," returned Miss Edith, as she scuttled out of the room in a desperate hurry.

Mrs. Gordon sent a cab to Briarcroft on breaking-up day, and when Gipsy's box had been placed on the top, Meg, Eppie, and Molly bore away their guest with great rejoicing. The Gordons lived at an old-fashioned house about a mile from the school. It seemed quite in the country, with fields all round, and had an orchard and large garden, a pond, an asphalted tennis court for wet weather, as well as a grass one, and a croquet lawn.

Mrs. Gordon welcomed Gipsy most kindly, and at once made her feel at home, and the remainder of the family were introduced by degrees. Mr. Gordon, a jovial, genial man, greeted her with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

"So this is Meg's idol! Glad to see you, my dear!" he remarked. "If you can cure Meg of standing on one leg and puckering up her mouth when she talks, I'll be grateful. She seems disposed to listen to you in preference to anyone here, so please act mentor."

"Oh, Dad! Don't be naughty!" shrieked Meg. "What will Gipsy think of you?"

"A favourable opinion, I trust," laughed Mr. Gordon, as he vanished into his own particular sanctum.

Donald, Meg's elder brother, seemed disposed to be friendly; but Billy, the twelve-year-old offender who had started the family with measles, was afflicted with shyness, and preferred to inspect the visitor from afar until he grew accustomed to her presence. Rob, the youngest, a roguish laddie of six, fell openly in love with Gipsy at first sight, and prepared to monopolize her company to an extent that Meg would by no means allow.

"She's my friend, and hasn't come here to play with little boys. Run away to the nursery, and leave us alone!" she commanded, enforcing her words by a process of summary ejection, regardless of all wails.

Gipsy had further to form an acquaintance with two dogs, three cats, a dormouse, and a tame starling, before she was considered intimate with the whole household, but after that she felt thoroughly at home.

The Gordons were a particularly jolly, merry, happy-go-lucky set of young people, and they made their guest so entirely welcome that at the end of a few days she might have known them all for years. Even the bashful Billy soon ceased turning crimson whenever he spoke to her, while Eppie and Molly disputed fiercely over the honour of sitting next to her at tea. It happened to be a fine Easter, so outdoor occupations were in full swing. Gipsy was an ardent tennis player, and revelled in golf also. She and Meg and Donald made many cycling excursions, for the neighbourhood was pretty and the roads were good. With packets of sandwiches tied to their handlebars they would

start off for a whole day's ride, to explore some ruined abbey or ancient castle, or to get a picturesque view of the fells. Donald, who was keen on collecting birds' eggs, would often stop the party, to hunt for nests in the hedges or banks; while Meg, whose hobby at present was wild flowers, kept a watchful eye for any fresh specimens that she might find growing by the roadside.

Mr. Gordon was an enthusiastic member of an Alpine Club, and he would sometimes take the elder and more reliable members of his family on to the fells for mountaineering practice. Many of the rocks afforded excellent training for Switzerland, without involving any special danger. These climbs were something quite new for Gipsy, and an immense delight. She was very fearless, and had a steady head, so she proved an apt pupil. Mr. Gordon would show her exactly how she must place her feet and hold herself so as to take advantage of the tiniest and narrowest ledges of rock, and she much enjoyed the excitement of accomplishing, under his guidance, what would have appeared to her impossible performances without his skilled advice. Meg and Donald had already received some training, and when Gipsy was sufficiently advanced to be able to keep up with them, Mr. Gordon allowed them all three to venture with him on a more difficult ascent, linked together with one of his Alpine ropes. Gipsy was proud indeed as she stood at the top of a jagged crag and waved her hand to Billy, who was taking a snapshot of the party from below.

Poor Billy was liable to fits of dizziness since his attack of measles, and was not allowed any real climbing, so he consoled himself by following the others about with a Brownie camera, and photographing them in the most dangerous-looking positions that he could catch.

"Billy must do some extra prints, and you could put them in the Magazine," suggested Meg to Gipsy. "You could write an article on 'Mountaineering in Cumberland'. It would be grand, and would make Maude Helm gnash her teeth with envy."

"Perhaps she's been doing something even more exciting to astonish us with," laughed Gipsy. "I wish we could have climbed a real mountain, like Skiddaw."

"Yes, there'd be some credit in that," commented Donald thoughtfully. He said no more at the moment, but a few days afterwards, when the three young people had set out on another cycling expedition, he had an enterprising plan to unfold.

"I vote we ride as far as Ribblesdale, leave our machines there, and then climb Hawes Fell," he announced. "We've started so early we'd have heaps and loads of time. It would be a thing worth doing! I didn't broach the idea at home because I knew the Mater'd be in such a state of mind, and think we were going to break our necks. It will be time enough to tell about it when we come back. Are you two game to go?"

"Rather!" exclaimed both the girls rapturously.

Gipsy, with her Colonial bringing up and independent American ideas, did not realize any necessity to ask permission for such an expedition. She had been in far wilder places, and considered the Cumberland fells civilized ground compared with portions of the Rockies and certain mountainous tracts of New Zealand with which she was familiar.

If Meg had any qualms of conscience she contrived to quiet them with the comforting assurance: "Dad would have taken us if he hadn't been busy at his office, and we can manage so well ourselves now, we can get on all right without him."

Ribblesdale was a pretty little village about six miles away, a typical north-country hamlet with its stone cottages, with mullioned windows and flagged stone roofs, its grey turreted church tower, and its quick-flowing, brawling river. It was well wooded, but it stood high, and at this early season of the year the trees were still bare, and only a few green buds showed here and there on the hedges. The gardens were full of golden daffodils and clumps of opening polyanthus; but primroses—which had long been in blossom in the sheltered garden at Briarcroft—were here only venturing into bud. As the inn looked clean and attractive, the three decided to leave their bicycles there, and to have a lunch of ham and eggs and coffee before setting out on their climb.

"Then we can take our sandwiches with us. We're sure to want them up there," said Donald.

"Yes; best to fortify ourselves thoroughly before we start," agreed Meg.

"Billy'll be fearfully sick when he hears where we've been," said Gipsy.

"Poor old Billy—ho! Yes, he'd have liked to follow us with his camera; but he's not quite up to tackling Hawes Fell just at present," agreed Meg.

The inn was a delightfully quaint, old-fashioned, primitive little place, such as is not often found in these days of

modern improvements. Gipsy, who had had no opportunity before of seeing English country life, was enchanted with its sanded floor; its oak dresser with rows of willow-pattern plates, its pewter mugs and dishes, and the great brass preserving-pan that was set in the ingle-nook. She admired the oak beams of the ceiling, the rows of plant pots in the long mullioned window, the settle drawn up by the big fireplace, and the glass cases of stuffed pike and game birds that adorned the walls.

The lunch was a great success--a smoking dish of fried ham and eggs, home-made bread and farmhouse butter, thin oatcakes and moorland honey, and coffee, with thick yellow cream to pour into it.

"Beats school, doesn't it?" said Donald, with a chuckle of enjoyment, as he helped himself to a third serving of honey. "I say, though, we shan't have to stop too long feasting here if we mean to get to the top of Hawes Fell. It's a jolly good step, I can tell you."

"We're ready!" returned Meg smartly. "We were only waiting for you to finish gormandizing."

"Thanks for the compliment! One doesn't get the chance of heather honey every day, and I've a remarkably sweet tooth. Anything in the way of jam or preserves left near me invariably vanishes."

The way up the fell lay first over the old stone bridge that spanned the river, then across fields, and by a narrow footpath leading up a steep and thickly-wooded hillside. Though the trees were still in their winter garb they were none the less lovely for that; the lack of foliage revealed the delicate tracery of their boughs and the beauty of their straight stems, which, in one or two terraced glades, were like the columns and shafts of some great cathedral. The sun shining down the glen gave a soft purplish tint to the bare twigs, and brought out in bolder contrast the deep dark green of the innumerable masses of ivy that had utterly taken possession of and choked some of the trees supporting them.

"Isn't it glorious? I always say our fells need a great deal of beating," said Meg, who was an enthusiast over her native county. "I don't believe there's a wood equal to this anywhere!" and she began to sing the old north-country ditty:

"A north-countree maid  
Up to London had strayed,  
Although with her nature it did not agree.  
She wept and she sighed,  
And she bitterly cried:  
'I wish once again in the north I could be!  
Oh! the oak and the ash and the bonny ivy tree,  
They all grow so green in the north countree!'"

"Don't know whether you'll get Gipsy to agree with you; she ought to be a dab critic of scenery by now," grunted Donald.

"Oh, it's lovely!" said Gipsy, who was enjoying herself immensely. "Of course it's quite, quite different from America, or Australia, or South Africa. It's smaller, but it's prettier in its own way. It looks much more cultivated."

"Ah! wait till you get right out on the moor at the top. You won't insult that by calling it cultivated."

The woods were soon left behind, and the pathway led ever upwards, first through a tangle of heather and bilberry and gorse; then, higher still, over short, fine, slippery tracts of grass. They were reaching the upper region of the fell, where the hard rock cropped out into great splintered crags, weathered by countless winter storms, and where no bushes or softer herbage could face the struggle for existence. So far the walk had been comparatively easy, but now the footpath had disappeared, and they were obliged to trust to their knowledge of mountaineering. The top still towered above them a very long way off, and they calculated it would need a two hours' climb before they could reach the particular crag that marked the extreme summit.

Donald assumed the leadership of the party, and, scanning the mountainside with what he called an Alpine eye, decided which would be their best course to pursue. There were several steep precipices and awkward places that must be avoided, for though they were all quite ready to try their skill at scaling rocks, it seemed no use to waste unnecessary time over performing difficult feats.

"I expect that last crag will give us enough practice in that," remarked Donald. "I've brought a rope with me in case we want it--got it wound round and round my waist under my coat."

"Oh, that explains why you look so stout to-day!" laughed Meg. "I should think it's pretty uncomfortable."

"Not a bit of it! It keeps me warm. I call it jolly cold up here."

"I believe we've reached the Arctic zone!" agreed Gipsy.

The air had undoubtedly grown colder with every hundred feet of their ascent. The sunshine had disappeared, grey clouds had gathered, and feathery flakes of snow began to fall lightly. The grass was soon covered with a thin white coating which gave a delightfully Alpine aspect to the scene. The prospect was glorious--the sharp, splintered, snow-crested crags stood out in bold relief against the neutral-tinted sky, and the long stretches of moor below them looked soft and blurred masses of whiteness.

"We can find our way home by our footsteps in the snow!" said Gipsy, drawing long breaths of the pure, exhilarating air.

"I wonder if we ought to turn back," said Meg, rather doubtfully.

"Turn back!" exclaimed Donald. "You don't mean to say you want to turn tail now, Meg? Why, we're just getting to the exciting part!"

"I was only thinking of the snow."

"Why, that makes it all the more like Switzerland! You don't suppose Dad turns back at the snowline when he's doing a climb? We're in luck to have the chance of a little snow. I wish there'd been a keen frost, and we could have tried an ice axe somewhere. Pluck up your courage, Meg! You'll never do the Matterhorn if you shirk Hawes Fell!"

Thus encouraged Meg said no more, though she had her private doubts about the wisdom of proceeding farther. It is an unpleasant task to be a drag on other people's amusement, and both Donald and Gipsy were very keen on making the ascent. So they scrambled onward and upward, slipping often on the rapidly freezing rocks, helping each other over difficult places, sighing for nailed boots and alpenstocks, but laughing and enjoying the fun of the adventure.

To climb to the summit certainly taxed all their strength. The mountain seemed to heave before them in a succession of huge boulders, and as each one was scaled another appeared beyond it. At length they reached a piled confusion of rocks, where a little cairn had been built of small stones and loose pieces of shale.

"There we are! The very place!" shouted Donald. "I knew we'd find it if we pegged along. Now, can you girls tackle this last bit? Wouldn't you like to use the rope?"

The final piece of crag was slippery enough to justify Donald's offer, and as he seemed particularly anxious not to have brought his rope in vain, the others consented to give it a trial. With its aid the difficult bit was accomplished fairly easily, and the three were soon standing in triumph by the cairn, hurrahing and waving their handkerchiefs with much excitement.

"I'm going to eat my sandwiches here; I'm fagged out," declared Gipsy, sitting down on a stone and suddenly realizing that she was tired and hungry.

The others followed suit, very ready for a rest and a picnic. It was a long time since their lunch at the inn, and the frosty air had given them keen appetites. It was too cold to sit still, however, for more than five or ten minutes; a bitter wind had sprung up, and the snow, which had only fallen very lightly before, began to come down in thicker and heavier flakes.

"We'd better be going, or we shan't be able to find our way," worried Meg anxiously.

"Right-o! only we must each add a stone to the cairn first," replied Donald. "I've a pencil here, and we'll write our names on them as proof conclusive that we've been, in case anybody doubts our word afterwards."

So "Gipsy Latimer", "Margaret Gordon", and "Donald Alexander Gordon" were duly inscribed on smooth pieces of shale and placed as evidence on the top of the pile, after which ceremony the three began their descent with something of the feeling of Arctic explorers who had reached the Pole.

It was indeed high time to return. Clouds were blowing up fast, and with the thickening snow began rapidly to obscure the view. The trio went very cautiously, trying to remember various landmarks which they had noticed on the way up. Gipsy's idea of retracing their footsteps in the snow soon proved futile, for already all tracks were obliterated. It was impossible to see far in front of them, and but for the compass that hung on Donald's watch-chain they would have had no notion of where they were going.

"We must keep due west, and look out sharp for precipices. Don't let us get separated on any account. Hadn't we better use the rope again?"

"I don't believe we're anywhere near the way we came up. I don't recognize these rocks in the least," said Meg.

"Never mind, if we get down somewhere to civilization," returned Gipsy.

"Yes, but we don't want to be five miles away from our bicycles!"

"We're all right!" exclaimed Donald jubilantly. "Here's the piece of white quartz we were sitting on, I'm sure. Yes!" (grubbing about under the snow) "I'm right, for here's a scrap of the silver paper from the chocolate we were eating. Hurrah! I'm going to set up for an Alpine guide!"

The snow was clearing considerably as they got farther down the mountainside, and after a while they were able to recognize various points of the landscape, and realized that Donald's compass and instinct for locality had led them correctly.

"It was a narrow squeak, though," confessed Meg. "I don't mind telling you now that I thought we should have to stay up there all night! It's getting fearfully late—we must sprint back when we reach our machines."

"We'll have some hot tea at the inn first," declared Donald. "You girls will never sprint six miles without!"

Very tired, but exceedingly proud of themselves, the mountaineers reached home at half-past eight, to find Mr. and Mrs. Gordon looking out anxiously for their return.

"You young scamps! I'd no idea you were going climbing on your own!" said Mr. Gordon. "I'd have forbidden it if I'd known. Hawes Fell is a nasty little bit at the finish."

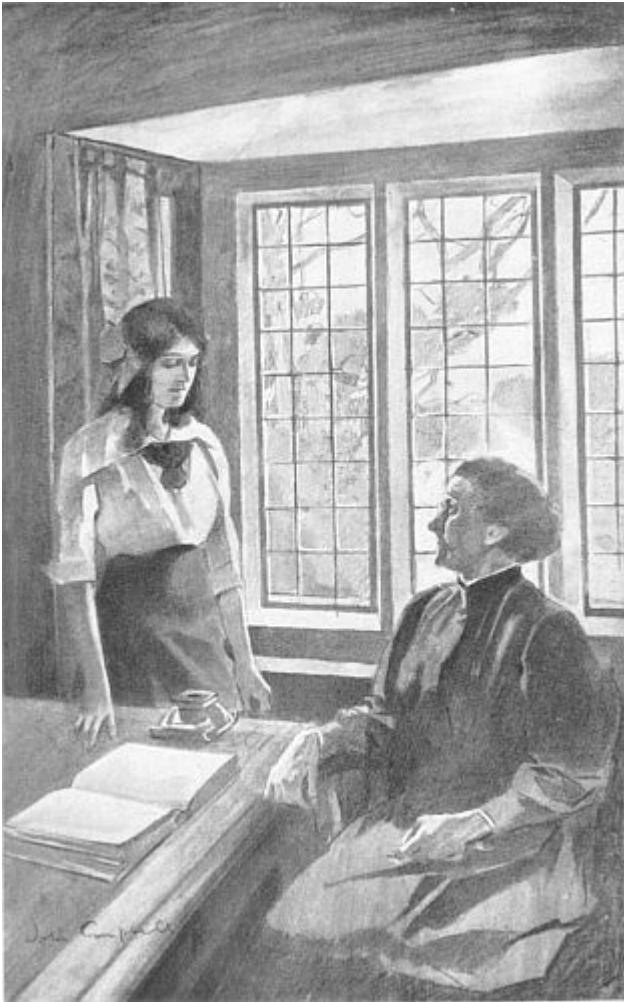
"But we did it, Dad!" cried Meg excitedly. "We put our feet on all the right ledges, just as you taught us. Oh! Don't you think I'm old enough to go to Switzerland with you next summer, and try some real ice work? You promised you'd take me when I was fifteen!"



## CHAPTER XV

### A School Mystery

AFTER the delightful three weeks spent with the Gordons, Gipsy felt that so pleasant an experience of English home life made it doubly difficult to return to Briarcroft. No news of her father had arrived during her absence, and she was received with black looks by Miss Poppleton. She had begun to dread, with a shrinking, nervous horror, those futile interviews with the Principal--interviews in which she could only state again how little she knew, and listen to fresh reproaches. She tried to brace herself for the ordeal when ordered to the study, but her heart failed her as she tapped at the door, and she entered with something of the apprehension of a victim of the Inquisition facing the torture chamber. She advanced hesitatingly towards the Principal's desk, and stood without speaking, a forlorn enough little figure to have excited compassion in the most mercenary heart. Miss Poppleton glanced at her furtively, and looked away again. She had made up her mind not to allow herself to be worked upon by her feelings, and meant to speak plainly.



AN INTERVIEW WITH MISS POPPLETON

"It's no use mincing matters, Gipsy!" she began, blustering a little to hide her own sense of uneasiness. "Here we are at the beginning of another term, and things are exactly the same as they were at Christmas. Not a word from your father, or from your New Zealand relations either. It's plain enough they mean to abandon you! Now, I want you to understand that I can't be responsible for you. You must think again. Are there absolutely no relations or friends to whom you can apply?"

Gipsy sighed as she gave the same old answer. Had she been possessed of any information, how gladly would she have supplied it!

"I can't keep a school for philanthropy," frowned Miss Poppleton. "I'm afraid your father is an adventurer pure and simple. He's left you on my hands, and gone off, who knows where? I'll let you have one more term here, just on the chance of his turning up; but if we've heard nothing by the summer holidays, then I shall be obliged to apply to the Emigration Society, and send you out to New Zealand. Your relatives there would be forced, at least, to support you, though I suppose I shall have to write down your fees here as bad debts. In the meantime you must make yourself as useful as you can, out of school hours. You might help Miss Edith with the mending, and look after No. 1 dormitory. I can't afford to keep you here on the same footing as an ordinary pupil. It's an unpleasant business from beginning to end."

Very unpleasant, thought poor Gipsy, as she availed herself of permission to go. Her proud spirit could not bear her position of sufferance in the school, and she would almost have preferred to be handed over to the Emigration Society, and deported to New Zealand. That

her father should be called an adventurer seemed the cruellest cut of all. The reason for his long silence she could not fathom, but she was positive he would never abandon her, and her faith in him did not waver. Some day, if he were still alive, she knew he would come to claim her; and in the meantime, though life was dark, for the sake of her own self-respect she must show a brave front. Gipsy certainly needed all the courage and fortitude of which she was possessed.

If last term had been hard, the present term was harder still. Miss Poppleton's hint about making her useful was no idle remark, as she soon found to her cost. Instead of joining the other girls at tennis and croquet in her play hours, she was expected to sit in the linen room, darning stockings and hemming dusters, or mending damaged garments. She was made into a kind of attendant for the little ones who slept in No. 1 dormitory, and was responsible for brushing their hair, seeing that they had their baths, putting away their clothes, and keeping their room in order. It was a recognized thing that she was to be at the beck and call of all the mistresses, to run errands, take messages, fetch articles wanted,

and do innumerable little "odd jobs" about the house.

She was willing enough thus to help to earn her salt, but the unfortunate part was that the extra work made serious inroads upon her time. Her new dormitory duties took a large slice out of each evening, and no allowances were made in class for the fact that her hours of preparation were curtailed. She resented the injustice of being reproached for badly learnt lessons, when she had been busy the night before washing the hair of her little charges, copying some notes for Miss Lindsay, sorting music, filling inkpots, and stitching fresh braid on Miss Poppleton's skirt. The mistresses did not really mean to impose upon Gipsy, but having been told to make the girl of use, it was so easy to hand over all the tiresome extra things for her to do, and completely to forget that an accumulation of trifles may make a large sum. It never struck anybody that Gipsy's legs could grow weary with constantly running up and down stairs, or that she preferred tennis to darning and croquet to brushing children's coats; all were supremely busy with their own concerns; and though Miss Edith sometimes noticed that she looked tired, loyalty to Miss Poppleton forbade the least interference. So Gipsy plodded away, with a grim determination to do her best, and not to give in under any circumstances whatsoever. She was much too proud to make complaints to her friends, even if they could have helped her, and met their compassion for her non-appearance at the tennis courts with an assumption of indifference.

"I can't get at Gipsy nowadays!" said Hetty Hancock to Dilys Fenton. "She seems quite changed this term, since Poppie's made her into a kind of pupil teacher. It's as if there were a barrier suddenly set up between us."

"So there is--a barrier of her own making," sighed Dilys. "I've tried to get across it myself, and I can't. The fact is, Gipsy's about the proudest girl in the school, and she's eating her heart out at finding herself in this queer position. She's neither exactly a pupil, nor a teacher, nor a mistress, nor anything: indeed, Poppie treats her more as a servant; sometimes she absolutely wipes her boots on her! Gipsy's like a princess sold into slavery! She's taking it hardly, but she won't let it crush her spirit. I think she feels so sore, she can't even bear our sympathy."

"I wish we could do something," groaned Hetty.

"Nothing would be of any use, unless you could find her father. I'm afraid, myself, he must be dead."

"She's fighting a battle against fearful odds," said Hetty, shaking her head. "She's keeping her self-respect when most girls would have given way utterly. I suppose there's nothing to be done but just look on and admire her pluck. I should like to speak my mind to Poppie sometimes!"

"You'd do Gipsy no good, I'm afraid."

"I wonder Miss Edith doesn't stand up more for her."

"Miss Edith! She's a jellyfish--a crushed worm--a mere serf and vassal! She's frightened to death of her sister, in my opinion, and hardly dare call her soul her own. She'd be nice enough to Gipsy if Poppie'd let her."

"Look here! I hope Gipsy's going to the Fourth Form picnic next week."

"Gracious! So do I. I hadn't thought of it. She never does go to anything now that needs paying for. Oh, but she must! We can't have her left out of it. Let's beard Poppie boldly in her den, offer to pay Gipsy's share in private, and beg for her to come."

"I'm game if you are, and ready to go halves."

The Upper and Lower Fourth Forms always joined in an excursion, which was invariably held on the first Saturday in June. They went, under the care of Miss White, to visit some place of interest in the neighbourhood, and the journey was made either by train or in hired wagonettes. Tea was provided at a farmhouse or hotel, and counting the price of admission to ruins and tips to guides, the little jaunt generally worked out at about three or four shillings per head. All the other Forms in the school had similar picnics: the Fifth and Sixth invariably combined, as did the First and Second; and the Third, which like the Fourth consisted of Upper and Lower divisions, was large enough to have its own outing. To miss the annual excursion would be felt by any girl as a terrible omission, almost as bad as missing the prize-giving or the Christmas soiree.

Hetty and Dilys hastened therefore to Miss Poppleton's study, to make quite sure that on such an important occasion Gipsy should not be left behind. They stated their case with considerable eagerness and enthusiasm.

"We'd pay all Gipsy's share between us, only, please, we'd rather she didn't know anything about that part of it," ended Dilys, who did the most of the talking.

Miss Poppleton received the suggestion with a coldness that was particularly damping.

"I can't decide anything at present," she said briefly. "I doubt if Gipsy can be spared. Her new duties keep her occupied in looking after the little ones, and Saturday is a busy day. No, Dilys, I can't promise. Gipsy must remember it is impossible for her to have everything the same as other girls, and she must not expect it."

"Oh, she didn't ask us to ask you! She doesn't know anything about it. It was our idea entirely," put in Hetty hastily.

"I'm glad to hear it," returned Miss Poppleton dryly, and dismissed the girls without further ceremony.

"I don't believe she means to let her go," declared Dilys indignantly, as they walked down the passage. "Poppie's taken an absolute spite against Gipsy lately. But I'll be even with her! I've got an idea. Let's make the picnic a Guild affair, and persuade all the Lower School to join together and do the same excursion on the same day. Then Gipsy'd be bound to go, to help to look after those kids! Besides, she's the Secretary."

"Stunning! I believe we shall compass it. Only don't say what's our object, or Maude Helm or somebody will be putting a spoke in our wheel perhaps. We'll call a meeting of the Guild and propose it. You bring it up, and I'll second it."

Dilys's and Hetty's suggestion was very well received by the Guild. The idea of a big united picnic sounded attractive, so the motion was carried unanimously. It was of course necessary to refer the matter to Miss Poppleton and the mistresses, but they were not likely to offer objections to a scheme favoured by the whole of the Lower School. It would indeed be easier for the mistresses to co-operate than for each to take charge of a separate Form. It was decided to ask permission for the excursion to be regarded as the annual treat of the Guild, and particularly to request that all officers should be present and wear their badges.

"Done Poppie for once, I believe!" triumphed Dilys. "She can't have the cheek to keep our Secretary at home. The Guild would mutiny."

"She's made such a fuss of the Guild, she's bound to allow us some latitude," agreed Hetty.

"Then on Saturday week Gipsy shall get one treat, if she doesn't get another all this term."

But before Saturday week something happened.

Among the various rules of Briarcroft, one of the strictest was that which forbade any boarders to go outside the grounds without first obtaining special permission from Miss Poppleton. The day girls at the school wore the regulation sailor hat with a plain band of navy-blue ribbon, but the boarders, to distinguish them from the others, had a navy band with a white stripe in it. They were extremely proud of these stripes, which they regarded as a badge of superiority, similar to the gold tassels which, many years ago, were worn by the sons of the nobility on their college caps at Oxford. The hats were of course very well known in the neighbourhood, and nobody who lived anywhere near the school could possibly mistake the Briarcroft "sailor".

Now it came to Miss Poppleton's ears, through the medium of one of those malicious little birds who have a reputation for carrying inconvenient pieces of information, that on several evenings, just at dusk, a girl who wore a boarder's hat had been seen to leave the garden and hurry up the road, returning about five minutes later to dodge with great caution inside the gate. Such a proceeding was manifestly irregular and highly improper. Miss Poppleton, at first indignant at the very idea that one of her pupils could be guilty of so great an indiscretion, nevertheless felt it her solemn duty to investigate the matter thoroughly, and either expose the offender or deny the imputation. She was the more particularly annoyed because the hint came from a quarter which, if not absolutely hostile, was inclined to regard her establishment as old-fashioned, and to air the notion that there was room for another high-class ladies' school in Greyfield. In the face of such reports, the scandal must be instantly suppressed. She arranged, therefore, that a careful watch should be kept on the school, and if anyone were seen going out or returning in a surreptitious and unorthodox fashion, the occurrence must be immediately reported, so that she could act promptly and catch the delinquent. She said nothing about the affair to the girls, as she did not wish to put them on their guard, but Miss Edith and the mistresses were instructed to use extreme vigilance.

One of the manifold duties that had lately been heaped upon Gipsy's shoulders was the task of sorting the stockings that came from the wash, and putting in a pile those that required darning. She had been very busy one evening with this rather uncongenial occupation, and had barely finished the necessary counting and arranging, when the bell rang for preparation. During the last few days Miss Lindsay had insisted upon Gipsy joining the others and learning her lessons as usual, and had scolded her if she were absent, even on an errand for another mistress. It was most unreasonable to reproach her for what was seldom her own fault; but knowing that Miss Lindsay would expect her to be in her place, she hastily put the stockings away, and fled to fetch her books.

Preparation was being held in the Juniors' room, and the girls were sitting on forms round the long table. Gipsy,

scuttling in just in time to avoid the mistress's censure, took a seat between Hetty Hancock and Lennie Chapman, and, opening her French grammar, began to write an exercise. All the Junior boarders were at work with the exception of Dilys Fenton, Leonora Parker, and Barbara Kendrick, who were practising, for the girls had to take turns to use the pianos, according to a carefully arranged monthly music list. Gipsy plodded on with her exercise, and had arrived at sentence No. 9 when suddenly a horrible thought struck her. It had been rather dark in the linen room, and in order to examine the stockings better, she had switched on the electric light. She was almost certain that in her hurry she had forgotten to turn it off again. Leaving on the electric light unnecessarily was one of Gipsy's worst crimes, a negligence for which Miss Poppleton had often rebuked her severely. If the Principal were to walk past the linen room she would certainly enquire who had been there last, and would administer a scolding, at the prospect of which Gipsy shivered.

She wondered if she dared ask Miss Lindsay to allow her to go and ascertain. It was a mild, wet evening, much darker than usual, and the mistress sat reading close by the window, so as to catch the advantage of the fading light. Her profile, rather stern in its outline, did not look particularly encouraging, and Gipsy sighed, knowing that her request would probably be met by a prompt refusal. What was she to do? It was a question of braving either Miss Lindsay's or Miss Poppleton's wrath--perhaps both. 'Twixt two fires she hesitated, then an idea occurred to her. If she could get out of the room and return to her place without the governess discovering her absence, all would be well. Miss Lindsay seemed absorbed in her book, and as long as her pupils kept quietly at work she took no particular notice of them. As before stated, she was seated close to the window, while the girls were placed round a long table, the end of which, nearest to the open door, was unoccupied. Gipsy hastily scribbled on a scrap of paper: "I'm going to do a bolt--don't give me away!" and, with her finger on her lips for silence, showed it to her two neighbours, Lennie and Hetty. Then very quietly and cautiously she dropped from the form, and began to creep underneath the table in the direction of the open door. Lennie and Hetty, after a glance at the paper, comprehended her scheme, and moved nearer together, lest her absence should be betrayed by a telltale gap. Some of the other girls of course noticed the occurrence, but, being loyal to Gipsy, they held their tongues and made no sign. As gently as a mouse she crept under the whole length of the table, chuckling inwardly at the fun of the adventure.

I do not believe anyone in the school except Gipsy would have thought of such a rash and risky experiment; but she had not yet entirely forgotten her old Colonial habits, and every now and then, despite Miss Poppleton's discipline, her wild spirits would crop up and assert themselves in very questionable ways. Miss Lindsay read calmly on, quite oblivious of the fact that one of her pupils was crawling through the doorway on all-fours, and that the greater proportion of the rest were consciously aiding and abetting such a scandalous proceeding. Once she had gained the passage in safety, Gipsy sprang to her feet and ran with all speed to the linen room. As she expected, the light was still on, so she switched it off with supreme satisfaction, congratulating herself heartily that Miss Poppleton had not been before her. It was only the work of a minute, and she hoped she could regain her place at the table in the same way as she had left it, without being missed by Miss Lindsay. She was hurrying back along the passage when Leonora, coming from practising, entered from the opposite direction, and without seeing Gipsy or noticing her frantic signs, went into the Juniors' room and closed the door behind her.

The Peri shut out of Paradise was as nothing to the disconcerted girl who stood blankly in the corridor. Poor Gipsy was indeed in a dilemma. It was utterly impossible to open the door and walk in, but in the meantime every minute increased the probability of her absence being detected. There seemed nothing for it but to hang about on the chance that Dilys or Barbara might also return from practising, and that she could persuade one of them to leave the door open, so as to give her the opportunity of entering. But the corridor was not a safe place to wait in. Mistresses or Seniors might very possibly be passing, and would ask awkward questions. It seemed more discreet to retire downstairs, where she might catch Dilys as she came from the library. There was a large cupboard in the hall where the boarders kept some of their outdoor clothes, and here Gipsy took refuge, listening to the five difficult bars of a sonata with which Dilys was wrestling, and wishing her friend's half-hour at the piano might soon expire. As she stood among the coats and waterproofs, peeping out through a small chink of the door, she noticed Miss Poppleton come from the drawing-room, and cross the hall in the direction of the library. Gipsy was in a panic of fright. What account should she give of herself if her retreat were to be discovered? Alarm made her draw her breath sharply, and the action, combined perhaps with some dust or a slight cold--alack! alack!--brought on a terrific and utterly uncontrollable fit of sneezing.

"Ha-chaw! Ha-chaw! Ha-chaw!" issued from the cupboard with horrible distinctness. Miss Poppleton paused for a second, then made an instant dart, and seized the culprit in the very midst of her fourth convulsive gasp.

"Oh, indeed! So it's you, Gipsy Latimer, is it?" said the Principal grimly. "What are you doing here, I should like to know?"

Too much taken aback even to sneeze again, poor Gipsy stood looking the picture of guilt, without volunteering any explanation of her presence in the cupboard. She felt that to do so would only involve her in further difficulties. Miss Poppleton's keen, suspicious eyes seemed to note every detail of her embarrassment.

"You've been out, Gipsy Latimer; it's easy enough to tell that! So you're the one who's been seen every evening in Mansfield Road!"

"Out!" gasped Gipsy, galvanized into speech by the utter falsity of the accusation. "No, indeed! I haven't been out of the house at all."

"It isn't the slightest use denying it," returned Miss Poppleton harshly. "I might have known it would be you. Besides--" (here she began to examine the waterproofs and hats that were hanging upon the hooks), "Oh, you wicked, wicked girl! Here's proof conclusive that you are telling a deliberate untruth! Why, your 'sailor' and your mackintosh are quite wet! Look at them, marked with your name, and try to deceive me if you dare!"

"But, Miss Poppleton, indeed, indeed, you're mistaken!" protested Gipsy with warmth. "If you want proof, look at my shoes--they're not wet."

"You may think you're very clever, but you're not able to blind me! Whose galoshes are these, I should like to know, all muddy and covered with gravel? I suppose you'll pretend your initials are not 'G. L.' Go along immediately to your bedroom. I intend to sift the matter to the bottom. So this is how you repay me for my kindness in keeping you here!"

From Miss Poppleton's point of view the case against poor Gipsy certainly looked extremely black. Apparently she had been caught in the very act of returning from some clandestine excursion, and was leaving her incriminatingly moist garments in the cupboard when she was surprised.

The more the affair was investigated, the more everything seemed to indicate her guilt. The girls who had been present with her at preparation were obliged, much against their will, to confess how she had left the room without Miss Lindsay's knowledge by crawling under the table, and what had been merely a piece of mischief assumed a far graver aspect when coupled with other circumstances. It was really a very serious fault of which poor Gipsy was accused. She was supposed not only to have set the school rules deliberately at defiance by taking a surreptitious walk alone in the evening, but to have shielded herself by the most brazen falsehoods. Remembering how, when she had first come to Briarcroft, she had begged to be permitted to go out, had chafed against the confinement of her life, and had constantly quoted the larger liberty allowed in American schools, Miss Poppleton could easily believe that she would be ready to break bounds if she found a suitable opportunity; and though hitherto Gipsy had been strictly truthful, her previous reputation for honour could not do away with the circumstantial evidence of the damp waterproof and galoshes.

The neighbours who had reported noticing one of the Briarcroft boarders in Mansfield Road on several successive evenings could give no account of the truant's personal appearance. It had been dusk at the time, and they had only seen a girl in a sailor hat with a blue-and-white striped band hurrying rapidly past, as if anxious to escape observation. They thought she had dark hair, and that she must be about fourteen or fifteen years of age, but otherwise could not identify her in the least. The description might or might not fit Gipsy, but Miss Poppleton, misled by her own prejudice, jumped immediately to the conclusion that she and no other was the miscreant. If she had been harsh with the girl before, she was terribly stern with her now. She considered it an act of the very basest ingratitude and the most double-dyed deceit, and was the more particularly angry because the episode had brought the school into discredit. She had always prided herself upon the immaculate behaviour of her boarders, and it was extremely galling to have such an occurrence talked about in the neighbourhood. The reputation of Briarcroft, hitherto above reproach, had sustained a serious blow, from which it might take some time to recover.

"This is what comes of fostering the children of adventurers!" she said bitterly. "I feel as if I had warmed a serpent, and it had turned and stung me for my pains."

"I couldn't have believed it of Gipsy!" sobbed Miss Edith, who, if anything, was even more concerned than her sister, owing to her predilection for the offender.

"You were always much too generously disposed towards her," sniffed Miss Poppleton. "She certainly has not proved worthy of your kindness."

The affair made the most immense sensation in the school. Nothing else was talked of next morning, and the day girls questioned the boarders closely upon every detail.

"Isn't it awful?" sighed Lennie Chapman. "And to think that we had to tell about her!"

"We don't believe she's really done it, though," protested Hetty Hancock.

"It looks bad, I'm afraid," said Mary Parsons, shaking her head gravely. "It's so queer!"

"Very queer for a girl who set herself up to teach other people, like Gipsy," sneered Maude Helm. "What do you

think of your precious leader now?"

"Where is Gipsy?" asked Meg Gordon.

"Locked up in the dressing-room next Poppie's bedroom till she confesses, and that she declares she won't do, if she stays there till she dies! We've none of us seen her, of course. We're forbidden to go anywhere near."

"Oh, poor Gipsy! I'm so sorry for her! Whatever did she go and do it for?" wailed Daisy Scatcherd.

"You don't for a second suppose Gipsy's guilty?" said Meg Gordon indignantly. "If you do--well then, you just don't know Gipsy Latimer, that's all!"



## CHAPTER XVI

### A Friend in Need

MISS POPPLETON, having, as she deemed, successfully detected Gipsy in her misdoings, was determined to force her into making a full confession. The girl's repeated denials she regarded as mere stubborn effrontery, and after several stormy scenes she had locked her up in the dressing-room, to try if a spell of solitary confinement would reduce her to submission. Poor Gipsy, agitated, overstrung, burning with a sense of fierce anger against the injustice of her summary condemnation, had faced the Principal almost like an animal at bay, and defying her utterly, had persisted in sticking without deviation to her own version of the story.

"You'll gain nothing by this obstinacy!" stormed Miss Poppleton. "I'll make you see who is in authority here! Do you actually imagine I shall allow a girl like you to set herself against the head of the school? Here you stay until you own the truth and beg my pardon."

"Then I'll stop here till I'm grown up, for I've told the truth already," returned Gipsy desperately.

She had kept up a brave front in opposition to Miss Poppleton's accusations; but after the key had turned in the lock, and the sound of footsteps died away down the passage, she sank wearily into a chair, and burying her hot face in her trembling hands, sobbed her heart out. She felt so utterly deserted, friendless and alone. There seemed nobody to whom she might turn for help or counsel, nobody in all the wide, wide world who belonged to her, and would defend her and take her part. Everything appeared to have conspired against her, and this final and most crushing blow was the last straw. Gipsy clenched her fists in an agony of hopelessness. "Oh, Dad, Dad! why don't you come back?" she moaned, and the utter futility of the question added to her misery. Outside the sun was shining and the birds were singing cheerily--they had their mates and their nests, while she had not even a relation to claim her. She could hear the voices of the girls as they took their eleven o'clock recreation; each one had a joyful home to return to, and parents or friends who would shield and protect her.

"I've never had a home!" choked Gipsy. "Oh! I wonder why some people are always left out of everything?"

Then she sat up suddenly, for there was the sound of a hesitating footstep in the passage. The key turned, the door opened gently, and Miss Edith, very nervous and excited, entered the room.

"Oh, Gipsy!" she began tremulously, "Miss Poppleton doesn't know I'm here, but I felt I must come. Oh! you poor, naughty, naughty child, why did you do it? How could you, Gipsy? I'd never have thought it possible. Oh, do be a good girl and own up! Miss Poppleton will forgive you if you'll only tell the truth--and you know you ought to! For the sake of what's right, be brave, and don't go on with this dreadful tissue of lies--it's too wicked and terrible!"

Miss Edith's eyes were full of tears. She laid her hand tenderly on the girl's shoulder, and looked at her with a world of reproach in her twitching face. If Miss Poppleton's scolding had been hard to endure, Miss Edith's concern was far worse. Gipsy seized the kind hand, and held it tightly.

"Oh, Miss Edie, I can't bear you to misjudge me!" she exclaimed bitterly. "Indeed, if you only knew, I am telling the absolute, whole truth. Have I ever told you an untruth before?"

"No, Gipsy. But this, alas! has been so conclusively proved."

"But has it? It all rests on my wet waterproof and galoshes. I don't know how they got wet, but I do know that I didn't go out in them, and if I said I did, why, then I should be really telling a falsehood."

Miss Edith sighed with disappointment, and drew her hand reluctantly away.

"I thought I might have influenced you, Gipsy," she said, with a little sad catch in her voice. "I'm not clever like my sister, but you were always fond of me. I can't put things as she does, but I should have liked to make you feel that doing right is worth while for the sake of your own conscience. Oh, you poor misguided child, do think it over, and make an effort! You'll be glad all your life afterwards if you own your fault, and start afresh. I can't stay any longer now--and you've no need to tell Miss Poppleton that I came--but I'll be your friend, Gipsy, if you'll only confess."

She lingered a moment, half hopefully; then, as Gipsy only shook her head in reply, she gave up her useless attempt, and went sorrowfully away. In black despair Gipsy mentally went over the conversation, wondering how she could have convinced Miss Edith of her innocence. She could not allow herself to be cajoled by kindness into a confession of what she had not done, any more than she could permit herself to be coerced by severity. Miss Edith might use gentle persuasion, and Miss Poppleton might try to cow her and break her spirit, but neither should succeed in forcing

her to a false admission.

Helen Roper came up at dinner-time with a plate of meat and vegetables in one hand and a glass of water in the other. She slammed them down hastily on the table, with a scornful glance at the prisoner.

"That's all you'll get," she remarked brusquely. "Miss Poppleton says you don't deserve pudding to-day. And quite right, too! Bread and water'd be enough for you, in my opinion. Why haven't you the pluck to face things in an honourable way, and say you're sorry for what you've done? I never much cared for you, but I thought better of you than this. For the sake of the school, do let's have an end of this wretched business! 'Noblesse oblige' has been our motto, and I hoped every girl would have risen to it. Have you no self-respect?"

"Yes--too much to say I've done what I haven't," retorted Gipsy, glowering her defiance.

Helen shrugged her shoulders.

"Miss Poppleton says you're as obstinate as a mule, and she's about right!" she remarked tartly, as she banged the door and locked it noisily behind her. Gipsy was not hungry, so the plentiful supply of meat and vegetables was quite sufficient for her needs, and the lack of pudding was no grievance. Helen's severe censure hurt her desperately. Had the girls all condemned her equally without fair trial, and without sifting the evidence against her? Did Hetty, and Dilys, and Meg, and Lennie, her own particular friends, consider her guilty? Had they no better belief in her honour than that? Had everybody forsaken her? Gipsy pushed her half-finished plateful aside. She was choking too much with sobs to swallow another morsel.

"There isn't a single soul here who cares! I shall have to go away and find Dad!" she exploded in a kind of desperation, standing up and scrubbing her eyes with her wet pocket-handkerchief.

In the meantime Gipsy's friends had not altogether abandoned her, as she supposed. They had been on the alert all the morning to discover some means of communicating with her, though, owing to Miss Poppleton's vigilance, their efforts had so far met with ill success. Any girl found loitering in the vicinity of the passage that led to the dressing-room had been packed off in a most summary fashion, with a warning not to show herself there again under penalty of an imposition. After dinner, however, Meg, who had secret plans of her own, managed to dodge Miss Lindsay, and by creeping under the laurels in the plantation made her way to a forbidden part of the garden which commanded a view of the dressing-room window. Exactly underneath this window stood a greenhouse with a sloping glass roof, and at the corner of the greenhouse there was a long down spout to drain the gutters above. Meg advanced under cover of the bushes with the caution of a scout, and reviewed the position carefully before she ventured into the open.

"I believe I can manage it," she murmured. "My toe would fit into that hole, and I could catch hold of the bracket. I haven't learnt mountaineering for nothing, and if I could tackle that crag on Hawes Fell I oughtn't to be stumped by a gutter pipe. I flatter myself there's not another girl in the school who could do it, though. Between half-past one and two is a good time. Probably no one will be round at this side of the house, but I shall have to risk something, and trust to luck."

The down spout certainly put Meg's climbing powers to the utmost test. It was smooth and slippery, while the footholds in the wall were of the very slenderest. With considerable difficulty she swung herself up, and creeping over the roof of the greenhouse reached the small railed balcony that gave access to the dressing-room window. She peeped in. There was Gipsy, sitting, doing nothing, and looking the picture of disconsolate misery.

"Gipsy!" called Meg, under her breath.

"Hello! It's never you! Oh, Meg, you angel!"

"Don't make such an idiotic noise, but help me in quietly. Mum's the word! How are you getting on here?"

"Come in and I'll tell you. But you'll have to whisk out pretty quickly if we hear Poppie's fairy footsteps in the passage. We must listen with both ears open while we talk."

"Trust me! Oh, Gipsy, we're all so sorry for you!"

"You believe in me, then? How does the school take it?"

"Variously. Some are for you, and some are against. Dilys and Lennie and Hetty of course stand up for you hard, and funnily enough so does Leonora. She took your part this morning quite hotly, and had such a quarrel with Maude and Gladys that she won't speak to them. I didn't think Leonora would have behaved so decently. The Seniors are very dubious, especially Helen Roper."

"Yes, Helen lashed into me when she brought my dinner. She's always ready to think the worst of me."

"Poppie's furious," continued Meg. "She says you're only making your punishment worse by obstinate falsehoods, and she means to make an example of you."

"What's she going to do?" asked Gipsy with apprehension.

"I don't know--she didn't condescend to tell us."

"Look here, I'm sick of the whole business!" said Gipsy bitterly. "I'm not wanted at Briarcroft. Poppie'd be only too delighted to get rid of me. I'm not going to stay here any longer to be ordered about and scolded, and accused of things I've never done. I'll run away. If you can climb up the greenhouse roof, I can climb down it."

"Oh, Gipsy! Where will you go? Come to us! We'd hide you somewhere at home, and Mother wouldn't give you up to Poppie, I know!"

But Gipsy shook her head emphatically. The very fact of the Gordons' kindness made it impossible for her to trespass upon their generosity. She knew that if she were to seek sanctuary at their house, she would place Mrs. Gordon in a most awkward and difficult position, and her natural delicacy of feeling caused her to shrink from such a course. It would be a poor return indeed for their former hospitality.

"No, Meg; it's awfully good of you, but I must go farther away than that. I'm off to Liverpool. Don't look so staggered; I've quite made up my mind!"

"Liverpool! Why, that's miles and miles away! How will you go? And what will you do when you get there?"

"I shall manage somehow to sell my watch. It's a gold one, you know, so it ought to be worth enough to pay my railway fare, at any rate. It belonged to my mother, and I wouldn't have parted with it under any other circumstances than these. Thank goodness I put it on this morning! I don't wear it always. When I get to Liverpool I have a plan. Captain Smith--the captain of the vessel we were wrecked on--lives at a suburb called Waterloo. I'll enquire and enquire till I find the house. If he's at home, it's just possible that he could give me some little hint about my father. Dad might have dropped something in talking to him that he did not tell to me. I believe Captain Smith would help me if he could."

"But suppose he's gone to sea again?"

"That's quite likely. I've thought of that too. Well, I mean to go to some of the shipping offices, and see if they'll give me a post on a South African liner as assistant stewardess. Don't look so frightfully aghast! It's work I could do very well, though it wouldn't be pleasant. I've travelled so much about the world that I'm absolutely at home on board ship. I know all the ins and outs of voyaging, and I'm a splendid sailor, never seasick in the least. I could make myself most uncommonly useful. I'd buy a packet of hairpins and tuck up my hair so that I'd look much older, and I believe they'd engage me, because it's so difficult sometimes to meet with assistant stewardesses. I'm nearly fifteen now, and I'd rather earn my own living like that than stay here at Briarcroft on Poppie's charity. American and Colonial girls are never ashamed to work. When I get out to Cape Town, I'll go to the headmistress of the school where I stopped three months. She was a trump, and I believe she'd help me to find Dad."

So bold a plan almost took Meg's breath away, yet its ambitious daring appealed strongly to her schoolgirl imagination. She had absolutely no knowledge of the world, and the scheme which an older person would have instantly vetoed sounded to her inexperienced young ears not only perfectly feasible, but delightfully enterprising and romantic. She entered into it with enthusiasm, absolutely certain that anything that Gipsy proposed must be right. Having worshipped her friend for so long, she could not believe her idol's judgment would be at fault.

"I'll tell you what we'll do!" she exclaimed. "Let's change dresses! Then if Poppie tries to follow you, it will throw her off the scent. Mine's longer than yours, too, so it will be better for a stewardess."

"Won't they notice it in school? It might give the thing away," hesitated Gipsy.

"It's Drawing the whole afternoon with Mr. Cobb, and he won't know the difference. Quick, or somebody may be coming! Take my hat too. I'll get yours out of the cupboard, or go home without one. None of the girls would tell, and I'll dodge mistresses."

It did not take very long for the pair to effect an exchange of costumes. They were soon arrayed in each other's dresses, an arrangement which was certainly more to Gipsy's advantage than Meg's. They knew there was no time to be lost, so, swinging themselves over the balcony railings, they began creeping cautiously down the greenhouse roof. They had just about reached the middle when Meg, who was first, suddenly stopped with a stifled exclamation, and lay as flat and as still as she could. Gipsy naturally followed suit, and looking downwards saw the reason for the alarm.

They were in horrible and imminent danger of discovery. Miss Poppleton herself had entered the conservatory below, and with a little watering can in her hand began to attend to her plants. Would she look up and notice the two dark bodies on the roof above her?

Gipsy felt she had never been so thrillingly interested in gardening in the whole of her life. She watched while the geraniums and fuchsias received their due sprinkling, and held her breath when the Principal appeared about to stretch up to a hanging basket. Most fortunately for the two girls, she changed her mind, and evidently thinking there was not enough water in the can, emptied the remainder on a box of seedlings, and went into the house for a fresh supply.

"Now!" breathed Meg. "As quick as you can, without putting your heels through the glass!"

"It was the nearest squeak!" gasped Gipsy, as the pair, after a rapid slide down the gutter pipe, reached the ground in safety. "She'll be coming back directly."

"Rush under the shrubs--quick!" said Meg. "Oh, I say! There's the bell! I must fly. I daren't walk in late, or your dress might be noticed at call-over."

"I'm off too, then," returned Gipsy. "When Poppie unlocks the dressing-room door, she'll find the bird has flown!"

"Goodbye! I can't wait! Oh, Gipsy! when shall I see you again?"

"Some day. I promise that! The bell's stopping! You'll be late, Meg, if you don't scoot."

Torn in two between her reluctance to part from her friend and her anxiety to be in time for call-over, Meg hurried away without further farewell; and Gipsy, in wildest fear of detection, metaphorically speaking burnt her boats, and darting through the side gate, ran with all possible speed down the high-road.



## CHAPTER XVII

### A Tangled Story

MEG rushed to the lecture hall just in time to enter unobtrusively among a crowd of other girls, and to take her seat for afternoon call-over without attracting special notice from mistresses or monitresses. She congratulated herself on having been promoted to Mr. Cobb's painting class. The fact of her change of costume would be quite lost upon him, though Miss Harris, the ordinary drawing mistress, might possibly have recognized Gipsy's dress. One or two of her Form mates stared at her curiously, but the greater number were too much preoccupied with answering "present" to their names, and filing away to their various classes, to pay any particular attention to her. The girls at the painting lesson, with the exception of Fiona Campbell, were all Seniors. If they realized any difference in Meg's appearance, there was no opportunity either for them to make comments or for her to give explanations. I am afraid the study in oil colours of carnations, upon which she was engaged, did not make much progress that afternoon, for her thoughts were entirely about Gipsy, wondering how far she had got upon her travels, and whether Miss Poppleton had yet discovered her absence.

Directly the four o'clock bell rang and the class was released, Meg, leaving the other girls leisurely putting away their tubes of paints and cleaning their palettes, scrambled her possessions together anyhow, and bolted from the room before she could be questioned. Going boldly to the boarders' cupboard in the hall, she purloined Gipsy's hat, and, without waiting even to tell her story to Hetty and Dilys, departed from the premises with all possible speed.

She had come to school that day on her bicycle, and fetching it hastily from the shed where all the machines were stored, she rode away in the direction of Greyfield. There was something slightly wrong with one of her pedals, and her father had told her that morning that she had better have it mended at once, so she intended to take the cycle to the depot where it had been bought, and let it be thoroughly overhauled before she returned home. The assistant at the shop promised to have the repairs finished in about half an hour, and Meg therefore strolled into the town, to wait with what patience she could muster. She walked up Corporation Street and round by the Town Hall, peeped into the Parish Church and the Free Library, then finding herself close to the railway station, decided to go and buy a copy of *Home Chat* or *Tit Bits* at the bookstall.

"Want a ticket, Miss?" asked a porter, as she passed the booking-office near the entrance.

"No, thank you; I'm only going to get a paper," replied Meg, walking briskly on.

She noticed that the man looked at her keenly, and said something to another official. Immediately afterwards an inspector came on to the platform, and eyed her with more than ordinary curiosity. She could hear the telephone bell ringing hard, but it never struck her that these occurrences had anything to do with herself. She walked to the bookstall, and after spending some minutes looking at the various magazines spread forth, bought a copy of *Tit Bits*, and strolled back down the platform reading it as she went, and smiling over the jokes. At the automatic sweet-machine she paused, put a penny in the slot, and had just withdrawn her box of chocolates when, turning round, she found herself face to face with a policeman.

"Very sorry, Miss," said the man civilly, "but I'm afraid you've got to go along with me."

Meg was so surprised that she nearly dropped both *Tit Bits* and the chocolates.

"To go along with you!" she gasped. "Indeed I shan't do anything of the sort."

"Better not make a scene, Miss," advised the policeman, with an indulgent smile. "I'm sorry, but it's my duty to take you in charge."

"But what for? I've done nothing!" protested Meg in huge indignation.

"That's a little matter between your schoolmistress and yourself. It's none of my business. My instructions are to take you straight to the police station."

"But I tell you I won't be taken!"

"Better go quietly, Missy," said the station inspector, who had come bustling up. "You don't want to attract a crowd, I'm sure, do you? No; then let me put you in this cab, and drive you round to the police station. It's only a couple of streets away. They'll explain everything to you there."

There was sense in his remarks, for people on the platform were beginning to stop and stare at Meg with an interest

she deeply resented. To enter the cab seemed the lesser evil, even if she must pay a visit to the police station. The inspector handed her in politely, and entering after, took the seat opposite, while the policeman mounted the box beside the driver.

"They seem desperately afraid of my escaping! I wonder they don't handcuff me!" thought Meg, waxing more and more angry at the indignity of the proceeding. The little drive only occupied a few minutes, and arrived at the police station, she was shown at once into the head inspector's office.

"I should like to know what charge you have against me," demanded Meg, determined to hold her own, and not to be frightened at her arrest.

"Withdrawing yourself from the hands of your lawful schoolmistress and present guardian," replied the inspector pompously.

"But I was only on my way home!"

The official, however, was busy reading something from a notebook.

"Surname Latimer, Christian name Gipsy. Height, 5 feet 1 inch. Eyes brown, complexion dark, hair brown. Dressed in navy-blue alpaca frock over white delaine blouse top, and probably wearing sailor hat with blue-and-white striped band, and a pair of tennis shoes.' The whole tallies exactly," he murmured, surveying Meg from head to foot, to see that he had not omitted any of the items.

"You're making a mistake. My name's Margaret Gordon, not Gipsy Latimer! I live at The Gables, near Willowburn. My father is a solicitor in the town. His office is at 15 Wells Street."

"We'll soon see about that. I think I must trouble you for your pocket-handkerchief, Missy, please."

Considerably mystified, Meg felt in her pocket and handed over the article in question. The inspector examined it closely, then shook his head.

"It has 'G. Latimer' marked in the corner. That doesn't look much like Margaret Gordon, does it?"

Meg was furious at her own stupidity. She and Gipsy had never thought of exchanging the contents of their pockets.

"Look here! Send for my father!" she begged. "He'll soon tell you who I am, and explain the whole matter."

"We don't need to send for anybody," returned the official. "Miss Poppleton's quite enough for us. We've got her description of you, and our instructions are to take you straight back to the school. You'll find you've not gained much by running away."

There was only one consolation for Meg, the remembrance that her capture would possibly enable Gipsy to escape in safety.

"They must have been looking out for her at the railway station," she thought, "but they wouldn't recognize her in my dress. I'd like to know what Poppie'll say when I turn up instead!"

There was undoubtedly a humorous side to the situation, and Meg laughed as she pictured the discomfiture of the officials when they discovered their mistake. It seemed of no further use to try to prove her identity at present, so she allowed herself to be once more escorted to the cab and driven off, this time in the direction of Briarcroft.

"I wonder what sort of a scrape I'm in for," she thought, as they drew up at the front door, and the constable in charge solemnly marched her into the house. Miss Poppleton came hurrying out of the library into the hall, followed by Miss Edith.

"I am happy to be able to inform you, Madam, that our search has been successful," said the policeman, standing at attention.

"What? Have you found her?" cried Miss Poppleton eagerly; then she stopped as she recognized Meg. "Ah! So that's it, is it? I'm sorry to say, constable, that you've brought the wrong girl!"

Meg had thought out her plan of action carefully during her drive in the cab, and took advantage of the sensation that followed to rush at the Principal with an air of aggrieved and injured innocence.

"Oh, Miss Poppleton! Isn't it a horrible mistake!" she exclaimed. "I told them my name, and they wouldn't believe me! Oh! please, may I go home immediately? My mother will be so dreadfully anxious at my being so late!"

"Meg, do you know where Gipsy is?" interposed Miss Edith, catching her by the arm.

"Indeed I don't; I haven't the least idea!" replied Meg truthfully. "Please let me go home, and relieve Mother's mind!"

"Yes, go at once!" answered Miss Poppleton distractedly; and turning to the rueful constable, she began to explain matters with much volubility.

Meg vanished like the wind, thankful that in the general excitement nobody had remarked upon the fact that she was wearing Gipsy's dress. She considered that she had come out of the affair uncommonly well, and congratulated herself upon her presence of mind in the emergency. She hurried home as fast as she could, anxious to tell the tale of Gipsy's escape and her own adventure, and rather proud of her share in both. To her surprise her mother took an utterly different view of the case from her own.

"Gipsy run away!" cried Mrs. Gordon in great consternation. "And you changed dresses with her so as to help her? Oh, Meg! what have you done! You naughty, foolish, foolish girl! You little know the dangers you may have thrown her into. We must do our utmost to find her and bring her back this very evening. We should never forgive ourselves if any harm came to her. I must telephone at once, and see if Father's still at the office."

"But, Mummie darling, Gipsy doesn't want to be caught and brought back to Poppie's tender mercies. She's going to ship as a stewardess, and go to South Africa to look for her father. I think it's ripping!"

"You don't know what you're talking about, Meg. Gipsy is too young to manage her own affairs without consulting her elders. I would have had the poor child here, rather than that she should run away. Tell me everything you can remember of her plans. I expect Father will start for Liverpool at once in search of her."

"You won't tell Poppie, Motherkins?"

"I shall send a note to Miss Poppleton as soon as I have telephoned to Father. We must leave no stone unturned to find Gipsy. Miss Poppleton will be as alarmed and anxious as I am myself. She may be a little stern, but she is a good, conscientious person in the main."

Mrs. Gordon's estimate of Miss Poppleton's character was a correct one. The latter, though she had been severe and even hard with Gipsy, had meant well by her, and had intended to take charge of her until she found an opportunity of sending her, under careful protection, to her relations in New Zealand. She was in a state of the utmost concern at the girl's rash action in running away, and had lost no time in summoning the aid of the police to track her and ensure her safety. If Gipsy were the black sheep of the flock, she was at any rate the lost sheep, to be sought for diligently, and rejoiced over when found.

To Miss Edith the affair was a sad blow. She was genuinely fond of Gipsy, and had been greatly distressed by the events of the last few days. Though she dutifully accepted her sister's opinion, and believed Gipsy guilty, she nevertheless was ready to welcome back the prodigal with open arms. She did not dare to break down before Miss Poppleton, who disliked a public exhibition of feeling, so she retired to the linen room to wipe her eyes in private. Having indulged in a little surreptitious weeping she felt better, and decided to try to distract her mind by tidying her cupboards. Now, though Miss Edith was on the whole a good housekeeper, she had a poor memory, and was very apt to put things away and forget all about them. As she rearranged her drawers and shelves on this particular evening, she was dismayed to find several articles for which she had searched in vain elsewhere.

"Why, here's the tea cloth that I thought had been lost in the wash!" she exclaimed. "And Miss Lindsay's dressing jacket--she was afraid she must have left it in London. Why! and here's a coat of Daisy Scatcherd's. I remember quite plainly putting it by last autumn, when she had such a terrible cold. I thought it was too thin for her to wear. Why didn't the child ask me for it? She's as forgetful as I am. It's just the thing for chilly evenings, to slip on when she's been playing tennis."

Miss Edith gave the coat a good shake, and as she did so there fell from the pocket an unopened letter. She picked it up and looked at the address:

"MISS GIPSY LATIMER,  
Briarcroft Hall,  
Greyfield,  
England."

She read it twice before she realized its significance. Then, trembling violently, she sank on to a chair, and gave way to what very closely resembled a fit Of hysteria.

"Fetch Miss Poppleton!" she cried to the alarmed servant who ran to the linen room at the sound of her wails. "Oh, dear! To think it's all my fault!"

Miss Poppleton hurried to the scene at once, and though at first her sister's explanation was rather incoherent, she managed to grasp the main facts of the case.

"It's Gipsy's missing letter, Dorothea! It must have come after all, you see, only I can't imagine how it got into Daisy Scatcherd's pocket. I don't remember looking in the pockets when I put the coat by. And it's been there all this time! Look, the postmark is Cape Town, 3 November. Oh, isn't it dreadful? And the poor, dear child has just run away! Dorothea, whatever are we to do about it?" moaned Miss Edith, almost beside herself with horror at her discovery.

"In the circumstances I consider I am perfectly justified in reading the letter," replied Miss Poppleton, solemnly tearing open the envelope. "Why, here's an enclosure for me inside it!"

The long-delayed missive was from Gipsy's father, and contained the very information for which Miss Poppleton had waited more than six weary months. Mr. Latimer informed her that he was on the point of starting with a pioneering expedition to prospect for minerals in the almost unexplored district at the sources of one of the tributaries of the Zambesi. It might be several months before he would be in any civilized place whence it would be possible for him to communicate with her again, but during his absence he was glad to know that his little daughter was left in good hands. For all expenses in connection with Gipsy's education, dress, and pocket-money, he begged to refer her to his London bankers, Messrs. Hall & Co. of Lombard Street, who had instructions to settle the account as soon as submitted to them.

"I hope my girly will behave well, and give no trouble," he wrote. "She is generally ready to attach herself to anybody who is kind to her."

Miss Poppleton turned a dull crimson as she finished reading the letter, and handed it to Miss Edith.

"I must question Daisy Scatcherd at once," she remarked peremptorily. "I can't understand how the letter came to be in her pocket at all."

The luckless Daisy, subjected to a searching examination, could at first render no account of how she came to be mixed up in the affair. Then little by little a vague remembrance returned to her, and she began dimly to recall the circumstances.

"It must have been on my birthday," she faltered. "I have a kind of recollection that I stopped the postman in the drive, and he gave me several letters. But indeed I never noticed one for Gipsy! If I even looked at the name, I didn't take it in properly. I suppose I only saw it wasn't for me, and stuffed it in my pocket while I opened my own letters. Then I utterly forgot all about it."

"It must be a warning to you, Daisy, against carelessness--a warning to last you the rest of your life," said Miss Poppleton, relieving her feelings by improving the occasion. "Your thoughtless act has had the most unfortunate consequences. It's no use crying now" (as Daisy dissolved into tears). "You can't mend matters. But I hope you'll take this to heart, and be more careful in future."

"If we could only find that poor, unfortunate child, Gipsy," sobbed Miss Edith, when the weeping Daisy had taken her departure. "I always said perhaps her father wasn't an adventurer after all. I think you were too hard on her, Dorothea--too hard altogether!" Which, was the nearest approach to insubordination that Miss Edith, in all her years of meek subserviency to her sister, had ever yet dared to venture upon.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### Gipsy at Large

AND where, all this time, was Gipsy, whom we left running down the road in the direction of Greyfield?

She tore along at the top of her speed, until she had put a considerable distance between herself and Briarcroft; then, panting and almost breathless, she slackened her pace, and looked round to see whether anyone was following her. As nobody of a more suspicious character than an errand boy and a nurse girl with a perambulator was in sight, she began to congratulate herself that she had escaped unobserved. How soon her absence would be discovered depended upon when Miss Poppleton or one of the monitresses next paid a visit to the dressing-room; and she laughed to picture the consternation that would ensue when the door was unlocked and her prison found to be vacant. No doubt they would send in search of her, but in the meantime she had stolen a march upon them, and given herself the advantage of a start, so she hoped by using all possible haste to get away before she was traced.

As she strode rapidly along, all her old vagabond instincts arose, and the gipsy element which had justified her name came strongly to the fore. It was a delightful, mild afternoon, with blue sky and bright sunshine; the gardens on either side of the road were gay with pink hawthorn and long, drooping sprays of laburnum, while blackbirds, thrushes, chaffinches, and tits were singing in a perfect chorus of joy. It felt so glorious to be as free as the birds, to be rid of all the tiresome rules and restrictions and conventions that had oppressed her soul for the last eight months, to be accountable to nobody but herself, and to be able to do just what she chose and go where she liked. School seemed as a nightmare behind her, and the world a fresh wonderland which it was her happy privilege to have the chance to explore.

"I'll never go back again--never!" she resolved. "Not if I have to sweep a crossing or sell flowers! But I don't think it will come to that, because I'm sure I can get a post on board ship. Oh, what a blissful relief it is to be on my own for once! I've made up my mind to find Dad, if I have to go to the ends of the earth to hunt for him."

In the exuberance of her spirits she almost danced along, humming now Schubert's "Wander Song", with its ringing refrain:

"Oh! surely he must careless be,  
Who never loved to wander free,  
To wander! To wander!"

or "The Miller of Dee", with special emphasis on the words:

"I care for nobody, no, not I!  
And nobody cares for me."

The sight of the town of Greyfield, with its streets and shops, changed the current of her thoughts, and brought the more sober reflection that she had no money in her pocket, and that it was a matter of urgent necessity to obtain some if she meant to reach Liverpool and start for South Africa. The fare, she knew, was about seven shillings, and though she hoped to be able to embark on board ship almost immediately after her arrival at the port, she supposed she would require something in the way of food on the journey. It went to her heart to be obliged to sell her beautiful gold watch, but in the circumstances it seemed the only thing to be done, and she braced her mind to part with it. She had no previous experience of selling things, so, choosing out the best jeweller's shop in the High Street, she marched blithely in, and taking off her watch and chain laid them upon the counter.

"Yes, Miss; want repairing, I suppose?" enquired the assistant who came to attend to her.

"No, they're in perfectly good order; but I wish to sell them. What price can you give me for them?" returned Gipsy confidently.

The man looked at her in decided astonishment, then pushed back the watch across the counter with a marked decrease of civility.

"We don't do that kind of business," he replied shortly.

"Won't you buy it then?" asked Gipsy in accents of blank disappointment.

"No; it's not in our line at all."

"Then where should I be able to sell it?"

"I couldn't say; probably at a secondhand shop. We only deal in new articles."

Very much disconcerted and snubbed, Gipsy snatched up her watch and chain and fled from the shop. She had evidently made a mistake in applying at a first-class jeweller's, and she was angry at having exposed herself to the humiliation of a rebuff. With two flaming spots in her cheeks, she stalked down the High Street, and into one of the narrower and more modest by-streets, where smaller shops were to be found. She walked on for quite a long way without meeting with any place that looked in the least degree likely; then at last, at the corner of an even humbler street still, she found a secondhand furniture dealer, who, to judge by the contents of his windows, seemed also to trade in a variety of miscellaneous articles. On the pavement in front of the shop were spread forth specimens of chairs, tables, and washstands, and inside she could see a goodly array of glass, antique china, old jewellery, old silver, prints, pictures, books, candlesticks, firearms, and an assortment of small pieces of bric-a-brac. Over the door was the name of Daniel Lucas.

"This looks more the kind of place," she murmured. "I'll have a try here, at any rate."

The interior of the shop was so crowded with furniture that it was quite difficult to walk between the piled-up sideboards and sofas to the corner where a very dirty and shabby-looking individual, with untidy grey hair and unshaven chin, was busy adding up accounts. He paused with a grimy finger in the middle of a column of figures, and peered at Gipsy with a pair of red, bleary eyes.

"I see you sell secondhand jewellery here, and want to know if you care to buy a watch," she began, with rather less assurance than at her former interview.

"It depends on the article. Have you brought it with you?" replied the old man cautiously.

"It's real gold, and so is the chain," volunteered Gipsy, as she produced her treasure.

Mr. Daniel Lucas examined both watch and chain with minute care, then shook his head deprecatingly.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be of much use to me. You see, it's not exactly in the nature of an antique," he replied.

Gipsy's face fell. To get the money for her journey was a matter of vital importance.

"Couldn't you offer me anything for it?" she pleaded.

The bleary red eyes glanced at her keenly, and appeared to appreciate her disappointment.

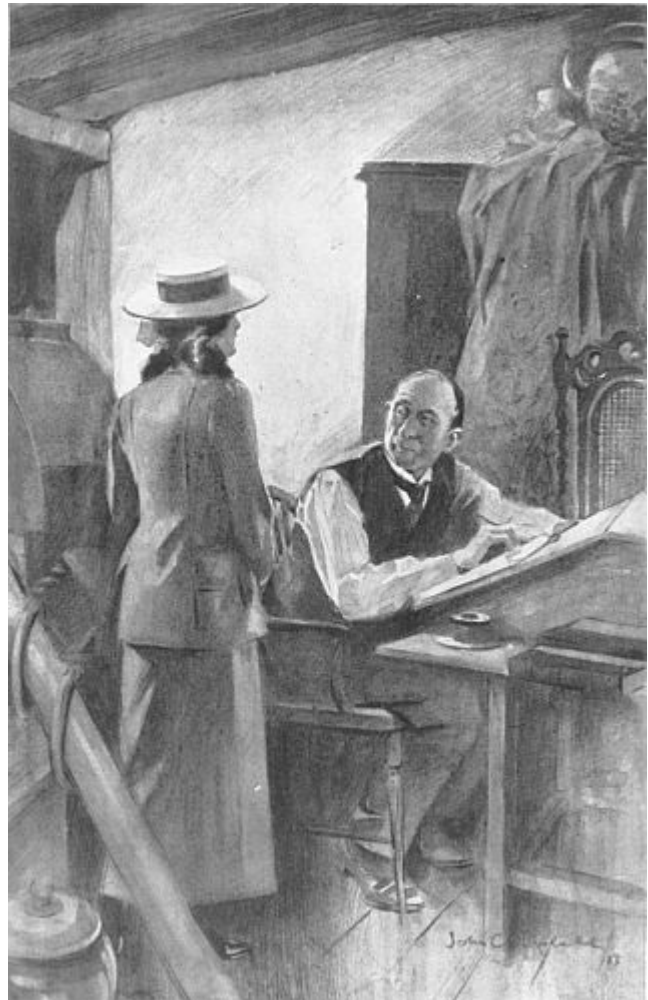
"Well, to oblige you, I might go to a matter of seven and six."

"Couldn't you possibly make it ten shillings, with the chain?" hazarded Gipsy. She had no idea of the value of secondhand articles, and thought only of what amount would take her to Liverpool.

"All right—with the chain. But it's a poor bargain for me, mind you. I'm only doing it just to oblige you," returned Mr. Lucas, opening a drawer and counting out four half-crowns with an alacrity that belied his words. Thankful to have concluded the transaction on any terms, Gipsy seized the money and beat a hasty retreat.

She was extremely anxious to reach the station before Miss Poppleton missed her and sent somebody in search of her. She had no idea of the times of the trains, but trusted to luck to catch the next that would take her anywhere in the right direction. With her four precious half-crowns grasped tightly in her hand, she hurried back up the sordid street, and took the shortest cut possible to the railway station. There was quite a crowd at the booking office, so she was able to take her place in the queue of prospective travellers and to obtain her ticket without attracting any special attention.

"Liverpool?" said the inspector who stood at the platform door. "You've just time if you're quick. That's the train



"HE PAUSED AND PEERED AT GIPSY"

over there on No. 3."

Gipsy fled across the bridge with a speed that seriously interfered with the convenience of passengers coming in the opposite direction; she rattled down the steps on to Platform 3, and, nearly falling over a pile of luggage, flung herself into the first third-class compartment that came to hand.

"Am I right for Liverpool?" she gasped tremulously to the collector who came to punch her ticket.

"Quite right, Miss; change at Preston, that's all," replied the man as he slammed the door.

The porters were thrusting some boxes into the luggage van, and a few latecomers made a last dash for carriages; then the green flag waved, the whistle sounded, and the train started with a jerk. Gipsy, hot, excited, and agitated, drew a long, long breath of relief. She was actually off! They were speeding fast out of the station, and she was leaving Greyfield and Briarcroft, and all the painful experiences of the last few months, entirely behind her. She could hardly believe her good luck in thus slipping away unobserved. True, she had only a half-crown and two pennies left after paying her fare, but she supposed that would be enough to last her until she could go on board a vessel. Surely chance had favoured her in enabling her to reach the station in the nick of time to catch the train, and no doubt she would be equally fortunate when she reached Liverpool. Her fellow passengers were uninteresting, and she had no desire to talk to anyone and confide her affairs, so she amused herself with her own thoughts and plans for the future. At Preston she changed, and bought a bun at the refreshment rooms; her dinner had been almost untasted, and she was growing hungry now. It seemed funny to have absolutely no luggage, though in one respect it was a great convenience not to be obliged to haul about a heavy handbag, or to tip a porter out of her extremely small capital.

"I feel almost as if I'd been shipwrecked again--in a borrowed dress and hat, and nothing else to call my own!" she thought with a smile.

It was half-past six before the train arrived at the big Liverpool terminus--rather late in the day to begin all the numerous enquiries which Gipsy was determined to make; but, nothing daunted, she set out at once for Waterloo, to try to find the residence of her old friend Captain Smith. She was directed by a policeman to take an overhead electric car, and travelled several miles above what seemed a wilderness of streets before she reached the suburb in question. Not knowing where to make a beginning, she decided to go first to a post office, thinking that there she might be able to gain the information she wanted. She had somehow imagined Waterloo to be quite a little place, where by diligent enquiry it would be fairly easy to trace such an important person as a sea captain who had been wrecked in the Bay of Biscay; greatly to her dismay, however, she found herself in the midst of what seemed a large city in itself--a veritable maze of long streets and small houses, stretching away into the distance with an endless vista of chimneypots. In a distinctly sober frame of mind she entered the post office and proffered her question.

"Smith? I couldn't tell you, I'm sure; there are so many Smiths," said the girl at the counter, with a superior smile. "One of them may be a sea captain, for anything I know. You'd better look in the Directory."

Gipsy seized upon the book with a sense of relief, and carried it off to a less busy part of the office. She turned up Waterloo, found the list of residents, and went through them in alphabetical order till she reached the letter S. She was appalled to see the number of Smiths who resided at Waterloo. To some of the names the Directory had appended an occupation, but with many it gave no details. Taking one of the telegraph forms she wrote down the addresses of about a dozen Smiths who, she considered, might be likely; then, returning the Directory to the girl at the counter, she started off on her arduous quest.

"I shall go to 'Ocean Villa' first," she thought. "It has a particularly nautical sound. I shouldn't think anybody but a sea captain could possibly live there. 'The Anchorage' sounds hopeful too, though it ought to be the home of somebody who is retired. 'Sea View Cottage' is doubtful, but 'Teneriffe House' is likely. The *Queen of the Waves* used to touch sometimes at Teneriffe. Oh, dear! the trouble will be to hunt out where they all are."

Poor Gipsy had indeed undertaken a most difficult task. She was obliged to ask her way again and again, and when at length she arrived at "Ocean Villa" it was only to meet with the information that nobody of a seafaring description was known there. Much disappointed, she trudged away in an opposite direction to find "The Anchorage", and after walking half a mile or more in search of it, was again confronted with ill success. At "Sea View Cottage" and "Teneriffe House" she fared no better; the occupiers, albeit they belonged to the great family of Smiths, had no connection whatever with the sea: and though she went to several other addresses on her list, the answer was invariably the same.

Utterly tired out, weary and despondent, Gipsy retraced her steps in the direction of the post office. Having parted with her watch, she had no idea of the time, but catching sight of a clock in a public building, she was horrified to find it was nearly a quarter to nine. The days at that season of the year were long, and this particular evening had been more than usually light; moreover, she had been entirely preoccupied with her quest, so she had never given a thought to

the rapidly passing hours. For the first time the question of where she must sleep presented itself to her.

"I must get back to Liverpool," she thought, "and apply at one of the shipping offices. The docks aren't very far away, so I can get engaged as stewardess and go on board some ship at once, I expect."

But in the meantime a meal was an urgent necessity. She was sick and faint from want of food, and felt as if her tired feet could scarcely carry her farther. Seeing a modest confectioner's shop with a notice "Teas Provided", she went in and asked for some refreshment. The proprietress, a little elderly woman, struck partly by the weary look on her face, and partly by the unusual circumstance of a girl of her age coming into the shop alone to ask for tea at so late an hour, took her into a small parlour, and while laying the table and bringing in the meal, insinuated a few skilful questions as to where she was going. Gipsy had decided to pose as a working girl, so she answered readily enough that she was on her way to Liverpool, to find a post as assistant stewardess; and she wished to be very quick over her tea, so that she might go at once to the shipping offices, procure an engagement, and proceed at once to her vessel.

The expression on the woman's face changed from curiosity to sympathy, and then to utter consternation, as Gipsy briefly stated her intentions.

"But my goodness gracious! You'll never get a situation at this time of night!" she broke out. "Why, don't you know all the offices close at half-past five?"

Gipsy had not known, and the news struck her like a deadly blow.

"The offices all closed! Do you mean to say I can't get on board ship to-night?" she gasped. "Then where in the world am I to go?"

The woman shook her head dubiously.

"Best go back where you've come from," she remarked.

"I can't! I can't!" cried Gipsy. "That's absolutely impossible. Oh! why didn't I know of this before? What shall I do? What shall I do?" and springing up excitedly from the table, she burst into a flood of tears. For the first time she realized what an extremely rash thing she had done in running away, and in what a terrible position she had placed herself. Alone, friendless, and nearly penniless, in the midst of a great, strange city, with no one who knew her, nowhere to go, and the light already fading so fast that it was dark in the little parlour! She had acted almost on the spur of the moment in leaving Briarcroft, without seriously considering whether her plans were practicable, and now she was reaping the bitter harvest of her own folly. She began heartily to wish herself back at school; even Miss Poppleton's severest scolding was as nothing to the misery of this present crisis, and she yearned for the sight of Miss Edith with a longing that amounted to home-sickness. Wishing and regretting, however, would not help her in the least. She must find some way out of her difficulty, and that promptly.

"I've only one and ninepence left," she faltered. "And out of that I have to pay for my tea and keep a few pennies to go back into Liverpool with by the car. Could I get a night's lodging anywhere very cheaply? Do you know of a clean place?"

"Better not try cheap lodgings!" said the woman emphatically. "Can't you go home again? No? That's a bad lookout." Then, noticing the utter agony in Gipsy's face, she added: "Well, I'd be sorry to turn a young girl like you out alone at this time of night. I'll let you sleep on the sofa here, if you can manage, and you can get on to Liverpool first thing in the morning."

Manage? Gipsy would have slept on the floor, instead of the sofa, if required. She was only too thankful to be allowed to stay, and was almost ready to hug the little confectioner with gratitude. She was so utterly wearied that she was glad to lie down at once in the parlour, and even before the tea-things were removed from the table she had sunk into a sleep of absolute exhaustion. Her hostess scanned her face narrowly, took in the details of her dress, and examined her school hat with attention, then shook her head.

"Doesn't look much in the stewardess line of business," she muttered. "There's something wrong here, I'm afraid. I'll have a talk with her to-morrow." Then she locked the parlour door carefully before she went back to the shop.

Gipsy slept straight on until eight o'clock the next morning, when she was aroused by her landlady, who brought her a cup of tea and a piece of thick bread and butter.

"If you'll take the advice of one who knows more of the world than you," said the woman, "you'll go back home as fast as you can. Your own folks are the best to look after you. If you've spent all your money, they'd help you at the police station. They'll always send a girl back to her friends." Then, leaving Gipsy to digest her remarks while eating her breakfast, she went to perform household tasks.

The last hint put Gipsy in a panic. With her long night's rest her spirits had revived, and her courage returned. The idea of seeking her father in South Africa appeared once more attractive, and she had no wish to be taken charge of by the police and ignominiously packed back to school. She wondered whether the little confectioner had already gone to inform a constable of her whereabouts. She could and would not allow herself to be thus treated. Hurriedly finishing the tea and bread and butter, she laid all her money, with the exception of sixpence, on the table, and finding the shop door already open, made her escape into the street. It felt almost like running away a second time, and she was sorry not to have said "Thank you!" for her night's lodging, but she considered the emergency to be critical, and was glad when she turned the corner and was out of sight of the shop. She made her way as fast as possible to the electric railway, and took the first car for Liverpool, determined not to waste any further time in looking for Captain Smith at Waterloo, but to try her utmost to obtain a berth as stewardess. By dint of diligent asking, she managed to find the quarters of one of the shipping companies that ran a line of steamers to South Africa, and after toiling up a long flight of stairs she boldly entered the office, and stated her business to an astonished clerk. He gave her one comprehensive glance, screwed up his mouth, and most impolitely whistled.

"Whew! You're rather juvenile for the job, ain't you?" he asked facetiously. "Ever been on the sea before? 'Tisn't nice when it's rough, I can tell you."

"I'm older than I look," returned Gipsy with dignity, suddenly remembering, however, to her confusion, that she had forgotten to buy a box of hairpins and turn up her hair. "That's to say, I'm quite old enough to be very useful on board ship, and I know all about long voyages. I'd like to speak to the head of the office."

"I dare say you would! But he's not here yet--never comes down till ten or half-past, and I don't believe he'd see you, either. We're not wanting any stewardesses at present--leastways, those we engage have to be on the wrong side of thirty."

"I'll wait and see the head of the office," announced Gipsy firmly.

"Well! Of all the cheek--!"

But at that moment the telephone bell rang violently in an inner room, and the clerk fled to the instrument. After a few minutes he returned, and with a complete change in his manner asked Gipsy to take a seat.

"The Chief will be here before long," he said affably. "If you don't mind waiting a little, I can promise it will be to your advantage."

Gipsy sat down on one of the office chairs, and amused herself for about the space of ten minutes in studying the shipping advertisements that were hung round the walls. She turned eagerly at last when a footstep was heard upon the staircase. Was it the manager of the Tower Line, she wondered, and would he after all be willing to engage her for the work she desired? Her heart beat and throbbed as the door swung open. But instead of a stranger appeared the familiar figure of her friend Meg's father.

"Gipsy! Gipsy!" cried Mr. Gordon reproachfully. "Thank Heaven I've found you! Come along with me at once, child! We must go straight back to Greyfield by the next express."

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## CHAPTER XIX

### The United Guild Festival

MR. GORDON had been most seriously concerned at the news of Gipsy's unauthorized flight, and considering the part which his daughter Meg had played in helping her to escape, he held himself to be morally responsible for the consequences of so foolish a step, and had started at once for Liverpool in search of the truant. Until very late at night he had used all efforts to trace her, but without success; then as soon as possible in the morning, acting on the knowledge of Gipsy's plans which Meg had supplied, he had telephoned to every steamship company in the city that ran vessels to South Africa, giving a description of the girl, and asking, if she called at the office, that she might be detained until he could arrive and claim her. By a fortunate chance he rang up the Tower Line at the very time when Gipsy had presented herself to enquire for work, so, jumping into a taxicab, he had driven immediately from his hotel to their offices.

On the whole, Gipsy was so relieved to see a friend who was prepared to take charge of her that she submitted quite peaceably to be escorted back to Greyfield. The clerk's hilarity at her application for a stewardess-ship, and his assurance that such posts were only given to middle-aged women, had upset her calculations, and remembering her forlorn condition of the previous night, she was glad not to risk a repetition of such a painful experience. Mr. Gordon had at first intended to take her home with him to The Gables, but on telephoning to his wife on his arrival at Greyfield station, he learnt about the missing letter which had been discovered in Daisy Scatcherd's coat pocket, and decided it would be better for her to go straight to Briarcroft.

The prospect of a letter from her father was a magnet more than sufficient to draw Gipsy back to school. All fear of Miss Poppleton's wrath faded away in the excitement of this wonderful news.

"And to think that if I'd gone to South Africa I should have missed it!" she exclaimed.

Miss Poppleton received the prodigal with wonderful graciousness, and Miss Edith wept over her, upbraided her, and kissed her all at once.

"Gipsy, darling! How could you be so naughty? You might have known we were your best friends. I never slept all night for worrying about you; and I'm sure Miss Poppleton didn't either. To think that you should have run away from us! And your letter was there all the time, if we'd only known! It's locked up safely in my desk, all ready for you."

"Give it me now, please!" pleaded Gipsy.

Although Gipsy's return to Briarcroft had been a very desirable conclusion to the episode of her running away, there were several matters left which remained in a far from satisfactory condition. In the first place, though her father's letter had relieved all anxiety about her school fees and general expenses, and removed her from her former most unpleasant position, it did not give any clue to his present whereabouts. Beyond the brief information that he was going to the sources of a tributary of the Zambesi, she knew nothing. There was no address given to which she might write, or any definite date fixed for his return to civilization. The London bankers, with whom Miss Poppleton at once communicated, had no further knowledge. He seemed to have disappeared into the unexplored wilds of Central Africa, and to have left no trace. In view of the dangers to which a pioneering party, such as he had joined, would be exposed from wild beasts, hostile natives, lack of food and water, or the hardships of travelling in the interior of the continent, there was cause for considerable uneasiness on his behalf. It seemed high time that some news was received of the expedition. It was now seven months from the date of Mr. Latimer's letter, and he had apparently expected to return in three or four.

Poor Gipsy conjured up all kinds of fears for her father's safety. She imagined him ill in some inaccessible spot, without medical aid, or taken prisoner by a native chief, or--more terrible still--that he had succumbed to the dangers and difficulties of the journey. She carried his letter about as her greatest treasure, and kissed it a dozen times a day; but she felt that, while appreciating its possession, she found it a very unsatisfactory substitute for the fuller details she coveted of his present welfare.

Her second trouble was the fact that she was still supposed to be guilty of that surreptitious outing in the evening, and to have flatly told falsehoods to screen herself. Gipsy had many faults, but she was strictly truthful, and this imputation against her honour rankled sorely. Miss Poppleton had not pressed the matter, probably thinking it a secondary consideration to her greater crime of running away. In her relief at receiving a handsome cheque from Mr. Latimer's bankers, the Principal had decided to forgive Gipsy's past indiscretions, and to start afresh on a different basis. By a little rearrangement she managed to find room for Gipsy again in her old dormitory, and the manifold odd

duties which had been assigned to her were entirely removed. Once back in her favourite No. 3, with a new set of summer clothes and an ample supply of pocket-money, Gipsy felt reinstated in her former position in school. With the utmost satisfaction she paid up her arrears of subscriptions to the Guild, and put straight several other little matters where she felt she owed a moral if not an actual debt.

"There's only one thing that makes me savage," she declared one evening to some of her own set who were assembled in the Juniors' room, "and that is that Poppie still believes I told those awful fibs about not going out that wet evening. On my honour I spoke the truth. Somebody else must have gone out in my waterproof."

"What does it matter, now it's all over?" asked Leonora. "Poppie's forgiven you."

"Why, it matters a great deal. I don't want to be forgiven for what I've never done. And I don't care to possess a reputation for telling fibs. Whoever went out in my cloak ought to own up, and if she doesn't, she's a mean, detestable, contemptible sneak!"

"Shielding herself at your expense!" added Hetty indignantly.

Leonora turned as crimson as the woolwork she was stitching.

"I never thought of it in that way! It really never struck me!" she gasped. "I'm sure I've no wish to shield myself at anybody's expense. Why, if you want to know, it was I who went out in your waterproof and galoshes."

Leonora's announcement made the sensation it deserved.

"You! You!" cried the amazed girls.

"But why did you go?"

"How could you do such a thing?"

"Why didn't you tell?"

"I went for a very simple reason," replied Leonora coolly. "You know how fond I am of sweets, and what an abominably mean rule there is here about our not buying them. Well, I just couldn't stand doing without my chocolates, so I used to dodge out whenever I dared to that little shop in Mansfield Road, and buy some. On that particular wet evening I was in a fearful hurry to go before I began practising, so I rushed to the hall cupboard and seized on the first waterproof and hat and galoshes that came to hand. I didn't know they were Gipsy's."

"And yet you let her bear the blame!" exclaimed Dilys heatedly.

"I thought, as she hadn't really done it, she'd very soon clear herself. She could have 'proved an alibi' directly, if the thing had been properly gone into. There were heaps of girls who could have witnessed for her. Even though she did crawl under the table and go out of the room, the times didn't fit in, as Poppie would have found directly, if she'd troubled to ask."

"That's true. Poppie was utterly prejudiced; she asked a few hasty questions, never noticed whether the stories agreed, and jumped to a conclusion," said Hetty.

"Then, when Gipsy came back, Poppie dropped the matter entirely," continued Leonora. "I thought she knew she'd made a mistake. I didn't see any use in getting myself into trouble if I could help it, so I held my tongue."

"And disgustingly mean of you, too!" exploded Lennie.

"You're the most extraordinary girl, Leonora! I never saw anybody like you!" commented Dilys.

"You'll tell Poppie now, won't you?" urged Hetty.

Leonora shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course I shall. She can do what she likes. I don't mind if she expels me! I'm sick of Briarcroft and its strict rules. I'd rather try another school, where they'd allow one to buy more sweets. I never much wanted to come here. I think I'll go and explain to Poppie now; she'll be in the study. If she expels me, I could just go home in time for next Thursday. Mother's giving a big garden party, and having some Russian dancers down from London. They're to give a performance on a platform on the lawn. I'm simply wild to see them!"

As Leonora walked calmly from the room, the girls broke into a universal "Well!" of astonished comment.

"She didn't even tell you she was sorry, Gipsy!" remarked Lennie.

"Never mind! As long as she sets me right with Poppie I don't care," returned Gipsy.

"She seems to want to be expelled," said Dilys.

"Poppie's pet won't be expelled, no fear!" laughed Hetty. "Catch Poppie parting with her millionairess! She's much too good an advertisement for the school."

"I think Poppie'll have somewhat to say on the subject, though!" remarked Dilys.

Both Dilys and Hetty proved right. Leonora was not expelled, but Miss Poppleton gave her a severe lecture on the error of her ways, and a warning against any further transgression of Briarcroft rules. She returned to the Juniors' room in a very chastened frame of mind.

"Poppie was as hard as nails," she volunteered. "She won't let me go home on Thursday to the garden party, so I shan't see the Russian dancers. Isn't it a shame?"

"Well, in my opinion it about serves you right, Leonora Parker," retorted Dilys. "You've looked at the affair all along entirely from your own point of view. I don't believe you'd have told now if you hadn't wanted to go home. You've not begged Gipsy's pardon yet."

"Oh, never mind!" said Gipsy magnanimously. "What do I care, now it's all serene with Poppie? I've proved I don't tell fibs, anyhow. I like people to know I'm straight and square and above-board, and since that's put right, I vote we drop the subject."

"I shall have the picnic next week, even if I don't see the Russian dancers," murmured Leonora.

The suggestion of a united picnic for the whole of the Lower School, which had been unanimously carried at the Guild meeting, had been approved by Miss Poppleton, and the date fixed for a day early in July. As it was the first outing in connection with the United Guild, the girls were anxious to celebrate the occasion with as much observance as possible. It had been decided to visit a castle about six miles away, and it was thought that the ruins would provide a picturesque setting for something in the nature of a grand ceremony.

"Like the Freemasons, you know," said Gipsy, "or any of those old 'worshipful companies' that meet and have big dinners and enjoy themselves."

"What do the Freemasons do?" enquired Lennie. "I thought their meetings were dead secrets."

"So they are; but sometimes they have processions through the streets, and carry banners. We might have a banner, and wear badges."

The idea of a banner appealed to the girls, who set to work with the greatest enthusiasm to make one. It was designed by Fiona Campbell, and carried out by a committee of six, chosen for their skill in needlework. It had a cream-coloured ground, on which was a bold pattern, in applique, of pink briar roses with green leaves, meant as a delicate compliment to Briarcroft. In the centre, in large green letters, was the motto chosen by the Guild: "United we Stand". It was decided at a special meeting that every member must wear a briar rose for a badge, and as real wild roses seemed too perishable to be of much use, an extra committee undertook to construct a sufficient quantity of artificial ones out of crinkled paper. Officers were to wear pale pink sashes, tied over the right shoulder and under the left arm, and a wreath of pink roses round their hats. The form of ceremony for the occasion was entrusted to Gipsy's fertile brain, for nobody else felt equal to inventing it. These preparations naturally absorbed all the energies of the Lower School. Many willing hands set to work to make paper flowers, copying a very pretty specimen of a briar rose twisted by the drawing mistress out of pink crinkled paper, with a most natural-looking green leaf, and secured with fine wire.

Gipsy, who wished the affair to be a great day in the annals of the Juniors, kept adding fresh items to her ceremonial programme till she made a list that filled her with satisfaction. There was nothing she loved so dearly as inventing entertainments, and this festival gave her just the opportunity for which she longed. As organizing secretary she was allowed full powers of administration, so she picked out her performers, called rehearsals, and arranged every detail with scrupulous care and attention.

The school picnic had generally been held on Saturdays, but thinking the castle would be more free from visitors on a Friday, Miss Poppleton had granted a special half-holiday for the purpose. Most fortunately the day turned out to be fine, and by two o'clock seventy-four excited Juniors were waiting for the arrival of the wagonettes that were to convey them to the ruins. Each Form was accompanied by its own mistress, and Miss Poppleton and Miss Edith completed the party. Every girl wore her briar rose badge, and the officers their sashes and wreaths. The banner was carried rolled up, but ready to be unfurled when the ceremonies should begin. Riggs Tower, the old ruined keep that was the goal of their excursion, had a romantic history of its own, and had been the scene of many an exciting struggle in border

warfare. The guidebook related the legends of illustrious prisoners, fierce hand-to-hand combats, doughty champions, secret passages, underground dungeons, thrilling escapes, and other episodes of the past that added greatly to the attraction of the ancient building.

Some of the girls had been there before, but to others it was a fresh spot, and all looked with interest as the wagonettes turned a particular corner of the road where the first glimpse of the castle could be seen. It was a grey, turreted fortress, with half of its west wall battered down by Cromwell's cannon, and the rest in a crumbling state, chiefly held together by the great masses of ivy that clung round the worn stones. In former days it must have been grim and bare enough, but kindly Nature had thrown her mantle of greenery around it, and softened its rugged outlines. Wallflowers and scarlet valerian and the pretty trailing ivy-leaved toadflax were growing in every nook and cranny where they could find roothold; a thick grove of trees clothed the base of the south front; and the courtyard was a strip of verdant sward thickly covered with daisies. Gipsy took a survey of the old keep with the greatest complacency. No place could possibly have provided a better background for the pageant she had arranged. The courtyard made a natural theatre, and the stones lying about would provide seats for the audience. Happily there were very few visitors that day, so they had the castle almost to themselves, and could go through their programme without interfering with the convenience of other people. It was decided to begin the ceremonies at once, so that they would be over in good time before tea.

The banner, which had been rolled on two school pointers, was unfurled and borne aloft by Lennie Chapman and Meg Gordon, and very fine it looked with its design of wild roses and its motto in the centre. The members of the Guild, walking two and two, fell into line, and, preceded by the banner bearers and the chief officers, marched round the courtyard.

Barbara Kendrick had been constituted crier, and, ringing a small handbell, shouted the opening announcement in true mediaeval fashion:

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! Be it known to one and all that this worshipful companie is the Briarcroft United Juniors' Guild."

As the girls marched they chanted a ditty, the words of which had been composed by Gipsy for the event, though the music was out of one of the school song books:

"We've met to-day to celebrate  
A very great occasion,  
We wish to show by this display  
Our Guild's inauguration.

"For be it known to one and all,  
This blissful companie  
Doth now unite all former Guilds,  
So many as there be.

"Athletics, Music, Drama, Arts,  
We do include them all  
In the United Juniors' Guild  
We form at Briarcroft Hall.

"Each member's pledged to do her best  
To aid the common weal,  
And to the tenets of the Guild  
Aye to be stanch and leal.

"Then wave the banner, flaunt the badge,  
And Crier, ring the bell!  
Good luck to our United Guild!  
Long may it prosper well!"

Miss Poppleton, Miss Edith, and the mistresses, who composed the audience, applauded heartily at the end of the marching song.

It had made a good introduction for the Guild, and an opening for the proceedings which were to follow. Gipsy's programme had been drawn up somewhat on the lines of a May Day masque; she herself called it "The Festival of the Briar Rose". It consisted of a number of songs and dances, appropriate to the occasion, which she had collected from

the repertoire of the Lower School. Each Form took its own turn. The little girls of the First performed a charming flower dance, the Second sang a madrigal in praise of summer and the Lower Third a May Day glee, the Upper Third executed a lively Tarantella, the Lower Fourth took Sir Roger de Coverley, the Upper Fourth chanted an Elizabethan Ode to the Spring, while at the end the whole Guild joined in a morris dance.

Besides wearing their badges, the girls had brought with them some garlands and a number of bunches of flowers, to be used in the dances, so that the whole affair, seen against the background of the ancient tower, had a most romantic and picturesque effect. A few parties of visitors, who were looking over the castle, stopped to watch the performance, and appeared greatly to enjoy it. To Miss Poppleton and the teachers the various items were of course well known, as they had been often rendered at school; but thus combined, in such suitable surroundings, they made quite a pretty pageant. Gipsy was in her element, marshalling, conducting, directing, and acting leader, while all the time taking her own part in the singing and dancing. As the members ranged themselves at the end, and wound up the programme with "God Save the King", she felt a thrill of delighted gratification. The Guild, which had begun under her auspices, and which she had so carefully fostered, seemed a well-established institution of the Lower School, likely to continue and flourish among the Juniors for many years to come. If she had done nothing else during her three terms at Briarcroft, it was a satisfaction to feel that she had accomplished this much. Perhaps some such thought struck her companions.

"Hip, hip, hip, hooray for the Guild!" shouted Hetty Hancock. "And hip, hip, hip, hooray for the Festival! And hip, hip, hip, hooray, girls, for our secretary, Gipsy Latimer! She arranged it all, and she deserves a hearty vote of thanks."

As the vigorous cheers rang out, Gipsy stood with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. It was sweet to have her schoolgirl triumph, and to feel that her efforts on behalf of her fellow Juniors had met with so much appreciation.

When the applause died away and the girls broke up, a stranger, who from behind a portion of the ruins had been an eager witness of the proceedings, stepped up to Miss Poppleton.

"I should like to add my congratulations," he remarked. "Perhaps you don't remember me? If I may have one word with the little secretary of your Guild, she will tell you who I am."

But at that moment Gipsy caught sight of him, and with one wild cry of "Father!" flung herself into his arms.

How Mr. Latimer had arrived upon the scene at such an extremely opportune moment demands a word of explanation, so we will narrate his story as he told it to Gipsy afterwards. In the previous November, after landing at Cape Town, he had joined a pioneering expedition, and gone far into the interior to prospect for minerals. The little party had experienced many hardships, perils, and privations, but had been very successful in its discoveries, finding a rich vein of gold that promised a handsome return when worked. Once back at Cape Town, Mr. Latimer had taken the first vessel to England, landing there with the mails. Finding that he could reach Briarcroft as soon as a letter, he had decided to go straight there in person, instead of writing to Gipsy to tell her of his coming. On his arrival at the school, he had learnt that his daughter, with a number of her companions, had started for a picnic at Riggside Tower; so, keeping the taxicab in which he had driven from Greyfield station, he had followed at once to the castle. Finding the Guild celebrations in progress, he had not interrupted the programme, but, concealing himself in an angle where he could see without being seen, he had remained an interested spectator of the pageant, waiting till the affair was over before he made his presence known.

Gipsy's rapture at this reunion was enough to compensate her for all the trouble she had endured during her father's absence. "You won't go away, Dad, and leave me again?" she pleaded.

"No, sweetheart! Fortunately I have business in connection with these newly discovered mines that will keep me in England for a year or two. You can continue at Briarcroft, where by all appearance you seem to be much appreciated, and we can spend all your holidays together. No more gadding about the world just at present. Will that suit you, little woman?"

"Splendiferously!" answered Gipsy, with a sigh of ecstasy.

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There is very little more to be told. For Gipsy the sequel was a time of intense thankfulness and utter content. Two matters, however, which disturbed her, she brought to her father's notice, and he at once settled them to their common satisfaction.

He paid a visit to the secondhand shop of Mr. Daniel Lucas in Greyfield, and bought back her watch and chain; and though he was obliged to pay four pounds to regain what she had parted with for ten shillings, he was glad to get

possession on any terms of what was to him a treasure to be valued for old time's sake. He further hunted out the little confectioner at Waterloo who had sheltered his daughter in her hour of need, and gave her not only his heartfelt thanks, but a more substantial token of his appreciation. Gipsy, you may be sure, lost no time in introducing him to her friends the Gordons, for whose share in fetching her back from Liverpool Mr. Latimer considered he owed a debt of gratitude. It was arranged that the two families should spend a summer holiday together in Switzerland--an event to which Donald, Meg, and Gipsy, with their thoughts on the joys of mountaineering, looked forward with the keenest anticipation.

"I've only one regret," confessed Gipsy on the breaking-up day. "If I'm moved up next term into the Fifth, I shan't be Lower School any more, and it will mean goodbye to the United Guild."

But as none of us can remain stationary, and all growings are outgrowings, I think we may safely predict that Gipsy, who won her way as leader of the Juniors, will have an equally successful career among the Seniors, and that her name will be handed down in the annals of Briarcroft institutions as that of one who upheld the common weal, and whose record was an asset to the school.

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
*By Blackie & Son, Limited, Glasgow*