

Angela Brazil



*A Pair
of Schoolgirls*

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CHAPTER I

A School Election

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It was precisely five minutes past eleven on the first day of the autumn term, and Avondale College, which for seven whole weeks had been lonely and deserted, and given over to the tender mercies of paperhangers, painters, and charwomen, once more presented its wonted aspect of life and bustle. The reopening was a very important event in the opinion of everybody concerned, partly because it marked the beginning of a fresh school year, and partly because the building had been altered and enlarged, many changes made in the curriculum, and many new names added to the already long list in the register. Three hundred and eighty-seven pupils had assembled that morning in the great lecture hall, the largest number on record at the College; five additional classes had[10] been formed, and there were six extra mistresses. At the eleven o'clock interval the place seemed swarming with girls; they thronged the staircase and passages, filled the pantry, blocked the dressing-rooms, and overflowed into the playground and the gymnasium—girls of all sorts and descriptions, from the ten-year-olds who had just come up (rather solemn and overawed) from the Preparatory to those elect and superior damsels of seventeen who were studying for their Matriculation.

By the empty stove in the Juniors' Common Room stood half a dozen "betwixt-and-betweens", whose average age

probably worked out at fourteen and a quarter, though Mavie Morris was a giantess compared with little Ruth Harmon. The six heads were bent together in closest proximity, and the six tongues were particularly active, for after the long summer holidays there was such a vast amount to talk about that it seemed almost impossible to discuss all the interesting items of news with sufficient rapidity.

"The old Coll. looks no end," said Grace Russell. "It's so smart and spanky now—one hardly knows it! Pictures in the classrooms, flowers on the chimneypieces, a stained glass window in the lecture hall, busts on brackets all along the corridor wall, and the studio floor polished! Every single place has been done up from top to bottom."

"I'd like it better if it didn't smell so abominably^[11] of new paint," objected Noëlle Kennedy. "When I opened the studio door, the varnish stuck to my fingers. However, the school certainly looks much nicer. Why, even the book cupboard has been repapered."

"That's because you splashed ink on the wall last term. Don't you remember how fearfully cross Miss Hardy was about it?"

"Rather! She insisted that I'd done it on purpose, and couldn't and wouldn't believe it was an accident. Well, thank goodness we've done with her! I'm glad teachers don't move up with their forms. I'm of the opposite opinion to Hamlet, and I'd rather face the evils that I don't know than those I do. Miss Pitman can't possibly be any worse, and she may chance to be better."

"I say, it's rather a joke our being in the Upper Fourth now, isn't it?" remarked Ruth Harmon.

"I'm glad we've all gone up together," said Dorothy Greenfield. "There's only Marjory Poulton left behind, and she won't be missed. We're exactly the same old set, with the addition of a few new girls."

"Do you realize," said Mavie Morris, "that we're the top class in the Lower School now, and that one of us will be chosen Warden? There'll be an election this afternoon."

"Why, so there will! What a frantic excitement! We shall all have to canvass in the dinner-hour.[12] I wonder if Miss Tempest has put up the list of candidates yet? I vote we go to the notice board and see; there's just time before the bell rings."

Off scrambled the girls at once, pushing and jostling one another in their eagerness to get to the lecture hall. There was a crowd collected round the notice board, but they elbowed their way to the front notwithstanding. Yes, the list was there, in the head mistress's own handwriting, and they scanned it with varying comments of joy or disappointment, according as their names were present or absent.

"Hurrah!"

"Disgusting!"

"No luck for me!"

"I don't call it fair!"

"You're on, Dorothy Greenfield, and so am I."

"I say, girls, which of you'll promise to vote for me?"

Avondale College was a large day school. Its pupils were drawn from all parts of Coleminster and the surrounding district, many coming in by train or tramcar, and some on

bicycles. Under the headmistress-ship of Miss Tempest its numbers had increased so rapidly that extra accommodation had become necessary; and not only had the lecture hall and dressing-rooms been enlarged, but an entire new wing had been added to the building. Avondale[13] prided itself greatly upon its institutions. It is not always easy for a day school to have the same corporate life as a boarding school; but Miss Tempest, in spite of this difficulty, had managed to inaugurate a spirit of union among her pupils, and to make them work together for the general good of the community. She wished the College to be, not merely a place where textbooks were studied, but a central point of light on every possible subject. She encouraged the girls to have many interests outside the ordinary round of lessons, and by the help of various self-governing societies to learn to be good citizens, and to play an intelligent and active part in the progress of the world. A Nature Study Union, a Guild of Arts and Crafts, a Debating Club, a Dramatic Circle, and a School Magazine all flourished at Avondale. The direction of these societies was in the hands of a select committee chosen from the Fifth and Sixth Forms, but in order that the younger girls might be represented, a member of the Upper Fourth was elected each year as "Warden of the Lower School", and was privileged to attend some of the meetings, and to speak on behalf of the interests of the juniors.

Naturally this post was an exceedingly coveted honour: the girl who held it became the delegate and mouthpiece of the lower forms, an acknowledged authority, and the general leader of the rest. It was the custom to elect the

warden by ballot on[14] the afternoon of the reopening day. Six candidates were selected by Miss Tempest, and these were voted for by the members of the several divisions of the Third and Fourth Forms.

Among the six chosen for this election, none was more excited about her possible chances than Dorothy Greenfield, and as our story centres round her and her doings she merits a few words of description. She was a tall, slim, rather out-of-the-common-looking girl, and though at present she was passing through the ugly duckling stage, she had several good points, which might develop into beauty later on. Her large dark grey eyes, with their straight, well-marked brows, made you forgive her nondescript nose. She lacked colour, certainly, but her complexion was clear, and, despite her rather thin cheeks, the outline of her face was decidedly pleasing. Her mouth was neat and firm, and her chin square; and she had a quantity of wavy, fluffy brown hair that had an obstreperous way of escaping from its ribbon and hanging over her ears. During the past six months Dorothy had shot up like Jack's beanstalk, and she was still growing fast—an awkward process, which involved a certain angularity of both body and mind. She was apt to do things by fits and starts; she formed hot attachments or took violent prejudices; she was amiable or irritable according to her mood, and though capable of making herself most attractive,[15] could flash out with a sharp retort if anybody offended her. She had a favourable report in the school: she was generally among those marked "excellent" in her form, and she was above the average at hockey and tennis, had played a piano solo

at the annual concert, won "highly commended" at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, and contributed an article to the School Magazine.

Possessing such a good all-round record, therefore, Dorothy might have as reasonable a possibility of success as anybody else at the coming election, and she could not help letting her hopes run high. The ballot was to be taken at half-past three, which left little time for canvassing; but she meant to do the best for herself that circumstances would allow. She was a day boarder, so, when morning classes were over, she strolled into the Juniors' Common Room to discuss her chances. Already some papers were pinned up claiming attention for the various candidates:

"Vote for Val Barnett, the hockey champion."

"Hope Lawson begs all her friends to support her in the coming election."

"Grace Russell solicits the favour of your votes."

"Noëlle Kennedy relies upon the kindness of the Lower School."

"Hallo, Dorothy!" said Mavie Morris. "Aren't you going to add your quota to the general lot? All the others are getting up their appeals. I wish Miss Tempest had put me on the list of likelies!"

"I can't think why she didn't," replied Dorothy. "I should say you're far more suitable than Noëlle Kennedy."

"Why, so do I, naturally. But there! it can't be helped. I'm not among the elect, so I must just grin and bear it. Is this your appeal? Let me look."

She seized the piece of paper from Dorothy's hand, and, scanning it eagerly, read the following lines:

Ye voters at the school election,
I beg you'll look in my direction;
I hate to boast and brag, but yet
For once I'm blowing my own trumpet.
Now don't you think in me you'd find
A candidate suited to your mind?
No bookworm I, but fond of sports,
Hockey or games of other sorts;
At acting I can run the show,
And play my part, as well you know.
At meetings all your wants I'd state,
And make a speech at the debate.
I'd back in all scholastic storms
The interests of the Lower Forms.
A zealous leader I should be,
So when you vote, please remember me!
I hope these verses you will pardon,
And choose me for the Lower School Warden.

"What do you think of it?" asked Dorothy. "I made it up during the history lesson, and wrote it on my knee under the desk. One wants^[17] something rather different from other people's, and I thought perhaps no one else would have a rhyming address."

"It's not bad," commented Mavie, "but you do brag."

"I've apologized for it. One must state one's qualifications, or what's the use of being a candidate? Look at Val's notice—she calls herself the hockey champion."

"No one takes Val too seriously. I don't believe she's the ghost of a chance, though she did win the cup last season.

One needs more than that for a warden; brains count as well as muscles."

"I know; that's why I tried poetry."

"Please don't call that stuff poetry. Half of the lines won't scan."

There was a pucker between Dorothy's dark eyebrows as she snatched back her literary bantling.

"I don't suppose that matters. Everybody isn't so viper-critical," she retorted. "Shall I pin it up here or in the gym.?"

"It will be more seen here; but I warn you, Dorothy, I don't think the girls will like it."

"Why not?"

"Well, it's clever enough, but it's cheeky. I'm afraid somehow it won't catch on. If you take my advice, you'll tear it up and just write 'Vote for Dorothy Greenfield' instead."

But taking other people's advice was not at[18] present included in Dorothy's scheme of existence; she much preferred her own ideas, however crude.

"I'll leave it as it is," she answered loftily. "It can't fail to attract attention anyhow."

"As you like. By the by, if you're going round canvassing, there's been a new——"

But Dorothy did not wait to listen. She was annoyed at Mavie's scant appreciation of her poetic effort; and having manifested her independence by pinning the offending verses on the notice board, she stalked away, trying to look nonchalant. She was determined to use every means at hand to ensure success, and her best plan seemed to be to go round personally soliciting votes.

"I'll tackle the dinner girls now," she thought, "and I expect there'll be just time to catch the others when they come back in the afternoon. Thank goodness the election is only among the Third and Fourth! It would be terrible if one had to go all round the school. Why, I never asked Mavie! How stupid! But she's certain to be on my side; she detests Val, and she's not particularly fond of Hope either, though of course there's Grace. Had I better go back and make sure of her?"

On the whole she decided that as she had left Mavie in rather a high and mighty manner, it would seem a little beneath her dignity to return at once and beg a favour, so she went into the playground instead to beat up possible electors.[19] She was not the first in the field, by any means. Already Valentine Barnett and her satellites were hard at work coaxing and wheedling, while the emissaries of Doris Earnshaw and Noëlle Kennedy were urging the qualifications of their particular favourites. Hope Lawson was seated on the see-saw in company with a number of small girls from the Lower Second.

"What's she doing that for?" thought Dorothy. "Those kids haven't got votes. It's sheer waste of time to bother with them. She's actually put her arm round that odious little Maggie Muir, and taken Nell Boughton on her knee! I shouldn't care to make myself so cheap. I suppose she's letting Blanche Hall and Irene Jackson do her canvassing for her."

Dorothy was, however, too much occupied with her own affairs to concern herself greatly about her neighbours' movements. To put her claims adequately before each

separate elector was no mean task, and time fled all too quickly. She used what powers of persuasion she possessed, and flattered herself that she had made an impression in some quarters; but very few of the girls would give any definite promises. Many of them, especially those of the Middle and Lower Thirds, seemed to enjoy the importance of owning something which it was in their power to withhold.

"I'm waiting till I've heard what you all six[20] have to say for yourselves," said Kitty Palgrave condescendingly. "I shan't make up my mind until the very last minute."

"It's so difficult to choose between you," added Ellie Simpson, a pert little person of twelve.

Their tone verged on the offensive, and in any other circumstances Dorothy would have administered a snub. As it was, she pocketed her pride, and merely said she hoped they would remember her. She heard them snigger as she turned away, and longed to go back and shake them; but discretion prevailed.

"One has to put up with this sort of thing if one wants to get returned Warden," she reflected. "All the same, it's sickening to be obliged to truckle to young idiots like that."

She had not by any means found all the possible voters, so she decided to return to the Juniors' Common Room. Mavie had gone, but a number of other girls stood near the notice board talking, and reading the appeals of the various candidates. Dorothy strolled up to see how her verses were being received. They made a different impression on different minds, to judge from the comments that met her ears.

"It's ripping!" exclaimed Bertha Warren.

"Says she can run the show, does she?" sneered Joyce Hickson.

"I call it just lovely!" gushed Addie Parker.

[21] "Her trumpeter's dead, certainly!" giggled Phyllis Fowler. "Hallo, Dorothy! I didn't see you were there."

"I'm going to vote for you, Dorothy," said Bertha, "and so is Addie. Phyllis has promised Hope, and Joyce is on Val's side. If you like, I'll canvass for you here, while you do the gym. You'd better not waste any time, because the others are hard at it, and it's best to get first innings if you can."

Dorothy hastily agreed, and hurried off to the gymnasium, where she was fortunate enough to catch some of her own classmates. They were all sucking enormous peppermint "humbugs", and were almost speechless in consequence; but they had the politeness to listen to her, which was more than she had experienced from some of the girls.

"Very sorry!" replied Annie Gray, talking with difficulty. "You should have asked us sooner. Val's been round, and simply coerced us."

"She made it a hockey versus lacrosse contest, and of course we plumped for hockey," murmured Elsie Bellamy.

"Val's simply ripping at hockey!"

"Is that all you care for?" exclaimed Dorothy scornfully. "Val has nothing else to recommend her."

"Hasn't she? What about peppermint 'humbugs'?[22] I call them a very substantial recommendation."

"Did Val give you those?"

"Rather! She put on her hat and bolted out into High Street and bought a whole pound. Lucky Miss James didn't

catch her as she dodged back!"

"She's handing them round to everybody," added Helen Walker. "I wish I had taken two."

For once Dorothy's pale cheeks put on a colour. She could not restrain her indignation.

"How atrociously and abominably mean!" she burst out. "Why, it's just bribery, pure and simple. I didn't think Val was capable of such a sneaking trick. She knows quite well how unfair it is to the rest of us."

"Why, you could have done the same if you'd liked," laughed Elsie. "It's not too late now. I've a preference for caramels, if you ask me."

"I'd be ashamed!" declared Dorothy. "Surely you ought to give your votes on better grounds than 'humbugs' or caramels? Such a thing has never been done before at the Coll."

"All the more loss for us," giggled Helen flippantly.

"Do you mean to tell me you don't care whether a candidate behaves dishonourably or not?"

"Not I, if she's jolly."

"I'm disgusted with you, absolutely disgusted![23] If you haven't a higher ideal of what's required in a warden, you don't deserve to have votes at all."

"Draw it mild, Dorothy!" chirped Elsie.

"I won't. I'll tell you what I think of you: you're a set of greedy things! There isn't one of you with a spark of public spirit, and if the election is going to be run on these lines, I —"

But Dorothy's tirade was interrupted by the dinner bell; and the objects of her scorn, hastily swallowing the

offending peppermints, decamped at a run, leaving her to address a group of empty chairs. She followed more leisurely, fuming as she went. She knew she had been foolish and most undiplomatic to lose her temper so utterly, but the words had rushed out before she could stop them.

"They wouldn't have voted for me in any case," she said to herself, "so it really doesn't matter, after all, they're only a minority. I expect it will prove a very even affair, perhaps a draw, and that no one will have a complete walk-over."

CHAPTER II

What Dorothy Overheard

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At half-past three, exactly in the middle of the French reading-lesson, Miss James, the school secretary, entered the Upper Fourth room with a sheaf of voting papers in her hand. These were dealt round to all the girls, with the exception of the candidates, and Miss James gave a brief explanation of what was required.

"On each paper you will find six names. You must put a cross to the one you wish to choose for your warden. Do not write anything at all, but fold the paper and hand it in to Miss Pitman, who will place it in this box, which I shall call for in five minutes."

So saying, she bustled away in a great hurry to perform a similar errand in the next classroom. The six candidates tried to sit looking disinterested and unconscious while their fates were being decided. Hope Lawson hunted out words in the dictionary, Valentine Barnett made a parade of arranging the contents of her pencil box, and the others opened books and began preparation. Not[25] a word was allowed to be spoken. In dead silence the girls recorded their crosses and handed in their papers, and the last was hardly dropped into the ballot box before Miss James reappeared. The result of the election was to be announced at four o'clock, therefore there were still twenty minutes of suspense. Miss Pitman went on with the French reading as if

nothing had happened, and Dorothy made a gallant effort to fix her attention on *Le Jeune Patriote*, and to forget that Miss Tempest and Miss James were hard at work in the library counting votes. Nobody's translation was particularly brilliant that afternoon; everyone was watching the clock and longing for the end of the lesson. When the bell rang there was a general scuffle; books were seized and desk lids banged, and though Miss Pitman called the Form to order and insisted upon a decorous exit from the room, the girls simply pelted down the stairs to the lecture hall. In a few moments the whole school had assembled. There was not long to wait, for exactly at the stroke of four Miss Tempest walked on to the platform and made the brief announcement:

"Hope Lawson has been elected Warden of the Lower School by a majority of fifty votes."

Dorothy left the lecture hall with her head in a whirl. That Hope should have won by such an enormous majority was most astonishing. She[26] could not understand it. Conversation was strictly forbidden on the staircase, but the moment she reached the gymnasium door she burst into eager enquiries.

"Yes, it's a surprise to everybody," said Ruth Harmon. "I thought myself that Val would get it. All the Lower Fourth and most of the Upper Third were for her."

"Then how could Hope possibly score by fifty?"

"She did it with the kids, I suppose."

"But the First and Second weren't voting?"

"Indeed they were! Do you mean to say you never knew? Why, Miss James gave it out this morning."

"Of all sells!" gasped Dorothy. "I heard nothing about it! It's the first year those kids have ever taken part in the election. Why couldn't some of you tell me?"

"I was just going to," said Mavie, "but you stalked away and wouldn't listen. It's your own fault, Dorothy."

"You might have run after me."

"You looked so lofty, I didn't feel disposed."

"Val didn't know either," interposed Bertha Warren. "She never canvassed in the First or the Second; no more did Grace or Noëlle. I'm not certain if any of you knew except Hope. Only a few were in the room when Miss James gave it out."

[27] "Then she's taken a most mean advantage," said Dorothy. "I understand now why she was sitting on the see-saw making herself so extremely pleasant. It's not fair! Miss James ought to have announced to the whole school that such a change had been made."

"Go and tell her so!" sneered Phyllis Fowler.

"Those who lose always call things unfair," added Joyce Hickson.

Dorothy walked away without another word. She did not wish to be considered jealous, and her common sense told her that she had already said more than enough. She was too proud to ask for sympathy, and felt that her most dignified course was to accept her defeat in silence. She thought she would rather not speak even to her friends, so, ignoring violent signals from Bertha Warren and Addie Parker, she went at once to put on her outdoor clothes. The dressing-room, to provide greater accommodation, had not only hooks round the walls, but double rows of hat-stands

down the middle, with lockers for boots underneath. As Dorothy sat changing her shoes, she could hear three girls talking on the other side of the hat-stand, though, owing to the number of coats which were hanging up, the speakers were hidden from her. She recognized their voices, however, perfectly well.

"I'm rather surprised at Hope getting it," Helen[28] Walker was saying. "I thought Val was pretty safe. I voted for her, of course."

"A good many voted for Dorothy," replied Evie Fenwick.

"I know. I thought she might have had a chance even against Val. She'll be dreadfully disgusted."

"I'm very glad Hope was chosen," said Agnes Lowe. "After all, she's far the most suitable for Warden; she's ever so much cleverer than Val."

"But not more than Dorothy!"

"No; but she's a girl of better position, and that counts for something. Her father was Mayor last year, and her mother is quite an authority on education, and speaks at meetings."

"Well, Dorothy's aunt writes articles for magazines. One often sees the name 'Barbara Sherbourne' in the newspapers. Dorothy's tremendously proud of her."

"Dorothy needn't take any credit to herself on that account," returned Agnes, "for, as it happens, Miss Sherbourne isn't her aunt at all; she's no relation."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. I know for a fact that Dorothy is nothing but a waif, a nobody, who is being brought up for charity. Miss Sherbourne adopted her when she was a baby."

At this most astounding piece of information,[29] Dorothy, who had followed the conversation without any thought of eavesdropping, flung her slippers into her locker and stalked round to the other side of the hat-stand.

"Agnes Lowe, what do you mean by telling such an absolute story?" she asked grimly.

"I'd no idea you were there!" returned Agnes.

"Listeners never hear any good of themselves," laughed Helen.

"I'm extremely glad I overheard. It gives me a chance to deny such rubbish. I shall expect Agnes to make an instant apology."

Dorothy's tone was aggressive; she waited with a glare in her eyes and a determined look about her mouth. Agnes did not flinch, however.

"I'm sorry you heard what I said, Dorothy," she replied. "It wasn't meant for you; but it's true, all the same, and I can't take back my words."

"How can it be true?"

Agnes put on her hat hastily and seized her satchel.

"You'd better ask Miss Sherbourne. Probably everyone in Hurford knows about it except yourself. Come, Helen, I'm ready now," and she hurried away with her two friends, evidently anxious to escape further questioning.

Dorothy took up her pile of home-lesson books and followed them; but they must have raced down[30] the passage, for when she reached the door they were already disappearing round the corner of the playground. It was useless to think of pursuing them; she had barely time, as it was, to catch her train, and she must walk fast if she meant