

HAUNTED.

"You shouldn't do it if you were my daughters!" cried Mrs. Dawson, tartly. "I wonder at you for proposing such a masculine achievement. I wonder yet more at your parents for permitting it!"

Joan Orton smiled vaguely, and bent over the photographs she had in her lap.

Thank goodness Mrs. Dawson was not related to her, and could exercise no control over her actions!

Marjorie—bonnie Marjorie Gordon!—smiled too; but she was ready with a good-humored reply:

"It will not be such a very tremendous achievement after all, auntie! Simply a walking-tour through some of the prettiest scenery of this enchanting island."

"It is a great deal too much for a couple of young girls to attempt; and what will you gain by it, I should like to know?"

"Health, strength, and fresh ideas," said Joan, curtly.

"You can get all three by staying here with me and Mr. Dawson. There's everything you can wish for, or ought to wish for, at Cowes: Sea air, plenty of company, sea-bathing, a band that plays in the evening, and, if we stay long enough, a glimpse at the Prince and Princess, who will be here as well as the *élite* of the aristocracy."

"But we can rub shoulders with them in Hyde Park," retorted Joan. "We did not come here to be units in a fashionable crowd, but to rest and clear our brains after the hard work of the Cambridge exam."

"There were none of those exams. when I was young," Mrs. Dawson peevishly observed; "and the girls were as nice and pretty. But if it is rest you want, why are you proposing a long, wearying, purposeless walk?"

"Not purposeless," replied her niece. "I told you we have promised to stay a fortnight with the Franklyns, who have settled themselves for the autumn at Freshwater Gate. Instead of driving there, we have decided on a more leisurely mode of seeing the country."

"And you will arrive with your complexions ruined by the sun, your clothes spoiled by the dust, your boots in holes, your feet blistered, and your heads aching. You will be so knocked up as to be only fit for bed; and if the Franklyns are a sensible couple—which, as the husband is an artist, and the wife an authoress, is an open question—why, they will look upon you as a couple of young idiots."

Marjorie laughed gaily at these ominous predictions.

"You forget that we are not going to the wilds of Africa, but intend keeping within the bounds of civilization, so that the moment Joan begins to flag—I am sure I shall not—we can betake ourselves to the rail or the coach."

"I shall not flag," said Joan. "In Switzerland I did twenty miles in the course of a day more than once."

"Then you deserved to be ill after it," Mrs. Dawson grimly told her. "However, the young women of this generation seem to follow their own inclinations in all things, so I may as well hold my tongue. I consider this scheme of yours and Marjorie's a very unfeminine one, but as it is no use to say so, I will keep my opinion to myself. I suppose I may ask a question or two."

"A hundred if you like," Marjorie assured her, "and they shall be truthfully answered. What is number one to be? Have we made our wills?"

"You might do a more foolish thing than that," was the retort, "but what I intended to ask was this—you brought from London three large trunks; do you propose taking these with you?"

"Two out of the three are packed, strapped, and labelled to be forwarded to Mrs. Franklyn. We hope they will reach their destination before we do, that we may have the inestimable comfort awaiting us of a change of clothes."

"May I also inquire if you mean to *do*—that is the correct phrase, isn't it?—to do your twenty miles a day here as well as in Switzerland?"

"My dear aunt," replied Marjorie, producing a pocket map and pencil "we are going to practice the severest moderation. We shall leave here to-morrow morning after an early breakfast, but we do not propose to get farther than Seaview by the evening."

"A distance of something like ten miles," Mrs. Dawson commented. "Your grandmother, Marjorie, and she was one of the best and wisest of women—never went beyond the village in which she was born but twice in her life."

"How much wholesome enjoyment she must have missed," Joan murmured.

"Ah!" said Marjorie, saucily, "it is plain that her daughters have not followed the dear old lady's example, for mamma is going to take my sister to Cromer; and you, auntie, never omit to pay a yearly visit to one or other of our seaside resorts."

"My delicate health necessitates it," Mrs. Dawson, who had never had a day's illness since her marriage, unblushingly responded. "But I take my pleasure sensibly, and do not make myself notorious by starting off on walking-matches."

Joan answered this in her calmest tones;

"Although we shall carry a few toilet necessaries in knapsacks"—("Just like private soldiers!" exclaimed Mrs. Dawson, horrified)—"we shall do nothing to attract notice. We shall not be the only friends who will tread the pretty lanes that lie between here and Wootton. From thence to Fishbourne is a mere stroll; and at Fishbourne I have a friend who will give us some luncheon. We shall cross the grounds at Quarr Abbey leisurely, stop a while at Binstead Church to sketch the building and meditate among

the tombstones, then enter Ryde by the pretty shady Spenser Road. After high tea—we mean to eschew set dinners—we shall continue our journey, and keep to the sea-wall till we reach Seaview. Could any arrangement be more reasonable?"

"Especially if it rains," said Mrs. Dawson, ironically.

"Ah! yes," replied Joan. "At this season a shower is always refreshing, and we shall have our waterproofs with us."

Mrs. Dawson threw up her hands.

"I have done. I have made my protest, but to no purpose; you will do as you like. But no matter what happens, I shall hold myself blameless."

"Dear aunt, you shall hear from us frequently," Marjorie promised.

"No doubt I shall. Your uncle, who persists in spoiling my breakfast by reading aloud all the horrors he can find in his morning paper, will regale me with a paragraph to the effect that you have been waylaid in some lonely spot, robbed and murdered, and thrown into the sea, so that we shall not even have the satisfaction of giving you a Christian burial."

"Query!" said Joan. "How will you know what has happened to us if the sea entombs us? Will our disembodied spirits dictate that interesting paragraph to the editor of the *Standard*?"

But Mrs. Dawson would not hear this, nor would she admit her niece on the morrow to say her adieux. So Marjorie breathed them through the keyhole, and, shouldering her knapsack, joined her friend, and then started gaily on their tour.

But when they had bidden adieu to Cowes, and were climbing the hill towards Berton, Joan suddenly became grave, and took a confidential tone.

"I'm going to make a confession, Marjorie *mie*. Your aunt's remarks have made me slightly uneasy on one point. You really are intolerably pretty. You cannot help it, I know. It is not your fault that you have such shining eyes and kissable lips, but I am afraid you will attract more attention than we shall find agreeable. So I have borrowed from your aunt's landlady a hideous brown gauze veil. Will you oblige me by wearing it whenever we approach the busy haunts of men? You can tuck it up at other times."

Marjorie could hardly reply for laughing.

"I'll wear the veil, but I have a confession to make as well as you. I said to myself last night, Joan looks so awfully young and handsome, that the people at the hotels where we shall have to spend our nights may look askance at us, and think with Aunt Dawson that we ought not to be strolling about the country by ourselves. So I tell you what I did—I stole uncle's huge pair of blue goggles for you to put on whenever you want to look elderly or imposing."

Joan accepted the spectacles, and her friend tied the veil round her hat; but it was sometime before they could look at one another without bursts of laughter; and at Fishbourne they amused Joan's friend by appearing before her in their disguises.

Altogether it was a happy, merry day, though the skies were threatening, and just after they reached Seaview the rain came down in torrents. Did this augur ill for their travels?

But the sun was piercing the mists of morning when they drew up their blind on the morrow, and the birds were singing gaily as they paid their hotel bill and started on their journey.

The tide was down, and they were able to make their way to St. Helen's along the shore, but it involved such rough walking that they were glad to cross Brading Haven, and take a long rest under the trees at Bembridge.

Prudence, in the shape of a matron who divided her time between watching the gambols of her children, and chatting with the young ladies who shared her seat, counselled taking to the road if they were *en route* for Sandown; but, by doing this, they would have lost a pleasant hour in the charming little bay under the shadow of Culver Cliff, and the glorious view from the summit of the downs above Yaverland.

It was not yet noon; they had the larger half of a delicious summer day before them, and, fearless of fatigue, they bade adieu to their adviser, and set off once more.

Presently, however, as they were rounding Bembridge Point, Marjorie detected Joan casting glances over her shoulder. Why?

"Oh! it's nothing; only a man whom I have caught sight of once or twice this morning already. I could almost fancy that he was dogging us; for, as soon as he detected me looking towards him, he stepped behind some rocks, and went in a hiding."

"Are you nervous?" demanded Marjorie.

"Not at all. It only struck me as odd that he should come so near, and yet try to keep out of sight. Why did he not walk on, as he should have done?"

But Marjorie was amused at Joan's uneasiness and laughed at it.

"Behind those rocks is he? Then we will wait till he has passed on or gone back. Put on your goggles that you may give him a basilisk stare if he comes within range."

Accordingly they seated themselves on a convenient stone. Then they ate their luncheon, and had agreed to translate a page or two of German, when the annoying stranger strode quickly past their resting-place, and was soon out of sight.

Joan submitted to be teased a little about her scare, which was forgotten when Whitecliff Bay lay before our fair pedestrians, and they stood watching the tide roll into it.

But time raced on as well as the waves, and they must not linger too long, so they sought the zig-zag path that climbs the hillside, and found themselves presently warm and breathless at the obelisk on the summit.

Marjorie was about to run forward and throw herself on the short turf so redolent with wild thyme and starred with yellow flowers, but Joan held her back with a significant gesture. On the other side of the obelisk sat