



THE
DEEPENING
STREAM

DOROTHY CANFIELD

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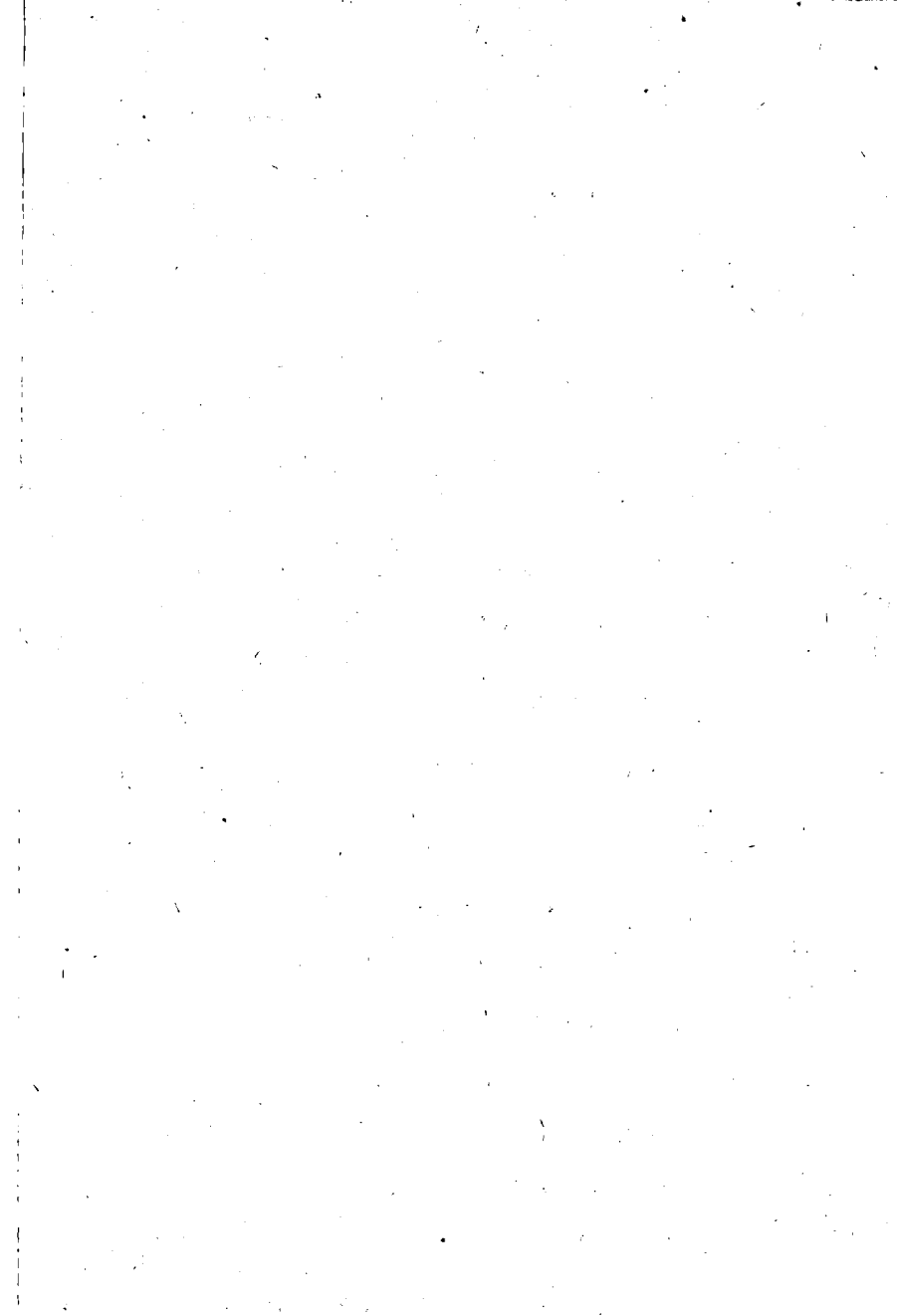
DOROTHY CANFIELD

(1879-)

A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR OF "THE DEEPENING STREAM"

More than a century before the American Revolution the Canfield family had settled in the United States. Since 1764 they have lived in Vermont and have continuously owned land there, identifying themselves with the most progressive educational and humanitarian undertakings of that State. Dorothy Canfield's father was an educator, the president of two State universities. At the age of ten, Miss Canfield was sent to Europe for a year's schooling, and for all her life thereafter she has studied in France and in this country. She took her arts degree at Ohio State University, during the time her father was president of that institution, and later studied for her doctor's degree at the Sorbonne and Columbia University. In 1907 she married John R. Fisher and returned to live on one of the Canfield farms at Arlington, Vermont. From this ancestral home have gone forth a succession of novels, essays, short stories and miscellaneous writings that have had far-reaching influence on several generations of Americans. Among her best-known novels are her very first, *The Squirrel Cage*, published in 1912, *The Bent Twig*, *The Brimming Cup*, *Her Son's Wife*, *The Deepening Stream* and *Bonfire*. Active in many cultural spheres, Dorothy Canfield's work has carried her reputation far beyond the literary market-place and into the world of affairs, of learning and of high social purpose.

THE DEEPENING STREAM



PART ONE

I

WHEN people talked about things they could remember Matey always wondered which kind of remembering they meant—the kind that was just a sort of knowing how something in the past had happened or the other kind when suddenly everything seemed to be happening all over again. Why did time fade out some memories so that they didn't seem any more real than a story in a book? And why were others, whether you liked it or not, a living part of you at any moment when they come into your head? These were among the many questions for which Matey never found an answer.

Perhaps it was the ring of Aunt Connie's old voice, usually so dim, which had hooked the first of these living memories into Matey's four-year-old mind. Yet that was always the end of the memory. With the last echo of Aunt Connie's word all the rest vanished . . . the pale dreaming sky, the wide bare river, the leafless spring trees towering over the moist sweet-smelling earth of the flower beds.

When some chance reminder made the contact which clicked this picture up before her eyes she was again the very little girl who, holding confidently to a cold, soft old hand, scuffed her feet unrebuked on the gravel path as she walked slowly beside Aunt Connie's billowing black, camphor-scented skirts. With the remembered smell of camphor came instantly the old knock at her heart . . . how *could* the tulips be there, finished, shapely, when the last time she had looked there had been nothing but a few skimpy, rolled-up leaves?

There they were, as much themselves, though so new, as Matey was herself. Steady on their strong stems they stood, seeming at Matey's "Oh!" to look off into the distance as though (she

thought) they were trying not to show how proud they were of the surprise they had given her. What struck the small Matey was not so much that they were beautiful as that they were there at all so quickly! How ever had they done it? Dirt and stones and manure-stained straw lying at their feet. That was all they had to make themselves out of!

Matey's astonishment was too big to keep inside her. But she could not get it out without saying something, and she didn't know any words that fitted. The hand which held her little fingers always gave her what she wanted. She jerked imperiously at it, tipping her head back to peer up into the bitter withered face above her. It was looking at her now with tenderness. But Matey was only four years old. She took the tenderness for granted.

"Oh, Aunt Connie!" she cried, her mind full of her own feelings. And then because she still could think of no word which fitted the tulips she could only cry again, longingly, "Oh, Aunt Connie!"

Aunt Connie had known at once a word to say. She cried out, "Incredible!" She said it queerly, not in her usual quiet voice, but almost roughly. It sounded to Matey hardly like a word at all but like the sudden noise a feeling makes inside you before you can think of a word when you get knocked off your sled on a hill or see the Christmas tree for the first time.

It was so strange for old cross silent Aunt Connie to have a sudden loud feeling that Matey was startled. She did not dare to look up again but made herself small, bending her head to look fixedly at the tulips. They seemed in the instant she had glanced away from them to have turned their faces toward her.

Matey knew from the sound part of what Aunt Connie's word meant. It meant that something you hadn't thought possible was really so.

But what was it that Aunt Connie hadn't thought possible?

For an instant, every time this memory came, just before they all winked out into the dark, it seemed to Matey that the tulips looked wise and conscious as though they knew.

This was the instant which did not die like things forgotten, nor, like most remembered things, shrink and dwindle into something so much less than itself that it could be put into little words. No matter how long an interval passed between the in-

frequent times when Matey was reminded of it the memory always sprang freshly into life, as big as all outdoors, just as it had been . . . the sky as lofty, the Hudson as broad, the tall old leafless trees life-size; yet all that bigness less than the bright flowers which stood looking with a wise intentness at the little girl; while Aunt Connie's voice, like a gust of wind, shook the trees as it shook Matey's heart, and carried its cry out across the wide bare river. It never stirred a petal of the tulips.

2

THE children had honestly thought, at least Priscilla and Francis had, that they were quite sure of the path up Izcohébie Hill to the look-out rock. Matey had thought nothing about it. She was nearly six—two long years of life had passed since she had stood with Aunt Connie, looking at the tulips beside the Hudson so far from her now—but she was still in the age which takes no responsibility about finding the right path.

Also they had honestly meant to keep their promise to Dominiqua about not leaving the right path for an instant. Leave it? Priscilla had laughed and asked Dominiqua how far off the path she supposed anybody *could* take Matey's short legs through that prickly *genêt*?

Matey needed no commands from her big sister to make her hold the exact middle of the winding trail as she trotted after her elders. The tall broom on each side bristled furiously with what Matey called when she was talking English "stickers," and when she was talking French "*piques*," though Francis told her that wasn't right in either language. She turned her head from one side to the other to look at the prickly stiff green bushes. Like rough sprangling-branched little trees they were, millions of them, every one separate. How different *genêt* looked when you saw it through the window of Dominiqua's house in Biriadou, the smooth carpet of its yellow blossoms laid like seamless silk, fitted to every roll and shoulder of the hills. You wanted to lean out from the window and stroke your hand over a mile or two of that soft gold.

Of course, after these weeks of staying with Dominiqua, she

knew what broom was. She had known all the time that the shining gold which she saw out of the windows was nothing but *genêt*, with skinchy little blossoms not so very big any of them, not such an awful lot of them to any one bush. She couldn't say that it was a surprise to see that the soft gold velvetiness was made of something just the opposite, prickly and rough and dark; but it did make many thoughts for her—dim six-year-old thoughts that were mostly feelings.

"Here we are," said Priscilla from on ahead.

Matey was glad to know they were there. Her legs were tired and her stomach was empty. She could see Priscilla against the sky already running up on the look-out rock, the wind blowing her fair hair and fluttering her short skirts.

She saw Francis scrambling up the rock. And now Matey herself was at the foot of the boulder. The others shouted down patronizing directions where to put her feet. *She* knew where to put her feet! "I want my *gôûter*," she said rather crossly, as soon as she was up beside him. They wanted their *gôûter* too. Priscilla was already getting it out from the paper bag.

For a time they gnawed and chewed and swallowed hard, in silent blissful gluttony, seeing distinctly the big brown crusts and nibbled-at lumps of chocolate, and dimly the distant blue sheet of the ocean to their left and the heaped-up Spanish Pyrenees to their right. Yet, even while she was still reveling in the mightiness of her jaw-muscles setting hard on their bones as they triumphantly brought her teeth together through the hardest crust, Matey was noticing that, there! the *genêt* blossoms had all melted together into one shining sheet of gold again.

But the outlines of what she saw began now to blur, as everything awake in her let go in the first loosening of drowsiness. Francis and Priscilla were talking about the view like grown-ups. "That little scriggle of dirt-color must be the road from Hendaye to San Sebastian. When Father and Mother came up here they said they could see clear to Bayonne." But their voices were to Matey's deliciously dulled ears like the hollow murmur of an echo.

She could not rouse herself even when they gave her oh, such a rare and priceless chance to show off, by wondering if this was the place where the witches were supposed to gather, nights. Matey could have told them. Being too young to do lessons, she spent her mornings hanging around the kitchen and back terrace,

where she heard more witchcraft and black magic stories than Priscilla and Francis dreamed of. She could have pointed out—Dominiqua's aunt had pointed it out to her dozens of times—the very valley up which, as soon as the dark began to fall, the demons flew in from the sea on their leathery wings to join the witches on Izcohébie, leaning down to snatch the souls of any innocents whose mother left them out after dark. But it was bright daylight now; witches and demons couldn't do anything as long as the sun was up.

"You mustn't go to sleep there, Matey," said Priscilla responsibly, her eye catching the limpness of her little sister's arms and legs. "You'd roll off. And anyhow we must be starting back."

"I wasn't going to sleep," said Matey, nettled, sitting up and stretching.

And then they were lost!

Of course it couldn't have happened like that. They must have been following paths through the *genêt* for ever so long—several hours perhaps—before Matey knew they were lost, for when she did, the sun was quite down. But her memory included none of what happened in the late afternoon. Probably she had trotted along, still in a golden half-sleep, still blandly unquestioning the wisdom of those who led her, the green walls on each side of the path sliding by, sliding by.

But she was awake—quite—when Priscilla and Francis stopped and stood still. It was awful that in spite of the terrified look of Francis' back, the path was so narrow they couldn't huddle together, but had to stand in single file. All Matey could do was to wiggle past Francis till she was between him and Priscilla and had caught her sister's hand.

"What'll we do?" said Francis, his voice trembling. Now that Matey was around in front of him she could see that his face looked even more frightened than his back.

Priscilla did not answer. For one horrible never-forgotten instant Matey thought Priscilla was going to be scared, as scared as she was, as Francis was, crazy scared. It was not just being lost, like getting lost in the woods at home, bad as that would be. It was being out alone at night on Izcohébie Hill.

Matey looked up into the grayness over her head. The wind was rising and making long, awful rustlings as it swept towards the top of the slope. A stray gust fumbled coldly at her hair.

Terror flung itself at the door of the little girl's heart, rattling

and shaking the latch. Her lips were parted to let out a shriek, when Priscilla spoke. She said in her ordinary Priscilla voice, "It won't hurt us any, even if we have to stay out till morning. It's warm, nights." Oh, rocklike twelve-year-old courage! Oh, great-hearted big sister! The panic clattering at the door of Matey's heart reeled back a step.

But was Priscilla only pretending not to be scared? Matey longed frightfully to be sure that Priscilla was not, deep inside, afraid of . . . of . . . what Matey did not dare even to think of in words, lest the rapidly darkening sky turn into . . . into . . . she longed so terribly to know whether Priscilla was really afraid that she dared not ask.

She took another way to find out. She dropped Priscilla's hand, put her arms tightly around Priscilla's waist, and pressed her little body as hard as she could against her sister's. No, Priscilla did not feel afraid.

"Oh, ouch! *aié!* Matey!" she said. "You're squeezing the wind out of me. Let me go, for goodness' sakes!" No, Priscilla did not sound afraid. Her voice sounded beautifully natural and cross.

The panic terror at the threshold of Matey's little heart shrank further back. The whooshing of the wind died down from being a shriek to a great humming sound, and that was partly in Matey's ears as her blood unfroze and began to trickle along its usual channels. She looked up adoringly at the older sister as she went on, "We must have made a wrong turn and got into a sheep path. But we'd never find the right one now. If we tried we'd probably just get farther and farther away. We'd better stay right here till they come to look for us. Dominiqua'll be sure to raise the roof when we don't come in. You know how scared she is of anything happening to us while Father and Mother are away. I bet she gets the whole village out."

Because of the humming in Matey's ears she did not hear a word of this. But she heard the sound of it perfectly. The sound meant that they were safe as long as Priscilla could talk in that sort of voice.

The relief made Matey feel faint. Her legs gave way under her and she sat down, dragging Priscilla with her.

"That's a good idea," said Priscilla. "We've got a long wait, perhaps. Sit down, Francis, and rest your legs."

Francis sat down as close to his sisters as the crowding prickles would let him. Crouched there, on the ground, their heads were

quite below the surface of the broom. Above them, Matey could hear the wind loudly blowing the blackness up the hill. It did not touch her now. Night had quite fallen so that she could see nothing at all, not Francis as he lay up against her, not Priscilla, although her arms were still around her. But, though she could not be seen, all of Priscilla was there, solid and warm and breathing, stronger than the mortal wickedness roaring over their heads.

"Oughtn't we holler a little to let them know where we are?" said Francis. His voice was still trembling. Matey moved a little to one side, not to take more than her share of Priscilla.

"Oh, they wouldn't have got out so far from the village as this, so soon," said Priscilla, reaching around back of her waist and undoing Matey's hands. "You'd better let go of me and curl up your legs so you'll be more comfortable, Matey. You'll probably drop right off in a nap. You were half asleep up on the rock." She pushed the child down till her head rested on what small lap was made by Priscilla's short cotton skirt. It was enough for Matey. She let Priscilla do whatever she would with those warm sisterly hands. But as to going to sleep . . . with that panic creeping closer! She saw him plain . . . the lean demon sprawled face down on his dark cloud spreading out his arms as he swept overhead, stretching out his stringy arms to clutch at the hair of any helpless child out under the night sky. . . .

Dominiqua's voice sounded in her ears. . . . "They can smell innocence, the fiends can, as flies smell meat, and flock to it—children after baptism and before they have lived long enough to commit any deadly sins—that's the age—"

That was Matey's age. . . .

The black wind stooped lower, fumbled with long stringy arms in the broom. By this time the air above them must be filled with evil spirits, lying out along the wind, drawing the ragged clouds around them, their devil's eyes gleaming through.

Matey's start of horror woke her up . . . she had almost dozed off, even the part of her she had left on guard to remember what it was that kept her safe . . . for an instant she did not know what that was. Quick! Quick! before she died with terror . . . what had it been that had made her safe? There *had* been something, hadn't there?

Her hand, clawing out in the dark, clutched something, something knobby and hard and warm . . . Priscilla's knee. Oh, yes, it was all right, Priscilla was there. The blood ebbed languidly

back into her sickened body. She laid her head down again on Priscilla's lap. My! but she was tired!

Was Francis all right? She felt in the dark for him. Yes, there he was, on the other side of Priscilla's other knee. He felt warm and limp and sound asleep. Oh, dear big sister!

"Don't nestle around so, Matey," said Priscilla's voice through the darkness. "Do get yourself in a comfortable position and *stay* there!"

What could the powers of hell and the demons of all evil do against a Priscilla? Nothing. Nothing.

To that refrain and to the now very distant murmur of the night wind, Matey fell soundly asleep, this time with all of herself, just as she did in her bed, nights. She left nothing on guard. Priscilla was on guard.

So sound asleep was she that when she woke she was inexplicably in bed, back at Biriadou in her nightgown, the sun shining on Dominiqua's sleek hair and kind face as she stood beside the bed, holding her black-eyed baby over one shoulder.

When she saw Matey's eyes open, she stooped to kiss her, saying, "I'll run get your chocolate, it's all ready on the fire."

Matey lifted a face of stupefied wonder from her pillow. There through the window stretched the old smooth miles and miles of golden blossoms. On the edge of his bed sat Francis, bright and glowing, just as usual. Priscilla looked around from the table where she was writing, a smile in her eyes. "Well, Matey," she said, "you're a seven sleeper all right. It's ten o'clock."

No, the rescue was no part of the memory for Matey, although she heard from others a great many times all about it. How, sure enough, Dominiqua had raised the roof and got the village out with lanterns, and how she, Matey, had slept through it all, even when Dominiqua's husband picked her up and carried her—even when Dominiqua undressed her and put on her nightgown.

"Just like a sack of meal you were," said Francis, laughing.

She could remember none of that. But it took her an hour or two that morning, after she opened her eyes, to subside into her usual rate of living. Her mind went right on recording sharply the commonplace impressions of an ordinary day, as vividly as it had recorded the roar of the black wind over the *genêt*. Part of the memory of being lost was the anxious look on Pris-

cilla's face when she said, "Now, kids, look here. Don't let's tell Mother and Father about getting lost. Dominiqua would get blamed like everything. *You* know Father would. . . . Will you keep still? Promise."

Sure they would. Matey had less than no wish to talk or think about that night. And it would be meaner than dirt to get Dominiqua into trouble over something that was no fault of hers. If Father came back from the trip to Italy as cross as he'd been when he started, he'd be sure to make an extra fuss over anything that would help show that it had been silly to go . . . and all Mother's fault for wanting to. Matey's experience of life as a whole was limited. Her experience of her parents, however, was quite sufficient to let her foresee this result. Over her bowl of chocolate she nodded seriously. Francis said with emphasis, "Gracious, no! Absolutely not a word!"

The two elders applied themselves to their lessons. Matey got herself dressed and loitered sleepily down the stairs to get another *tartine* of bread and jam. Dominiqua evidently had her usual visitors. Matey could identify each staccato voice. Probably, she thought, they were saying how wonderful American children are, not to cry and get excited when they are lost, but to stay calm and . . . What they were really saying as she went into the kitchen plucked her sleepiness roughly away. "Why, Maï Iturbe's boy, not eleven yet, went last week, a day's journey, and the path not half so well marked. And did he lose his way like these babyish foreign . . ." Seeing Matey come in, they stopped hastily and smiled down at the little foreigner with a kind-hearted unadmiring pity.

Matey was only six, but she had lived long enough with herself to scringe, even before she felt it, at the pang which she knew was aching itself into her mind. She knew this pang. It hurt. She snatched up hastily one of her usual weapons against it. As she watched Dominiqua spreading jam on her slice of bread, she tried to think with all her might that Dominiqua was nothing but an ignorant cook, and that nobody cared whether she looked down on you or not. But alas, as usual Matey did care.

She moved away. But even leaning on the low stone wall which ran around the far side of the garden terrace, she could still catch echoes of their lack of admiration. She chewed loudly to drown out their voices. She swallowed hard, trying to swallow

down the heaviest of her discomfort with her bread and jam. By and by, she listened cautiously again to the tick-tick-ticking of the talk.

"... every seventh year," said Dominiqua's voice, once more getting it all wrong about Father's sabbatical. She was saying again that all Americans worked hard for six years and fooled around the seventh—getting paid for it into the bargain. Well, let her. It never did any good to tell her it was only college professors who were allowed to do that—and this year wasn't even a "sabbatical," just a leave of absence without salary—and Father had worked like a dog writing text-books to pay for it.

Now they began to talk about something else. Matey couldn't make it out at first. About somebody who had been very brave, although so young, who had gallantly played the part of a real little man, had comforted and quieted his frightened sisters—and then hadn't bragged about it afterward. In fact it had been hard work to get him to say a word about himself, as it always was. Matey made it out now, all right.

An angry impulse sent her running toward the kitchen to tell them what Francis had really . . . but halfway across the garden she stopped short. She stood still. Something was again the matter inside her. She bit hard through her *tartine* of bread and jam, and chewed thoughtfully. To tell on Francis . . . ? Wouldn't that be—well, wouldn't it be sort of like what Francis had done, the other way around? Yes, it would.

With a sigh she turned back and went again to lean on the wall. It was strange, but that inner heaviness and misery was gone. Oh, goody! For the first time since it had begun she felt quite light and comfortable inside, and fell happily to watching an ant fetch and carry to a tiny anthill between the cracks of the stones.

Presently Francis came running out to play ball. "I've got my verb learned," he called defensively to his small sister, tossing his *pelota* up on the sloping roof of the cow-barn and catching it as it rolled down and off.

Matey was only six, but she knew that the women watching him from the kitchen were thinking how graceful the little boy was, and how beautiful his sunny hair looked, tossing about in the wind. It *did* look nice. Priscilla looked out of a window and saw him leaping in the sunshine, a small smile on his face.

At once she drew in her head and came running out on the back terrace. "See here, Francis," she said seriously, speaking in English so that the people in the kitchen wouldn't understand, "you really *mustn't* tell Father and Mother."

Francis turned his clear blue eyes on her, pausing as he leaned his supple spine backward to launch his ball. "Why, *I'm* not going to tell them," he said in a surprised voice.

He threw the ball and ran nimbly to catch it.

Priscilla walked up close to him. "Francis," she said in a threatening voice, "if you ever *do*—I'll tell Father and Mother about the time you . . ." She said the last words so low in Francis' ear that Matey could not hear them. She heard very distinctly, however, Francis' quick answer. "Why, of course I won't tell them. Didn't I say I wouldn't? What in the world makes you *think* I would?"

Would Priscilla say what in the world made her think he would? Matey's heart shrank together. But of course Priscilla wouldn't. Couldn't. From under her dropped lids Matey could see that Francis went on briskly throwing and catching the ball, and that Priscilla stood a moment longer looking at him. Then she turned around and went back into the house.

Well, what else could she do?

What had Matey encountered on Izcohébie Hill which had driven that long memory so deeply into her mind? Into her mind alone. For when a few years later she had grown up enough so that she could speak of it, she was astounded to find that Priscilla had forgotten their being lost.

"Were we?" she said vaguely.

She thought of talking it over with Francis, but on second thought decided not to. He *had* told—the next time he had needed something to divert Father's attention. And Priscilla hadn't told on him. Matey had known she wouldn't—and so had Francis—even while she was threatening him.

This was a nighttime memory, one of those that never come to you at all in daylight, but when you get about so far asleep, start to unroll themselves in the dark. All at once Matey would not be flat on her bed, but trotting unquestioningly along the winding path behind Francis and Priscilla, turning her head from one side to the other to look at the tall green bushes, thinking