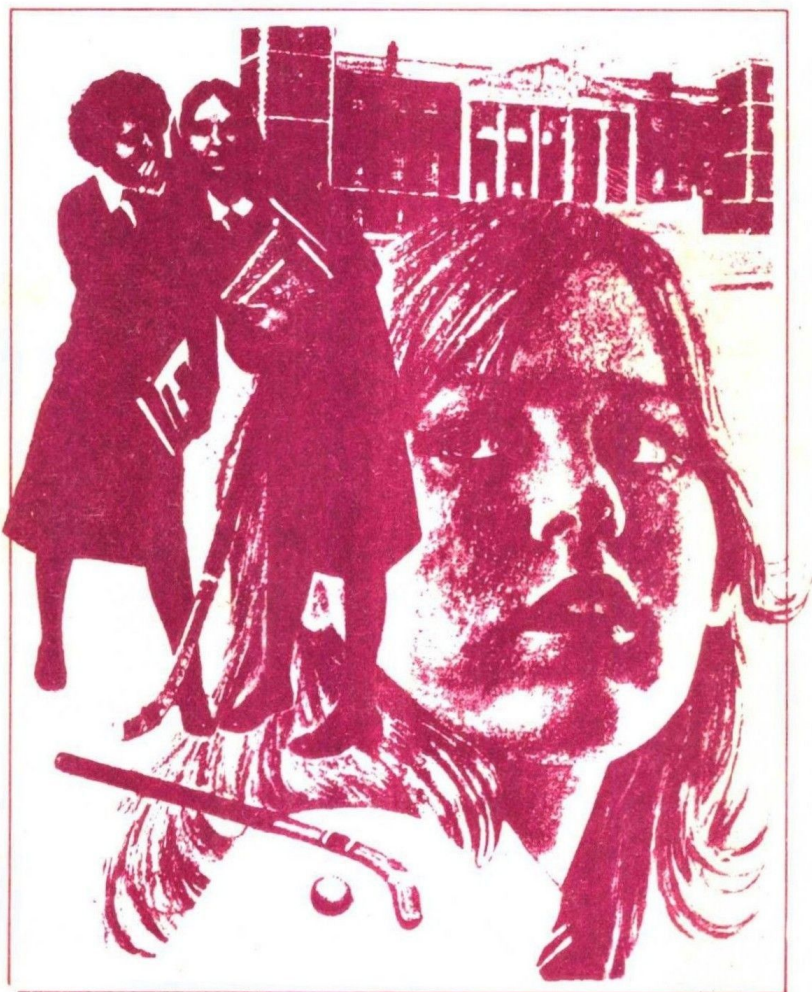


First term at ²
TREBIZON
ANNE DIGBY



Anne Digby

First Term at Trebizon

Illustrated by Gavin Rose

GRANADA

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Going Away to School

'Have a good first term, Rebecca. Try and be happy.'

'Remember, this is a wonderful chance for you. And you'll soon make new friends.'

'Yes, Mum. Yes, Dad.'

Rebecca's voice was flat. It was a Tuesday morning. Her trunk had been loaded into the luggage van. Her hand luggage was up on the rack in an empty compartment somewhere down the corridor. She had deliberately dodged the carriage reserved for new girls.

Now she was in the corridor of the train, leaning out of the window while her parents, on the platform below, kissed her good-bye.

'Off you go!'

They stepped back as the train started to move away. What a forlorn little figure their daughter looked, half-drowned in her brand new school cape, an arm reaching out of it to wave. The breeze was wrapping her fair hair round her face.

Rebecca thought how grand some of the people on the platform looked, seeing their daughters off on the train, and how small and round and homely her own parents looked in comparison.

'I hope you like it out there --' she called, her voice hoarse. She pushed her hair out of her eyes with the back

of her hand, brushing away a tear at the same time.

'We'll be back in England for Christmas,' called her mother. 'We'll all be together again. Write to us!'

'And write something for that school magazine!' shouted her father.

Rebecca waved as hard as she could; the platform seemed to be sliding rapidly backwards, her parents getting smaller and smaller. It was as though all her past life were slipping away, a dreadful feeling.

'Get your head in!'

Rebecca did not hear, but just kept on waving. By leaning out as far as she could, she could still see them – little pin people – way back there on the platform. They were going, going ... gone.

'Are you deaf?'

Somebody grabbed the back of her dark blue cape and pulled her in and then, getting their fingertips under the top metal edge of the window, slid it up and snapped it shut.

'Can't you read? You're not supposed to lean out of the window,' said the voice.

Her eyes blurred, Rebecca could not see the person properly, except that she was a girl in a checked coat. As far as Rebecca could tell she had nothing to do with either British Rail or Trebizon School. She had her back to her now as she bent down to pick up a large black bag that she had dumped down in the corridor of the train.

'Mind your own business!' said Rebecca, angry and miserable.

The girl stood up, holding the bag, and turned round to face Rebecca. Her brown eyes had narrowed down to

frightening slits. Her whole appearance was striking, indeed, overpowering. She had long black wavy hair, bony features and a rather hawk-like nose. She towered above Rebecca for she was almost grown-up and very tall and elegant. She wore her beautifully cut tweed coat open and with graceful flair. Under the coat she was wearing a blue skirt, cream blouse and striped tie, and a navy v-necked jumper. This was the winter uniform of Trebizon School, the same outfit that Rebecca herself was wearing. Sixth Formers could wear a winter coat of their own choice in place of the regulation blue cape, and this girl was a Sixth Former.

‘Did you say something to me?’

Rebecca hung her head, cheeks hot with embarrassment. She felt very small and insignificant in front of this imposing figure.

‘I was rude. I’m sorry.’

‘What’s your name?’

‘Rebecca Mason.’

‘Ever been away to school before?’

‘No.’

‘Heard of prefects?’

Rebecca’s spirits sunk even further.

‘I’m both a prefect and school officer, if that means anything to you. My name is Elizabeth Exton. If you don’t mind me saying so, you’d better learn a few manners if you want to fit in at Trebizon.’

‘Elizabeth!’ shouted a girl from the other end of the corridor. She, too, was tall and grown-up looking and was wearing a camel-hair coat over her school uniform. ‘Come on! I’ve found a free table in the Buffet Car!’

Elizabeth Exton crooked her arm round the bulging

black bag, rather like a doctor's, and hugged it close to her as though its contents were very important.

'Okay, Emma. Coming!'

She moved off along the swaying corridor without looking back.

Rebecca wondered where she had heard the name Exton before, and what was in the black bag, and just what was meant by a 'school officer'. But she didn't really care. She turned and pressed her forehead against the cool glass of the corridor window and watched the railway sidings slipping past.

It seemed a bad omen, somehow, getting on the wrong side of a prefect the minute she had set foot on the train. So she would have to learn some manners if she wanted to fit in, would she? 'Rotten boarding school!' she thought savagely. She had no desire to go to Saudi Arabia with her parents, now that her father had been posted there by his firm. She knew that was impossible, anyway. But if only she could have stayed in London, at her day school, with all her friends!

'As the firm is paying, we may as well have the best,' Mr Mason had told his wife, trying to sound nonchalant, although in reality he was still rather stunned by the news of his promotion, and the fact that full boarding school fees for his daughter went with it. He had been to a very ordinary school himself. 'Trebizon is the one with the big reputation. They turn out musicians, artists, novelists - all sorts. If they've got any talent a place like that brings it out.'

'We could never afford it ourselves,' agreed Mrs Mason, though not without a pang. 'It's on the coast, too. It's the chance of a lifetime for Rebecca, and I'm sure

she'll make the most of it.'

It was true that Rebecca wanted to be a writer when she grew up, and she had already won prizes in poem and essay competitions. It was also true that her new school produced a magazine each term, *The Trebizon Journal*, that was quite breathtaking to look at -- a copy had been sent to her parents with the school prospectus. Not only was it thick and glossy, like a real magazine, but it had some really good stuff in it, and all the writing and art work was done by girls at the school.

'See what it says here,' her father had said, holding up the Principal's Summer Newsletter, which had been tucked in a pocket at the back of the prospectus with a lot of other bits and pieces. He quoted from the Newsletter: 'It has long been a tradition at Trebizon that the girls who rise to the position of Editor of our own *Trebizon Journal* seem to go forward to carve out for themselves a distinguished career. We are sure that the past year's Editor, Mary Green, who has been offered a post on a famous national newspaper, will prove no exception to this rule.'

Standing in the train's corridor, it suddenly came to Rebecca where she had heard the name Exton before. Wasn't Fred Exton a well-known business tycoon, always 'taking over' small companies? Hadn't there been something about him, in the same Newsletter, in connection with the school magazine?

'Until recently, it looked as though increases in printing and paper costs would force us to publish *The Trebizon Journal* once a year in future, instead of once a term. Thanks to the generosity of a parent, Mr Fred Exton, to whom we owe a deep debt of gratitude, the magazine is

to continue on its present termly basis and a tradition that goes back fifty years thus remains unbroken.'

Rebecca remembered her father giving a chuckle.

'Freddie Exton, eh? Glad to see he's been putting his ill-gotten gains to some useful purpose.' Later, taking his daughter's hand, he had said, 'Who knows, Becky? You might become the Editor of that magazine yourself, one of these days.'

Yet none of this could make Rebecca feel enthusiastic about coming to Trebizon. As she watched the factories and housing estates of West London racing past, sombre on the grey September morning, she felt only the dull ache of homesickness.

Suddenly she heard laughter. Two girls came rushing into the corridor from the next carriage, laden with hand luggage, their blue capes flapping. They looked about Rebecca's age.

'Shove over!' said the first one, a girl with jet black curly hair, turned up nose and an enormous laughing mouth.

Rebecca shrank against the window, her back firmly turned, as first the dark girl and then her friend, who had sandy-coloured shoulder-length hair and spectacles, squeezed past her.

'Thanks!'

'Let's find a compartment, Tish,' said the sandy-haired one. 'We've shaken her off.'

'I suppose even Roberta Jones can take a hint.'

With much giggling and scuffling of feet they made their way along the corridor, peering into compartments as they went.

'I could have screamed when she walked in!,' Rebecca

heard the dark-haired girl called Tish say. 'Imagine having to listen to *her* voice all the way!'

'Look!' There was a whoop of joy. 'An empty one!'

The door of a compartment slid to and Rebecca sighed. The corridor was silent again now; just the sound of the train rushing over the rails. Seeing those two, obviously close, reminded her of another dreadful fact. She was being pitched into Trebizon in the Second Year. Everyone else would have been there a whole year; they would all be fixed up with friends, in twosomes and threesomes, like her and Claire and Amanda, the two friends she had left behind in London.

Rebecca felt weary. She must find her compartment, sit down, read a book or something – anything to take her *mind off things*. She walked down the corridor, trying to remember where she had left her hand luggage. The first three compartments were all occupied – it must have been about the fourth one along where she had left her things.

She peered into it and found herself staring directly in at the two girls who had passed her just now. They had taken over the entire compartment, sprawled out on the seats, amongst a scattering of belongings: hockey sticks, a violin case, and carrier bags that spilled out sweets, books and oranges. The black-haired girl looked up and saw her and seemed to scowl.

Her cheeks hot, Rebecca quickly turned on her heel and hurried back along the corridor the way she had come. She stood once more by the window and stared out, feeling confused. Had those two taken over her compartment? It looked like it.

'Hey!' The black-haired one had slid back the glass

door and stuck out her head, calling to Rebecca. 'Thought you were somebody else. Are you lost? There's a denim bag and a hockey stick in here, up on the rack.'

Slowly, Rebecca retraced her steps and entered the compartment. She looked up and saw her bag and then sat down in the corner by the door and took a paperback book out of the deep pocket inside her cape.

'You're new aren't you? First or Second Year?'

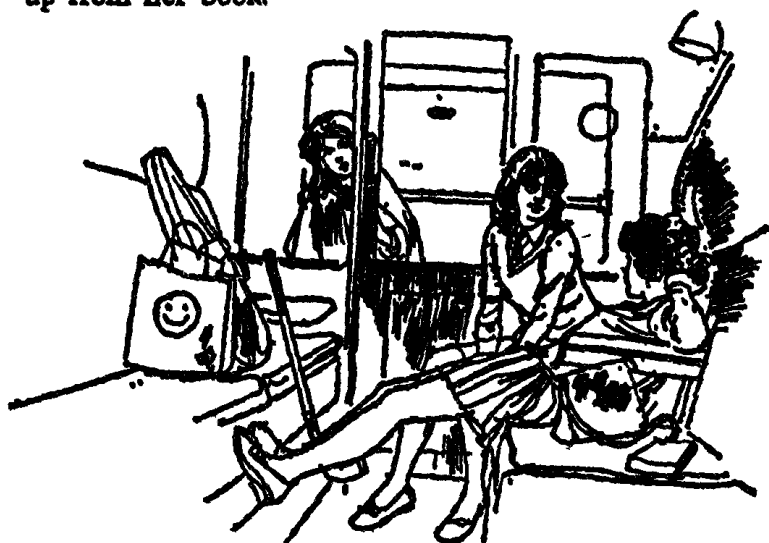
'Second.'

'Like us. You'll be in Juniper then. I'm Ishbel Anderson. Tish for short, and this is Sue Murdoch.'

'Hallo,' said Rebecca politely, then opened her book and started to read.

'Do you have a name?' The huge grin came again. 'Or did your parents forget to give you one?'

'Rebecca Mason,' she replied, without even glancing up from her book.



All About the Magazine

Rebecca read her book with cool concentration. If these two thought that they had to make conversation with a new girl, just when they had escaped from this Roberta Jones person, they could think otherwise. She could look after herself perfectly well!

After one or two curious glances in her direction, the two friends settled down soon enough to a long, low buzz of conversation that seemed, to Rebecca, all set to last for hours.

'Hallo! Rebecca Mason? I've been looking for you!'

Sliding back the door, a woman put her head into the compartment. She wore chunky jewellery and a thick blue jumper with a high neck and a light grey coat; her hair was blonde, streaked with grey, and swept back off her face and she had clear blue eyes and a friendly smile.

'For me?' asked Rebecca guiltily, looking up from her book.

'Yes, I'm Miss Morgan, your House Mistress. That means -' her nose screwed up as she laughed, 'that I'm supposed to be looking after you on the train. We've got a special carriage for new girls - which makes it sound as though they're infectious, doesn't it? - so they can begin to get to know one another before they get to Trébizon.

But you've managed to avoid us nicely!'

'I - I'm sorry,' began Rebecca. She rather liked this person. 'I did see them, but they seemed younger than me, and I thought -'

'Quite right, they are younger. All First Years. And you're going to be a Second Year, aren't you? Like Ishbel and Susan here. As a matter of fact you'll be in the same form as them, too, you're down for II Alpha. And naturally you'll be in Juniper together.'

Juniper House, by far the largest boarding house at Trebizon, was where all girls lived for their first two years there. Miss Morgan came further into the compartment, gripped the luggage rack to steady herself, and raised her voice above the noise of the swaying train as it rushed into a tunnel.

'This is very suitable. Ishbel, Susan, please look after Rebecca for the rest of the journey. Her parents are going to live in Saudi Arabia and she's never been to boarding school before. Rebecca - you'll be comfortable here, so I won't ask you to move.'

She went out into the corridor, leaving an awkward silence.

Rebecca couldn't stand it. She stood up and put her book in her pocket and felt for her money. It made her feel uneasy that Miss Morgan had told these two something about her. She would go for a walk down the train.

'Going somewhere?' asked Tish.

'Just to get a coffee in the Buffet Car,' replied Rebecca.

'D'you want us to come with you?' asked Sue.

'I know I've never been to boarding school before,' said Rebecca lightly, 'but I think I can find my way around a train.'

The Buffet Car was very nearly full. As Rebecca made her way down the central gangway, looking for an empty seat, she passed two senior Trebizon girls in navy jumpers and blue skirts, with a table to themselves. She recognised the prefect, Elizabeth Exton, and the girl called Emma. They had taken their coats off now and put them up on the rack.

They seemed settled there for the journey. The big black bag was open and up on the table. The two girls' heads were bent close together over some pictures that Elizabeth had spread out on the table. Although Elizabeth was shielding them, rather possessively, Rebecca caught a glimpse of some exquisite line drawings of birds, on artists' pasteboard, beautifully coloured in.

'Elizabeth, some of this stuff's sensational,' she heard Emma say. 'You've been really busy in the holidays.'

'I've met some super people, I can tell you.'

Rebecca found a seat, opposite an elderly gentleman, and ordered a coffee from a steward in a white coat. The coffee arrived in a white carton, with a lid, the cream in a miniature carton beside it; sugar lumps were in a bowl on the table, each lump separately wrapped.

The coffee tasted delicious. Looking out of the window, Rebecca saw rolling green fields, some houses and a church spire. They had left London behind and every minute took the high-speed train further west, towards Trebizon School and her new life.

'Elizabeth Exton must be an artist,' thought Rebecca. No wonder the prefect and her black bag appeared inseparable; it must contain all her holiday work. Was she specialising in Art perhaps, and hoping to go on to one of the big Art Colleges? The thought that she could