



ARMADA
PAPERBACKS for
Boys & Girls

FIRST TERM AT MALORY TOWERS

by
Enid Blyton



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Off to boarding school

DARRELL RIVERS looked at herself in the glass. It was almost time to start for the train, but there was just a minute to see how she looked in her new school uniform.

“It's jolly nice,” said Darrell, turning herself about. “Brown coat, brown hat, orange ribbon, and a brown tunic underneath with an orange belt. I like it.”

Her mother looked into Darrell's room, and smiled. “Admiring yourself?” she said. “Well, I like it all too. I must say Malory Towers has a lovely school uniform. Come along, Darrell. We don't want to miss the train your very first term!”

Darrell felt excited. She was going to boarding school for the first time. Malory Towers did not take children younger than twelve, so Darrell would be one of the youngest there. She looked forward to many terms of fun and friendship, work and play.

“What will it be like?” she kept wondering. “I've read lots of school stories, but I expect it won't be quite the same at Malory Towers. Every school is different. I do hope I make some friends there.”

Darrell was sad at leaving her own friends behind her. None of them was going to Malory Towers. She had been to a day-school with them, and most of them were either staying on there or going to different boarding schools.

Her trunk was packed full. On the side was painted in big black letters DARRELL RIVERS. On the labels were the letters M.T. for Malory Towers. Darrell had only to carry her tennis racket in its press, and her small bag in which her mother had packed her things for the first night.

“Your trunks won't be unpacked the first evening,” she said. “So each girl has to take a small hand-bag with her nighty and tooth-brush and things like that. Here is your ten- shilling note. You must make that last a whole term, because no girl in your form is allowed to have more pocket-money than that.”

“I shall make it do!” said Darrell, putting in into her purse. “There won't be much I have to buy at school! There's the taxi waiting, Mother. Let's go!”

She had already said good-bye to her father, who had driven off to his work that morning. He had squeezed her hard and said, “Good-bye and good luck, Darrell. You'll get a lot out of Malory Towers, because it's a fine school.

Be sure you give them a lot back!”

Now they were off at last, the trunk in the taxi too, beside the driver. Darrell put her head out to take a last look at her home. “I’ll be back soon!” she called, to the big black cat who sat on the wall, washing himself. “I’ll miss you all at first but I’ll soon settle down. Shan’t I, Mother?”

“Of course,” said her mother. “You’ll have a lovely time! You won’t want to come home for the summer holidays!”

They had to go up to London to catch the train for Cornwall, where Malory Towers was. “There’s a special train always, for Malory Towers,” said Mrs. Rivers. “Look, there’s a notice up. Malory Towers. Platform 7. Come along. We’re in nice time. I’ll stay with you a few minutes and see you safely with your house-mistress, and her girls, then I’ll go”

They went on to the platform. A long train was drawn up there, labelled Malory Towers. All the carriages were reserved for the girls of that school. The train had different labels stuck in the windows. The first lot said “North Tower.” The second lot said “South Tower.” Then came compartments labelled “West Tower” and others labelled “East Tower”.

“You’re North Tower,” said her mother. “Malory Towers has four different boarding houses for its girls, all topped by a tower. You’ll be in North Tower, the Head Mistress said, and your housemistress is Miss Potts. We must find her.”

Darrell stared about her at the girls on the crowded platform. They all seemed to be Malory girls, for she saw the brown coats and hats, with the orange ribbons, everywhere. They all seemed to know one another, and laughed and chattered at the tops of their voices. Darrell felt suddenly shy.

“I shall never know all these girls!” she thought, as she stared round. “Gracious, what big ones some of them are! They look quite grown-up. I shall be terrified of them.”

Certainly the girls in the top forms seemed very grown up to Darrell. They took no notice at all of the little ones. The younger girls made way for them, and they climbed into their carriages in a rather lordly manner.

“Hallo, Lottie! Hallo, Mary! I say, there’s Penelope! Hi, Penny, come over here. Hilda, you never wrote to me in the hols, you mean pig! Jean, come into our carriage!”

The gay voices sounded all up and down the platform. Darrell looked for her mother. Ah, there she was, talking to a keen-faced mistress. That must be

Miss Potts. Darrell stared at her. Yes, she liked her—she liked the way her eyes twinkled—but there was something very determined about her mouth. It wouldn't do to get into her bad books.

Miss Potts came over and smiled down at Darrell. “Well, new girl!” she said. “You'll be in my carriage going down— look, that one over there. The new girls always go with me.”

“Oh, are there new girls besides me—in my form, I mean?” asked Darrell.

“Oh, yes. Two more. They haven't arrived yet. Mrs. Rivers, here is a girl in Darrell's form—Alicia Johns. She will look after Darrell for you, when you've said good-bye.”

“Hallo,” said Alicia, and two bright eyes twinkled at Darrell. “I'm in your form. Do you want to get a corner-seat? If so, you'd better come now.”

“Then I'll say good-bye, dear,” said Mrs. Rivers, cheerfully, and she kissed Darrell and gave her a hug. I'll write as soon as I get your letter. Have a lovely time!”

“Yes, I will,” said Darrell, and watched her mother go down the platform. She didn't have time to feel lonely because Alicia took complete charge of her at once, pushed her to Miss Potts' carriage, and shoved her up the step. “Put your bag in one corner and I'll put mine opposite,” said Alicia. “Then we can stand at the door and see what's happening. I say—look over there. Picture of How Not to Say Good-bye to your Darling Daughter!”

Darrell looked to where Alicia nodded. She saw a girl about her own age, dressed in the same school uniform, but with her hair long and loose down her back. She was clinging to her mother and wailing.

“Now what that mother should do would be to grin, shove some chocolate at her and go!” said Alicia. “If you've got a kid like that, it's hopeless to do anything else. Poor little mother's darling!”

The mother was almost as bad as the girl! Tears were running down her face too. Miss Potts walked firmly up to them.

“Now you watch Potty,” said Alicia. Darrell felt rather shocked. Potty! What a name to give your housemistress. Anyway, Miss Potts didn't look in the least potty. She looked thoroughly all-there.

“I'll take Gwendoline,” she said to the girl's mother. “It's time she went to her carriage. She'll soon settle down there, Mrs. Lacey.”

Gwendoline appeared ready to go, but her mother clung to her still. Alicia

snorted. "See what's made Gwendoline such an idiot?" she said. "Her mother! Well, I'm glad mine is sensible. Yours looked jolly nice too—cheerful and jolly."

Darrell was pleased at this praise of her mother. She watched Miss Potts firmly disentangle Gwendoline from her mother and lead her towards them.

"Alicia! Here's another one," she said, and Alicia pulled Gwendoline up into the carriage.

Gwendoline's mother came to the carriage too and looked in. "Take a corner-seat, darling," she said. "And don't sit with your back to the engine. You know how sick it makes you. And..."

Another girl came up to the carriage, a small, sturdy girl, with a plain face and hair tightly plaited back. "Is this Miss Potts' carriage?" she asked.

"Yes," said Alicia. "Are you the third new girl? North Tower?"

"Yes. I'm Sally Hope," said the girl.

"Where's your mother?" asked Alicia. "She ought to go and deliver you to Miss Potts first, so that you can be crossed off her list."

"Oh, Mother didn't bother to come up with me," said Sally. "I came by myself."

"Gracious!" said Alicia. "Well, mothers are all different. Some come along and smile and say good-bye, and some come along and weep and wail—and some just don't come at all."

"Alicia—don't talk so much," came Miss Potts' voice. She knew Alicia's wild tongue. Mrs. Lacey suddenly looked annoyed, and forgot to give any more instructions to Gwendoline. She stared at Alicia angrily. Fortunately the guard blew his whistle just then and there was a wild scramble for seats.

Miss Potts jumped in with two or three more girls. The door slammed. Gwendoline's mother peered in, but alas,

Gwendoline was on the floor, hunting for something she had dropped.

"Where's Gwendoline!" came Mrs. Lacy's voice, "I must say good-bye. Where's..."

But the train was now puffing out. Gwendoline sat up and howled.

"I didn't say good-bye!" she wailed.

"Well, how many times did you want to?" demanded Alicia. "You'd already said it about twenty times."

Miss Potts looked at Gwendoline. She had already sized her up and knew her to be a spoilt, only child, selfish, and difficult to handle at first.

She looked at quiet little Sally Hope. Funny little girl, with her tight plaits and prim, closed-up face. No mother had come to see her off. Did Sally care? Miss Potts couldn't tell.

Then she looked at Darrell. It was quite easy to read Darrell. She never hid anything, and she said what she thought, though not so bluntly as Alicia did.

“A nice, straightforward, trustable girl,” thought Miss Potts. “Can be a bit of a monkey, I should think. She looks as if she had good brains. I'll see that she uses them! I can do with a girl like Darrell in North Tower!”

The girls began to talk. “What's Malory Towers like?” asked Darrell. “I've seen a photograph of it, of course. It looked awfully big.”

“It is. It's got the most gorgeous view over the sea, too,” said Alicia. “It's built on the cliff, you know. It's lucky you're in North Tower—that's got the best view of all!”

“Does each Tower have its own schoolrooms?” asked Darrell. Alicia shook her head.

“Oh, no! All the girls from each of the four Tower houses go to the same classrooms. There are about sixty girls in each house. Pamela is head of ours. There she is over there!”

Pamela was a tall, quiet girl, who had got into the carriage with another girl about her own age. They seemed very friendly with Miss Potts, and were eagerly discussing with her the happenings planned for the term.

Alicia, another girl called Tessie, Sally and Darrell chattered too. Gwendoline sat in her corner and looked gloomy. Nobody paid her any attention at all, and she wasn't used to that!

She gave a little sob, and looked at the others out of the corner of her eye. Sharp Alicia saw the look and grinned. “Just putting it on!” she whispered to Darrell. “People who really do feel miserable always turn away and hide it somehow. Don't take any notice of our darling Gwendoline.”

Poor Gwendoline! If she had only known it, Alicia's lack of sympathy was the best thing for her. She had always had far too much of it, and life at Malory Towers was not going to be easy for her.

“Cheer up, Gwendoline,” said Miss Potts, in a cheerful tone, and immediately turned to talk to the big girls again.

“I feel sick,” announced Gwendoline at last, quite determined to be in the limelight and get sympathy somehow.