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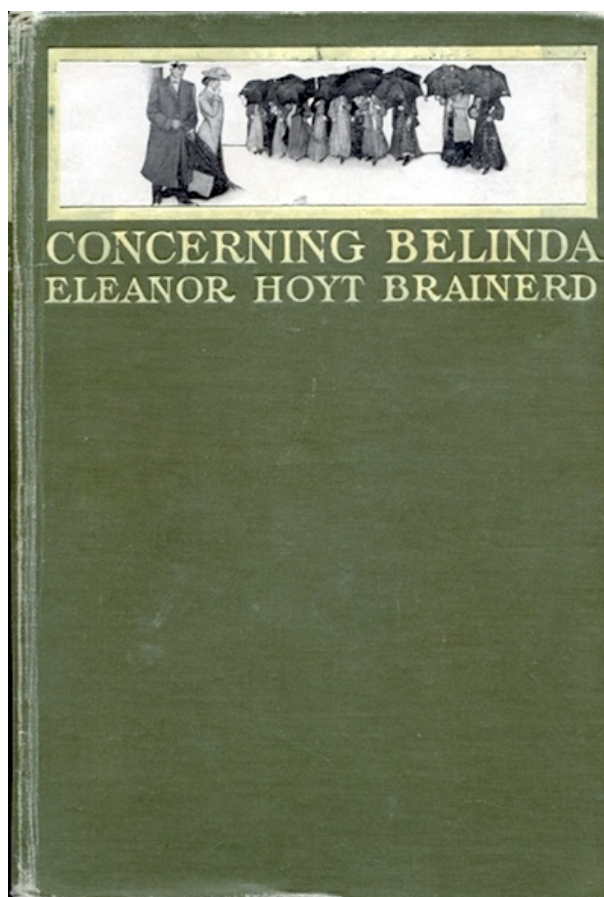
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CONCERNING BELINDA

BOOKS BY

ELEANOR HOYT BRAINERD

"CONCERNING BELINDA"

"NANCY'S COUNTRY CHRISTMAS AND OTHER STORIES"

"THE MISDEMEANORS OF NANCY"



**"A gay, dimpling girl and a stalwart,
handsome man were whirling down Fifth
Avenue"**

**CONCERNING
BELINDA**

BY

ELEANOR HOYT BRAINERD

ILLUSTRATED BY
HARRISON FISHER
AND
KATHARINE N. RICHARDSON



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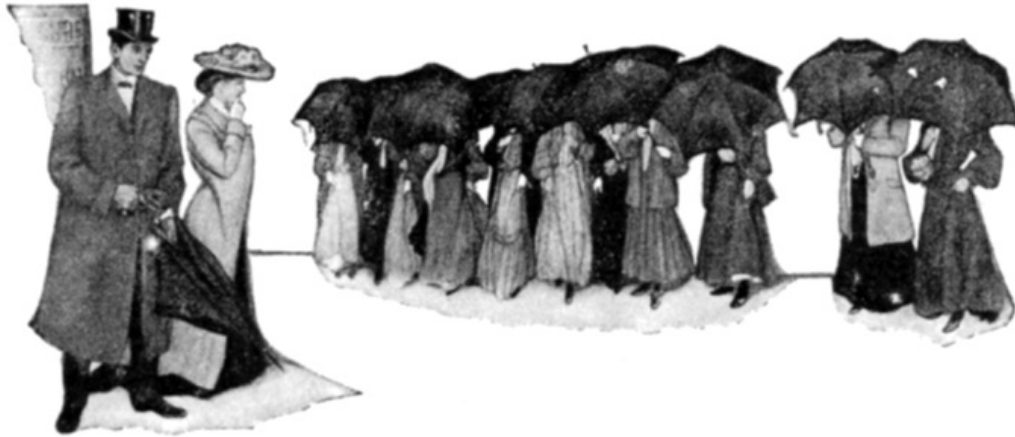
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AN APOLOGY

To all principals of New York boarding-schools, the author of these sketches offers humble apologies for having approached those excellent institutions chiefly from their humorous side.

That the city boarding-school has its earnest and serious phases, its charming and sensible pupils, no rational mortal could deny; but each finishing school has, also, its Amelias, and their youthful absurdities offer tempting material to the writer of tales.



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Concerning Belinda

CHAPTER I

BELINDA AND THE TWELVE

FOR years New York had been beckoning to Belinda. All during her time at the western co-educational college, where she collected an assortment of somewhat blurred impressions concerning Greek roots, Latin depravity, and modern literature, and assisted liberally in the education of her masculine fellow-students, New York, with its opportunities for work and experience, had lured her on. Fortune she would not need. Daddy had attended to that in his will, but success, and a knowledge of the world outside of Indiana, she must have.

This fixed purpose rendered her immune from the sentimental and matrimonial epidemics that devastate the Junior and Senior ranks in co-educational institutions. She graduated with honours—and with scalps. Many Seniors went away sorrowful because of her, the French professor lapsed into hopeless Gallic gloom, and even the professor of ancient history was forced into painful recognition of the importance of the moderns.

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When the fortune which had seemed a premise in life's logic shrunk to proportions barely adequate to support the mother and the younger children, and became for Belinda herself a vague hypothesis, New York still hung mystic and alluring upon the horizon; but a public-school position in the home town offered solid ground upon which to stand, while yearning toward the apparently unattainable star. The public-school career was a success. The English classes attained unheard-of popularity; and, if the number of fights between the big boys swelled amazingly, at least the frays did not, as a rule, occur upon the school grounds, and the casualties were no more dire than those contingent upon football glory. Belinda shone for all. She allowed great and small to adore her. To her pupils she was just but merciful, and stoically impartial. The school superintendent, who had weathered the first throes of widowhood, and reached the stage where he loved sitting upon a veranda in the twilight and hearing nocturnes played by some feminine personality in the parlour, suffered much emotional stress and strain in the endeavour to decide whether he would rather have nocturnes and a parlour-chained Belinda or a Belinda beside him in the twilight and no nocturnes.

Chopin eventually went to the wall; but, just as the superintendent was developing a taste for major harmonies once more, the unexpected happened.

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Miss Lucilla Ryder came to town.

Miss Ryder was one of the Misses Ryder. Apart from the other Miss Ryder was incomplete, but she more nearly approximated completion than did Miss Emmeline Ryder under the same conditions.

Together, the elderly maiden sisters made up a composite entity of considerable force; and for something like thirty years this entity had been the mainspring of a flourishing Select School for

Young Ladies, located upon a fashionable side street in the most aristocratic district of New York. To the school of the Misses Ryder youthful daughters of New York's first families might be entrusted, with no fear that their expensive and heaven-allotted bloom would be rubbed off by contact with the offspring of second-rate families. As Miss Lucilla Ryder explained, in an effort to soothe the natural fears of a society leader whose great-grandfather had been a most reputable farmer, the young ladies of the school were divided into groups, and the flowers of New York's aristocracy would find in their especial classes only those young ladies with whom they might reasonably expect to be intimate after their school life ended and their social career began.

Miss Ryder did not mention this interesting fact to the fond parents from Idaho and Texas who contemplated placing their daughters in the school, in order that they might acquire a New York lacquer, and make acquaintances among the social elect. In fact, Miss Ryder always dangled before the eyes of these ambitious parents a group of names suggesting a list of guests for the most exclusive of Newport functions, and dwelt eloquently upon the privilege of breathing the air which furnished oxygen to members of these exalted families. Nine times out of ten, mere repetition of the sacred names hypnotised the prospective patrons, and they gladly offered up their daughters upon the altar of social advancement.

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An explanation of the class-system would have marred the optimistic hopes of these fond parents, and the Misses Ryder were too altruistic to disturb the happiness of fellow mortals. Moreover, it was a comparatively simple thing to separate day-scholars from boarders without appearing to make a point of it.

In the handling of such delicate matters, the Misses Ryder displayed a tact and a *finesse* which would have made them ornaments to any diplomatic corps; and, fortunately, the number of the young ladies who were, of necessity, to be kept in cotton wool was small. The great bulk of the school's attendance was more or less genially democratic.

School keeping in an aristocratic section of New York is an expensive matter. It must be done upon a large and daring scale. The Misses Ryder occupied two brownstone houses. The rents were enormous. The houses were handsomely furnished. Teachers of ability were a necessity, and such teachers were expensive. A capable housekeeper and efficient servants were required to make domestic affairs run smoothly. In consideration of all this, it was imperative that the Misses Ryder should gather in, each year, enough boarders to exhaust the room capacity of the two big houses, and that these boarders should be able and willing to pay high prices. In order to insure this condition of things, one of the two principals always made summer pilgrimages to remote places, where wealthy families possessed of daughters hungering for New York advantages might reasonably be supposed to exist; and it was in the course of one of these promoting tours that Miss Lucilla Ryder came to Lanleyville—drawn there by knowledge of certain large milling interests in the place.

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It was—with apologies to Tennyson—"the miller's daughter" who was "dear, so dear," to Miss Lucilla, but an unkind fate had decreed that the miller's daughter should show a pernicious desire for college education, and that the miller himself should be as wax in his daughter's hands. Miss Lucilla did not find pupils in Lanleyville, but she found Belinda. That alone should have repaid her for the trip.

The meeting was accidental, being brought about through the aforesaid miller's daughter, who had been, for a High-School period, one of Belinda's adoring slaves.

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The Misses Ryder needed a teacher of English; Belinda dreamed of New York. To make a long story short, Belinda was engaged to teach to the Ryder pupils such sections and fragments of the English branches as might be introduced into their heads without resort to surgery. The salary offered was meagre, but the work would be in New York; so the contract was made, and Belinda was inclined to look upon Miss Lucilla as angel of light. Miss Lucilla's opinion of the arrangement was summed up briefly in her next letter to Miss Emmeline.

"I have secured a teacher of English," she wrote. "The young person is much too pretty and girlish, but she is willing to accept a very small salary and is unmistakably a gentlewoman. Her attractions will give her an influence which we may be able to utilize for the benefit of the school."

Two months later Belinda sat upon her trunk in a New York hall bedroom and considered.

The room was the smallest in the Misses Ryder's Select School for Young Ladies, and before the introduction of the trunk it had been necessary to evict the one chair which had been a part of the room's furnishing. The bed was turned up against the wall, where it masqueraded, behind denim curtains, as a bookcase. When the bed came down there was no standing room outside of it, and, as Belinda discovered later, getting into that bed without casualties was a feat calling for fine strategy. A chiffonier retired as coyly as possible into the embrace of a recessed doorway; a washstand of Lilliputian dimensions occupied an infinitesimal fraction of a corner.

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The newly arrived instructor of youth studied her domain ruefully from her vantage point on the trunk; and it might have been observed, had there been any one on hand to observe it, that the study was interrupted by occasional attacks of violent winking, also that much winking seemed to impart a certain odd moisture to the singularly long lashes which shielded a pair of rather remarkable gray eyes.

As she winked, the young woman of the gray eyes kicked her heels against the side of the trunk in a fashion that was distinctly undignified, but appeared to be comforting. There was a note of defiance in the heel tattoo, an echo of defiance in the heroic attempt at stubbornness to be

noted in a deliciously rounded chin, and a mouth which a beneficent Providence never mapped out upon stubborn lines, but the eyelashes gleamed moistly.

If, as has been claimed by worthy persons who have made physiognomy their study, the eyes reflect one's native spirit, and the mouth proclaims one's acquired character, Belinda's spiritual and emotional heritage was in tears, but her mental habit challenged fate to hurl hall bedrooms *ad libitum* at her curly head. She had wanted to come to New York. Well, she was in New York. The immortal Touchstone loomed up before her with his disgruntled protest: "Now am I in Arden. When I was at home I was in a better place." Belinda quoted the comment softly. Then suddenly she stopped winking and smiled. The chin and mouth incontinently abandoned their stubborn rôle, and showed what they could do in the line of curves and witchery. Dimples dashed boldly into the open.

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Belinda looked up at the large steel engraving of the Pyramids, which filled most of the room's available wall space, and the smile expanded into a laugh. When Belinda laughs, even a city hall bedroom is a cheerful place.

"*J'y suis; j'y reste*," the young woman announced cheerfully to the largest Pyramid. It looked stolidly benignant. The sentiment was one it could readily understand.

There came a tap upon the closed door.

"Come in," called Belinda. The door opened, and a tall young woman dispassionately surveyed the scene.

"It's a mathematical impossibility," she said gravely, "and that's expert testimony, for I'm Miss Barnes, the teacher of Mathematics. Don't apologize. I had this room myself the first year, and I got so used to it that when I moved to one that is six inches larger each way, I positively rattled around in it. Miss Ryder sent me to ask you to go to her sitting-room. I'll come and call as soon as you've unpacked and settled."

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She went away, and Belinda, after dabbing a powderpuff recklessly over her eyelids and nose, hurried to the private sitting-room, which was the Principal's sanctum.

Miss Lucilla, slim, erect, well gowned, superior, sat at a handsome desk between the front windows. Miss Emmeline, a delightful wash drawing of her strongly etched sister, was talking with two twittering girls at the opposite end of the room. Miss Emmeline was always detailed to the sympathetic task. Her slightly vague gentleness was less disconcerting to sentimental or homesick pupils than Miss Lucilla's somewhat glacial dignity.

Belinda hesitated upon the threshold. Miss Emmeline bestowed upon her a detached and impersonal smile. Miss Lucilla summoned her with an autocratic move of a slender hand, a gesture so imperious that it was with difficulty the new teacher refrained from an abject salaam.

"Miss Carewe," said the smooth, cool voice, "some of the young ladies want to go to the theatre to-night. School does not begin until to-morrow; there are no duties to occupy their time and attention, and we are, of course, liable to an epidemic of homesickness and hysteria. Under the circumstances the theatre idea is a good one. It will distract their minds. I have selected a suitable play, and you will chaperon. The teachers who have been here before will be needed to assist me with certain preliminary arrangements to-night. Moreover, you seem to be cheerful, and at present the young ladies need to be inoculated with cheerfulness. Be very careful, however, to be dignified first and cheerful afterward. Remember, however young you may look or feel, you are a teacher with responsibility upon your shoulders. You must make the pupils understand that you cannot be overrun, even though you are young. Unless you take a very wise stand from the first your position will be difficult and you will be of no value to us. Be reasonable but uncompromising."

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Belinda had been listening attentively. Already she began to hear the whirring of wheels within wheels in this work of hers, began to understand that in city private-school life "face" must be preserved as religiously as in Chinese ceremonial circles; but she recognised in Miss Lucilla a woman who understood her problem, and she found this middle-aged spinster, with the keen eyes, the Roman nose, the firm lips, and the grande-dame manner, interesting.

"How many girls will go?" she asked meekly.

"Twelve."

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Belinda gasped. Twelve strange, homesick girls! She wondered if they would all be as big as the two with Miss Emmeline.

"The theatre is the Garrick. You will start at five minutes of eight."

Miss Lucilla turned to her desk. The interview was finished. No one ever lingered after Miss Lucilla had said her say.

Belinda went back to her room. On the way she met Miss Barnes.

"Where is the Garrick Theatre?" she inquired.

The teacher of mathematics stopped and looked at her.

"Thirty-fifth Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. Walk over and take the stage or the Sixth Avenue car. Make the girls walk in twos and the couples close together. Walk behind them. Watch them. They'll stand it. Don't let them laugh or talk loud or giggle like idiots. I suppose you may as

well get broken in first as last."

The voice and manner were brusque, but the eyes had a kindly gleam, and Belinda was devoutly thankful for the information so curtly given.

"Do they ever cry in the street cars?" she asked with an air of grim foreboding.

Miss Barnes's eyes relented still further.

"No, but they flirt in the street cars."

"Not really." Belinda's tone expressed incredulous disgust.

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"Really. By the time you've chaperoned miscellaneous specimens of the up-to-date young person for a few months, Miss Carewe, you'll not be surprised at any breach of good taste. The girls carry on handkerchief flirtations with strangers from the windows."

"Girls from respectable families?"

"Girls from excellent families. Of course, there are numbers of well-bred girls who behave correctly; and there's nothing actually bad about the ones who behave badly. They are merely lacking in good taste and overcharged with animal spirits or sentimentality. I'm always surprised that they don't get into all sorts of disgraceful scrapes, but they seldom do. We have to be eternally vigilant, though."

"But handkerchief flirtation is so unspeakably common," said Belinda emphatically—then, with a twinkle, "and such a desecration of a really fine art."

Miss Barnes shook her head.

"The Misses Ryder haven't any sense of humour," she warned; "you'd better let your conversation be yea, yea, and nay, nay"—but she smiled.

At five minutes to eight the Youngest Teacher stood in the lower hall, surrounded by schoolgirls of assorted sizes and shapes, and prayerfully hoping that she didn't look as foolish as she felt.

One of the older teachers, commissioned by Miss Ryder, had come down to see the expedition fairly started. She was a plump, sleek woman with an automatic smile and a pneumatic manner.

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"You will all give your car fares to Miss Carewe, young ladies," she purred. "You have your rubbers? That's right. The pavements are damp. Miss Bowers and Miss Somerville, you may lead. Fall in closely, in couples, and be very careful not under any circumstances to become separated from the chaperon. She will report any annoyance you may cause her. I hope you will have a delightful evening."

The door closed upon her unnatural amiability. Six couples swung into the street, with Belinda at their heels. Out of the grim, inclosing walls, with the cool, moist air in their faces, the lights reflected gayly in the glistening pavements, the cabs and carriages dashing by, the mystery and fascination of a great city clinging around them, and a matinée idol beckoning them, the girls began to find life more cheerful. Even fat, babyish little Kittie Dayton, whose face was swollen and blotted almost beyond human semblance by six hours of intermittent weeping, stopped blowing her nose long enough to squeal delightedly:

"Oh-e-e! The man kissed the lady in that cab."

It was with difficulty that Belinda stopped a stampede in the direction of the hansom. This was seeing New York. The melancholy atmosphere of the school was forgotten.

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They giggled in the car. It worried Belinda. Later she learned to bow to the inevitable. The young man who gave Amelia Bowers his seat was sociably inclined; but, on the whole, Amelia behaved very well, though she admitted, later, that she thought he had "most romantic eyes, and a perfectly elegant waistcoat."

Belinda squirmed on the car. Arrived at the theatre she squirmed still more. The lobby was well filled. It was almost time for the curtain. She hated leading her line down the middle aisle to the fourth row; she hated the smiles and comment that followed them; she loathed being made conspicuous—and her sentiments were not modified, as she followed the last of the girls through the door, by hearing the manager say jocularly to the doorkeeper:

"My eye! and who's chaperoning the pretty chaperon?"

There was a balk, a tangle, when the fourth row was reached. The acquaintances between most of the girls dated from the morning of that day, but already each of the group had strong convictions in regard to the girls beside whom she chose to sit, and hours of discussion and debate could not have solved the problem to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Belinda firmly hustled the protestants into the seats without regard to prejudices, and sat down in the end chair exhausted and rebellious. She detested the Young Person, individually and collectively. She resented being bear leader. She thought longingly of the Lanleyville High School and the home friends, and the fact that New York seethed round the theatre in which she sat afforded her no consolation. She was profoundly indifferent to the popular actor before whom her charges became as dumb, adoring worshippers. In a little while she would have to lead her flock of geese home, and she wished she dared lose them and run away. She felt a sudden sympathy for

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Kittie Dayton, whose pudgy, swollen face, though now radiant, looked like an unfinished biscuit. Belinda, too, was homesick—deeply, darkly, dismally homesick. Even her sense of humour was swamped. June and the end of her contract loomed but vaguely beyond a foggy waste of months.

"Isn't he just too perfectly sweet, Miss Carewe?" gurgled Amelia Bowers in her ear.

Belinda was non-committal.

"Did you ever meet him on the street?"

Belinda had never had that rapture.

"Well, one might, you know," said Amelia hopefully. "Alice Ransom plumped right into Faversham, one day, when she was in New York, and he took off his hat to her and said, 'Beg pardon.' She said she felt perfectly faint. His voice sounded just like it does on the stage, and he had the most fascinating eyes and the sweetest bulldog. Alice said it seemed like Fate, running right into him that way, the first time she went out alone. She walked down Fifth Avenue at that same time every day for a week, but she never met him again."

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The star and his leading lady fell into each other's arms for the final curtain and later were brought out to bow their amiable acknowledgements, with results disastrous to the seams of Amelia's white gloves.

The crowd rustled to its feet, preened itself, and took lagging flight toward the street. Belinda marshalled her flock and joined the exodus. She would be glad to reach the hall bedroom and shut its door upon a world that was too much with her. She coveted the stolid, tranquil society of the Pyramids. They would watch her cry with the same impenetrable indifference with which they would watch her laugh, but presumably the Garrick Theatre crowd would be impressed if she should burst into floods of tears.

Drearly she followed the six couples of chattering girls who dropped adjectives and exclamations as they went, and who were quite unable to keep in line, according to the prescribed formula, in the midst of the jostling, hurrying crowd; but Belinda was little concerned by that. As a matter of fact, her thoughts were self-centred. This was her first view of a New York crowd, but she received no impression save that men and women alike looked tired and dissatisfied, though surely they were not all elected to spend the next nine months in a boarding-school.

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The middle aisle emptied her into the lobby; and as she stood there, vaguely conscious that something was incumbent upon her, her wandering glance fell upon a young man across the lobby. Belinda gasped, flushed. The young man's eyes met hers from where he was wedged against the wall. His face, too, lighted into incredulous joy. It was a good-looking face, a gay, boyish face, but browned to a hue that contrasted oddly with the city-bleached skins around him. Perhaps that was why he had attracted attention, and why several heads turned to discover the cause of the sudden illumination. When the owners of the heads saw Belinda they understood and smiled benignantly. All the world loves a lover.

Belinda was utterly unconscious of the glances, unconscious of anything save that the gods were good.

Here was Jack—Jack, of all men, dropped into the midst of her gloom. Hilarious memories and cheerful anticipations swarmed into her mind. Jack stood for home, old days, old larks, old irresponsibility. New York disappeared from the map. The Select School for Young Ladies ceased to exist. The young ladies themselves were blotted out.

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Beaming, dimpling, Belinda squeezed a way across the outgoing current. Grinning, radiant, Jack Wendell forced an opening for his square shoulders.

They met in the whirlpool, and he cleverly hauled her into a high and dry corner.

"Belinda!"

"Jack!"

Everyone near them smiled sympathetically. Belinda's enthusiasm is often misleading, and on this occasion she was unreservedly enthusiastic.

"Is the Massachusetts in?"

"Docked yesterday."

"And you are going to stay?"

"Several weeks—and you?"

"All winter."

Belinda's delight approached effervescence. Jack's face was a luminous harvest moon. Both were oblivious to the fact that he was still holding her hand.

They talked breathlessly in laughter-punctuated gusts. They went back to the beginning of things and rapidly worked down past the Deluge which separated them, and the subsequent wanderings. They brought their life histories almost up to date, and then, suddenly, Miss Lucilla Ryder entered Belinda's tale.

"Miss Lucilla Ryder!"

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As she spoke the name she underwent a sudden transformation. Her smiles and dimples vanished, her face lengthened miraculously, her eyes stared fixedly at some awesome vision.

Lieutenant Wendell cast an alarmed look over his shoulder. The glance encountered a blank wall and returned to Belinda's face.

"For Heaven's sake, what is it?" he asked.

"The girls!" said Belinda in a whisper.

Once more the Lieutenant looked over his shoulder.

"Where?" he inquired, eyeing her anxiously.

"I—don't—know," faltered Belinda.

"Good Heavens, Belinda," protested the Lieutenant. "Wake up. What's the matter? Are you ill?"

Her look and manner distressed him. This was some sort of an attack, and he didn't understand. He didn't know what ought to be done.

Belinda had clutched his coat sleeve. He patted her hand encouragingly.

"There, there, never mind," he murmured soothingly.

Never mind, indeed! Belinda waxed tremblingly wroth.

"I'm in a cold sweat. They've gone home alone. Oh, Jack, what shall I do? I don't dare to meet Miss Ryder. She'll send me away to-morrow. It's awful!"

Still holding him by the coat sleeve, she was pulling him toward the door. The lobby was almost empty. The few stragglers were eyeing the tableau curiously. [Pg 22]

Masculine common-sense asserted itself. The Lieutenant drew Belinda's hand through his arm and stopped her under the glare of the electric light.

"Don't be an idiot," he said brusquely. "Who is Miss Ryder? Who are the girls?"

The bullying stirred the young woman to intelligence.

"She's principal of the school. I'm teaching there. I brought twelve pupils to the theatre."

Amazement, comprehension, sympathy chased each other across the man's face and were swallowed by wild mirth, but Belinda's eyes filled with tears, and his mirth evaporated.

"Never mind. Buck up, little girl. We'll fix it some way. We'll get a cab. We'll kill a horse. We'll get there before they can. Maybe they won't tell."

"Oh, yes, they will. If they were only boys—but girls will." Still Belinda revived slightly under the suggestion.

"Come on. We must hustle."

He hurried her to the door. Alert, energetic, self-confident, he had taken command of affairs. Belinda's spirits soared. After all, she reflected, there's something about a man. He has his moments.

It was raining. The crowd had scattered, the carriages had gone. As Lieutenant Wendell raised an umbrella and looked sharply around for a cab Belinda's eyes caught sight of a row of dripping umbrellas ranged along the curb. Below the umbrellas were carefully lifted petticoats. She counted the umbrellas. There were twelve. [Pg 23]

"Jack, look!"

He looked. Belinda darted forward.

The umbrellas were lifted and disclosed twelve girlish faces. On each face was a wide-spreading, comprehending, maddening grin, but not a girl spoke.

Belinda's cheeks were crimson, but she pulled herself together heroically.

"Good night, Mr. Wendell. Come, girls."

They dropped into line, still grinning.

Jack stepped to Belinda's side for a moment.

"Cheer up. They look like a good sort—but if there is any trouble let me know," he said softly.

The teacher and her charges made their way silently toward the car. No one mentioned the lieutenant, and Belinda volunteered no explanation or excuse. She would keep at least a shred of dignity.

Arrived at the school Belinda saw the girls deposited in their respective rooms, then she pulled down her folding bed, crept into it, and cried into her pillow. If the girls should tell—and they would—and even if they didn't, how could she ever have any authority over them? [Pg 24]

"Be very careful not under any circumstances to become separated from the chaperon." Miss

Spogg's soft voice purred it into her ear.

"Remember, however young you may look or feel, you are a teacher with responsibility upon your shoulders. Unless you take a very wise stand from the first you will be of no value to us." Miss Lucilla's voice now smote the ears of memory.

If the girls should tell——

"I've changed my mind about girls," Belinda announced to Lieutenant Wendell, on her free evening, a week later. "They are much nicer than boys, and quite as generous."

CHAPTER II

THE MUSICAL ROMANCE OF AMELIA

A SUBTLE thrill was disturbing the atmosphere of high-bred serenity which the Misses Ryder, with a strenuousness far afield from serenity, fostered in their Select School for Young Ladies.

As a matter of fact, this aristocratic calm existed only in the intent and the imaginations of the lady principals, and in the convictions of parents credulous concerning school prospectuses. With fifty girls of assorted sizes and temperaments collected under one roof agitation of one sort or another is fairly well assured.

Miss Ryder's teachers were by no means blind to the excitement pervading the school, but its cause was wrapped in mystery. Amelia Bowers seemed to be occupying the centre of the stage and claiming the calcium light as her due, while Amelia's own particular clique gathered in knots in all the corners, and went about brimming over with some portentous secret which they imparted to the other girls with a generosity approaching lavishness.

It was after running into a crowd of arch conspirators in the music-room alcove and producing a solemn hush that Miss Barnes sought the Youngest Teacher and labored with her.

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"Belinda," she began in her usual brusque fashion, "what's the matter with the girls?"

"Youth," replied the Youngest Teacher laconically.

She was trimming a hat, and when Belinda trims a hat it is hard to divert her serious attention to less vital issues.

"Have you noticed that something is going on, and that Amelia Bowers is at the bottom of it?"

Belinda looked up from her millinery for one fleeting instant of scorn. "Have I noticed it? Am I stone blind?"

Miss Barnes ignored the sarcasm.

"But what are they doing? The light-headed set is crazy over something, and I suppose there's a man in it. They wouldn't be so excited unless there were. Now, who is he? What is he? Where is he?"

"Search me," replied the Youngest Teacher with a flippancy lamentable in an instructor of youth.

"I suppose Amelia is making a fool of herself in some way. Sentimentality oozes out of that girl's pores."

"And yet I'm fond of Amelia," protested Belinda.

Amelia was one of the twelve who had witnessed the Youngest Teacher's first disastrous experiment in chaperoning and had remained loyally mute.

Miss Barnes shook her head.

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"My dear, I can stand sharp angles, but I detest a human feather pillow. Push Amelia in at one spot and she bulges out at another. It's impossible to make a clean-cut and permanent impression upon that girl."

The teacher of mathematics always stated her opinions with a frankness not conducive to popularity.

Belinda laughed.

"It ought to be easy for you to find out what the girls are giggling and whispering about," continued Miss Barnes. "They are so foolish over you."

"I hate a sneak."

"But, Belinda——"

"Yes, I know—the good of the school and all that. I've every intention of earning my salary and being loyal to Miss Ryder. I'll keep my eyes open and try to find out why the girls are whispering and hugging each other; but if you think I'm going to get one of the silly things into my room, and because she's fond of me hypnotise her into a confidence, and then use it to bring punishment down on her and her chums—I'm not!"

"But what do you suppose is the trouble?" asked the Elder Teacher.

"I don't believe there is any trouble. Probably Amelia's engaged again. If she is it's the sixth time."

"That wouldn't stir up the other girls."

"Wouldn't it? My dear, you may know cube roots, but you don't know schoolgirls. An absolutely fresh engagement is enough to make a flock of girls twitter for weeks. If there are smuggled love letters it's convulsing, and if there's parental disapproval and 'persecution' the thing assumes dramatic quality. Probably all the third-floor girls gather in Amelia's room after lights are out, and she tells them what he said, and what she said, and what papa would probably say, and they plan elopements and schemes for foiling stern teachers and parents. Amelia won't elope, though. She won't have time before her next engagement."

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A bell rang sharply below stairs. Miss Barnes sprang to her feet.

"There's the evening study bell. I must go. I'm in charge to-night. But they do elope sometimes. This school business isn't all farce. Do watch Amelia, Belinda."

Belinda had finished the hat and was trying it on before the glass with evident and natural satisfaction.

"My respect for Amelia would soar if she should attempt an elopement, but even the sea-serpent couldn't elope with a jellyfish. Amelia's young man may be a charmer, but he couldn't budge Amelia beyond hysterics."

In the history of the school there had been an experiment with silent study in the individual rooms; but an impartial distribution of fudge over the bedroom carpets, gas fixtures and furniture, an epidemic of indigestion, and a falling off in class standing had effected a return to less confiding and more effectual methods of insuring quiet study.

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As Miss Barnes entered the study-room, after her talk with Belinda, a group of agitated backs surrounding Amelia Bowers dispersed guiltily, and the girls took their seats with the italicized demureness of cats who have been at the cream. Amelia herself radiated modest self-esteem. She was IT; she was up to her eyebrows in romance! What better thing had life to offer her?

The teacher in charge looked at her sharply.

"Miss Bowers, if you will transfer your attention from the wall paper to your French verbs you will stand a better chance of giving a respectable recitation to-morrow."

Amelia's dreamy blue eyes wandered from the intricate design on the wall to the pages of her book, but they were still melting with sentiment, and her pink and white face still held its pensive, rapt expression.

"*J'aime, tu aimes, il aime*," she read. "*Il aime!*"—she was off in another trance.

Miss Barnes would have builded better had she recommended algebraic equations instead of French verbs.

Following the study hour came an hour of recreation before the retiring bell rang. Usually the girls inclined to music and dancing in the parlours, but now the tide set heavily upstairs toward Amelia's room, which was at the back, and was the most coveted room in the house because the most discreetly removed from teachers' surveillance.

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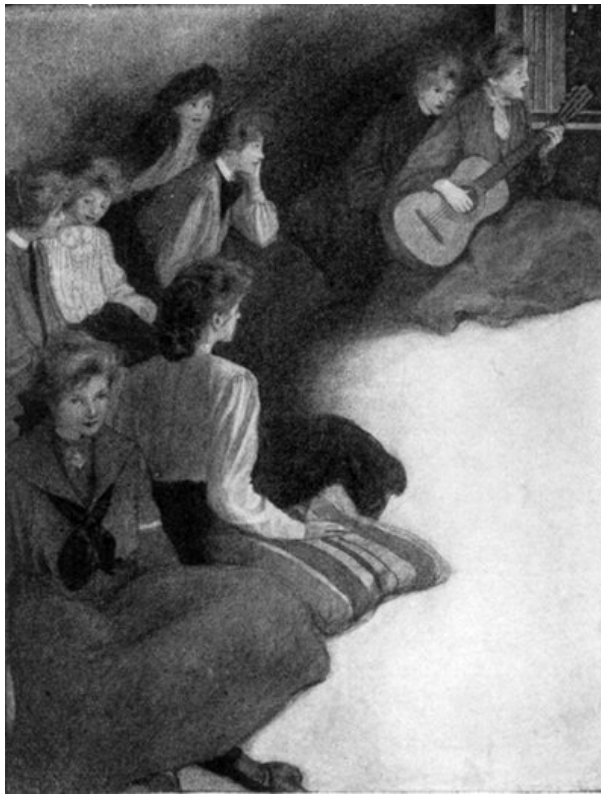
When Miss Barnes passed the door later she heard the twang of a guitar and Amelia's reedy voice raised in song. The teacher smiled. Harmless enough, certainly. Probably she had been over-earnest and suspicious.

Meanwhile, behind the closed door the girls of Amelia's set were showing a strange and abnormal interest in her music—an interest hardly justified by the quality of the performance. The lights in the room were turned down as low as possible. Amelia and her roommate, Laura May Lee, were crouched on the floor close by the open window, beyond which the lights of the houses around the square twinkled in the clear dark of the October night.

Huddled close to the two owners of the room on the floor were six other girls, all big-eyed, expectant, athrill with interest and excitement.

Amelia touched her guitar with a white, if somewhat pudgy, hand, and sang a few lines of a popular love song. Then suddenly she stopped and leaned forward, her elbows on the windowsill, her lips apart, her plump figure actually intense. The other girls edged closer to the window and listened with bated breath. A moment's hush—then, out of the night, came an echo of Amelia's guitar, and a tenor voice took up the song where she had left it.

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**"Amelia touched her guitar with a white,
pudgy hand"**

A sigh of satisfaction went up from the group by the window, and Amelia laid one fat hand upon what she fondly believed to be the location of her heart. The stage business was appropriate, but the star's knowledge of anatomy was limited, and the gesture indicated acute indigestion.

The other girls, however, were properly impressed.

"It's him," murmured the fair one rapturously, as reckless of grammar as of anatomical precision. "Oh, girls, isn't it just too sweet; what a lot of feeling he puts into it!"

"The way he sings 'My Love, My Own,' is simply elegant," gasped Laura May. "I shouldn't wonder a bit if he's a foreigner. They're so much more romantic over there. An Italian's just as likely as not to fall in love this way and go perfectly crazy over it."

"Maybe he's a prince," Kittie Dayton suggested. "The folks on this block go round with princes and counts and earls and things all the time. Like as not he's visiting somebody, and——"

"If he were an Italian prince he wouldn't sing such good English," put in Serena Adams. Serena hailed from Massachusetts and hadn't the fervid exotic imagination characteristic of the daughters of the South.

"Well, earls are English."

"Earls don't sing."

"Why don't they?"

Serena tried in vain to imagine the English earl of her fiction reading warbling love songs out of a back window to an unknown charmer, but gave it up.

"I think he's a poet," Amelia whispered, "or maybe a musician—one of the high-strung, quivering kind, don't you know." They all knew.

"They're so sensitive—and responsive."

Amelia spoke as though a host of lute-souled artists had worshipped at her shrine and had broken into melody at her touch.

"Like as not he's only a nice American fellow. My cousin Sam at Yale sings like an angel. All he has to do is sing love songs to a girl and she's positively mushy."

Amelia looked reflectively at the last speaker.

"Well, I wouldn't mind so much," she said. "If he lives on this block his folks must be rich."

"Some day, some day,"

yearned the tenor voice.

"Some day I shall meet you."

"My, won't it be exciting when he does," gurgled Kittie.

"Does he do this every night?" Serena asked. This was her first entrance into the romantic circle.

"Five nights now," Laura May explained. "Amelia was just sitting in the window Wednesday night playing and singing, and somebody answered her. Then they played and sang back and forth. We were awfully afraid the servants in the kitchen would hear it and report, but they didn't. It's been going on every night since. We're most afraid to go outside the house for fear he'll walk right up and speak."

"He wouldn't know you."

Amelia turned from the window to look scornfully at the sordid-souled Serena.

"Not know me! Why, he'd feel that I was The One, the moment he saw me. It's like that when you love this way."

She pillowed her chin on her arms again and stared sentimentally into the back yard.

"Only this, only this, this, that once you loved me.

Only this, I love you now, I love you now—I lo-o-ve you-u-u now."

The song ended upon a high, quavering note just as the retiring bell clanged in the hall.

The visiting girls waited a few moments, then reluctantly scrambled to their feet and started for their rooms. But Amelia still knelt by the window.

"I'm positive he has raven black hair and an olive complexion," she said to Laura May as finally she drew the shade and began to get ready for bed.

The next morning the Youngest Teacher took the girls for their after-breakfast walk. Trailing up and down the streets at the tail of the "crocodile" was one of the features of the boarding-school work which she particularly disliked; but, as a rule, the proceeding was commonplace enough.

For a few mornings past Belinda had noticed something unusual about the morning expedition. She was used to chattering and giggling. She had learned that the passing of a good-looking young man touched off both the giggles and the chatter. She had even forced herself to watch the young man and see that no note found its way from his hand to that of one of the girls; but this new spirit was something she couldn't figure out.



"For a few mornings past Belinda had noticed something unusual about the morning expedition"

In the first place the girls developed a mad passion for walking around the block. Formerly they had begged her to ramble to Fifth Avenue and to the Park. One saw more pedestrians on the avenue than elsewhere at that hour of the morning; and, if one walked to the Park, one might perchance be late for chapel and have to stay out in the hall until it was over. But now Fifth Avenue held no charms; the Park did not beckon. Round and round the home block the crocodile dragged its length, with Amelia and Laura May at its head and Belinda bringing up the rear. Men were leaving their homes on their way to business, and every time a young man made his appearance upon the steps of one of the houses on the circuit something like an electric shock ran along the school line and the crocodile quivered from head to tail.

The problem was too much for the Youngest Teacher. She led her charges home in time for chapel, and meditated deeply during the morning session.

Late on that same afternoon Belinda was conferring with Miss Lucilla Ryder when the maid brought a card to the principal.

"'Mr. Satterly'—I don't know the gentleman. What did he look like, Katy?"

"Turribly prosperous, ma'am."

"Ah! possibly some one with a daughter. Miss Carewe, will you go down with me? I am greatly pressed for time. Perhaps this is something you could attend to."

Belinda followed the stately figure in softly flowing black. Miss Ryder always looked the part. No parent could fail to see her superiority and be impressed.

The little old gentleman who rose to greet them in the reception-room was not, however, awed by Miss Lucilla's gracious elegance.

He was a corpulent, red-faced little man with a bristling moustache and a nervous manner; his voice when he spoke was incisive and crisp.

"Miss Ryder, I presume."

Miss Ryder bowed.

"This is Miss Carewe, one of our teachers," she said, waving both Belinda and the visitor toward seats.

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Mr. Satterly declined the seat.

"I've come to ask you if you know how your pupils are scandalizing the neighborhood," he said abruptly.

Belinda jumped perceptibly. Miss Ryder's lips straightened slightly, very slightly, but she showed no other sign of emotion.

"I am not aware of any misconduct on the part of the young ladies." Her manner was the perfection of courteous dignity. Belinda mentally applauded.

"It's scandalous, madam, scandalous," sputtered the old gentleman, growing more excited with every second.



"It's scandalous, madam!"

"So you observed before, I believe. Will you kindly tell me the nature of the offence?"

"Clandestine love-making with the Astorbilt's coachman—for five nights, flirting out of windows, singing mawkish songs back and forth to each other till it's enough to make a man sick. My daughters hanging out of our back window to hear! Nice example for them! Nice performance for a school where girls are supposed to be taken care of!"

A faint flush had crept into Miss Ryder's cheeks. A great awakening light had dawned in Belinda's brain.

"Amelia," she murmured.

Miss Ryder nodded comprehension.

"She's so romantic, and she supposed it was Prince Charming."

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Again the principal nodded. She was not slow of comprehension.

"One of our young ladies is excessively romantic," she explained to the irate Mr. Satterly. "I think I understand the situation, and I shall deal with it at once. I am grieved that the neighbors have been annoyed."

The old gentleman relented slightly. "Well, of course, I thought you ought to know," he said.

"You were quite right. I am deeply indebted to you, and shall be still more so if you will not mention the unfortunate incident to outsiders. Good-morning."

The door closed behind him.

Principal and teacher faced each other. Miss Ryder's superb calm had vanished. Her eyes were blazing.

"Dis-gust-ing!" she said.

Belinda wrestled heroically to suppress a fit of untimely mirth. She knew Amelia and her set so well. She could picture each detail of the musical flirtation, each ridiculous touch of sentimentality.

"I shall expel her."

Miss Ryder's tone was firm.

Belinda laid a soft hand impulsively upon the arm of the August One. "She isn't bad—just foolish—"

"She's made the school ridiculous."

"The school can stand it. She's made herself more ridiculous, and it will be hard for her to stand that."

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"How would you punish her?"

"Tell the story to the whole school to-morrow. Rub in the fact that the serenader is a coarse, common, illiterate groom. Mention that the stablemen and other servants all around the block are chuckling over the thing. Rob the episode of every atom of romance. Make it utterly vulgar, and sordid, and ugly, and absurd."

Miss Ryder looked at the Youngest Teacher with something akin to admiration.

"I believe you are right, Miss Carewe. It will be punishment enough. I'll mention no names."

"Oh, no. Everyone will know."

There was a short but dramatic special session the next morning. The principal slew and spared not; and all the guilty squirmed uncomfortably, while the arch offender hid her face in her hands and sobbed miserably over shattered romance and open humiliation.

Even her boon companions tittered and grinned derisively at her as she fled to her room when the conference ended.

But the Youngest Teacher followed, and her eyes were very kind.

CHAPTER III

THE ELOPEMENT OF EVANGELINE MARIE

EVAMAE rose, like a harvest moon, above the Ryder school horizon late in November. Large bodies being proverbially slow of motion, she had occupied the first two months of the school year in acquiring enough momentum to carry her from Laurelton, Mississippi, to New York and install her in the Misses Ryder's most desirable room—providentially left vacant by a defection in the school ranks.

The price of the room was high, but money meant nothing to Eva May. Creature comfort meant much. The new pupil clamoured for a private bath, but finally resigned herself to the least Spartan variety of school simplicity, bought a large supply of novels, made an arrangement by which, for a consideration, the second-floor maid agreed to smuggle fresh chocolates into the house three times a week, unpacked six wrappers, and settled down to the arduous process of being "finished" by a winter in New York.

Miss Lucilla Ryder, conscientious to a fault in educational matters, made an effort to plant Eva May's feet upon the higher paths of learning, and enrolled the girl in various classes; but the

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passive resistance of one hundred and ninety pounds of inert flesh and a flabby mind were too much for the worthy principal.

"We must do what we can with her," Miss Lucilla said helplessly to the Youngest Teacher. "She may acquire something by association; and, at least, she seems harmless."

Belinda agreed with due solemnity.

"Yes, unless she falls upon someone, she'll do no active damage."

"But her laziness and lack of ambition set such bad standards for the other girls," sighed Miss Lucilla.

Belinda shook her head in protest.

"Not at all. She's valuable as an awful example."

So Eva May, whose baptismal name was Evangeline Marie, and whose father, John Jenkins, a worthy brewer, had wandered from Ohio to the South, married a French creole, and accidentally made a colossal fortune out of a patent spigot, rocked her ponderous way through school routine, wept over the trials of book heroines, munched sweets, filled the greater part of the front bench in certain classes where she never, by any chance, recited, furnished considerable amusement to her schoolmates, and grew steadily fatter.

"If she stays until June we'll never be able to get her out through the door," prophesied Miss Barnes, the teacher of mathematics one morning, as she and Belinda stood at the door of the music-room during Eva May's practice hour, and looked at the avalanche of avoirdupois overflowing a small piano-stool. "Something really must be done."

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Chance provided something. The ram in the thicket took the form of an epidemic started by Amelia Bowers, whose fond parents conceived the idea that their child was not having exercise enough in city confines and wrote that they wanted her to have a horse and ride in the Park. Being a southern girl she was used to riding, but they thought it would be well for her to have a few lessons at a good riding-school, and, of course, a riding-master or reliable groom must accompany her in the Park.

The Misses Ryder groaned. A teacher must chaperon the fair Amelia to riding-school, and sit there doing absent chaperoning until her charge should be restored to her by the riding-master. The teachers were already too busy. Still, as Mr. Bowers was an influential patron, the arrangement must be made.

No sooner was the matter noised abroad than the whole school was bitten by the riding mania. Those who could ride wanted to ride. Those who couldn't wanted to learn. Frantic appeals went forth by letters to parents throughout the United States, but riding in New York is an expensive pastime, and only five fathers responded with the desired blessings and adequate checks.

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Miss Ryder wrote to the head of a popular riding-school and asked that someone be sent to talk the arrangements over with her.

The next evening, during recreation hour, the girls fortunate enough to be in the drawing-room saw a radiant vision ushered in by the maid and left to await the coming of the principal.

He was slim, he was dapper, he was exquisite, he was French. His small black moustache curved briskly upward from red lips curved like a bow; his nose was faultlessly straight; his black eyes were sparkling; his brows were well marked, his dark hair was brushed to a high, patent-leather polish.

He wore riding clothes of the most elaborate type, despite the hour of his visit, and as he sat nonchalantly upon the red-damask sofa he tapped his shining boots with a knowing crop, curled his moustache airily, and allowed his glance to rove boldly over the display of youthful femininity. A number of the older girls rose and left the room, but a majority lingered fearfully, rapt in admiration and wonder.



"... curled his mustache airily, and allowed his glance to rove boldly over the

display of youthful femininity"

Eva May palpitated upon a commodious window-seat. Here was a realization of her brightest dreams. So Comte Robert Montpelier Ravillon de Brissac must have looked as he sprang lightly from his curveting steed and met the Lady Angélique in the Park of Flambéron. In her agitation she tucked a caramel in each cheek and forgot that they were there.

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"Young ladies, you may be excused."

Miss Emmeline Ryder had arrived.

The girls departed, and a buzz of excited conversation floated back from the hall; but Evangeline Marie went silently to her room, sore smitten.

If Miss Lucilla Ryder had been selected by the Fates to meet Monsieur Albert de Puys, the chances are that some riding-school other than Manlay's would have been patronized by the Ryder school, for Miss Lucilla was a shrewd judge of men and things; but, as luck would have it, Miss Lucilla was suffering from neuralgia, and Miss Emmeline, gentle, vague, confiding, was sent down to conduct the interview.

Monsieur de Puys, clever in his own fashion, was deferential and diplomatic.

Miss Emmeline quite overlooked his *beaux yeux* and the havoc they might work in girlish hearts. She made arrangements for the lessons, settled the details, and reported to Miss Lucilla that everything was satisfactory and that the envoy was "a very pleasant person."

So the girls rode, and the teachers chaperoned, and the fathers paid, and on the surface all went well.

Belinda was elected, more often than any of her fellow-teachers, to take the girls to the riding-school; and, on the whole, she liked the task, for it gave her a quiet hour with a book while the young equestriennes tore up the tanbark or were out and away in the Park. She merely represented the conventions, and her position was more or less of a sinecure. Occasionally she watched the girls who took their lessons indoors, and she conceived a violent dislike for one of the masters—a Frenchman with an all-conquering manner and an impertinent smile; but she never thought of taking the manner and smile seriously. If it occurred to her that the swaggering Frenchman devoted himself to Eva May more persistently than to any of the other pupils, she set the thing down to Gallic spirit and admired the instructor's bravery.

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Mounted upon a sturdy horse built more for strength than for speed, Evangeline Marie was an impressive sight, but she brought to the exercise an energy and a devotion that surprised everyone who knew her.

"She'll not make the effort more than once," Miss Lucilla had said; but the weeks went by and still Eva May went to her riding-lessons with alacrity and regularity. She said that she was riding to reduce her flesh and had lost six pounds, and the cause seemed so worthy that the phenomenon soon ceased to excite wonder.

In course of time the other schoolgirls who belonged to the riding contingent dropped the fad, but still Evangeline Marie was faithful. All through April and into the fragrant Maytime she went religiously to the riding-school twice a week, but all of her lessons were taken outdoors now, and Belinda waited upon a bench near the Park entrance, thankful to be out in the spring world.

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A good-looking young man, wearing his riding clothes and sitting his horse in a fashion that bespoke long acquaintance with both, passed the bench with surprising frequency, and in course of time it was borne in upon the Youngest Teacher that his unfailing appearance during Eva May's lessons was too methodical to be a mere coincidence. But, beyond a smile in his eyes, the horseman gave no sign of interest in the lonely figure upon the bench, so there was no reason for resentment, and Belinda learned to look for the bay horse and its boyish rider and for the smiling eyes with a certain pleasant expectation that relieved her chaperoning duty of dullness.

One morning she sat upon her own particular bench with a book open in her lap and a listless content written large upon her. Green turf and leafy boughs and tufts of blossoms stretched away before her. There were lilac scents in the warm spring air and the birds were twittering jubilates. The man on the bay horse had ridden past once, and the smile in his eyes had seemed more boyish than ever. She wondered when he would come by again—and then, looking down the shaded drive, she saw him coming.

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Even at a distance she recognised something odd in the fashion of his approach. He was bending forward and riding rapidly—too rapidly for compliance with Park rules. She watched to see him slow down and walk his horse past the bench in the usual lingering way; but, instead, he came on at a run, pulled his horse up abruptly, dismounted and came toward her with his hat in his hand.

Belinda drew a quick breath of surprise and embarrassment, but there was no smile in the eyes that met hers, and she realised in an instant that the stranger was in earnest—too much in earnest for thought of flirtation.

"I beg your pardon," he was saying. "Maybe I'm making an ass of myself, but I couldn't feel as if it were all quite right. I've seen you here so often, you know, and I knew you were chaperoning those schoolgirls, and I didn't believe you'd allow that fat one to go off in a hansom with that beast of a Frenchman."

"Wh-w-what?" she asked breathlessly.

"You didn't know? I thought not. You see, I was riding past one of the Fifth Avenue gates in the upper end of the Park, and Peggy here—my horse—went lame for a minute, so I got off to see what was wrong. Just then up came the Frenchman and your fat friend, and he climbed off his horse and helped her down. Anybody could see she was excited and ripe for hysterics, and De Puys looked more like a wax Mephistopheles than usual, so I just fooled with Peg's foot and watched to see what was up. There was a boy on hand and a cab was standing outside the gate. Frenchy gave the horses to the boy and boosted the girl into the cab, and I heard him say, 'Grand Central, and hurry.' They went off at a run, and I mounted and was starting up the drive when all of a sudden it struck me that the thing was deuced queer and that maybe you didn't know anything about it. So I piked off to tell you."

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"I heard him say, "Grand Central, and hurry""

Belinda looked at him helplessly.

"She's eloped with him. It's her money, I suppose. What can I do?"

The stranger sprang into his saddle.

"Head them off, of course. You wait at the gate until I lose Peggy and get a cab. Perhaps we can catch them at the station."

He was gone, and Belinda did as she was told. It was a comfort to have a man take things in hand, and she didn't stop to think that the man was a stranger.

In three minutes he was at the gate with a cab, helped her into it and climbed in himself.

"There's an extra dollar in it if you break the record," he said cheerfully to the cabby, and off they clattered.

Not a word was spoken on the way to the station, but as the stranger paid the extra dollar Belinda fumbled in her purse.

"Never mind; we'll settle up afterward. Let's see if they are here."

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No sign of the runaway couple. Belinda collapsed weakly into a seat and there were tears in her eyes.

"Don't, please don't," begged the man beside her. "You sit here and I'll try the gatemen. Anybody'd be likely to spot a freak couple like that. Perhaps their train hasn't gone yet."

A few minutes later Belinda saw him bolt into the waiting-room and stop at a ticket window.

"Come on," he said, as he rushed up to her. "They've gone to Albany—train left fifteen minutes ago. Gateman thought they were funny, and noticed their tickets. He says the girl was crying. We'll have to step lively."

"B-b-but what are we going to do?" stammered Belinda, as he hurried her through the gate and down the long platform.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. We're going to Albany on the Chicago Express."

He helped her on the train, deposited her in a seat on the shady side of a Pullman car, sat down beside her and fanned his flushed face with his cap.

Belinda strove for speech, but no words came. Things appeared to be altogether out of her hands.

"They took a local express," explained the stranger by whom she was being personally

conducted. "Afraid to wait in the station, I suppose. Our train passes theirs up the road, and we'll wait for them in Albany."

"But perhaps they'll get off before they reach Albany," replied Belinda.

"Well, their tickets were for Albany, and we'll have to gamble on that. It's a fair chance. Probably they want to lose themselves somewhere until the storm blows over and papa makes terms."

"But why should you go to Albany? You've been awfully good and I'm so much obliged to you, but now I'll just go on by myself."

He looked down at the independent young woman, and the familiar smile came back into his eyes.

"That would be a nice proposition. I can see a life-size picture of myself letting you go up to Albany alone to handle De Puys. A chap like that needs a man. You can get the girl. I wouldn't attempt to handle her without a derrick, but I'll just make a few well-chosen remarks to that rascally Frenchman myself."

"But it is an imposition upon——"

"Nothing of the sort. It's an interposition—of Providence. I've spent weeks wondering how it could ever be done."

Belinda looked puzzled. "You knew they were going to elope?"

"No, that wasn't what I meant."

"It's dreadful, isn't it?" wailed Belinda.

He shook his head. "It's heavenly," he said.

She tried to look puzzled again, but broke down, blushed, and became absorbed in the landscape.

"My name is Morgan Hamilton."

She shot a swift look at him, then turned to the window again.

"I'm Miss Carewe, one of Miss Ryder's teachers."

"Yes; I knew you weeks ago."

Belinda lost her grasp upon her dignity and laughed.

"Then it isn't like going to Albany with a perfect stranger," she said with an air of profound relief.

The trip to Albany is a short one—much shorter than the railway time-schedules indicate. Both Belinda and Morgan Hamilton are prepared to testify to that effect. Also, they are willing to swear that the time between the arrival of the Chicago Express at Albany and the coming of the next New York train is grossly over-estimated. As the local train pulled into the Albany station a look of conscious guilt mingled with the excitement upon Belinda's face.

"I wonder if they will come," she whispered.

"I'd forgotten all about them," confessed the man at her side.

The look of guilt deepened. She had forgotten, too.

They came.

From afar off the waiting couple saw Eva May's mighty bulk and the dapper figure at her side.

Belinda stepped forward and the girl saw her. There was a pause, a moment's frightened silence, then Evangeline Marie made a noise 'twixt a groan and a squeal and clutched her beloved one's arm.

Monsieur de Puys looked quickly around, saw the small but determined Nemesis in his path, and swore eloquently in good Anglo-Saxon.

"Get into a cab," he said harshly to the hysterical girl beside him; and, as she made a move to obey, he turned threateningly to Belinda—but a tall, square-shouldered figure intervened, and two contemptuous eyes looked down at him.

"That's enough, you contemptible whelp," said a very low but emphatic voice. "Your game's up, and you don't marry an heiress this trip. Now, get out, before I kick you out. If it weren't for the ladies I'd treat myself to the satisfaction of kicking you before you could go. I'll cut it out on their account, but if ever I hear of your speaking to that girl again or mentioning her name to anyone I'll make it my business to look you up and thrash you within an inch of your scoundrelly life."



**"Your game's up, and you don't marry an heiress
this trip"**

The red lips of Eva May's hero curled back from his white teeth in a snarl. The shallow, handsome face was white and vicious, but the insolent black eyes of the coward could not meet those of the man before him. A curious crowd was collecting.

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"Get out of this," said Morgan in a voice that held a warning.

And the Frenchman went at once, muttering ineffectual vows of vengeance, but with never a look toward the fair Evangeline Marie, who was weeping upon Belinda's shoulder.

The next train from the west took on only three passengers at Albany—a fair, good-looking young fellow in riding clothes, a fat, red-eyed girl in riding habit, and a pretty young woman in conventional garb. The fat girl fell into a seat, shut her eyes, and sobbed occasionally in a spasmodic way.

The man held out his hand to the young woman.

"I'll go into the smoker. I can't be of use any longer, but I'll see that you get a cab, and——"

He hesitated, looked at her imploringly.

"And—if—if I——"

Belinda smiled.

"Why, I'd be delighted," she said in answer to the question in his face.

"Oh, may I come? Really? That's awfully good of you."

And as he sat in the smoking-car puffing mechanically at a cigar that was not lighted Morgan Hamilton vowed a thank-offering to the god of chance.

CHAPTER IV

A WOLF IN THE FOLD

MISS LUCILLA RYDER, clothed in stateliness as in a garment, was conducting a business interview in her study.

Facing her, sat a slender young woman gowned in black. The black frock, the black hat, the black gloves were simple, unobtrusive, altogether suitable for an impecunious instructor of youth; but there was a subtle something about them that would have whispered "French" to a worldly-wise observer, even if their wearer had not been speaking the purest of Parisian French in a voice calculated to impart melody to any language.

Miss Lucilla bent upon this attractive applicant for the position left vacant by the illness of Madame Plongeon—long-time French chaperon in the Ryder school—what she fondly believed to be a keen and penetrating scrutiny.

Mademoiselle de Courcelles met the judicial glance with a sweet and deprecatory smile.

In Miss Lucilla's hand were several letters, each written in flowing, graceful French upon stationery bearing an imposing crest. Madame la duchesse de Rochechouart, Madame la comtesse de Pourtales, Madame la comtesse de St. Narcy had in those gracious letters expressed their enthusiastic appreciation of Mademoiselle de Courcelles's rare qualities of mind and heart, their absolute confidence in her integrity and ability, and their deep regret that they had been unable to persuade her to remain in Paris and continue her supervision of the education of certain prospective dukes and counts.

One note, less aristocratic in character, was from Mrs. Dent-Smyth, head of the teachers' agency to which the Misses Ryder resorted in emergencies like the present one.

This worthy lady wrote frankly that as Mademoiselle de Courcelles's advent had been almost coincident with Miss Ryder's request for a teacher, there had been no time to investigate the Frenchwoman's Paris references. Mrs. Dent-Smyth was, however, of the opinion that these references seemed most satisfactory, and she believed that a personal interview with the applicant would convince Miss Ryder that the young woman was a very superior person, and her French of a superfine quality.

Miss Lucilla, albeit maintaining a non-committal exterior, mentally agreed with Mrs. Dent-Smyth. Mademoiselle de Courcelles was distinguished in appearance, polished in manner, sweet of voice. She spoke English haltingly, but her French was of a quality to suit the most exacting of parents. To all of Miss Ryder's questions she made deferential, modest, yet self-possessed answer.

She was, it seemed, but newly come to America. Financial reverses had forced her, an orphan of good family, to earn her living. There were wealthy and influential friends who were willing to help her, but a De Courcelles—Mademoiselle spoke the word proudly—could not live upon charity. She had taught in the families of several of these friends, but the situation was impossible, and she had decided that it would be easier to live her life among strangers, where she would be unhampered by old traditions and associations.

Sounding titles flitted through the tale, brought in quite casually, but proving none the less impressive to a thoroughgoing republican.

Miss Lucilla listened thoughtfully, glancing from time to time at the crests upon the letters she held. As a freeborn American she scorned to truckle to the effête aristocracy of Europe; but still, she admitted, there was really something pleasing about a title. Of course she had always been very particular about looking up references, but this was an exceptional case. She would consult Miss Emmeline.

Now when Miss Lucilla says that she will consult Miss Emmeline, her mind is already made up. Miss Emmeline has never, by any chance, volunteered an opinion upon a subject without having first heard the elder sister's opinion upon the same subject. Having heard, she echoes.

"I believe this young person will be a great addition to the staff," said Miss Lucilla.

"I'm sure of it," murmured Miss Emmeline.

"We might possibly mention in our next circular the names of the noble families with which she has been associated in France."

"Certainly," echo answered.

So Mademoiselle de Courcelles was engaged.

Twenty-four hours later the new French teacher and three large trunks were installed in a small room on the top floor of the Ryder school. The size and number of the trunks excited comment among the servants, but the expressman who carried Mademoiselle's impedimenta up four flights of stairs noticed that the trunks were surprisingly light in weight.

From the first Mademoiselle was a success, and by the time she had spent a fortnight in the school her popularity among the girls moved many of the teachers to jealousy, and even wakened in Belinda's heart a slight sense of injury to which she wouldn't have confessed for worlds. Miss Barnes, herself impervious alike to adoration or disapproval, expressed her opinion of the new comer with her usual frankness.

"Cat!" she said calmly. "Graceful, sleek, purring, ingratiatory, but cat all the same."

"She's very attractive," murmured Belinda.

"Bad eyes," Miss Barnes commented curtly.

"Handsome eyes."

"All the worse for that. Mark my words, that woman isn't to be trusted."

But Miss Barnes was alone in her verdict. Mademoiselle taught preparatory French so cleverly yet so modestly that Professor Marceau himself expressed his approval; and Professor Marceau, the distinguished and expensive French instructor-in-chief of the school, had never before unbent to a subordinate.

Under Mademoiselle's stimulus the twenty perfunctory French phrases demanded of each pupil during the progress of dinner expanded into something approaching French conversation. Amelia Bowers and Laura May Lee, who had memorized a small section of dialogue from a Labiche play, and were in the habit of reciting it to each other every evening with much expression,

thereby impressing distant teachers with the idea of fluent French chat, abandoned their brilliant scheme to talk chaotic French with Mademoiselle. In the drawing-room during evening recreation hour girls who had regarded conversation with Madame Plongeon as punishment dire, crowded around Mademoiselle de Courcelles, listening breathlessly to her vivacious stories, her reminiscences of life among the French nobility. The tide of flowers, fruit, candy, etc., that had flowed Belinda's way set heavily toward the new teacher. A French chaperon—once a calamity to be avoided at all costs—became the heart's desire of all shopping, theatre-going and holiday-making pupils.

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"She's perfectly lovely, Miss Carewe," gushed Amelia Bowers, "and she's had the most interesting experiences. I should think you and she would be bosom friends. You couldn't help loving her if you'd just get to knowing her well. Why, every single one of our crowd has got the most dreadful crush on her. Laura May says she's just like a heroine out of a book; and you needn't think because she's so gay and jolly that she's always been happy. That's just the French way. She says the French even go to death jesting. Isn't that splendid? But she's had awful sorrows. It would make you cry to hear her talk about them—that is, she doesn't exactly tell you about them, you know, but you can tell from the way she talks that she's had them, and that's what makes her so sympathetic and lovely about other people's troubles. Why, I could just tell her ANYTHING."

Amelia heaved a cyclonic sigh, and assumed the expression of one who could reveal much to a properly sympathetic soul.

Finding no encouragement in Belinda's face, she plunged again into praise of Mademoiselle.

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"All the girls feel that way. They tell her every blessed thing that ever happened to them. Laura May says she never saw anybody before that she could reveal her most sacred feelings to. She told Mademoiselle all about Jim Benton the very first night she met her. Mademoiselle says she had almost the same sort of a time—she called it '*une affaire*'—with Comte Raoul de Cretigny, when they were both very young, but that one does get over such things. She encouraged Laura May a lot; but she said such beautiful things about first love and about how no love that came afterward could have just the same exquisite flavour—at least it wasn't exactly 'flavour' she used, and it wasn't 'bloom' either, but it was something like that. Anyway, Laura May cried bucketfuls, and yet she said she felt encouraged to hope she might forget and love again. That's like Mademoiselle. Now some people would have encouraged Laura May too much, and wouldn't have understood how sad the whole thing was, and that would have spoiled everything."

The breathless Amelia came of necessity to a full stop, and Belinda went on her way to her room with a queer little smile hovering around her lips.

Not only the emotional contingent of the school, but the sensible girls as well, appeared to come under the siren's spell.

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"She's awfully clever and amusing, Miss Carewe," said Katherine Holland, Belinda's staunch and faithful satellite. "Of course I'm not dotty over her like Amelia's crowd, but she really is great fun, and I like being with her when those girls aren't around. She does talk such sentimental trash to them."

"If you want to criticise any of the teachers you may find another room and another listener, my dear." Belinda's dignified reproof was most impressive and Katherine subsided, with a murmured, "Oh, but I do like her, you know."

As the weeks passed by the general enthusiasm gradually crystallised into particular adoration.

Mademoiselle was still universally popular, but with a certain clique she was a mania. All of the moneyed pupils belonged to this set, and their devotion was such that they were one and all unwilling to go for an outing save under convoy of the French chaperon. Even Evangeline Marie Jenkins was stirred to her depths by Mademoiselle's charm and, rising above the handicap of avoirdupois and temperament, became almost energetic in her shopping and theatre-going, in order to enjoy the privilege of the charmer's society.

At first Miss Lucilla Ryder was inclined to interfere in the interest of humanity, and save Mademoiselle de Courcelles from being imposed upon; but the little Frenchwoman met the kindly interference with good-natured protest.

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"Ah, Miss Ryder, you are so good, so thoughtful," she said in her delicious French. "You have the kind heart; but I must earn my salary, and if it is in this way that I am most useful to you, let me show my goodwill, my devotion to your school, by going where the young ladies will. They amuse me—those dear children. I love being with them, and I am strong and well. I do not tire."

"But there is one thing, *chère Mademoiselle Ryder*. I know that the other teachers—my associates—dislike the shopping. They object to chaperoning the young ladies upon the little expeditions to the shops. Me, I do not mind. I am glad to go if it will save the others from a duty that is disagreeable. It has come to me that perhaps the theatre is more popular than the shopping, that it may give pleasure to chaperon to the theatre, the opera, the concert. That is so, is it not?"

Miss Ryder admitted that there might be reason in the theory.

Mademoiselle smiled, a sweet, swift smile. "Ah, it is so. Then you will do me a favour? Yes? It would be better that for the theatre other chaperons should be chosen. Me, I will take for myself all the shopping. It will give me pleasure to have it so. I will feel that it is for the happiness of my

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fellow-teachers, and that will give *me* happiness. You will arrange it so, is it not?"

Miss Lucilla demurred. The arrangement was unfair. Shopping was the teachers' *bête noire*. It would not do to load all of the unpleasant duty upon one pair of shoulders.

Mademoiselle refused to be spared. She appreciated her superior's consideration, but she was bent upon being noble, and begged for martyrdom.

"After all it is not as if I, too, disliked the thing. Me, I am French. I love the shops. Fatiguing? Yes, the young ladies are slow in making up their minds, but it is all one to me."

In the end Miss Lucilla yielded, and in due course the announcement was made in faculty meeting that Mademoiselle de Courcelles would chaperon all shopping expeditions, but would do no evening chaperoning. Miss Lucilla accompanied the announcement by a few remarks concerning the cheerful spirit in which Mademoiselle de Courcelles accepted the undesirable duty. Mademoiselle looked modestly deprecatory. The teachers were surprised and pleased. Only Miss Barnes, unmoved, eyed the willing martyr with a coolly speculative glance.

Shopping was always a vital issue with a certain set of the Ryder pupils. The girls were extravagant and amply provided with pocket-money by parents foolishly indulgent. Moreover, shopping commissions from home were many; and, though one of the school rules carefully embalmed in the circulars was to the effect that no pupil could be allowed more than one shopping expedition in any one week, this rule, like many another, was more honored in the breach than in the observance.

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So Mademoiselle de Courcelles found her hands full with her self-elected task, and not a day went by without her leading forth from one to fifteen girls bent upon storming the shops.

As Christmas holidays approached, the shopping fever waxed more violent, and there was no afternoon of rest for the shopping chaperon. Not only had each of the girls a long Christmas list of purchases she must make for herself, but the lists of commissions from home grew and multiplied.

Through all the strain and stress Mademoiselle de Courcelles maintained her cheerful serenity. Her amiability never wavered, her gay volatility never flagged. The girls chorused her praises. She was the most helpful of advisers, the most wise of shoppers, the most unwearying of chaperons.

Sometimes she came home to dinner with dark circles under her eyes and lines of fatigue about her mouth, but her spirits were always intact, and even Miss Barnes admitted that the Frenchwoman was good-natured and that her amiable self-sacrifice had been a boon to the rest of the resident teachers.

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During the last week of the term several annoying incidents disturbed the serenity of the Misses Ryder, and caused more or less excitement among the girls. First and most distressing was the loss of Laura May Lee's pocket-book. Under ordinary circumstances this would not have been a calamity, for Laura May's pocket-money melted away as if by magic, and her pocket-book was chronically flat. But, as it happened, Mr. Lee, a wealthy Southern widower, had been confiding enough to send Laura May a check for \$500, and commission her to select two rings as Christmas presents for herself and her younger sister. The rings were chosen after several expeditions to famous jewellery shops, and at last one afternoon Laura May and a group of chosen friends, chaperoned by Mademoiselle de Courcelles, set forth to bring home the spoils.

Miss Ryder had cashed the check, the \$500 in cash reposed snugly in Laura May's purse; but when, at the jeweller's, Laura May opened her shopping-bag, lo! the purse had vanished and the \$500 with it—gone, evidently, to swell some pickpocket's holiday harvest.

Only a few days later Mademoiselle de Courcelles, in an interview behind closed doors, reported to Miss Ryder that a small sum of money had been stolen from her trunk, and that circumstantial evidence pointed to Ellen, one of the chamber-maids, as the thief. Mademoiselle explained that she did not mind the personal loss, but as the pupils had been complaining of the disappearance of money, jewellery, silver toilet articles, etc., she felt it her duty to report her suspicions.

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Miss Lucilla promptly ordered Ellen's trunks and bureau drawers searched and, a gold hatpin belonging to Evangeline Marie Jenkins having materialized in one of the bureau drawers, Ellen, weeping and to the last protesting her innocence, was summarily turned out of the house.

After this excitement, school life flowed on smoothly until the last Saturday before the holiday vacation.

"The whole school's going shopping to-day," Amelia Bowers announced at the breakfast table on this particular Saturday morning. "Everybody's got a Christmas list a mile long, and it's going to be something awful. The stores will be simply jammed and it'll take an hour to buy a paper of pins."

Miss Lucilla Ryder smiled tolerantly and omitted her usual criticism of Amelia's extravagant speech.

"You will need assistance to-day, Mademoiselle de Courcelles. I will send some of the young ladies out with other teachers."

She did; but Mademoiselle's ardent admirers were faithful, and she started out at half-past nine in charge of twelve of the richest girls in the school.

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From shop to shop the flock fluttered, chattering, giggling, elbowing their way through the

crowds, buying many things, inspecting more, meeting smiles and good nature on every hand. There's something about the effervescent exuberance of a boarding-school crowd that thaws even the icy hauteur of the average saleswoman, and stirs any salesman to spectacular affability.

It was after a hasty and simple luncheon, beginning with lobster salad and ending with tutti-frutti ice cream and chocolate éclairs, that the Ryder expedition drifted into a well-known jewellery shop.

Belinda, helping Katherine Holland to choose a stickpin for her brother, saw the familiar faces and idly watched the girls as they bore down upon a counter where a bland salesman greeted them with welcoming smiles. She knew that Laura May was once more in quest of rings—her long-suffering father having dutifully forwarded a second cheque when told, in a tear-blotted letter, of the fate that had met the first gift—and she smiled when Laura May triumphantly fished a chamois-skin bag out of her blouse front and extracted a roll of bills which she clutched firmly in her hand, while her glance, roaming suspiciously over the surrounding crowd, glared defiance at all pickpockets.

Suddenly Belinda's smile faded. Her eyes opened wide in amazement.

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She had seen a swift, deft movement of Mademoiselle's hand—but no, it was impossible. She had imagined it. Yet she stood staring in a bewildered fashion at the Frenchwoman until Katherine touched her arm.

"What's the matter, Miss Carewe? I'm ready to go."

Belinda smiled vaguely, and moved toward the door in the wake of Mademoiselle and her charges, who were also leaving. She lost sight of them in the crowd; but, as she neared the door, there was a sudden swirling eddy in the incoming and outgoing tides. Something was happening outside. The sound of excited girlish voices floated into the shop. A crowd was forming on the sidewalk.

Belinda's cheeks flamed scarlet. A look of startled comprehension gleamed in her eyes.

"Hurry," she urged curtly; and, with her hand on Katherine's arm, forged ahead through the door, unceremoniously pushing aside everyone who interfered with her rapid exit.

Once outside, she turned unhesitatingly toward a group blocking the sidewalk. A policeman's helmet loomed large above the heads of the crowd; and, as Belinda approached, the policeman's sturdy form forced a way through the circle. Following came Mademoiselle de Courcelles escorted by two men whose faces wore smiles of quiet satisfaction. Behind was a bewildered, hysterical group of girls, weeping, lamenting, protesting, entreating.

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Belinda stopped the procession.

"There must be some mistake," she said falteringly. "What is wrong?"

One of the keen-eyed men took off his hat respectfully.

"Sorry, Miss; but it's French Liz, all right. We got the tip from Paris that she was working New York again, but we couldn't spot her till to-day."

"B-b-but what has she done?" stammered Belinda, to whom twelve anguish-stricken girls were attempting to cling, while a mixed audience looked on appreciatively.

"Cleverest shop-lifter in the graft," explained the detective. "She's got plenty of the goods on her right now; but I say"—and his glance wandered to the girls—"who'd a-thought of this lay except Liz? She's a bird, she is!"

He turned to Mademoiselle de Courcelles with honest admiration in his eyes, and she smiled at him recklessly, with white lips.

"You'd have been too late to-morrow. I was expecting a telegram calling me away to-night."

All the hesitation was gone from her English. She spoke fluently, and a hard metallic ring had crept into the velvety voice.

The detective looked at Belinda.

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"This other fellow is the shop-detective. We'll have to take her in here and see what swag she has beside the diamonds we saw her lift. I don't know as there's any use keeping the young ladies ___"

Evangeline Marie gave a smothered wail at the suggestion, and Laura May showed signs of fainting in Belinda's arms.

"Boarding-school crowd, I see. Now, Miss, if you'll just give me the name of the school and the address, you can take the bunch along home. It isn't likely that any of those babes are in the game with Liz. She's just used them for a blind. Holy smoke! but that was a good idea. Turn a crowd of boarding-school girls loose at a counter, and their teacher could steal the clerks blind without their suspecting her. Lost anything in the school?"

Belinda had a sudden vision of the disgraced Ellen's tearful face, and a thought of Laura May's pocket-book smote her, but she merely wrote the address on a card and handed it to the detective.

"If you could keep the name of the school out of the scandal it would be worth your while," she

said in a low voice.

The detective nodded.

"I'll try; but I guess the papers will get it one way or another. Don't let anyone touch Liz's trunks. I'll be up to go through them just as soon as I've finished here."

For the first time, Mademoiselle faced Belinda and the wide-eyed girls.

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"*Ces chères demoiselles! Cette superbe Mees Ryder!* Bah! It was too easy. I mention a duchess, a countess. The lofty Mees Ryder falls upon my neck. I tell stories of the French noblemen who have adored me, persecuted me with their devotion until I fled from France; poor but honest. The little schoolgirls gulp it all down and beg for more. Oh, but they are stupid—these respectable people. You have my sympathy, Mademoiselle Carewe. You must live among them. For me—give me *les gens d'esprit*, give me a society interesting. *Adieu, mes chères*. It was amusing, that boarding-school experience, but to endure it long—*mon dieu*, I prefer even this!"

She waved her hand airily toward the policeman and the grinning detectives, and, with a shrug, moved toward the shop door, then paused for a parting message.

"My regards to the venerable spinsters. It pains me that I shall never be able to arrange for them a meeting with the Duchesse de Rochecouart and Madame la Comtesse de Pourtales. The maid of the duchess collected stationery for me at one time. It is often of use, the stationery that carries a good crest. *Adieu!*"

Belinda convoyed a subdued group of girls back to the school; but, by the time they reached the door, their spirits had soared. It is sad to be disillusioned, but after all it is something to have been intimately associated with a famous criminal, and to have been an eye-witness of her capture.

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Only Laura May Lee mourned and refused to be comforted.

"I will never again open my soul to anyone," she vowed hysterically.

"I said the woman was a cat," commented Miss Barnes when the news reached her ears.

What Miss Lucilla Ryder said in the first fervor of her surprise no one save Belinda knew, for their interview was behind closed doors, but when she came from her room to meet the detective Miss Lucilla's calm dignity was without a ripple.

The investigation of teachers' credentials is now her pet hobby, and she freezes at the mention of the French nobility.

CHAPTER V

THE BLACK SHEEP'S CHRISTMAS

FIVE days before Christmas the school of the Misses Ryder emptied its pupils and teachers into the bosoms of more or less gratified families, and closed its doors for the holiday season.

The principals lingered for two days after the girls left, in order to see that the furniture was covered, the furnace fires were allowed to die, the gas was turned off, the shades were decorously drawn, the regular butcher's, baker's and milkman's supplies were stopped. Then they, too, went out into the world, for they always spent Christmas with the old aunt who lived upon the ancestral Ryder acres in New Hampshire.

Five of the servants had joined the exodus. Only Ellen, the fat cook, and Rosie, the laundress, were left in the basement, and in the back hall bedroom on the top floor was the Youngest Teacher, who had submitted to enthusiastic kisses from her departing girl adorers, had responded cheerfully to pleasant adieus from her employers, and had settled down to face a somewhat depressing situation. On Christmas Eve she was still facing it pluckily.

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A storm of wind and sleet was beating at the windows, and the little hall bedroom, unheated for days past, had taken on the chill that seems to have body and substance.

In a wicker chair, beside the small table, Belinda, wrapped in blankets and with a hot-water bag under her feet, sat reading by the light of a kerosene lamp which threw weird, flickering shadows on the ugly gray walls.

As a particular vicious blast shrieked at the window the girl dropped her book into her lap, drew the blankets more closely about her, looked around the room, and made a heroic effort to smile.

Then she smiled spontaneously at the lamentable failure of the attempt, but the smile left the corners of her mouth drooping.

She was tired of being brave.

Somewhere out across the night there were love and laughter and friends. She wondered what the home folk were doing. Probably they missed her, but they were together and they had no idea how things were with her, for her letters had been framed to suggest festive plans and a school full of holiday sojourners.

She had written those letters with one eye upon the Recording Angel and the other upon her mother's loving, anxious face, and it had seemed to her that the Recording Angel's smile promised absolution.

She was glad she hadn't been frank, but—she wanted her mother.

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The quivering face was buried in the rough folds of the blankets, and a queer, stifled sound mingled with the noise of the storm.

The Youngest Teacher was only twenty-two, and this was her first Christmas away from home.

But the surrender did not last long. Belinda sprang to her feet, hurled a remark that sounded like "maudlin idiot" at a dishevelled vision in the mirror, picked up the lamp, and went down to the gymnasium on the second floor. When she came back she was too warm to notice the chill of the room, too tired to think. She pulled down the folding bed, tumbled into it, and dreamed of home.

Christmas morning was clear and cold.

Belinda awoke late, and, as the realities crowded in upon her, shut her eyes and tried to dodge the fact that there was no one to wish her a merry Christmas.

She was crying softly into her pillow when the room door was opened cautiously and two ruddy Irish faces peered through the crack.

"A merry Christmas to ye, Miss!" shouted two voices rich in creamy brogue.

Belinda opened her eyes.

"Sure, Oi said to Rosie, 'It's a shame,' sez Oi, 'the young leddy up there wid divil a wan to wish her luck. Let's go up,' sez Oi. So we come."

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Then Ellen, who was an excellent cook and a tough citizen, had the surprise of her life, for a slim, pretty girl sprang out of bed, threw her arms around the cook's portly form, and kissed the broad, red face. Rosie had her turn while Ellen was staggering under the shock.

"Bless you both," said Belinda, looking at them through wet eyes.

The cook opened and shut her mouth feebly, but her own eyes held a responsive moisture.

"Aarraah, now, was it ez bad ez that?" she asked with rough gentleness.

"We were thinkin' maybe we'd be so bold as to ask wud ye come down to the kitchen and have a drop av coffee and a bit av toast wid us. It's bitter cold the mornin' to be goin' out to an eatin'-house, and there's a grand foire in the stove."

The invitation was accepted, and the guest stayed in the warm kitchen until Rosie's young man materialised. Then Belinda retreated to her own room, made her bed, tucked herself up snugly in the big chair, and once more turned to the consolations of literature.

She was still grimly reading when, at eleven o'clock, Ellen tapped on the door.

"If ye plaze, Miss, there's a man wud loike to be spakin' wid yez."

Belinda looked blankly incredulous. Then a gleam of hope flashed across her face. By a miracle, Jack's boat might have come back—or somebody from home——

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"Yis; he sez his name's Ryder."

"Ryder?" echoed Belinda.

"He wuz afther askin' fer Miss Ryder and Miss Emmiline furrst, and he loked queer loike when I told him they wuz gone away.

"'Who's here, anyway,' sez he, sort o' grinnin' as if it hurt him.

"'There's Miss Carewe,' sez Oi, 'wan av th' tachers.'

"'Ask her will she see me fer a minute,' sez he; an' wid that I come fer yez."

"What's he like, Ellen?"

"Well, he's bigger than most and kind av gruff spoken, as though he'd as lave hit ye if he didn't loike yer answers; but it's nice eyes and good clothes he has. He's a foine figger av a man, and he do be remindin' me some way av Miss Ryder. I doubt he's a relation."

Belinda was straightening her hair and putting cologne on her swollen eyelids.

"I'll have to go down. Where is he?"

"In the back parlour, Miss."

"Did you raise the shades?"

"Divil a bit. It's ez cheerful ez a buryin' vault in there."

It was. John Ryder had grasped that fact as he sat waiting, upon one of the shrouded chairs. He turned up his coat collar with a shiver.

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"Lord, how natural it seems," he muttered. "They did the same sort of thing at home. Give me the ranch."

The portière before the hall door was pushed aside and the man rose. He was prepared for a gaunt, forbidding, elderly spinster. He saw a girl in a dark blue frock that clung to the curves of the slender figure as though it loved them. He saw a waving mass of sunny brown hair that rippled into high lights even in the darkened room and framed a piquant face whose woeful brown eyes were shadow-circled.

"Merry Christmas!" he said abruptly.

"Merry Christmas!" Belinda replied before she realised the absurdity of it.

"You don't look it," commented John Ryder frankly.

Belinda crossed the room, threw up the shades, and turned to look at the amazing visitor, who stood the scrutiny with imperturbable calm.

"I am Miss Carewe. You wish to see me?"

The tone was frigid, but its temperature had no apparent effect.

"Yes. I'm John Ryder," the man announced tranquilly; then, seeing that she didn't look enlightened, he added, "I'm Miss Ryder's brother, you know."

Belinda thawed.

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"Why, I didn't know——" she began, then stopped awkwardly.

"Didn't know the girls had a brother. No; I fancy they haven't talked about me much. You see, I'm the 'black sheep.'"

The statement was brusque, but the smile was disarming.

"I've been thoroughly bleached, Miss Carewe. Don't turn me out."

She had no intention of turning him out. His voice had an honest note, his eyes were very kind, and she lacked supreme confidence in her employers' sense of values; so she sat down upon an imposing chair swathed in brown Holland and looked at the "Black Sheep."

"What have they been doing to you?" he asked.

"I'm homesick." She essayed gay self-derision, but her lips trembled, and to John Ryder's surprise he found his blood boiling, despite the icy temperature of the room.

"Did they leave you here all alone?"

"Nobody left me. I stayed."

Belinda was conscious that the conversation had taken an amazing leap into intimacy, and clutched at her dignity, but she felt bewildered. There was something overpowering and masterful about this big, boyish man.

"Nobody else here?"

"Servants."

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"House shut up like this?"

"Naturally."

"No heat?"

"I can't see that the matter concerns you, Mr. Ryder—unless——"

"Oh, no. I'm not thinking of staying."

Her attempt at rebuff had not the smallest effect.

"No gas, either, I suppose?"

She didn't answer.

He said something under his breath that appeared to afford him relief.

"No friends in town, evidently?"

Belinda rose with fine stateliness.

"If there's nothing I can do for you, Mr. Ryder——"

"Sit down."

She sat down involuntarily, and then felt egregiously foolish because she had done it; but John

Ryder was leaning forward with his honest eyes holding hers and was talking earnestly.

"Please don't be angry. I've been out in the Australian bush so long that I've forgotten my parlour tricks. Men say what they think, and ask for what they want, and do pretty well as they please—or can—out there. I've hardly seen a woman. I suppose they'd cut down the independence if they entered into the game. But, see here, Miss Carewe, you're homesick. I'm homesick, too—and I'm worse off than you, for I'm homesick at home. It's rather dreadful being homesick at home."

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There was a note, half bitter, half regretful, in the voice and a look in the eyes that was an appeal to generosity.

Belinda's conventionality crumpled up and her heart warmed toward the fellow-waif.

"I've been counting a good deal upon a home Christmas," he went on; "more than I realised; and this isn't exactly the real thing."

Belinda nodded comprehension.

The "Black Sheep" read the sympathy in her eyes.

"It's good of you to listen. You see, I've been away twenty years. It's a long time."

He sat silent for a moment staring straight before him, but seeing something that she could not see. Then he came back to her.

"Yes; it's a long time. One imagines the things one has left stand still, but they don't. I thought I'd find everything pretty much the same. Of course I might have known better, but—well, a fellow's memory and imagination play tricks upon his intelligence sometimes. I liked New York, you know. It's the only place, but I made the mistake of thinking I could fill it, and it was bigger than I had supposed. I swelled as much as I could, but I finally burst, like the ambitious frog in the fable. I'd made a good many different kinds of a fool of myself, Miss Carewe."

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He hesitated, but her eyes encouraged him.

"I'd made an awful mess of things, and the family were down on me—right they were, too. The girls were pretty bitter. It was hard on them, you see, and I deserved all I got. Emmy would have forgiven me, but Lou was just rather than merciful. You know justice is Lou's long suit. Well, I cut away to Australia, and I didn't write—first because I hadn't anything good to tell, and then because I didn't believe anybody'd care to hear, and finally because it had got to be habit. It'd a' been different if mother had been alive. Probably I'd never have run—or if I had run I'd have written, but sisters—sisters are different. Mothers are——"

His voice stuck fast with a queer quaver, and Belinda nodded again. She knew that mothers were——

He found his voice.

"I struck it rich after a while and I was too busy making money to think much; but by-and-by, after the pile was pretty big, I got to thinking of ways of spending it, and then old New York began bobbing into my world again, and I thought about the girls and the things I could do to make up, and about the good times I could give some of the old crowd who had stood by me when I was good for nothing and didn't deserve a friend. And then I began planning and planning—but I didn't write. I used to go to sleep planning how I'd drop back into this little village and what I'd do to it. Finally I decided to get here for Christmas. The schoolgirls would be away then and I would walk in here and pick Emmy and Lou up, and give them the time of their lives during the holidays. All the way across the Pacific and the continent I was planning the surprise. I've got two ten-thousand-dollar checks made out to the girls here in my pocket, and I've got a list a mile long of other Christmas presents I was going to get for them. I even had the Christmas dinner menu fixed—and here I am."

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He looked uncommonly like a disappointed child. Belinda found herself desperately sorry and figuratively feeling in her pocket for sugar-plums.

"Your friends——" she began.

He interrupted.

"I tried to hunt up five of the old crowd, over the 'phone. Two are dead. One's in Europe. One's living in San Francisco. The other didn't remember my name until I explained, and then he hoped he'd see me while I was in town. It's going to be a lively Christmas."

Suddenly he jumped up and walked to the window, then came back and stood looking down at the Youngest Teacher.

"Miss Carewe, we are both Christmas outcasts. Why can't we make the best of it together?"

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Belinda flushed and sat up very straight, but he went on rapidly:

"What's the use of your moping here alone and my wandering around the big empty town alone? Why can't we spend the day together? You'll dine with me and go to a matinée, and we'll have an early supper somewhere, and then I'll bring you home and go away. We can cheer each other up."

"But it's so——"

"Yes, I know it's unconventional, but there's no harm in it—not a bit. You know my sisters, and nobody knows me here—and anyway, as I told you, I'm bleached. Word of honor, Miss Carewe, I'm a decent sort as men go—and I'm old enough to be your father. It would be awfully kind in you. A man has no right to be sentimental, but I'm blue. The heart's dropped out of my world. I'm not a drinker nowadays, but if I hadn't found you here I'm afraid I'd have gone out and played the fool by getting royally drunk. Babies we are, most of us. Please come. It will make a lot of difference to me, and it would be more cheerful for you than this sort of thing. Come! Do, won't you?"

And Belinda, doubting, wondering, hesitating, longing for good cheer and human friendliness, turned her back upon Dame Grundy and said yes.

Half an hour later a gay, dimpling girl, arrayed in holiday finery, and a stalwart, handsome man with iron-gray hair but an oddly boyish face, were whirling down Fifth Avenue, in a hansom, toward New York's most famous restaurant. The man stopped the cab in front of a florist's shop, disappeared for a moment, and came out carrying a bunch of violets so huge that the two little daintily gloved hands into which he gave the flowers could hardly hold them.

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The restaurant table, reserved by telephone while Belinda was making a hasty toilette, was brave with orchids. An obsequious head waiter, impressed by the order delivered over the wire, conducted the couple to the flower-laden table and hovered near them with stern eyes for the attendant waiters and propitiatory eyes for the patron of magnificent ideas.

Even the invisible chef, spurred by the demand upon his skill, wrought mightily for the delectation of the Christmas outcasts—and the outcasts forgot that they were homesick, forgot that they were strangers, and remembered only that life was good.

John Ryder told stories of Australian mine and ranch to the girl with the sparkling eyes and the eager face: talked, as he had never within his memory talked to anyone, of his own experiences, ambitions, hopes, ideals; and Belinda, radiant, charming, beamed upon him across the flowers and urged him on.

Once she pinched herself softly under cover of the table. Surely it was too good to be true, after the gloom of the morning. It was a dream: a violet-scented, French-cookery-flavoured dream spun around a handsome man with frank, admiring eyes and a masterful way.

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But the dream endured.

They were late for the theatre, but that made little difference. Neither was alone, forlorn, homesick. That was all that really counted.

After the theatre came a drive, fresh violets, despite all protest, an elaborate supper, which was only an excuse for comradeship.

As the time slipped by a shadow crept into John Ryder's eyes, his laugh became less frequent. He stopped telling stories and contented himself with asking occasional questions and watching the girl across the table, who took up the conversation as he let it fall and juggled merrily with it, although the colour crept into her cheeks as her eyes met the gray eyes that watched her with some vague problem stirring in their depths.

"We must go," she said at last.

John Ryder pushed his coffee-cup aside, rose, and wrapped her cloak around her, without a word. Still silent, he put her into the cab and took a seat beside her.

"I shall go to-night," he said after a little.

"Go? Where?"

Belinda's voice was surprised, regretful.

The man looked down at her.

"It's a good deal better. I belong out there. There's no place for me here, unless——"

He stopped and shook his head impatiently.

"I'd better go. I'd only make a fool of myself if I stayed. I'll run up and spend a day with the girls and then I'll hit the trail for the ranch again. I'll be contented out there—perhaps. There's something here that gets into a man's veins and makes him want things he can't have."

"I'm sorry," Belinda murmured vaguely. "It's been very nice, hasn't it?"

He laid a large hand over her small ones.

"Nice—that's a poor sort of a word, little girl."

The cab stopped before the school door. The two Christmas comrades went slowly up the steps and stood for a moment in the dark doorway.

"You are surely going?"

"Yes, I'm going."

"You've been very good to me. I shall remember to-day——"

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"And I." He put a hand on each of her shoulders. "I'm forty-five and I'm—a fool. You've given me a happy day, little girl, but some way or other I'm more homesick than ever. I've had a vision—and I think I shall always be homesick now. Good-by. God bless you!"

Belinda climbed the stairs to her room with a definite sense of loss in her heart.

"Still," she admitted to herself, as she put the violets in water, "he was forty-five."

CHAPTER VI

THE BLIGHTED BEING

KATHARINE HOLLAND was distinctly unpopular during her first weeks in the Ryder School. Miss Lucilla Ryder treated her courteously, but Miss Lucilla's courtesy had a frappé quality not conducive to heart expansion. Miss Emmeline showed even more than her usual gentle propitiatory kindness toward the quiet, unresponsive girl, but kindness from Miss Emmeline had the flavour of overtures from a faded daguerreotype or a sweetly smiling porcelain miniature. It was a slightly vague, impersonal, watery kindness not calculated to draw a shy or sensitive girl from her reserve.

The teachers, all save Belinda, voted Katharine difficult and unimpressionable. As for the girls, having tried the new pupil in the schoolgirl balance, and having found her lamentably wanting in appreciation of their friendliness, they promptly voted her "snippy," and vowed that she might mope as much as she pleased for all they cared—but that was before they knew that she was a "Blighted Being."

The moment that the cause of Katharine's entrance into the school fold and of her listless melancholy was revealed to her schoolfellows, public opinion turned a double back-somersault and the girl became the centre of school interest. Her schoolmates watched her every move, hung upon her every word, humbly accepted any smallest crumbs of attention or comradeship she vouchsafed to them. No one dared hint at a knowledge of her secret, but in each breast was nursed the hope that some day the heroine of romance might throw herself upon that breast and confide the story of her woes. Meanwhile, it was much to lavish unspoken sympathy upon her and live in an atmosphere freighted with romance.

Amelia Bowers was the lucky mortal who first learned the new girl's story and had the rapture of telling it under solemn pledge of secrecy to each of the other girls. Sentiment gravitates naturally toward Amelia. She is all heart. Possibly it would be more accurate to say she is all heart and imagination; and if a sentimental confidence, tale, or situation drifts within her aura it invariably seeks her out. Upon this occasion the second-floor maid was the intermediary through which the romantic tale flowed. She had been dusting the study while Miss Lucilla and Miss Emmeline discussed the problem of Katharine Holland, and happening to be close to the door—Norah emphasised the accidental nature of the location—she had overheard the whole story.

Norah herself had loved, early and often. Her heart swelled with sympathy, and she sped to Amelia, in whom she had discovered a kindred and emotional soul.

Fifteen minutes later Amelia, in one of her many wrappers, and with but one side of her hair done up in kids, burst in upon Laura May Lee and Kittie Dayton, who were leisurely preparing for bed. Excitement was written large upon the visitor's pink and white face. She swelled proudly with the importance of a bearer of great tidings.

"Girls, what do you think?" She paused dramatically.

The girls evidently didn't think, but they sat down upon the bed, big-eyed and expectant.

"Cross your hearts, hope to die?"

They crossed their hearts and solemnly hoped they might perish if they revealed one word of what was coming.

"You know Katharine Holland?"

They did.

"Awful stick," commented Laura May.

Amelia flamed into vivid defence.

"Nothing of the sort. I guess you'd be quiet too, Laura May Lee, if your heart was broken."

With one impulse the girls on the bed drew their knees up to their chins and hugged them ecstatically. This was more than they had hoped for.



"The girls on the bed drew their knees up to their chins"

"Yes, sir, broken," repeated Amelia emphatically.

"How d'you know?" asked Kittie Dayton.

"Never you mind. I know all about it."

"She didn't tell you?"

"No, she didn't tell me, but I know. She's madly in love with an enemy of her house."

"Not really?" Laura May's tone was tremulous with interest.

Kittie gave her knees an extra hug. "It's like Romeo and Juliet," she said. Kittie was a shining light in the English Literature classes.

Satisfied with the impression she had made Amelia gathered her forces for continuous narrative.

"You see, her folks have got lots of money, and she's their only child, but her father's an awful crank and her mother don't dare say her soul's her own."

"Don't Katharine's father like her?"

Amelia was annoyed.

"If you'll keep still, Kittie, I'll tell you all about it. If you can't wait I won't tell you at all."

Kittie subsided, and the story flowed on.

"He adores her, but he's very stubborn, and there's a man he hates worse than poison. They had some sort of a business quarrel a long time ago, and Mr. Holland is as bitter as can be yet and never allows one of his family to speak to one of the other family. He said he'd shoot any Clark who stepped a foot on his grounds."

Amelia's face was radiant with satisfaction. Her voice was hushed for dramatic effect.

"There's a Clark boy," she went on; then, not pleased with the ring of her sentence, began again.

"The hated enemy has a son." That was much better, and it gave her a good running start. "He's handsome as a prince, and perfectly lovely in every way." Miss Lucilla hadn't confided this fact to Miss Emmeline, but there are some things one knows instinctively, and Amelia believes in poetic license as applied to drama. "He's been away at school, but he came home last June, and he and Katharine got acquainted somewhere. She didn't dare tell her father she had met him, but she loved him desperately at first sight." Once more Miss Lucilla's bald facts were being elaborated.

"Did he fall in love that way, too?" Kittie was athirst for detail.

"He was crazy over her the minute he set eyes on her, and he just had to see her again, and he

got a friend to take her walking and let him meet them, and it went on that way until they got so well acquainted that he could make love to her, and then they got rid of the friend and used to go walking all by themselves, and finally somebody saw them and told Katharine's father. My, but he was mad. He sent for Katharine and she wouldn't lie to him. She said she and the young man were engaged and she was going to marry him, and her father swore something awful, and her mother cried, and Katharine was just as white as marble, but she kept perfectly calm." Amelia was warming to her work. "And they imprisoned her in her room, and her father used to go and try to make her promise she'd never speak to her lover again, and her mother used to cry and beg her to give him up. But they couldn't break her spirit or make her false to her vows, and finally they decided to send her away, so they wrote to Miss Lucilla and told her all about it. Miss Lucilla said she hated to have such a responsibility, but that they offered so much money she didn't feel she could refuse to take the girl—and that, anyway, the parents probably knew best, and it was for Katharine's best interests she should be separated from the boy. So Mr. Holland brought Katharine here, and she's not to stir out without a teacher, and she's not to have any mail save what passes through Miss Lucilla's hands and is opened by her, and she's not to receive any callers unless they bring a note from her father, and she's not to write letters except to her mother."

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"How'll they help it, I'd like to know? They can't watch her all the time," chorused the two listeners, each mentally devoting her inkstand, pen, stationery and services as postman to the cause of unfortunate love.

"How we've misjudged her," sighed Laura May.

"I thought it was funny she came here when she's so old. She must be eighteen, isn't she?" asked Kittie.

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"Pretty near. I'd elope and defy my cruel parents if I was eighteen, but she says she won't elope—that she'll wait until she's twenty-one, and then if her father won't give in, and can't show her anything bad about the man, she'll marry him anyhow. Miss Lucilla had a talk with her, and she said Katharine seemed to be a very nice girl and very reasonable except when it came to breaking off her love affair, but that she was just as stubborn as a rock about that."

"What do you suppose they'll do?"

Amelia meditated, turning the searchlight of memory upon her favourite novels.

"Well, she may waste away. She's pretty thin. I guess her father would feel dreadful when he stood by her deathbed. And then her lover may persuade her to fly with him. I wish she'd let me help her fly. Or she may just wait till she's twenty-one and then leave home with her father's curses on her head, and if she did that her mother'd probably die of grief, and everything her father'd touch would fail, and finally he'd be a lonely, miserable old man and send for Katharine to forgive him, and she'd bring her little daughter to him and——"

"Why, Amelia Bowers!" protested Kittie, whose slow brain had been following the rapid pace with difficulty, and who had not lost her schoolmate in the cursed and married heroine.

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"Well, it's pretty dreadful any way you fix it. She's a Blighted Being," said Amelia cheerfully. "We must be very considerate of her. Good-night."

She hurried away, intent upon spreading her news before the "lights-out" bell should ring, and with each telling the tale grew in detail and picturesqueness.

The next morning the girls began being considerate of Katharine. If the Blighted Being noticed the sudden change of attitude it must have occasioned her some wonder, if not considerable annoyance. She was not a girl to air her wrongs nor bid for sympathy, although she was not brave enough to assume a cheerful manner and keep her heartache out of her face. She learned her lessons, did her tasks, was respectful to the teachers, polite to the girls, but she held aloof from everyone—was, in the arrogant fashion of youth, absorbed in her own unhappiness. Occasionally, when she met Belinda's smiling, friendly eyes, her face softened and an answering smile hovered around her sensitive lips, but the relaxing went no further.

Amelia and her mates found the victim of parental tyranny an absorbing interest. They missed no word or act or movement of hers when she was with them. They offered her caramels and fudge with an air of fervent sympathy. They left the best orange for her at breakfast. They allowed her to head the crocodile during morning walk, day after day, and allotted the honor of walking with her to a different girl each day, the names being taken in alphabetical order.

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"They offered her caramels with fervent sympathy"

They gave her the end seat on the open cars, in church, at the theatre. They surreptitiously sharpened her pencils and cleaned her desk for her. They made offerings of flowers. They volunteered to loan her their novels even before they had read them.

And Katharine, not understanding the spring from which all this friendliness flowed, unbent slightly as the days went by, paid more attention to the life around her, yet kept the tightly closed lips and the unhappy eyes. She was very young, very much in love, and her pride suffered even more than her heart. Mr. Holland's method of parental government was, to put it mildly, not diplomatic.

James, the handy man of the school, was the only person upon whom she was ever actually seen to smile, but she appeared to have a liking for James. Amelia several times saw her talking to the man in the hall, and once something white and square passed from the girl's hands to the man's.

"She's getting James to mail letters," announced Amelia breathlessly, breaking in upon Laura May and Kittie.

"Bully for James!" crowed Kittie inelegantly. "But won't he catch it if Miss Lucilla finds out."

Miss Lucilla didn't find out, but an avenging Nemesis apparently overtook James, for a few days later he failed to appear at the school in the morning, and the cook had to attend to the furnace.

Later came a most apologetic note from the missing handy man. He was ill—seriously ill. The doctor had forbidden his leaving the house for at least a week. He was greatly distressed—in English of remarkable spelling—because he was inconveniencing Miss Ryder, but he didn't want to give up the place altogether, and if he might be allowed to send a substitute for a week or so he would surely be able to take up work again at the end of that time. He had a friend in mind—a nice, respectable young fellow who would do the work well and could be trusted even with the silver—a bit youngish, perhaps, but willing and handy. Should he send him?

Miss Lucilla answered by messenger. The young man was to come at once. The snow must be shoveled from the steps and walk before time for the day scholars to arrive. She hoped James would soon be able to return, but she would give his friend a trial.

Half an hour later a manly young fellow in very shabby clothes presented himself, had an interview with Miss Lucilla, who told her sister that he seemed a very decent person, and adjusted to his shoulders the burden of duties laid down by James. He bore the burden lightly, did his work with cheerful conscientiousness, and made himself useful in many ways unknown to the former incumbent. Norah and the other maid smiled upon him ineffectively.

"Always ready to lend ye a hand at an odd job, but divil a kiss or a bit of love-making behind the door," Norah explained to Amelia, who had sniffed an incipient romance below stairs when she first saw the new man.

Miss Lucilla congratulated herself upon the addition to her staff of servants and sought an excuse for letting James go altogether and cleaving to his friend. The teachers sang the praises of Augustus, the girls found him obliging and resourceful in smuggling, the servants couldn't pick quarrels with him. Evidently here was a gem of purest ray serene—that pearl beyond price, a perfect servant.

The incomparable Augustus was seldom in evidence above the basement, save when he went to the study for orders, moved the furniture, or did odd jobs of carpentering; but he was intrusted with the cleaning and setting in order of the big schoolroom, and Katharine Holland was occasionally in his way there. She liked to study before breakfast.

One Tuesday night, when study hour was over, the girls had gone to their rooms, and the downstairs lights were out, Belinda sat in her room, correcting examination papers. She struggled through the pile, reached the last paper, and found that several sheets of it were missing. A careful search in the room failed to bring them to light; and the Youngest Teacher, with a frown of vexation between her pretty brows, picked up a match, girded her dressing gown about her, and making no noise in her knitted bedside slippers, went swiftly down the stairs.

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The door of the large schoolroom, where she expected to find her missing papers, was closed; and as Belinda stopped before it she fancied that she heard a murmur of voices beyond the door. She hesitated, smiled at herself, struck a match sharply, and threw open the door.

There was a sudden movement in the room—a smothered exclamation. The light of the match fell full upon a man who held a girl in his arms.

So much Belinda saw before she put out her hand to the electric button and turned on the light.

Before her stood the incomparable Augustus, shabby, handsome, defiant; and to his arm clung Katharine Holland, white and frightened, but with her head up and a challenge in her eyes.

Belinda stared for a second in bewilderment. Then she understood. She tried to remember that she was a teacher and to fix the culprits with an icy glare, but Belinda is not very old herself, and in common with all the world she loves a lover. The situation was shocking—but—the look on the girl's face was too much for the Youngest Teacher's severity.

Impulsively Belinda held out her arms.

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"Oh, you poor child," she said. "You poor, foolish, hurt child." Her voice was athrill with tenderness. Her face was aglow with the mother-love that lives in the woman heart from doll days to the end of life.

With a little sob the girl moved forward blindly. Belinda's arms went round her and drew her close.

"Hush, dear. Don't cry. This is all wrong, but you've been very unhappy and you didn't mean to do wrong."

The Youngest Teacher's eyes met those of the boy who stood, crimson-cheeked, uncertain, under the glare of the electric light; and she studied his face—a good-looking, determined face, with honest manliness under its boyish recklessness.

"It wasn't fair," she said softly. "It wasn't fair to her. You would take care of her better than this if you loved her."

The recklessness faded, leaving the manliness.

"They've treated us abominably."

"Yes, I know, but she is only seventeen—and clandestine meetings are vulgar and dangerous."

"Her father can't give any reason except that ridiculous family feud."

"A scandal would furnish an excellent reason, and justify him in his attitude toward you."

"But there isn't going to be any scandal."

"Suppose someone else had found you here and told the story broadcast."

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He winced.

"But I can't live without seeing her sometimes."

"Then your love is a very small, boyish thing. A man who loved her could wait."

He had come forward now and was looking straight into her accusing face.

"I suppose you are going to tell Miss Ryder, and Katharine will be sent home in disgrace?"

Belinda shook her head. "What I do depends upon you. Perhaps I ought to tell. I owe a duty to Miss Ryder—but then I owe something to Katharine, too. She needs sympathy and sane counsel more than harshness. I think you are honest—though that was a dishonest, underhand trick of yours. If you will give me your word of honour as a gentleman not to try to see Katharine again while she is here I will say nothing about this."

He hesitated, looked down at the rumpled head upon Belinda's shoulder.

"Shall I do it, Katharine?"

Belinda's face flamed indignantly.

"Are you coward enough to shift the responsibility to her? Aren't you man enough to do what is best for her, no matter what she says?"

The broad shoulders squared themselves.

"I'll promise."

"Does any one know about this escapade?"

"James."

"Can you shut his mouth securely?"

"I will."

"You would better go now."

He moved a step nearer.

"Good-by, dear."

Katharine lifted a tear-stained face.

"You'll not stop caring?" There was a sob in her voice.

"It's only a question of waiting, sweetheart," he said gently; "and we love each other well enough to wait."

He looked beseechingly at the Youngest Teacher, who, being a very human pedagogue, turned her back upon the tragic young things; but a moment later she held out a friendly hand to the departing lover.

"Good-by. I'll trust you."

"Good-by. You may. I do love her. Be good to her," he added brokenly as he disappeared through the door.

Belinda was good to her; and long after the girl was asleep, the Youngest Teacher lay awake, puzzling over problems of right and wrong, of duty and impulse, of justice and mercy.

"They are only children," she said from her pinnacle of two-and-twenty years.

"But children's hurts are hard to bear while they last," her heart answered promptly.

"Perhaps I was all wrong. Probably I ought to have been more severe—but now I've promised"—and Belinda was asleep.

The next morning the incomparable Augustus had disappeared from the horizon. The faithful James, attired in a sporty new suit, new shoes and necktie, and looking astonishingly well and prosperous for a man who reported himself as just back from the gates of death, was once more in his accustomed place.

"James is a good soul, but Augustus had so much more resourcefulness and initiative," said Miss Lucilla regretfully.

"He had," agreed Belinda.

CHAPTER VII

THE PASSING OF AN AFFINITY

MADAME NOVERI, reader of palms and cards, and dabbler in astrology, was an institution in the Ryder school.

The Misses Ryder did not wholly approve of her, but when Miss Lucilla felt qualms of conscience concerning traffic with the black arts, Miss Emmeline reminded her that Madame had been patronized by the Vanderhuysens, and the older sister, whose creed included a belief that the Four Hundred, like the King, can do no wrong, smoothed the wrinkles from her brow and her conscience.

"I suppose it would be foolish not to allow her to come occasionally. The young ladies like it, and she has promised not to tell them anything tragic," she said reluctantly.

So Madame Noveri came to the school once or twice a year, and she kept her word about the tragedy, but as for sentiment—little did the Misses Ryder know of the romances she evoked from

rosy palms and greasy cards.

It was Amelia Bowers who suggested calling in the priestess of the occult to lighten the general gloom following the end of the Christmas holidays and a return to the Ryder fold.

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"This is simply too dead slow for anything," groaned the fair Amelia. "Let's ask Miss Ryder if we may send for Madame Noveri. I'd like to see whether meeting George Pettingill at the New Year's dance did anything to the lines in my hand. Good gracious! I should think it would have made a perfect furrow."

The other girls seconded Amelia's motion, a deputation waited upon Miss Ryder, and, within an hour, the palmist was holding Amelia's hand in the little waiting-room to which the other seekers after knowledge were admitted, one by one.

Madame instantly detected the havoc wrought by young Pettingill; or, at least, as Amelia said afterward, "she didn't see his name, but she knew right away that there had been *some one* during the holidays." But it was for Cynthia Weston that Madame Noveri flung wide the gates of the future and revealed coming events of absorbing interest.

Cynthia enjoyed the enviable distinction of being the prettiest girl in the school, and disputed with Laura May Lee the honor of being the best dressed of the Ryder pupils. In addition she was a good student, she was amiable, and her manners were the admiration of the faculty. Taking all this into consideration, the fact that she was even more sentimental than the ever-gushing Amelia could not effectually dim her radiance. Moreover, her sentimentality was of a finer fibre than that of her chum. She did not fall in love with the lightning-change-artist celerity displayed by Amelia. Man dominated her horizon as well as that of her friend, but for her man was an abstraction, a transcendently perfect being, who might come around any corner to meet her, and for whom she waited breathlessly. She read novels and dreamed of a hero. Amelia read the same novels and saw a hero in every man she met.

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As it happened, for one reason or another, Cynthia had never consulted Madame Noveri, but the occult note appealed to her romantic side, and she needed only slight evidence to convince her that Madame was, as Amelia contended, "a wonder." The evidence was speedily forthcoming. Closeted with the fortune-teller, Cynthia heard an analysis of her own character and tastes, which owed its accuracy to skillful pumping of Amelia, but which impressed the listener profoundly.

By the time Madame Noveri had thrown in a few facts concerning the Weston family history—also gathered from the unsuspecting Amelia—Cynthia was ready to accept as inspired truth any revelations that might be made to her.

Then Madame, shrewd in knowledge of schoolgirl logic, felt that it was safe to turn to prophecy.

"A crisis is coming in your life," she said solemnly. "It is written in your hand. Let me see what the cards tell."

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She shuffled the cards and bent over them, while Cynthia, thrilled by the thought of an approaching crisis, watched eagerly.

"Yes; it is here, too. I knew the hand could not lie. A dark man is coming into your life."



"A dark man is coming into your life"

Cynthia gasped ecstatically. She admired dark men.

"It is all clear in the cards. There is the fate card, and there is the dark man."

"I do hope he hasn't a moustache," murmured the listener. "Can you see his name?"

"No."

"And you can't tell where I'll meet him, or how, or when?"

"The cards don't say, but it will be soon, and there's the money card, so he'll be rich. You'll both fall in love the moment you meet. He's your affinity."

Cynthia went out of the room in a sentimental trance. At last her dream was coming true. Not a tinge of skepticism lurked in her mind. Hadn't Madame told her all about her innermost feelings, and about her sister Molly having been ill with diphtheria, and about her father having made a big fortune out of pine lands, and about her having refused little Billy Bennington, whose father was a millionaire and had a huge house on Fifth Avenue? No; there was no room for doubt.

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She laughed off the questions of the girls. What she had learned was too sacred to be told to anyone except Amelia and Laura May, and possibly Blanche White.

After the lights were out that night she told them, and their sympathy and excitement were all she could have desired.

"Goodness, but I just envy you, Cynthia Weston," said Amelia in a stage whisper, which was a concession to the faculty's unreasonable prejudice against visiting after "lights-out" bell. "It's the most exciting thing I ever heard. He may pop out at you anywhere. She said it would be soon, didn't she?"

"Very soon." There was a soulful pride in Cynthia's manner, a tremulous thrill in her voice.

"Well, we'll all watch out for him. I'm almost as interested as if I were it," said Laura May generously; and Cynthia crept cautiously to her own room, to dream of a beautiful being with raven hair and piercing black eyes—and no moustache.

The days following that eventful evening were agitating ones for Cynthia. Every dark-haired man who passed the school procession during the morning excursion set her heart palpitating. Katharine Holland's dark-eyed brother turning up unexpectedly at the school was flattered by the tremendous impression he made upon his sister's friend, Miss Weston; a swarthy book-agent who succeeded in obtaining an interview with Miss Ryder was surprised when a pretty girl whom he passed on the stairs grasped hastily at the baluster and seemed quite overcome by emotion.

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At any moment the affinity might appear; but the days went by and still he delayed his coming.

A new play, fresh from Western successes, had begun a New York run upon the preceding Monday night; and with its advent a new matinée idol had dawned upon the theatrical horizon. Critics chanted praises of his *beaux yeux*, a strenuous press-agent scattered broadcast tales of his conquests, of the countless letters he had received from infatuated maidens, of the heiresses and society belles who had fallen victims to his charms. Occasionally someone mentioned that he could act, but that was a minor consideration.

Rumors of his fatal beauty reached the school by way of a day pupil who had seen the play on its first night, and Amelia, Laura May, Cynthia, Blanche and Kittie Dayton promptly bought tickets for the Saturday matinée and asked Belinda to chaperon them. They were in their seats early, and tranquilly watched the curtain go up upon a conventional drawing-room scene; but as Cecil Randolph, the leading man, turned from the window at the back of the stage and strolled toward the footlights, Belinda heard a queer little choking sound from Cynthia, who sat beside her, and saw her clutch Amelia's arm.

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The matinée idol was tall, he had black hair and eyes, he was smooth-shaven—and Cynthia *knew!*

The other girls were inclined to discount her claim when they had a chance to talk the matter over. Friendship is all very well, but to give a matinée idol up to any one girl, without entering a protest, would be more than human. Still there was no denying that the event fitted into Madame Noveri's prediction at every point, and it was natural to suppose that if Cynthia had met her affinity according to schedule she would be absolutely certain of his identity, so the confidants finally accepted the situation and gave themselves up to vital interest in their friend's romance, while Cynthia herself went about with her head in the clouds, drove her teachers to despair by her absent-mindedness, read the theatrical columns of all the papers, and wasted her substance in riotous buying of photographs. As for the amount of money squandered upon matinée tickets during those weeks—only the long-suffering fathers who were called upon for supplementary pocket-money could do justice to that tale of extravagance.



**"... wasted her substance in riotous buying
of photographs"**

Amelia and Laura May and Blanche stood by nobly. If anything exciting were going to happen they wanted to be there when it happened; so they went with Cynthia to all her affinity's matinées and occasionally to an evening performance. All of the teachers were successively pressed into service, and when the list gave out the girls began again with Belinda. Sometimes, when the other girls' pocket-money ran short, Cynthia paid for all the seats.

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In due course Cecil Randolph noticed the group that invariably occupied seats in the third row, and smiled upon the girls—not his inclusive, catholic, matinée-idol smile, which might be taken to heart by any girl in the audience, but a personal, italicized smile all their own. The chaperon missed the phenomenon, but all four girls thrilled with delight, though three loyal hearts passed the smile on to Cynthia, its rightful owner. Even the idol himself accentuated his smile when it reached the fair girl with the blushing cheeks and eager eyes. She was so uncommonly pretty, and though it paid him to be adored by the plain it was a pleasant thing to be adored by the pretty.

On the eleventh of February Cynthia gave a luncheon and box party to her faithful three with Miss Spogg as chaperon. Mr. Weston's monthly check had been more liberal than usual, and a box is even nearer the stage than the third row of the orchestra chairs.

The idol's special smile followed the group to the box. Perhaps it was even warmer, more melting than usual; for the four girls were uncommonly good to look at, in their dainty frocks and hats, and with the great bunches of long-stemmed single violets, which had been luncheon favors, nestling among their laces and chiffons and furs.

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During his great scene in the last act the actor faced the Ryder box and Cynthia bore the brunt of his wild raving. Even near-sighted Miss Spogg had an uncomfortable feeling that all was not quite as it should be, and registered a mental vow that she would protest to Miss Ryder against the conspicuousness of box seats; but the girls were too completely absorbed to feel conspicuous, and Cynthia, cheeks flaming, eyes glowing, red lips apart, drank in the love scene as though she hadn't already known it by heart and were not sharing it with hundreds of strangers. She was absurdly young, unspeakably foolish, but she was beyond a shadow of a doubt enjoying life—and it is hard to be severe with any one so pretty and impractical as Cynthia.

As the curtain fell upon the hero's hopeless passion the little maid's hands went to her breast, and an instant later a huge bunch of long-stemmed violets dropped at the idol's feet. He did not ruin his curtain pose by picking them up, but for one fleeting second he smiled his thanks. Miss Spogg was, of course, irate; but there were ways of appeasing Miss Spogg, and Cynthia knew them.

On Valentine's Day morning the school postman's load was heavy, and the solemnity of chapel was marred by a pervading excitement.

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Cynthia had valentines—several of them—yet she did not look happy. All of her envelopes bore home postmarks, and she had expected—well, she hardly knew what she had expected, but something, surely.

After chapel came French recitation, and the Disappointed One was wrestling in melancholy fashion with the imperfect subjunctive, when a maid appeared at the door.

"A box for Miss Weston," she announced to the teacher.

"Put it in her room," commanded Mademoiselle.

"Please, ma'am, it's flowers. Should I open them?"

Mademoiselle smiled. She remembered valentine offerings of her own.

"You may be excused to attend to the flowers, Miss Weston. Come back as soon as possible."

Cynthia took the big, square box and fled to her room. Her prophetic soul told her what the contents would be.

She removed the wrapping and the lid. A gust of fragrance sweetened the room. The blonde head went down over the flowers and the pretty face was hidden in them. Then Cynthia lifted from the box a great mass of long-stemmed single violets, and with fast-beating heart read the legend on the little valentine tucked among the blossoms.

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"Love's offering," said the valentine.

Cynthia quite forgot to go back to the French class; and when, at the end of the period, Amelia, Laura May and Blanche burst in upon her, she was still sitting with the flowers in her lap and the card in her hand.



"Cynthia quite forgot to go back to the French class"

"From *him*?" chorused the girls.

Cynthia nodded dreamily and handed them the card. Of course they were from *him*.

If the history of that week could be adequately written the chapter might be headed "The Cult of the Violet."

Cynthia worshipped at the shrine of the valentine violets. She clipped their stems, she changed the water in the vase, she opened the window and shut the register because the room was too warm for violets, she shut the window and opened the register for fear of chilling the flowers. When not on duty elsewhere she might ordinarily be seen sitting in her own room gazing at the purple blossoms like a meditating Yogi.

Some time the flowers would fade and she would dry them and lay them away; but if she could only keep them fresh enough to wear to the matinée on Saturday! Of course they would be a little withered, but he would understand that.

Friday night, both Cynthia and Amelia were elected to dine at the Waldorf with Kittie Dayton

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and her uncle—an old bachelor uncle who spent several months in New York each winter, and, feeling that he must do something for Kittie at least once during his stay, lightened his penance by inviting two of her prettiest friends to share his hospitality with her.

Cynthia was too deep in romance to be enthusiastic about the outing, but the engagement was of long standing, and even the most love-lorn of boarding-school girls is not wholly impervious to the charms of a good dinner. So the three girls were escorted to the hotel and left in Mr. Dayton's charge. Under his wing they entered the dining-room, found the table reserved for them, and were seated by an impressive head-waiter.

Then they looked about them and Cynthia stiffened suddenly in her chair, while Amelia gave vent to a smothered "Oh!"

Kittie followed their eyes, but couldn't fully appreciate their emotion.

"Why, there's Cecil Randolph at the next table," she whispered joyously. "What larks to meet him off the stage. Isn't he perfectly seraphic?"

Mr. Dayton's glance travelled idly to the adjoining table.

"Yes, that's Randolph and his wife. Handsome couple, aren't they?"

Amelia swallowed an oyster whole, and created a fortunate though involuntary diversion by choking violently; while Cynthia, under cover of the excitement, clutched at composure and fought a sharp but successful battle against tears.

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Married! Her affinity married! Well, after all, Madame Noveri had never promised she would marry the dark man. She had only foretold a coming crisis—and this was the crisis.

The thought of being in the middle of a bona-fide crisis was distinctly uplifting. She must be brave. Her favourite heroines always smiled bravely with white lips when they were sorely smitten by grief.

She and the idol could never marry and live happily ever afterward, but there was a certain consoling splendour in having been loved hopelessly by such a perfect hero—for he did love her. She was sure of that. Of course he ought not to have done it, ought not to have sent her the violets and the love message; but that was Fate! Hadn't Madame Noveri known all about the thing before it happened?

Cynthia sighed miserably. She was quite sure that her heart was broken, but she was glad he loved her, and she would treasure his violets always, though she would not go to the matinée to see him again. All was over.

The dinner ended at last; and as the Dayton party filed past the Randolph table their progress was blocked by an incoming group. Cynthia did not raise her eyes; but suddenly her affinity's jovial voice fell upon her ears like a blow.

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"Look, Daisy, there's the little girl who's so silly over me—yes; the blonde one. Pretty child, isn't she? Too bad to encourage such infants, but they mean box-office receipts, and we have to earn terrapin like this, in one way or another."

Just how Cynthia got out of the room she will never know. She was blushing furiously, for shame's sake, and the tears of mortification in her eyes kept her from recognizing Billy Bennington immediately when he appeared at her elbow.

"Oh, I say, Miss Weston, this *is* jolly. Let me go out to the carriage with you."

Billy was a nice little boy, but she hated him. She hoped she'd never see a man again. She wished she were dead. She rather thought she'd go into a convent.

"D-d-id you g-get my valentine?" stammered Billy.

He knew that something had gone wrong with his divinity, and he was embarrassed, but his conscience was clear.

Cynthia shook her head.

"What? You never got my violets?"

She turned toward him swiftly.

"Violets?"

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"Why, yes. I sent you those big single ones you like best, and I put a little valentine in with them."

She looked at the chubby little figure, the round, rosy face, the neatly-parted blond hair, the downy moustache.

For a moment a resplendent vision of a raven-haired hero blotted out poor Billy's image, and the little girl winked fast to keep back the tears. She had learned a lesson not down on the Ryder schedule and found it overwhelming, but she managed to smile faintly.

"Yes, I did get the flowers. Thank you so much," she said in a small, wobbly voice.

The carriage door slammed and she was whirled away, while Billy stood gazing fatuously into

the night.

The next morning there were long-stemmed single violets and shredded photographs in the Ryder ash-can.

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUEER LITTLE THING

BONITA ALLEN was a queer little thing. Everyone in the school, from Miss Ryder down to the chambermaid, had made remarks to that effect before the child had spent forty-eight hours in the house, yet no one seemed able to give a convincing reason for the general impression.

The new pupil was quiet, docile, moderately well dressed, fairly good looking. She did nothing extraordinary. In fact, she effaced herself as far as possible; yet from the first she caused a ripple in the placid current of the school, and her personality was distinctly felt.

"I think it's her eyes," hazarded Belinda, as she and Miss Barnes discussed the newcomer in the Youngest Teacher's room. "They aren't girl eyes at all."

"Fine eyes," asserted the teacher of mathematics with her usual curtness.

Belinda nodded emphatic assent. "Yes, of course; beautiful, but so big and pathetic and dumb. I feel ridiculously apologetic every time the child looks at me, and as for punishing her—I'd as soon shoot a deer at six paces. It's all wrong. A twelve-year-old girl hasn't any right to eyes like those. If the youngster is unhappy she ought to cry twenty-five handkerchiefs full of tears, as Evangeline Marie did when she came, and then get over it. And if she's happy she ought to smile with her eyes as well as her lips. I can't stand self-repression in children."

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"She'll be all right when she has been here longer and begins to feel at home," said Miss Barnes. But Belinda shook her head doubtfully as she went down to superintend study hour.

Seated at her desk in the big schoolroom she looked idly along the rows of girlish heads until she came to one bent stoically over a book. The new pupil was not fidgeting like her comrades. Apparently her every thought was concentrated upon the book before her, and her elbows were on her desk. One lean little brown hand supported the head, whose masses of straight, black hair were parted in an unerring white line and fell in two heavy braids. The face framed in the smooth, shining hair was lean as the hand, yet held no suggestion of ill-health. It was clean-cut almost to sharpness, brown with the brownness that comes from wind and sun, oddly firm about chin and lips, high of cheekbones, straight of nose.

As Belinda looked two dark eyes were raised from the book and met her own—sombre eyes with a hurt in them—and an uncomfortable lump rose in the Youngest Teacher's throat. She smiled at the sad little face, but the smile was not a merry one. In some unaccountable way it spoke of the sympathetic lump in the throat, and the Queer Little Thing seemed to read the message, for the ghost of an answering smile flickered in the brown depths before the lids dropped over them.

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When study hour was over the Youngest Teacher moved hastily to the door, with some vague idea of following up the successful smile and establishing diplomatic relations with the new girl; but she was not quick enough. Bonita had slipped into the hall and hurried up the stairs toward her own room.

Shrugging her shoulders Belinda turned toward the door of Miss Ryder's study and knocked.

"Come in."

The voice was not encouraging. Miss Lucilla objected to interruptions in the late evening hours, when she relaxed from immaculately fitted black silk to the undignified folds of a violet dressing-gown.

When she recognised the intruder she thawed perceptibly.

"Oh, Miss Carewe. Come in. Nothing wrong, is there?"

Belinda dropped into a chair with a whimsical little sigh.

"Nothing wrong except my curiosity. Miss Ryder, do tell me something about that Allen child."

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Miss Lucilla eyed her subordinate questioningly.

"What has she been doing?"

"Nothing at all. I wish she would do something. It's what she doesn't do, and looks capable of doing, that bothers me. There's simply no getting at her. She's from Texas, isn't she?"

The principal regarded attentively one of the grapes she was eating, and there was an interval of silence.

"She is a queer little thing," Miss Lucilla admitted at last. "Yes, she's from Texas, but that's no reason why she should be odd. We've had a number of young ladies from Texas, and they were quite like other schoolgirls only more so. Just between you and me, Miss Carewe, I think it must be the child's Indian blood that makes her seem different."

"Indian?" Belinda sat up, sniffing romance in the air.

"Yes, her father mentioned the strain quite casually when he wrote. It's rather far back in the family, but he seemed to think it might account for the girl's intense love for Nature and dislike of conventions. Mrs. Allen died when the baby was born, and the father has brought the child up on a ranch. He's completely wrapped up in her, but he finally realised that she needed to be with women. He's worth several millions, and he wants to educate her so that she'll enjoy the money—'be a fine lady,' as he puts it. I confess his description of the girl disturbed me at first, but he was so liberal in regard to terms that—"

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Miss Lucilla left the sentence in the air and meditatively ate another bunch of grapes.

"Did her father come up with her?" Belinda asked.

"No; he sent her with friends who happened to be coming—a highly respectable couple, but breezy, very breezy. They told me that Bonita could ride any bronco on the ranch and could shoot a Jack-rabbit on the run. They seemed to think she would be a great addition to our school circle on that account. Personally I'm much relieved to find her so tractable and quiet, but I've noticed something—well—er—unusual about her."

As Belinda went up to bed she met a slim little figure in a barbaric red and yellow dressing-gown crossing the hall. There was a shy challenge in the serious child face, although the little feet, clad in soft, beaded moccasins, quickened their steps; and Belinda answered the furtive friendliness by slipping an arm around the girl's waist and drawing her into the tiny hall bedroom.

"You haven't been to see me. It's one of the rules of the school that every girl shall have a cup of cocoa with me before she has been here three evenings," she said laughingly.

The Queer Little Thing accepted the overture soberly, and, curled up in the one big chair, watched the Youngest Teacher in silence.

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The cocoa was soon under way. Then the hostess turned and smiled frankly at her guest. Belinda's smile is a reassuring thing.

"Homesick business, isn't it?" she said abruptly, with a warm note of comradeship in her voice.

The tense little figure in the big chair leaned forward with sudden, swift confidence.

"I'm going home," announced Bonita in a tone that made no reservations.

Belinda received the news without the quiver of an eyelash or a sign of incredulity.

"When?" she asked with interest warm enough to invite confession and not emphatic enough to rouse distrust.

"I don't know just when, but I have to go. I can't stand it, and I've written to Daddy. He'll understand. Nobody here knows. They're all used to it. They've always lived in houses like this, with little back yards that have high walls around them, and sidewalks and streets right outside the front windows, and crowds of strange people going by all the time, and just rules, rules, rules everywhere! Everybody has so many manners, and they talk about things I don't know anything about, and nobody would understand if I talked about the real things."

"Perhaps I'd understand a little bit," murmured Belinda. The Queer Little Thing put out one brown hand and touched the Youngest Teacher's knee gently in a shy, caressing fashion.

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"No, you wouldn't understand, because you don't know; but you could learn. The others couldn't. The prairie wouldn't talk to them and they'd be lonesome—the way I am here. Dick says you have to learn the language when you are little, or else have a gift for such languages, but that when you've once learned it you don't care to hear any other."

"Who's Dick?" Belinda asked.

"Dick? Oh, he's just Dick. He taught me to ride and to shoot, and he used to read poetry to me, and he told me stories about everything. He used to go to a big school called Harvard, but he was lonesome there—the way I am here."

"The way I am here" dropped into the talk like a persistent refrain, and there was heartache in it.

"I want to go home," the child went on. Now that the dam of silence was down the pent-up feeling rushed out tumultuously. "I want to see Daddy and the boys and the horses and the cattle, and I want to watch the sun go down over the edge of the world, not just tumble down among the dirty houses, and I want to gallop over the prairie where there aren't any roads, and smell the grass and watch the birds and the sky. You ought to see the sky down there at night, Miss Carewe. It's so big and black and soft and full of bright stars, and you can see clear to where it touches the ground all around you, and there's a night breeze that's as cool as cool, and the boys all play their banjos and guitars and sing, and Daddy and I sit over on our veranda and listen. There's only a little narrow strip of sky with two or three stars in it out of my window here, and it's so noisy and cluttered out in the back yards—and I hate walking in a procession on the ugly old streets, and

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doing things when bells ring. I hate it! I hate it!"

Her voice hadn't risen at all, had only grown more and more vibrant with passionate rebellion. The sharp little face was drawn and pale, but there were no tears in the big, tragic eyes.

Belinda had consoled many homesick girls, but this was a different problem.

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "Don't you think it will be easier after a while?"

The small girl with the old face shook her head.

"No, it won't. It isn't in me to like all this. I'm so sorry, because Daddy wants me to be a lady. He said it was as hard for him to send me as it was for me to come, but that I couldn't learn to be a lady, with lots of money to spend, down there with only the boys and him. There wasn't any lady there on the ranch at all, except Mammy Lou, the cook, and she didn't have lots of money to spend, so she wasn't the kind he meant. I thought I'd come and try, but I didn't know it would be like this. I don't want to be a lady, Miss Carewe. I don't believe they can be very happy. I've seen them in the carriages and they don't look very happy. You're nice. I like you, and I'm most sure Daddy and Dick and the boys would like you, but then you haven't got lots of money, have you? And you were born up here, so you don't know any better, anyway. I'm going home."

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The burst of confidence ended where it had begun. She was going home, and she was so firm in the faith that Belinda, listening, believed her.

"But if your father says no?"

The dark little face was quiet again, all save the great eyes.

"I'll *have* to go," said the Queer Little Thing slowly.

Four days later Miss Lucilla Ryder called the Youngest Teacher into the study.

"Miss Carewe, I'm puzzled about this little Miss Allen. I had a letter from her father this morning. He says she has written that she is very homesick and unhappy and doesn't want to stay. He feels badly about it, of course, but he very wisely leaves the matter in our hands—says he realises she'll have to be homesick and he'll have to be lonesome if she's to be made a lady. But he wants us to do all we can to make her contented. He very generously sends a check for five hundred dollars, which we are to use for any extra expense incurred in entertaining her and making her happy. Now I thought you might take her to the theatre and the art museum, and the—a—the aquarium, and introduce her to the pleasures and advantages of city life. She'll soon be all right."

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With sinking heart Belinda went in search of the girl. She found her practising five-finger exercises drearily in one of the music-rooms. As Belinda entered the child looked up and met the friendly, sympathetic eyes. A mute appeal sprang into her own eyes, and Belinda understood. The thing was too bad to be talked about, and the Youngest Teacher said no word about the homesickness or the expected letter. In this way she clinched her friendship with the Queer Little Thing.

But, following the principal's orders, she endeavoured to demonstrate to Bonita the joy and blessedness of life in New York. The child went quietly wherever she was taken—a mute, pathetic little figure to whom the aquarium fish and the Old Masters and the latest matinée idol were all one—and unimportant. The other girls envied her her privileges and her pocket-money, but they did not understand. No one understood save Belinda, and she did her cheerful best to blot out old loves with new impressions; but from the first she felt in her heart that she was elected to failure. The child was fond of her, always respectful, always docile, always grave. Nothing brought a light into her eyes or a spontaneous smile to her lips. Anyone save Belinda would have grown impatient, angry. *She* only grew more tender—and more troubled. Day by day she watched the sad little face grow thinner. It was pale now, instead of brown, and the high cheekbones were strikingly prominent. The lips pressed closely together drooped plaintively at the corners, and the big eyes were more full of shadow than ever; but the child made no protest nor plea, and by tacit consent she and Belinda ignored their first conversation and never mentioned Texas.

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Often Belinda made up her mind to put aside the restraint and talk freely as she would to any other girl, but there was something about the little Texan that forbade liberties, warned off intruders, and the Youngest Teacher feared losing what little ground she had gained.

Finally she went in despair to Miss Ryder.

"The Indian character is too much for me," she confessed with a groan half humorous, half earnest. "I give it up."

"What's the matter?" asked Miss Ryder.

"Well, I've dragged poor Bonita Allen all over the borough of Manhattan and the Bronx and spent many ducats in the process. She has been very polite about it, but just as sad over Sherry's tea hour as over Grant's tomb, and just as cheerful over the Cesnola collection as over the monkey cage at the Zoo. The poor little thing is so unhappy and miserable that she looks like a wild animal in a trap, and I think the best thing we can do with her is to send her home."

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"Nonsense," said Miss Lucilla. "Her father is paying eighteen hundred dollars a year."

Belinda was defiant.

"I don't care. He ought to take her home."

"Miss Carewe, you are sentimentalising. One would think you had never seen a homesick girl before."

"She's different from other girls."

"I'll talk with her myself," said Miss Lucilla sternly.

She did, but the situation remained unchanged, and when she next mentioned the Texan problem to Belinda, Miss Lucilla was less positive in her views.

"She's a very strange child, but we must do what we can to carry out her father's wishes."

"I'd send her home," said Belinda.

It was shortly after this that Katharine Holland, who sat beside Bonita at the table, confided to Belinda that that funny little Allen girl didn't eat a thing. The waitress came to Belinda with the same tale, and the Youngest Teacher sought out Bonita and reasoned with her.

"You really must eat, my dear," she urged.

"Why?"

"Why, you'll be ill if you don't."

"How soon?"

Belinda looked dazed.

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"How soon will I be sick?"

"Very soon, I'm afraid," the puzzled teacher answered.

"That's good. I don't feel as if I could wait much longer."

Belinda gasped.

"Do you mean to say you want to be ill?"

"If I get very sick Daddy will come for me."

The teacher looked helplessly at the quiet, great-eyed child, then launched into expostulation, argument, entreaty.

Bonita listened politely and was profoundly unimpressed.

"It's wicked, dear child. It would make your father wretchedly unhappy."

"He'd be awfully unhappy if he understood, anyway. He thinks I'm not really unhappy and that it's his duty to keep me up here and make a lady of me, no matter how lonely he is without me. He wrote me so—but I know he'd be terribly glad if he had a real excuse for taking me home."

Belinda exhausted her own resources and appealed to Miss Lucilla, who stared incredulously over her nose-glasses and sent for Bonita.

After the interview she called for the Youngest Teacher, and the two failures looked at each other helplessly.

"It's an extraordinary thing," said Miss Lucilla in her most magisterial tone—"a most extraordinary thing. In all my experience I've seen nothing like it. Nothing seems to make the slightest impression upon the child. She's positively crazy."

"You will tell her father to send for her, won't you?"

Miss Lucilla shook her head stubbornly.

"Not at all. It would be the ruination of the child to give in to her whims and bad temper now. If she won't listen to reason she must be allowed to pay for her foolishness. When she gets hungry enough she will eat. It's absurd to talk about a child of twelve having the stoicism to starve herself into an illness just because she is homesick at boarding-school."

Belinda came back to her threadworn argument.

"But Bonita is different, Miss Ryder."

"She's a very stubborn, selfish child," said Miss Ryder resentfully, and turning to her desk she closed the conversation.

Despite discipline, despite pleadings, despite cajolery, Bonita stood firm. Eat she would not, and when, on her way to class one morning, the scrap of humanity with the set lips and the purple shadows round her eyes fainted quietly, Belinda felt that a masterly inactivity had ceased to be a virtue.

James, the house man, carried the girl upstairs, and the Youngest Teacher put her to bed, where she opened her eyes to look unseeingly at Belinda and then closed them wearily and lay

quite still, a limp little creature whose pale face looked pitifully thin and lifeless against the white pillow. The Queer Little Thing's wish had been fulfilled, and illness had come without long delay.

For a moment Belinda looked down at the girl. Then she turned and went swiftly to Miss Ryder's study, her eyes blazing, her mouth so stern that Amelia Bowers, who met her on the stairs, hurried to spread the news that Miss Carewe was "perfectly hopping mad about something."

Once in the presence of the August One the little teacher lost no time in parley.

"Miss Ryder," she said crisply—and at the tone her employer looked up in amazement—"I've told you about Bonita Allen. I've been to you again and again about her. You knew that she was fretting her heart out and half sick, and then you knew that for several days she hasn't been eating a thing. I tried to make you understand that the matter was serious and that something radical needed to be done, but you insisted that the child would come around all right and that we mustn't give in to her. I begged you to send for her father and you said it wasn't necessary. I'm here to take your orders, Miss Ryder, but I can't stand this sort of thing. I know the girl better than any of the rest of you do, and I know it isn't badness that makes her act so. She's different, queer, capable of feeling things the ordinary girl doesn't know. She isn't made for this life. There's something in her that can't endure it. She's frantic with homesickness, and it's perfectly useless to try to keep her here or make her like other girls. Now she's ill—really ill. I've just put her to bed, and, honestly, Miss Ryder, if we don't send for her father we'll have a tragedy on our hands. It sounds foolish, but it's true. If nobody else telegraphs to Mr. Allen *I'm* going to do it."

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The gauntlet was down. The defiance was hurled, and as Belinda stood waiting for the crash she mentally figured out the amount of money needed for her ticket home; but Miss Ryder was alarmed, and in the spasm of alarm she quite overlooked the mutiny.

"Oh, my dear Miss Carewe. This will never do, never do," she said uncertainly. "It would sound so very badly if it got out—a pupil so unhappy with us that she starved herself into an illness. Oh, no, it would never do. We must take steps at once. I wish the child had stayed in Texas—but who could have foreseen—and eighteen hundred dollars is such an excellent rate. I do dislike exceptions. Rules are so much more satisfactory. Now as a rule—"

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"She's an exception," interrupted Belinda. "I'll telephone for the doctor while you are writing the telegram."

"Oh, no, not the doctor. He wouldn't understand the conditions, and he might talk and create a false impression."

"I'll manage all that," Belinda assured her soothingly. Miss Lucilla Ryder in a panic was a new experience.

When the doctor came there were bright red spots on the Queer Little Thing's cheeks and she was babbling incoherently about prairie flowers and horses and Dick and Daddy.

"Nerve strain, lack of nourishment, close confinement after an outdoor life," said the doctor gravely. "I'm afraid she's going to be pretty sick, but beef broth and this Daddy and a hope of homegoing will do more for her than medicine. Miss Ryder has made a mistake here, Miss Carewe."

Meanwhile a telegram had gone to Daddy, and the messenger who delivered it heard a volume of picturesque comment that was startling even on a Texas ranch.

"Am coming," ran the answering dispatch received by Miss Ryder that night; but it was not until morning that Bonita was able to understand the news.

"He's scared, but I know he's glad," she said, and she swallowed without a murmur the broth against which even in her delirium she had fought.

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One evening, three days later, a hansom dashed up to the school and out jumped a tall, square-shouldered man in a wide-brimmed hat, and clothes that bore only a family resemblance to the clothing of New York millionaires, though they were good clothes in their own free-and-easy way.

A loud, hearty voice inquiring for "My baby" made itself heard even in the sick-room, and a sudden light flashed into the little patient's eyes—a light that was an illumination and a revelation.

"Daddy!" she said weakly; and the word was a heart-throb.

Mr. Allen wasted no time in a polite interview with Miss Ryder. Hypnotised by his masterfulness, the servant led him directly up to the sick-room and opened the door.

The man filled the room, a high breeze seemed to come with him, and vitality flowed from him in tangible waves. Belinda smiled, but there were tears in her eyes, for the big man's heart was in his face.

"Baby!"

"Daddy!"

Belinda remembered an errand downstairs.

When she returned the big Texan was sitting on the side of the bed with both the lean little hands in one of his big, brawny ones, while his other hand awkwardly smoothed the straight, black hair.

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"When will you take me home, Daddy?" said the child with the shining eyes.

"As soon as you're strong enough, Honey. The boys wanted me to let them charge New York in a bunch and get you. It's been mighty lonesome on that ranch. I wish to Heaven I'd never been fool enough to let you come away."

He turned to Belinda with a quizzical smile sitting oddly on his anxious face.

"I reckon she might as well go, miss. I sent her to a finishing school, and, by thunder, she's just about finished."

There was a certain hint of pride in his voice as he added reflectively:

"I might have known if she said she'd have to come home she meant it. Harder to change her mind than to bust any bronco I ever tackled. Queer little thing, Baby is."

CHAPTER IX

A CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE

BELINDA paused in the doorway of the Primary School room, which adjoined her bedroom, and stared in amazement at the five scribes.

The girls were absorbed in their writing, but the Youngest Teacher was reasonably certain that a fine frenzy of studiousness was not the explanation of the phenomenon. When had Amelia and her "set" ever devoted recreation hour to voluntary study?

Suddenly Amelia put down her pen, sat back in her chair and spoke.

"I simply will not have Aunt Ellen ride in the third carriage. So there! She'll think she ought to because she's one of the nearest relatives, but I can't bear her, and I don't care whether she goes to the funeral at all. I'd a good deal rather put May Morton in with cousin Jennie, and cousin Sue, and Uncle Will."

"It'll make an awful fuss in the family," protested Laura May, while all the girls stopped writing to consider the problem.

"I don't care if it does," said Amelia stoutly.

"Well, I don't know," Blanche White put in, nibbling the end of her pen reflectively. "Seems as if everything ought to be sort of sweet and solemn and Christian at a time like that."

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"Christian nothing!" Opposition only strengthened Amelia's opinion.

"I'd like to know whose funeral it is anyhow! If you can't have your way about your own funeral it's a funny thing. I never did like Aunt Ellen. She's always telling tales on me and saying that Mamma lets me have too much freedom, and talking about the way girls were brought up when she was young. Mamma makes me be nice to her because she's papa's sister, but when I'm dead I can be honest about her—and anyway if there's a family fuss about it, I'll be out of it. I'm not going to plan any place at all for Aunt Ellen in the carriages."

"Your father'll put her in with the rest of the family."

"No, he won't—not if I fill every single seat and say that it's my last solemn wish that people should ride just that way."

"For charity's sake, girls, tell me what it all means," urged Belinda, seating herself at one of the small desks and eyeing the sheets of paper covered with schoolgirl hieroglyphics.

"We're writing our wills, Miss Carewe," said Amelia with due solemnity.

"Your wills?"

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"Yes; I think everybody ought to do it, don't you? I told the girls we all had things we'd like to leave to certain people, and of course we want our funerals arranged to suit us, and there's no telling when anybody may die. It seems to me it's right to be prepared even if we are young."

The five looked preternaturally solemn, and Belinda wrestled triumphantly with her mirth. Much of her success with the girls was due to the fact that she usually met their vagaries with outward seriousness, if with inward glee.

"Now, there's my diamond ring," Amelia went on. "I want Laura May to have it, and I'm perfectly sure they'd give it to Cousin Sue; so I'm going to say, in my will, that it's for Laura May, and she's going to will me her turquoise bracelet. She'd like to give me her sapphire and diamond ring, but she thinks her sister would expect that, and that all the family would think she ought to have it. Of course she can do as she likes, but, as for me, I think when you are making your will is the time to be perfectly independent. I'm leaving Blanche my chatelaine and my La Vallière, and I

don't care what anybody thinks about it."

"Is there anything of mine you'd like to have, Miss Carewe?" Kittie Dayton asked with a benevolent air.

"I'd just love to leave you something nice, but I've given away most everything—that is, I've willed it away. Would you care about my pigskin portfolio? It's awfully swell, and Uncle Jack paid fifteen dollars for it. I know because I went to the shop the next day and priced them—but I upset the ink bottle over it twice, so it isn't so very fresh."

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"I'd love to have it," said Belinda.

"I've got you down for my fan with the inlaid pearl sticks," announced Amelia, with a dubious tilt of her curly head, "but I don't know. It came from Paris, but one of the sticks is broken. Of course it can be mended, but I kind of think I'd like to leave you something whole, and I can give the fan to one of my cousins. I've got a perfect raft of cousins and they can't all expect to have whole things. There's my gold bonbonnière. I might leave you that. Anyway, I've put you in the second carriage."

"The second carriage?" Belinda looked puzzled.

"Yes, at the funeral, you know. I want you to be right with the family. You see there's Papa and Mamma and my brother and George Pettingill in the first carriage."

The Youngest Teacher gasped.

"George Pettingill?" she echoed weakly.

"Yes; I know everybody'll be surprised. They don't know we're engaged. It only happened last week. That's one reason why I had to change my will. You see I was engaged to Harvey Porter before Christmas, and of course I put him in the first carriage. Mamma and Papa'd have been surprised about him too; but when it was my last will and testament, they couldn't have had the heart to object to his riding with them. I couldn't die happy if I thought George wouldn't ride in the first carriage. Poor fellow! He'll be perfectly broken-hearted."

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Amelia sniffed audibly and her eyes filled with tears. She was revelling in the luxury of woe.

"I hope it will be a cloudy day," she said in a choked voice. "A cloudy day always seems so much more poetic and appropriate for a funeral. Oh, but I was going to tell you about the other carriages. Uncle Joe and Aunt Mary and Cousin Dick—he's my favourite cousin—and you will be in the second carriage; and then the other relatives will be in the other carriages—all except Aunt Ellen. When I was home for Christmas, she told Mamma, right before me, that I was a sentimental chit, and that I ran after Harvey Porter. As if everybody couldn't see that Harvey was crazy over me and that I didn't have to run a step!"

"Don't you think I'd be out of place ahead of so many of the relatives?" Belinda inquired modestly.

"Oh, no; not a bit. We girls talked it over and we decided we'd all put you in the second carriages. Blanche says she thinks there's a peculiarly intimate tie between a young girl and the teacher who moulds her mind and character, and you're the only one who has moulded us a bit—and then we all simply adore you, anyway."

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The Youngest Teacher bowed her head upon her hands as if overcome by emotion at the success of her moulding process or at the prospect of five free rides in second carriages, and her shoulders shook gently.

"We've talked a lot about our funerals, and I've got mine all arranged, even the hymns," continued Amelia, who was always spokesman for her crowd. "I'm going to be buried in the white chiffon dress I wore at the New Year's dance and with that big bunch of pink roses on my breast—the dried bunch in my green hatbox. I met George at that dance and he gave me the roses. I was going to wear my blue silk in my last will. Harvey loved light blue, but, anyway, white's more appropriate and sweet, don't you think so?"

The Youngest Teacher was driven, by a sense of duty, to extinguish her mirth and remonstrate.

"Do you know, girls, I think this is all very foolish and sentimental," she said sternly. "There's no probability of your dying within fifty years."

"Well, it won't do any harm to be prepared," interrupted Amelia.

"It's absolutely silly and morbid to sit down and deliberately work yourselves into a green and yellow melancholy by thinking about your deaths and your funerals. I'm disgusted with you."

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"But, Miss Carewe"—Laura May's voice was plaintive—"the Bible says you ought to think about dying, and only last Sunday the rector said we were too indifferent and that we ought to realise how uncertain life is and make some preparation, instead of just going to dances, and card parties, and eating, and drinking, and doing things like that."

"I hope you don't call sickly sentimentalising over the stage effects for your funerals preparing for death. If you'd stop thinking about your silly selves altogether and think of other people, you'd come nearer preparing for the hereafter."

Amelia's plump face took on an expression of pained surprise.

"Why, Miss Carewe, you don't suppose I'm thinking about the chiffon dress and the roses and all that on my own account, do you? I'd be so dead I wouldn't know anything about it; but I think it would be perfectly sweet for George. He'd know I had planned it all because I was so devoted to him, and I should think that would be a great comfort to him, shouldn't you, Laura May?"

Laura May agreed, and Belinda shrugged her shoulders helplessly. Serious argument was always wasted upon this light-headed group of sentimentalists. There had been a time when, urged on by conscience, she had considered it necessary to labor with Amelia about her lightning-change *affaires de cœur*, had talked to her as she would have talked to an ordinary, reasonable girl about the folly and cheapness of such episodes, had tried to open her eyes to the fine ideals of girlhood, had urged upon her the desirability of perfect frankness and confidence in her relations with her mother and father.

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Amelia had only opened her big blue eyes wider and listened politely but uncomprehendingly to a language she could not understand. She adored Miss Carewe, but she realised that the adored one had the failings common to aged folk and lacked, entirely, any understanding of love's young dream.

"You'd think Miss Carewe wasn't too old to understand," she said to Laura May later; "but perhaps she's had an unfortunate love affair that has made her bitter and suspicious." And, out of the softness of her heart, she forgave, in one who had "suffered," even a callous lack of sympathy concerning matters of the affections.

Belinda took her failure to Miss Ryder, who smiled as she listened.

"My dear Miss Carewe," she said, when the tale was ended, "you are right in being conscientious, but you mustn't tilt at windmills. There are girls and girls. Fortunately, a majority of them are amenable to reason, simple minded and comparatively sensible. They have had wise mothers and proper home training. But I've seen a great many girls of Amelia's type, too far advanced in foolishness before they come to us to be straightened out here. They pass silly girlhoods and usually develop into plump, amiable women, devoted to husbands and babies, and given to talking about servants and clothes when they don't talk about the husbands and babies. We must do all we can for such girls, see that they are carefully taught and zealously guarded. No young gentleman calls here on reception night unless I have had a written permission from the parents of the girl upon whom he calls; but because a few of the girls are silly, I will not shut the sensible girls away from social training.

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"You can influence the Amelias—but within certain limitations. As for making them see things in the sane way—the thing isn't humanly possible. Do your best with them, but don't take their absurdities too seriously."

In time Belinda had learned that her employer's philosophy was wise, though it did not altogether agree with certain theories set forth in the school prospectus; so the funeral problem did not distress her. It was only one phase of a monumental sentimentality and it would pass as a host of other phases quite as foolish had passed.

The girls gathered up their writing materials as the retiring bell rang, but Amelia lingered for a private word with her teacher.

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"Miss Carewe," she said, as the last petticoat whisked down the stairs, "I wish you'd think of something nice to put on my tombstone. You know such a lot about poetry and things of that kind. I've thought and thought, and I went through a whole book of Bible verses, and that Dictionary of Familiar Quotations down in the library, but I couldn't find a single thing that really suited me—and then the ones I did like best seemed sort of conceited for me to pick out. Now, if you'd select something nice and pathetic and complimentary, I could just say, in my will, that you wanted me to have that epitaph and that I had promised you I would."

She checked her eloquence, and waited in the hall until the teacher had turned out the school-room lights and joined her; then the tide of prattle swept on.

"Do you know, Miss Carewe, I'd simply love to be buried in that Protestant cemetery in Rome—the one where Sheets and Kelly are buried."

"Keats and Shelley," corrected the teacher of English literature, with lively horror written on her face.

"Oh, was it that way? Well, anyway, the men who wrote *Deserted Village* and *Childe Harold* and the other things. You told us all about the graveyard in literature class, and it sounded so perfectly lovely and romantic, with the big Roman wall, and old what's-his-name's pyramid, and daisies and violets and things running all over everything—and that epitaph on Keats' stone was simply splendid—something about his name being made out of water, wasn't it? I don't remember it exactly, but I just loved it. It was so sort of discouraged and blue and mournful. We girls talked about it that night and we all cried like everything over the poor fellow—only Blanche said she did wish his father hadn't been a butcher. You know Blanche is awfully cranky about families, because her mother was a Lee of Virginia and her aunt married a Randolph. It was awfully sad anyway, even if his father was a butcher, and that epitaph was lovely. I do wish I could think of something as good as that for myself. You'll try, won't you, Miss Carewe? Good-night."

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"Good-night," replied Belinda in smothered tones, as she closed her bedroom door. There are times when the Youngest Teacher's sense of humour and her dignity meet in mortal combat, and she felt that one of the times was close at hand.

She had rather fancied that talk of hers about Keats, and had been flattered by the sympathetic interest displayed by even the most shallow members of the class. She sighed in the midst of her laughter—if only one could make even the Amelias understand world beauty and world pathos!—but the laughter triumphed. "Sheets and Kelly" could not be viewed seriously.

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Nothing more was heard of the Funeral Association, Limited, until a week later, when Belinda, noticing a light in the third-floor classroom, investigated and found Amelia and Laura May bending over one sheet of foolscap.

"More wills?" asked the teacher.

Amelia lifted a flushed and tear-stained face.

"I'm cutting Blanche White out of my will. I've been deceived in her, Miss Carewe. She isn't a true friend, is she, Laura May?"

Laura May shook her head emphatically.

"Perhaps you are mistaken," Belinda suggested, in the interests of peace.

"I *heard* her!" Amelia's tone was tragic.

"She told Lizzie Folsom that I was a conceited thing and always wanted to run everything and that I thought every boy that looked at me was in love with me, and that she'd heard lots of boys make fun of me. I was in the next room and couldn't help hearing, so I walked right straight out in front of them and told Blanche what I thought of her.

"'You're a false, double-dealing hypocrite,' I said, 'and I'd scorn to have you for a friend,' and then I walked out of the room, and I could hardly wait till after study hour to come up here and change my will. Just to think that if anything had happened to me last week, that horrid thing would have had my chatelaine and my La Vallière! Sometimes I don't believe anybody's true—except Laura May. I told everything to Blanche, and I suppose she's betrayed every single thing to that freckled Lizzie Folsom. It's just because Lizzie has so much money for matinées and Huylers."

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"That doesn't sound well, Amelia." Belinda's tone was reproving. "Lizzie is a very attractive girl, and though Blanche wasn't very loyal, she may have said some things that were true. I'd advise you to think her criticisms over and see if any of them fit. As for her repeating what you've told her, when one doesn't want things known, one would better keep them to herself. You talk too much."

"I could tell Laura May anything."

Laura May looked modest.

"And I'm going to leave my chatelaine and La Vallière to Laura May."

The Only True One's face brightened.

"Besides the pearl ring?" she asked.

"Yes."

Laura May beamed self-righteously. Apparently true friendship was practically remunerative as well as theoretically fine.

The next night Amelia spent with a day pupil who was to have a birthday party; and the following evening she was in the Primary room as soon as she could escape from study hour. There Belinda found her alone, and the girl looked slightly confused as she met the teacher's questioning glance.

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"Another quarrel?"

Amelia blushed.

"Oh, no; I was just changing the carriages a little. I had a heavenly time last night, Miss Carewe."

"Pretty party, was it?"

"Perfectly lovely. Do you know many Columbia men, Miss Carewe?"

"A few."

"Don't you think they're splendid?"

"Well, some of them are pleasant enough."

"I simply adore Columbia men. Their colors are lovely, aren't they?"

"Rather wishy-washy."

"Oh, Miss Carewe, I don't see how you can think that. I think light blue and white are perfectly sweet together—not a bit crude and loud like orange and black or red and black or that ugly bright blue."

Belinda wakened to suspicion.

"Why, Amelia, I thought George Pettingill was a Yale man."

Amelia examined carefully a picture on the other side of the room.

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"Well, he is, but only a Freshman, and I don't think bright blue's a nice color. The Yale men are sort of like the color too. Don't you think they're a little bit loud and conceited, Miss Carewe?"

This was rank heresy. Belinda smiled and waited.

"There was a Columbia man at Daisy's party—a Sophomore. He's the most elegant dancer. His name's Lawrence—Charlie Lawrence. He says my step just suits his. We had five two-steps and three waltzes."

For a few moments Amelia lapsed into reminiscent silence, but silence is not her *métier*.

"He has three brothers, but no sister at all, and he says a fellow needs a girl's influence to keep him straight. There's such a lot of wickedness in college life, and by the time you're a Sophomore, you know the world mighty well."

There was the glibness of quotation about the recital, and Belinda indulged in a little smiling reminiscence on her own account. She, too, in earlier days, had been in Arcady—with desperately wicked and blasé Sophomores who needed a nice girl's gentle influence. Verily, the old methods wear well.

"He's coming to see me next reception night, if I can get permission from Mamma before then," said Amelia.

"Miss Carewe!" called a voice in the hall. Belinda turned to go.

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"But what was wrong with the carriages?" she asked.

Amelia bent her fair head over the will until her face was hidden, but the tips of her ears reddened.

"Oh, I was just thinking that it didn't seem very respectful to Mamma and Papa to put George in the first carriage with them when they haven't known anything about him, so I thought I'd move him back a little way."

"Oh!" commented Belinda, with comprehension in her voice.

A quarrel between Amelia and Laura May, the Only True One, necessitated much remodelling of the unstable will during the next week, but the trouble was finally smoothed over and the pearl ring clause reinstated, though the chatelaine and La Vallière were lost to Laura May forever.

Friday evening was reception evening, and on Saturday morning Amelia flew to the Primary room immediately after breakfast.

She lifted a beaming face when Belinda looked in upon her.

"Do you believe in love at first sight, Miss Carewe?" she asked.

"No."

"Oh, don't you? Why, I *know* it's possible."

Belinda didn't argue the question.

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"I'm writing out a whole new will. The other was all mussy and scratched up from being changed so often. Doesn't that look neat?"

She held up a sheet of paper which bore, in systematic grouping, a plan for filling the funeral carriages. Belinda glanced at it.

"Why, where's George Pettingill?" she asked, with a twinkle in her eye.

Amelia tossed her head.

"If he goes to my funeral he can take the trolley," she said with profound indifference. "You see I've only put three people down for the first carriage. I thought I'd just leave one place vacant, in case——"

"Exactly," said Belinda.

Before the successor to the Columbia Sophomore appeared upon the horizon to complicate the carriage problem anew, the funeral fad had run its course and the wills of Amelia and her satellites had gone the way of all waste paper.

CHAPTER X

THE Youngest Teacher looked across the room at the new girl and tried to goad her conscience into action. New girls were her specialty. She was an expert in homesickness, a professional drier of tears and promoter of cheerfulness. When she really brought her batteries into action the most forlorn of new pupils wiped her eyes and decided that boarding-school life might have its sunny side.

Gradually the Misses Ryder and Belinda's fellow-teachers had recognised the masterly effectiveness of her system and her personality, and had shifted the responsibility of "settling" the new girls to the Youngest Teacher's shoulders. As a rule, Belinda cheerfully bowed her very fine shoulders to the burden. She knew that as an accomplished diplomat she was of surpassing value, and that her heart-to-heart relations with the pupils were of more service than her guidance in the paths of English.

She comforted the homesick, set the shy at ease, drew confidences from the reserved, restrained the extravagances of the gushing.

But on this January evening she felt a colossal indifference concerning the welfare of girls in general and of new girls in particular—a strong disinclination to assume any responsibility in regard to the girl who sat alone upon the highly ornamental Louis Quinze sofa. [Pg 17]

The newcomer was good looking, in an overgrown, florid, spectacular fashion. Belinda took note of her thick yellow hair, her big blue eyes, her statuesque proportions. She noted, too, that the yellow hair was dressed picturesquely but untidily, that the big eyes rolled from side to side self-consciously, that the statuesque figure was incased in a too tightly laced corset.

Miss Adelina Wilson did not look promising, but her family was—so Miss Ryder had been credibly informed—an ornament to Cayuga County, and Mr. Wilson, père, who had called to make arrangements for his daughter's schooling, had seemed a gentlemanly, mild, slightly harassed man, of a type essentially American—a shrewd, successful business man, embarrassed by the responsibility of a family he could support but could not understand.

"She's my only daughter, and her mother is gone," he explained to Miss Ryder, leaving her to vague speculation concerning the manner of Mrs. Wilson's departure.

"The boys are all right. I can fix them, but Addie's different, and I guess she needs a good school and some sensible women to look after her. She's a good girl, but she has some silly notions."

Looking at Addie, Belinda accepted the theory of the silly notions, but wondered just what those notions might be. She would have to find out, sooner or later, and it might as well be sooner; so she rose, set her diplomatic lance at rest, and charged the young woman. [Pg 17]

"I'm afraid you'll feel a trifle lonely at first," she said with her most friendly smile.

The new girl made room for the Youngest Teacher upon the sofa beside her, and executed a smile of her own—a mechanical, studied, carefully radiant smile that left Belinda gasping.

"Oh, no; I'm never lonely. I'm used to being apart," said Adelina in resigned and impressive tones.

Belinda met the shock with admirable calm.

"Yes, you have no sisters," she said; "brothers are nice, but they're different."

Adelina sighed.

"It isn't my being an only daughter that makes the difference," she explained. "It's my genius, my ambition. Nobody understands and can really sympathise with me, so I've worked on alone."

The "alone" was tolled sadly and accompanied by a slow, sweet, die-away smile that worked automatically.

Belinda's brain fumbled for a clew to the girl's words and affectation, and she looked closely for any earmarks of genius that might clear up the situation.

Suddenly Adelina clasped her hands around her crossed knees, struck a photographic pose, and languishingly turned her great eyes full upon Belinda. [Pg 18]

"Do you think I look like Langtry?" she asked. "Lots of people have noticed the resemblance. Of course, I don't know, but I can't help believing what people tell me. There's a young gentleman who crossed on the same steamer with Langtry, and he says I'm the very image of her—only more spiritual."

The Youngest Teacher had found her clew. She was sitting beside an embryonic tragedy queen, a histrionic genius in the rough.

"Well, you're near Langtry's size," she admitted, "and the shape of your face is something like hers."

Adelina relaxed her pose.

"Yes, I guess it's so. At first I wasn't very well suited, I'd hoped I'd be more like Bernhardt. I just adore the thin, mysterious, snaky kind, don't you? I think those serpentine, willowy, tigerish,

squirmy actresses are perfectly splendid. They're so fascinating, and they can wear such lovely, queer clothes. I wouldn't have minded being like Mrs. Pat Campbell, either. There's something awfully taking about that hollow-chested, lippy sort of woman. But you just can't choose what you'll look like. I got long enough for anything, but then I just began to spread out and get fat, and there wasn't any stopping it, so I had to give up any idea of being the willowy kind. I was awfully disappointed for a while, and I hardly ate anything for months, trying to stay thin, but it didn't make a bit of difference. I kept right on getting fat just the same. After all, it isn't shape that counts so much if you've got genius. Mary Anderson's pictures look awfully healthy, and I know lots of folks think Langtry's finer than Bernhardt. Which do you like best?"

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Belinda diplomatically evaded the question. "You hope to go on the stage?" she asked.

Adelina lapsed into tragedy. "I'd die if I couldn't. I was just born for the stage. Papa and the boys don't seem to understand. They think I'm silly, stage-struck, like girls who go on in the chorus and are Amazons and things. I can't make them see that I'm going to be a star, and that being a great actress is an entirely different thing from being an Amazon. Folks up home are all so dreadfully narrow. A genius hardly ever gets sympathy in her own home, though. I've read lots of lives that showed that—but you can't keep real genius down."

The retiring bell rang.

Belinda rose with alacrity.

In her own room, with the door closed behind her, she gave way to unseemly mirth. Then she sallied forth to tell Miss Barnes of the young Rachel within their gates; but there was a troubled look from between her twinkling eyes.

"She's silly enough to do something foolish," she thought. "I hope she's *too* silly to do it."

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The stage-struck Adelina's hopes and ambitions were known throughout the length and breadth of the school within twenty-four hours. Some of the girls thought her ridiculous. Some of the romantic set sympathised with her aims. All found her a source of considerable entertainment and treated her with good-natured tolerance.

Miss Ryder and the teachers shook their heads disapprovingly, but had no real cause for complaint.

The Stage-struck One didn't shine in her classes, but the same criticism might have been made concerning a large assortment of girls who made no pretensions to dramatic talent.

Adelina obeyed the rules, attended recitations, was respectful to her teachers and amiable toward her schoolmates. If she spent her recreation hours in memorising poetry and drama, or spouting scenes from her favourite plays, the proceedings could hardly be labelled misdemeanors. To be sure, she broke considerable bedroom crockery in the course of strenuous scenes, and in one of her famous death falls she dislodged plaster on the ceiling of the room below, but she cheerfully provided new crockery and paid for ceiling repairs, so Miss Ryder's censure, though earnest and emphatic, was not over-severe.

Belinda's English literature class became popular to an unusual degree, and its sessions were diverting rather than academic. In this class only did Adelina take a fervid interest. The midwinter semester was being devoted to consideration of Elizabethan drama, and in the Shakespearian readings, recitations and discussions which were a feature of the study the Cayuga County genius played a star rôle. The other girls might search out and memorise the shortest possible quotations—Adelina absorbed whole scenes, entire acts, and ranted through them with fine frenzy, until stopped in full career by the teacher's stern command. With folded arms and frowning brow she rendered Hamlet's soliloquy. She gave a version of Ophelia that proved beyond question that luckless heroine's fitness for a padded cell. She frisked through Rosalind's coquetries like a gamesome calf, and kept Lady Macbeth's vigils with groans and sighs and shuddering horrors.

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Only by constantly snuffing her out could the Youngest Teacher maintain anything like order in the class; and, as it was, the enjoyment of Adelina's classmates often verged upon hysteria. As for the Gifted One's own honest pride and satisfaction in her prowess, words cannot do justice to it, and it would have been pathetic had it not been so amusing.

But it was in her own room that Adelina was at her best. There she rendered with wild intensity scenes from a score of plays, and there the girls resorted during their leisure hours, in full certainty of prodigal entertainment.

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In one of the trunks brought from home Langtry's counterpart had a choice assortment of costumes, constructed chiefly from cheesecloth and cotton flannel, but reinforced by tinsel paper, beads, swan's-down and other essentials for regal rôles. There were artificial flowers, too, among the supplies, and a make-up box—jealously guarded from the notice of a faculty prone to narrow prejudices—was used by the tragédienne with wonderful and fearful results.

Adelina did not—intentionally—lean toward comedy. Tragedy was her sphere. She loved to shiver, and shudder, and groan, and shriek, and swoon, and die violent deaths; and although she admitted, as all true artists must, the claims of Shakespeare, she, in her secret soul, considered Sardou the immortal William's superior.

An indiscriminate course of theatre-going during visits to New York with an indulgent and unobservant father had introduced her to a class of modern dramas that are, to put it mildly, not meant for babes—though the parents of New York babes seem blandly indifferent to the unfitness

—and the chances are that had the teachers been thoroughly posted as to her repertoire it would have been suddenly and forcibly abridged; but she reserved Shakespearian rôles for the edification of the faculty.

Miss Emmeline passing through the hall one day was much perturbed by hearing from behind a closed door emphatic iteration of "Out, damned spot," and even Miss Lucilla's firm assurance that the lines were Shakespeare's could not wholly reconcile the younger principal to such language.

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Heavy sobbing, maniacal laughter, and cries of "My child, my child!" or "Spare him! I will tell all," ceased to attract the slightest attention upon the third floor.

Beyond restricting performances to recreation hours, insisting that they should not interfere with regular study, and supervising strictly the choice of real plays which Adelina and her fellow-pupils were allowed to attend, the powers that be did not take the dramatic mania seriously nor attempt to suppress it. So many fads come and go during a boarding-school year, perishing usually of their own momentum.

"The girls will soon tire of it," said Miss Ryder, very sensibly, "and Adelina will be through with the nonsense the more quickly for being allowed to work it off."

Incidentally she wrote to Mr. Wilson, père, asking for his opinion. He replied in a typewritten, businesslike note that he, too, believed the stage fever would soon run its course; and there, so far as official action was concerned, the matter dropped.

Gradually the girls ceased to find sport in the dramatic exhibitions and fell away, but Adelina pursued her course valiantly and unflaggingly.

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Occasionally Belinda labored with her honestly, trying to insert into her brain some rational and practical ideas concerning stage life, dramatic art and vaulting ambition; but her efforts were of no avail, and she, too, fell into an attitude of tolerant amusement, quite free from alarm.

It was during the last week of March that the unexpected happened. One Tuesday morning Adelina failed to appear at chapel. The teacher sent to investigate reported her room in order but without occupant. A maid was sent to look through the house for the recreant, but came back without her.

Then Belinda, with a flash of intuition, ran up to the vacant room.

The bed had not been slept in. The trunks were there, but the girl's dress-suit case, coat, hat, furs and best street frock were missing.

Pinned to the pincushion Belinda found a note, written in Adelina's spidery hand. It ran:

"I am going away to carve out a career for myself. It will be useless to try to find me. I have some money, and, if necessary, I will pawn my jewels; but I will soon be making plenty of money, and as soon as I am famous I will come back to see you all.

"Tell my father not to worry. I will be all right and he won't miss me, and I can't let him keep me from my Art any longer. If he is willing to let me study for the stage he can advertise in the papers."

Even in the midst of her annoyance and her apprehension the Youngest Teacher could not smother a chuckle over the melodramatic tone of the letter, the reference to the jewels—consisting of three rings, a breastpin and a watch—the serene egotism and confidence in imminent fame and fortune.

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But there was a serious side to the complication. There was no telling into what hands the stage-struck girl had fallen, nor where she might have been persuaded to take refuge. It would probably be an easy matter to find her with the aid of detectives, even if she had confided her plans to no one in the school; but meanwhile she might have an unpleasant experience.

So Belinda's face was grave as she ran down to Miss Ryder's study with the letter, and it was still grave as she went out, a little later, to send a telegram to Mr. Wilson, and visit the office of a well-known detective agency. In the interval everyone in the house had been questioned and professed complete ignorance.

The detective was smilingly optimistic—even scornful. The thing was too easy. But when Mr. Wilson, torn 'twixt distress and vexation, arrived that evening the self-confident sleuth had made no progress. Adelina had apparently vanished off the face of the earth. The very simplicity of her disappearance was baffling.

That she would, sooner or later, apply to some theatrical manager or agency, or interview some teacher of dramatic art, was a foregone conclusion, and on the second day after her departure it was found that she had tried to obtain interviews with several managers, and had had a talk with one, who good-naturedly told what had taken place at the interview.

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"Handsome young idiot," he said to the detective. "That's why they let her in; but she hasn't a gleam of intelligence concealed about her, and it would take her a lifetime to get rid of her crazy ideas and mannerisms, even if there were any hope of her amounting to anything after she did get rid of them. Her idea of stage life is a regular pipe dream, and she'd never be willing to begin at the bottom. She wouldn't stand the hard work twenty-four hours. She had sort of an idea that she

was a howling beauty with a genius that didn't need any training, and that if she could only get to see me I'd throw a fit over her and start her out on the road at five hundred dollars a week to star in 'Camille,' or something of that kind. She made me tired. I've seen thousands of the same kind, but I talked to her like a Dutch uncle; told her she wasn't so much as a beauty, and that she had a voice like a hurdy-gurdy, and that all her ideas about acting were crazy. Kind of rough, of course, but wholesome, that sort of straight talk is. I told her genius in the stage line was twins with slaving night and day; that they looked so much alike you couldn't tell them apart, and that the kind of genius she was ranting about was all hot air. I said if she could take some lessons and learn to sing and dance a little she might go on in the chorus, but that I'd advise charwork ahead of that, and that I didn't see the faintest illusive twinkle of a star about her. She cried and looked sick, but she seemed to be discouraged and open to conviction. So then I told her the best thing she could do was to go home to her folks and marry some decent fellow and look at the stage across the footlights—not too much of that, either. Yet the Gerry Society doesn't think much of us managers, and nobody'd suspect me of heading rescue brigades. I've got a daughter of my own, and she isn't on the stage—not by a blamed sight."

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All this was interesting, but the clew began and ended at the manager's office door, and no further trace of Adelina was found during the day.

About nine o'clock that evening Maria, the parlour maid at the school, knocked at Belinda's door in a fine state of excitement.

"If you please, Miss Carewe, Miss Wilson's come back. I let her in and she's gone up to her room, and Miss Ryder ain't here, and she looks fit to drop, and her face is that swollen from crying, and——"

Belinda cut the monologue short and hurried down to the front room on the third floor.

It was dark, but by the gleam from the street lamps the teacher made out a bulky form on the bed, and the sound of stifled sobbing came to her ears.

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She went over and knelt by the bed.

"I'm glad you've come back, dear," she said in a cheerful, matter-of-fact voice. "Your father will be so relieved, and it isn't quite right for a girl to be alone in a big city, you know."

The figure on the bed gave a convulsive flop and the sobbing redoubled.

"Don't cry any more. It will make you ill. Nothing very bad has happened, has it?"

Belinda was still prosaically cheerful.

"Oh, it was horrid," wailed the youthful tragédienne with more spontaneous feeling than she had ever put into Ophelia's ravings or Juliet's anguish. "They wouldn't take me in at boarding-houses, and when I did find a place it was so smelly, and they had corned beef for dinner, and I loathe corned beef, and the people were so queer, and the sheets weren't clean, and the bed had lumps; and I thought when Mr. Frohman saw me and heard me give the sleep-walking scene he'd be glad to educate me for the stage like they do in books, but he wouldn't even see me. Hardly anybody would see me, and when one manager did he told me I hadn't any talent, and that I wasn't even fit for an Amazon unless I could learn to dance, and that I'd better do charwork, and he said such dreadful things about the stage and the work; and then I went back to the boarding-house, and it smelled worse than ever, and one of the men spoke to me in the hall, and—Oh, dear. Oh, d-e-a-r!"

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She ran out of breath for anything save wailing, and Belinda patted her on the back encouragingly without speaking.

"And then I felt so sick, and I was afraid to stay alone all night, and I just left my bag and slipped out—and I really do feel dreadfully sick, Miss Carewe. I guess it's a judgment. It'd be a good thing if I'd die. I'm not any good and I can't be a star, and papa and the boys'll never forgive me."

"Nonsense," laughed Belinda. "It wasn't nice of you, but fathers are not so unforgiving as all that, and if you'll just give up raving about the stage——"

"I never want to hear of acting again."

"Well, I don't think your father will be very angry if he hears that."

"But suppose I die?"

Belinda lighted the gas. In the light the girl's cheeks showed scarlet, and when the Youngest Teacher felt Adelina's hands and face she found them burning with fever.

"Small danger of your dying within fifty years, child, but you are tired and nervous. I'll have the doctor come in and see you."

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She put the returned wanderer to bed and telephoned for the doctor, but while she waited for him there was a ring at the bell and she heard Mr. Wilson's voice in the hall.

He was standing in the doorway, uncertainly twirling his hat in nervous hands, and looking even more harassed than usual, when Belinda went down to him.

"I don't suppose——" he began.

"She's here," interrupted Belinda.

The father's face flushed swiftly.

"And she's all right, only I'm afraid she's going to be ill from the excitement. She's very much ashamed and very much disillusioned, Mr. Wilson. I think she's had her lesson, and I don't think I'd scold much if——"

There was an odd moisture on the glasses which Mr. Wilson removed from his nose and wiped with scrupulous care; and he cleared his voice several times before he spoke.

"I won't scold, Miss Carewe. I guess I'm a good deal to blame. She didn't have any mother, and I was pretty busy, and nobody paid much attention to what she was doing and reading and thinking. I just gave her money and thought I'd done all that was necessary; but I expect the carpet business could have got along without me occasionally, and I could have known my girl a little better."

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They climbed the stairs together, but Belinda left him at his daughter's door.

When she went up, later, with the doctor Mr. Wilson looked more at ease in the world than usual, and Adelina's face was cheerful, though grotesquely swollen from much crying.

"Papa and I are going to Europe for the summer, Miss Carewe," she called out excitedly. Then, as she saw the doctor, her dramatic habit reasserted itself, and she fell into one of her most cherished death-scene poses, looking as limp and forlorn as circumstances and a lack of rehearsal would permit.

With melancholy languor she held out her hand to the doctor. He took it, felt her pulse, looked her over quickly and keenly.

"Measles," he said crisply. "You'd better look out for the other girls, Miss Carewe."

Adelina sank back in her pillows with a sigh of profound despair.

"I might have known I wouldn't have anything romantic," she said with gloomy resignation.

Transcriber's Notes:

Some of the illustrations have been moved so that they do not break up paragraphs and so they correspond to the text, thus the page number of the illustration might no longer matches the page number in the original List of Illustrations.

Repeated chapter titles have been deleted.

On page 20, "Belinda's enthusiasm are" was replaced with "Belinda's enthusiasm is".

On page 21, the quotation mark after "what shall I do?" was deleted.

On page 20, a quotation mark was added after "her next engagement." and another quotation mark was added before "There's the evening study bell".

On page 33, a quotation mark was added after "is simply elegant,".

On page 33, the comma after "earls are English" was replaced with a period.

On page 34, a quotation mark was added after "she's positively mushy."

On page 37, the double quotation mark after "Mr. Satterly" was replaced with a single quotation mark.

On page 50, a quotation mark was added after "beast of a Frenchman.".

On page 56, a quotation mark was added after "if——if I——".

On page 63, "preparatoy" was replaced with "preparatory".

On page 76, "smpathy" was replaced with "sympathy".

On page 89, a quotation mark was added before "Yes; it's a long time".

On page 111, "your poor child" was replaced with "you poor child", and the quotation mark was deleted before "With a little sob".

On page 122, "some one" was replaced with "someone".

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CONCERNING BELINDA ***

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