The TINDER BOX

by

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CHAPTER V.

Sweeter When Tamed?

I WONDER if men ever melt suddenly into little boys and try to squirm and run back to hide their heads in their mothers' skirts. It is an open secret that starchy, modern women often long to wilt back into droopy, musk roses that climb over gates and things, but they don't let each other. When I feel myself getting soluble I write it out to Jane, and I get a bracing cold wave of a letter in reply. The one this morning was on the subject of love, or, at least, that is what Jane would have said it was on.

She wrote:

Yes, it is gratifying to know that Mary Elizabeth is so happily engaged to the young teacher who has been in her work with her. She writes that she was encouraged by our resolution at last to be her best self while in his presence as she had not had the courage to do last year. You see, Evelina? And also, you are right in your conclusion that there is not enough abstract love in this world of brotherhood and sisterhood, that the doctrine of divine love calls us to give more and more of it. We cannot give too much. But, also, considerations for the advancement of the world call for experiments by the more illumined women along more definite and concrete lines. How old is this Mr. Hayes on whom you have chosen to note the reactions of sisterly affection? Are you sure that he is not a fit subject for your consideration in the matter of a choice for a mate? Remember to be as frank in your expressions of regard for him as he is in his of regard for you. That is the crux of the whole matter. Be frank, be courageous. Let a man look freely into your heart, and thus encouraged he will open his to you. Then you will both have an opportunity to judge each other with reference to a lifelong union. It is the only way, and remember what rests on you in this matter. The destinies of many women are involved.

I don't say this in a spirit of levity, but I do wish Polk Hayes and Jane Mathers were out on the front steps in the moonlight after a good supper that has made him comfortable, Jane to be attired in something soft that would float against his arm whether she wanted to or not. I believe it would be good for Jane and make things easier for me. Be frank with Polk as to how much he asphyxiates me? I know better than to blow out the gas like that. No, Jane!

But what is a woman going to do when she is young and hearty and husky, with the blood running through her veins at a two-forty rate, when her orchard lain blown, the mocking birds are singing the night through and she is not really in love with anybody? The loneliness does fill her heart full of the solution of love, and she has got to pour off some of it into somebody's life. There is plenty of me to be both abstract and concrete at the same time, and I thought of Uncle Peter.

Uncle Peter is the most explosive and crusty person that ever happened in Glendale, and it takes all of Aunt Augusta's energy, common sense, and force of character to keep him and the two chips he carries on his shoulders as a defiance to the world in general from being in a constant state of combustion. He has been ostensibly the mayor of Glendale for twenty-five years, and Aunt Augusta has done the work of the office very well indeed, while he has thrown up things in general with great energy. He couldn't draw a long breath without her, but of course he doesn't realize it. He thinks he is in a constant feud with her and her sex. His ideas on the woman question are so terrific that I have always run from them, but I concluded that it would be a good thing for me to liquefy some of my vague humanitarianism and help Aunt Augusta with him while she wrestles with the city council on the water question. Anyway, I have always had a guarded fondness for the old chap.

I chose a time when I knew Aunt Augusta had to be busy with his report of the disastrous concrete paving trade the whole town had been sold out on, and I lay in wait to capture him and the chips. This morning I waited behind the old purple lilac at the gate, which immediately got into the game by sweeping its purple plumed arms all around me, so that not a tag of my dimity alarmed him as he came slowly down the street.

"Uncle Peter," I said as I stepped out in front of him suddenly, "please, Uncle Peter, won't you come in and talk to me?"

"Hey? Evelina?"

"Yes, Uncle Peter; it's Evelina," and I hesitated with terror at the snap in his dear old eyes back under their white brows. Then I let my eyes uncover my heart full of the elixir I had prepared for him and offered him as much as he could drink.

"I'm lonely," I said, with a little catch in my voice.

"Lonely, hey?" he grumbled, but his feet hesitated opposite my gate.

In about two and a half minutes I had him seated in a cushioned rocker on the south side of the porch. Jasper had given us both a mint julep, and Uncle Peter was much less thirsty than he had been for a long time. Aunt Augusta is as temperate in all things as a steel ramrod.

"You see, Uncle Peter, I needed you so that I just had to kidnap you," I said to him as he wiped his lips with a pocket handkerchief as stiffly starched as was his wife herself.

"Why didn't you go over and live in James' hennery—live with James—hey?" he snapped, with the precision of a pistol cap.

To be just, I suppose Aunt Augusta's adamant disposition accounts to some extent for Uncle Peter's explosive way of thinking and speaking. A husband would have to knock Aunt Augusta's nature down to make any impression whatever on it. Uncle Peter always has the air of firing an idea and then ducking his head to avoid the return shot.

"His house is so full, and I need a lot of space to carry on my work," I answered him, with the words I have used so often in the last two weeks that they start to come when the Petunia asks me if I want waffles or batter cakes for supper.

"Well, Sallie Carruthers will get him and then there'll be a dozen more to run the measure over—children—hey? All girls! A woman like Sallie would not be content with producing less than a dozen of her kind, hey?"

His chuckle was so contagious that I couldn't help but join him, though I didn't like it so very much. But why shouldn't I? Sallie is such a gorgeous woman that a dozen of her in the next generation will be of value to the state. Still, I didn't like it. I didn't enjoy thinking of Cousin James as so serving his country.

"Carruthers left her to James. He'll have to take care of her. Henry turned toes in good time. Piled rotten old business and big family on to James' shoulders, and then died—good time—hey? Get a woman on your hands, only thing to do is to marry or kill her. Poor James—hey?" He peered at me with a twinkle in his eyes that demanded assent from me.

"Let Sallie have him since you don't need him."

"Why, Uncle Peter, I don't know that Sallie has any such idea. She grieves dreadfully over Mr. Carruthers, and I don't believe she would think of marrying again," I answered, trying to put enough warmth in my defense to convince myself.

"Most women are nothing but gourd vines, grow all over a cornstalk, kill it, produce gourds until it frosts and begin all over again in the next generation. James has to do the hoeing around Sallie's roots, and feed her. Might as well marry her, hey?"

"Does does Cousin James have to support Sallie and the children, Uncle Peter?" I asked, coming with reluctance down to the rock bed of the discussion.

"Thinks he does, and it serves him right—serves him right for starting out to run a widow ranch in the first place. It's like making a collection of old shoes. He let Henry Carruthers persuade him to mortgage everything and buy land on the river for the car shops of the new railroad, which just fooled the town out of $150,000 and is going by on the other side of the river with the shops up at Bolivar. If James didn't get all the lawing in Alton county they would all starve to death, which would be hard on the constitution of old lady Hargrove and her two hundredweight."

"Oh, has Cousin James really lost all of his fortune?" I asked, and I was surprised at the amount of sympathetic dismay that rose in me at the information.

"Everything, but what he carries around under that old gray hat of his. Not so bad a fortune at that, hey?"

I feel I am going to love Uncle Peter for the way he disdainfully admires Cousin James.

"And—and all of his—his guests are really dependent on him?" I asked again as the stupendous fact filtered into my mind.

"All the flock, all the flock," answered Uncle Peter, with what seemed under the circumstances a heartless chuckle. "They each one have little data of property about as big as a handful of chicken feed, and as they have each one given it all to James to manage they expect an income in return and get it—all they ask for. A lot of useless old live stock—all but Sallie, and she's worse—worse, hey?"

I agreed with his question, but I didn't say so.

"Glad your money is safe in public town bonds and city securities, Evelina. If James could he might lose it, and you'd have to move over. It would then be nip and tuck between you and Sallie which got James—nip and tuck, hey?"

"Oh, Uncle Peter!" I exclaimed with positive horror that was flavored with a large dash of indignation.

"Well, yes; a race between a widow and a girl for a man is about like one between a young duck and a spring chicken across a mill pond—girl and chicken lose—hey? But let Sallie have him since you don't need him. I've got to go home and listen to Augusta talk about my business that she knows nothing in the world about or I won't be ready for town meeting this afternoon. Women are all fools, hey?"

"Will you come again, Uncle Peter?" I asked eagerly. I had set out to offer Uncle Peter a cup of miscely affection, and I had got a good, stiff bracer to arouse me in return.

"I will whenever I can escape Augusta," he answered, and there was such a kindly crackle in his voice that I felt that he had wanted and needed what I had offered him. "I'll drop in often and analyze the annals of the town with you. Glad to have you home, child, good young blood to stir me up—hey?"

And as I sat and watched the mayor go saunteringly down the street, with his crustiness carried like a child on his shoulder, which it delighted him to have knocked off, so that he could philosophize in the restoring of it to its position, suddenly a realization of the relation of Glendale to the world in general was forced upon me, and I quailed.

Glendale is like a dozen other small towns in the Harpeth valley. They are all drowsy princesses who have just waked up enough to be wondering what did it. The tentative kiss has not yet disclosed the presence of the prince of revolution, and they are likely to doze for another century or two. I think I had better go back into the wide world and let them sleep on. One live member is likely to irritate the repose of the whole body.

Their faint stirrings of progress are pathetic.

They have an electric plant, but, as I have noted before, the lights there from show a strong trace of their pine knot heredity and go out on all important occasions, whether of festivity or tragedy. Kerosene lamps have to be kept filled and cleaned if a baby or a revival or a lawn festival is expected.

They have a lovely, wide concrete pavement in front of six of the stores around the public squares, but no two stretches of the improvement join each other, and it makes a shopping progression around the town somewhat dangerous on account of the sudden change of grade of the sidewalk about every sixty feet. Aunt Augusta wanted Uncle Peter to introduce a bill in the city council forcing all of the property owners on the square to put down the pavement in front of their houses at small payments per annum, the town assuming the contract at 6 per cent. Uncle Peter refused, because he said that he felt a smooth walk around the square would call out what he called "a dimity parade" every afternoon.

They have a water system that is supplied by so much mud from the river that it often happens that the town has to go unwashed for a week while the pipes are cleaned out. There is a wonderful spring that could be used with a pump to supply the town, Aunt Augusta says.

The city council tied up the town for a glorious subscription to the new railroad and failed to tie the shops down in the contract. They are to be built in Bolivar. A great many of the rich men have lost a lot of money thereby. Cousin James the most of all, and everybody is sitting up in bed blinking.

There are still worse things happening in the emotional realm of Glendale.

Lee Greenfield has been in the state of going to ask Caroline Lellyett to marry him for fifteen years and has never done it. Caroline has been beautiful all her life, but she is getting so thin and faded at thirty that she is a tragedy. Lee goes to see her twice a week, and on Sunday afternoon takes her out in his new and rakish runabout that is as modern as his behavior is obsolete. Caroline knows no better and stands it with sublime patience and lack of character. That is a situation I won't be able to keep my hands off of much longer.

Ned Hall's wife has seven children, with the oldest one not twelve, and she looks fifty. Ned goes to all the dances at the Glendale hotel dining room and looks thirty. He dresses beautifully, and Nell and all the girls like to dance with him. Just ordinary torture wouldn't do for him.

Polk Hayes wouldn't be allowed to run loose in London society.

Sallie Carruthers is a great big husky woman, with three children that she is responsible for having had. She and her family must consume tons of green groceries every month and a perfectly innocent man pays for them.

Mrs. Dodd, the carpenter and contractor's wife, is a Boston woman who came down here. Before I could write all about that Boston girl so that Jane could understand perfectly the situation Polk came around from the side street and seated himself on the railing of the porch so near the arm of my chair that I couldn't rock without inconveniencing him.

I am glad he found me in the mood I was in and I am glad to record the strong minded—it came near being the strong armed—contest in which we indulged.

"Me for a woman that has a lot of spirit! She is so much sweeter when tamed, Evelina!" was one of the gentle remarks with which he precipitated the riot. "I think it has been spunkily fascinating of you to come and live by yourself in this old barn. It keeps me awake nights just to think of you over here—alone. How long is the torture to go on?"

Jane, I tried, but if I had frankly and courageously shown Polk Hayes what was in my heart for him at that moment I couldn't have answered for the results.

From the time I was eighteen until I was twenty the same sort of assault and battery had been handed out to me from him. He had beaten me with his love. He didn't want me. He doesn't want any woman except so long as he is uncertain that he can get her. Just because [illegible] firm with him when e[illegible] denied him, he has be[illegible] And now that I am a woman and armed for the combat, it will be to the death.

Shall I double and take refuge in a labyrinth of subterfuge or turn and fight? So I temporized today.

"It is lonely—but not quite torture to me with the family so close across the street," I answered him, and I went on whipping the lace on a piece of duff I am making to discipline myself because I loathe a needle so. "Please don't you worry over me, dear." I raised my eyes to his, and I tried the common citizenship look. It must have carried a little way, for he flushed—the first time I ever saw him do it—and his hand with the cigarette in it shook.

"Evelina, are you real or a farce?" he asked after a few minutes of peace.

"I'm trying to be real, Polk," I answered, and this time I raised my eyes with perfect frankness. "If you could define a real woman, Polk, in what terms would you express her?" I asked him straight out from the shoulder.

"Hell fire and a hallelujah chorus if she's beautiful," he answered me promptly.

I laughed. I thought it was best under the circumstances.

"I'll tell you, Evelina," he continued stealthily. "A man just can't generalize the creatures. Apparently they are craving nothing so much as emotional excitement, and when you offer it to them they want to go to housekeeping with it. Love is a business with them and not an art."

"Would you like to try a genuine friendship with one, Polk?" I asked, and again struck from the shoulder with my eyes.

"Help! Not if you mean yourself, beautiful," he answered promptly and with fervor. "I wouldn't trust myself with you one minute off guard like that."

"You could safely."

"But I won't!"

"Will you try?"

"No!"

"Will you go over and sit in that chair while I tell you something calmly, quietly and seriously? It'll give you a new sensation, and maybe it will be good for you." I looked him straight in the face, and the battle of our eyes was something terrific. I had made up my mind to have it out with him then and there. There was nothing else to do. I would be frank and courageous and true to my vow and accept the consequences.

He slid along the railing of the porch and down into the chair in almost a daze of bewilderment.

"Polk," I began, concealing a gulp of terror, "I love you more than I can possibly"—

"Say, Polk, I let the pup git hung to her apron to the wheel of your car out in the road, and her head is dangersome kinder upside down. It might run away. Can you come and get her loose for me?"

CHAPTER VI.

Sorrier Than Shoulders and Ribs.

HENRIETTA [illegible] Polk's dire circumstances was a lesson to both Polk and me, for with two gasps that sounded as one we both raced across the porch, down the path and out to the road where Polk's runabout stood by the worn old stone post that had tethered the horses of the women of many generations of the maids of my house.

But, prompt as our response to Henrietta's demand for rescue had been, Cousin James was there before us. He stood in the middle of the dusty road with the tousled mite in his arms, soothing her frightened sobs against his cheek with the dearest tenderness and patting Sallie on the back with the same comforting.

"Oh, Henrietta, how could you nearly kill your little sister like this?" Sallie sobbed. "Please say something positive to her, James."

"Henrietta," began Cousin James with a suspicion of embarrassment at Polk's and my presence at the domestic scene. Polk choked a chuckle and I could have murdered him.

"Wait a minute," said Henrietta, in her most commanding voice. "Sallie, didn't you ask me to take that pup from Aunt Dixie, 'cause of the phthisis and keep her quiet while the kit got a nap and didn't I ask you if it would be all right if I got her back whole and clean?"

"Yes, Henrietta, but you"—

"Ain't she whole all over and clean?"

"Yes, but"—

"Couldn't nobody do any better than that with one of them twins. I won't try. If I have to 'muse her it has to be in my own way." And with her head in the air the Bunch marched up the walk to the house.

At this Polk shouted, and the rest of us laughed.

"Polk, please don't encourage Henrietta in the way she treats me and her little sisters." Sallie begged between her laughs and her half swallowed sobs. "I need my friends' help with my children, not to have them make it hard for me. Henrietta is devoted to you, and you could influence her so for the best. Please try to help me make a real woman out of her and not some sort of a terrible—terrible suffragette."

Sallie is the most perfectly lovely woman I almost ever saw. She has great violet eyes with black lashes that beg you for a piece of your heart, and her mouth is as sweet as a blush rose, with cheeks that almost match it in fashion. She and the babies always remind me of a cluster rose and roses, flower and buds, and I don't see why every man that sees her is not mad about her. They all used to be before she married, and I suppose they will be again as soon as the crape gets entirely worn off her clothes. As she stood with the bubbly baby in her arms and looked up at Polk I couldn' see how he could take it calmly.

"Sallie," he answered seriously, with a glint in his eyes over at me, "if you'll give me a few days longer I will then have found out by experience what a real woman is, and I'll begin on Henrietta for you accordingly."

"Don't be too hard on the kiddie," Cousin James answered him, with the crinkle in the corner of his eyes that might have been called shrewd in eyes less beautifully calm. "Let's trust a lot to Henrietta's powers of observation of her mother and her neighbors."

"Isn't that old mossback a treat for the sight of gods and men?" asked Polk with a laugh as we all stood watching the old gray coattails flapping in the warm breeze that was frolicking across the valley.

"I don't know what I would do without him," said Sallie softly, with tears suddenly misting the violets in her eyes as she turned away from us with the baby in her arms and went slowly up the front walk of Widegables.

"Please come stay with me a little while, Evelina," she pleaded back over her shoulder. "I feel faint."

I hesitated, for, as we were on my side of the road, Polk was still my guest.

"Go on with Sallie, sweetie," he answered my hesitating. "I don't want the snipped off fraction of a declaration like you were about to offer me. I can hide my time and get my own." With which he turned and got into his car as I went across the street.

Jane, I feel encouraged. I have done well today to get halfway through my declaration of independence, though he doesn't think that is what it is going to be—to Polk. If I can just tell him how much I love him before he makes love to me we can get on such a sensible footing with each other. I'll command the situation then.

But suppose I do get Polk calmed down to a nice friendship after old Plato's recipe, what if I want to marry him?

Do I want to marry a friend?

Yes, I do.

No, no!

There are many fundamental differences between men and women which strike deeper than breadth of shoulders and number of ribs on the right side.

Men deliberately unearth matters of importance and women stumble on the same things in the dark. It is then a question of the individual as to the complications that result.

This has been a remarkable afternoon, and I wish Jane had been in Glendale to witness it.

"Say, Evelina, all the folks over at our house have gone crazy, and I wish you would come over and help Cousin James with 'em," Henrietta demanded as I sat on my side porch calmly hemming a ruffle on a dress for the kitten. Everybody sews for the twins, and, as much as I hate it, I can't help doing it.

"Why, Henrietta, what is the matter?" I demanded as I hurried down the front walk and across the road at her bare little heels. By the time I got to the front gate I could hear sounds of lamentation.

"A railroad train wants to run right through the middle of all their dead people, and Sallie started the crying. Dead's dead, and if Cousin James wants 'em run over I wants 'em run over too." She answered over her shoulder as we hurried through the wide front hall.

"What's the matter?" I demanded with the second shake.

Sallie sat in the large armchair in the middle of the room weeping in the slow, regular way a woman has of starting out with tears when she means to let them flow for hours, may be days, and there were just five echoes to her grief, all done in different keys and characters.

Cousin Martha knelt beside the chair and held Sallie's head on her ample bosom, but I must say that the expression on her face was one of bewilderment, as well as of grief.

The three little Horton cousins sat close together in the middle of the old hair cloth sofa by the window and were weeping as modestly and helplessly as they did everything else in life, while Mrs. Hargrove, in her chair under her son's portrait, was just plainly out and out howling.

And on the hearth rug before the tiny line of oak chips that the old ladies liked to keep burning all summer, stood the master of the house, and for once in my life I have seen the personification of masculine helplessness. He was a tragedy, and I flew straight to him with arms wide open, which clasped both his shoulders as I gave him a good shake to arouse him from his paralyzation.

"What's the matter?" I demanded with the second shake.

"I'm a brute, Evelina," he answered, and a sudden discouragement lined every feature of his beautiful Biblical face. "I couldn't stand that, and I hugged him tight to my breast for an instant and then administered another earthquake shake.

"Tell me exactly what has happened," I demanded, looking straight into his tragic eyes and letting my hands slip from his shoulders down his arms until they held both of his hands tight and warm in mine.

Jane, I was glad that I had offered the cup of my eyes to him full of this curious intersex elixir of life that you have induced me to seek so blindly, for he responded to the dose immediately, and the color came back into his face as he answered me just as sensibly as he would another man.

"The men who are surveying the new railroad from Cincinnati to the gulf have laid their experimental lines across the corner of Greenwood cemetery, and they say it will have to run that way or go across the river and parallel the lines of the other road. If they come on this side of the river they will force the other road to come across too, and in that case we will get the shops. It just happens that such a line will make necessary the removal of—of poor Henry's remains to another lot. Sallie's is the only lot in the cemetery that is that high on the bluff. Henry didn't like the situation when he bought it himself, and I thought that as there is another lot right next to her mother's for sale she would not—but, of course, I was brutal to mention it to her. I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me, Sallie." And as he spoke he extracted himself from me and walked over and laid his hand on Sallie's head.

"It was such a shock to her—poor Henry!" sobbed little Cousin Jasmine, and the other two little sisters sniffed in chorus.

"To have railroad trains running by Greenwood at all will be disturbing to the peace of the dead," snorted Mrs. Hargrove. "We need no railroad in Glendale. We have never had one. And that is my last word—no!"

"Four miles to the railroad station across the river is just a pleasant drive in good weather," said Cousin Martha plaintively as she cuddled Sallie's sobs more comfortably down on her shoulder.

"I feel that Henry would doubt my faithfulness to his memory if I consented to such a desecration," came in smothered tones from the pillowing shoulder.

And not one of all these six women had stopped to think for one minute that the minor fact of the disturbing of the ashes of Henry Carruthers would be followed by the major one of the restoration of the widow's fortune and the lifting of a huge financial burden off the strong shoulders they were all separately and collectively leaning upon.

I exploded, but I am glad I drew the Crag out on the porch and did it to him alone.

"Evelina, you are refreshing if strenuous," he laughed after I had spent five minutes in stating my opinions of women in general and a few in particular. "But I ought not to have hurt Sallie by telling her about the lines until they are a certainty. It is so far only a possibility. They may go across the river anyway."

"And, as for seeing Sallie swaddled in your consideration and fed yourself as a sacrifice from a spoon, I am tired of it," I flamed up again. "It's not good for her. Feed and clothe her and her progeny—men in general have brought just such burdens as that upon you in particular by their attitude toward us—but do let her begin to exert just a small area of her brain on the subject of the survival of the fit to live. You don't swaddle or feed me."

"Eve," he said softly under his breath as his wonderful, gray eyes sank down way below the indignation and explosiveness to the quiet pool that lies at the very bottom of my heart.

Nobody ever found it before, and I didn't know it was there myself, but I felt as if it were being drained up into heaven.

"Eve," he said again, and it is a wonder that I didn't answer.

"Adam!"

I don't know just what would have happened if Uncle Peter hadn't broken in on the interview with his crustiest chips on both shoulders and so much excitement bottled up that he had to let it fly like a double reporter.

"Dodson is down at the hotel looking for you, James," he began as he hurried up the steps. "Big scheme this—got him in a corner if the C. and G. comes along this side of Old Harpeth—make him squeal, hey?"

"Who's Dodson?" I asked with the greatest excitement. I was for the first time getting a whiff of the schemes of the masculine mighty, but I was squelched promptly by Uncle Peter.

"We've no time for questions, Evelina, now—go back to your tatting, hey?" He answered me as he began to buttonhole the Crag and lead him down the steps.

"Dodson is the man who is laying down and contracting for the line across the river, Evelina," answered Cousin James without taking any notice whatever of Uncle Peter's squelching of me. "If this other line can just be secured he will have to come to our terms—and the situation will be saved." As he spoke he took my hand in his and led me at his side down the front walk to the gate, talking as he went, for Uncle Peter was chuckling on ahead like a steam tug in a hurry.

"And the shades of Henry will again assume the maintenance of his family," I hazarded with lack of respect of the dead, impudence to Cousin James about his own affairs and unkindness by implication to Sallie, who loves me better than almost anybody in the world does. And I got my just punishment by seeing a lovely look of tender concern rise in Cousin James' eyes as he stopped short in the middle of the walk.

"I want to go back a minute to speak to Sallie before I go on downtown," he said quickly, and before Uncle Peter's remonstrances had exploded he had taken the steps two at a bound and disappeared in the front door.

"Sooner he marries that lazy lollypop the better," fumed Uncle Peter as he waited at the gate. "The way for a man to quench his thirst for woman sweets is to marry a pot of honey like that and then come right on back to the bread and butter game. Here's a letter Jasper gave me to bring along for you from town. Go on and read it and do not disturb the workings of my brain while I wait for James—workings of a great brain, hey?"

There is no better sedative for a woman's disturbed and wounded emotions than a little stiff brain work. Richard's letter braced my viny drooping of mind at once and from thinking into Frank Crag's affairs of sentiment I turned with masculine vigor to begin to mix into his affairs of finance. However, I wish that the first big business letter I ever got in my life hadn't had to have a strain of love interest running through it. Still, Dickie is a trump card in the man pack.

It seems that as his father is one of the most influential directors and largest stockholders in this new branch of the Cincinnati and Gulf railroad he has got the commission for making the plans for all the stations along the road, and he wants to give me the commission for drawing all the gardens for all the station yards. It will be tremendous for both of us so young in life, and I never dared hope for such a thing. I had only hoped to get a few private gardens of some of my friends to laze and pose over, but this is startling. My mind is beginning to work on in terms of hedges and fountains already and Dickie may be coming south any minute.

I have been in Glendale a whole month now, and I can't see that my influence has revolutionized the town as yet. I don't seem to be of half the importance that I thought I was going to be. I have tried, and I have offered that bucket of love that I thought up to everybody, but whether they have drunk of it to profit I am sure I can't say. In fact, my loneliness has liquefied my gaseous affection into what almost looks like officiousness.

Still, I know Uncle Peter is happier than he ever was before because he has got me to come to as a refuge from Aunt Augusta, a confidante for his views of life that he is not allowed to express at home and also the certainty of one of Jasper's juleps.

Sallie has grown so dependent on me that my shoulders are assuming a masculine squareness to support her weight. I am understudying Cousin James to such an extent over at Widegables that I feel like the heir to his house. Cousin Martha sends for me when the chimney smokes and the cows get sick. I have twice changed $5 for little Cousin Jasmine and sternly told the man from out on their farm on Providence road that he must not root up the lavender bushes to plant turnip greens in their places. I afterward rooted the patch from him to grow the lavender because he said he couldn't lose the price that the greens would bring him "for corchets."

Mrs. Hargrove has given me her will to keep for her, and the sealed instructions for her burial. I hope when the time comes the two bobcats will strike a balance, but I doubt it.

Her ideas of a proper funeral seem to coincide with those of Queen Victoria, whom she has admired through life and mourns sincerely.

Henrietta has not been heard to indulge in profane language since I had a long talk with her last week out in the garden, that ended in stubby tears and the gift of a very lovely locket which I impressed upon her was as chaste in design as I wished her speech to become.

The twins have been provided with several very lovely pieces of wearing apparel from my rapidly skill acquiring needle. That's on the credit side of my balance. But that is all, and it doesn't sound revolutionary, does it, Jane?

Petunia married Jasper according to his word of promise, and I have taught her to cook about five French dishes that he couldn't concoct to save his life, and which help her to keep him in his place. His pomposity grows daily but he eyes me with suspicion when he sees me in secret conclave with Petunia.

"We needs a man around this place," I heard him mutter the other day as I left the kitchen.

I wonder!

The garden has been weeded, replanted, trained, clipped and garnished, and my arms are as husky and strong as a boy's and my nose badly sunburned from my strenuosity with hoe and trimming scissors.

All of which I have done and done well. But when I think of all those five girls that are waiting for me to solve the emotional formula by which they can work out and establish the fact that man equals woman, I get weak in the knees.

Jane's letters are just prods.

(To be continued)

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