

A Missing Year

"I wish he had chosen another time than this for his visit. It is too provoking. Bella is sure to be in the way!" and Mrs. Elder drew her embroidery needle through her work with a jerk that betrayed very plainly her annoyance.

"You can't put him off a week or two, I suppose?" said her sister who was reclining on a sofa near by with a book in her hand.

"No; he would think it odd after we have urged him so often to come at any time. And there's no hope of Aunt Della's return for ten days at least!"

"I presume not; and Bella meanwhile will be a fixture here."

"Yes, I can't get rid of her. I promised Aunt Della I wouldn't let her out of my sight if I could help it."

"I don't wonder she exacted the promise! What an odd freak it was for Belle to run away from school and hide herself a whole year! I confess I am dreadfully curious about it. I wonder if she will ever explain it."

"I don't suppose she will," answered her sister. "She is the most stubborn girl I ever saw! See how resolutely she holds herself aloof from us all!"

"She knows we don't approve of her," said Augusta. "And no wonder! But she may be a little more socially inclined after Edgar Hoyt comes. A young, handsome man, with an income of ten thousand a year is not often kept at a distance."

"No; and nothing would please her more than to keep him from bestowing any attention on you, Augusta."

Augusta smiled languidly and glanced in the long mirror which hung opposite the sofa on which she sat. She was proud of her stately figure, blue-black hair and clearly cut features. She knew she was conceded to be handsome even by her enemies, and she intended to show off her beauty to the best advantage during Edgar Hoyt's visit.

With that end in view, she had ordered several new dresses, though she was already in debt, her small income not being sufficient to meet half her wants. She was dependent upon her brother-in-law for a home, and it was only natural that she should desire an establishment of her own. But, though nearly thirty years of age, she had failed to secure one, and the visit of Edgar Hoyt had been arranged especially for her benefit by Mrs. Elder, who was almost morbidly anxious to have her sister make a good marriage, and did not scruple to scheme toward that end.

Mr. Elder was a banker, and his home was a handsome country mansion, surrounded by gardens, orchards, and fertile fields, and situated at such a convenient distance from the city that he was able to go back and forth every day. It was through negotiating some loans that he had made Edgar Hoyt's acquaintance, and had received from him the promise of a visit.

So anxious was Mrs. Elder to keep the field clear for Augusta that she invited no other guests; but when her aunt, Mrs. Lester, who was a widow, was compelled to make a journey to the Far West to the sick-bed of an only brother, and asked her to take charge of Belle during her absence Mrs. Elder did not know how to refuse.

Belle was in disgrace. She had been placed by her stepmother at a boarding-school to finish her education in French, music and English literature, but had been there only three months when she suddenly disappeared. As a "parlor boarder" she had been allowed many privileges one of which was to go out walking alone once a day, and she had gone out one morning and failed to return. She had left a note to be forwarded to her stepmother, in which she had said simply that she would write soon and explain all. But no further communication from her had been received, and it was a year before Mrs. Lester saw her again. Then she had met her by accident in the street and had taken her home at once and sternly demanded from her a full history of the twelve months which had elapsed since she had left the school.

But Belle was silent. No threats, persuasions or arguments could make her speak. She absolutely refused to tell her stepmother anything except that she had earned her living by coloring photographs in a studio, a work for which she had always shown great aptitude in her school-days, when it had been pursued as a pleasure. Of her reason for leaving the school she refused to speak.

Perhaps had Mrs. Lester been a different woman, or the girl's own mother, she would have succeeded in wringing from Belle's lips the history of that missing year in all its details; but she was a cold, hard, severe woman, and had never had much love for her beautiful stepdaughter. Her means were very limited, and she

looked upon Belle as a burden, and had never sought to win her affection.

But she had resolved to do her duty by her, and to keep her, if possible, from attempting any more escapades, and with this purpose in view had, on going West for an indefinite time, left her in Mrs. Elder's care, with countless charges as to her treatment.

"It will be folly now to hope she will make a good marriage," said the stepmother. "She has damaged herself too much for that. But she can be trained for a governess."

Belle Lester's face wore anything but a happy expression as she stood by one of the parlor windows looking out on the lawn, the evening before the day on which Edgar Hoyt was expected. But the melancholy, wistful look in her blue eyes had grown habitual during the past few weeks; for it is not a pleasant thing to stand outside the pale of love and sympathy, and she had felt keenly her position in Mrs. Elder's household. But she uttered no word of blame or reproach. She was far too proud to bare her wounds to unloving eyes.

She had been a gay, joyous girl in Mrs. Westbrook's seminary, and she was now a reserved, silent woman, but the secret of the change was known only to herself.

But she was as beautiful as ever, and the ineffable sadness that shaded the dark lustre of her eyes only lent to her a greater charm. But, unlike Augusta Vane, she cared little for her beauty. Her thick, soft, golden hair was pushed back from her low, white brow in careless confusion, and she wore neither lace nor jewels. Her only ornament was a bunch of purple pansies on her breast.

She was in so deep a reverie that the opening of the door did not rouse her, and she started and colored when the voice of Augusta Vane broke the silence.

"All alone, Belle?" she said, as she seated herself in the most comfortable chair she could find, and trifled carelessly with a circlet of gold on her wrist. "Well this is the last of our quiet evenings, I suppose."

"I don't understand you," said Belle, in a cold, indifferent voice.

"Do you mean to say you have not heard we are to have company? Yes, George is to bring a young man home with him to-morrow, to stay three weeks."

"I had not heard of it," said Belle, not turning from the window.

"Yes, and the young man is the catch of the season, my dear. He came into a fortune only six months ago, through the death of an old grand-uncle in Australia. He has been dreadfully run after, and is said to be singularly indifferent to ladies' charms. Perhaps, however, he will not be so callous when he sees you, Belle."

A bitter expression flitted across Belle's face.

"I shall not compete for the prize," she said, coldly.

This was precisely the answer for which Augusta had hoped.

"You will alter your mind when you come to see him," Augusta said, in her own positive tones.

Belle was silent.

"It is best not to make any rash promises," continued Augusta. "Now, I am willing to wager almost any amount that you get up a grand flirtation with him."

A look of quiet contempt was the only reply Belle made to this speech, and, turning abruptly from the window, she left the room.

"She is certainly the most peculiar girl I ever saw," mused Augusta. "I'd give a good deal to know the secret of that missing year. I dare say a love-affair had something to do with it. Her whole disposition seems changed. Well, I scarcely think that, after what I said, she'll pay much attention to Edgar Hoyt."

The visitor arrived late on the following afternoon, and was received with all due honor, Augusta wearing one of her prettiest dresses and her most fascinating smile. She was much impressed with his appearance, and was loath to part with him when he was shown to the best guest-chamber—a large, handsomely furnished room, the windows of which overlooked the garden.

"A most delightful place in which to spend a few weeks," thought Edgar Hoyt, as, having performed his evening toilette, he walked to one of the windows and drew aside the lace curtain.

As he gazed listlessly down at the beautifully kept beds of flowers, the straight, neat walks, and trim hedges, a girl appeared suddenly from behind a clump of cedars, and turned in the direction of the house.

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Never had Belle Lester looked prouder or colder than when she entered the dining-room at the ringing of the dinner-bell at seven o'clock, and she acknowledged her introduction to Mr Hoyt by only a faint inclination of her golden head. And not once during the progress of the meal did she even glance in his direction.

"She's determined to show me she is not impressionable," thought Augusta, well pleased.

But she was not at all pleased, a little later, to observe that Mr. Hoyt, who sat next to her, was abstracted and ill at ease, and that his eyes rested continually on the fair cold face opposite him. In vain did Augusta smile her sweetest and talk her gayest. The young man answered her lively sallies at random, and evidently sustained with an effort his share in the conversation.

It was no better when the adjournment to the parlor was made. Belle had retired to her own room the moment dinner was over, and Augusta had Mr. Hoyt entirely to herself, and played and sang to him, and looked over albums and books of foreign views with an unflagging amiability and interest which were almost sublime. But she told herself, in a rage, when she went to her own room, at the end of the evening, that she might as well have tried to entertain a stone, so utterly unappreciative of her efforts had Edgar Hoyt seemed. His thoughts had evidently been far away throughout the whole evening, and he had welcome with unmistakable relief Mr. Elder's proposition to smoke a late cigar on the terrace.

"It's all Belle's fault, you can be sure of that," said Mrs. Elder, when she came into her sister's room to receive an account of her grievances. "George told me an hour ago that when he was out in the garden with Mr. Hoyt, just before dinner, he left him by the orchard gate while he went to the stable to give an order, and when he came back he was just in time to see Belle walking away as fast as she could go. Of course she had had the assurance to speak to Mr. Hoyt without an introduction. It was just like her! And then when I introduced him to her in the dining-room she acted as if she had never seen him before!"

"It's a case of love at first sight with him, I suppose," said Augusta, bitterly.

"If it is, he shall know the story of her leaving Mrs. Westbrook's school," said Mrs. Elder. "I fancy that will bring him to his senses. She will find I am a match for her; and I will see that she does not have a chance to see him alone."

Several days went by, during which Mrs. Elder kept as keen a watch as possible on her aunt's stepdaughter, but saw nothing to arouse her ire further, and was beginning to think she was mistaken in supposing Belle had any designs on their visitor, when she became the accidental witness of a scene which showed her that her fears had been well founded.

She was in the conservatory, reading, late one afternoon, shielded from the view of anyone in the parlor by a great date-palm. Belle was in the parlor at the piano, and when she began to sing, Mrs. Elder put down her book to listen, for the girl's voice had been highly cultivated, and the song she had taken up, "Golden Days," brought out to the full its pathetic power.

The sweet, impassioned notes rose with their burden of sadness upon the air through one verse, but at the beginning of the next there was a sudden crash of the piano keys, and the song terminated abruptly.

At the same moment Mrs. Elder heard the voice of Edgar Hoyt, and peering around the palm, she saw him standing by the piano, his dark eyes fixed on Belle's proud, half-averted face, and one hand extended appealingly toward her. His attitude and expression gave evidence that he was under the influence of some strong emotion, but Mrs. Elder could not catch his words.

But he had spoken only a moment when Belle interrupted him with a gesture of pain and deprecation.

"Explanation!" Mrs. Elder heard her say. "How can it be explained! No, I will not listen."

"You shall and must," answered Edgar Hoyt in a loud voice. "I have a right to be heard," and he made a step forward as if to seize her in his arms.

But she was too quick for him. Even as his breath was on her cheek she started back, threw open the door of the library and disappeared, just as Mrs. Elder, white with anger and chagrin, but trying to suppress all appearance of excitement, emerged from her hiding-place.

"Mr. Hoyt," she said, "I have been a most unwilling witness of the scene that has just passed. It requires no explanation, knowing Belle Lester as I do. She has only been trying upon you some of the arts for which she is noted. I deeply

regret that she should have deceived you, but assure you that I have done my best to prevent just such a catastrophe."

"I do not understand you, madam," said the young man, who had grown very pale.

"Perhaps you will when I tell you that my aunt's stepdaughter—I am thankful she is no relation of mine—is here under the strictest espionage. It is only right that you should know that she has disgraced her name forever."

"Disgraced it!" repeated Edgar Hoyt, aghast.

"Yes. There is a year missing from the record of her life, for which she refuses absolutely to account. She ran away from the school in which my aunt had placed her, and for a year we knew nothing of her. Until she gives her reason for leaving the school, and accounts for that year she is beyond the pale of either affection or esteem. And you will see—"

"That it is wise to leave me alone in my disgrace," interrupted a voice, and Belle appeared in the doorway of the library her proud head held high, her eyes flashing. "You have done well to inform Mr. Hoyt of the shame attaching to me, Cousin Emily," a half contemptuous smile curving her lips. "He will scarcely try to force from me the history of that missing year."

"No," said Edgar Hoyt, advancing toward her; "because I know you too well to allow one doubt of your honor to enter my heart. Belle, dear Belle, can't you believe me when I tell you that I have loved you devotedly from the first hour we met? Can't you trust me, Belle, and let me take you away from this home where you have been so miserable?"

"Mr. Hoyt, you must be mad," said Mrs. Elder, in a hoarse, shocked voice.

But Edgar Hoyt only smiled, and kept his dark eyes riveted on Belle's pallid, changing face.

For one moment she seemed to hesitate, then raised her eyes timidly, and something he read in their azure depths made the young man spring forward and clasp her to his heart.

"Do you mean to say that, after what I have told you, and an acquaintance with Belle Lester of only five days, you actually offer to marry her?" said Mrs. Elder, scarcely able to credit the evidence of her senses.

"No, madam," answered the young man, turning toward her, but still keeping an arm about the slight figure which rested against him; "no for she is already married. When she left Mrs. Westbrook's school it was to become my wife."

And he bent his head to look into Belle's eyes as he uttered the last two words.

"Your wife?" echoed Mrs. Elder.

"Yes the explanation of our long separation is very simple. We became acquainted in a circulating library where Miss Lester went to read every day, and believed her mother to be a very rich woman, and felt sure she would oppose my suit, I persuaded Belle into a clandestine marriage. A friend of mine was a witness to the ceremony, and after it was over went with us to my rooms in Harley street to take lunch. When he left us an hour later, I went down stairs with him, and he remarked to me in an unnecessarily loud tone, that I had done a good thing for myself in marrying old Martin Lester's heiress. I answered 'Yes,' but added that I would have married her had she not been worth a penny. Belle had followed me to the head of the stairs, and heard only Curran's remark and my assent, and at once she rushed back to the room, overwhelmed by the discovery that I believed her to be Isabelle, the daughter of the rich Mrs. Martin Lester, when she was, in fact, Annabel, the stepdaughter of Mrs. Harvey Lester, who was in very moderate circumstances. She was sure I had married her from mercenary motives alone, and, deeply wounded, she followed her first impulse and fled, a back stairway affording her a chance to escape into an alley without the risk of encountering any one. The next day I received a note from her telling me why she had left me; but, though I searched for her, I never saw her again until I met her here just five days ago."

"And as to that missing year, as you term it, Cousin Emily," said Belle, "it was spent in hard work. I boarded with a widow, a Mrs. Bronson, who will vouch for my steadfast application to the business by which I earned my living, and my blameless life."

"I need only your word for it, my darling," said Edgar Hoyt, looking down again into those azure eyes, which now shone like stars.

When he looked up a moment later, Mrs. Elder was gone, and within an hour he took his young wife from her protection forever, and Augusta was left to mourn the attentions she had wasted on a married man.

How to Wear Shoes.

"Do you know there isn't one man in five hundred who knows how to wear shoes?" remarked a shoemaker the other day. "The average man buys a pair of shoes, wears them until they are no longer presentable, and then throws them away and buys another pair. A man ought to have at least two pair of shoes for every day wear, and no pair should be worn two days in succession. At first thought this may strike you as a scheme to benefit the shoe dealer, but it is nothing of the kind. In fact, such a plan would injure the shoe business. Two pair of shoes worn alternately will last three times as long as a single pair. The saving, of course, is made in the wearing of the leather. A pair of shoes worn every day goes to pieces almost twice as fast as a pair worn every second day. I know that proposition is a straggler, but it is true, nevertheless. A man does not wear out two pair of shoes in exactly the same manner. Do you remember how an old pair feels when you first put them on again after they have been discarded for awhile? They don't fit you like your new shoes, and the contrast is very marked. But the same thing holds good in the case of new shoes. No two pair fit your feet in exactly the same way. In one pair the strain and wear of the leather fall heaviest upon one particular part of the shoe, and in another the greatest wear and tear fall upon another part altogether."

His Time Had Come.

"Is there a man in all this audience," fiercely exclaimed a female lecturer, "that has ever done anything to lighten the burden resting on his wife's shoulders? What do you know of woman's work?"

"Is there a man here," she continued, folding her arms and looking over her audience with a glance of superb scorn, "that has ever got up in the morning, leaving his tired, worn out wife to enjoy her slumbers, gone quietly down stairs, made the fire, cooked his breakfast, sewed the missing buttons on the children's clothes, darned the family stockings, scoured the pots and kettles, cleaned and filled the lamps, swept the kitchen, and done all this day after day uncomplainingly? If there is such a man in this audience, let him rise up! I should like to see him!"

And in the rear of the hall a mild-looking man in spectacles, in obedience to the summons timidly arose. He was the husband of the eloquent speaker. It was the first time that he ever had a chance to assert himself.

Buffalo Herds a Half Century Ago.

I think I can truly say that I saw in that region in one day more buffaloes than I have seen of cattle in all my life. I have seen the plain black with them for several days' journey as far as the eye could reach. They seemed to be coming northward continually from the distant plains to the Platte to get water, and would plunge in and swim across by thousands—so numerous were they that they changed not only the color of the water, but its taste, until it was unfit to drink; but we had to use it. One night when we were encamped on the South Fork of the Platte, they came in such droves that we had to sit up all night and make what fires we could to keep them from running over us and trampling us into the dust. We could hear them thundering all night long; the ground fairly trembled with the vast approaching band; and if they had not been diverted, waggons, animals and emigrants would have been trodden under their feet.—Gen. John Bidwell, in Century.

SURVIVED HIS OWN EXECUTION—A man who has attended his own execution and still survives to relate the details is surely worthy of a short paragraph. The man in question, although at present serving in the humble capacity of waiter in one of the Paris cafes, was, 21 years ago, one of the historic characters of the world. His name is Col. Marteras, and in 1869 he was on the point of being proclaimed president of Uruguay, when he was arrested, charged with treason and sentenced to be shot.

On Monday, June 30th of that year, he was taken by a platoon of soldiers out of the capital to a cleared spot in the heart of a forest and bound to a chair. At the word "Fire!" a nervous shock caused Marteras to fall to the ground. He did not hear the volley, but a laborer working near by did. The workman went to ascertain the cause; saw the soldiers marching away, and Marteras badly wounded, but not dead by any means, lying on the ground. The laborer took the would-be president home and cured his wounds, and he and Marteras as both now often tell of the supposed execution of the "French pretender."

In Lake county, Tenn., a short time since, a young man of 27 married a widow of 49, who has 17 living children.

ALL SORTS.

The Russian budget for 1891 shows an estimated surplus of \$1,167,840.

Beet sugar making is largely on the increase in Norway and Sweden.

The Czar is the largest of all living landed proprietors, owning an estate which is nearly equal in area to the whole of France.

The largest sheep ranch in the world is in the counties of Webb and Dummit in Texas. It contains upwards of 400,000 acres, and yearly pastures 800,000 sheep.

The island of Heligoland is said to be cut off from the mainland by ice, and provisions are rapidly growing scarce.

Herr Miguel, Prussian minister of finance, has announced that the secret of the Koch lymph will soon be published.

The Guatemalan government is said to be reorganizing the army with a view of renewing the fight with San Salvador.

There are 111 newspapers printed in Fleet street, London. Eleven of them are dailies.

Over 200 houses have been burned at Bombay, and hundreds of families are homeless.

The Chins of Farther India made a raid on Pinthaw, a village of Burmah, on January 7, killing eight persons and capturing twelve.

A treaty satisfactory to England and Portugal on the African question is nearly concluded.

Mr. Balfour's fund for the distressed poor in Ireland now amounts to £10,000. Many contributions of clothing have also been received.

It is reported that a syndicate is being formed to buy up all the flour mills in the north of England. The syndicate is said to command a capital of £2,000,000.

Mr. Alex. Robb head of the firm of A. Robb & Sons, Amherst, died Wednesday, aged 64. A widow and five children are left.

During the last five months 357 cases of diphtheria were reported in Halifax and 109 deaths. Last month 57 cases were reported and 14 deaths.

The death is announced of Shybael Dimock, the well known Windsor, N. S. shipbuilder. Deceased, who died of pneumonia after a brief illness, was 71 years old.

Premature gray whiskers should be colored to prevent the appearance of age, and Buckingham's Dye is by far the best preparation to do it.

The Trinity church estate in New York is worth \$150,000,000, and is rapidly increasing in value. The reason is that it lies on the west side of the town, which has become a vast trade centre.

The New York Sun has news from the City of Mexico that the sport of bull-fightings has been prohibited there; that the main plaza de toros has been cut up into lots for the service of builders.

David Jacks, a millionaire of Monterey county, Cal., can ride 20 miles in a straight line on his own land. He is a Scotchman, and in 1849 stowed himself away in a barrel on a vessel bound for California. Now he has a fortune of \$7,000,000. He is a devoted Presbyterian churchman.

There was great excitement in Montreal Thursday amongst those who still put faith in bucket shops when a despatch reached the city that J. C. Allen & Co., of Buffalo, had suspended. Montrealers will lose heavily through Allen's agents.

Charles Rose, of Ray City, Ill., a young farmer, has been paying attention to the daughter of a neighboring farmer, Miss Mollie Welsh, aged 18. Rose was forbidden to visit Miss Welch by her parents, but while the parents were at church Sunday Rose visited the house and induced the young woman to take a walk. When they had gone a short distance he asked her if she was willing to die for him. She replied yes, and he drew a pistol and fired the ball taking effect in the girl's back, inflicting a probably fatal wound. Young Rose then returned, locked himself in a room and blew out his brains.

Steamer Britannia, from Leith, collided on Sunday morning with the steamer Bear, from Grangemouth in the Firth of Forth, Scotland. The Bear sank immediately, and of fourteen men on board twelve went down with her; two others were received by a boat from the Britannia. After the collision the Britannia, which was badly damaged, transferred her forty-five passengers to the steamer Thames, and was taken in tow by that vessel, the two steamers proceeding slowly toward Leith, and before they had gone far the hawser connecting the vessels snapped, and the damaged vessel gave a terrible plunge and sank. Fortunately her crew had put on life belts after the collision, and all except the chief engineer were picked up by the boats from the Thames. The chief engineer went down with the vessel and was not seen again.