THE DEAREST GIRL IN THE WORLD

CHAPTER I.

Darkness was falling over the earth. The air was still cool, though spring flowers were peeping through the crevices, on mossy banks and in ferny hollows.

The great towers of Castle Royal cast sombre shadows across the great court, and the heavy dark building made a grotesque silhouette against the horizon.

A grand old home was Castle Royal! For years it had been the pride of all those silent sleepers that lay under the stone chancel of the parish church, and in the geat vaults of the Wedderburns. Their great wealth was now in possession of one young man, Reginald Home, Lord Wedderburn, the only child of the deceased Lord Wedderburn and Alicia, the daughter of the Earl of Ely. The old Lord had for years slept in the Wedderburn vaults, and Lady Alicia and her son dwelt in the proud old home, surrounded by hosts of servants.

The spring evening was drawing to a close. An early dinner had been served for my Lady, since the young Lord had not yet returned from town. A bright fire gleamed on the hearth, and heavy silken curtains were drawn over the windows. The apartment was one whose exceeding elegance would have delighted the most fastidious eye.

Luxurious silken lounges were here and there, and over the heavy Persian carpet were spread fur robes that were as costly as beautiful. On a small table there burned dimly a fairy lamp, shedding roseats hues over the room, whose sole occupant was Alicia, Lady Wedderburn.

Impatience was strongly marked on her face—a face that with its years had grown cold, proud and was yet beautiful. Her hair was slightly gray; but the face was one of those that absence of care had left unlined. Her form was still rounded and beautiful, but the pose of the head was the characteristic that so plainly betokened her great pride. Lady Wedderburn arose from her silken couch and impatiently rang for lights.

"Tell Marston to ask Lord Wedderburn to come to me immediately on his return," she said to the servant, and despite the anger or impatience written on her face when she uttered the name of Lord Wedderburn, there was a soft intonation of the voice that bespoke the great love of this grand woman for her son. To her he was a god to be worshipped. Each year, as he grew to manhood, had augmented her fear that she might lose some of her great influence over him.

Lady Wadderburn threw herself in an easy chair beside a table on which lay an open letter, which she once more read.

"The Weston Homes are still here. They certainly are the most vulgar people that it has ever been my ill fortune to meet. How Weston Home could have allied himself to that coarse woman is beyond me, and those daughters! When I mention the som I am filled with unutterable shame, for few have the audacity to speak his name. I am told that Reginald led an exceedingly gay life last season, being seen constantly in the company of that objectionable person, his cousin, and his followers. I was told yesterday that Reginald had certainly great talent, that he could lead two lives so directly opposite to each other: one night he is honored at Lady Elsmere's; the next he is with Weston Home in company with the gayest of the gay. In this double life he has been leading he is in great danger. One may do this successfully for a time; but the time most surely will come when the heavy weight of evil companionship will drag him down to their level. If I were in your place, Alicia, I would use every influence to get Reginald to marry and settle down to respectability, as that would probably be the very calamity most feared by those Weston Homes. It would deprive them of unbounded wealth in expectation, and I am sure they stand in great need of it, despite their loud vulgarity and show."

Lady Wedderburn's face was as white as her robe, and angry fear was plainly written on every feature. Litle, idle, gossipy stories had frequently reached her ears, but were soon dispelled by one glance at her son's handsome face. He was her son, and was beyond reproach; but the stories nettled her—they stung her pride. The letter before her, written by her aunt, the Countess of Marchmont, filled her with consternation. Great bare facts confronted her. Reginald, Lord Wedderburn, who now in his thirtieth year, had not shown the least inclination for the society of young ladies, notwithstanding the fact that Lady Alicia had been almost constantly surrounded by them. It was the worm in her heart's bud: that, under that "idiotic will," should her son die before her, and unmarried, the property should pass to the Weston Homes, and my Lady Alicia would then have to repair to an ancient, poor and dilapidated country place of her own, having scarce enough means to surround herself with plenty, much less with luxury. To give up Castle Royal! The very thought of it made her sick. To have the Weston Homes parading over the marble halls, standing gawking in their vulgarity at the fine old portraits, not knowing a Van Dyck from a Reynolds or a Lely! It was almost beyond human endurance; but what was she to do? She could not say to a many of thirty "you must marry," especially since that man of thirty had received thirty years of training in family pride and strength of will, besides his great natural inheritance of it.

Besides, Lady Wedderburn had surrounded herself with hosts of the fairest girls, and through all intriguing he came out uninterested.

It was simply unbearable. She would nerve herself to a grand effort, and do something she had seldom done, speak plainly to her son, and tell him her mind.

Lady Wedderburn dried her eyes, took a few turns around the room, and as she heard her son's footsteps, seated herself in an uncertain light to hide her eyes, that were red with weeping.

He entered the room as he always his face beaming with devotion to his mother. She was his all.

His great love for her precluded all love for another. His thirty years left no traces on him. His was yet the boyish, handsome face of her lover-husband. There was the same dark hair, and great, soulful, honest eyes.

All her anger melted away instantly; but the great fear still lingered.

"How cozy!" he exclaimed, as he entered and clasped her in his strong arms. "It is a downright pleasure to get home after being in town a few hours. You are different from any other woman, mother, you carry your radiance with you wherever you are."

He lounged before the warm fire, but no answer came to his greeting.

He glanced at the face beside him and saw there traces of tears, but a great love shone in her eyes. He arose at once and went to her.

"Tell me, what has arisen to distress you?" he asked.

Lady Wedderburn could never tell how she had the courage to resist his soft, pleading tones, and to act as she did; but without a reply she handed him the letter that lay beside her. He read it through carefully. He seemed to realize, in a moment, all the pain his mother had experienced—her wounded pride—and the color mounted to his face.

"I am somewhat surprised that Aunt Emily should have taken so much pains to write thus," he stammered.

"Your Aunt Emily realizes my great danger," she said. Then, as if eager to hear a denial, she added:

"Then there is no truth in it?"

For a moment Lord Reginald seemed confused. He had never deceived her in his life, and the hesitation was the only answer necessary. The eagerness all fled from the face of Lady Wedderburn. In its stead came the cold, haughty manner she had assumed.

"You do not know what I suffer. Those vulgar people are nearly at their wits' end for money, and they would sacrifice you to their own ends. The very idea of those people scheming to usurp my son is utterly loathsome to me. You have no idea how I live with this great danger hanging over my head. This sword, that may fall at any moment; and the result would be a thousand times worse than death to me. If any accident happened you I must give up Castle Royal, our beautiful home, and go out like a discharged servant."

Lady Wedderburn here burst into tears—Lord Reginald felt that every word was true, and the force of the words fell upon him as it had never done before. He took her in his strong arms.

"There is time enough, mother—let me have you as my idol a while longer, then I may follow your advice. Am I not young enough yet? Am I not strong and healthy as a young birch tree?"

These words had the desired effect. Lady Wedderburn dried her tears, but the words "there is time enough" brought so little comfort—she had heard them so often, and they did not lessen her danger one whit, still he had taken her words to heart—she was quite sure of this, from his face, as he left the room.

Lady Wedderburn arose and drew herself up proudly once more.

"How could I have ever said all that to him, I wonder," she thought, "and he so noble and true. I must know him that I am not angry with him, by being doubly tender towards him, poor, wounded boy."

Lord Reginald stepped through an open window, and lighted his cigar. There before him lay a sea of fair land—great old trees that had weathered the storms of centuries—each one seemed an old friend. Rich fields and fertile meadows, and on the north the sea whence came the cool evening breeze.

The moonlight fell softly over the castle. The great towers cast deep shadows on the sward below.

"A fair inheritance," he murmured, "and mother is right. It would kill her to give it up."

Just then a gleam of light stole timidly through the trees. It came from old Lenthill, a part of Lord Reginald's estate. The house was of stone, but was now almost in ruins. An uncanny place it looked, and every place about it seemed desolate enough. There were only a few acres that were let with the old house, and these were barren and almost useless to its present occupant. The house had been occupied by an aged woman, who had been a pensioner of the late Lord Wedderburn.

Why Dame Wynter had been permitted to live there free of charge during all those years, none could tell. It had long since been given up as one of those mysteries that no one but the late lord and the mysterious dame could answer, and when death claimed the one, and the other refused to tell, the Wedderburn agents ceased troubling over the matter. It was the late lord's wishes that Dame Wynter should have such small odds and ends of work as she could manage, and be paid a small sum therefor. The Castle housekeeper had always kept the dame's deft fingers well supplied, but now she was growing very infirm, and there were two to be kept, since there was Dorothy, her grandchild. A wild weed truly was Dorothy, with her strange, nymph-like face, great, liquid, brown eyes, and a mass of tangled, sunny hair. Everything about Dorothy seemed to be at war among themselves. She looked like a mass of odds and ends of humanity hitched together, regardless of coloring, and she had strangely beautiful eyes that did not in the least match her hair. Her complexion was one that vied with the newly blown roses, and this was at outs with the color of her eyes. Her hair fell in a shower of tangled masses down her shoulders and looked innocent of ever having been combed. Often she ran her fingers through the tangled curls, straightening them as best she could. For fifteen years she had been wild as the gulls [illegible] wings [illegible] trees [illegible] that seldom knew shoes, were as beautifully arched as those of a duchess.

No one knew anything about Dorothy, save the fact that she was brought there fifteen years ago by Dame Wynter, and the neighbors surmised she was the grandchild of Dame Wynter; but that dame carried herself at such a distance, no one dared question, but when the harsh voice of the old dame called out to her angrily, and shortly after Dorothy came out with tear-stained eyes and bruises on her fair skin, it was half guessed that Dorothy was an unwilling reminder of something decidedly unpleasant to the dame.

Hence Dorothy, with her strangely beautiful face and her high-bred hair, was a conundrum to all who saw her.

The clock in the great tower struck ten and aroused Lord Webberburn from his thoughts. A light from the old ruined house stole faintly through the trees and finally flickered out.

Lord Wedderburn arose and threw away his cigar. It was as yet early, and, not being sleepy, he walked down the pathway that led to Lenthill. The graveled walks were well kept, and the lawn was like velvet. The great trees gently stirred their leaves, and the air came cool and invigorating from the sea.

"What if anything should happen me?" he thought; "it would kill poor mother. I must arrange matters as she wishes. I owe her that much; still I will not be hurried."

This was the usual ending of his thoughts.

The light came through the trees faintly and flickering, and ere he was aware he stood near the ruined house. He stood in the shadow of an old tower. He had not intended coming, but his thoughts led him thither. He heard a voice calling louder and louder:

"Dorothy! Dorothy!"

There was no answer save the whispering of the leaves and the beating of his own heart.

The call came more and more angrily. Lord Wedderburn stood in the shadow, but he could plainly see the inside of the room through the curtainless windows. The door opened, and Dame Wynter came into the room, the clack of her walking stick resounding on the stone floor.

"You miserable beggar!" she exclaimed, "how dare you burn the wood such a night as this?"

Lord Wedderburn could not see Dorothy, but he knew from the dame's tones she must be there. He took a few steps nearer the window, and there his eyes fell on the subject of the dame's wrath, for there, lying asleep, on the bare floor, lay Dorothy. How cold those stones looked against the snowy white arms that were half covered by the rags she wore. Lord Wedderburn was riveted to the spot. In all his life he could never forget the scene where Dorothy lay asleep as sweetly as though in a downy bed, her fair hair streaming over her like a veil of gold and her face resting on an arm outstretched on the cold stone floor. Dame Wynter struck her several times with her cane to arouse her, then went to the fire and placed the half-burned fagots on one side of the hearth, that she might prevent their burning, then after more angry words she turnd to go.

"Don't you dare to burn the wood on such a night, you beggar! Don't you know that the lord will not let you burn his wood? You will have them coming to me for rent next—and much good it will do them to come." The dame laughed shrilly, then shook her cane again at the unoffending Dorothy.

"I dare them to come. I dare them to ask me for money. I ask them why old Sir Robert let me live here all these years without pay? Let them answer that!"

Dorothy sat there rubbing her eyes, half asleep still.

"Do you hear?" shrieked the dame. "You are not to burn another fagot of this wood."

"The stone floor was so cold, granny," she said, softly.

"Cold, is it? Then set up—freeze, you beggar brat, and I'll have one less mouth to feed. Do you know if there is one reason why I should be burdened with you," she screamed.

"I don't know, Granny," replied Dorothy, fearfully.

"You are nothing to me, you beggar, do you know that?"

"You are all I have, Granny," she replied softly.

The dame, finding no excuse for a longer stay, hobbled out, the clacks of her cane sounding as it struck the hard floors.

For a moment Dorothy seemed dazed—then great tears rolled down her cheeks, and she caught a few rags that fell from her arms and wiped them away. She lay down again, and ever and anon a sob escaped her until she fell asleep.

Lord Wedderburn stood as if transfixed. He was brought face to face with a state of affairs that staggered him. He had never dreamed that such miserable poverty as he had just seen was so nearly within sound of his boundless wealth.

Instead of the rugged child he had known, there was the quaintly, beautiful girlish face.

The words of the dame came slowly to his memory:

"Let them dare ask for rents from me." Who was Dame Wynter that she should talk thus? Instead of the motherly old dame he had thought her, there was this cruel virago. The dame then had led dual lives. One was that of the good motherly woman that, despite her harsh voice and cruel eyes, had said pleasant things to him and had pretended to like him since his earliest boyhood. This then was the true Dame Wynter.

What was the mystery about this girl Dorothy? If she was not Dame Wynter's grandchild, as report said, then who was Dorothy Wynter?

Lord Wedderburn gazed once more into the room and on the sleeping occupant; then he stepped from the shadow of the tower and took the path toward home.

What strange fate that led Lord Reginald Home to take than walk he could never think.

That night he fell asleep dreaming over the whole scene; but in the dream the old ruined Lenthill had changed to a fairy palace and Dorothy was a queen, and he was a lover, but to all his entreaties she was cold and proud, and his hopeless love for her made him so miserable that he awoke and tossed about restlessly on his bed, exceedingly happy when the clock in the tower told him that it was nearly sunrise, and almost time to be up and ready to take the early train for London. Even when the sun had fairly gilded the tops of the eastern hills, his valet was astonished to find him up, enjoying the early morning; but there was a worn look on his face for he was worried from loss of sleep and he was restless and uneasy.

As soon as he returned he must see that something be done for Dorothy—something to make life more bearable to her; but women folks were better in that kind of business, and had Lady Home been up so early he would have told her; but my lady slept late, hence that must wait awhile—until his return—poor Dorothy!

CHAPTER II.

Immediately on his arrival in London, Lord Wedderburn repaired to his club. There he found letters awaiting him, and among them was one from his aunt, Lady Emily Marchmont, that concluded with the following request:

"If you arrive in town on Thursday come to the Harcourts' ball. I have Lady Leith with me now, accompanied by her niece, a Miss Stanton, an American, but a lovely girl. I would take it as a favor if you would pay them some attention. You need not leave at once for Castle Royal, as I can assure you that you will find Miss Staunton an exceedingly lovely young person."

"Gad! Lady Marchmont is growing democratic. I can remember when my lady was bitterly opposed to all Americans, on general principles. Wonder what's the cause if it, anyway?"

Lord Reginald smiled grimly to himself while he pondered over it awhile, then gave it up as one of the mysteries. He opened another letter, which read thus:

(To be Continued.)

A Trial Treatment of Cuticura Soap and Ointment Free to Skin Sufferers

If you, or someone dear to you, are suffering the itching, burning, sleep-destroying torments of eczema or other cruel skin eruption, with its embarrassing, unsightly disfigurement; if you have tried all manner of treatment, no matter how harsh, to no avail, and have all but given up hope of cure, write to-day for a liberal sample of Cuticura Soap and Ointment. Thousands of skin-tortured sufferers, from infancy to age, have found that the first warm bath with Cuticura Soap and gentle application of Cuticura Ointment bring instant relief, permit rest and sleep, and prove the first steps in a speedy and successful treatment. Address "Cuticura," Dept. 10M, Boston, U. S. A.

REFLECTIONS OF A BACHELOR.

(New York Press.)

You have to know a man's weakness not to hate him for his strength.

A girl who gets a box of flowers can feel as proud as a general who wins a battle.

To be a comforting companion to anybody in trouble without saying anything takes the greatest genius of all.

The more a man respects the Ten Commandments the more he can want to break them when the gas bill comes in.

A woman feels dead sure of her husband when he comes home from a poker game and has enough left to give her money for a new hat.

A girl is never so crafty as in making it seem how she isn't.

Money used in charity seems much more expensive than in any other way.

People are too busy with foolish amusements to have any time for sensible ones.

When a man can be interested in an old uncle it's a sign he may not get anything in the will after all.

A girl who can stay wide awake all night, dancing with strangers, would fall sound asleep before 9, talking with her family.

Easy to kiss, stay a miss.

The highest flyers make the shortest flights.

Would votes for women have to be tied up in blue or pink ribbon

Some men seem to think they are doing their country a favor by living in it.

There's never any love lost between two men who want the title of the best fellow in town.

The only widow a woman will trust is when it's herself.

A girl knows novels are natural because she never met any people like those in the story.

The nearest the average man can come to being a hero is for some woman to imagine he is.

Most men have a deep-down feeling they are saving the country by belonging to their political party.

The best way for a woman to get a man to come home is for her to have good meals waiting there for him.

NO OPERATION WAS EVER NEEDED HERE

Because Mrs. Goodine Used Dodd's Kidney Pills

Doctor Said She Would Have to Undergo Operation, but Dodd's Kidney Pills Cured Her.

Central Kingsclear, York Co., N. B., May 27.—(Special.)—"The doctor said I would have to undergo an operation." So said Mrs. J. V. Goodine, of this place. But she smiled as she made the remark, for all need of the dreaded operation had vanished. Mrs. Goodine used Dodd's Kidney Pills and is a well woman. Given in brief and in her own words, Mrs. Goodine's experience is as follows:

"I was very miserable with Kidney Disease and unable to do my own work. The doctor said I would have to undergo an operation. After using three boxes of Dodd's Kidney Pills I was all better and able to do my work. This statement is true, as you can easily prove by inquiring among my neighbors."

Dodd's Kidney Pills cure the Kidneys; cured kidneys strain all the poisons and other causes of disease out of the blood. Thus Dodd's Kidney Pills are a natural cure for all Kidney diseases and all ills caused by diseased kidneys.

NATURAL CURIOSITY.

(St. Paul Dispatch.)

An Irishman dropped into a Presbyterian church and immediately went to sleep. After the services were over the sexton came and shook him by the arm.

"We are about to close up," said the functionary, "and I'll have to ask you to go now."

"What talk have you?" said the Irishman. "The cathedral never closes."

"This is not the cathedral," said the sexton. "The cathedral is several blocks above here." This is a Presbyterian church."

The Irishman sat up with a jerk and looked about him. On the walls between the windows were handsome paintings of the apostles.

"Ain't that St. Luke over yonder?" he demanded.

"It is," said the sexton.

"And St. Mark just beyant him?"

"Yes."

"And still further along St. Timothy?"

"Yes."

"Young man," demanded the Irishman, "since whin did all thim blissed saints turn Protestants?"

MOTHERS.

(Annie McQueen, in Lippincott's Magazine.)

Look, mother-sheep in the pasture,
Look, mother-bird on your nest—
Rose-mother, with your roses,
See the child that is on my breast!

O, mother-earth, with your children—
Cattle and corn and vine—
Rich were you in your fulness,
And naught was there ever of mine!

I envied you, bird, your nestlings,
O corn-field in the valley,
I envied you, trees, your leaves;
I was woe for your golden sheaves!

But now I may walk among you,
A mother along with the rest.
Be glad with me, my neighbors,
For the child that is on my breast!

HATS FOR CHINA.

(Chicago Tribune.)

The Oriental Review, a Japanese periodical, published in this country, calls attention to the fact that the Chinese revolution is playing directly into the hands of the hatters. As the republic spreads the queues go. The shears follow the white flag. Without queues the Chinese want the hats of the occident. "The first shipment from Kobe," says the Review, "on November 21st, was of 144,000 hats in felt and hunting caps."

There's a nation to be hatted! Silk hats for Yuan Shi Kai, Wu Ting Fing, who has worn them abroad; for Tang Shao Yi, and the elder statesmen; opera hats for the young bloods in the cities, caps for the farmers and derbies for the honest tradesmen; broad trimmed felt hats for the rough riders of mountainous Shansi and Shens—work for all the hatters of the world.

HOW MONGOOSE KILLS COBRA.

Description of a Contest in Which the Little Animal Came Off Victor.

I had the good fortune this evening to witness a fight between a four foot cobra di capella and a mongoose.

On first catching sight of the cobra rikki tik (as Rudyard Kipling calls the Indian mongoose) quietly smelt its tail and then hung around awaiting events with curiosity, but he had not long to wait, for the cobra spread its hood, hissed out its death sentence and prepared to dart from its coil at its natural and hated enemy.

Now commenced a most interesting and deadly battle—of feint and counter feint by the mongoose and strike and lightninglike recovery by his adversary, who was also on the defensive, all the time watching for the opportunity to get in his properly aimed bite.

Time after time rikki tik squirmed slowly up to within reach of those terrible fangs—belly on ground—with every gray hair of his body erect with anger and excitement, his eyes glaring from his head, which, by the way, he invariably held sideways during this approach and attack; but the moment the cobra struck in a flash back sprang master mongoose, and although often it appeared as if impossible that he could have escaped the dreaded fangs, ne'er a scratch harmed him and there he would be again wearing the cobra out and pressing his advantage inch by inch. At last with a growl and sharp rikky cry the plucky little beast flew in, avoided the strike and seized the snake behind the head, never for a moment getting under its mouth, but right at the nape of the neck and head, which he scrunched with a loud crackling sound, despite its struggles and twisting and turning of the cobra. Again and again rikki returned to the now writhing reptile and bit its head and body until it lay dying.

Finally he ate three or four inches of his mortal foe, but carefully avoided eating the fangs and poison glands, which I picked up by a stick and found them broken, but with the venom sacks attached.

Contrary to popular belief, I am of opinion the mongoose is not immune from snake poison, else why should he so particularly and carefully avoid being bitten? It is only by his marvellous activity that he escapes the spring and darting strike of his deadly enemy, the cobra di capella.—Times of Ceylon.

Hank—I hear I'em Higgins fell into some property the other day.

Silas—Yep, Squire Stubbs' hothouse bed.

PERPETUAL WIDOWHOOD.

(Rochester Herald.)

The widow of John Jacob Astor is little more than a girl, and for a girl to be domed to widowhood throughout a life of three score and ten, and possibly a longer period, is not a pleasing prospect. When Mr. Astor made his will, he probably had not considered the possibility of so speedy a removal. Hazlitt says in one of his essays: "No young man ever thinks he shall die," and we believe that there are other men, no longer young, who adopt a similar attitude toward life." But no matter what a man may think, the time is coming when he will be forced to leave this present sphere, and every man ought to consider seriously what this leaving will mean for those whom he leaves behind. Whether he has a right to impose perpetual widowhod upon one whom he has made his companion, is one of the things open to grave doubt. Marriage often means more to a woman than it does to a man, for reasons so obvious that they do not need to be discussed. To impose a perpetual widowhood upon a young woman is almost to commit a crime.

BRIDGE MAXIMS.

(Boston Post.)

A good partner is rather to be chosen than great hands.

Jack of all suits is master of none.

A fool and his aces are soon parted.

It's a long suit that has no returning.

Take care of the trumps and the tricks will take care of themselves.

Money makes the game go on.

A little ten-ace is a dangerous thing.

The wages of bridge is debt.

PERSONAL BUYING.

(Rochester Herald.)

Economists are urging that the h.c. of l. is due to the fact that house-wives do not go to market with their baskets to carry home the truck they might buy, instead of having it delivered. If they are ashamed to carry a market basket a suitcase will do quite as well, and lend an air of distinction to the transaction.

A New York inventor has combined an incandescent lamp with an ordinary electric hair dryer so that a person's hair can be given a light bath and dried at the same time.

PERENNIAL

By Berton Braley.

(Mr. Bryan will not be much of a factor in the coming campaign.—Political Gossip.)

"Old Doctor Bryan is totally dead,
The sod and the daisies are over his head,
His power is gone and he's out of the game—"
But old Doctor Bryan's alive just the same.
In spite of the people who say he is dyin'—
Old Colonel Bryan.

It's said that "they cannot come back, but they do;
And old Doctor Bryan is proving it true.
For just when physicians pronounce him the worse,
He cleans out the doctors, dismisses the nurse,
And [illegible] all the frog-throated prophets a-flyin'—
Colonel Bryan.

[illegible] something to say
[illegible] to plant him away,
[illegible] nurishes hope
[illegible] for the dope.
[illegible] Lion—