

# Beautiful Cynthia;

## Victory After Many Defeats.

CHAPTER I.  
THE BOY HERO.

Notwithstanding the fact that the village school of Summerleigh had recently been fitted with all the latest and most improved dodges for ventilation, the girls' classroom was, at half past four on an afternoon of early June, decidedly stuffy and airless.

School had been dismissed, and Miss Angelica Todd, the mistress, gathered together the papers and books on her desk with a sigh which was expressive of relief allowed by impatience and irritation.

For though she longed to escape from the room from which a score of hungry young lungs had seemingly sucked all the air, she could not leave her post, because she had to keep watch over one girl who had been "kept in."

This girl was seated at her desk, busily engaged in her penial task; she was fifteen, a thin slip of a girl. She was the most troublesome of Miss Angelica's flock; but no one who regarded her at this moment would have suspected the fact, for when Cynthia Drayle's face was in repose it had something of the serenity of that of an angel, one of the dark-haired, gray-eyed angels of the early Italian masters.

Her forehead, upon which the hair grew low, was smooth and unpuckered; there was no sign of fretfulness in the red, ripe lips, her gray eyes were placid and unclouded. It was evident by her attitude and expression that she admitted the justice of her sentence, and was working it out steadily and methodically.

Every now and then her hair, having escaped the bondage of its ribbon, fell partly over her face, and she put up an ink-smearing hand to thrust it back.

Only once did she glance wistfully at the nearest window through which the sun was streaming, but her glance met that of Miss Todd's gloomily meditating one, and her eyes returned to the copy book with grave serenity.

There was something in the girl's

attitude and manner which began to get on Miss Todd's nerves; she stepped down from her platform, marched, with a schoolmistress' dignified gait, to the girl and looked over her shoulder.

Cynthia continued writing. "It is rude and unladylike to thrust out one's tongue."

"That is not the way to spell tongue, Cynthia," said Miss Todd, sternly. "It should be t-o-n-g-u-e."

"Oh, should it?" said Cynthia, with surprise and a little moue of disgust. "It's an ever so much longer way, and it doesn't look any nicer."

"That is a matter of opinion," observed Miss Angelica. "You will be good enough to write the word in the proper manner," she added.

She left the girl's side and passed into an adjoining classroom, where the pupil-teacher was tidying up. She was Miss Floss.

"Aren't you coming out, Miss Todd?" the pupil-teacher asked deferentially. "It's beautiful out of doors, and I'm longing for a breath of fresh air."

"So am I," said Miss Todd, with a sigh, "but I can't come yet; one of the girls has an imposition."

"It's Cynthia Drayle, I suppose?" said Miss Floss. "She's always getting impositions. I'm glad I haven't much to do with her. I can't make her out; I mean," correcting herself primly, "I do not understand her."

"You share that misfortune with others—with me, at any rate," said Miss Angelica, with another sigh. "I, too, do not understand her. She is always doing something for which one has to punish her; and yet one can't help liking her."

"She's very pretty, certainly," said Miss Floss.

"Yes," assented the head mistress. "I'm afraid she's going to be very beautiful. But I was not thinking of her looks, but of her disposition. With all her love of mischief, I am convinced that she is the best-natured girl in the school, and she is certainly the most popular."

"Especially with the boys; they are always ready to do anything for her. She is quite the favorite. It's a pity she's so troublesome. Don't you think, Miss Angelica," Miss Floss suggested somewhat timidly, "that it is owing to her bringing up? She has not had the advantage of a mother, like most of us. I mean a mother to care for her. And she's lived alone with that queer man, her father, in that solitary, out-of-the-way place on the hills. Depend upon it, Miss Angelica, it's the strange way she's been brought up that makes Cynthia misbehave herself."

"Probably," responded Miss Angelica. "She is to be pitied, poor child." She looked wistfully at the open door. "I think I will let her go now."

She returned to the other room and went up to the girl.

"Let me see how many lines you have done," she said gravely.

Cynthia handed up the copy book and stretched her angular self.

"I trust you will remember this admonition you have been writing, Cynthia," said Miss Angelica severely. "Will you give me your promise never again to be guilty of such intolerable rudeness and vulgarity?"

Cynthia pondered for a moment, with her head on one side, then she raised the black-fringed eyes to the mistress' face and, said demurely and gravely:

"I don't think I'd better promise, Miss Todd, because if Lucy Grimes were to make another ugly face at me I'm almost sure I should forget the promise and put my tongue out at her. You see, it's so easy. It slips out before you know it. And I don't like giving a promise," she added slowly and thoughtfully, "unless I am quite sure that I can keep it. Father says that making promises is tempting Providence. I don't quite know what he means."

"It is of no consequence," interrupted Miss Angelica quickly, but with dignity. "You may go now."

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Cynthia sprang to her feet, stood on tiptoe, and stretched out her arms to their full length; then, as Miss Angelica's prim lips pated for a rebuke, Cynthia let her arms fall suddenly, and stood with her hands clasped before her in the attitude proper to a well-mannered schoolgirl.

But suddenly her sharp eyes noted that the demure ribbon under Miss Angelica's spotless collar had become almost untied, and quickly and not ungracefully the long, thin hands went up to the ribbon and tied it in its formal little bow.

There was something so fearless, so forgiving, in the little act that Miss Angelica's soft heart melted, and murmuring "Thank you, my dear," she kissed the upturned face.

In an instant, Cynthia's arms were round her, gave her a hug, and, with a low, rippling laugh, the worst-behaved girl in the school ran into the obby, snatched up her tam-o'-shanter and, leaping down the three outer steps, ran toward home.

"Home" meant to Cynthia an old and roomy cottage—it was not large enough to be called a house—on the side of a hill divided from the village by a valley or coombe of remarkable beauty. Indeed, the whole place was beautiful, with a variety quite starting in its extent; wide, stretching woods, woods of rich and fragrant trees, emerald meadows, shady lanes, from the hillsides one could catch glimpses of the sea.

As a rule, scenery does not appeal to the very young. But Cynthia was other a singular girl, and it may safely be said that she never went to school without feeling, perhaps in a subconscious way, the loveliness of the country, and something in the child's immature mind responded to all the moods of Nature around her.

This afternoon, for instance, the warmth and the sunshine seemed to get into her young blood; and she wanted to sing, and did so.

As she ran down the slope to the arrow footbridge which spanned the stream the song ceased, for there, leaning on the single handrail of the arrow plank bridge, was a boy whom he knew well, and, if she did not exactly fear, disliked greatly.

He was a boy of her own age, a heavy, hulking lad, with a big head and clumsily formed features.

His name was Sampson Burridge, and he was the son of an attorney who had practiced for some years in the neighboring town of Dursley, but had recently retired and built himself a very ugly and pretentious stone house on a conspicuous site in Summerleigh.

Though he had ostensibly retired from business, the elder Burridge acted as agent for Sir Anson Frayne, of Summerleigh Court, and was said to be still, in a secret and stealthy way, engaged in the money lending by

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which, it was generally believed, he had acquired his wealth.

He was not popular in Summerleigh, and was rather like a fish out of water there, for the gentry would not associate with him on anything like equal terms, and he would not condescend to make friends of the farmers and the tradespeople.

The boy, too, was unpopular with his schoolfellows, for, knowing that his father was sufficiently well off to send him to a higher school, Sampson gave himself airs. Besides, he was a loutish boy, who took no part in cricket and football, and found his chief amusement in bullying his smaller companions.

Ever since he had first come to the place he had pestered Cynthia with a rough and altogether unpleasant kind of attention characteristic of a boy of his nature, and expressed the attraction she had for him by alternate teasing and a loutish kind of persecution.

Cynthia avoided him whenever she could do so, and now, as she saw his awkward figure there on the plank which served as a bridge, she looked about her for some way of escape; but she knew that she would have to cross the bridge to reach the cottage, and Sampson, too, knew it, for he stretched his gash of a mouth into a smile, and his small eyes twinkled tauntingly.

Cynthia was not afraid of him, and, with her brows drawn straight and her lips set tightly, she went slowly down toward the bridge.

"Hello, Cynthia!" he said. "Been kept in again? My, you're always in trouble! Shouldn't wonder if you was expelled one day. But there! I rather like you for it. It shows you've got some spirit. You're different to the rest of the girls. They're a pulling lot. Yes, I like you, Cynthia Drayle. Here, give us your bag of books; I'll carry it up the hill for you."

Cynthia's hand closed tightly on the bag, and she shook her head decisively.

"No, thank you, Sampson," she said, "I can carry it myself."

She stood at the end of the plank waiting for him to come off, so that she might cross, for there was no room to pass him; but Sampson leaped against the rail, stuck his hands in his pockets, and thrust his feet forward, completely barring the way.

(To be continued.)

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