

BOYS AND GIRLS

The White Light of Truth.

(Hope Daring, in 'Wellspring.')

'Let me repeat what I have said: No life can be pure and upright, no life can be a worthy one, unless it is illumined by the white light of truth. This includes sincerity of thought and action as well as that of speech.'

The Reverend Joseph Lancaster looked benignly down upon his hearers. His eyes met and, for a single instant, held the gaze of Lois Wheeler. The pink flush on the girl's cheeks deepened in hue.

'Of course that is true,' she said to herself. 'I want my life to be a worthy one and—more.'

By that time the pink flush had burned to crimson. Lois's breath came a little faster.

'Why, to be sure, I am truthful.' She was still communing with herself, so her resentfulness might be pardoned. 'I wouldn't speak a falsehood for anything. No one can accuse me of lying, even if I do exaggerate a little.'

Lois frowned and fixed her eyes on the red and golden leaves of the maple bough that touched the window near which she sat. She tried to think of something besides her pastor's words. At last she succeeded in fixing her mind on her soon-coming departure for school at Glasner. She lost the rest of the sermon, but preferred that to thinking of what she had already heard.

Three days later, Lois was making her farewell round of family calls. On the morrow she would start for the Glasner Private School. The last place on her list was a modest cottage on a side street. Her knock was answered by a plump, middle-aged woman.

'Good afternoon, Cousin Maria. Yes, I'll come in just a minute. You know I start in the morning, and I ran in to say good-bye to you.'

Miss Maria Wheeler pushed forward a chair. 'Set down. Here's Cousin Julia. There hain't any fire in the other part of the house, so I have to entertain callers here, even young ladies who air goin' away to school.'

Lois was annoyed by the words. Before taking the designated chair, she went forward to shake hands with Mrs. Julia Lane. That person frowned disapprovingly upon her young relative and began to ask many questions about Glasner.

It was a subject upon which Lois liked to dwell. Her girlish enthusiasm proved contagious so far as Miss Maria's rather weak nature was concerned, but Mrs. Lane's frown deepened.

'I never did believe in girls going away to school,' she said. 'None of the Wheelers ever went, and this is an idea of your mother's. Now, I'm not saying a word against Margaret Landis Wheeler.'

'I understand that,' and the head of Margaret Landis Wheeler's daughter was held proudly erect. 'No one can say a word against my mother.'

'Your mother is a proper good woman. I hope you've inherited her good sense, 'long with her hazel eyes and flaxen hair, One thing, Lois: Do be careful what you say at that school. You're such a hand to stretch things.'

'Why, Cousin Julia, what do you mean? Do you think I do not tell the truth?'

'You tell the truth and more, too. You know what I mean, Lois. You made a good story out of my falling in the mud that time, but how much real truth was there in what you told?'

Lois bit her under lip. 'Why, you did fall. Of course, I told it so as to make a good story; I am one of the few persons who do not care to tell a poor one. You do not seem to understand that certain little picturesque touches of fancy are not falsehood.'

'I understand when they are and when they are not,' was Mrs. Lane's uncompromising retort. 'There hain't no use of your being provoked. I'm only warning you that your habit of exaggerating may lead you into serious trouble. Like's not you'll grow up to be a writer of novels, if you're not careful.'

The girl fixed her gaze on the prim hair-cloth-covered sofa opposite and swallowed twice. She dared not trust her voice. Cousin Maria spoke, thus giving Lois another minute's respite.

'We mean it for your good, of course we do. But don't let's talk 'bout it any more. Can't you stay to supper, Lois? We're goin' to have baked apples and cream toast.'

Lois declined the invitation with icy politeness. Five minutes later, she had said good-bye and was gone.

Miss Wheeler turned to Julia Lane.

'I don't see how you dared do it, Julia. It was gospel truth you told her, though. She will make a cute story out of 'most nothin'.'

Mrs. Lane tossed her head. 'I never yet was afraid to do my duty. Lois does stretch the truth, and you and me know, Maria, to our shame, that the Wheelers have need to be careful.'

The spinster's florid face grew a shade redder. 'I s'pose you mean Second-cousin Samuel, but he belonged to another branch of the family.'

'Yes, but he was a Wheeler. I am as proud of the family as anybody, but you and me know—though I don't s'pose Lois does—that our second cousin, Samuel Wheeler, was took up for perjury twenty-seven year ago.'

A minute's silence followed. Then Miss Wheeler rose.

'I'm sure the baked apples air done. You know, Julia, it never did take them Pumpkin Sweets long to bake. You excuse me while I make the toast. No, I'll not put myself to a mite of trouble.'

In the meantime, Lois was hurrying homeward, her head well thrown back, and her heart full of resentment.

'I am glad that by this time to-morrow I'll be far away from this poky village,' she thought. 'Here everybody knows everybody's business and meddles with it. It was so unkind in Cousin Julia! She doesn't understand, and I could not explain—not to her.'

Lois walked rapidly. She ascended the slope upon the summit of which stood her home. The girl looked at the rambling white house with its wide verandas and vine-draped wall.

Something rose in her throat. To-morrow she would be far away from what she called 'this poky village,' and also far

away from the love-blessed home life that had always been hers.

Opening the hall door softly, Lois called, 'Motherdie.'

There was no response. After a hasty glance round, she murmured:

'Oh, I remember! Mother was going to the missionary meeting.'

Lois went up to her own pleasant room. There she sat down.

'Now I'll have it out with myself,' she said, with what her mother called 'the Wheeler air.'

She did exaggerate. Lois admitted that. It was not done maliciously or with evil intent. To herself the girl said it was 'for the picturesque effect.'

'It's just this way: I can neither play nor sing, not well enough so people care to hear me. Reciting is not my forte, and I am not witty, but people say I can tell a story well. It's just for the story that they listen, and I've as good a right to make it sound well as a novelist has.'

She knew that last was a lame plea. In vain she tried to forget the difference between telling a true story in such a way as to convey a false impression and writing a bit of lifelike fiction. A faint smile curved her lips when she recalled Cousin Julia's fear lest she should come to be a writer.

'The poor soul never dreamed that to do so would be to realize my dearest day-dream,' she said, unconsciously speaking aloud.

Lois sat there until she heard her mother's step below. She arose, saying:

'I do exaggerate a little. It's not wrong, but it's not what Mr. Lancaster calls "the white light of truth." I will be careful what I say at Glasner.'

The first month Lois was at Glasner, she was careful. However, she wanted to be popular, and it seemed as if every other girl had some accomplishment or grace. Gradually Lois began to practice her gift of story-telling.

'O you witch!' Isabelle Foster cried one afternoon, when the girls were walking. 'I would have said, "I met a funny-looking man," but you have taken fifteen minutes to tell about him, and your description is as good as one of Mark Twain's lectures.'

Lois caught her breath, remembering her cousin's plain words. Half of this story had been pure invention.

'I meant no harm,' she told herself. 'Why, it is my duty to be entertaining and win friends.'

The holiday vacation was only two weeks distant, when, one stormy evening, the matron gave Lois and Isabelle permission to visit Linda Grant and Faye DeVerge.

The room occupied by those girls contained many articles of beauty and value, for both had wealthy parents. Lois leaned back among the down cushions of the pretty corner seat, at peace with all the world.

After a little, Faye took her place at the oak table on which stood a pot of steaming chocolate, a plate of crisp wafers, and a wicker basket heaped with oranges. Linda served the guests, and the girls waxed merry over the impromptu feast.

After the cups and plates were put aside, Faye brought out her banjo. Soon Isabelle and Linda were singing snatches