

# Delia's Bachelors

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his elderly resentment against the boys still harder. Let it be not understood, however, that this bitter rivalry in any way marred the tumultuous happiness at Chesleyvale. On the contrary! It made a queen of Delia and courtiers of the men; it filled her life—and theirs—with beauty and chivalry and love in its broadest sense. There was no happier home in Christendom.

Then suddenly June flung her starry nights and perfumed days across the campus. Buds opened, birds chirruped, lads and lasses hummed beneath their breath, and all the world was athrill.

All except Delia. The day came when seniors tucked a roll of parchment under their arms and strolled home nonchalantly to pack. They would have one believe that it was no trouble to have earned the precious roll. Any fool could do it! Juniors switched their tassels to the other side and spoke of their 'last year.' Sophs. and Freshmen assumed the gait, which if not actually a swagger, was just the next best thing, and College closed its doors with a bang.

Delia helped her bachelors pack, tucking in many a tear when they were not looking; she trotted up and down stairs endless times a day collecting their belongings and distributing them. She stuffed loving little gifts in unexpected places, and after they had gone, she found just as loving and just as silly ones, left for her by them.

Ellery watched her motherly fussing over them with terrible bitterness in his heart. She evidently did not care a button what became of his favorite pipe, his clipping book or his tobacco pouch; she did not make a dozen trips from his room to the library or suggest his leaving things behind, against his return in the autumn.

He nerved himself to the point of hinting that she take him back, but so delicately was the suggestion couched that Delia missed it entirely, thereby adding to the poor distracted man's humiliation and resentment. He called himself an old fool. Obviously, she looked upon him as pre-historic.

By noon of a gloomy Wednesday four of them had gone. The grand old oak fairly quivered with the violence of the yell they gave for their Aunt Delia, to say nothing of a Jungleful of tigers. By dinner time none of the bachelors remained except Robert and the professor. Then Bob, too, swung down the flower bordered driveway and called his sentiments, (expressed in the latest college phraseology), from the gate.

She forced back the scorching tears and turned to Ellery whose train did not go for another hour.

"I can't help being silly," she said, realizing that though one does acknowledge to forty, one's appearance is not improved with a red nose, swollen eyes and sniffles. "I feel so terribly lonely without them. Never, before, did I know what the breaking up of a family meant. Oh the poor, poor mothers!"

He muttered things which were supposed to be sympathetic and then talked about the most trivial matters. She asked him if he had remembered everything. He hoped so. She suggested sending on any trifles he might have left. He thanked her. Silence, an uncomfortable silence, fell between the two.

Presently, she looked at the clock and he looked at his watch.

"You haven't much time," she ventured.

He agreed. They rose and shook hands stiffly.

"You will miss your train," she said, briskly, he thought.

"Quite right. I must hurry. Good night—and good bye."

He, too, strode out into the heavy-scented night, and left her pitifully alone.

So utterly miserable that she could be brave no longer, Delia rushed into the house, upstairs, and on the impulse of a mad moment into the room which had been Ellery's, to cry. Her heart ached to bursting, and now that there was no one to see, she threw aside all regard for her appearance. She was hideously alone; even Tilly had gone home for the night.

How long she sat there in the dark, racked by great shaking sobs, she did not know. In memory she rehearsed every day from the time of the boys coming as minutely as possible; she even remembered thinking of the lock on Mr. Ellery's door which needed repairing—it had developed a disinclination to move which is common to the best and worst of locks—when she became conscious of a step on the stair.

Too paralyzed to move or scream, she crouched beside the table and held

her breath, while the intruder came straight toward the room. He came inside, closed the door, and flooded the room with light. It was Alfred C. Ellery.

"Why, what are you doing here?" she asked feebly.

"Missed my train by a fraction, and came back to see if you would extend me your hospitality for another day—unless you would prefer my going to a hotel," he added.

His words were formal, but his tone was warm and glad.

But Delia's cheeks flamed and she rose. "I hardly know what to say," she stammered. "It seems so frightfully silly, doesn't it?—and yet—yet—even Tilly has gone home."

"Of course," he said, "in that case—naturally—"

He grasped at the knob and turned it sharply. But the door refused to open. He shook it gently, violently, desperately. He was afraid to look at Delia.

"Unusually stubborn," he muttered. "No doubt but that it will give in time."

"Oh, of course," she returned in a tone which sought to give conviction to herself. "Let me try it."

Her efforts were so far successful in that she pulled the knob entirely off. Its other half dropped with a tremendous thud to the floor outside.

Her pathetic endeavor not to lose her head, to treat the affair with coolness, touched Ellery more than hysterics would have done. With sudden insight he looked at her brimming eyes and sopping handkerchief and an almost uncomfortable longing to take her in his arms and comfort her possessed him. But where jealousy of the boys held him dumb before, a sense of chivalry prevented his speaking at the moment. He did not want to force his attentions upon her when she was helpless to escape them. It was impossible for him to break the door; they made real doors in Judge Chesley's day. There was no clinging vine by which he could make a spectacular descent, no leafy branch to which he could drop and so, reach the ground. There was no rain spout. In books, he told her, there is *always* a rain spout. Even knotting the bed-clothes together would not send him half to the ground. There was but one way—to leap from the third story window, and he was prepared to do that rather than cause her any embarrassment or unhappiness.

"Nonsense," she said, in the tone of affectionate scolding she often used toward the boys. "There *must* be a way! My head seems to be bad—I can't think—But certainly, Mister Ellery, there *must* be a way!"

Then silence was broken by a step across the street. Like a flash Delia was at the window straining her eyes to pierce the star flecked night, outside.

"Is that you, Muriel?" she hissed. "Yes, it's I—Delia. Come closer . . . I don't want to rouse the whole street—I'm marooned in Mister Ellery's room, and I want you to phone old Watkins to come and unlock the door. Do hurry!"

"Marooned in Mr. Ellery's room?" repeated the puzzled girl. "How on earth . . . Well, what does it matter? No use to get the poor old fellow up at this time of night. You just tumble into bed up there, and I'll bring him over the first thing in the morning."

Preferring death rather than this alternative, there was nothing to it but for Delia to explain that Mr. Ellery was marooned there, too. With a little more discussion Muriel disappeared into the house, and shortly after led old Watkins up to the refractory door. What had transpired in the meantime is neither your business or mine. But when at last they were released Delia and Ellery were sitting comfortably hand in hand, an admirable illustration of that fine old adage which informs us that love laughs at locksmiths.

The smallest bit of coaxing persuaded Muriel to stay all night, and the three sat down to supper in the gayest spirits. So often did Muriel look askance at Delia, that the latter bursting into happy laughter, finally said,

"She has already guessed it, Alfred—the minx—you might as well tell her."

He did, with two inches added height and heaven known how many, chest expansion. There were congratulations all around.

"But the poor bachelors," sighed Muriel, thinking particularly of one of them! "What a disappointment for them to have lost their lovely college home."

"The idea!" protested Ellery. "As if either Delia or I want to turn them out, eh, my dear? There will be as much room for them here as ever, and they will be quite as welcome. Huh, turning out

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