

MABEL'S ADVENTURE

CHAPTER I.

In thinking over my own girlhood, and of all that happened to me then, of course my school life with all its consequent trials and joys stands out more distinctly than the more ordinary home life.

It is the fashion nowadays to describe a child of nervous active disposition, as being "full of character." Rightly or wrongly, this did describe a little school-mate of mine, many years younger than myself, but always remembered by me with affection and interest.

We both lived in the same town, and went to the same boarding school, and in the same year; Mabel Arnton to enter the intermediate class, and I the senior. The differences in our ages and classes prevented our being much together; nevertheless, the pranks of the younger pupils were a never-ending source of secret amusement to the seniors. Mabel Arnton amply satisfied us, and I think that some of us were quite disappointed if a term went by without anything particularly exciting happening among the juniors.

The Arntons and ourselves were very old friends, and so in Mabel's spare moments she often came to me with her confidences, and though I was inclined to be indulgently patronizing, we were, on the whole, very fast friends. I am sorry to say that the determination to send Mabel to school was the outcome of her many pranks at home, so her long suffering parents sent her in the hopes that in due time she would be tamed.

There is always a leading spirit in a school. Mabel's companions soon discovered that she was a born one, where mischief and fun were concerned, so she soon had her train of admirers. This school was kept by a Miss Marler, a somewhat firm and elderly lady, who, of course, had her staff of assistants.

It really was a school of good moral tone, and everything was done methodically and in good order. There was one room in this house dubbed by the girls as "The Lion's Den." It was on the second flat, a little room at the end of the hall, one used by Miss Marler for various purposes, half office and half study, or more often, the girls said, it was used to receive them in order to lecture them upon their various misdemeanors.

Mabel knew this room off by heart. Her first visit rather awed her, but, alas, her second, and third, and fourth, and fifth, and I don't know how many more visits, produced no such effect at all. She knew by this time exactly what Miss Marler would say. Miss Marler always ended her lecture pathetically, and, overcome by her own eloquence, her face would wax pinker and pinker, a spotless hemstitched handkerchief be produced, and then slow tears began to fall. Mabel had learned to note these signs, and generally stood before the worthy lady deaf to all she said, but occupying her mind more agreeably; admiring Miss Marler's crepe lisse frill; counting the buttons down the front of her bodice, first down, then up, then zig-zag, as there were rows of them. This pastime over, Mabel wondered how Miss Marler managed to get such beautiful flat crimps; just five exactly on each side of her part. Finally she wondered if Miss Marler could really ever have been a little girl. Mabel would have doubted it entirely, but there was a picture in the drawing room, on one side of the mantel shelf, of Miss Marler when she was ten years old. It was that of a little girl, with large staring blue eyes, very red lips and five exact wooden looking curls on either side of the face. One hand gingerly rested on a table, the other hung straight down her side, pantellets reached a pair of small neat feet that were turned rigidly out.