

What Red Gables Taught Her

Lonny Davis had been advised not to return to Red Gables another year.

During her interview with Miss Latham in that lady's study, whose very atmosphere of sunny calm was charged with something impressive, even awesome, to the girls who were received there by special appointment, she had learned that the two years already spent at school had amounted for her to nothing less than a disgraceful failure. Her record, while not heinously bad, was absolutely devoid of good. From the first, she had shirked her studies, and failed to show the slightest appreciation of her advantages and responsibilities.

Red Gables was limited in its capacity for pupils, and on the waiting list were many eager to make earnest use of its opportunities.

"If I could see in you, Leonora," said the teacher, concluding, "any sign of gain in anything—if you could give me proof of progress or improvement in any direction, I should take heart of hope, and say we will go on trying. But you have been with us now two years, and so far as I can see—not from lack of ability—in that case I should feel very differently, as you well know—but, as it seems, from sheer indifference, your school life is making no impression whatever for good on your mind or character. And so, however reluctantly, I feel that your chance should be given to another."

Miss Latham did not say this severely, but sadly, which was much worse; for Lonny was of an exceedingly cheerful disposition, and hated anything that verged upon pathos. She admitted frankly and directly the truth of what the principal had said, and the justice of her decision, with a vague reserve in her own mind as to both.

Looking back at the Leonora of two years ago, and then at the Leonora of today, Lonny was conscious of a difference—of a change, a gain, somewhere, directly connected with her experience of school life. She could not have put this consciousness into words, and felt, dismally, that, whatever the nature of the gain, it was probably quite worthless, as tested by any other standard than her own personal feeling. Yet she was vaguely comforted thereby, and went out from the judicial presence less cast down, perhaps, than she should have been, by its stern judgment and decree.

She was not wont to analyze her feelings, nor indeed to think very deeply about anything. At the present moment her keenest impression was that leaving school meant parting from Kitty Robb. And she loved Kitty Robb. Kitty was a fine scholar; she would go straight on to a brilliant climax of graduation, while Lonny settled down to the somewhat dull routine of her life at home. Fortunately there was no one there to be hurt or disappointed by her failure. Lonny was an orphan, and her Aunt Mary, who had sent her to school at the girl's own wish, would not grieve nor wonder, if a change of caprice induced her to give up the course she had planned to take.

Aunt Mary would come on to hear the Cantata, which was to be given during Commencement week, and would bring Cousin Jim, a young college student some years older than Lonny, to whose visit she looked forward with unqualified glee.

"Jim will enjoy the Cantata so much!" she said to Kitty Robb. "He is perfectly devoted to music, and as bright about it as I am stupid."

Well, there was that to look forward to, and she need not say anything about leaving school until after Commencement. Meanwhile—there was Kitty now, out on the lawn, waving her racket in joyous greeting.

The June sky was blue and clear. The grass was in its first glory of emerald freshness. The gray stone house with its red gables showed pleasantly against the dark trees among which it stood. Girls sat on the steps, strolled about the walks and ran and shouted and laughed in the tennis courts.

Lonny felt suddenly how much more fond of it all she was than she had thought. The

associations, the friendships, the very routine of the busy days, whose duller tasks were sweetened by the constant joy of companionship—how familiar and how dear they were! The sight of the croquet wickets, over whose position she and Sallie Young had wrangled refreshingly ever since September—the brown cover of her Latin Grammar, which she had caught up hastily when summoned to Miss Latham's room, with a dim notion that its presence in her hand might have a propitiatory tendency—even these sent a pang to her heart.

If there had been another chance—if she could in any way manage to produce that proof for which Miss Latham asked, but, of course, that was impossible now.

"Hallo!" cried Kitty. "You're just in time! There's a rehearsal at the hall at four o'clock." And away they went, arm in arm, Lonny shaking the weight from her heart as lightly as she had shaken the dust from her Grammar.

In the little dressing-room of the hall she stood with the other girls on the evening of the performance.

The building was filled with guests, and well up in a front row sat Aunt Mary, with handsome Jim, whose interest in the occasion had in no whit disappointed his cousin.

Lonny was full of glee. No part of any prominence was hers; but at least she could go on with the rest, and sing in the choruses which she had picked up, in her own haphazard way, from them. And this she enjoyed. She loved to feel herself one of the fluttering, white-robed sisterhood moving together lightly with harmonious pace. And she loved to see and listen to Kitty Robb, who had a solo part, and was an image of girlish grace and sweetness when she sang.

The organist was in her place in the little gallery at the left of the platform; the pianist in hers, below; the violinist was softly trying the strings of his instrument for the last time. A final whisper ran through the group, Miss Myers, the leader, gave the signal, and in they marched.

That was a moment for Lonny! To stand there among her fellows on the radiant platform, and look down over the sea of smiling, upturned faces—this was to set one's heart, already quickened by excitement, all a-throgl with joyous pride. But in a moment it began, the delicate melody of the piano sustained by the full tones of the organ, the violin streaming high above both.

The prelude swept on for a few bars. Then, suddenly, there was a squeak, a wheeze—the organ gave a great sigh, and stopped. The other instruments went on; but a wave of dismay ran among the girls. This break at the very outset troubled them, threatened to upset their composure, to disturb the confidence and enthusiasm so necessary to their success.

Lonny stood at the end of the platform where they had entered. She felt the strain of the emergency, and, quick of wit and of movement, slipped from her place and down into the ante-room.

At one side was a door, from which a flight of stairs led into the basement of the hall, and at the top of these stairs a little movable platform was arranged, to support the short but sturdy figure of Teddy Magee, the organ blower.

Teddy, as a pillar of the institution, was prone to totter. He frequently fell asleep at his post, and was subject to attacks of incapacitating illness, quickly relieved when devoted time was over. But he was deeply devoted to Miss Glenn, the organist, and had taken his place in season on this eventful evening.

"Teddy!" called Lonny, cautiously opening the door. "What ails the boy?"

By the dim light of the lantern swinging overhead, she discerned Teddy's prostrate figure lying on the steps, apparently in the agonies of dissolution.

"I got the toot'ache!" wailed Teddy. "Toothache! And is that why you can't use your arms?" cried Lonny, distracted.

The organist's signal, sharp, imperative, sounding behind her, made her jump. Teddy, too, at the familiar summons, rose mechanically, and reached for the pumping-bar. But just as he grasped the handle, a fresh pang made him drop it with a suppressed howl.

"Is it so bad as that!" said Lonnd. "Give me the bar!"

"I t'ought I could, but I can't!" sobbed Teddy, writhing. Lonny looked at his swollen cheek, half sympathetic, half indignant.

"Teddy Magee," she said, "give me that bar, and go home and put some laudanum on your 'toot.' I guess I can manage this organ!"

She grasped the bar as it rose, and pushed it up and down vigorously until the indicator showed that the pipes were full. Now—if only Miss Glenn had not given up! No—in a moment the boards above her head began to vibrate to the roll of the organ. The girls' voices joined in with it sweetly; and Lonny laughed.

"Good thing I haven't an important part!" she said, pumping steadily. "They'll never miss my little squeak, and I might as well stay, now I'm here. The organ parts keep coming in."

It was strange to be shut away suddenly in this dark, close little corner from all the radiance of the scene without. Its sounds came to her through the muffling walls—the music, the applause that followed. She thrilled with rapturous pride at this, and fancied Aunt Mary and Jim clapping with the rest.

A voice—the voice of one of the teachers—called softly through the crack of the door. "Teddy!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Lonny, cheerfully.

"Lonny Davis! Are you pumping?"

"Yes'm," said Lonny. "Teddy was dying, you know, with the toothache, and I sent him home. I can pump all right. Is it going well?"

"My dear child! I am afraid—I'll try and send some one else—"

But there were many things to look after, and she did not send any one else. Probably she forgot about it later.

When it was all over, and the last chord of music had died away, Lonny flew joyfully from her prison, and made her way through the crowd to her aunt.

"Wasn't it fine!" she cried, glowing. "Didn't we do well!"

Jim laughed. "Well," he said, "and what did you have to do with it, Miss Lonny? Apparently you made your exit early!"

"O, I was pumping the organ," said Lonny. "The boy gave out, and there wasn't time to get any one else. But, Jim, wasn't it?"

She stopped, somewhat embarrassed by the discovery that Miss Latham was close by, talking with some friends, and that just then her eyes met Lonny's with a smile which the girls did not quite understand.

It was explained to her the next day by Miss Latham herself, in a little speech which she made informally to the girls before they left the assembly room.

"The success of a performance like last night's," she said, after some words of cordial praise, "is due largely to what we call 'esprit de corps,' the endeavor of each to do her best simply as a part of the general whole, and in a spirit of generous enthusiasm for the success of that whole. And the girl who has learned the meaning of this 'esprit de corps'—who has learned to sink her own individuality, in that of a larger unit, and to play, gladly, and all unconscious of sacrifice, the humblest part, if so she may contribute to the interest of the body of which she is only a member—that girl has learned something which books cannot teach her, and which is worth all the experience and discipline of her school life."

"Why, that's it!" said Lonny, suddenly, to herself, feeling that her own dim thoughts were being put into words. The narrow little Lonny of two years ago—would she have felt, or acted, like the Lonny of last night? This Lonny loved the girls, and their success was hers. Was that 'esprit de corps'? And did Miss Latham understand?

Walking slowly through the hall, with a vague quickening of hope in her heart, she felt the principal's hand upon her shoulder, and turning, met her smile.

"Lonny," said Miss Latham, "I am thinking of making some changes in the house this summer. Should you like to room with Kitty Robb—when you come back next fall?"

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