

STANDARD'S MILITARY MAIDS



WOUNDED

PRUDENCE OF THE PARSONAGE

THE FAMOUS STORY OF A HAPPY FAMILY

By Ethel Hueston

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SYNOPSIS

The town of Mount Mark is brought to the attention of the world by the arrival of Rev. Mr. Starr and his five daughters, who have been sent to pastoral work in this Methodist diocese. The story opens with the arrival of Prudence, the youngest daughter, who is a very beautiful and gentle nature. She is immediately impressed by the parsonage, which she has heard so much about. She is a young girl still in her teens, but she is a real home body. Since the death of her mother, Prudence has been living in her home, but she has been compelled to take over the duties of her mother. She is a very kind and gentle girl, and she is very much loved by her father and her four sisters.

The twins get Prudence and the parsonage into embarrassing positions. A clergyman calls and remains for lunch. The twins laugh at the way he says grace. Carol also degrades herself when coming home from the pasture by riding on the back of the Jersey cow. Several days later the parsonage is in a state of excitement. The Ladies' Aid are holding their monthly meeting there. The twins again embarrass Prudence by taking the bottom out of one of the chairs, and just leaving a cushion in, also. Prudence is very much mortified, but she is very much loved by her father and her four sisters.

Carol and Lark have a secret society known as the "Skull and Crossbones," to which Constance applies for admission. She is accepted and her two weeks' probation are filled with many trials; she finally throws up the whole thing when asked to give her pear to Skull and Crossbones.

Connie is taken back in the society, but her weeks of probation are harder than before. She is finally induced by Skull and Crossbones to take some apples from a neighbor's garden, and being found out by Prudence is being punished severely when the order of Skull and Crossbones is a punishment.

Now what are you going to do as a last resort? Carol said, "I'll tell papa on him." Miss Allen laughed again, heartily. "It does have a disturbing effect on the class, I admit, and often spoils a good point, but Professor Duke calls on Carol every time he sees her eyes twinkle. He does it on purpose. And Miss Adams is nearly as bad as he. One day she said, 'Suppose you have unintentionally done something to greatly irritate and inconvenience'."

Oh! Quite a difference between sweet old lamb, and the dearest duck, and being very pretty and smart! Do you see it?"

"Yes," confessed Prudence reluctantly, "but I hadn't thought of it before."

"Now, what is wrong? What have I done? Why, look here. The twins think everything of Professor Duke, and I am sure Carol deliberately neglects her school lessons in order to be kept in after school by him. But though she hates mathematics, my subject, she works at it desperately so I can't keep her in. She sits on Mr. Duke's table and chats with him by the hour. But she passes me up with a curt, 'Good night, Miss Allen.'"

"And Larkie, too?"

"Lark is worse than Carol. Her dislike is deeper-seated. I believe I could win Carol in time. Sometimes I way lay her when she is leaving after school, and try my best. But just as she begins to thaw, Lark invariably comes up to see if she is ready to go home, and she looks at both of us with superior icy eyes. And Carol freezes in a second. Ordinarily, she looks at me with a sort of sympathetic pity and wonder, but Lark is always haughty and nearly contemptuous. It is different with the rest of the class. It is nothing important to them. The twins are popular in the class, you know, and the others, realizing that they dislike me, hold aloof on their account."

"I can't fathom it," said Prudence.

"Now, Professor Duke is very brilliant and clever and interesting. And he does like Carol tremendously. Larkie, too. He says she is the cleverest girl he ever knew. But Carol is his favorite. But he does not like teaching, and he has not the real interests of the scholars at heart. Next year, he is to begin some very wonderful research work at a big salary. That is what he loves. That is where his interests lie. But this year, being idle, and his uncle being on the school board here, he accepted this place as a sort of vocation in the meanwhile. That is all it means to him. But I love teaching, it is my life-work. I love the young people, and I want to help them. Why won't the twins give me a chance? Surely I am as attractive as Professor Duke. They are even fond of Miss Adams, whom most people consider rather a sour old maid. But they have no use for me. I want you to find out the reason, and tell me. Will you do it? They will tell you if you ask them, won't they?"

"I think so. It is partly my fault. I am very strict with them about saying unkind things about people. I do not allow it. And I insist that they like everybody, if they don't, I make them. So they have just kept it to themselves. But I will do my best."

One would have thought that Prudence carried the responsibility for the entire public school system of the United States upon her shoulders that night, so anxious were her eyes, so grave her face. Supper over, she quietly suggested to Prudence that she should appreciate the absence of herself and Connie for a time. And Prudence instantly realized that the twins must

be dealt with seriously for something. So she went in search of Connie, and the two set out for a long walk. Then Prudence went to the kitchen where the twins were washing dishes, and as usual, laughing immoderately over something.

Prudence sat down and leaned her elbows on the table, her chin in her palms. "I met Miss Allen to-day," she said, closely observing the faces of the twins. A significant glance flashed between them, and they stiffened instantly.

"She's very pretty and sweet, isn't she?" continued Prudence.

"Yes, very," agreed Lark without any enthusiasm.

"Such pretty hair," added Carol dispassionately.

"She must be very popular with the scholars," suggested Prudence.

"Yes, most of them are fond of her," assented Lark.

"She has rather winsome manners, I think," said Carol.

"Which of your professors do you like best?" queried Prudence.

"Duck," they answered unanimously, and with brightening faces.

"Why?"

"Because he is a duck," said Carol, and they all laughed. But Prudence returned to the charge without delay.

"Do you like Miss Allen?" She was going through these questions with such solemnity that the twins' suspicions had been aroused right at the start. What had Miss Allen told their sister? Again that significant flash from twin to twin.

"She certainly has very likeable ways," said Lark shrewdly.

"But do you like her?" insisted Prudence.

"I would like her very much under ordinary circumstances," admitted Carol.

"What is unusual about the circumstances?" Prudence wanted to know.

"Look here, Prudence, what did Miss Allen tell you? Was she complaining about us? We've been very nice and orderly. I'm sure," Lark was agrieved.

"She wasn't complaining. She likes you both. But she says you do not like her. I want to know why."

"Well, if you must know, Miss Allen is a heretic," snapped Lark.

Then Prudence leaned back in her chair and gazed at the flushed faces of the twins for two full minutes.

"A heretic?" she ejaculated, when power of speech returned to her.

"Heretic," said Carol with some relief. "A heretic! You know what heresy is, don't you? We'll tell you all about it if you like, now you've got things started."

"We didn't tell you before because we thought you and father would feel badly about sending us to school to a heretic. But don't worry. Miss Allen hasn't influenced us any."

"We haven't given her a chance," said Carol, with her impish smile.

"Go on," begged Prudence.

"Tell me. You're both crazy, I see that. But tell me!"

"Well," began Lark, for Carol always relegated the story-telling to her more gifted twin, "we've suspected Miss Allen right from the start. They used to have Bible reading every morning in school, one chapter, you know, and then the Lord's prayer. After the first week, Miss Allen dropped it. We thought that was a suspicious circumstance."

"Phenomenally so," said Carol darkly.

"But we kept our suspicions to ourselves, and we didn't come across anything else for several days. We could

not condemn anybody on—on circumstantial evidence, Prue. We're very fair-minded, you know."

"In spite of being twins," added Carol.

"What's that got to do with it?" Prudence inquired, frowning at Carol.

"Oh, nothing," admitted Carol, driven into a corner. "I just wanted to make it emphatic."

"Go on, Lark."

"Well, there's a girl at school named Hattie Simpson. You do not know her, Prue. We don't associate with her. Oh, yes, we like her very well, but she isn't parsonage material."

"She's a goat," put in Carol. "You needn't frown, Prue, that's Bible. Don't you remember the sheep and the goats? I don't know now just what it was they did, but I know the goats were very—very disreputable characters!"

"Go on, Lark."

"Well, her folks are atheists, and she's an atheist, too. You know what an atheist is, don't you? You know, Prue, Mount Mark is a very religious town, on account of the Presbyterian College, and all, and it seems the Simpsons are the only atheists here. Hattie says people look down on her terribly because of it. She says the church folks consider them, the Simpsons, that is, the dust of their shoes, and the crumbs off the rich man's table. She got that terribly mixed up, but I didn't correct her."

"I think she did very well for an atheist," said Carol, determined not to be totally overlooked in this discussion.

"What has all this to do with Miss Allen?"

"Well, one day Hattie was walking home from school with us, and she was telling us about it—the dust on their shoes, etc.—and she said she liked Miss Allen better than anybody else in town. I asked why. She said Miss Allen believed the same things the Simpsons believe, only Miss Allen doesn't say so publicly, or they would put her out of the school. She said Miss Allen said that most church members were hypocrites and drunkards and—and just generally bad, and the ones outside the church are nearly all way good and moral and kind. She said Miss Allen joined the Presbyterian church here because most of the school board are Presbyterians. She said Miss Allen said she didn't care if people were Catholics or Jews or atheists or—or just ordinary Christians, so long as they were kind to one another, and went about the world doing good works. And that's why Miss Allen wouldn't read the Bible and say the Lord's prayer in school."

"What do you think of that?" demanded Carol. "Isn't that heresy? She's as bad as the priest and Levite, isn't she?"

(To be continued)

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