

# Miss Johnson's Ellen

## And What Canada Had to Offer Her

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Illustrated by Maude Maclaren



"He found her making splints out of match sticks to set the broken leg of a baby chicken."

hang curtains and do a hundred and one little things necessary to make the room a suitable habitation for Evelyn Magrath, Ellen hummed a joyous tune as she worked. "After all," she said, "if it is done to-night, then I won't have to do it to-morrow," which meant that she would have more time to spend sunning herself in the radiance of Evelyn's presence.

Ellen's love for Miss Johnson's niece had intensified during ten years until it combined all the elements of worship. It was such an adoration as the emotional young girl feels for the matinee idol, the devout Russian for his



MISS JOHNSON stood in the doorway — herself unobserved — and watched with inscrutable eyes the girl among the roses. Her hair was a warm chestnut brown and it glowed in the light of the setting sun; she wore a pink print dress, a poem in simplicity, her step was firm and sure, her lithe young body full of vigor without aggression, and she bent tenderly over the nodding roses like a mother putting her children to bed. Miss Johnson watched her several minutes in silence, then she called,

"Ellen! Ellen! Are you never coming to tea? I am hungry."

"Right away," answered the girl, showing a row of gleaming white teeth, "and I haven't found one caterpillar!"

Seated at the table Miss Johnson looked disapprovingly at her vis-a-vis.

"One would think," she remarked, "that no one else in the world ever had success with flowers and vegetables! I grew 'em before you ever saw Canada, and I didn't spend the whole day fussing over 'em either."

Ellen smiled. "If you think I am going to abandon them to grubs and blight now, after bringing them on so nicely, you are wrong, Miss Johnson. They really do require all my time." "Fiddlesticks! Breaking yourself in two and stewing out in the sun all day so that you can't eat your food properly—What use do you think you'll be to me as an invalid, pray?"

Before Ellen could answer, the honk of a motor sounded with a sort of imperious summons, in the distance.

"Why, that sounds like Miss Evelyn," cried Ellen, putting down her tea untasted, and running out on the porch.

A smart little motor drew up at the steps and its smarter occupant did various things to pedals and levers before turning to greet the girl who stood waiting at the foot of the steps with a smile of welcome on her lips and in her eyes.

"Lo, Ellen," she said finally, twisting from under the wheel. "Thought I would give Aunt Frances a surprise. Beastly hot driving down. You all right, I suppose?"

The type of woman who never looks red and moist on a hot day, whose nose remains white on a cold one, whose appearance after forty-five miles of driving was as unstained by travel as when she started, Evelyn Magrath did not wait for Ellen's answer but ran lightly up the steps and into the house. Ellen followed her with a dust robe and a hand bag.

"—somehow, now that you have come," she was in time to hear Miss Johnson say, ungraciously. "Your room is being redecorated, heaven knows why, for it was good enough before. But Ellen got some notion. . . . It's papered and painted, but that's all. It is always more convenient to give people notice." "But surprises are lovely, too," interrupted Ellen. "If you wouldn't mind sleeping in my room to-night, I can hang your curtains and get everything ready to-morrow."

"I wouldn't think of it," said Evelyn. Her tone was a reproof that Ellen could have suggested such a thing. "I prefer the bare room—anything will do for me if I can only fling myself down somewhere and sleep. But speaking of notice I suppose I had better tell you that Toby is coming down to-morrow."

"Indeed," remarked Miss Johnson. "I trust that the passenger trains are running more regularly than the mail trains."

"Oh, how nice," cried Ellen, with shining eyes. Evelyn looked from one to the other and laughed. A very sensitive person might have imagined that she resented Ellen's happiness more than Miss Johnson's sarcasm.

"Oh, no doubt he thought I would tell you," she said. "Toby never was much of a letter writer, and I don't suppose you really mind," she continued smoothly. "We thought we'd like to spend as much of our summer together as possible."

"Makes it very pleasant for us, eh, Ellen?" snorted Miss Johnson.

Ellen made fresh tea, whisked soiled plates off the table and substituted clean ones. She warmed the food and ran down into the store-room for a jar of Evelyn's favorite crabapple jelly, then quite forgetting that her own meal had been neglected, she went upstairs to prepare the spare and bare room.

Although begrudging the time required to select linen, unwrap blankets from their snowy coverings,

sacred ikon. Evelyn Magrath was a being above and apart from ordinary humanity, a being to whom one gives, and from whom one asks nothing, a being one loves to serve.

And if Ellen felt her own commonplaceness while she built a picture of simple beauty in that bare room, there was no sting of resentment accompanying it. On the contrary, she felt privileged and thankful that her lot had fallen in such happy surroundings. She shuddered to think where it might have lain.

HER mind bridged a space of years and she saw herself a tiny atom who formed part of one of those British Institutions deified by the name of Home. She felt again the ache in her arms and torture in her stooped back as she ceaselessly washed and scrubbed. She remembered, vividly, even now, the pleasure of being allowed an hour with the younger children when she spun them wonderful stories, and angered the Matron by making them cry. They used to howl for her and refuse to eat or sleep or pray for any one but Ellen.

The day which was of paramount importance in her life was but a blurred and hazy memory. She was dressed in her best clothes, handled by a bewildering number of officials and finally delivered into the steerage of a huge C.P.R. liner. She did not know the joy in store for her, and she felt terribly frightened and alone.

The ocean was vastly more terrifying when upon it, than when describing its mysterious delights to the open-mouthed children round her knee. Ellen would have died of terror had there not been so many babies to mother. They spoke in polyglot tongues, but she made them understand her.

"Love's the same in any langwidge," she muttered, rocking a forlorn product of Galicia upon her heart.

"Now, don't yer cry, my angel," she whispered. "It is cold ayn't it? She'd order have somethink on her feet."

"You look cold, yourself," said a harsh voice over her shoulder, and turning, Ellen saw that one of the officers and several of the 'gentry' were making a tour of the steerage. Unlike many of her companions she did not resent their coming any more than she would have resented the interest of the king and queen of Mars. She liked to be with them. So she stood up respectfully, bobbed a curtsey and clutched the baby closer.

"Haven't you any other sort of wraps?" demanded the lady in a very angry voice. "Yes, ma'am," faltered Ellen, "but I give it to a little gurl. She's awful bad, she is, an' I don't feel the cold."

The lady looked as though Ellen had been guilty of some desperate crime, and continued. "Are you trying to take care of the whole steerage?"

She pointed to the crowd of children who had edged cautiously closer, until they hung around her like bees about to swarm.

"Most of their mothers is sick," apologized the child, "an' I'm used to children—I likes 'em," she added.

That was the beginning of her acquaintance with Miss Johnson. Although it was years before she outgrew a sensation of uneasiness at the sound of the harsh, rasping voice, Ellen became accustomed to seeing the lady whose face had no smiles in it, in the steerage.

Often, too, she was sent for, and in Miss Johnson's state-room, she answered exhaustive questions about herself and her life in the Home.

It hardly surprised her, therefore, to learn, after a tiresome day spent with Quarantine and Immigration officials, that she was to accompany Miss Johnson to her home. Ellen had a tremendous respect for this elderly spinster whose severe manner and sharp commands were obeyed on the instant by every one from the stewardess down—and up.

The child was so bewildered by the multitude of her experiences that she moved as one in a dream and it was only when the noise and confusion of Montreal were left behind that she gathered her wits together and discovered that she was travelling with Miss Johnson in a very luxurious train. She rubbed her thin, pinched cheek appreciatively along the plush seat and sighed. Then she felt a pair of keen gray eyes boring into her.

"Yes, ma'am," murmured Ellen, from force of habit. "Ahem—er—Ellen," said Miss Johnson, severely, "you are going to be my latest experiment. Do you know what an experiment is?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Ellen, very much awed. "I have forgotten what it is, ma'am."

Miss Johnson turned her head away and looked out of the window a moment, then she said.

"I have tried married couples, and widows; unmarried people and widowers. I have had them old, young, medium; but I have never tried a child. Did you ever milk cows?" she demanded suddenly.

"No, ma'am," Ellen whispered. She felt rather sick. Cows and man-eating tigers were one and the same to her, released from the safety of picture books.

"Nor feed chickens, nor weed a garden, nor make butter?"

"No, ma'am. Please ma'am, do you keep a hotel?"

Miss Johnson exclaimed at this and declared emphatically that she did not. She explained rapidly that she lived on a model farm; that the best place for spinsters was on farms where they kept out of the way of people who had to crowd into cities to earn their salt. She spoke enthusiastically of Theories and a lot of things that Ellen did not even try to understand and finally said with heavy impressiveness:

"I am trying to prove—I am proving—that by going back to the land we can support ourselves from the land without the frantic effort now being made in the cities to keep body and soul together. A small farm will yield an abundance for the needs of a small family, and the residue can be sold or exchanged for such commodities as flour, sugar and so on. If more people would adopt my plan and live on farms—I mean those people who are not bound to the city—the congestion there would be relieved, there would be greater production, and God knows there would be fewer faces in the world . . . like yours."

"Yes, ma'am," said Ellen and wondered if her face were dirty.

SHE recalled vividly her amazement at seeing "the farm," nothing more than a small house set in the centre of a fenced-off enclosure and the whole surrounded by a stretch of unbroken snow-covered country; it reminded Ellen of a toy decoration on a huge expanse of sugar frosting, and she timidly squealed her delight. She remembered the exuberance of Toby who met them at the door and who was the first and only person of her acquaintance who did not stand in awe of his adopted aunt, Miss Johnson.

"Greetings, fond relative," he shouted, folding her in a hug which dislocated her severe hat and sent her bags clattering. "Why didn't you let me know you were coming? Never mind, so long as you're here. . . . Petticoat Government for me, every time. I'm tired of being a bachelor. . . . Let the women rule if they like the job. I don't. Housekeeping—no, sir. Sure, the live stock is all alive, and no pipes burst. I've been able to eat most of the eggs from the henery, but several dozen would accumulate in spite of my valiant efforts. They're worth about \$10.00 a yoke in the city, now."

But, I say, who—" he broke off and stared at Ellen.

Miss Johnson flung a few words of explanation at him and remarked:

"I suppose the house is like a pig-pen."

Toby, whose name was Granville, grinned, unabashed. "Couldn't do everything," he said. "Spent most of the time eating eggs. I fancy, it will feel all the better for a duster."

It was to Toby that Ellen turned in her loneliness and it was to Toby she crept when frightened almost into insensibility by some bitter sarcasm of Miss Johnson's. So that as spring slipped into summer he became to her what the sun was to the growing things they planted together, and if he realized what Ellen felt, he was not embarrassed by her devotion. He was her cheery comrade. Then Evelyn came.

Although a child just two years Ellen's senior, she never played with her aunt's "experiment." She commanded and was obeyed; she was idle and was served.

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"Granville Pearce—are you in love with Ellen?"