

# My Lady Cinderella

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson

Author of "My Friend the Chanfleur," "Lady Betty Across the Water," Etc., Etc.

## CHAPTER I

The Day When Something Happened.

Today I had meant to be a happy day. But after all, I was miserable. I would have given a great deal to be almost anywhere else—yes, even at home in Cousin Sarah East's villa in Peckham.

I had never thought of myself as a vain girl; but I suppose it was a morbid sort of vanity that induced me to keep a pang of shame in my heart on this glorious June day in the park.

Anne Bryden, who had brought me, and proudly paid for the chairs to which we had found our way through the crowd, looked serenely blissful. She was not one whit depressed by the fact that she and I were the only ugly ducklings in this dazzling array of swans. Forgotten was her rusty black frock, with the cheap, pathetic lot of trimming on the bodice; her last year's hat, with its faded pink roses, and practically ceased to exist.

I did not even occur to her that it might be well to give her shabby boots the protection of her skirt. This lack of self-consciousness struck me as nearly short of greatness in Anne. It was almost above the level of the feminine, and far above the level of the male.

It was not often that I could get a glimpse from Cousin Sarah's babies, whom I had the honor of being nursery governess—alas nursemaid—with a mingling of general servant's duties. There were no regular "days off" for me, but Cousin Sarah considered Anne a "most respectable rolling woman." (Anne had with unskilled diplomacy praised the house, admired the babies, and deferred to Cousin Sarah's opinion during the one

visit I had received from her at Haptholme Villa. Accordingly this whole June afternoon in her society had been granted.

I ought to have been radiant, reveling in the pretty faces, the prettier dresses, and the glittering equipages of my betters, but instead I sat wishing that I were not ashamed to ask Anne if she were ready to go away; concealing the mended finger tips of my gloves by curling my hands into my fists, and feeling utterly wretched that I, who adored beauty, must be so hopelessly out of the picture.

Carriage after carriage rolled by; well-groomed, clean-limbed men lounged over the railings, and raised their tall, shining hats to the occupied girls, who looked like floating flowers under their tinted chiffon and lace parasols. The rhododendrons were a flame of glorious color; the distance was blue with the soft mist that hung, ineffable and pensive, above the Serpentine, and the far, billowy reaches of sweet-smelling, new-cut grass in the park.

"It's a nice world, isn't it?" remarked Anne, apropos of everything—everything but ourselves.

"Yes, and there are lots of nice times in it. Only we're not in any of them."

Anne looked critically at me. "You ought to be, Con," she observed, after an interval of reflection. "After all, I don't count. I'm nobody. I was born to things, and I don't expect them. But you—you are different. You are a beauty. And you are a mystery. A book could be written about you."

I laughed a little. "It would have to be a book for children. Nothing has ever happened to me since I was a child, and then they were all sad things."

"But you are the sort of girl that things do happen to. They will yet; you mark my words."

I shook my head. "Oh, if they only would! I'm so, so tired of Peckham. If something would happen today!"

"What would you like to happen?" queried Anne.

"Am I to have my choice? Are you a fairy godmother in disguise? Well, I should say, please, fairy godmother, you see that beautiful maiden in pink satin, driving with her mother in the particularly desirable victoria?"

(As I spoke my eyes focused upon a wonderful girl who looked haughtily, lazily conscious that she was one of Fortune's supreme favorites.) "Well, then, dear fairy godmother, wave your magic wand which so sadly resembles a three-and-sixpenny umbrella, and make me, if only for the space of one gorgeous month like her. Give me as many Paris gowns, as much fun, as wild a whirl of gaiety, as she will enjoy this season. It isn't a very noble or exalted wish, but I'm in the mood for that, and nothing else, today."

Anne's chair was on my left. On my right, separated by a little distance, I had been conscious for the past half hour of a vague cloudiness of silk and muslin that represented a woman. I had not actually glanced in her direction, but the corner of my eye had reflected a pale lavender fluff which was a sunshade. Now, suddenly, it was lifted, and a soft voice addressed me from underneath.

"Do forgive me, won't you? I really can't resist speaking. I don't want to be rude. On the contrary, I wish to be very nice. But—I couldn't help overhearing some of the things that you and your friend have been saying."

I felt the color stealing up, as I racked my brain to recall exactly what we had been saying. Anne was staring in blank surprise; for this was a personage of great magnificence who was endeavoring to draw us into conversation, and no doubt Anne was wondering, given as I was, wondering, what could be the motive of such apparently purposeless condescension.

The lady was of middle age—if women who frame their personal charms with the best can ever appear of middle age. She had elaborately undulated brown hair, under a bonnet that was a poem, in one verse; bright, searching eyes, and a complexion that could still live up to its past. As for her gown, it was too exquisitely Parisian to have been made out of London.

"Don't look so horrified," she smiled. "I'm not mad, only a little eccentric. That means that some of my friends think me a genius. I wonder what you would think of me if I suggested that you tried me as a fairy godmother?"

She spoke to me, not Anne. She did not even look at Anne after the first courteous, comprehensive glance.

"Why, I—I'm afraid I'd think you were a king fun of me," I stammered, since some answer must be given.

"Then you'd be mistaken. I fancied, from some of the expressions which I involuntarily overheard that you were not—we'll, not quite a conventional girl; that you had an original way of regarding life. If you have, we might cultivate each other's acquaintance with mutual advantage."

"I should find it more interesting to know you than you would to know me," I said meekly, for I felt as if I must have fallen asleep in my chair, and be dreaming.

"That remains to be seen. Your preface looks promising. Let's begin. If you don't mind, to cut each other's leaves. My name is Sophie de Gretton—Lady Sophie de Gretton, stargazers call me. What is yours?"

"Constance Brand," I answered.

## THE EVILS OF SUBSTITUTION EXPOSED.

A dealer substitutes because he makes more profit on an inferior article. A local citizen was induced to take a substitute for Putnam's Corn Extractor, with the result that the substitute burnt his toes and failed to cure. Putnam's contains no acids, and is guaranteed. Always get Putnam's—no other.

I had never talked to a Lady Anybody in my life, but although her aquiline nose and thin red line of lips might be formidable if she chose, she was really to talk to than Cousin Sarah's friends in Peckham.

"What a queer name! Why did they call you Constance?"

I blushed vividly.

"My mother had had a great deal of trouble. She hoped I would be her consolation."

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I didn't mean to be prying. But it's my turn to impart information now. I live close by, in Park Lane. You can almost see my house from here. I strolled into the park by myself because I wanted to think."

"And our chatter disturbed you."

"On the contrary, it has been most helpful—why, is my secret. But what do you say, you and your friend, to going home with me and having a talk over a cup of tea?"

My heart gave a little jump. Here was an adventure! The shabby nursery governess from Peckham asked to tea with a personage in Park Lane!

"I should like it immensely, thank you, and so would my friend, Anne Bryden, I'm sure."

I turned to Anne, but her face expressed disapproval. I could read her thoughts, and guessed that she was saying to herself: "Humph! how do we know that this bird of paradise isn't a sham? If she Park Lane, she pretends to be why on earth should she pick up and invite us after ten minutes' conversation, to visit her? There's something pretty queer about this."

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I only saw it in small, greenish sections at home. I was not ignorant of the fact that I was pretty, or might be pretty in a decent dress; but I had not suspected that I was pretty enough to triumph over the combined hat in a rage this morning, boots, and serge.

"You don't answer. Don't you think your people would let you come for a while?"

"I have no people. Only a cousin, who doesn't like anyone to know that we're cousins. When she is angry she says she 'keeps me out of charity.'"

"When I answer her back, I say that I more than earn my living. Sometimes she tells me she wishes I were out of sight forever. I don't know whether she means it or not, but I do not suppose she could force me to stay if I were determined to go."

I made these explanations jerkily, and then, at the end, before Lady Sophie de Gretton could comment upon them, I broke out:

"But why—why do you say such strange things to me, whom you never saw till an hour ago? There are thousands of girls whom you know who would love to come and visit you—poor girls, perhaps, yet in your own class of life. Why do you put such ideas in my head when you must feel, if you stop to think, that by tonight you will be sorry, and have to disapprove of the poor 'doll' you wanted to play with?"

"My mind is made up," she quietly returned. "As for the 'why-why' which you fling at me, can't you be satisfied with the explanation I have given? I've set my heart on having you to play with. You are the prettiest doll in the whole shop, and I hope to get you completely my own."

"But what would you do with me?" "Oh, put you in pretty frocks, take you about with me, and show you off."

"There must be some other reason."

I had not meant to speak aloud, for the words sounded ungracious. But they broke forth without my volition.

Lady Sophie's handsome face flushed, and she bit her lip. For an instant her eyes appeared to flash from mine, and suspicion, vague, yet sharply pinching, clutched my perturbed spirit.

"Well, if you must have it, my fancy for you arose partly from a resemblance to some one I used to know and admire years ago. I noticed it the instant I saw you in the park, and though you did not guess that I observed you, I hardly took my eyes from your face, peeping under the frills on your sunshade, until I spoke to you. Now that I've exhibited myself as a woman of sentiment—a creature I despise—are you satisfied?"

"Perforce, I had to answer flatteringly that I was. But suspicion, once aroused, would not be put to sleep again so soon. There was a look in Lady Sophie de Gretton's eyes which told me (or I morbidly imagined it) that there was still something concealed under her most unexpected, most astonishing offer. I felt this electrically, yet I would not listen to the subdued whisperings.

What if there was something else? What did it matter? What did anything matter if this transformation of my life could come about? I was intoxicated by the cup that she held out to me, and I would have been ready to drink it down to the dregs—if only I need not taste the dregs quite yet."

"I must be hard to please if I were not satisfied," I said. "But I'm so bewildered, you must forgive me. Only tell me, since you say this is real and serious, what I am to do."

"You are to get leave, and come to stop with me, as soon as you can."

"Oh, for how long? A week—a fortnight—if you won't mind my asking?"

"Would it be worth while your offering your Peckham relative and losing a home for a fortnight?"

I drew in my breath. The room swam before my eyes.

"Yes!" I cried recklessly. "It would be worth it all—for that. For a fortnight I should have lived. I should have had my day; and surely something, some sort of work, would turn up later."

"Brava! you're a girl after my own heart. You are a woman who dares. I was only trying you. I'd keep you longer than a fortnight. Just how long, I'm too honest, Miss Brand, to pretend to settle now. It would depend on many things."

As she spoke she dropped away from me as if her falling lashes would hide something of mystery. But I was used to mystery. I had it in my own life, so close, so intimate a companion, that familiarity had bred contempt—or carelessness.

"Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof; and you would have to trust me to see that your future prospects at Peckham or elsewhere were not endangered. Meanwhile I can promise you this: While your visit lasts you shall have everything that the most spoiled and petted girl could ask for—quite as much as the one you took for an example in speaking to your friend in the park. By the way, I know her well, and you shall know her too, if you wish, though I warn you she doesn't easily tolerate rivals, and you will be so dangerous a one—that the rose of her acquaintance may have its thorns."

I wonder if a spirit of prophecy had entered into Lady Sophie de Gretton, that she should have made use of just those words?

As she spoke the door opened, and the footman who had brought in tea appeared.

"Sir George Seaforth, my lady—!" he had decorously begun, when his mistress sprang up impulsively, her face flushing. Her eyes darted to the doorway, well nigh blocked by the man's padded shoulders, and so doing her features slightly relaxed.

The visitor was, at all events, not close behind the servant, and for some reason she was glad of the respite.

"Where is he?" she questioned, a slight quiver in her voice.

"I showed Sir George into the boudoir, your ladyship, thinking you were engaged."

UNEASINESS IN THE STOMACH.

That's the complaint to prove the merit of Putnam's Nerviline. Cures nausea and indigestion at once, settles the stomach and makes you well, and all for 25 cents per bottle.

I did not take her at her word and glance mirrorward for I was familiar enough with the reflection I should have met there; though, to be sure,

"Always the Best of Everything for the Least Money."

## Read Over this List of "Specials" for Thursday

You'll surely find at least one or two of the items too tempting to let slip by you. It would be perhaps wiser to come in the morning, too, when assortments will be complete and shopping much cooler and more pleasant.

If you want to replenish your stock of **Long Silk Gloves**, do so, Thursday, when you will be allowed the privilege of saving almost half a dollar on each pair. Black, blue, gray and white, worth \$1.25 a pair, Thursday, for a pair.....**78c**

**Collar Tops**—Very fine material, prettily embroidered. Regular 25c, Thursday, for.....**17c**

Another embroidered line. Regular 20c, Thursday, for.....**12½c**

**For Bathers—Red Cotton Stockings**—Fast colors, good quality material. Price, a pair.....**25c**

Fine, silk finished, **Lisle Hose**, in pale blue and pink. Regular, 35c a pair, for a pair.....**25c**

**Light Weight Corsets**—Made of white batiste, straight front, called the P. C. Probably you have worn a pair ere this. With or without hose suspenders. Regular 75c, price, Thursday, for.....**50c**

**Corset Cover Embroideries**—18 inches wide! Regular 35c a yard, Thursday, for, a yard.....**25c**

**Summer Vests**—The cool cotton kind, woven with Egyptian yarn and having the yoke and arm holes daintily crocheted. This is a very special line that we will offer, Thursday, at the very little price of, each.....**19c**

**Oversizes**—A good quality of cotton, light weight, sleeveless. Garment, each.....**25c**

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## Advertiser Patterns

DESIGNED BY MARTHA DEAN.



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Two Patterns—4208, 4 sizes, 14 to 17 years; 4098, 5 sizes, 13 to 17 years. This price of these patterns is 20 cents, but either will be sent upon receipt of 10 cents.

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Street Address .....

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Age (if child's or misses' pattern).....

CAUTION—Be careful to inclose above illustration and send size of pattern wanted. When the pattern is bust measure you need only mark 32, 34, or whatever it may be. When in waist measure, 22, 24, 26, or whatever it may be. If a skirt, give waist and length measure. When misses' or child's pattern, write only the figure, representing the age. It is not necessary to write "inches" or "years." Patterns cannot reach you in less than one week from the date of order. The price of each pattern is 10 cents in cash or in postage stamps.

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ADVERTISER, LONDON, ONT.

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Cures all forms of catarrh, radically and permanently—it removes the cause and overcomes all the effects. Get Hood's.

My ears tingled with the sting of my conviction.

"She was ashamed to have anyone see us in our dowdy clothes. And that brute of a William was ashamed, too. That's why."

"Oh, do you think so? I don't. It goes deeper than that. Mark my words, Con, there's a mystery of some sort, and the man who called is mixed up in it. Don't go to sleep with that woman, dear. It's all too fantastic. No good can come of it, but maybe dreadful harm to you."

No wonder that Anne's words struck coldly on my heart. It was odd that she, as well as I, should have suspected something hidden, for Lady Sophie de Gretton's explanation, though eccentric, had sounded frank enough. I would not have given up my new prospects, chimerical as they still appeared, unwise as it was according to an old proverb to exchange "a bird in the hand for two in the bush," but since the entrance of the footman to announce a visitor my excitement had been dying down. Now I felt chilled and unhappy, yet obstinate.

"I can't help it," I said sulkily. "It's



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