

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## Aunt Katherine's Choice

(By Hope Daring, in 'Ladies' World'.)

The Daileys were seated at their mid-day dinner. The tiny dining-room was cool and quiet, the September sunlight filtering through the close-clinging tendrils and leaves of the thrifty English ivy which covered both windows with a luxuriant growth. Dinner of Hamburg steak, mashed potatoes and escalloped tomatoes, had been finished, and the simple rice pudding and cookies which formed the dessert were on the table, when a neighbor's boy unceremoniously pushed open the screen door and tossed in a letter.

'Got your mail, Mis' Dailey,' he called out as he ran off.

Mrs. Dailey, a little faded blonde, turned and picked up the envelope. 'It's from Katherine, girls,' she cried, her voice not quite steady.

Beatrice, the eldest daughter, held out her hand. 'I will read it, Mamma,' she said, speaking in a commanding although well-bred voice.

Mrs. Dailey handed her the letter. To be sure, it was addressed to herself, but Beatrice attended to the affairs of the entire household.

She pushed back her unfinished pudding with the air of one making a martyr of herself for the good of the family, and opened the envelope.

Beatrice was twenty-three. Tall and erect, she resembled her mother, only her eyes and hair were darker, and she had the air of one born to command. Bernice, three years Beatrice's junior, was the beauty of the family. She was small and dark with a sparkling face and long-lashed, Spanish-like eyes. Gladys was eighteen and looked like her mother. She was musical and ambitious, their limited means alone preventing the thorough cultivation of her gift.

The letter was from Mrs. Dailey's sister and only near relative, Mrs. Katherine Dillion, who had been for years abroad with an invalid husband. Mr. Dillion had died several months before, and the return of the sister and aunt had been eagerly looked forward to by the Daileys.

'Why don't you read it aloud?' Bernice asked petulantly as Beatrice turned another leaf of the letter.

'Oh, I always knew life held something for me besides existence here in Hamlin,' the elder sister exclaimed, her face aglow with excitement. 'Listen to Aunt Katherine's letter:

Dear Sister:—I will arrive in Hamlin on or about the tenth and will probably remain a month. I long to look again in your face, Margaret, for it is twelve years since we met. Now that I am alone in the world, my heart turns to you and your daughters. I almost envy you, sister. I would gladly give my wealth for your girls. I am going to borrow one of your treasures for the winter at least. Which one we will decide after I have had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with them. I shall spend the winter in either Florida or Southern California, and am sure I can make the season a delightful one for a girl. Good-bye, dearest sister. I shall have much to tell you when we meet. Love to all. Your affectionate sister,  
KATHERINE DILLION.

'Of course she'll take me,' Bernice cried, a crimson flush staining her olive cheek. 'Just think of dozens of new dresses and a winter in a fashionable Southern resort!'

Gladys sat bolt upright and opened her pale-blue eyes to their greatest extent. 'I don't see why you should be so sure. Aunt Katherine loves music, and when she knows how eager I am to study under better masters—'

'Don't dispute, girls; it's vulgar,' Beatrice said. 'Mamma, a cup of fresh tea, please. You all seem to forget that I am the eldest and strongly resemble Aunt Katherine.'

Mrs. Dailey sighed as she hurried out to the kitchen after hot water for Beatrice's tea. No one remembered her own deep joy at the coming of Katherine.

'But I am selfish to think about myself,' she concluded when dinner was over and she began clearing the table. 'Katherine will

walk and on to the little vine-covered porch. The sitting-room door was ajar. The two occupants of the room turned their heads when they heard a step.

Beatrice was attired in a neat blue serge skirt and a cream shirt waist. A trim sailor hat, chamois gloves, and a sun umbrella completed her outfit, for she was ready for a walk. Bernice was dainty and sweet in a pink cambric wrapper. She was leisurely rocking back and forth in a willow rocker. From the room above came the low, pure tones of a violin.

'Aunt Katherine,' both girls exclaimed, hurrying forward.

Mrs. Dillion greeted her nieces affectionately. Gladys heard the hum of voices and



YOU LOYAL LITTLE MOTHER! HOW MUCH CONFIDENCE HAVE YOU IN ME, MARGARET?

be as proud of my daughters as I am. No, girls, I don't need any help. I can do the dishes.'

So Beatrice and Bernice sat down to talk over the coming of their aunt, while Gladys went to her room to practice the violin solo that had been so much praised.

The next few days were busy ones. As the exact date of Mrs. Dillion's arrival was uncertain, the Daileys resolved to be ready at the earliest possible time when she could be looked for.

She arrived at nine in the morning and walked up from the depot. Katherine Dillion was a woman of forty. Her form was slender and gracefully poised. Her face was much like that of Beatrice, but the years had brought to it lines of thought as well as to her blue-gray eyes a serene light. The brown hair, which was smoothly parted above her low brow, was thickly strewn with silver threads.

With a firm, easy step she came up the

came running down, her bow still in her hand.

When the aunt could make herself heard, she said softly: 'You forget, my dears, that I want your mother.'

Mrs. Dailey was busy in the kitchen. She had just taken from the oven a delicious coconut pie, and after placing it to cool, advanced into the dining-room. Through the open door, Katherine caught a glimpse of her. Springing forward, she caught her in a close embrace.

There was a moment's silence. Then Mrs. Dillion held her sister at arm's length and carefully studied her face. Mrs. Dailey was worn and wan, she wore a faded but clean print dress; her sleeves were rolled up above her elbows, and specks of flour clung to her toil-hardened hands.

Katherine Dillion's keen eyes noted the warm kitchen. Then she glanced at the three girls. 'What have you been doing with your mother, girlies? It is not only that she