

MISS BELL.

Sept. 8.—I found this little red-covered book in my trunk, among some other things which papa had stowed away there without my knowledge and considered what use I had best make of it. I have concluded to keep a record of some of my school experiences. I dare say that is what papa meant it for. It was like him to tuck it in without saying anything. I hope I shall never have to recall what I would not be willing he should see.

I have been here a week now, and like it very well. I was not homesick as I expected to be. Papa and I have lived by ourselves so long, away off by the Rocky Mountains, that this coming East to school, and finding myself among so many girls all at once, was quite bewildering at first. But I beginning to find out that I am as much a girl as any of them, and if I only had a congenial room-mate, I should be quite happy.

There is something about Miss Alma Wood which is not altogether agreeable, to say the least. She is nice enough to look at; has a fair face with great blue eyes, with the most innocent expression imaginable. One would think to see her that she could not do anything bad; yet she has a way of saying and doing disagreeable things, as if she did not dream they were otherwise than right and proper. I really cannot make up my mind whether her nature is such that she doesn't know how mean her conduct is, or whether it is consummate cunning and malice.

Sept. 14.—I am fast finding out that if I wish to have any friends here, I must be on my guard against my room-mate, Alma. Every disagreeable remark she happens to hear any one make about me, she repeats for my benefit—and I do not believe it loses anything in the telling.

I have taken a special fancy to one girl here, Viva Maxey; she rooms just across the hall from me. I suppose Alma has discovered my liking for Viva, for yesterday she took great pains to tell me several rather complimentary speeches she had heard Miss Viva make about me. Among others, some sarcastic remarks concerning the conflict between my name and my nature, which I must confess, were too true. To one whose disposition is not angelic, it is something of a trial to be burdened with such a name as Grace Angell. But papa says there is one way I can mend matters, and that is by growing good enough to deserve it.

I was angry at first, of course, with Viva, and made some unpleasant speeches about her in return. But in a moment or two, I happened to think that Alma would repeat them to her, and that would make a bad matter worse. So I resolved to tell her about it myself, which I did. And we have made a compact of friendship and promised that we will not listen to Alma.

Sept. 20.—I have not written anything yet about my teachers, because there has not seemed to be much to say. Certainly not much about the Misses Prim, who are at the head of this institution, except that their name is as appropriate and descriptive as mine is the reverse. There are two other teachers: Miss James, with whom I have little to do, and Miss Bell, who has charge of most of the classes I have been placed in. I like Miss Bell very much, but am all the time haunted with a feeling that I have met her somewhere, though I cannot recall where or how.

Sept. 28.—It has all come to me now about Miss Bell! Viva and I were talking with her to-day, and Viva happened to say something about my having come from Colorado. I saw her start and then grow very pale, and a look came into her face which brought the whole affair back to my memory. I don't think I will write anything about it here. I know it is a horrid thing to say about any one, but I haven't the slightest doubt that if Alma were by any chance to get hold of this book, she would not hesitate to read all there is in it. It will be wisest to keep on the safe side, as I would not do anything to injure Miss Bell for worlds.

Oct. 25.—Well, little book, I have neglected you of late, haven't I? I am having the gayest times here now! I do not think there is any immediate danger of my injuring my health by hard study. Viva, Clara Dexter, Ada French and I have formed

a secret society of four. We found we were getting into such a way of slandering our neighbors, and gossiping, that we came to the conclusion there ought to be something done about it; and after much discussion, we decided upon this plan:

Each of us has a little blank book, and every time we catch ourselves using our tongues improperly, we set down a black mark in our book. Of course, we have badges and a motto like other societies. Our motto is two lines from one of Will Carleton's poems—changed a little.

"Boys flying kites like white-winged birds—Remember you can't do so with words."

As we have adopted them, for "boys" read girls. We meet once a week to compare notes and have some other exercises. It is great fun—only it is rather discouraging to find my book getting so full of black marks. I never realized before how much I allowed myself to give way to such things.

Nov. 18.—Miss Bell is perfectly lovely! I never tire of looking at her. Some of the girls do not like her. They say she is cold and haughty, but I do not think so. To be sure, she holds herself a little aloof from us all, but I, at any rate, can easily account for that. And I am sure it is sadness, not coldness, that makes her so grave and silent. When she does smile though, she is altogether lovely, I do not know how it is, for I have scarcely exchanged a dozen words with her outside the class-room, but I am sure I never before loved any one so much, excepting papa. He has been all I had to love, for I cannot remember my mother, and I have no sisters or brothers.

Dec. 23.—The holidays are almost here, and as I am too far from home to be able to go there, I am very fortunate in having an invitation from Viva to spend them with her at her home in Providence. I am sure I shall enjoy myself, but I almost wish Miss Bell could have had my invitation. I asked her to-day what she was going to do, and if she was so happy as to slide to go home. And she told me that she was going to stay here, and that she had no home.

Feb. something or other.—I almost wish I had been born deaf and dumb, or—anything else, so I could not have done what I have done now!

I have been a bad girl, of late, anyway; neglectful of my books, and Viva and I have been up to all sorts of mischief. Miss Bell has had to reprove us a good many times, especially me. To-day she kept me after the rest were dismissed, and gave me a regular talking to.

"I shall have to report you to Miss Prim," she said, at last.

"Oh no, don't do that!" I cried, hastily, for I was afraid she would report to papa; and I know he would be so grieved and disappointed to hear such things about me.

"Forgive me just this once more, please!" I begged.

"I do not see how I can," she answered. "This is not the second or third time, within a week, that I have been obliged to reprove you. I told you if I had to speak again, I should feel compelled to do something more, and I see no reason why I should change my decision."

"Yes, there is a reason," I coaxed, for I imagined I saw a relenting look coming into her face:

"What?"

"Because I love you," emphasizing my words with a good hug. I don't know what ever possessed me. I had no intention of saying anything when I began, but somehow, I just couldn't help it.

There was silence for a minute after this. She looked surprised, and I am sure I saw her lips quiver. But when at last she did speak, it was coldly enough.

"Even if I could think so, I do not see how it should excuse me for letting your idleness and inattention go unpunished. But for my part, I fail to understand an affection which has so little respect for its object as you have shown me by your conduct of late."

Without another word, and without even waiting for permission, I turned and left the room, closing the door not very gently behind me as I went. How angry I was! Of course, when I had calmed down, I could see plainly enough that I had no right to be so; but one does not stop to reason when in a passion. Papa has often warned me

that, if I allowed myself to give way to such fits of temper, I might some time do that which would cause me life-long regret; and now I am afraid his warning has come true.

I hastened toward my room, but was stopped at the door by Viva and Clara, who stood in the hall waiting.

"What did she say to you?" asked Viva, catching my dress as I was rushing past them.

"She is a proud, hateful old thing!" was my lucid reply. "But if I had been in prison for stealing, I don't believe I would put on quite so many airs!"

"What do you mean? Are you crazy?" she gasped.

"Yes, call me crazy, or anything else you like, only do not ever speak or think again of what I said." I returned; for I could have bitten my tongue out the minute after those words had gone from me.

"But," said Clara, "you must have meant something, and I think you ought to explain. Very likely we shall imagine worse than the truth if you do not."

I saw there was no help for it, so I asked them to come into my room; but Viva—very strangely, as I then thought—insisted upon our going to hers instead.

"Girls," I began, "I said, in a moment of anger, what I never meant should pass my lips here. It might injure Miss Bell greatly, in spite of what I am sure is the fact—her entire innocence. And now if I tell you what I know of her story, I must do it with the understanding that you will keep it secret."

"Some six years ago, when I was about ten years old, I went on a visit to my uncle in Denver. While there, my cousin took me, one day, to spend an afternoon with some little friends of hers next door. It was there I first saw Miss Bell. She was then governess in this family. I took a wonderful fancy to her, as children sometimes will, but probably should not have remembered her so long, if it had not been for what happened soon afterwards.

"It was only a few days, in fact, after this visit that we heard she had been arrested for stealing. The people with whom she lived had, as they declared, been missing things for some time; small sums of money, jewelry, and other articles. For some reason, their suspicions had fallen upon her. I do not remember all the circumstances now, but I know my uncle and aunt were very indignant about the arrest. They were acquainted with Miss Bell, and thought much more highly of her than they did of her employers.

"My uncle, who was a lawyer, undertook her defence. She was acquitted, as there was no evidence and nothing but a suspicion against her. I know my uncle thought that the whole thing was a plot laid by these people to ruin Miss Bell's character; but however that may have been, I am sure none who knew her believed her guilty.

"My cousin and I were allowed to be present at her trial; and as this was the first and last time I have been in such a place, I never could forget her face after seeing it under such circumstances. Of course, she did not recognize me here, as I was only a little girl then, and she did not even know my name, at least, only my first name.

"The saddest part of all was about her mother. She was a great invalid; had heart-disease, I believe, and the news of her daughter's arrest killed her. She died in a few minutes after hearing of it.

"This is all I have to tell you. My uncle and aunt intended to befriend Miss Bell after her release, but she suddenly left the city, and they were unable to trace her. I never heard anything more of her till I saw her here. And now, girls, promise me that you will never speak of this to any one."

Clara promised, but Viva looked at me strangely.

"Do you know," she said, "that when you spoke of Miss Bell's having been in prison for stealing, you were standing with your back to the door of your room. The door was open a little way, and, just as you said that, I caught a glimpse of Alma peeping out; I am sure she heard you."

Feb. 20.—I have been trying to behave myself since that miserable day when I last wrote. To tell the truth, I have no heart for mischief any more, and I have been as studious and exemplary as possible. I do not know what Alma is plotting; but

do not think she has said anything yet. It is only a question of time, however. She is certain to have the story out before long.

I am quite sure Miss Bell does not know what I have done, for to-day when I stayed in after school-hours puzzling over my algebra, she came to me and, smoothing my hair caressingly said—

"What is troubling you? Cannot I help you Grace?"

She had never called me so before, and it made me very happy for a moment. Then it rushed over me how undeserving I was of any kindness from her. I caught her hand and kissed it, and then I gave up and cried as I never did before in all my life. Of course she did not in the least understand what it meant, but she tried to soothe me, and when at last I was able to look up, I saw that her eyes were filled with tears. How I hate myself!

Feb. 25.—What I feared has come—and worse, if possible. Miss Bell has lost her situation here. Alas, of course, the cause of it. She always disliked Miss Bell, and now she is triumphant.

The Misses Prim were of course greatly scandalized to learn that they had one with "such a stain upon her character" in their employ, and so informed her at once. I thought it possible that if they knew the whole story just as it really was, they might relent; so I went to them and told it, but it did not do any good, and I might have known it would not. There are some people who are too proper!

Of course Miss Bell knows she has me to thank for this—indeed, Alma has given me to understand as much.

Long years have passed since I made the last record in this little book. To-day I happened to come upon it, where I had carefully hidden it away among other mementos of my school-life, and after looking it over I have decided to complete here the story of Miss Bell's life. It may be that my own little daughter will read it some day, and then she will understand why I have tried so hard to impress upon her the importance of raising her tongue; and I trust she may be spared the teaching of such a bitter experience as was mine.

The very day I last wrote in my diary I received a telegram informing me that my father was very ill; and the next day I left school never to return. For many weeks after this, my time and strength and attention were all for and with my father; but when at last he left me all alone in the world, my thoughts again turned towards Miss Bell. I wrote to my friend Viva, asking if she could find out for me her whereabouts; but she was unable to do so then, and it was two years before I was able to learn anything about her. At the end of this time, came a letter from Viva—who had now left school and was at her home in Providence—with the word I had been longing for.

"Whom do you think I ran across the other day?" she wrote. "It was no other than our old teacher Miss Bell. I found her sewing in a dressmaker's shop, where I went to get some work done. I was never more surprised and shocked in my life. I say shocked, for she looked like death. Certainly she was not able to be at work. She was very shy of me, and I was unable to find out where she is living; but I intend to do so if possible. I was really distressed to see her looking so ill."

It did not take me long to make up my mind as to what I should do next. In less than a week I was eastward bound. I had sent word to Viva of my intention, and when I arrived in Providence she met me and took me directly to her home.

"Do you know," she said, "Miss Bell is in the hospital very sick with brain fever? I had just been telling papa about her" (her father is a doctor), "so when he saw her there he recognized her at once."

"We found where her boarding-place had been, and went there to see if she had any friends who could be sent for, as papa does not think she can recover; but we could not learn of any one. It seems so sad to think of her dying there friendless and alone!"

"It shall not be alone or friendless," I answered, "but help me and pray that she may not die now."

And she did not. Yet for a time it seemed as though it would have almost been better if she had. Her strength began, at last, slowly to return; but the light of