

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## When Sarah Ann Rebelled.

(Susan Hubbard Martin, in 'The Youth's Companion.')

Sarah Ann was washing in the shed kitchen. The roof was low, and although it was yet early, the June sun streaming upon it made the heat of the small room almost unbearable. The steam from the boiler of bubbling clothes only added to the discomfort. There was an unusually large washing, that had to be finished before noon. Then there were dinner to get, dishes to wash and Jane Harriet to be made comfortable for the afternoon.

Sarah Ann's scant calico dress hung in limp folds, her grey hair was strained severely back, and her thin lips were set in stern lines. Life looked difficult this June morning, and in Sarah Ann's usually tranquil soul was a faint uprising of rebellion. She could not help questioning why the hard things and never the easy ones came to her; why other lives should be so full and rich and beautiful, her own so poor and bare and limited.

Sarah Ann was forty-seven years old, and had never married. She lived now with her sister, whom she had brought up. Jane Harriet had once been a pretty girl, but she had married young, and married a poor man. Under the shiftless management of her indolent, improvident husband, she lost her beauty and her bloom and her ambition. At thirty-three she was a chronic invalid with five small children. Then it was that Sarah Ann left her own little home and came to the rescue. It was not likely that she would lack for something to do in the narrow, pinched household.

As Sarah Ann plunged the clothes-stick into the bubbling boiler, her spirit of rebellion deepened. Just then there came a tap at the door. A young girl stood there, a young girl in a shady hat and a rose-colored dress. Her cheeks matched her gown.

It was pretty Charlotte Dent, one of the young members of Sarah Ann's church.

'Good morning, Sarah Ann!' she said, in her cheerful voice. 'I knocked and knocked at the front door, but as nobody came, I thought I'd better come round here.'

'Jane Harriet's asleep,' replied Sarah Ann, briefly. 'She had a bad night, and the children are playing next door. Well,' she added, a little brusquely, 'what is it? Something about the church, I know. I can't ask you to come in; you'd smother.'

Charlotte's face took on a warmer hue. She felt the resentment of Sarah Ann's manner, and hesitated a little. What had altered the usual unassuming humility of Sarah Ann?

'We're going to have an ice-cream social, Sarah Ann,' she began, shyly. 'It's to be at the town hall Friday night, and we want to know if you'll come over and wash dishes for us.'

Sarah Ann took up her gingham apron and slowly dried her knotted hands. Then she turned, and with something tragic in her gaze, looked into the pretty face, noting its freshness and beauty. She saw the whiteness of the slender hands and the gracefulness of the girlish figure. 'And I—I might have looked like that once,' she thought, with a passion of longing, 'if everything hadn't been so hard!'

After a moment's silence, she spoke.

'Help you?' she said, in a harsh tone. 'No, I won't!'

'You won't?' cried Charlotte, in surprise. 'Why, Sarah Ann, you always have!'

Sarah Ann stood still, tall and grim; her usually meek brown eyes were flashing.

'Yes,' she retorted, 'I always have! For twenty-seven years I've been a member of the church. I don't believe in all that time I've ever missed washing dishes once at anything that's come up. I've worked faithful at every supper, every social, every bazaar we've ever had. Look at my hands! Do they look as if I'd shirked my duty? Oh, yes, when there's work to be done you always come for Sarah Ann! She's used to it; you think she don't mind it. Why shouldn't I have a good time,

Charlotte, soothingly, 'don't cry! I ought not to have asked you, and, Sarah Ann, it isn't as if we hadn't appreciated what you've done; we just didn't think—that's all.'

A second later she was gone, with a new pity and thoughtfulness upon her face—a thoughtfulness brought there by the picture of a gaunt, tired woman with toil-worn, knotted hands.

On the night of the social the moon shone clear and bright. It had been a hot day, and poor Jane Harriet had been unusually trying. But it was over now. The children were asleep, Jane Harriet was safely settled for the night, and Sarah Ann could take a minute's breathing-time.

As she sat in the doorway in the soft



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like the rest of you?' she went on, bitterly. 'Why should I be always drudging and washing dishes? Is it because I'm old and poor and ugly? There's Mrs. Judge Macon. Ask her to wash your dishes, and see what she'll say!'

'When the ladies gave that dinner and supper election day,' she went on, more quietly. 'I stayed all day. The rest of you left, and I washed dishes alone until twelve o'clock that night. I could hardly drag myself home, and the next day Jane Harriet had a bad spell that lasted a week. Now let somebody else wash your dishes. I'm tired.'

The face in the doorway flushed and quivered under Sarah Ann's words. Then the girl came in suddenly and put her arms about Sarah Ann's shoulders. At the gentle pressure the poor, overtaken woman broke into sobs, heavy, tearless sobs that shook her thin figure.

'There, there, Sarah Ann,' whispered

stillness of the moonlight, she was thinking of the social, and of Charlotte Dent. 'I ought to have gone,' she whispered, slowly. 'They can't get any one to wash dishes but me. I needn't have told Charlotte the things I did, either.'

She folded her hands in her lap and sighed heavily. As she sat there, the gate clicked. Some one was coming up the walk; some one in a white dress. It was Charlotte.

'Get your bonnet, Sarah Ann,' she said, in a low voice. 'Is your sister in bed, and are the children asleep? That's good. Come, I want you to go to the social. Not to help,' she added, hastily, 'but to enjoy yourself like other people.'

'We never thought about it, Sarah Ann,' she went on, shyly. 'We have imposed on you, and you've had so much to do at home! Come, get your bonnet!'

Sarah Ann rose stiffly. It had been a hard day.