

THE BUTTERFLY ETUDE

How a Small Girl Prevented an Elopement

By JEAN GRAHAM

It seemed such a very long time since I had been able to see things. Even in the weeks when I had lain with cold cloths on my forehead, when purple and green lights had danced all over the wall and creatures with hard cold wings had brushed against my cheek I had been conscious, somewhere in the back of my head, that I was not really seeing them at all, that some night they would go away and I should awake in the morning to look again at the high walnut bureau and the portrait of my grandfather, the Reverend Winslow Conway. There he was now looking quite cheerful with sunbeams dancing about his lips. Aunt Hester is so proud of the Conway mouth and says it shows character. Everything seemed the same as it had, two weeks ago, when I was taken with such a bad pain in my head and when the walls of my room suddenly fell in and made it so dark.

But there was a big bouquet of sweet peas in a beautiful tall vase, such as I had not seen before, and there were some pinks—the spicy kind—in a glass bowl which was certainly new. Then I languidly noticed a pink scarf lying on the foot of the bed. I was too weak to reach it but I just lay there and stared hard at it, for I could not imagine how anything like that came to be in Aunt Hester's house. It was all chiffon, yards and yards of it, with lace and ribbon and tiny silk roses. I thought I must be sick again and winked hard, but there it was when I opened my eyes. The door was open and a breeze made a crinkly rustle in the muslin curtains, when suddenly there came the sound of music from the parlor—such light, dainty notes that they seemed part of the breeze and the sweet peas and the sunshine. Aunt Hester has never been very much in favor of my taking music lessons, for she says musical people are nearly all queer in their ways and wrong in their habits. So, I have only taken a year from Miss Morris and am to learn the variations of "Robin Adair" next winter. But the music was quite different from anything else I had heard in Norton and even the piano did not sound the same as it did when I played scales and exercises.

I must have fallen asleep, for, when I opened my eyes again, it was late in the afternoon and some one in a white dress was sitting beside me.

"Now you mustn't talk, honey," said a voice that seemed to have all the hard sounds strained out of it and only the sweetness left. Aunt Hester says that for a girl of fifteen I have an unhealthy imagination. "You must take this first," said the voice again; and I raised my head and drank some stuff that was so disagreeable that it made me feel stronger. "What a funny face you make!" said the voice with a ripple in it. "Now you may ask a few questions."

"Have I been sick? My head feels all fuzzy."

"You have had a fever and frightened us right badly. But you're going to be well in a few weeks and we'll go out in an automobile. Have you ever been in one, honey?"

Of course, I am quite grown-up although I am not to have long skirts for three years yet. But in spite of my being so old, I really thought of Cinderella and the fairy godmother who turned the pumpkin into a coach. "Who are you?" I said feebly.

"The only cousin you have in the world—Perrine Ockley."

"Oh!" I said weakly, and began to think of all that Aunt Hester had said about this cousin, who was so very different from the Conways and who was rich and worldly and not a person to have a "good influence" as Aunt Hester would say. You see, there had always been Conways in Norton. Carrie Jackson once said that Aunt Hester seemed to think that Shem and Japhet had been married to Conways; but Aunt Hester only made her mouth into a straight line when I told her and said that Carrie had inherited a rude flippant manner from her mother. Aunt Hester had never married and I think she considered it grander to be Miss Conway than to be the wife of an emperor. There had been two brothers: Winslow, Perrine's father, was the eldest of the family, and Edward, my father, was the youngest. Of course, it was very sad to think that there were only three Conways left—all women. Perrine had changed her name, too, which made it all the sadder. I had never seen her, because Aunt Hester had not been friends with Perrine's mother, who came from New Orleans and belonged to the Church of Rome. Aunt Hester said it had always been a mystery to her that a Conway should have been attracted to that sort of person. But, although I didn't dare to say so, I thought it was ever so romantic of him and was glad that I had an aunt with a French name and a cousin who had been educated in a French convent. Perrine's mother died in Rome and was buried there, which seemed even more romantic. Think of being buried in Rome near the Caesars, and all those old families! Then Perrine was married to Mr. Ockley, who is, as I have said, rich and worldly, and she came back to live in America. But I had never seen her and here she was, smoothing my forehead and calling me pet names, which was something that Aunt Hester would not approve of.

"I was awake before. What was that piece you played? It was just like the summertime."

"Was it like this?" Then she hummed softly. I nodded as hard as I could.

"It's a study by Chopin. It's called 'The Butterfly Etude.'"

"I'm glad it's called that. It sounded just like butterflies—white ones."

"You fanciful little Puritan! Do you know that we're going to be chums? And I'm not going to call you Rebecca. It's too harsh."

"I've always hated it," I said vigorously—for a person who has had a fever. Then I was frightened, for Aunt Hester might have been in the hall and Rebecca was my grandmother's name.

"Don't be afraid, honey," said the voice with a velvet laugh in it, "she won't be home until seven o'clock. I think it's foreign missions."

"I don't like them either," I said, with a wonderful increase of courage. "I can't bear those maps of the world, with the Christians marked in red and the heathens in black."

"I'm afraid you haven't the Conway mouth. Aunt Hester says I haven't a single Conway feature. But you're feverish, and I must go away."

"Will you play it again?" I asked.

"The Butterfly Etude." Of course, you funny child. Now, be good." Her lips just touched my cheek softly, like a flower—ever so different from Aunt Hester's peck. Then she went downstairs and played that lovely butterfly thing again until I saw the sweet peas dancing to it. The music changed to the softest, mournfullest notes that were like the pines in October, and then there were solemn chords that I knew were hymns and prayers. How could Aunt Hester think that Cousin Perrine had been brought up almost as bad as the heathen. She was just making the piano



"Who are you?" I said feebly.

talk the holiest things I had ever heard and I was so glad that the fever had gone away and left me in the world again, for I knew the angels couldn't play love-lie music. Then it all went away and I felt so happy because I was too weak to see or to hear or to do anything but just drift away in a lazy boat until it was morning and time for some more medicine.

The days went on until it was a whole week since I had met Cousin Perrine and heard that butterfly music for the first time. Aunt Hester had been quite nice to me at first, and said that I had been shown "great mercy" in being allowed to get well—but she didn't approve of the books Perrine read to me, and told me not to gush when I asked her if she didn't think Perrine's eyes perfectly lovely. But the foreign missions had to be looked after every week, and one afternoon when she put on her bonnet and took up a bundle of yellow leaflets I was wicked enough to be glad, for I knew that Perrine would play to me most of the afternoon.

"I'm going to take you downstairs, honey," she said, as soon as Aunt Hester had shut the gate. She put a lovely kimono on me—it was white silk with yellow chrysanthemums on it and the prettiest lace on the sleeves—and then she almost carried me down to the parlor. I don't know what Perrine had done to the room but it looked all softened, with bowls of flowers and chairs out of their old proper place.

"I'm so glad the poppies are out," I said, for I could see them from the east window. "I wish you'd sing about 'The Garden of Sleep,' the way you did, the

other night. It was a strange song about cliffs and the sea and waiting for some one where the poppies are born." Perrine sang it and then was quiet for a long time. I felt so worried when she turned her head and I saw that her eyes were wet.

"Cousin Perrine, I'm awfully sorry. Could I help you?"

"Help me! You dear old-fashioned child! Betty, dear, I'm very miserable." She came over and knelt down beside me with her face close to mine on the pillow. I just stroked her cheek and then said:

"I know I'm not very old yet. But I've been so lonesome sometimes that I can tell how it hurts. Then I love you, Perrine—better than anyone else." It was harder than you would think to tell her the last, because half of me is a Conway and the Conways keep their feelings to themselves.

"You're a dear child. Perhaps you'd understand, after all. It—it's about Violet." Then I knew what the music meant and the lonesome look that sometimes came into my cousin's eyes. Aunt Hester said that Perrine had lost an "infant daughter" last winter, but that her nature "seemed too light to be disciplined by suffering." Aunt Hester told me that Perrine even refused to talk about the subject.

"She must have been very sweet, Perrine." I didn't know what else to say. But Perrine was crying with such great heavy sobs that I was almost frightened and could only keep my thin little arms around her shoulders. But, at last, she was better, and then she said:

"It's the first time I've broken down like this, my dear." Then she told of what a lovely little baby Violet had been, and how healthy she was until she took that dreadful diphtheria. "I felt this summer as if I must be with some one who belongs to me, and I thought of Aunt Hester, who was my father's only sister, and whom I hadn't seen since I was a little bit of a girl. So I wrote to her, asking if I might come, and had such a cold reply that I hesitated about my visit. But it seemed as if I must be away from the house that Violet had filled with sunshine. You had been unconscious for several hours when I got here and I begged to nurse you, because you seemed desolate—like me."

"But, Perrine, there is your —your husband." There was a long silence, then she said, just as if she couldn't help it:

"That's the worst of it all, little cousin. He doesn't care. I don't believe he even cared when she died. He is a good man and honorable, but he is just as cold and hard as if he were a Conway." There was a queer little choking laugh and then Perrine sprang to her feet.

"Forget all about it, dear. It was selfish to tell a poor little invalid my troubles. Now I'll play your Butterfly Etude. Sometimes, I think I'm just like that—a breath of summer wind."

"I won't forget," I said solemnly. I think you were good to tell me about the dear little baby."

"You're a true friend, Bettikins. I think my Violet would have had cool grey eyes like yours."

That night I heard Aunt Hester speaking in her most distant tones to Perrine, who seemed to be laughing softly as she looked out of the hall window.

"My dear Aunt Hester," said Perrine, as if she were explaining something to a little child, "the world has moved during the last twenty years. I assure, you there is nothing extraordinary about my going for a spin with Mr. Hargrave."

"This is the fourth time this week that Mr. Hargrave has called to take you out for 'a spin,' as you call a drive in that vulgar, ill-smelling machine. Where is he staying?"

"At Linden Beach, about fifteen miles away." "One of those new hotels, where the idle rich congregate during the summer, to spend the time in drunkenness and gambling!" When she is really angry, Aunt Hester always reminds me of one of the prophets.

"Why won't you come with us?" said Perrine. "In one of those abominable inventions with a man who is divorced from his wife!" shrieked my Aunt.

"She was really a very trying person; she wouldn't understand that dear Jack needed amusement." Then Perrine laughed in a really wicked way, and I fancied I could hear Aunt Hester gasp as my cousin ran downstairs.

Aunt Hester came into my room and poured out my medicine with a hand that shook. "To think that I should hear my brother Winslow's child refer lightly to the marriage tie and speak of another woman's husband as 'dear Jack!' Her husband ought to know of this."

"Oh, don't tell him, Aunt Hester," I cried. "Perrine just likes to drive fast."

"Hush!" said my aunt, sternly. "It's nothing for a child like you to talk about."

Long after Perrine had come back I lay awake and worried about her and the husband who did not care for anything but shares and stocks, and who did not feel very sorry when the baby died. Someway, I thought Perrine must be mistaken, for I had seen a photograph of her husband Arthur Ockley, and he had a firm mouth but such nice, kind eyes. It must have

(Continued on page 42)