

## AFTER LONG YEARS

"Look mad—do I? I guess I do, if I look what I feel," declared pretty Madge Porter, pouting her cherry lips as she cantered by the side of one of her many gentlemen admirers. She and her bosom friend, Nelly Brooke, were out for their usual evening ride, when they had been joined by two gentlemen, not an unusual occurrence, he it said, for both girls in their different styles, were two of the prettiest for many miles.

The younger of the two men, Cyril Lambert, laughed as he replied:

"Why, who has dared to upset you so, Madge?" "You had better not let Maud hear you speak so," retorted the young lady, still trying to look injured and "mad." "She is just up in the skies with delight, goodness knows when she will come to the earth again. In fact—not until the object of these transports arrives, I guess. You see," she went on to explain, "mamma has this morning heard that her sister, my Aunt Kate, is on her way here from England to spend the summer with us. She has been sick, overwork or something, and has been ordered to Canada for her health."

"Oh!" sighed her friend Nelly Brooke, with big, round blue eyes. "How delightful." She was rather inclined to be sentimental was this young person, and having no relations herself in the old country, always wished she had. There was a halo of romance round anyone, or anything associated with England, and gazing at Madge with envy and admiration, she added, "You are a lucky girl!"

"I'm sure I don't see why," retorted Madge, petulantly. "She will spoil our summer, that is all. She is awfully clever, is a journalist, critic, and writes books, so is bound to be severe and disagreeable."

"Not necessarily," put in the other man, who had not yet spoken. Madge flashed upon him her saucy brown eyes, and pretty pouting face. "Blue stockings always are, now, aren't they, Mr. Lester, confess?"

Ralph Lester smilingly shook his head. "I have met many lady writers both in this country and Europe, who are perfectly charming and some quite beautiful."

Vexed and piqued, the girl tossed her head. "Possibly you are such a traveller, Mr. Lester. We do not aspire to the acquaintance of celebrities and beautiful journalists."

Cyril Lambert smiled and Nelly giggled rather hysterically. She always felt nervous when her friend began a war of words, for Madge's tongue was both pointed and witty.

"In fact," I cannot imagine a good looking bluestocking," went on Miss Madge, recklessly. "This is how I picture my Aunt Kate—a little, yellow, withered person, with short grey hair

sticking up all over her head, and eye glasses astride a severe, learned looking nose."

"Madge!" laughed Nelly, "how can you? Haven't you ever seen her photograph? Surely Mrs. Porter has described her to you."

Madge laughed disagreeably. "Mamma's descriptions are never to be relied upon; besides, she has only seen Aunt Kate once since she married father and came out here. So how can she remember what she is like? There are lots of old fogies in Mamma's albums, but never look at them. I hate looking at photos of ancients who have been dead and buried years and years."

Cyril Lambert laughed uproariously, as he always did at the girl's pert speeches, which he thoroughly enjoyed, but Mr. Lester bit his lip and said nothing. He was feeling surprised, hurt and annoyed. He had not seen much of the Porters, but what he had he liked very much, and Madge had attracted him strangely. It was not alone because she was a very pretty, brilliant girl, but of the indescribable something in her face, voice and manner which reminded him of a dead, and almost forgotten past. Even now she reminded him of the only woman he had ever wished to marry, whose quick brain and ready wit had often caused her tongue to utter cutting, unkind words, which her really tender heart never intended.

His face whitened as the past came back with a rush, causing him to bit his lip in agony. He felt he could not stay longer with that young thoughtless trio, so raising his hat with a muttered apology, he dug his spurs into his horse and galloped away.

"You have done it now, Madge. He has gone off as mad as can be," remarked Nelly, her face pink and distressed. Madge had colored up also, but retorted sharply—

"I guess I do not care; he is only an old fogey himself."

But she did care in a way. That is to say, her vanity was wounded. It had pleased her to hear people call him her "elderly admirer." At the outside he was not more than forty, and did not look that, but he appeared old to the young, giddy girl of nineteen.

They little guessed, any of them, that it was for the sake of a woman he had loved many years ago, of whom Madge Porter reminded him, that caused him to seek the society of the young girl, and to listen with a sweet mingling of pleasure and pain to her bright, animate talk, her flow of brilliant repartee.

But when this repartee grew spiteful and bitter, as it sometimes did, then he would steal away very quietly, an intensely sad expression upon his face.

Madge soon recovered from his desertion and turned gaily to Cyril Lambert. She liked Mr. Lester, but she

liked Cyril much better, he was more her age and style and met all her sarcastic speeches with roars of good natured laughter. A few evenings later Aunt Kate arrived. Mr. and Mrs. Porter had driven into the town to meet her and Madge had been left at home to look after supper. Her pretty face, which had worn a supercilious expression, changed into amazement when she saw a slender figure in a well made grey travelling suit, spring lightly out of the buggy, making some gay remark which sent her father off into peals of laughter.

Laughing and talking, the two ladies entered the dining room, where Madge stood, rather white and distinctly nervous.

She knew that she would not have felt half so frightened of the severe, plain "bluestocking" aunt she had pictured, as she was of this graceful, youthful looking woman who was mirthfully regarding her out of twinkling, humorous grey eyes. Her aunt kissed her affectionately, then holding her at arm's length, cried—

"Methinks I see myself again as I was twenty years ago, Alice."

"Yes, Madge is very like you. I always thought she was," replied Mrs. Porter, looking pleased and proud.

"But," went on her sister, with dry humor, "this young person is a little beauty, of which no doubt she is aware, so I need not fear spoiling her innocence. Now, my greatest admirer could never say I was a beauty, and yet—there is the likeness, even I can see it."

Beauty or no beauty, Madge felt it a distinct compliment to be like her Aunt that evening. The latter, after changing her travelling suit, came down to supper in a very becoming gown, pale green in color, and of some soft flimsy material which fell in graceful folds round her pretty figure. She looked very young in the lamplight, almost as young as her niece, with complexion and skin quite as soft, white and pure. They also had the same bright, unruly red-brown hair. Aunt Kate's, however, plentifully streaked with grey. There the likeness as regards feature ended. Madge had big, saucy brown eyes, a straight little nose and small red mouth. Aunt Kate's eyes were grey in color, not very large, but full of humor, as also were her tip-tilted nose and wide mouth. Madge was pretty, very pretty, but her face lacked the character and humor her aunt's possessed in a marked degree. Aunt Kate was the life and soul of the party that evening. She sang and played to them in a style all her own. Even Nelly and Cyril, who had dropped in, it must be confessed, out of curiosity, to see the "aunt," were astonished and charmed, and were ready to admit she equalled Madge in wit and brilliant repartee, but not in beauty.

"She is lovely," whispered Nelly to Madge at parting. "I guess I shall love her no end before long."

Whilst Cyril, the rogue, teasingly remarked, "You must look to your laurels, Madge; your charming young aunt will knock our nose out."

Madge did not mind. She was already too much under the charm of

her aunt's fascination to be jealous. For the first time in her wayward little life she had met her superior, one to whom she had to play second. The experience was a novel one and not without its charm.

Aunt and niece soon became great chums, Aunt Kate reading the young girl like a book. Even whilst she disapproved of the petty vanities and paltry ambitions which spoiled the girl, she also sympathised with them, for she remembered herself, alas! exactly the same at her age.

"Wait until you have been through the fire like I," remarked her aunt one day; "that will take it out of you, Madge." She smiled sadly as she spoke and her sparkling face grew startlingly pale and quiet.

Madge learned afterwards from her mother that Aunt Kate had an unhappy love affair years ago, but Mrs. Porter either did not know or would not give her daughter any particulars.

"I believe it was her unruly tongue and reckless spirit which did the mischief—so beware, Madge," her mother concluded, to which her daughter replied with a little saucy grimace.

The days passed happily to Aunt Kate. She had resolutely put away all pens and paper, though this was a great sacrifice, as she dearly loved her work, and had given herself up entirely to enjoying her holiday. She was learning to ride and drive under Mr. Porter's and Madge's guidance, in both of which she proved herself an apt pupil.

"I am quite sure I shall not want to go back to dear old ugly London and my little flat. Your Canada is so entrancing," she declared on one occasion.

"Then do not go back, stay here!" cried Madge and her mother in one breath, but Aunt Kate shook her head. "My work lies there, and, after all, it is my home."

A week after her arrival Mr. Lester called. It was his first visit, and strangely enough his name had not been mentioned before her by any of the family. She had been out for her usual morning ramble, coming back laden with wild flowers. She was arranging a big bowl of fragrant wild roses in the pleasant morning room, when she heard a man's footstep cross the hall and enter the room. Thinking it was Mr. Porter, she said, without looking round:

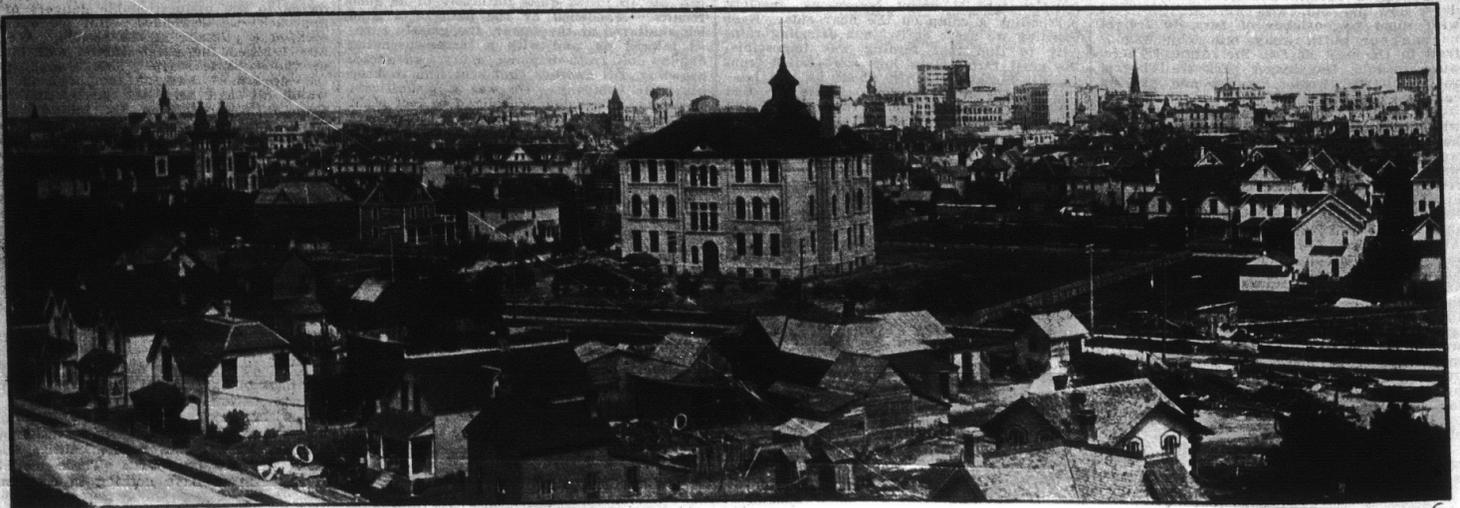
"What do you think of my spoils, George, are not these roses simply lovely?"

She heard her name uttered in a strange stifled voice, and she turned quickly round, the bowl of roses falling to the ground with a crash.

"Ralph!" she cried, then reeled and fell fainting into his outstretched arms.

Who can wonder at it? Brought face to face with desperate suddenness with the man she had loved and lost twenty years before?

When she recovered, it was to find both her sister and lover bending anxiously over her. With a tender kiss and smile, Mrs. Porter left them, for she knew that after so long a separation they would have much to say to each



VIEW OF WINNIPEG LOOKING NORTH-EAST FROM WESLEY COLLEGE.