

The Custard Cup

By
Florence Bingham Livingston

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"YES, I KNOW"

SYNOPSIS.—Living in a barn, converted into a dwelling, Mrs. Penfield is manager of an apartment building known as "The Custard Cup," originally "Cluster Court." Her income is derived from laundry work, her chief pastime being a Mrs. Horatius Weatherstone, whom she has never seen. Living with her are "Crink" and "Thad," homeless small boys whom she has adopted. They call her "Penzie." Thad tells Penzie a strange man was inquiring for her under her maiden name. A tenant, Mrs. Gussie Bosley, induces Penzie to take charge of a package, which she does with some misgivings. Searching a refuse dump for things which might be of value, Crink, veteran at the game, encounters a small girl, Lettie, who proves a foe man worthy of his steel. He takes her to Penzie, and Lettie gets adopted into the family. The stranger proves to be Mrs. Penfield's uncle Jerry. He announces he is going to remain in the vicinity of The Custard Cup. Uncle Jerry arranges to occupy the loft above Mrs. Penfield's abode. Uncle Jerry meets Prudence Hapgood, no longer young, but attractive, and the two appear to "hit it off" well. Lorene Percy, young friend of Penzie's, tells her of her engagement to Dick Chase, also a mutual friend.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

She nodded pleasantly. "You're perfectly welcome." The words were hospitable, but not so cordial as Mrs. Penfield herself could have wished. She could not entirely conquer a feeling of irritation upon finding in her house a man whom she instinctively distrusted. A foolish feeling, she thought to herself. She had not a shred of tangible evidence against Frank Bosley, but the repulsion was strong. Her delight in finding a relative here in California had been greatly tempered by the friendship between these two men, unaccountable, persistent.

"Don't hurry because I came," she said, waving the guest back to his seat. "I'm going on into the kitchen in a minute." She opened her shabby leather bag, and took out a small box, wrapped in paper. "I'll first give you this, as long as you're home again."

She passed it over.

Frank Bosley took the box mechanically and turned it about as if bewildered. "What is it?" There was no doubting his surprise.

"I'm sure I don't know. Valuable, I s'pose. Your wife brought it in for me to keep while she was gone."

The red of swift anger surged into his face. "Gussie brought it in! What in h—l'd she do that for?"

Mrs. Penfield smiled. "I don't know. For safety, was all she said. And of course a burglar would be rather low in his mind 'fore he'd try this place."

His anger mounted steadily, blazing now in his prominent eyes. "D—n! She makes me sick, always getting the jumping jimmies! I'll see that she doesn't bother you any more, Mrs. Penfield."

"Oh, 'taint that I count it a bother, Mr. Bosley; but, land, there ain't any great protection here."

"And, great Scott, you carry this"—he turned the box over in his hands—"these rings—or whatever 'tis—round with you when you go anywhere?"

"No, I ain't never done that before, but going out of The Custard Cup altogether—And even so, what if I lost it?"

"I should say!" His words cut the air with violence. "Believe me, I'll fix this!"

Jerry Winston, whose merry eyes had sharpened with alert interest, broke in with a careful drawl. "Ain't you a bit hard on nerves, Bosley? Likely your wife's had a dream or something."

This lightened version seemed to restore Frank Bosley's composure. "Likely," he agreed glibly. "Been reading the newspapers, I presume. Got her mind full of robberies, and thinks she's going to be the next in line."

Jerry Winston nodded. "Worst thing in the world for nerves," he said sadly. "Women need lighter goods'n that."

Mrs. Penfield started for the kitchen. Frank Bosley's voice followed her. "I'll be ambulating along, Winston. See you again in a day or two."

Mrs. Penfield, emptying the baked beans into the saucepan, shook his head. "Wouldn't that beat you?" she murmured.

She put the saucepan on the stove and went to the back door. Lettie's game was in full swing. There were now ten scraps of humanity, because Thad had been annexed to the party as a family courtesy and was traveling deadhead through its joys. Each one of the ten had been assigned the part of a creature of feathers or fur and was practicing the new character with voracious spirit. Timmy Catterbox, as Gray Squirrel, was eating an imaginary nut with increasing grace, to the accompaniment of appropriate noises; his little sister, as Hen, was strutting and clucking in a way that would have been illuminating to untrained poultry. Rabbit was represented, also Cat and Dog and Mouse and several others—all small, as Lettie had promised; all active, as she might expect.

Mrs. Penfield, satisfied by her moment of supervision, went back to her supper preparations and the ironing which further utilized the supper fire.

Uncle Jerry tramped through the living-room and paused on his way through the kitchen. Mrs. Penfield was far from understanding why he had come into her home. It had seemed natural enough at first, but the supposition that he wanted to participate in the home life of his own kindred was being rapidly dissipated. He had fitted up the loft with a few pieces of plain furniture and had constructed a reasonable sort of stepladder that made it easily accessible; but Mrs. Penfield was beginning to wonder why he had taken the trouble. He rarely had a meal at Number 47; there were days at a time when The Custard Cup never saw him at all.

Nevertheless, when he came breezily back, bringing some offering of food which he ostentatiously claimed to have secured at a tremendous bargain, brimming with stories of the Oregon woods that delighted the children, full of rough but jolly kindness—then Mrs. Penfield appreciated him without reserve. But there were other times—times when reticence was uppermost, about his absences, his business, his companions. Then she was puzzled and disturbed, even piqued.

"Well, Car'line," he began, "I didn't know you had a safety vault for the neighbors. That's 'bout the last thing I'd expect you to start."

She said nothing.

"Mrs. Bosley must have the fidgets," he continued; and as his tone grew lazier his eyes grew keener. "Say, wasn't he mad? I'll bet they've had trouble over that box. It was a box, wasn't it? Does she always bring the same package?"

Mrs. Penfield, testing the heat of the irons, turned in astonishment. "My goodness, Uncle Jerry, how'd it come to intrust you so?"

He shrugged. "Just making conversation. Hasn't nothing else happened to talk about."

"That's so, too," she agreed. "Well, no, 'tain't always the same package. Sometimes it's thin and soft. I guess she's got different ways of salting



Gray Squirrel Came Hurling Through the Thin Roof.

down her jewels. Why, are you going off again? I thought maybe you'd have supper with us tonight."

"Can't, Car'line. Sorry, but I got to see a man. Heavens, what's going on in your yard?"

Mrs. Penfield explained. She had to lift her voice, because Uncle Jerry had opened the door, and the game, now at its most vocal stage, filled the air with diverse calls and squeaks and clucks. Jerry Winston's footsteps on the board walk that ran around the house were lost in the din.

The animal game was drawing nearer. A zealous participant had discovered his habitat to be in the tree that overhung the lean-to kitchen. By the squeaky calls it was Gray Squirrel. Also, Gray Squirrels leap from branch to branch. Mrs. Penfield set down her iron and started for the door, with the intention of curbing the hazardous realism, when Crash—Splash—Gray Squirrel came hurtling through the thin roof between two supports and landed in a tub of soaking clothes. During the descent he instantaneously forsook the cluckings of the wild and shot out his furry personality as the parachute drops from the balloon. He became all at once a human baby, full of human shrieks and screams, bent on sifting his troubles to a listening neighborhood.

"My goodness land!" Mrs. Penfield made a dive for the floundering, yelling Timmy and extracted him as lightly and swiftly as if he had been a breadcrumb on the tablecloth. On the instant a mob of children poured into the kitchen, not so much attracted by fear as eager to obtain choice posts of observation from which the downfall of Timmy might be fully enjoyed. Shakespeare knew what he was about when he wrote tragedy for the delight of audiences.

Lettie stormed through her group of followers, as a tornado plows its way through a populous landscape.

"By Jiminy!" she shouted. "Wouldn't that jiggle your pins? There goes one cent. I won't never get paid for Timmy."

"Lettie, get me the blanket off my bed. And hurry! Hush, Timmy, dear; you ain't hurt a speck. We'll have you warm and dry in no time." With the protesting Timmy in one arm, Mrs. Penfield rummaged in the cupboard for towels.

Lettie switched back with the blanket, her resentment flaming higher than ever. She snapped her teeth at Timmy.

"You little stupid! Don't you know a roof's to keep you out, 'stead of leaking you in? By jingoes, s'pose Mrs. Catterbox won't pay me for Susie, either. That makes two cents gone. Ain't that luck?"

"Lettie, be still. Stop thinking 'bout money when you 'most broke a feller's neck. Now clear out, children. Land, if I wasn't so busy, I'd spank every one of you for enjoying yourselves 'cause Timmy here fell into misfortune. Step lively. I got to have elbow room—and sudden."

The company, thus explicitly unwanted, initiated a fade-out. Lettie shooed them vigorously.

"Run along, babies," she commanded. "You're going to play hop-scotch in the driveway—darned if you ain't! I'm going to have that seven cents or bust." She turned back and stuck her nose into the kitchen. "Say, Penzie, what you going to do with him? A scornful twirk of her thumb indicated the suffering Timmy."

"Dry him out," replied Mrs. Penfield tersely. "We can't return him soaked. I expected to iron tonight, but I didn't s'pose it'd be Timmy. And now, Lettie, you remember to keep all them kids on the ground. Moreover, you'll have a quiet little talk when things clear up a bit."

"Yes'm." Lettie gulped from the depths of a great comprehension; then flew to the pursuit of whatever pennies remained.

CHAPTER VIII

Sobsuds.

It was a regular thing for Mrs. Penfield to be called to Number 41. Mrs. Sanders lived there, alone except for a roomer; and during the few months since she had come to The Custard Cup, she had summoned Mrs. Penfield several times when overwrought nerves had brought her to a climax of suffering. Her neighbors had little patience with these attacks. Because of the weeping and lamentations which were the outer symbols of her distress, they had nicknamed her Sobsuds. And she knew it.

Sensitive to an attitude which she interpreted as unsympathetic, Mrs. Sanders turned for comfort to Mrs. Penfield as the only one of her neighbors who could soothe her into equilibrium.

It was Monday, and Mrs. Penfield was in the midst of washing; but when the summons came, she made all haste to respond, her office being that of the physician who is called in an emergency.

She found Mrs. Sanders in her small living-room, pacing rapidly back and forth, beating the air with her clenched fists.

They exchanged no word of greeting. Mrs. Penfield entered casually, as if she had happened to think of it in passing. Mrs. Sanders gave her a glance of recognition, but said nothing.

"It's colder today," remarked Mrs. Penfield in a matter-of-fact tone. "Seems a mite like fall if you ain't in the sun. What do you say if I make us some tea to drink while we're chattering?"

Mrs. Sanders did not reply, but the taut muscles in her face relaxed the merest trifle. Mrs. Penfield went into the kitchen and poured boiling water over the hops she had brought. She found a tray and arranged her service daintily, as if the occasion were purely social. She was profoundly sorry for Mrs. Sanders, whose nerves, she understood, had been shattered by grief until at times they became uncontrollable. She filled a bag with hot water and went back.

"Keep your hands on this when you can," she advised briskly. "You can hold it in your lap while we're drinking this here tea. Yes, I know the tea's hot, but you can sip it. My, it tastes good, don't it?"

Mrs. Sanders finished her tea and put down the cup. "I'm sorry," she whispered, with quivering lips, "but I couldn't stay here by myself. I got to thinking and I—Oht!" She sprang to her feet, tossing the hot-water bag to the floor, and took up her pacing again. She was a small woman, with a thin, white face and gray eyes that at the moment were burning with rebellion.

"Oh, I can't stand it; I can't stand it," she cried aloud, beating her hands together. "I got to thinking, and it—"

Mrs. Penfield had risen, too. "Yes, I know," she interrupted quietly. "It shuts off your breath, and your blood runs cold. It makes creation seem big and cruel and against you."

Mrs. Sanders wheeled and fixed her with a strange look, as if she could not believe that it was her neighbor who had spoken. "Yes, like that, but it's so much worse being by myself. It's different with you. You got the children. They keep you going."

"I'm happy—but it's a different kind of happiness."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

It's difficult for a man to collect his self when his wits are scattered.

TWO GOVERNORS AT ELON FINALS

DR. CLARK, FATHER OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR, ALSO PARTICIPANT.

REV. S. C. HARREL TO SPEAK

One of Features of Commencement to Be Laying of Cornerstone of Alumnus Building.

Elon College.—Governor E. Lee Trinkle, Governor Cameron Morrison, Dr. Francis E. Clark, Hon. E. S. Parker, and Rev. Stanley C. Harrell are to be the outstanding speakers of the Elon College Commencement to be held this year May 27-28 inclusive.

The commencement this year will be held under adverse conditions because of burning of the administration building which contained the college auditorium. The First Christian church at Burlington has invited the college to hold any of the exercises in its building which may seem convenient. This proffer has been accepted for the baccalaureate sermon on Sunday morning, and the Southern railway has agreed to cooperate with the college and town, making it possible for the people here to attend the baccalaureate sermon, making use of the trains. The train which passes the college at 9:50 in the morning will carry extra coaches for the accommodation of the students and visitors and will leave these coaches at Burlington. They will be picked up by train No. 21, which passes Burlington at 12:44, and which is not scheduled to stop at Elon, but which will stop that day to accommodate the commencement crowds.

The baccalaureate sermon for this occasion is to be preached by Dr. Francis E. Clark, father of the Christian Endeavor Movement, and president of the World Christian Endeavor Federation.

Governor E. Lee Trinkle of Virginia will give the literary address on Tuesday morning. Governor Trinkle will be introduced by Governor Cameron Morrison.

The baccalaureate address, which is customary to be given on Sunday evening of the commencement season will be omitted this year by vote of the faculty.

Rev. Stanley C. Harrell, of the class of 1909, will give the Alumni oration on Monday evening at 8:00 o'clock and on Tuesday evening the final event of the commencement, two pageants which have been woven into a single program will be given under the leadership of Prof. W. F. Greenwood.

One of the features of the commencement will be the laying of the cornerstone of the Alumnus Building. Col. R. L. Holt of this county will preside, and Hon. E. S. Parker will deliver the oration of this occasion. Dr. Ople of Burlington, will also have part in the program. The cornerstone for this building will carry the inscription "Donated by the citizens of Alamance county."

Berries Rank First in Columbus.

Cerro Gordo.—Strawberries were the first farm products that blazed the trail for Columbus county to build up its present rate of progress and prosperity. If I mistake not, berry culture was introduced in this county about the year 1895. For a number of years afterward the luscious fruit was produced on a good sized scale. A few years ago tobacco and cotton commanded fancy prices, and in consequence of this the berrygrowing industry was neglected to a great extent. Splendid prices paid for the 1922 crop induced many to return to strawberry growing and it now appears that a tremendous demand for Carolina berries is no secret. Neither am I revealing any secret in saying that strawberries have brought western Columbus farmers from the ox-drawn vehicle manner of transportation to motor-driven trucks, tractors and passenger cars. It is strawberries that has discharged mortgages and claims off of many Columbus farms.

Increase Capital Stock.

Weldon.—The Weldon Cotton Manufacturing Company has increased its authorized capital stock from \$100,000 to \$250,000 and will issue \$83,000 new stock to present shareholders to cover additional buildings and machinery in extension of its equipment. This corporation, now one of the landmarks of new Weldon, has been in successful operation for 25 years, paying dividends each year since its organization.

Woodmen to Attend Encampment.

Salisbury.—The week beginning July 30th will be encampment week for 1,200 members of the uniform rank Woodmen of the World of the sixth district including North and South Carolina and Virginia and Salisbury has been chosen as the site for the camp. That the camp will be held at the local fair grounds is the news from E. B. Lewis, one of the managers of the Sovereign Camp of Woodmen and Chief Engineer on the staff of General Fraser.

RALEIGH GETS CONVENTION

Traveling Men Elect Rocky Mount Man President of the State Association.

Rocky Mount.—Selecting Raleigh as the 1924 convention city and naming E. I. Fleming, of this city, President of the North Carolina division of the Travelers' Protective Association of America, concluded its 27th annual convention here. An address by A. W. McLean, of Lumberton, featured the concluding session.

The election of officers, which followed immediately after the selection of Raleigh over Winston-Salem as next year's meeting place, resulted as follows:

President E. I. Fleming, of Rocky Mount; first vice president, J. B. Norris, of North Wilkesboro; second vice president, D. W. Davis, of Goldsboro; third vice president, A. C. Bardin, of Wilson, fourth vice president, D. A. Hargett, of Charlotte; fifth vice president, C. L. Mosteller, of Hickory; board of directors, C. C. McLean, of Greensboro; W. W. Burgess, of High Point; O. W. Patterson, of Greensboro and E. N. Lewis, of Fayetteville; State attorney, R. S. McCain, Henderson; State chaplain, Rev. Isaac W. Hughes, of Henderson.

The following committee chairmen were also named: Railroad, A. S. Wishart, of High Point; president, R. P. Rawley, Winston-Salem; hotel, B. S. Marsh, of Winston-Salem; employment, J. L. Baldwin, of Wilmington; sick and relief, B. W. Mobgood, Durham; good roads, F. R. Warnhoff, of Charlotte; commerce, J. H. Holloway, Raleigh; legislative, A. L. Byrd, of Charlotte.

D. C. Crutchfield, of Winston-Salem, continues as secretary-treasurer as he was chosen last year for a two year term. Twenty-five delegates were named to the National convention which meets in St. Paul.

Hotel Project Seems Assured.

Durham.—Durham's new \$1,000,000 hotel project appears to be definitely assured. The committee of citizens appointed by the chamber of commerce has arranged to purchase the site from the City of Durham, and initial plans have been submitted.

The committee proposes to place the project in the hands of the Hockenbury hotel system for the purpose of staging a financial campaign. In the campaign it is hoped to raise \$1,038,000. This amount of money, it is said, will provide an eight story hotel building.

Officers Elected Knights of Columbus.

Greensboro.—The State Council of Knights of Columbus in annual meeting here, elected officers, selected a place for the next meeting and endorsed a movement for a national tuberculosis home.

Officers chosen are: State Deputy, Charles F. Linthicum, Charlotte; treasurer, J. L. Allen; secretary, G. T. Cary, Asheville; warden, M. T. Mulvaney, Asheville; advocate, J. J. McSorley, Greensboro; past deputy, W. V. Hall, Charlotte.

Delegates to the National Council meeting to be held in Montreal next August, are Messrs. Linthicum and Hall. The next State meeting will be held in Asheville next May. Efforts will be made to have the National Tuberculosis home located at Asheville.

Prisoners Attempt to Break Jail.

Wilmington.—Five prisoners from the Pender county jail at Burgaw were brought here after an effort at a wholesale jail delivery had been made.

The prisoners had sawed through four bars in the jail in the absence of the jailer and were climbing through the aperture as the jailer and chief of police arrived on the scene and again took them into custody.

Credit for the apprehension of the prisoners is given to Stuart West, a 17 year old negro trusty, who finding that the delivery was planned scoured the county in a search for the jailer who was six miles in the country.

Powder Can Used to Make Whiskey.

Lenoir.—One of the most interesting whiskey stills added to the sheriff's trophy room is one found a few days ago by Deputy Clarke Steele in the Laytown section. This still will hold about 2 1/2 or 3 gallons and is made of a powder can. The cap is an old coffee pot and the piping or connections leading from the cap to the condensing keg is made of a sourwood bush with a hole bored through the center. The condensing can will hold about a quart and a half and is made of a paint can. The worm used with this outfit was a casing off a buggy top stove. Another piece of buggy top stove was used in the connection leading to the condenser. It is evident that this outfit had not been operated for several weeks.

Kings Mountain Gains Population.

By reason of the recent extension of the town limits, the people of Kings Mountain may now boast of having the largest town in Cleveland county, the nearest competition being Shelby. The section known as East Kings Mountain, formerly having a government of its own, was included in the revised limits, adding something over 1,000 population to the larger town, together with three cotton mills. Kings Mountain now has about 5,000 inhabitants, 11 cotton mills within or near the limits.

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Too Late to Recall It.

Blake was talking with his friend Scribbler, the well-known English journalist of Fleet street.

"Do you believe in writing anonymously?" he asked the hero of the pen. Scribbler looked to see that the door of his study was shut ere he replied in a confidential whisper:

"Well, I've often wished that one of my productions had been anonymous."

"What was that?" asked Blake.

"A letter proposing to Mrs. Scribbler," growled the famous writer.—London Answers.

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