

# The Custard Cup

By Florence Bingham Livingston

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### SYNOPSIS

**CHAPTER I**—Living in a barn, converted into a dwelling, Mrs. Penfield is manager of an apartment building known as the "Custard Cup," originally "Cloister Court." Her income is derived from laundry work, her chief patron being a Mrs. Horatius Weatherstone, whom she has never seen. Living with her are "Crink" and "Thud," homeless small boys whom she has adopted. They call her "Penzie." Thud tells Penzie a strange man was inquiring for her under her maiden name.

**CHAPTER II**—A tenant, Mrs. Gussie Bosley, induces Penzie to take charge of a package, which she does with some misgivings.

**CHAPTER III**—Searching a refuse dump for things which might be of value, Crink, veteran at the game, encounters a small girl, Lettie, who proves a foeman worthy of his steel. He takes her to Penzie, and Lettie is adopted into the family.

**CHAPTER IV**—The stranger proves to be Mrs. Penfield's uncle Jerry. He announces he is going to remain in the vicinity of the Custard Cup.

**CHAPTER V**—Uncle Jerry arranges to occupy the loft above Mrs. Penfield's abode.

**CHAPTER VI**—Uncle Jerry meets Prudence Hapsfoot, 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

#### What Can You See in Him?

Lettie was in the midst of a financial enterprise. Mrs. Catterbox, a leader in penny prodigality, had offered the job of watching her two children till dinner time, at one cent per head. Lettie had not only accepted, but had used this as a lever with which to pry off further gain. Whatever other qualities might be debatable or in abeyance, Lettie's trustworthiness was generally conceded. Successfully, therefore, she had interviewed tired mothers, until she had assembled nine youngsters in the driveway, each representing a cash value of one cent. When Mrs. Penfield entered, they were about to be conducted to the back yard, there to be vigorously and conscientiously entertained for an hour.

"We're going to play animals," announced Lettie, vastly excited.

"Animals?"

"Uh-huh. Out of that lib'ly book you been reading us."

"Lettie," called Mrs. Penfield, as the child danced away, "remember not to play too hard. You're big and strong compared with—"

Lettie pirouetted momentarily while



Lettie Pirouetted Momentarily.

she quieted this misgiving. "Huh, trust me! It's just little animals we're going to play."

Mrs. Penfield went on into the house. Uncle Jerry was there before her; also Frank Bosley.

"I thought you wouldn't mind, Car'line, if we walked into your living-room for a minute."

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 just 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. Valuables, 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 hadn't never done that before, but going out of the Custard Cup altogether— And even so, what if I lost 'em?"

"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 foot'n that."

Mrs. Penfield started for the kitchen. Frank Bosley's voice followed her.

"I'll be ambling 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 Thud 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 vociferous 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 cackling 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 one 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 step-ladder 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 absence, 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," he agreed. "Well, no, 'tain't always the same package. Sometimes it's thin and soft. I guess she's got different ways of salting 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 mar. 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—



Gray Squirrel Came Hurling Through the Thin Roof.

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 airing 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 actuated 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 flaring 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 snatched 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 hitch. "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'n I'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.

### TO BE CONTINUED

Mrs. A.—"What a lot more things cost than before the war."

Mrs. B.—"Yes, a simple cry used to get a new gown. Now I have to go into hysterics."—Boston Transcript.

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### Mill Grove News

March 22.—Mr. S. C. Foard has been on the sick list for the past week.

Mr. Mack Simpson is moving near Union Grove from Charlotte.

Miss Mary Ford was the guest of Miss Lena Ormand Wednesday night. Mr. C. A. Foard has purchased a new Ford touring car.

Mr. Harrison Yandle visited his cousin, Mr. Willie Ormand, one night this week.

Miss Lena Lemmond visited Miss Eva Foard in Charlotte this week.

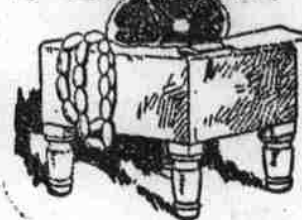
Mr. J. M. Ormond is prepared to do barber work at his home every Saturday.

Most all the students are looking forward to an entertainment at the close of the term this year. How many of them can say that they have done their best in school this term?

We should all try to consume all the school hours in hard, honest study. Maybe by next year the patrons of Mill Grove and Furr schools will make a move to try and have their schools consolidated. Some people object to consolidated schools, but if they knew the good that comes from them there would be more of them in Union county. What do you say, fellow citizens? Let us advance our educational work along this line of consolidation.—Lena Star.

God will not look over you for medals, degrees and diplomas, but for scars.—Aron.

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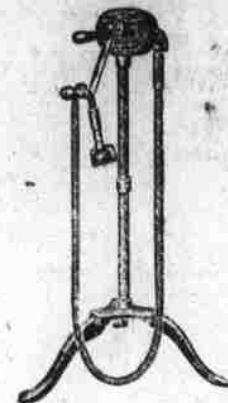


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One of the greatest improvements ever introduced into stable management, according to the opinions of leading veterinarians, is the custom of clipping horses in the spring, which has now become so common. A clipped horse will not only do a greater amount of work, on the same amount of food, than a horse with his natural coat will do, but he will also be fresh and full of vigor, while the horse with the heavy coat will be dull, out of condition, and seldom or never dry or clean. Clipping removes the tendency to sweat, and there is no comparison as between a long, wet coat and a short, dry one. When the long coat is warmed up and the horse is being worked regularly, it is next to impossible to thoroughly dry the coat, and this causes the animal to lose flesh in addition to making him a prey to a multitude of ills. Big companies which require hundreds of horses in carrying on their business, have experimented and found that where their horses were clipped, coughs and pneumonia have been practically eliminated. Clip your horses in the Spring if you want to keep them healthy and in good condition.

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