

# The Custard Cup

By Florence Vaughan Livingston

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### SYNOPSIS

**CHAPTER I.**—Lying 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 Weatherston, whom she has never seen. Lying with her are "Crank" 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.

**CHAPTER II.**—A tenant, Mrs. Gustie 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 forerunner 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 Haggood, 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.**—Friendship developing between Uncle Jerry and Frank Bosley, husband of Gustie, worries Penzie.

**CHAPTER VIII.**—Calming a tenant, Mrs. Sanders, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, Mrs. Penfield reveals the tragic story of her own life, the sudden loss of her three children in an epidemic and the subsequent death of her husband.

**CHAPTER IX.**—Lettie's pet aversion in the Custard Cup has long been a certain Mr. Josiah Wopple, and the animosity culminates in a physical encounter in which much water is spilled.

**CHAPTER X.**—Dick Chase confides to Mrs. Penfield that his fiancée's stepmother, Mrs. Percy, by pleading physical helplessness, is seeking to prevent their marriage. Penzie skillfully exposes Mrs. Percy's sham, and the latter is forced to withdraw her objections.

**CHAPTER XI.**—The domestic difficulties of the Bosleys become a matter of gossip among the other tenants of The Custard Cup.

**CHAPTER XII.**—Lettie, having subtly discovered her beloved Penzie's distrust of Frank Bosley as a companion of Uncle Jerry, denounces Bosley and appeals to Uncle Jerry to give up the acquaintanceship. They laugh at her.

**CHAPTER XIII.**—Endeavoring to prevent the marriage of Lorene and Dick Chase, Mrs. Percy succeeds in badly damaging Lorene's trousseau. Mrs. Penfield, by the hardest kind of work, repairs the damage, and the wedding takes place.

**CHAPTER XIV.**—Remarks let fall by Mrs. Bosley leave Penzie in utter bewilderment as to the relations between Uncle Jerry and the Bosleys. Uncle Jerry is evasive in his explanations.

**CHAPTER XV.**—In the absence of Penzie, Lettie "entertains" Prudence Haggood and Uncle Jerry, with disastrous results.

**CHAPTER XVI.**—The small members of the Penfield household insist on a Christmas celebration, Lettie engaging to provide a whole dollar for the occasion. She has an inspiration, and evolves a "machine" which she submits to an advertising agency. The manager is not at first impressed, but finally sympathizes with the earnestness of the child and gives her a dollar for the invention.

### CHAPTER XVII

#### Dimes, Limited.

"The reason some folks have to have so much money," explained Mrs. Penfield, "is they don't know how to plan. Land, they'd be 'sprised to know how little money they could live on if they'd only mix their brains with it."

It was admitted at Number 47 that funds were ample for the project in hand, but the young Miss Penfield was dismayed to find her capital diminished

from one dollar to eighty cents, the intervening twenty being required to liquidate the final payment on the Wopple window. It seemed that one could not face a holiday in the right attitude if one were in debt, and Lettie could not be spared to earn further money before the festive day. However, Crink brought in five cents returns from an errand, and Thad jubilantly contributed one penny, gross proceeds from two hours of chicken-fending from the Chatterbox garden. Total, eighty-six cents!

Mrs. Penfield knew a place in the country where a tree could be had for nothing. But it would take two car-fares and return; also Crink and the family hatchet. Twenty cents was segregated for the enterprise.

The next morning an important expedition set forth from The Custard Cup. Mrs. Penfield went along as guide, but the motive force was Lettie, who bore the badge of authority in a small purse containing sixty-six cents in negotiable form. She was easily the happiest child in the whole city. Her feet pressed the rainbow path of Promise; her fingers held the wand of Possibility; her starved life was suddenly illumined with the light of joy, dazzling by contrast, scarcely to be believed, permeating her being with a feeling of unreality.

The Penfields had a long walk, but the morning was beautiful, bright and crisp, with a bracing quality that emphasized the cheerful spirit of the season. There had been rain a few days before, washing the haze from the hills, giving greener life to lawns and trees. The streets were bustling with activity. Expressmen and delivery boys were busier than usual, running up steps and ringing doorbells with an agreeable appearance of rush; people were hurrying in every direction, carrying packages of delightful mystery.

Mrs. Penfield guided Lettie to a store that catered to shoppers whose desires were ambitious and whose resources were small. Head held high, Lettie pushed her way through the crowd that thronged the aisles. The first item on her list was tree trimmings. But she blinked in bewilderment at the array before her. And a dime was the limit, the absolute limit for this department. Lettie set her teeth and eliminated systematically until she reached the most for the least, which gave her three yards of thin silver tinsel for ten cents.

Candles? Most emphatically! A Christmas tree without candles is an evening sky without stars. For the affluent, candles were provided in boxes, at ten cents per; but others might be had at the rate of six for five cents. Six were so had by Lettie, who then turned her mental batteries upon the subject of holders, essential to safety of branch and limb. But candle-holders were ten cents. They came in sets of twelve clamped to a card, and you were obliged to take the entire lot or go without.

Lettie stood before the display so long that impatient shoppers disputed the space she occupied, so absorbed that the interrogations of floor-walkers failed to penetrate her consciousness. Her heart pounded in a panic. How could she do what couldn't be done? She looked around. A woman stood beside her, engaged in mental work on candle-holders. With the intuition of wide experience, Lettie appraised her instantly.

"Landy gracious!" she cried. "Ain't it a fright the way they lump 'em!" The woman looked up. "Ain't it?"

greater numbers, but plain mixed would surely melt less rapidly and therefore give longer entertainment to the consumer. Ultimately Lettie's money was on plain mixed.

The other purchases required little selection and were speedily made. They consisted of a tablet of plain, good paper for one dime; two packages of envelopes, for another; a spool of white thread, five cents; and a stick of pink-and-white candy, one cent. The latter would help decorate the tree and also serve as a gift for Thad.

During all these transactions Mrs. Penfield had been merely an attentive bit of background, but in the following few minutes she was called upon to take an active stand. It proved to be no simple matter to get Miss Lettie out of the store. So engrossed had she been in the purchases on her tentative list that she had scarcely cast a comprehending glance at other commodities; but now that her responsibility was over and her cash exhausted, she turned a fascinated eye upon tables and counters of alluring articles.

Lettie had never had anything to do with stores. This was the first time in her life that she had ever bought anything. The bustle, the glitter, the endless array, wrought havoc with her imagination, filled her with a frenzy of intoxication. Little cars with wheels that turned; dime banks that looked like the most blooming peaches on Mrs. Penfield's wall; games, books, toys! Marbles—imagine, twenty-four round pieces of baked terra firma for the ridiculous sum of five cents! How happy Crink would be! How Thad's soft eyes would bulge! It was more than could be borne.

"I don't care!" Lettie burst into frantic sobs that carried over a wide circle. "I don't care! Do you hear? I don't care!" Tears streamed down her face. She stamped her foot and swung her free arm with a violence and attitude that first grazed several astonished shoppers and then led to a somewhat freer space around the child.

"Lettie, dear," expostulated Mrs. Penfield hurriedly, "remember where you are."

"I do," shrieked Lettie. "That's what's the matter. I don't care. Some day I'll have things—oceans and heaps and oodles of things—millions more'n they've got here. I don't—"

"Lettie!" There was a finality in the word; there was also an expressive decision in the grasp of her arm. With swift skill Mrs. Penfield pushed her through the curious crowd, out of the store, to the comparative seclusion of a cross street.

"Lettie," she said sadly, "I'm shamed of you, making a scene that way. I thought you were—"

"Oh, Penzie," interrupted the child, "I'm awful sorry. But I got so full, thinking, seemed as if I'd bust. I had to let her out, I got so dang'rous inside. All them things!" Her voice was freighted with suppressed rebellion. "Why, Crink and Thad would be tickled—"

"No, Lettie," interposed Mrs. Penfield, as they went on slowly, "they wouldn't be one mite happier. Land, the world wain't never fixed up so unfair as that. Tain't the folks that have things that's happy; it's the folks that know they don't want things. When you get a little older, you'll see that the reason rich folks are unhappy is 'cause they got things; and the reason poor folks are unhappy is 'cause they want things. When folks get through twining their heart strings and their thoughts around things, then the world'll be miles nearer bliss than it is now."

Lettie's black eyes were wide with reproach. "Why, Penzie, you don't mean that Crink and Thad wouldn't like some of those—"

"Goodness, no, I don't mean they wouldn't like 'em; but I mean they'll be just as happy without 'em if you don't go and stir 'em all up with thoughts that you've twisted in your own head. Christmas ain't presents; it's feelings. And there's one thing you ought to keep in mind: it's a waste of good food to board any girl if there ain't at least two other folks happier 'cause she's living."

Lettie's brow cleared; a smile chased across her face. "I get you," she nodded. "It's up to me to do something."

"Yes, Lettie, dear. It's up to you right now, today."

"Ain't I the limit!" cried Lettie in disgust. "All time forgetting what I'm trying to remember! Gee, I know I'm lucky. I'll show you, Penzie; honest, I will."

It was long past lunch time when Crink returned with the tree, and he tried many hours before he accomplished a base that would support it in a corner of the living room. But no sooner was the fragrant fir in place than every little Penfield felt that Christmas was an assured fact.

Lettie meantime was making picture puzzles—mounting illustrations from Weatherston magazines on paste-board from old boxes and cutting them into fantastic shapes. Each puzzle was put in an envelope and inscribed with the name of a Custard Cup tenant who would be a guest at the party.

By the following evening the preparations had taken a different turn. Everybody gathered about the table in the living room to make blots. The tablet paper was cut into uniform pieces, Lettie's ink bottles had been brought out; and a few drops of ink, both black and red, were shaken from a pen on each paper, which was then folded once and smoothed flat. The resulting blots took varied, interesting forms, some of which were touched up slightly into clearer outlines.

Uncle Jerry was the umpire interpreter of these blot pictures. Perennial Prose, the only neighbor invited to the ceremony—and that because of her artistic abilities—thereupon un-

posed a couplet embodying the idea and wrote it in beautiful letters beneath the blot. The rest of the Manila envelopes were used to inclose these gifts.

Lettie's keen gaze soon discovered that the processes of interpreting and composing led to whispered conferences and much laughter that was not shared with the family; also that Uncle Jerry's eyes were more twinkly than ever, and that Miss Haggood's cheeks grew pink and pinker.

Lettie leaned confidentially across the table. "Say, Miss Haggood," she inquired pleasantly, "are you having a pretty good time?"

"Lettie, 'tend to your blots," put in Mrs. Penfield firmly.

"Yes'm." Lettie subsided, but with the vague feeling that her geniality had not been received in the right spirit.

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### EXECUTRIX' NOTICE

Having this day qualified before R. W. Lemmond, Clerk of the Superior Court of Union County, as executrix of the estate of W. H. Phifer, deceased, this is to notify all persons holding claims against said estate to present same duly verified on or before the 20th day of April, 1924, or this notice will be pleaded in bar of their recovery.

All persons indebted to said estate will please make prompt payment. This April 20th, 1923.

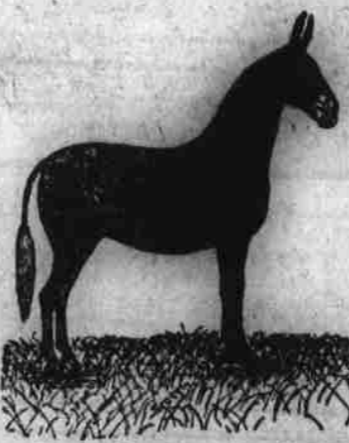
R. JANE PHIFER, Executrix of the Estate of W. H. Phifer, decd. Love & Hawfield, Attys.

### NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATION

Having this day qualified before the Clerk of the Superior court of Union county as administrator of the estate of Charity Lincoln, deceased, late of the county of Union and state of North Carolina, notice is hereby given to all persons holding claims against said estate to present them to the undersigned administrator on or before the 24th day of April, 1924, or this notice will be plead in bar of their right of recovery.

All persons indebted to said estate will please make prompt settlement. This the 20th day of April, 1923.

I. H. BLAIR, Administrator of Charity Lincoln, deceased. John C. Sikes, Atty.



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## HONORS TO MONROE BOYS AT WAKE FOREST COLLEGE

Wake Forest, April 26.—The hearts of the Wake Forest College students and especially the politicians among them were today gladdened by the appearance at last, of the annual college publication, "The Howler" in which is recorded the acts, honors, and decrees of all; and if they could imagine that publication speaking to them, it might speak in those coveted words, "well done thou—". One of the features of this year that has not been heretofore allowed, is the presence of Greek letter fraternities in the college, but which are displayed in all their glory in "The Howler."

The "Howler" is this year dedicated to Dr. H. A. Brown, pastor Emeritus of the Baptist Church system, of Winston-Salem; and describes the thirty six professors and twenty assistant professors. The glory of ninety seniors and the picturesqueness of the hundred and thirty six freshman, are all here recorded against the day of their judgment.

Monroe is this year represented in Wake Forest by Messrs. H.D. Browning, Jr., R. F. Beasley, J. E. Griffin, V. G. Burrell and J. B. Helms. Mr. Browning is one of the most conspicuous as well as one of the busiest men in the student body. Mr. Browning has one of the longest lists of college honors in the student body. The pictures in the Howler show him twelve times and among his honors appear: class football, assistant librarian, member of El Circulo Espanol, Education Club, College Press Association, Manager of Old Gold and Black, secretary of the Euzellian society, vice president of the Senior Class, manager of the McKinnon Club, and president of the Anniversar' exercises last February. Mr. Beasley is President of the College Press Association and one of the editors of Old Gold and Black. Mr. Burrell is a member of the D. V. L. fraternity, assistant manager of the baseball team and on the circulating staff of Old Gold and Black. Mr. Griffin is a member of the Phi Kappa Beta fraternity, and manager of the Junior Baseball team. J. B. Helms is a member of the Kappa

Alpha fraternity, football team and junior baseball team. He served this year as stage manager of the Dramatic Club.

**News From Brief Neighborhood**  
Brief, April 30.—Mr. Dewey Morgan of Alebamarle, who will make a business trip to Canada next month, visited his parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Morgan, last week.

Mr. Rufus Tarlton returned Saturday from Salisbury where he was taking medical treatment.

Mr. W. A. Tarlton of Concord visited here during the week-end.

Notwithstanding the prevalence of the boll weevil, farming has taken on a new impetus through this section, five new tractors having been sold and delivered in Brief alone this spring, making ten in all. At this rate, six more years' buying will have placed a kerosene mule in the hands of every farm owner of the community. Some express themselves as believing that this quota will be reached before a lapse of half the time mentioned above.

Bridger, young son of Mr. and Mrs. B. J. Clontz, is very sick at this writing.

### Helpful Hair Hints

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"I Gotta Scheme," said Lettie.

she agreed. "And the six-for-five candies are longer'n them in boxes, too."

"I gotta scheme," said Lettie. "What say if we go snucks on a card?"

"I'd be glad to."

Thereupon nickels were pooled, and a card was purchased and divided, to the infinite satisfaction of everybody concerned.

The Penfield plan allowed another dime for candy, but it was no easy matter to decide upon the variety. Divisibility had to be considered, as well as bulk. Fortunately, the lower the price, the higher the color, so the latter quality took care of itself. Lettie, pacing up and down before the long counter of heaped-up candies, came to rest before "plain mixed" and "mildly mixed." Undoubtedly they represented the best values. The milder would yield

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