

Before They Met.

The heavy gas chandelier shed its dim light upon the dining-table which the maid-servant had recently cleared of all except the desert. A dark-haired bearded man had poured out a glass of port for his wife, a comely woman in draped silken gown, her sleek hair relieved by bunches of curls at each side. They were a devoted couple, as much in love with each other now as when they were first married some 9 years ago. His eyes were upon his wife's happy, rosy face when there was a rattling of the door handle and the door opened to disclose another, that of an eager little child. Dark-eyed, rosy cheeked, and with her short dark hair artificially curled round her head and a "cockatoo" on top, there was a boyish look not discounted by the girl's embroidered white dress showing frilly knickers beneath. At sight of his eldest child, the father's eyes lit up anew and he held out his arms. His little daughter flew to him and hugged him with all the strength of her small being. But when her father was about to crack some filberts for her, she wanted herself to use the nutcrackers. "You are spoiling the child, Alec," expostulated his wife as he yielded to his daughter's plea, with the almost immediate consequence of a lusty yell as the little girl crushed a finger instead of cracking a nut. But the father soon quieted the sobs of the child by whispering in her ear. "What nonsense are you telling her now?" asked his wife, and then as he rose with her in his arms, she exclaimed: "Really, Alec, you are perfectly crazy with your politics. And what has a girl got to do with them?" For she knew that a favourite performance between them was again to be rehearsed, the child being placed on the "platform" to make a "speech." The father lifted his daughter on to the sideboard, and as she stretched out her right arm, he made her say clearly: "Here's the hand of a true Conservative." He looked with pride upon the sturdy little upstanding figure whose face beamed with delight as she spoke the long word. But all too soon the appearance of the dragon nurse put an end to the proceedings and the beloved "platform" had once more to yield place to the detested bed.

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Dart's father died when she was 7. For a year before his death his tongue had been paralysed. But he had been very fond of his eldest child and only daughter, and was determined that she should start life with sound principles, and with some of his own political fervour. Often he went through with her the little ceremony which was a forecast of years devoted to work for the Conservative party.

Dart was never left in any doubt of her naughtiness in every department of life. Whilst refusing to say her prayers at the proper times, her mother found her in a corner one afternoon, praying: "Please God, make me a boy," a desire that never left her. She chafed at many things. At the short ringlets into which her hair was curled, at the dresses she was doomed to wear, when she craved for the clothes of a miniature Jack Tar worn by a small boy she envied. All her requests and bitter complaints were squashed. An all too proper dressmaker came to the house, and in time produced an ill-cut blouse of red cotton with

blue spots, with a worse cut collar of quite the wrong shape, rounded off with a vest of the same material instead of the proper white singlet. The travesty was topped by a truly dreadful hat in red and white straw, with a jam-pot crown. Dart felt outraged by the frightful outfit and howled her fury.

Then, when there was a meadow, an orchard and a wood, all of their own, to play in, Dart did resent being dragged by the dragon nurse at the tail of a baby brother's perambulator. The hatred of that dusty - or muddy - main road, the unrelieved dullness of chalk soil and absence of water, never again left the child.

How different it was in Scotland where she was taken yearly. There was great excitement in staying with a granduncle, for his old house, with an exciting gun-room and stuffed animals, was in a glen. All over it grew lovely ferns, lacking at home like everything else of natural interest to Dart, and through it coursed a wonderful burn crossed by a rustic bridge. But the troublesome child had to be warned of the horror lurking in the water. No less a fiend than the devil himself had his abode in a deep, dark pool on one side of the bridge. Did the bad child fall into it, so surely would Satan rise up to clutch hold of her, and drag her down to her doom in the bottomless pit. But instead of frightening, this story fascinated Dart. How very exciting, if rather fearful, it would be to see Satan, of whom she had heard so much! Suppose she got a big stone and dropped it over the bridge into the pool? Perhaps Satan would be deceived into thinking it was she? Then, when he came up to seize his long-expected prey, she would see exactly what he looked like. When it came to the point, considerable courage was required, but Dart's mind was firmly made up. She picked out the biggest stone she could carry and sturdily struggled with it on to the bridge. A bold push, and over the stone went. Then she held tightly to the rail of the bridge. But nothing happened. The stone made a plop and a splash in the water and soon it was all smooth again.

As soon as Dart found opportunities of getting hold of delectable sharp-edged implements, notably a scythe, she began to cut herself. This continued despite her horror of seeing blood flow and the inevitable punishment for her actions. Accidents, indeed, became a feature of her life, limbs damaged by dislocation, sprains, and bruises due to falls in all sorts of circumstances, replaced those of a gory nature.

At home in England, Dart escaping unnoticed one fine day, observed some men working outside the gate. This seemed to promise a new interest in life, and the fact that the dragon nurse had dared her to leave the grounds, was a matter of no moment to her, so she promptly climbed over the gate, instead of tamely opening it and walking through. The men, she found, were mending the road after it had been taken up to lay pipes. Never shy, Dart had many questions to ask, and the men amused at "little Missie's" interest, laid a good foundation in her mind about "bottoming" and "binding," and other arts of road-mending. Unfortunately for her, Dart was so deeply absorbed in these proceedings

that she was, literally, "caught out," and had to suffer in consequence, though she thought the "deceitful" deed well worth the punishment with which it was inevitably visited.

A very large family of boys and girls lived next door to Dart's home. The youngest girl was of the same age as herself. But what sort of a companion for her was a stupid little girl, a "cry-baby," who played happily with dolls? No, two of the brothers, double Dart's age, were her choice of congenial friends, and they, attracted by her vivacity and unafraidness, good-naturedly allowed her to attach herself to them. So together they climbed trees, or went rat-hunting; or made a raft to float on a pool in a gravel-pit, the boys gallantly fishing her out when she fell in, and building a fire on the spot to dry her clothes. They taught her, too, how to use her fists, and sportively boxed with her. But when she enviously watched them wrestling together and besought them to "Let me, too," they would tell her playfully that they would tackle her when she reached their height. No decent boy took on anyone littler than himself.

Once, however, when Dart was at her granduncle's, and had been asked out to tea next door, two strange boy visitors, rather bigger than herself, immediately arrested her attention. They were dressed immaculately as Jack tars in white drill. This was too much for the envious Dart. Marching up to them, she challenged them to wrestle with her, and before they could recover from their astonishment, she fell upon each in turn, and soon was seated triumphantly upon the prostrate bodies of both. The numerous girls of the family, for whom Dart had a proper contempt as mere molly-coddles, ran away weeping to their mother, who, thoroughly frightened, at once sent for Dart's nurse to deal with her fearsome charge. A good whipping (which Dart always bore hardily) and a day confined to bed with bread and water for meals, was the issue of this unseemly exploit.

The elements of education were early begun in England, but a too gentle and altogether too "ladylike" a governess proved a complete failure. It was like expecting a dove to deal with a hawk. So when living in Scotland for a time, Dart was sent to school and with a stern and awe-inspiring mistress, she soon learnt to regard the with respect, and in consequence, all other lessons as well.

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When Althea was 2½, she had lost both her parents, and she and two elder surviving sisters were left in the guardianship of two sisters who together had founded a delightful girls' school. Miss Annie and Miss Jenny were tall and aristocratic in bearing: they were devout Church women of the strict Tractarian type, and in that tradition the school acquired its special atmosphere and dignity. Miss Annie particularly commanded the affection and admiration, blended with awe, of her successive pupils, and to her exclusively at this time Althea's love was given.

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In a comfortable parlour, a little girl with long straight hair and pale face, lay quietly on the sofa, a rug covering her. The door opened, and in came a very thin lady, tall and erect, with pretty grey hair becomingly dressed. At sight of her, the little girl wanly smiled and raised herself to say: "Miss Annie, I can quite well get up now. I ought to -" Miss Annie, with gentle hand pressing her back on the cushion behind her head, cut her short. "That is ridiculous. You are not fit to attempt anything to-day." "But this is the third week running I have missed my music lessons and -" "Never mind," interjected Miss Annie soothingly and kindly, though without relenting, "your health is of far greater importance than any lesson." Althea, however, who thought differently, was importunate, and pleaded: "If I am never allowed to make an effort, I shall never learn anything." "Oh yes, you will," said Miss Annie consolingly, and Althea having struggled more than usual to resist the imposition of Miss Annie's will, of necessity gave way. Some days later Althea was in bed with one of those sick headaches, of unusual frequency and intensity, which remained with her until within ten years of her death. On these occasions Miss Annie used to come in to see her the first thing in the morning. But this time, instead of her beloved guardian, the elder of Althea's two sisters, Frances, appeared, and asked: "How are you feeling now?" Barely recovered from the dreadful sickness which prostrated her for three or four days, she answered, "Better thank you," then added, "but where is Miss Annie?" "She is not feeling very well this morning, so I persuaded her to stay in bed." Althea, at once struggled to sit up, murmuring "I must go and look after her." Her sister's hand restrained her. "Don't be such an idiot! Why, you can hardly lift your head. Do you really think you are the only one who can look after Miss Annie?" A frown gathered on Althea's face. "How rude you are! I won't have you dictate to me -" "Althea, don't be a fool. You should know by this time what Miss Annie will say to you if you try to go to her." "Well, I'm going to try," and so saying, Althea made an attempt to get out of bed. But it was beyond her powers: she could only sink back on the pillows, and her sister grimly replaced the bed-clothes over her. "I believe you would sell your soul for Miss Annie," was her parting remark as she left the room, not, however, before promising to tell the beloved guardian that Althea, would have got up to look after her but for her sister's bullying.

The recurrence of these headaches, which Althea never ceased to dread, she could never foretell, and the many specialists and doctors consulted never did her the slightest good. But though she suffered so acutely from these devastating headaches, never once, from first to last, did the pain draw from her any murmur or complaint. When she was able to speak at all during these times, to gratitude alone did she ever give expression; and deplored the unpleasant nature of her affliction for those who so gladly waited on her.

Althea spoke of herself to Dart as having been a disagreeable child, but a schoolfellow who knew her when she was 8, denied this. She said that she herself, also not strong, was very friendly with Althea, and that they never had a quarrel. She was dreamy, and the two used to

play imaginary games together.

Even at that early age Althea was very fond of painting and of music, and she used to enjoy the classes of Mrs. Wordsworth a very celebrated dancing mistress who subsequently taught Royal children. Later it was discovered that Dart also had been taught by the same celebrity.

Another schoolfellow wrote affectionately of "dear Althea," of her remembrance of her playing the hymns at the school prayers, and of her neat performances in the school gymnasium. Althea herself told Dart of a favourite game they used to play of Royalists against Round-heads, and under what protest most girls took the part of the latter. But such an impression did Althea's very strong (and life-long) Royalist principles make upon her fellows, that they would never allow her to do violence to them even in play. King Charles the Martyr was the hero of the school, particularly of Althea. In contrast to this, Dart, at her successive schools was alone in her championship of him, always on the alert, and ready to rain hard blows - not always metaphorically - on any who dared to disparage the "white King."

Acting had great attractions for Althea, and she would happily recount a school performance of the "Midsummer's Night's Dream," in which she had been unanimously chosen to play Titania. Althea, too, had designed all the costumes for the play, produced by Miss Fogarty, and had taken a considerable part in making them with the other girls at school. Throughout her life, indeed, she was an exquisite needle-woman.

From the earliest days, Althea and her sisters were devoted to the interests of animals, and opposed to vivisection. It was a great joy when one of the specialists to whom she was taken about her headaches said she should never eat meat. She and one sister, Alice, had always felt that it was inconsistent with their love for animals to eat any food or to wear anything involving their killing outdoor. Shoes were the enforced exception. They found there was then no substitute for leather, but assuming a certain number of animals came to a natural end, they always hoped the shoes they wore came from the hides of these particular animals! For they both held that animals had as much right to their lives as human beings, and therefore when Althea became a vegetarian on doctor's orders, Alice was able to join her. Althea was always very careful to make it clear that, as far as she was concerned, doctor's orders were the pretext, and not the reason, for her renouncing flesh of every kind, to which she consistently added fish. But neither sister ever became a teetotaller, like so many vegetarians. They held total abstinence to be a "chilly virtue" which they had no reason to cultivate.

No one ever succeeded in interesting Althea in her health: indeed, she had a healthy contempt for those whose health was their obsession.

It is remarkable that, despite the constant interruptions of ill-

health, Althea was able to acquire so much knowledge both at school and later. She had a special talent for languages. French, like German, naturally came in the ordinary course of her education, but altho' she once enjoyed a holiday in France, she disliked both the French people and their language, which she therefore dropped. But she liked German, and by reading many German books, never lost her knowledge. After her school days, she attended classes given by a learned little curate, for the study of Hebrew and Greek, the latter of which was her favourite language. At the end of her life, she tackled Gaelic, and made remarkable progress in that difficult tongue. Though she always disclaimed anything but a smattering of Hebrew and Greek, she could read the O.T. in the one and the N.T. in the other.

The little curate fell in love with Althea, but she had small interest in the opposite sex, and for herself was repelled by the idea of marriage.

The art training Althea received at school was continued first at the local School of Art, and then at S. Kensington where she studied under at least one well-known artist. She was very skilled alike with pencil, brush, pastels, and pen, for besides painting, she printed and illuminated beautifully, and later also did black and white sketches for reproduction by wood blocks.

From Miss Fogarty she received her first commission to sketch for her a series of historical costumes, and this she accomplished with the minute care which distinguished everything she did. The work was exact in historical accuracy and finished in detail and execution.

Althea kept a large M.S. book in which she copied from original monuments and brasses in cathedrals and churches and armour in the Tower of London, such details of dress, heraldry and armoury as interested her. The book is a treasury of exquisite drawing and methodical order. With characteristic neatness of dress, orderly mind and habits, and a fastidious cleanliness, she scorned the dirty and slovenly practices supposed to show genius in certain art circles. Had anyone had the freedom of entry into Althea's exclusive studio, at no time would it have been found in a state of chaos, or even of litter, nor the artist begrimed, either in person or clothing, with the medium she was using.

Before Althea began to attend University Extension Lectures, which introduced her to the study of Egyptology and Astronomy, she had pursued the subject of heraldry, which always exercised over her the greatest fascination. She felt it was well suited to her as, being a closed subject, it was possible to learn all there was about it. Of indoor recreations, outside dancing on her schooldays and theatre-going, a great enjoyment to the end of her life, chess was the only game that interested her. For the acting of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, Althea had a wholehearted enthusiasm. She would never hear any detraction of the former's art as "stagey," and for her Ellen Terry was, and remained, the supreme actress.

With a natural as well as an educated taste for music, Althea had

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a very ear, and because of this, she shrank from playing the piano even in the family circle in case she made any mistake. But she always enjoyed listening to good music, tho' her opportunities of doing so progressively decreased.

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