Leslie Eliza

Stories for Helen

Eliza Leslie
Stories for Helen

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23158195
Stories for Helen:

Содержание

Leslie Eliza
Stories for Helen

THE TELL-TALE

"How all occasions do inform against me!"

Shakspeare.

ROSAMOND EVERING was one of those indiscreet mischievous girls who are in the daily practice of repeating every thing they see and hear; particularly all the unpleasant remarks, and unfavourable opinions that happen to be unguardedly expressed in their presence. She did not content herself with relating only as much as she actually saw and heard; but (as is always the case with tell-tales) she dealt greatly in exaggeration, and her stories never failed to exceed the reality in all their worst points.

This unamiable and dangerous propensity of their daughter, gave great pain to Mr. and Mrs. Evering, who tried in vain to correct it. They represented to her that as parents cannot be *constantly* on their guard in presence of their own family, and that as grown persons do not *always* remember or observe when children are in the room, many things are inadvertently

said, which, though of little consequence as long as they remain unknown, may be of great and unfortunate importance if disclosed and exaggerated. And as children are incapable of forming an accurate judgment as to what may be told with safety, or what ought to be kept secret, their wisest and most proper course is to repeat no remarks and to relate no conversations whatever; but more particularly those which they may chance to hear from persons older than themselves.

But neither reproof nor punishment seemed to make any lasting impression on Rosamond Evering; and scarce a day passed that she did not exhibit some vexatious specimen of her besetting sin. A few instances will suffice.

Mrs. Evering had a very excellent cook, a black woman, that had lived with her more than six years, and whom she considered an invaluable servant. One morning, when Venus (for that was her name) had just left the parlour, after receiving her orders for dinner, Mr. Evering remarked, in a low voice, to his lady, "Certainly, the name of Venus was never so unsuitably bestowed as on this poor woman. I have rarely seen a negro whose face had a greater resemblance to that of a baboon." In this remark Mrs. Evering acquiesced.

Rosamond was at this time sitting in a corner, looking over her lessons. Just before she went to school, her mother thought of a change in the preparations for dinner, and not wishing to give the old cook the trouble of coming up from the kitchen a second time, she desired Rosamond to go down and tell Venus

she would have the turkey boiled rather than roasted. Rosamond went down and delivered the message; but fixing her eyes on the cook's face, she thought she had never seen Venus look so ugly, and she said to her, "Venus, my father thinks you are the ugliest negro he ever saw (*even for a negro*) and he says your face is just like a monkey's, only worse." Having made this agreeable communication, Rosamond went out of the kitchen and departed for school, leaving Venus speechless with anger and astonishment; for though in other respects a very good woman, she was extremely vain, and had always considered herself among the handsomest of her race.

As soon as Venus found herself able to speak, she went into the parlour with her eyes flashing fire, and told Mrs. Evering that she must provide herself with another cook, as she was determined to leave her that very day. Mrs. Evering with much surprise inquired the reason, and Venus replied, that "she would not live in any house where she was called an ugly neger, the ugliest even of all negers, and likened to a brute beast."

Mrs. Evering, who had forgotten her husband's remark, asked the cook what she meant; and Venus explained by repeating all that Rosamond had told her. Mrs. Evering endeavoured to pacify her, but in vain. Ignorant people when once offended are very difficult to appease, and Venus had been hurt on the tenderest point. She would listen to nothing that Mrs. Evering could urge to induce her to stay; but exclaimed in a high passion, "I never was called a neger before. I am not a neger but a coloured woman. I

was born and raised on a great plantation in Virginny where there was hundreds of slaves, all among the Randolphs and sich like quality, and nobody never called me a neger. And now when I'm free, and come here to Philadelphy where nobody has no servants without they hires them, lo! and behold, I'm called a neger, and an ugly neger too, and a neger-monkey besides. No, no, I'll not stay; and Nancy the chambermaid may do the cooking till you get somebody else. And a pretty way she'll do it in. I'm glad I shan't be here to eat Nancy's cooking. I never know'd any *white trash* that could cook; much less Irish."

Finally, Mrs. Evering was obliged to give Venus her wages and let here go at once, as she protested "she would never eat another meal's victuals in the house."

When Rosamond came from school, her mother reprimanded her severely; and when her father heard of the mischief she had caused, he would not permit her to accompany the family to a concert that evening, as she had been promised the day before.

After the departure of Venus, it was a long time before Mrs. Evering could suit herself with a cook. Several were tried in succession but none were good; and to Rosamond's great regret, they were never able to get a woman whose skill in making pies, and puddings, and cakes, bore any comparison to that of Venus.

Still this lesson did not cure her fault; she still told tales, and still suffered in consequence.

One day, Mrs. Renwick, a lady who lived next door, sent a message to Mrs. Evering, requesting that she would lend her a pot

of red currant jelly, as she was quite out of that article, of which she shortly intended making a supply; and as Mr. Renwick had invited some company to dinner, some jelly would be wanted to eat with the canvass-back ducks.

Mrs. Evering lent her a pot, and as soon as currants were in the market, Mrs. Renwick sent her in return some jelly of her own making. It was not nice, and Mrs. Evering observed to her sister, Mrs. Norwood, who happened to be present: "I do not think Mrs. Renwick has been very successful with her jelly. It is so thin it is almost liquid, and so dark that it looks as if made of black currants. I suspect she has boiled it too long, and has not put in sugar enough."

Next day as they were coming from school together, Mrs. Renwick's little daughter, Marianne, said to Rosamond, "My mother made some currant jelly on Tuesday, and yesterday when it was cold, she gave me a whole saucer-full to eat with my slice of bread, at twelve o'clock."

"She might well give you a whole saucer-full," replied Rosamond, "for I do not think it was worth saving for any better purpose. She sent in a pot to my mother, in return for some she had borrowed of her. Now *my* mother's jelly is always so firm that you might cut it with a knife, and so bright and sparkling that it dazzles your eyes. I heard her tell my aunt Norwood, that Mrs. Renwick's jelly was the worst she had ever seen, that it was as thin and sour as plain currant juice, and dark and dirty-looking beside."

Marianne Renwick was much displeased at the disrespectful manner in which her mother's jelly had been spoken of. She let go Rosamond's arm, and turning up another street, walked home by herself, swelling with resentment, and told her mother all that had passed.

Mrs. Renwick was a lady very easily offended; and she always signified her anger as soon as she felt it. She immediately sent to a confectioner's for a pot of the very best red currant jelly, and had it carried into Mrs. Evering; accompanied by a note implying "that she regretted to hear that her jelly had not been so fortunate as to meet the approbation of so competent a judge of sweetmeats; but that, as she would be sorry if Mrs. Evering should lose any thing by it, she had sent her a pot made by one of the very first confectioners in the city; and she hoped it would be found an ample equivalent for that she had most unhappily borrowed."

Rosamond was in the parlour when the note and the pot of jelly arrived, and she coloured and looked so confused, that her mother immediately guessed she had been the cause of Mrs. Renwick's having taken offence. Reproof had no effect on Rosamond except for a moment; but that she might frequently be reminded of her fault, she was not allowed to taste currant jelly till the next summer. Mrs. Renwick, however, remained implacable; and could never be prevailed on to visit Mrs. Evering again.

Mr. Evering had an aunt, the widow of a western merchant

who had made a large fortune in business. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Marbury had removed to Philadelphia, which was her native place; and, being very plain in her habits and ideas, she had bought a small neat house in a retired street, where she kept but two servants, and expended more money in presents to her relations, than in any superfluities for herself. She generally went to a place of worship in her own neighbourhood; but hearing that a very celebrated minister from Boston was to preach one Sunday in the church to which her nephew's family belonged, she sent a message to Mr. Evering requesting that he would call for her with his carriage and give her a seat in his pew, that she might have an opportunity of hearing this distinguished stranger. Mr. and Mrs. Evering were both out when the message arrived, so that no answer could be sent till their return; which was not till evening.

It was dusk, and the lamps not being yet lighted, they did not perceive that Rosamond was lying on an ottoman in one of the recesses, or they would not have spoken as they did while she was present.

"I am very sorry," said Mrs. Evering, "that Mrs. Marbury has fixed on to-morrow for going to church with us, for I intended asking Miss Leeson, who will be delighted to have an opportunity of hearing this celebrated preacher; and his discourse, however excellent, will be lost on aunt Marbury, who always falls asleep soon after she has heard the text, that being all she ever remembers of a sermon. So that in reality, one preacher

is the same to her as another; though she goes regularly to church twice a-day, and never could be convinced that she sleeps half the time. And then she is unfortunately so fat, and takes up so much room in the pew."

"My dear," said Mr. Evering, "we must show Mrs. Marbury as much kindness and civility as we possibly can, for she is a most excellent woman, is very liberal to us now, and at her death will undoubtedly leave us the greatest part of her large property. Even if we had no personal regard for the good old lady, it would be very impolitic in us to offend her."

When the room was lighted, Mr. and Mrs. Evering saw Rosamond on the ottoman, and felt so much uneasiness at her having heard their conversation, that they thought it best to caution her against repeating it. "Oh!" exclaimed Rosamond, "do you think I would be so wicked as to tell aunt Marbury what you have just been saying about her?"

"You have often," said Mrs. Evering, "told things almost as improper to be repeated."

"But never with any bad intention," replied Rosamond, "I am sure my feelings are always good."

"I know not," said her father, "how it is possible that people with good feelings and good intentions can take pleasure in repeating whatever they hear to a person's disadvantage, and above all to the very object of the unfavourable remarks. Beside the cruelty of causing them poignant and unnecessary pain, and wounding their self-love, there is the wickedness of embroiling

them with their friends; or at least destroying their confidence, and imbittering their hearts. And all these consequences have frequently ensued from the tattling of a tell-tale child."

The next morning was Saturday; and the servants being all very busy, Mrs. Evering desired Rosamond to stop, as she returned from taking her music-lesson, and inform her aunt Marbury that they would be happy to accommodate her with a seat in their pew on Sunday morning; and that they would call for her in the carriage, as she had requested.

"Now, Rosamond," said Mrs. Evering, "can I trust you? Will you, for once, be discreet, and refrain from repeating to your aunt Marbury, what you unluckily overheard last evening?"

"O! indeed, dear mother," replied Rosamond, "bad as you think me, I am not quite wicked enough for that."

"But I fear the force of habit," said Mrs. Evering. "I believe I had better send Peter with the message."

"No," answered Rosamond, "I am anxious to retrieve my character. Rely on me this once; and you will see how prudent and honourable I can be."

On her way home from her music-lesson, Rosamond stopped at her aunt's, and delivered the message, exactly as it had been given to her.

While Rosamond was eating a piece of the nice plum-cake that her aunt always kept in the house for the gratification of her young visitors, Mrs. Marbury said to her, "This weather is quite too warm for the season; should it continue, it will be very

oppressive in church to-morrow."

"No doubt," answered Rosamond, "and most probably *our* church will be crowded in every part. I wonder, aunt, that you are anxious to go, as you certainly *must* be, when you sent so long beforehand to engage a seat in our pew."

"In truth," returned Mrs. Marbury, "I am willing to suffer some inconvenience from the heat, for the sake of hearing this great preacher."

"But, aunt," said Rosamond, "if you get sleepy, you will not hear him after all."

"O!" replied Mrs. Marbury, "I am never sleepy in church. I am always so attentive that I never feel in the least drowsy."

"O! indeed, aunt, I have often seen you asleep in church," exclaimed Rosamond.

"Impossible, Rosamond, impossible," cried Mrs. Marbury. "You are entirely mistaken. It must have been merely your own imagination."

"Why, dear aunt," said Rosamond, "my father and mother, as well as myself, have all seen you asleep in church. If it was not true, the whole family could not imagine it. It was but last evening, I heard my mother say, that she wished you had not taken a notion to go to church with us on Sunday, as it would prevent her from inviting Miss Leeson, whom she likes far better than you. She said, beside, that fat people take up so much room, that they are always encumbrances every where; and that there was no use at all in your going to church, as you slept soundly all

the time you were there, and even breathed so hard as to disturb the congregation."

"And what did your father say to all this?" asked Mrs. Marbury, turning very pale, and looking much shocked and mortified.

"My father," answered Rosamond, "said that, on account of your money, we must endure you, and all the inconveniences belonging to you; for if you were kept in good humour, he had no doubt of your leaving him all your property when you die."

Mrs. Marbury looked aghast. She burst into tears, and Rosamond, finding that she had gone quite too far, vainly attempted to pacify her.

"You may go home, child," exclaimed Mrs. Marbury, sobbing with anger, "you may go home, and tell your father and mother that I shall not trouble them with my company at church or any where else; and when I die, I shall leave my money to the hospital or to some other institution. How have I been deceived! But I shall take care in future not to bestow my affection on those that have any expectations from me."

Rosamond, now very much frightened, declared that she could not take such a message to her parents; and begged her aunt to screen her from their displeasure, by not informing them of the communication she had so indiscreetly made.

Her alarm and agitation were so great, that Mrs. Marbury consented, out of pity, not to betray her to her father and mother; and to excuse herself from going to church with them (which she

declared she could never do again) by alleging the heat of the weather, and the probable crowd.

"And now, Rosamond," said her aunt Marbury, "do not think that I feel at all obliged to you for having opened my eyes as to the manner in which your parents really regard me. Their behaviour to me, as far as I could judge for myself, has always been exactly what I wished it; and if their kindness was not sincere, I still thought it so, and was happy in being deceived. And now, after what you have told me, how can I again think of them as I have hitherto done? You have acted basely towards them in repeating their private conversation, and cruelly to your kind aunt, in giving her unnecessary pain and mortification. You have caused much mischief; and who has been the gainer? Not yourself certainly. You have lost my good opinion, for I can never like a tell-tale. I had heard something of your being addicted to this vice; but till now I could not believe it. I shall not betray you to your parents, though you have so shamefully betrayed *them* to *me*. But you may rely on it, that sooner or later the discovery will be made, to your utter shame and confusion. Now you may go home, with the assurance that you can no longer be a welcome visitor at my house."

Rosamond departed, overwhelmed with compunction; and in the resolution (which she had so often made and so often broken) never again to be guilty of a similar fault. She gave her aunt's message to her parents, and Miss Leeson was invited to accompany them next day to church.

Two days after, Mrs. Evering went to visit Mrs. Marbury, and to her great surprise heard from the servants that she had left town with some western friends who were returning home; and that she purposed being absent from Philadelphia five or six months; dividing her time among various places on the other side of the Alleghanies, and probably extending her tour to Louisiana, where she owned some land.

Her going away so suddenly without apprising them of her intention, was totally inexplicable to Mr. and Mrs. Evering; and they justly concluded that she must have taken some offence. Rosamond well knew the cause, and rightly supposed that her aunt finding herself unable to meet the family with her former feelings towards them, had thought it best to avoid seeing them for a very long time.

The confusion visible in Rosamond's face and manner when Mrs. Marbury was spoken of, aroused the suspicions of her father and mother: and on their questioning her closely, she confessed, with many tears, that she had really informed her aunt of what had passed on the subject of her accompanying them to church. But as tell-tales have very little candour where themselves are concerned, and as tale-telling always leads to lying, she steadily denied that she had been guilty of the slightest exaggeration in her report to Mrs. Marbury; protesting that she had told her nothing but the simple truth.

From that time, Rosamond was not allowed to visit or call at any house unaccompanied by her mother, who was almost

afraid to trust her out of her sight. Her parents avoided discussing any thing of the least consequence in *her* presence; always remembering to send her out of the room. This mode of treatment very much mortified her; but she could not help acknowledging that she deserved it.

Her father received no intelligence from Mrs. Marbury. He and Mrs. Evering both wrote to her at different times, endeavouring to mollify her displeasure; but not knowing exactly where she was, the letters were not directed to the right places, and did not reach her.

For a long time Rosamond was so unusually discreet, that her parents began to hope that her odious fault was entirely cured.

One day, her chamber having been washed in the afternoon, it was found too damp for her to sleep in with safety to her health; and her mother told her that she must, that night, occupy the room adjoining hers. This room, which was but seldom used, was separated from Mrs. Evering's apartment by a very thin partition; and communicated with it by a door which was almost always kept closed; the bed in each of these chambers being placed against it.

Rosamond, having been awakened in the night by the fighting of some cats in the yard, heard her father and mother in earnest conversation. They had totally forgotten her vicinity to them; and as tell-tales are never wanting in curiosity, she sat up in her bed and applying her ear to the key-hole of the door, she distinctly heard every word they said, though they were speaking in a low

voice.

She was soon able to comprehend the subject of their conversation. Mr. Evering was lamenting that the failure of a friend for whom he had endorsed to a large amount, had brought him into unexpected difficulties; but he hoped that he would be able to go on till the sums due to him by some western merchants should arrive.

Next evening, Rosamond was permitted to go to a juvenile cotillon-party, held once a fortnight, at the ball-room of her dancing-master. To this place her mother always accompanied her; and while Mrs. Evering was sitting in conversation with some ladies, a boy named George Granby, who was frequently the partner of Rosamond at these balls, came up and asked her to dance. They were obliged to go to the farthest end of the room before they could get places in a cotillon; and while they were waiting for the music to begin, George, who thought Rosamond a very pretty girl, asked her if she would also be his partner in the country-dance. She replied that Henry Harford had engaged her, at the last ball, for this country-dance.

"Oh!" replied George Granby, "Henry Harford will not be here to-night; his father failed yesterday."

"True," said Rosamond, "I wonder I should have forgotten Mr. Harford's failure, when my father lost so much by him. But when the fathers fail, must the children stay away from balls?"

"Certainly," replied George, "it would be considered very improper for the family to be seen in any place of amusement

when its head is in so much trouble, and when they have lost all they possessed."

"O then," exclaimed Rosamond, "I hope *my* father will not fail till the cotillon-parties are over for the season. There are but two more, and I should be very sorry to give them up. I hope he will be able to go on, at least till after that time. How sorry I shall be when he *does* fail."

"I believe you," said George; "but what makes you talk about your father's failing? I thought he was considered safe enough."

"Ah! you know but little about it," answered Rosamond. "I heard him tell my mother last night, that he was in hourly dread of failing, in consequence of the great losses by Mr. Harford, and of his own business having gone on badly for a long time. However, say nothing about it, for such things ought not to be told."

"They ought not, indeed," said the boy.

As soon as George Granby went home, he repeated what he had heard from Rosamond, to his father, who was one of Mr. Evering's creditors. The consequence was, that Mr. Granby and all the principal creditors took immediate measures to secure themselves; and Mr. Evering (who could have gone on till he got through his difficulties, had he been allowed time, and had the state of his affairs remained unsuspected,) became a bankrupt through the worse than indiscretion of his daughter. Had Mrs. Marbury been in town, or where he could have had speedy communication with her, he doubted not that she would have lent him assistance to ward off the impending blow. But she had gone

away in a fit of displeasure, occasioned, also, by the tattling of Rosamond.

Mr. Granby, who was the chief creditor and a man of contracted feelings and great severity, showed no liberality on the occasion; and proceeded to the utmost extremity that the law would warrant. Every article of Mr. Evering's property was taken; and indeed, since it had come to this, his principles would not allow him to reserve any thing whatever from his creditors.

The scene that ensued in the Evering family, on the day following the ball, can better be imagined than described. Mr. Granby had at once informed Mr. Evering of the source from whence he had derived his information with respect to the posture of his affairs; and when Rosamond found this new and terrible proof of the fatal effects of her predominant vice, she went into an hysteric fit, and was so ill all night, that her parents, in addition to their other troubles, had to fear for the life of their daughter. The sufferings of her mind brought on a fever; and it was more than a week before she was able to leave her bed.

Her father and mother kindly forgave her, and avoided all reference to her fault. But she could not forgive herself, and on the day that they left their handsome residence in one of the principal streets, and removed to a small mean-looking house in the suburbs, her agony was more than words can express. All their furniture was sold at auction, even Rosamond's piano, and her mother's work-table. Their most expensive articles of clothing were put away, as in their present circumstances it

would be improper to wear them. The house they now inhabited, contained only one little parlour with a kitchen back of it, and three small rooms upstairs. Their furniture was limited to what was barely useful, and of the cheapest kind. Their table was as plain as possible; and their only servant a very young half-grown girl.

This sad change in their way of living, added to the stings of self-reproach, almost broke Rosamond's heart; and her pride was much shocked when she found that her father had applied for the situation of clerk in a counting-house, as a means of supporting his family till something better should offer.

At length Mrs. Marbury returned; having hurried back to Philadelphia as soon as the intelligence of her nephew's failure had reached her. How did she blame herself for having taken such serious offence at what now appeared to her almost too trifling to remember. All her former regard for the Evering family returned. She sought them immediately in their humble retreat, and offered Mr. Evering her assistance to the utmost farthing she could command.

To conclude, Mr. Evering's affairs were again put in train. He resumed his business; and a few years restored him to his former situation.

This sad, but salutary lesson produced a lasting effect on Rosamond; and from that time, she kept so strict a watch over her ruling passion, that she succeeded in entirely eradicating it. She grew up a discreet and amiable girl; and no one who knew

her in after years, could have believed that till the age of fourteen she had been an incorrigible tell-tale.

THE BOARDING-SCHOOL FEAST

"They hear a voice in every wind,
And snatch a fearful joy."

Gray.

IT is a very common subject of complaint with boarding-school children (and there is often sufficient foundation for it) that they are too much restricted in their food, and that their diet is not only inferior in quality to what it ought to be, but frequently deficient in quantity also. There was certainly, however, no cause for any dissatisfaction of this sort at Mrs. Middleton's boarding-school, in Philadelphia. The table was in every respect excellent; and a basket of bread or biscuit, and sometimes of gingerbread, was handed round to all the pupils, every morning at eleven o'clock. Mrs. Middleton's young ladies were strangers to the common boarding-school practice of coaxing or bribing the servants to procure them cakes and tarts from the confectioners; for the table was sufficiently supplied with those articles, made in such a manner as to be agreeable to the taste without endangering the health; and they were every day allowed some sort of fruit, of the best quality the market could furnish.

At last, a young lady named Henrietta Harwood became a member of Mrs. Middleton's seminary. Miss Harwood had

been for several years a pupil of one of those too numerous establishments, where the comfort of the children is sacrificed to the vanity of a governess, who rests her claims to encouragement principally on the merits of elegantly furnished parlours, an expensive style of dress, frequent evening parties, and occasional balls. In schools where outward show is the leading principle, the internal economy is generally conducted on the most parsimonious plan, and while the masters (who attend only at certain hours) are such as are considered the most fashionable, the female teachers that live in the house, are too often vulgar girls obtained at a low salary, and who frequently are in league with the elder pupils in ridiculing and plotting against the governess.

Most of the faults and follies that were likely to be acquired at a show-boarding-school, Henrietta Harwood brought with her to the excellent and well-conducted establishment of Mrs. Middleton: but she had some redeeming qualities that made her rather a favourite with her new companions, and disposed her governess to hope that all would come right at last.

One evening, the elder young ladies were sitting very comfortably at their different occupations, round the table in the front school-room. The window-shutters were closed, a good fire was burning in the stove, and Mrs. Middleton had just sent them a basket of apples, according to her custom in the winter evenings. After finishing a very fine one, Henrietta Harwood exclaimed – "Well – I wonder at myself for eating these apples!"

Miss Brownlow. Why, I am sure they are the very best Newtown pippins.

Henrietta. That is true, Brownie: but at Madame Disette's we had something better of evenings than mere apples.

Miss Brownlow. What had you?

Henrietta. We had sometimes cheesecakes, and sometimes tarts; with very frequently pound-cake and jumbles; and sometimes we had even little mince-pies, and oyster-patties.

Miss Wilcox. O, delicious! What an excellent governess! How could you ever consent to leave her? I thought Mrs. Middleton allowed us a great many good things; but she does not send us cheesecakes and tarts of an evening.

Henrietta. O, do not mistake! We might have gone without them all our lives, before Madame Disette would have sent us any thing of the sort. She did not even allow us apples of an evening, or a piece of bread between breakfast and dinner. Why, one summer evening, she bought at the door some common ice-cream, of a black man that was carrying it through the streets in a tin pot; and when we thought that, *for once*, she had certainly treated us, she charged the ice-cream in our quarter-bills. No, no, – we got nothing from *her*, but stale bread; bad butter; sloppy tea; coffee without taste or colour; skinny meat, half-cooked one day, cold the next, and hashed or rather coddled the third. Then, for a dessert, we were regaled with sour knotty apples in the winter, worm-eaten cherries in the summer, and dry squashy pears in the autumn; and once a week we had boiled rice, or

baked bread and milk, by way of pudding. Though after the scholars had eaten their allowance, and made their curtsies and gone up to the school-room, she always had something nice brought for herself, and her sister, and niece: and of which poor Benson, the under teacher, was never invited to partake.

Miss Wilcox. But how did you get such nice things in the evening?

Henrietta. We bought them, to be sure: bought them with our own money. That was the only way. When the little girls had all gone to bed, and Madame Disette, and Madame Trompeur, and Mademoiselle Mensonge were engaged in the parlour with their company, we all (that is, the first class) subscribed something; and we commissioned the chambermaid to bring us whatever we wanted from the confectioner's. O, what delightful feasts we had!

Miss Thomson. Did Madame Disette never find you out?

Henrietta. O, no! – we laid our plans too cunningly. And Benson, the teacher, was a good creature, and always joined our party; so we knew she would not tell.

Miss Scott. I am sure we never could prevail on our teacher, Miss Loxley, to be concerned in such things. *She* would think it so very improper.

Henrietta. Well, we must take an opportunity when Miss Loxley is not at home. Mrs. Middleton permits her to go out whenever she requests it. She does not keep her so closely confined as Madame Disette did poor Benson.

Miss Scott. Mrs. Middleton has so much reliance on her elder

pupils, that she is not afraid to trust us sometimes without Miss Loxley. And we, certainly, have never yet abused her confidence.

Henrietta. O, you are undoubtedly a most exemplary set! But you never had one like *me* among you. I shall soon put a little spirit into you all, and get you out of this strict-propriety sort of way. I do not despair even of my friend Isabella Caldwell, the good girl of the school.

Isabella. Our way is a very satisfactory one. It is impossible for boarding-school girls to be happier than we are. Our minds are not exhausted with long and difficult lessons, and with studies beyond our capacity. When school-hours are over, we have full time for recreation, and are amply provided with the means of amusing ourselves. We have a library of entertaining books; and we have liberty to divert ourselves with all sorts of juvenile plays and games. Then how much attention is paid to our health and our comforts, and how kindly and judiciously are we treated in every respect! Certainly, we ought to think ourselves happy.

Henrietta. Ay! so you are made to say in the letters which you write home to your parents. All our French letters, at Madame Disette's were written first by her niece Mademoiselle Mensonge; and the English letters were manufactured by poor Benson; and then we copied them in our very best hands, with a new pen at every paragraph. They were all nearly the same; and told of nothing but the superabundant kindness and liberality of Madame Disette, our high respect and esteem for Madame Trompeur, her sister, and our vast affection for her amiable

niece, Mademoiselle Mensonge: together with our perfect health, and extreme felicity. In every letter we grew happier and happier.

Miss Snodgrass. And were you not so in reality?

Henrietta. No, indeed, – all the happiness we had was of our own making, for we derived none from any thing our governess did for us; though we were obliged in our letters to call her our beloved Madame Disette, and to express the most fervent hopes that we might one day exactly resemble her; which, I am sure, was the last thing we could have desired; for she was one of the ugliest women that I ever saw in my life.

Miss Thomson. But you might have wished to resemble her in mind and manners.

Henrietta. Why, as to that, her mind was worse than her face, and her manners we all thought absolutely ridiculous. Benson could mimic her exactly.

Miss Marley. I do not wonder that your parents took you away from such a school.

Henrietta. The school was certainly bad enough. We had dirty, uncomfortable chambers; scanty fires; a mean table, and all such inconveniences. But then it was a very fashionable school; all the masters were foreigners, and above all things there was a great point made of our speaking French. We knew the common phrases perfectly well. We could all say, *Comment vous portez vous*, *—Je vous remerçie*, *—Il fait beau-temps*, *—Donnez-moi un epingle*, *—Lequel aimez-vous mieux, le bleu ou le vert?* and many other things equally sensible and interesting. This was what was

called French conversation, and we were all able to join in it, after taking lessons in French a very few quarters.

But after all, we had a great deal of fun, and that made up for every thing. Madame Disette and her sister and niece, always hurried over the school-business as fast as possible, that they might have time to pay and receive visits; and every evening they were either out, or engaged at home with company; so that we had nobody to watch us but poor Benson, and none of us cared for *her*. And then we could make her do just as we pleased. She only got seventy-five dollars a year, for which she was obliged to perform all the drudgery of the school, even to washing and dressing the little girls; putting them to bed; darning their stockings and mending their clothes; besides doing all Madame Disette's plain sewing. Poor Benson could not afford to dress half so well as the chambermaid. So how could we have any respect for her? Even the servants despised her, and never would do any thing she asked them.

Miss Snodgrass. Well, we all respect Miss Loxley. She gets a good salary, dresses genteelly, is treated with proper consideration by every one in the house, and we obey her just as we do Mrs. Middleton.

Henrietta. Yes, and for those very reasons, we never can ask her to assist in any little private scheme of our own. Benson was certainly a much more convenient person. But to resume our first subject – I do really long for a feast.

Miss Roberts. Well, – Mrs. Middleton occasionally gives us a

feast as you call it; for instance, on the birth-day of the young lady who is head of her class.

Henrietta. O, but then at these regular feasts Mrs. Middleton is always present herself. I like to steal a little secret pleasure, unsuspected by any one that would check it. Ah! you have never dealt in mysteries; you know not how delightful they are. One half the enjoyment is in planning and carrying on the plot. Come now, girls, let us get up a little feast to-morrow evening. You know Miss Loxley will be out again, as her aunt is still sick; and the French teacher always goes home at dusk, as she does not sleep here.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.