

# SISTER ANNE

The Girl Who Pleases Only Herself Collides With the Girl Who Prefers to Please Others.

Here's a tip for the rising generation: Education is a dangerous thing. In ancient, forgotten times three It's stood for it, and what they meant was Readin', Writin' and Rithmetick. The three letters which would symbolize it now are TNT, a useful substance, but with disconcerting possibilities if it happens to backfire.

The young know a lot more than the old—this we cheerfully concede—but let them beware how they educate us. There's an occasional, harmless Victorian to be found here and there, born away back in the last decades of the last century before the grand old lady died, who is capable, under sufficient stimulation, of taking a leaf out of the new book. Charlotte Blunt, who had been Charlotte Fulton until she married Wilfred—Charlotte, at the ripe old age of 26—proved to be one of those too apt pupils.

Until her sister, Anne, aged 18, came home from school to spend the Easter holidays with her and Wilfred, it had never occurred to Charlotte to think of herself as a victim, let alone a slave or a groveling worm. If asked, she'd have said, in the benighted, unrealistic way which characterized her coevals, that she was an unusually lucky person and fully as happy as it was good for any one to be.

She'd grown up in a roomy, homely, suburban house. Her parents were nice, regular people, well enough off, and seriously enough disposed, to insure that everything they provided for their children should have the sterling mark of conventional approval stamped upon it. Since she was pretty and amiable and amusing from the time she was a baby, they made something of a domestic pet of her, especially her father. Her mother took her a little more seriously; concerned herself more constantly than Charlotte thought necessary with such details as rubbers, drafts, tooth brushes, slang, Sunday school lessons, hair curling, and so on—but then, that was the way of mothers, wasn't it? These minor drawbacks were magnificently compensated for, anyway, when on Charlotte's eighth birthday, her mother presented her, miraculously, with a live doll, a baby sister whom they named Anne.

It never occurred to Charlotte to scrutinize any of these people very closely, with the eye of disinterested analysis; to ask herself how admirable they really were, nor to define her own feelings about them. What was there to think about them? They were here, and she loved them. Of course, you loved your own father and mother and sister. Didn't everybody?

I don't mean to say that there never were any free acids of the spiritual sort in Charlotte's thoughts or emotions. She suffered disappointments and, occasionally, humiliations; she had to be told now and then, just to bulk; she sometimes lay awake for quite a while, after she'd been sent to bed, feeling exquisitely sorry for herself; once in a blue moon she got so angry that she cried. But no appalling terminology had, as yet, been applied to these phenomena, and no one took them any more seriously than Charlotte herself. This is old stuff, you might think.

She went on growing up in the regular way. She discovered how nice it was to be pretty and have the boys like you. She learned to dance the Hesitation and the Castle Walk. She knew the strange art of asking for things she didn't at all care she was going to get, during the first ten minutes of her father's after-dinner cigar; and, being a kind-hearted young thing, she spared her mother occasional bits of knowledge which that estimable lady might have found distressing.

They didn't send her away to the smart finishing school which some of her friends attended, but to a nice private day school a few miles up the shore instead. This was in order not to interfere with her piano lessons. Back in those days, of course, piano playing was still considered seriously as a feminine accomplishment, but it was a little more than that to Charlotte. She had a certain amount of real musical capacity. She practiced at the piano con amore, and by 18 it was the old part of her education that she herself regarded seriously.

She was entertaining a project, as yet coldly received at home, of going to Berlin to study with Mme. Carreno, and then bursting upon the world as a first magnitude concert pianist, when the outbreak of the war, in 1914, knocked all that in the head. Her mother needed a lot of time, what with all the benefits and drives and relief movements that were springing up every hand; and her father got to seeming a lot more affectionate and dependent upon her than he'd ever been before.

And then she met Wilfred Blunt and liked him awfully, and pretty soon got to liking him a lot more than that, and they fell into one of those typically suburban, undefinable, perfectly understood relationships which nice young American boys and girls seem to have invented for themselves. He was only two years older than she, and, having nothing to live on beyond what he could earn, he was, according to suburban ideas of the period, no more marriageable during the two years which followed his graduation from a school of architecture, than a school boy.

They didn't call themselves engaged even when he went up to the Sheridan training camp, in the summer of '17. She kept her week ends swept perfectly clean for him, and their caresses, though they didn't go much farther than they had gone before, abandoned an air, scrupulously maintained up to then, of fortuity; but he didn't ask her to be a war bride, and she, having been born in the last century, hadn't proposed to him—just waited for him like the nice little Victorian thing she was.

Indeed, the status quo ante bellum might have continued for quite a while after Wilfred emerged from his captain's uniform—quite intact (he had been useful to his country, but not especially glorious)—if it hadn't been for Charlotte's father. He remarked, one Sunday, after a sermon he hadn't liked, and a rather too carnal Sunday dinner, that young Blunt was all right, of course, and, for anything he knew to the contrary, talented in his line; and a boy and girl affair was all right, of course, for boys and girls; but, after all, the war was over.

"Wilfred and I are going to be married right after Easter," Charlotte said, bright pink and a little breathless. "I just thought I'd tell you." She was waiting in the hall with her things on for the aforementioned Wilfred when he came for his regular evening afternoon call, took him out for a walk, and told him—not what her father had said, but simply what was going to happen. Which was news to Wilfred.

She'd never realized how rapturously in love with him she was until she saw how he took it, the panic of happiness it threw him into. There was something shy about him, and mysterious, underneath his imperturbable surface and his thoroughly nice, conventional manners, and she got a fairer glimpse of it during that intoxicating afternoon than she'd ever had before.

Her father offered no active opposition to the match. He welcomed his prospective son-in-law with a jocular ferociousness that might pass for real affection. He told Charlotte one day—that was the nearest he came to overt discussion—that he wasn't a rich man; he had an excellent law practice, but in these days of terrible prices he wasn't able to put much of anything by, and if he should die tomorrow Charlotte's immediate share of the estate wouldn't run to more than a thousand dollars a year. He was going to

make a serious attempt to increase it, but that would mean, of course, cutting down on current expenses.

This was just and reasonable, and it was kind of him, no doubt, to tell her, but it left her chilled a little. Indeed, she was aware, in thinking back, that the rosy aura which had enveloped all their relations since she was 17 had changed to a colder color. She was not sure, though, that this wasn't as much her own fault as her father's. She was looking at all the family except her mother—at her father, two or three youngish uncles, and Anne—in a manner a little more critically detached since she had begun using Wilfred as a standard of comparison. It occurred to her that they were a little hardboiled, and she was aware that the quality about him which they were inclined to regard contemptuously, an



By Henry Kitchell Webster

annoyance at something commiserating and altogether insufferable which she read in her sister's smile. "I guess you'd better tell me just what you mean," she said.

Anne's smile broadened into one of unequivocal relish. "Well," she remarked, "it's a chance to find out whether you're old or not. If you're game to take it without frills, I don't mind."

Charlotte laughed. "Go ahead," she commanded, her voice logically responding with just the shade of carefree amusement she wanted. "Let's see whether I could get into the set or not."

But this touch of irony didn't discompose Anne a bit. She spoke, when she got ready, reflectively:

"You got a jolt when you found I'd written to father, too. You pretended to be pleased, because you pretend you love him so much that you have to let on to be glad over anything that would phase him, such as getting a sweet little goodby note from me. Really, you were just about as glad to hear that I'd written to him as you would be to find a note from some sweetie in one of Wilfred's pockets—it comes to more or less the same thing, of course."

Charlotte managed one more laugh. "Really, Anne," she said, "you're being just as funny as when you used to dress up in mother's clothes and pretend to go calling."

"O, yes," observed the imperturbable child, "that's the way people always try to get out of it when they've had enough. But I don't mind being funny."

"Is there any more?" Charlotte asked. "You've settled it that I don't care for father. What's the next thing? That he doesn't care for me?"

"We can take that next, if you like," said Anne. "He had an awful crush on you for a while. Golly, don't I remember! Perfectly silly about you. You could get anything you wanted out of him. Of course, he got some when you jilted him for Wilfred. He's been sore ever since, hasn't he? How many presents has he given you—real presents, I mean, not junk? How much has he done for you?"

"We don't want anything done for us," Charlotte said, quietly. "Wilfred wouldn't let me if I did. Father told us before we were married that he was going to try to reduce expenses in order to lay up more for all of us when he died." She added, with a pounce of anger, "I'd like to get into your mind with a broom!"

"Any time you like," said Anne. "Only it's your mind we're talking about now; yours and father's. Why, look here, I can remember—I suppose I must have been 8 or 9—before you got pretty, when you were scrawny and disagreeable and affected. I know I used to think you must have something terrible the matter with you. Well, did father ever make a fuss about you then—hold you in his lap and pet you, and bring you presents? And wouldn't it have done you more good right then than anything else? It wasn't until you were somebody nice to snuggle up to that he began. I was just beginning to get scrawny and unpleasant then myself, so I was in the side lines. But when you jilted him, I took him over."

"I guess that's enough," said Charlotte, getting to her feet. "I don't suppose you're old enough to realize what perfectly nasty things you've been saying."

"O, there's many enough," Anne agreed, good humoredly, "only the nastiness isn't in saying them. But I haven't got around yet to why you wrote that letter to father."

Charlotte turned upon her with a gasp of protest, but the girl didn't look up. She had clasped one knee in her hands and was staring at it meditatively.

"It wasn't because you're getting sick of Wilfred. You're still crazy about him—I could see that last night. That's one of the real things about you. So you must have written to dad because you wanted some money out of him. Well, I guess there's no reason why you shouldn't. That's what I did. I asked him for \$200—besides my regular allowance, of course. I told him I knew it was an awful lot of money, but I'd simply be heartbroken if I couldn't have it."

Charlotte echoed the amount mechanically, then inquired what the child wanted it for.

"Dancing lessons," she said. And in response to another echo went on to explain: "Not ordinary dancing lessons, nor that regular boarding school gymnastics dancing, either. The school provided that, and it was second rate, like all the rest of their instruction—good enough for fluff. But their bunch was going to get Baum, who was the greatest ballet master in New York, as well as one of the greatest of living dancers. He would do any of the routine teaching, of course, but he'd give them a good man and would look them over himself now and then. There were 10 of them meant to go into it. The school authorities had been bulletined into giving the scheme a sort of passive sanction; they'd furnish chaperones and arrange hours and on, provided the girls could get parental authorization, but they wouldn't have to do anything else."

Charlotte was up on one elbow, about to lean down and kiss him good night, but instead of doing that she said: "You like her though?"

"Sure, I like her. All she needs is a little warming up. We'll have to try to show her a good time."

"We can't spend any money on her, Bill," Charlotte remonstrated. "We simply haven't got it, not for theater tickets or parties—things like that."

He admitted, ruefully, that they couldn't do much.

His disclaimer didn't satisfy Charlotte, and it was on her tongue to tell him the thing she had been holding back—namely, that the collector had made his second call that day about the piano. The next installment would be due next week and they hadn't paid the last. But she forebore. After all, the collector had agreed to wait, and she had one more string to her bow.

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