









**TO**  
**MY FRIEND**  
**JOHN CARRINGTON YATES**



"Please do tell me somebody is scandalised."

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- "Please do tell me somebody is scandalized!"
- "Can I have what other women have – silk underwear and stockings?"
- "'Duane!' she gasped – 'why did you?'"
- "Oh, the horror of it! – the shame, the agonized surprise"
- "'This is one of those rare occasions ... where goodness is ... amply rewarded!"
- "'I want to confess! I've been horribly depraved for a week!'"
- "She dropped him a very low, very slow, very marvellous courtesy"
- "Crumpled up like a white flower in his arms"



## CHAPTER I THE SEAGRAVES

All day Sunday they had raised the devil from attic to cellar; Mrs. Farren was in tears, Howker desperate. Not one out of the fifteen servants considered necessary to embellish the Seagrave establishment could do anything with them after Kathleen Severn's sudden departure the week before.

When the telegram announcing her mother's sudden illness summoned young Mrs. Severn to Staten Island, every servant in the household understood that serious trouble was impending for them.

Day by day the children became more unruly; Sunday they were demons; and Mrs. Farren shuddered to think what Monday might bring forth.

The day began ominously at breakfast with general target practice, ammunition consisting of projectiles pinched from the interior of hot muffins. Later, when Mrs. Farren ventured into the school-room, she found Scott Seagrave drawing injurious pictures of Howker on the black-board, and Geraldine sorting lumps of sugar from the bowl on the breakfast-tray, which had not yet been removed.

"Dearies," she began, "it is after nine o'clock and — —"

"No school to-day, Mrs. Farren," interrupted Scott cheerfully; "we haven't anything to do till Kathleen comes back, and you know it perfectly well!"

"Yes, you have, dearie; Mrs. Severn has just sent you this list of lessons." She held out a black-edged envelope.

Geraldine, who had been leisurely occupied in dropping cologne on a lump of sugar, thrust the lump into her pink mouth and turned sharply on Mrs. Farren.

"What list?" she demanded. "Give that letter to me.... Oh, Scott! Did you ever hear of anything half so mean? Kathleen's written out about a thousand questions in geography for us!"

"I can't stand that sort of interference!" shouted Scott, dropping his chalk and aiming a kick at the big papier-maché globe. "I'm sorry Kathleen's mother is probably going to die, but I've had enough geography, too."

"Mrs. Severn's mother died on Friday," said the housekeeper solemnly.

The children paused, serious for a moment in the presence of the incomprehensible.

"We're sorry," said Geraldine slowly.... "When is Kathleen coming back?"

"Perhaps to-night, dearie — —"

Scott impatiently detached the schoolroom globe from its brass axis: "I'm sorry, too," he said; "but I'm tired of lessons. Now, Mrs. Farren, watch me! I'm going to kick a goal from the field. Here, you hold it, Geraldine; Mrs. Farren, you had better try to block it and cheer for Yale!"

Geraldine seized the globe, threw herself flat on the floor, and, head on one side, wriggled, carefully considering the angle. Then, tipping the globe, she adjusted it daintily for her brother to kick.

"A little higher, please; look out there, Mrs. Farren!" said Scott calmly; "Harvard is going to score this time. Now, Geraldine!"

Thump! came the kick, but Mrs. Farren had fled, and the big globe struck the nursery door and bounced back minus half of South America.

For ten minutes the upper floors echoed with the racket. Geraldine fiercely disputed her brother's right to kick every time; then, as usual, when she got what she wanted, gave up to Scott and let him monopolise the kicking until, satiated, he went back to the black-board, having obliterated several continents from the face of the globe.

"You might at least be polite enough to hold it for me to kick," said his sister. "What a pig you are, Scott."

"Don't bother me; I'm drawing Howker. You can't kick straight, anyway — —"

"Yes, I can!"

Scott, intent on his drawing, muttered:

"I wish there was another boy in this house; I might have a little fun to-day if there was anybody to play with."

There ensued a silence; then he heard his sister's light little feet flying along the hallway toward their bedrooms, but went on calmly with his drawing, using some effective coloured crayon on Howker's nose. Presently he became conscious that Geraldine had re-entered the room.

"What are you going to do to-day?" he asked, preoccupied.

Geraldine, dressed in her brother's clothes, was kneeling on one knee and hastily strapping on a single roller-skate.

"I'll show you," she said, rising and shaking the dark curls out of her eyes. "Come on, Scott, I'm going to misbehave all day. Look at me! I've brought you the boy you wanted to play with."

Her brother turned, considered her with patronising toleration, then shrugged his shoulders.

"You look like one, but you're no good," he said.

"I can be just as bad as any boy!" she insisted. "I'll do whatever you do; I'll do worse, I tell you. Dare me to do something!"

"You don't dare skate backward into the red drawing-room! There's too much bric-a-brac."

She turned like a flash and was off, hopping and clattering downstairs on her single skate, and a moment later she whirled into the red drawing-room backward and upset a Sang-de-boeuf jar, reducing the maid to horrified tears and the jar to powder.

Howker strove in vain to defend his dining-room when Scott appeared on one skate; but the breakfast-room and pantry were forcibly turned into rinks; the twins swept through the halls, met and defeated their nurses, Margaret and Betty, tumbled down into the lower regions, from there descended to the basement, and whizzed cheerily through the kitchen, waving two skateless legs.

There Mrs. Bramton attempted to buy them off with tribute in the shape of cup-cakes.

"Sure, darlints, they do be starvin' yez," purred Mrs. Bramton. "Don't I know the likes o' them? Now roon away quietlike an' ladylike — —"

"Like a hen," retorted Scott. "I want some preserves."

"That's all very well," said Geraldine with her mouth full, "but we expected to skate about the kitchen and watch you make pastry. Kindly begin, Mrs. Bramton."

"I'd like to see what's inside of that chicken over there," said Scott. "And I want you to give me some raisins, Mrs. Bramton — —"

"I'm dying for a glass of milk," added Geraldine. "Get me some dough, somebody; I'm going to bake something."

Scott, who, devoured by curiosity, had been sniffing around the spice cupboard, sneezed violently; a Swedish kitchen-maid threw her apron over her head, weak with laughter.

"If you're laughing at me, I'll fix you, Olga!" shouted Scott in a rage; and the air was suddenly filled with balls of dough. Mrs. Bramton fled before the storm; a well-directed volley drove the maids to cover and stampeded the two cats.

"Take whatever is good to eat, Geraldine. Hurrah! The town surrenders! Loot it! No quarter!" shouted Scott. However, when Howker arrived they retired hastily with pockets full of cinnamon sticks, olives, prunes, and dried currants, climbing triumphantly to the library above, where they curled up on a leather divan, under the portrait of their mother, to divide the spoils.

"Am I bad enough to suit you?" inquired Geraldine with pardonable pride.

"Pooh! That's nothing. If I had another boy here I'd — I'd — —"

"Well, what?" demanded Geraldine, flushing. "I tell you I can misbehave as well as any boy. Dare me to do anything and you'll see! I dare you to dare me!"

Scott began: "Oh, it's all very easy for a girl to talk — —"

"I *don't* talk; I *do* it! And you know perfectly well I do!"

"You're a girl, after all, even if you have got on my clothes— —"

"Didn't I throw as much dough at Olga and Mrs. Bramton as you did?"

"You didn't hit anybody."

"I did! I saw a soft, horrid lump stick to Olga!"

"Pooh! *You* can't throw straight— —"

"That's a lie!" said Geraldine excitedly.

Scott bristled:

"If you say that again— —"

"All right; go and get the boxing-gloves. You *did* tell a lie, Scott, because I did hit Olga!"

Scott hastily unstrapped his lone skate, cast it clattering from him, and sped up-stairs. When he returned he hurled a pair of boxing-gloves at Geraldine, who put them on, laced them, trembling with wrath, and flew at her brother as soon as his own gloves were fastened.

They went about their business like lightning, swinging, blocking, countering. Twice she gave him inviting openings and then punished him savagely before he could get away; then he attempted in-fighting, but her legs were too nimble. And after a while he lost his head and came at her using sheer weight, which set her beside herself with fury.

Teeth clenched, crimson-cheeked, she side-stepped, feinted, and whipped in an upper-cut. Then, darting in, she drove home her left with all her might; and Scott went down with an unmistakable thud.

"One—two—three—four," she counted, "and you *did* tell a lie, didn't you? Five—six—Oh, Scott! I've made your nose bleed horridly! Does it hurt, dear? Seven—eight— —"

The boy, still confused, rose and instinctively assumed the classic attitude of self-defence; but his sister threw down her gloves and

offered him her handkerchief, saying: "You've just got to be fair to me now, Scott. Tell me that I throw straight and that I did hit Olga!"

He hesitated; wiped his nose:

"I take it back. You can throw straight. Ginger! What a crack you just gave me!"

She was all compunction and honey now, hovering around him where he stood stanching honourable wounds. After a while he laughed. "Thunder!" he exclaimed ruefully; "my nose seems to be growing for fair. You're all right, Geraldine."

"Here's my last cup-cake, if you like," said his sister, radiant.

Embarrassed a little by defeat, but nursing no bitterness, he sat down on the leather divan again and permitted his sister to feed him and tell him that his disaster was only an accident. He tried to think so, too, but serious doubts persisted in his mind. There had been a clean-cut finish to that swing and jab which disturbed his boy's conceit.

"We'll try it again," he began. "I'm all right now, if you like — —"

"Oh, Scott, I don't want to!"

"Well, we ought to know which of us really can lick the other — —  
"

"Why, of course, you can lick me every time. Besides, I wouldn't want to be able to lick you — except when I'm very, very angry. And I ought not to become angry the way I do. Kathleen tries so hard to make me stop and reflect before I do things, but I can't seem to learn.... Does your nose hurt?"

"Not in the least," said her brother, reddening and changing the subject. "I say, it looks as though it were going to stop raining."

He went to the window; the big Seagrave house with its mansard roof, set in the centre of an entire city block, bounded by Madison and Fifth Avenues and by Ninety-fifth and Ninety-sixth Streets, looked out from its four red brick façades onto strips of lawn and shrubbery, now all green and golden with new grass and early buds.

It was topsy-turvy, March-hare weather, which perhaps accounted for the early April dementia that possessed the children at recurring intervals, and which nothing ever checked except the ultimate slumber of infantile exhaustion.

If anybody in the house possessed authority to punish them, nobody exercised it. Servants grown gray in the Seagrave service endured much, partly for the children's sakes, partly in memory of the past; but the newer and younger domestics had less interest in the past glories and traditions of an old New York family which, except for two little children, ten years old, had perished utterly from the face of the land.

The entire domestic régime was a makeshift—had been almost from the beginning. Mrs. Farren, the housekeeper, understood it; Howker, the butler, knew it; Lacy knew it—he who had served forty years as coachman in the Seagrave family.

For in all the world there remained not one living soul who through ties of kinship was authorised to properly control these children. Nor could they themselves even remember parental authority; and only a shadowy recollection of their grandfather's lax discipline survived, becoming gradually, as time passed, nothing more personal to them than a pleasant legend kept alive and nourished in the carefully guarded stories told them by Kathleen Severn and by Anthony Seagrave's old servants.

Yet, in the land, and in his own city of Manhattan, their grandfather had been a very grand man, with his large fortune, now doubled and still increasing; he had been a very distinguished man in the world of fashion with his cultivated taste in art and wine and letters and horses; he had been a very important man, too, in the civic, social, and political construction of New York town, in the quaint days when the sexton of Old Trinity furnished fashionable hostesses with data concerning the availability of social aspirants. He had been a courtly and fascinating man, too. He had died a drunkard.

Now his grandchildren were fast forgetting him. The town had long since forgotten him. Only an old friend or two and his old servants remembered what he had been, his virtues, his magnificence, his kindness, and his weakness.

But if the Seagrave twins possessed neither father nor mother to exercise tender temporal and spiritual suzerainty in the nursery, and if no memory of their grandfather's adoring authority remained, the last will and testament of Anthony Seagrave had provided a marvellous, man-created substitute for the dead: a vast, shadowy thing which ruled their lives with passionless precision; which ordered their waking hours even to the minutest particulars; which assumed machine-like charge of their persons, their personal expenses, their bringing-up, their schooling, the items of their daily routine.

This colossal automaton, almost terrifyingly impersonal, loomed always above them, throwing its powerful and gigantic shadow across their lives. As they grew old enough to understand, it became to them the embodiment of occult and unpleasant authority which controlled their coming and going; which chose for them their personal but not their legal guardian, Kathleen Severn; which fixed upon the number of servants necessary for the house that Anthony Seagrave directed should be maintained for his grandchildren; which decided what kind of expenses, what sort of clothing, what recreations, what accomplishments, what studies, what religion they should be provided with.

And the name of this enormous man-contrived machine which took the place of father and mother was the Half Moon Trust Company, acting as trustee, guardian, and executor for two little children, who neither understood why they were sometimes very unruddy or that they would one day be very, very rich.

As for their outbreaks, an intense sense of loneliness for which they were unable to account was always followed by a period of restlessness sure to culminate in violent misbehaviour.

Such an outbreak had been long impending. So when a telegram called away their personal guardian, Kathleen Severn, the children broke loose with the delicate fury of the April tempest outside, which all the morning had been blotting the western windows with gusts of fragrant rain.

The storm was passing now; light volleys of rain still arrived at intervals, slackening as the spring sun broke out, gilding naked branches and bare brown earth, touching swelling buds and the

frail points of tulips which pricked the soaked loam in close-set thickets.

From the library bay windows where they stood, the children noticed dandelions in the grass and snowdrops under the trees and recognised the green signals of daffodil and narcissus.

Already crocuses, mauve, white, and yellow, glimmered along a dripping privet hedge which crowned the brick and granite wall bounding the domain of Seagrave. East, through the trees, they could see the roofs of electric cars speeding up and down Madison Avenue, and the houses facing that avenue. North and south were quiet streets; westward Fifth Avenue ran, a sheet of wet, golden asphalt glittering under the spring sun, and beyond it, above the high retaining wall, budding trees stood out against the sky, and the waters of the Park reservoirs sparkled behind.

"I am glad it's spring, anyway," said Geraldine listlessly.

"What's the good of it?" asked Scott. "We'll have to take all our exercise with Kathleen just the same, and watch other children having good times. What's the use of spring?"

"Spring *is* tiresome," admitted Geraldine thoughtfully.

"So is winter. I think either would be all right if they'd only let me have a few friends. There are plenty of boys I'd like to have some fun with if they'd let me."

"I wonder," mused Geraldine, "if there is anything the matter with us, Scott?"

"Why?"

"Oh—I don't know. People stare at us so—nurses always watch us and begin to whisper as soon as we come along. Do you know what a boy said to me once when I skated very far ahead of Kathleen?"

"What did he say?" inquired Scott, flattening his nose against the window-pane to see whether it still hurt him.

"He asked me if I were too rich and proud to play with other children. I was so surprised; and I said that we were not rich at all, and that I never had had any money, and that I was not a bit proud,

and would love to stay and play with him if Kathleen permitted me."

"Did Kathleen let you? Of course she didn't."

"I told her what the boy said and I showed her the boy, but she wouldn't let me stay and play."

"Kathleen's a pig."

"No, she isn't, poor dear. They make her act that way—Mr. Tappan makes her. Our grandfather didn't want us to have friends."

"I'll tell you what," said Scott impatiently, "when I'm old enough, I'll have other boys to play with whether Kathleen and—and that Thing—likes it or not."

The Thing was the Half Moon Trust Company.

Geraldine glanced back at the portrait over the divan:

"Do you know," she ventured, "that I believe mother would have let us have fun."

"I'll bet father would, too," said Scott. "Sometimes I feel like kicking over everything in the house."

"So do I and I generally do it," observed Geraldine, lifting a slim, graceful leg and sending a sofa-cushion flying.

When they had kicked all the cushions from the sofas and divans, Scott suggested that they go out and help Schmitt, the gardener, who, at that moment, came into view on the lawn, followed by Olsen wheeling a barrowful of seedlings in wooden trays.

So the children descended to the main hall and marched through it, defying Lang, the second man, refusing hats and overshoes; and presently were digging blissfully in a flower-bed under the delighted directions of Schmitt.

"What are these things, anyway?" demanded Scott, ramming down the moist earth around a fragile rootlet from which trailed a green leaf or two.

"Dot vas a verpena, sir," explained the old gardener. "Now you shall vatch him grow."