

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallage Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
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Damaschke Darwin Dickens Schopenhauer Rilke George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Melville Grimm Jerome Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
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Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
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Miss Prudence A Story of Two Girls' Lives.

Jennie (Drinkwater) Conklin Maria

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This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

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MISS PRUDENCE

A STORY OF TWO GIRLS' LIVES

By

JENNIE M. DRINKWATER

1883

"We are not to lead events but to follow them." — *Epictetus*.

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MISS PRUDENCE.

I.

AFTER SCHOOL.

"Our content is our best having." — *Shakespeare.*

Nobody had ever told Marjorie that she was, as somebody says we all are, three people,—the Marjorie she knew herself, the Marjorie other people knew, and the Marjorie God knew. It was a "bother" sometimes to be the Marjorie she knew herself, and she had never guessed there was another Marjorie for other people to know, and the Marjorie God knew and understood she did not learn much about for years and years. At eleven years old it was hard enough to know about herself—her naughty, absent-minded, story-book-loving self. Her mother said that she loved story-books entirely too much, that they made her absent-minded and forgetful, and her mother's words were proving themselves true this very afternoon. She was a real trouble to herself and there was no one near to "confess" to; she never could talk about herself unless enveloped in the friendly darkness, and then the confessor must draw her out, step by step, with perfect frankness and sympathy; even then, a sigh, or sob, or quickly drawn breath and half inarticulate expression revealed more than her spoken words.

She was one of the children that are left to themselves. Only Linnet knew the things she cared most about; even when Linnet laughed at her, she could feel the sympathetic twinkle in her eye and the sympathetic undertone smothered in her laugh.

It was sunset, and she was watching it from the schoolroom window, the clouds over the hill were brightening and brightening and

a red glare shone over the fields of snow. It was sunset and the schoolroom clock pointed to a quarter of five. The schoolroom was chilly, for the fire had died out half an hour since. Hollis Rheid had shoved big sticks into the stove until it would hold no more and had opened the draft, whispering to her as he passed her seat that he would keep her warm at any rate. But now she was shivering, although she had wrapped herself in her coarse green and red shawl, and tapped her feet on the bare floor to keep them warm; she was hungry, too; the noon lunch had left her unsatisfied, for she had given her cake to Rie Blauvelt in return for a splendid Northern Spy, and had munched the apple and eaten her two sandwiches wishing all the time for more. Leaving the work on her slate unfinished, she had dived into the depths of her home-made satchel and discovered two crumbs of molasses cake. That was an hour ago. School had closed at three o'clock to-day because it was Friday and she had been nearly two hours writing nervously on her slate or standing at the blackboard making hurried figures. For the first time in her life Marjorie West had been "kept in." And that "Lucy" book hidden in her desk was the cause of it; she had taken it out for just one delicious moment, and the moment had extended itself into an hour and a half, and the spelling lesson was unlearned and the three hard examples in complex fractions unworked. She had not been ignorant of what the penalty would be. Mr. Holmes had announced it at the opening of school: "Each word in spelling that is missed, must be written one hundred times, and every example not brought in on the slate must be put on the blackboard after school."

She had smiled in self-confidence. Who ever knew Marjorie West to miss in spelling? And had not her father looked over her examples last night and pronounced them correct? But on her way to school the paper on which the examples were solved had dropped out of her Geography, and she had been wholly absorbed in the "Lucy" book during the time that she had expected to study the test words in spelling. And the overwhelming result was doing three examples on the board, after school, and writing seven hundred words. Oh, how her back ached and how her wrist hurt her and how her strained eyes smarted! Would she ever again forget *ama-teur*, *abyss*, *accelerate*, *bagatelle*, *bronchitis*, *boudoir* and *isosceles*?

Rie Blauvelt had written three words one hundred times, laughed at her, and gone home; Josie Grey had written *isosceles* one hundred times, and then taken up a slate to help Marjorie; before Marjorie was aware Josie had written *abyss* seventy-five times, then suspecting something by the demureness of Josie's eyes she had snatched her slate and erased the pretty writing.

"You're real mean," pouted Josie; "he said he would take our word for it, and you could have answered some way and got out of it."

Marjorie's reply was two flashing eyes.

"You needn't take my head off," laughed Josie; "now I'll go home and leave you, and you may stay all night for all I care."

"I will, before I will deceive anybody," resented Marjorie stoutly.

Without another word Josie donned sack and hood and went out, leaving the door ajar and the cold air to play about Marjorie's feet.

But five o'clock came and the work was done!

More than one or two tears fell slowly on the neat writing on Marjorie's slate; the schoolroom was cold and she was shivering and hungry. It would have been such a treat to read the last chapter in the "Lucy" book; she might have curled her feet underneath her and drawn her shawl closer; but it was so late, and what would they think at home? She was ashamed to go home. Her father would look at her from under his eyebrows, and her mother would exclaim, "Why, Marjorie!" She would rather that her father would look at her from under his eyebrows, than that her mother would say, "Why, *Marjorie!*" Her mother never scolded, and sometimes she almost wished she would. It would be a relief if somebody would scold her tonight; she would stick a pin into herself if it would do any good.

Her photograph would not be in the group next time. She looked across at the framed photograph on the wall; six girls in the group and herself the youngest—the reward for perfect recitations and perfect deportment for one year. Her father was so proud of it that he had ordered a copied picture for himself, and, with a black walnut frame, it was hanging in the sitting-room at home. The resent-

ment against herself was tugging away at her heart and drawing miserable lines on her brow and lips—on her sweet brow and happy lips.

It was a bare, ugly country schoolroom, anyway, with the stained floor, the windows with two broken panes, and the unpainted desks with innumerable scars made by the boys' jack-knives, and Mr. Holmes was unreasonable, anyway, to give her such a hard punishment, and she didn't care if she had been kept in, anyway!

In that "anyway" she found vent for all her crossness. Sometimes she said, "I don't care," but when she said, "I don't care, *anyway!*" then everybody knew that Marjorie West was dreadful.

"I'm *through*," she thought triumphantly, "and I didn't cheat, and I wasn't mean, and nobody has helped me."

Yes, somebody had helped her. She was sorry that she forgot to think that God had helped her. Perhaps people always did get through! If they didn't help themselves along by doing wrong and—God helped them. The sunshine rippled over her face again and she counted the words on her slate for the second time to assure herself that there could be no possible mistake. Slowly she counted seven hundred, then with a sudden impulse seized her pencil and wrote each of the seven words five times more to be "*sure* they were all right."

Josie Grey called her "horridly conscientious," and even Rie Blauvelt wished that she would not think it wicked to "tell" in the class, and to whisper about something else when they had permission to whisper about the lessons.

By this time you have learned that my little Marjorie was strong and sweet. I wish you might have seen her that afternoon as she crouched over the wooden desk, snuggled down in the coarse, plaid shawl, her elbows resting on the hard desk, her chin dropped in her two plump hands, with her eyes fixed on the long, closely written columns of her large slate. She was not sitting in her own seat, her seat was the back seat on the girls' side, of course, but she was sitting midway on the boys' side, and her slate was placed on the side of the double desk wherein H.R. was cut in deep, ugly letters. She had fled to this seat as to a refuge, when she found herself alone,

with something of the same feeling, that once two or three years ago when she was away from home and homesick she used to kneel to say her prayers in the corner of the chamber where her valise was; there was home about the valise and there was protection and safety and a sort of helpfulness about this desk where her friend Hollis Rheid had sat ever since she had come to school. This was her first winter at school, her mother had taught her at home, but in family council this winter it had been decided that Marjorie was "big" enough to go to school.

The half mile home seemed a long way to walk alone, and the huge Newfoundland at the farmhouse down the hill was not always chained; he had sprung out at them this morning and the girls had huddled together while Hollis and Frank Grey had driven him inside his own yard. Hollis had thrown her an intelligent glance as he filed out with the boys, and had telegraphed something back to her as he paused for one instant at the door. Not quite understanding the telegraphic signal, she was waiting for him, or for something. His lips had looked like: "Wait till I come." If the people at home were not anxious about her she would have been willing to wait until midnight; it would never occur to her that Hollis might forget her.

Her cheeks flushed as she waited, and her eyes filled with tears; it was a soft, warm, round face, with coaxing, kissable lips, a smooth, low brow and the gentlest of hazel eyes: not a pretty face, excepting in its lovely childishness and its hints of womanly graces; some of the girls said she was homely. Marjorie thought herself that she was very homely; but she had comforted herself with, "God made my face, and he likes it this way." Some one says that God made the other features, but permits us to make the mouth. Marjorie's sweetness certainly made her mouth. But then she was born sweet. Josie Grey declared that she would rather see a girl "get mad" than cry, as Marjorie did when the boys washed her face in the snow.

Mr. Holmes had written to a friend that Marjorie West, his favorite among the girls, was "almost too sweet." He said to himself that he feared she "lacked character." Marjorie's quiet, observant father would have smiled at that and said nothing. The teacher said that she did not know how to take her own part. Marjorie had been

eleven years in this grasping world and had not learned that she had any "part" to take.

Since her pencil had ceased scribbling the room was so still that a tiny mouse had been nibbling at the toe of her shoe. Just then as she raised her head and pinned her shawl more securely the door opened and something happened. The something happened in Marjorie's face. Hollis Rheid thought the sunset had burst across it. She did not exclaim, "Oh, I am so glad!" but the gladness was all in her eyes. If Marjorie had been more given to exclamations her eyes would not have been so expressive. The closed lips were a gain to the eyes and her friends missed nothing. The boy had learned her eyes by heart. How stoutly he would have resisted if some one had told him that years hence Marjorie's face would be a sealed volume to him.

But she was making her eyes and mouth to-day and years hence she made them, too. Perhaps he had something to do with it then as he certainly had something to do with it now.

"I came back with my sled to take you home. I gave Sam my last ten cents to do the night work for me. It was my turn, but he was willing enough. Where's your hood, Mousie? Any books to take?"

"Yes, my Geography and Arithmetic," she answered, taking her fleecy white hood from the seat behind her.

"Now you look like a sunbeam in a cloud," he said poetically as she tied it over her brown head. "Oh, ho!" turning to the blackboard, "you do make handsome figures. Got them all right, did you?"

"I knew how to do them, it was only that—I forgot."

"I don't think you'll forget again in a hurry. And that's a nice looking slate, too," he added, stepping nearer. "Mother said it was too much of a strain on your nervous system to write all that."

"I guess I haven't much of a nervous system," returned Marjorie, seriously; "the girls wrote the words they missed fifty times last Friday and he warned us about the one hundred to-day. I suppose it will be one hundred and fifty next Friday. I don't believe I'll *ever* miss again," she said, her lips trembling at the mention of it.

"I think I'll have a word or two to say to the master if you do. I wonder how Linnet would have taken it."

"She wouldn't have missed."

"I'll ask Mr. Holmes to put you over on the boys side if you miss next week," he cried mischievously, "and make you sit with us all the afternoon."

"I'd rather write each word five hundred times," she cried vehemently.

"I believe you would," he said good humoredly. "Never mind, Mousie, I know you won't miss again."

"I'll do my examples to-night and father will help me if I can't do them.

He used to teach in this very schoolhouse; he knows as much as Mr. Holmes."

"Then he must be a Solomon," laughed the boy.

The stamp of Hollis' boots and the sound of his laughter had frightened the mouse back into its hiding-place in the chimney; Marjorie would not have frightened the mouse all day long.

The books were pushed into her satchel, her desk arranged in perfect order, her rubbers and red mittens drawn on, and she stood ready, satchel in hand, for her ride on the sled down the slippery hill where the boys and girls had coasted at noon and then she would ride on over the snowy road half a mile to the old, brown farmhouse. Her eyes were subdued a little, but the sunshine lingered all over her face. She knew Hollis would come.

He smiled down at her with his superior fifteen-year-old smile, she was such a wee mousie and always needed taking care of. If he could have a sister, he would want her to be like Marjorie. He was very much like Marjorie himself, just as shy, just as sensitive, hardly more fitted to take his own part, and I think Marjorie was the braver of the two. He was slow-tempered and unforgiving; if a friend failed him once, he never took him into confidence again. He was proud where Marjorie was humble. He gave his services; she gave herself. He seldom quarrelled, but never was the first to yield. They

were both mixtures of reserve and frankness; both speaking as often out of a shut heart as an open heart. But when Marjorie could open her heart, oh, how she opened it! As for Hollis, I think he had never opened his; demonstrative sympathy was equally the key to the hearts of both.

But here I am analyzing them before they had learned they had any self to analyze. But they existed, all the same.

Marjorie was a plain little body while Hollis was noticeably handsome with eloquent brown eyes and hair with its golden, boyish beauty just shading into brown; his sensitive, mobile lips were prettier than any girl's, and there was no voice in school like his in tone or culture. Mr. Holmes was an elocutionist and had taken great pains with Hollis Rheid's voice. There was a courteous gentleness in his manner all his own; if knighthood meant purity, goodness, truth and manliness, then Hollis Rheid was a knightly school-boy. The youngest of five rough boys, with a stern, narrow-minded father and a mother who loved her boys with all her heart and yet for herself had no aims beyond kitchen and dairy, he had not learned his refinement at home; I think he had not *learned* it anywhere. Marjorie's mother insisted that Hollis Rheid must have had a praying grandmother away back somewhere. The master had written to his friend, Miss Prudence Pomeroy, that Hollis Rheid was a born gentleman, and had added with more justice and penetration than he had shown in reading Marjorie, "he has too little application and is too mischievous to become a real student. But I am not looking for geniuses in a country school. Marjorie and Hollis are bright enough for every purpose in life excepting to become leaders."

"Are you going to church, to-night?" Hollis inquired as she seated herself carefully on the sled.

"In the church?" she asked, bracing her feet and tucking the ends of her shawl around them.

"Yes; an evangelist is going to preach."

"Evangelist!" repeated Marjorie in a voice with a thrill in it.

"Don't you know what that is?" asked Hollis, harnessing himself into the sled.

"Oh, yes, indeed," said she. "I know about him and Christian."

Hollis looked perplexed; this must be one of Marjorie's queer ways of expressing something, and the strange preacher certainly had something to do with Christians.

"If it were not for the fractions I suppose I might go. I wish I wasn't stupid about Arithmetic."

"It's no matter if girls are stupid," he said consolingly. "Are you sure you are on tight? I'm going to run pretty soon. You won't have to earn your living by making figures."

"Shall you?" she inquired with some anxiety.

"Of course, I shall. Haven't I been three times through the Arithmetic and once through the Algebra that I may support myself and somebody else, sometime?"

This seemed very grand to child Marjorie who found fractions a very
Slough of Despond.

"I'm going to the city as soon as Uncle Jack finds a place for me. I expect a letter from him every night."

"Perhaps it will come to-night," said Marjorie, not very hopefully.

"I hope it will. And so this may be your last ride on Flyaway. Enjoy it all you can, Mousie."

Marjorie enjoyed everything all she could.

"Now, hurrah!" he shouted, starting on a quick run down the hill. "I'm going to turn you over into the brook."

Marjorie laughed her joyous little laugh. "I'm not afraid," she said in absolute content.

"You'd better be!" he retorted in his most savage tone.

The whole west was now in a glow and the glorious light stretched across fields of snow.

"Oh, how splendid," Marjorie exclaimed breathlessly as the rapid motion of the sled and the rush of cold air carried her breath away.

"Hold on tight," he cried mockingly, "we're coming to the brook."

Laughing aloud she held on "tight." Hollis was her true knight; she would not have been afraid to cross the Alps on that sled if he had asked her to!

She was in a talkative mood to-night, but her horse pranced on and would not listen. She wanted to tell him about *vibgyor*. The half mile was quickly travelled and he whirled the sled through the large gateway and around the house to the kitchen door. The long L at the back of the house seemed full of doors.

"There, Mousie, here you are!" he exclaimed. "And don't you miss your lesson to-morrow."

"To-morrow is Saturday! oh, I had forgotten. And I can go to see Evangelist to-night."

"You haven't said 'thank you' for your last ride on Flyaway."

"I will when I'm sure that it is," she returned with her eyes laughing.

He turned her over into a snowdrift and ran off whistling; springing up she brushed the snow off face and hands and with a very serious face entered the kitchen. The kitchen was long and low, bright with the sunset shining in at two windows and cheery with its carpeting of red, yellow and green mingled confusingly in the handsome oilcloth.

Unlike Hollis, Marjorie was the outgrowth of home influences; the kitchen oilcloth had something to do with her views of life, and her mother's broad face and good-humored eyes had a great deal more. Good-humor in the mother had developed sweet humor in the child.

Now I wonder if you understand Marjorie well enough to understand all she does and all she leaves undone during the coming fifteen or twenty years?

II.

EVANGELIST.

"The value of a thought cannot be told." — *Bailey*.

Her mother's broad, gingham back and the twist of iron gray hair low in her neck greeted her as she opened the door, then the odor of hot biscuits intruded itself, and then there came a shout from somebody kneeling on the oilcloth near the stove and pushing sticks of dry wood through its blazing open door.

"Oh, Marjie, what happened to you?"

"Something *didn't* happen. I didn't have my spelling or my examples. I read the "Lucy" book in school instead," she confessed dolefully.

"Why, *Marjie!*" was her mother's exclamation, but it brought the color to Marjorie's face and suffused her eyes.

"We are to have company for tea," announced the figure kneeling on the oilcloth as she banged the stove door. "A stranger; the evangelist Mr. Horton told us about Sunday."

"I know," said Marjorie. "I've read about him in *Pilgrim's Progress*; he showed Christian the way to the Wicket Gate."

Linnet jumped to her feet and shook a chip from her apron. "O, Goosie!
Don't you know any better?"

Fourteen-year-old Linnet always knew better.

"Where is he?" questioned Marjorie.

"In the parlor. Go and entertain him. Mother and I must get him a good supper: cold chicken, canned raspberries, currant jelly, ham, hot biscuit, plain cake and fruit cake and — butter and — tea."

"I don't know how," hesitated Marjorie.

"Answer his questions, that's all," explained Linnet promptly. "I've told him all I know and now it's your turn."

"I don't like to answer questions," said Marjorie, still doubtfully.

"Oh, only your age and what you study and — if — you are a Christian."

"And he tells you how if you don't know how," said Marjorie, eagerly; "that's what he's for."

"Yes," replied her mother, approvingly, "run in and let him talk to you."

Very shyly glad of the opportunity, and yet dreading it inexpressibly, Marjorie hung her school clothing away and laid her satchel on the shelf in the hall closet, and then stood wavering in the closet, wondering if she dared go in to see Evangelist. He had spoken very kindly to Christian. She longed, oh, how she longed! to find the Wicket Gate, but would she dare ask any questions? Last Sabbath in church she had seen a sweet, beautiful face that she persuaded herself must be Mercy, and now to have Evangelist come to her very door!

What was there to know any better about? She did not care if Linnet had laughed. Linnet never cared to read *Pilgrim's Progress*.

It is on record that the first book a child reads intensely is the book that will influence all the life.

At ten Marjorie had read *Pilgrim's Progress* intensely. Timidly, with shining eyes, she stood one moment upon the red mat outside the parlor door, and then, with sudden courage, turned the knob and entered. At a glance she felt that there was no need of courage; Evangelist was seated comfortably in the horse-hair rocker with his feet to the fire resting on the camp stool; he did not look like Evangelist at all, she thought, disappointedly; he reminded her altogether more of a picture of Santa Claus: massive head and shoulders, white beard and moustache, ruddy cheeks, and, as the head turned quickly at her entrance, she beheld, beneath the shaggy, white brows, twinkling blue eyes.