

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace 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
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer Bebel Proust
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke George
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schilling Kralik Schiller Iffland Sokrates
Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Gerstäcker Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht Ringelnatz
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving
Petalozzi Platon Pückler Michelangelo Knigge Kock Kafka
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The Pleasant Street Partnership A Neighborhood Story

Mary Finley Leonard

Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: Mary Finley Leonard

Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)

ISBN: 978-3-8491-6978-7

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To Charlotte

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The Pleasant Street Partnership

A Neighborhood Story

CHAPTER FIRST

A WAVE OF IMPROVEMENT

Pleasant Street was regarded by the Terrace as merely an avenue of approach to its own exclusive precincts. That Pleasant Street came to an end at the Terrace seemed to imply that nothing was to be gained by going farther; and if you desired a quiet, substantial neighborhood,—none of your showy modern houses on meagre lots, but spacious dwellings, standing well apart from each other on high ground,—you found it here.

It could not be denied that the Terrace was rather far down town. Around it the busy city was closing in, with its blocks of commonplace houses, its schools and sanitariums, its noisy car [12] lines, until it seemed but a question of a few years when it would be engulfed in a wave of mediocrity. Fashion had long ago turned her face in another direction, and yet in a way the Terrace held its own. It could boast of some wealth, and more distinguished grandfathers were to be heard of within its small area than in the length and breadth of Dean Avenue.

Its residents felt for each other that friendliness born of long association. Some of the best people of the town had built their homes here between thirty and forty years ago, and a comparison of directories would have shown a surprising proportion of the old names still represented.

Perhaps no one thing contributes more to a sense of dignity than long residence in one house, and it was natural enough that the Terrace should shrug its shoulders at the row of toy dwellings that sprang up almost magically on Pleasant Street. That this thorough-

fare, so long given over to side yards and vacant lots, was showing a disposition to improve, was a matter of no concern to the Terrace until unexpectedly its own territory was invaded. [13]

On the northeast corner of the Terrace and Pleasant Street there had long stood a cottage. In the midst of a large lot, with fine shade-trees around it and a beautifully kept lawn, it had never seemed out of place among its more pretentious neighbors; but now upon the death of its owner the property was divided into three lots and offered for sale. What this might mean was at first hardly realized, until one day men were discovered to be at work on the corner, digging a foundation.

Upon inquiry it developed that a drug store was to be built. The neighborhood did not like this, but felt on the whole it might have been worse,—this conclusion, as Wayland Leigh pointed out later on, being founded on the mistaken hypothesis that all drug stores are pretty much alike.

It happened that the druggist had for a brother a young and aspiring architect, who conceived the idea of putting up a building in keeping with a residence district. The result was a sloping-roofed structure whose shingled second story projected over the first, which was of concrete. It might have been a rural station, or post-office, [14] or a seaside cottage, but a drug store it did not remotely suggest.

The store opened on Pleasant Street; to reach the private entrance you must go in from the Terrace, where there was a square of lawn and a maple tree, relic of better days.

The worst of it was its utter incongruousness, the best—so Alexina Russell said—that it invariably made you smile, and anything in this weary world that caused a smile was not wholly bad. Miss Sarah Leigh pretended to admire it, and declared she wanted to meet the architect. Of all things she liked originality. Mrs. Millard heard her disdainfully. Any departure from tradition was objectionable in her eyes, and she was deficient in a sense of humor. Judge Russell complained that now St. Mark's had taken to high-church customs, and the Terrace was degenerating, it was time for him to be put away in Spring Hill Cemetery.

Pretty Madelaine, his granddaughter, looked longingly toward Dean Avenue, being divided between a desire for its new splendors and a complacent consciousness that it was something of a distinction in these days to live in the [15] house where your father was born. Alexina, her sister, treated this with scorn. She loved the shabby old house for other reasons.

In spite of the original intentions of the builder, fate decreed that this much-talked-of place was not to be a drug store after all, and early in the summer, before it was finished, it was advertised for rent.

The plastering stage was beginning when the agent in charge one day appeared conducting a young woman over the premises. If the agent's manner revealed some slight curiosity concerning her, it was not to be wondered at, for it was more than probable he had never before seen so charming a person in the guise of a possible shop-keeper.

Her bearing was dignified and businesslike, and if a smile hovered about her lips as they explored the odd little house, it did not go beyond the bounds of a polite interest. At length she seated herself on an empty nail keg in the shop, and became absorbed in thought. The agent leaned against the door frame and waited.

"I shall want a few changes made if I lease [16] it," she announced suddenly, after some minutes of silence.

The agent started as her eyes met his. "Oh, certainly," he replied, as if ready to agree without hearing what they were. On second thought he added that the architect was at that moment coming up the street, and the best plan, perhaps, would be to submit her wishes to him.

To this she graciously assented, and he left her. When he was gone, the young woman's dignity relaxed. She smiled broadly; she even laughed. "How ever did it happen!" she exclaimed.

She produced a tape-line and made measurements, then she stood with the tip of her tongue touching her upper lip. "I do wish Marion could see it," she said. "She will never believe what a fascinatingly funny place it is."

She was surveying the neighborhood from the front door when the agent returned, accompanied by the architect.

She wanted very little, she announced reassuringly; a fireplace in the shop was the chief thing.

The agent suggested that it would be far [17] more expensive to heat the room with an open grate than with an anthracite base burner. Whereupon she explained that an open fire was part of her stock in trade, and it would be impossible to carry on her line of business without one.

The agent ventured to inquire what her line was, and she answered with a twinkle in her eye, "Notions."

The architect was doubtful about the fireplace, but not unwilling to discuss it, and they grew so friendly over the matter that the agent retired to the door and stared gloomily up the street.

From the fireplace the discussion turned to other things. As a possible tenant, the young lady consulted the architect about the best color for the walls, so adroitly insinuating her own ideas as to the proper stain for the woodwork that they seemed his own.

While they talked, a small boy in a gingham apron, with a sailor hat on the back of his curly head and a gray flannel donkey under his arm, wandered in and stood surveying them with great composure. [18]

"Who's going to live here?" he presently asked, his brown eyes upon the lady.

She met his gaze with a smile that drew him a step nearer, but caused no break in his seriousness. "I am thinking of it," she said, adding, with a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, "if they will let me have a fireplace in this room. Shouldn't you want a fireplace if you were going to live here?"

He nodded, "'Cause if you didn't, Santa Claus couldn't come."

The lady turned gravely to the architect. "That is a consideration which had not occurred to me, but it is an important one. I shall not take it without the fireplace." Her manner said there was no need for further discussion.

"What is your name?" she asked the small boy.

He shook his head.

"Do you mean you haven't any?"

Another more vigorous shake.

"Perhaps you have forgotten it?"

"No, I haven't."

"Why not tell, then? I am always willing to tell mine." [19]

"What is it?" he inquired with great promptness.

"But I don't think it is fair to ask me when you won't tell yours."

"You said you would."

The lady laughed. "Very well, I am Miss Pennington."

The small boy pondered this for a moment, then announced with much distinctness, "My name is James Mandeville Norton."

"Well, James, I am glad to meet you. I see you are a fair-minded person. Do you live in this neighborhood?"

James Mandeville pointed in the direction of the row of toy houses on Pleasant Street, and said he lived over there.

"Then if they give me a fireplace, you and I will be neighbors."

They were standing in the door, just outside which, on the sidewalk, was a velocipede. This James Mandeville now mounted with gravity. He did not express a hope that she might come to live near him, but there was friendliness in the tone in which he said good-by as he rode away. [20]

"Good-by Infinitesimal James," replied the lady.

"My name's James Mandeville," he called back.

In the course of a day or two the matter of the fireplace was adjusted and the lease signed. Norah Pennington was the tenant's name, and her references all the most timorous landlord could ask.

On the afternoon of the day on which the transaction was closed Miss Pennington might have been seen walking along the Terrace, gazing about with interested eyes.

"What dear old houses," she said to herself. "I am sure Marion will like it here. This might be Doubting Castle, and there is Palace Beautiful, a little out of repair."

She stood for a moment on the corner in the full blaze of the summer sun. The happy courage of youth seemed to radiate from her. There was a vitality, a sparkle in her glance, in the waves of her sunny hair, in her smile, as with a slight gesture that embraced the Terrace, and Pleasant Street, too, she said half aloud, "Good-by till September." [21]

CHAPTER SECOND

WHAT SHALL WE CALL IT?

"And now what shall we call it?" Norah asked.

"Call it?" echoed Marion.

They sat on the rocks beside a mountain stream that filled the air with its delicious murmur.

"Certainly, everything has to have a name. Shall it be *Carpenter and Pennington, Dry-goods?*"

Marion removed the dark glasses she wore, turning a pair of serious eyes upon her companion. "How absurd," she said.

"No," insisted Norah, taking the glasses and adjusting them on her own nose, "not at all. It is businesslike. Can't you see it? — a large black sign with gilt letters."

"Give me my glasses, and don't be silly. It is not to be a dry-goods' store in the first place, [22] and above all things let us be original. If such signs are customary, ours must be different."

"Here speaks wisdom. Here the instinct of the born advertiser betrays itself. Let us think." Norah buried her face in her hands.

Marion watched her with a half smile, then as an expression of weariness stole into her face she restored the glasses and sighed, as with her elbow supported on a ledge of rock she rested her chin in her palm and looked down on the swift running water. She was

extremely slender, and it was easy to guess she was also tall, and that, seen at her best, she was a person of grace and elegance rather than beauty.

"I have it," Norah cried presently. "*The Pleasant Street Shop.*"

"Or *The Neighborhood Shop,*" Marion suggested.

"No, let us have Pleasant Street in it. It seems a good omen that the street is called Pleasant."

Marion smiled. "Have you told Dr. Baird?" she asked.

"Yes. He said I should be a novelist, and confine my wild-goose schemes to paper." [23]

"*The Notions of Norah* would be a taking title," laughed Marion, the weariness gone from her face.

"But as I told him, 'Deeds, not Dreams,' is my motto, and I'll show him if it is a wild-goose scheme. I am convinced that deep down in his heart he was interested; and although he made no promises, I believe we may count on him." [24]

CHAPTER THIRD

AN ALIEN

With the swiftness of a small tornado, Charlotte descended the long, straight stairway only to sink in a heap on the broad step at the bottom. "Oh, dear!" she said, her chin in her hand, "Oh, dear!"

A ray of sunlight falling through the side-lights of the door with their pattern of fleur-de-lis on a crimson ground, cast a rosy stain on the neutral-tinted carpet and brought to notice a few atoms of dust on one of the rosewood chairs that stood to attention on either side of the tall hat-rack. The wall against which they were ranged was done in varnished paper to represent oak panelling, and on it hung one or two steel engravings.

"If only something were crooked!" Charlotte sighed.

Now at Aunt Cora's nothing was straight. [25] Etchings and water colors fought for the honors of the walls, and chased each other up the side of the stairway. Tables and shelves were crowded with trifles, costly and otherwise, the chairs were deep and cushiony, except now and then a gilt toy which was distinctly for show; the divans were smothered with gay pillows. In contrast this house in Kenton Terrace seemed unbearably stiff and prim.

Why had not Uncle Landor allowed her to stay with him instead of sending her so far away? Perhaps, after all, he had not wanted her. Nobody wanted her—dreadful thought!—unless it were Aunt Cora; and Charlotte knew in her heart Uncle Landor was wise in deciding she was not to travel about with Aunt Cora any more.

Since she had been taken away, a child of seven, her memories of this southern town had grown vague, and it seemed strange to hear Uncle Landor refer to it as her home. He also said it was the sort of a background she needed for the next few years, until she should be ready for college. After that he promised, if she still wished it, she might come and keep house for him. [26]

But it would be so long. How could she stand it? If only she might have gone to boarding-school. Why had Aunt Caroline and Aunt Virginia agreed to her coming? They did not like her. Nothing she did pleased them. Charlotte looked about for a refuge where she might fling herself down and cry her heart out. She rose and stole on tiptoe into the drawing-room.

Here the same absolute order prevailed. She felt sure the carved chairs and sofas, with their covering of satin brocade, had occupied these same positions ever since they first appeared on the scene when Aunt Caroline made her *début*, more than thirty years ago. Fancy Aunt Caroline having a party! Aunt Virginia had described it to her, but it sounded unreal. Thirty years ago was too far in the past. Charlotte's own mother had been a little girl then.

The buhl cabinet near the window, the inlaid chess table in the corner beside the white marble mantel, even the folds of the handsome lace curtains, seemed petrified into their present positions. For thirty years the mantle mirror had been reflecting the Dresden clock and candelabra, and the crystal pendants of the chandelier; the face

[27] and figure that confronted Charlotte in the pier glass was, however, something new and alien.

It was a brown face with blue eyes that danced with mischief or flashed with anger, or grew soft with entreaty beneath their black lashes, as occasion might demand. Her hair, too, was brown, and shadowed her face in a wavy mass held most objectionable by her aunts. That a girl barely fourteen should have decided views on the subject of dress, and insist upon wearing what she called a pompadour and having her belts extremely pointed in front, was surprising to Aunt Virginia, shocking to Aunt Caroline.

As she stood facing her own image, the sound of sweeping skirts on the stairway sent her flying behind the half-open door.

"What has become of Charlotte?" she heard Aunt Virginia ask.

"I am sure I don't know," responded Aunt Caroline.

"And what is more, you don't care," added Charlotte, under her breath.

When the door had closed behind them, she ran to the window and watched as they went down the walk and entered the waiting carriage. [28] Two very charming ladies, an unprejudiced observer might have pronounced them. A little precise in their elegance, perhaps, but pleasant to look upon, especially Aunt Caroline, from head to foot a shimmer of silver gray. Aunt Caroline was Mrs. Millard, the widow of an army officer, and Charlotte had expected to like her best; but after all, Aunt Virginia, who was only Miss Wilbur, had proved the least objectionable.

She was not so handsome, but seemed kinder; and when she laughed, Charlotte always felt a little thrill of sympathy. When Aunt Caroline laughed, it was in a reserved, controlled manner. Charlotte had arrived at the conclusion that Aunt Virginia stood in awe of her sister; and this might have been a bond of union if it had been possible to become really acquainted, but Aunt Virginia held aloof. It was almost as if she were afraid of Charlotte, too. Still there was something rather nice about her. Charlotte hardly realized how often she returned to this opinion.

When they had driven away, she went to the library,—a less formidable apartment than the drawing-room,—and making herself comfortable in an arm-chair by the window, began to consider [29] what she should say to Cousin Francis, for she had decided that pouring out her soul in a letter would, after all, be more satisfactory than tears.

She looked out across the garden to where, on the other side of Pleasant Street, stood the little corner shop with its gray-green shingles, its upper windows all aglow in the afternoon sunshine. Before it stood a furniture van, and Charlotte idly watched the unloading.

She had made up her mind that life here was going to be hopelessly dull. She swung her foot listlessly, and, forgetting her letter, thought of Aunt Cora's home in a gay little suburb where something was always going on,—teas, dinners, receptions, where, although in the background, she had had her share of the excitement.

At the Landors', where she sometimes spent several weeks while Aunt Cora, worn by her strenuous social life, went down to Atlantic City to recuperate, it was much quieter. And still she loved to be there. The elder Mr. Landor was a busy lawyer, his son Francis a literary person, and they lived in a tall, brown stone house in the old part of Philadelphia, among any number of others exactly like it. It was a [30] man's house, overflowing with books and pictures, and yet showing the lack of a woman's presence. Charlotte was very fond of her guardian and his son, who petted and made much of her on the occasions of her visits. She was conscious, however, that Uncle Landor was not quite satisfied with her. He had a way of looking at her long and steadily through his glasses, as if he were studying her.

Cousin Frank, perhaps because he had no responsibility in the matter, treated her as a comrade in a way that was flattering. She was, of course, an ardent admirer of his stories and verses, and upon one or two rare occasions had been made blissfully happy by being allowed to listen to one fresh from the typewriter. But most interesting of all had been a discovery made on her last visit in the spring. Between the leaves of a manuscript she had been allowed to read she found some verses beginning:—

"I love her whether she love me or no,