

TAKING AFTER GRANDMOTHER

By Harriet Lummis Smith



Grandmother
Langworthy



THREE generations were represented at the Langworthy's supper table. At the head sat Grandmother Langworthy, still wiry and indomitable. Her daughter-in-law, Marcia's mother, had the worried propitiatory air not uncommon among mothers of growing daughters, and Marcia herself, sullen and silent, represented, unfairly, the new generation.

"But it's only a class picnic," said Marcia's mother. "I can't see why you have to dress up for a picnic."

"Marcia's always dressed up, it seems to me," said Grandmother Langworthy. "We children used to carry our shoes and stockings to church in our hands and put 'em on behind the horse sheds before we went in."

"You couldn't expect anything like that of young folks nowadays," her daughter-in-law said quickly. "But Marcia is well enough dressed for any girl. When I was her age I had only one dress for every day and one for best."

"O dear!" The querulous interjection came from Marcia. "I can't see why you don't understand, mother, that girls nowadays can't do with two dresses any more than they can go round barefooted the way they did when grandmother was young. Everything's different, and people do things differently."

"The more you have," contributed her

grandmother, "the more discontented you are. When I was a girl I was tickled to death to get a pair of new shoes or anything at all that was new."

"Oh, I wish you could see how some of the girls dress!" cried Marcia. She pushed back her chair and rose. "I've only one decent shirt waist to my name, and after I get it ironed I'll have to work till bedtime mending it so it'll be fit to wear." At the door she turned for a Parthian shot: "All the other girls will wear Georgette blouses."

Grandmother Langworthy reached for the bread. She was the only one of the three who ate the plain fare with relish.

"You spoil her, Mary," she commented impartially.

"I suppose I do," the mother sighed. "I shouldn't mind that so much if Marcia thought so, too, but it seems to her that she doesn't have anything."

She waited patiently for Grandmother Langworthy to finish her bread and butter. But before the thick slice was disposed of Marcia burst into the room.

"Oh, look!" she cried, holding something damp and filmy toward her mother.

"What is it, child? Has something happened to your shirt waist?"

"Look! Can't you see?"

The two women bent toward her, realizing that her excitement indicated pleasure rather than consternation. Her eyes were dilated; a half-frightened smile played about her lips. Now that something had dissipated her sullen air, she looked really pretty.

The mother was the first to speak. "Why, it's Georgette!"

"Yes, and hand embroidered all up and down the front. Look!" Marcia straightened the filmy, clinging fabric.

"But where did it come from?" Grandmother Langworthy demanded.

"That's more than I know. It was lying in our back yard right by the steps."

There was a brief silence.

"Do you suppose it'll fit you, Marcia?" the girl's mother exclaimed.

"It looks so. Besides Georgette isn't like voile. It'll fit a lamp-post or a feather bolster. And, mother, it's perfectly good except for a tiny little tear by the cuff."

"But who does it belong to?" asked Grandmother Langworthy.

The inquiry, though timely, was evidently unwelcome. Marcia's face clouded.

"It was in our back yard," she said with something like defiance in her manner.

"You wouldn't say it was yours, would you?"

"It couldn't have blown from anywhere. There's not a breath stirring."

"I declare!" exclaimed the younger Mrs. Langworthy. "Your finding it just now looks fairly providential."

Grandmother Langworthy chuckled. "It's not my idea of providence, taking a nice shirt waist from somebody's clothesline and dropping it down by our back steps."

"I suppose," Marcia said, "you wouldn't spend a five-dollar bill that you found blowing across the street."

"Not till I'd tried to find the owner."

"I can't go from house to house asking people whether this blouse belongs to them."

"Must have dropped from an aeroplane," commented the grandmother. In her dry way she was the humorist of the family.

Marcia went into the kitchen and shut the door hard.

"Now you've made her feel bad," sighed her mother. "It's a pity if she can't take comfort in a shirt waist that blows from nobody knows where into our back yard."

"I'm worried about Marcia, Mary," the older woman answered. "It seems to me that nowadays folks care more for appearances than they do for honesty. If they can dress as well as their neighbors, they don't care whether their bills are paid or not."

"Times have changed. You can't expect Marcia to be satisfied with what we had."

"The Ten Commandments haven't changed, not that I've heard of, anyway." Grandmother Langworthy began to clear the table.

It was soon evident that her grandmother's criticism had not permanently clouded Marcia's spirits. When she brought in the freshly ironed blouse her face was radiant.

"Isn't it a beauty, mother? It's even prettier than I thought. With this and my white skirt I'll look as well as the others. Would you mind mending that little place on the cuff? You can mend so much better than I."

Marcia was very likely to come home from school festivities in a depressed, not to say sulky, frame of mind; but the class picnic was a memorable exception. She had had a lovely time. Lots of the girls had noticed her blouse and said how pretty it was.

"Did you tell them where you bought it?" asked her grandmother.

"No, I didn't," answered Marcia, flushing.

As a matter of fact she had been asked that very question and had answered evasively that the blouse was a present. She cast a rather startled glance toward her grandmother, hoping that the uncomfortably shrewd old lady would not continue her catechism. Apparently Grandmother Langworthy had satisfied her curiosity.

The cloud on Marcia's spirits soon passed. "O mother, I've been asked to join the Cat and Canary Club, the C and C C, they call it."

"That doesn't sound so very friendly," remarked Grandmother Langworthy.

Marcia's mother smiled uneasily. Club membership meant dues, special assessments for special occasions, extra new dresses. But after all she must find some way to meet the added expenses; she could not bear to have Marcia shut out of pleasures that other girls enjoyed.

"It's a great honor, you know," Marcia went on brightly. "It is a club made up of high-school girls, though it really has nothing to do with high school. They meet Saturdays at one another's houses, and everybody is crazy to belong. I honestly believe," she added triumphantly, "that I owe my invitation to that Georgette blouse."

"I'd hate to think," exploded her grandmother, "that I owed anybody's good opinion to stuff as flimsy as that!"

"It may have been different when you were a girl, grandmother, but nowadays dress makes a great deal of difference."

"Where are you going to meet next Saturday?" asked Marcia's mother, more because she wanted to change the topic of conversation to a pleasanter one than because she really cared to know.

"Oh, I'm not a member yet. Next Saturday they'll propose my name, and the Saturday after next they'll vote on it. There are two vacancies now, and I guess Ellen McIntyre will be the other new member."

Marcia did most of the talking that evening. Her enjoyment of the class picnic and her pride over the honor done her by the invitation to join the exclusive C and C C rendered her unusually voluble.

For a fortnight Marcia's emotional barometer indicated fair weather; then without

warning it presaged storms. Poor Mrs. Langworthy did not know what to do with this girl who scarcely spoke, made a pretense of eating and went round wearing so forbidding an aspect that even her intrepid grandmother hesitated to address her.

With the hope of suggesting a topic of conversation that Marcia would find agreeable,



"Is that your dog?" she demanded quickly

Mrs. Langworthy one day spoke of the Cat and Canary Club. Marcia turned upon her almost savagely.

"Can't you see that that's all over? Ellen McIntyre's a full-fledged member, and I must have been blackballed."

"Blackballed!" repeated her mother, aghast. Even Grandmother Langworthy looked startled. Neither was quite sure about the nature of the rite, but both were vaguely aware that it was not creditable.

"I suppose somebody thought that I wasn't rich enough!" stormed Marcia. "Some girls in the club have rich fathers. Sara Kent, who asked me to join, hasn't come near me to explain or—anything. She just nods when she sees me and keeps her distance."

Mrs. Langworthy raised her head and looked at her daughter.

"I'd have got you the money you needed if you'd joined the club, Marcia," she quavered. "I'd have done it somehow."

Even Marcia was touched. "Yes, I know it, mother, but that's not enough. They meet round at one another's houses, you know; and I suppose somebody thought that our house wasn't nice enough. Oh!" she cried, with the tears starting. "How dreadful it is to be poor!"

The season for picnics passed, and cold weather came on. Marcia's mother bought her a new winter coat; she changed her hour of church attendance to evening, when the threadbare seams of her own garments would be less apparent. Marcia took the new coat as a matter of course and thought resentfully of the furs that some of the other girls wore. After the unpleasant episode connected with the Cat and Canary Club she was inclined to hold herself aloof even from the girls with whom she had hitherto been friendly.

"She doesn't have any good times to speak of," her mother remarked.

"She won't take the good times that she might have," said Grandmother Langworthy. "Seems as if she couldn't believe in a good time that didn't cost money."

One chilly fall day Marcia came home from school and, knowing that her mother was not there, went to the rear of the house where she

would find the door key, hidden rather obviously under the scrubbing pail on the porch. As she turned the corner with her books under her arm a big, brindled bulldog sprang from the steps where he had been lying. His strong jaws were set on a white garment apparently of cotton, and as Marcia stood staring at him in amazement he raised his head

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"Is that your dog?" she demanded quickly.

"Tibs? Why, yes. Surely Tibs is my dog."

"He was in our back yard when I came home just now, and he was worrying this. I brought it back because it had your name on it."

"My petticoat!" gasped Judith. "Why, I shouldn't have believed that Tibs would steal clothes from the line!"

"He seemed ashamed when I caught him at it," said Marcia. "I guess he knew he hadn't any right to it." Her expression changed suddenly as an entirely new thought crossed her mind. "Judith," she gasped, "you didn't lose a Georgette blouse, did you, back in the fall soon after school opened?"

"Yes," replied Judith quietly, "I did."

"The one I mean is embroidered down the front with —"

"Little wreaths of roses," said Judith, finishing the sentence. "I did it myself, every bit."

Marcia's face was aflame.

"Oh, grandmother was right when she said I ought to try to find the owner. But you see, there it was close by our doorsteps, and I did so want a Georgette blouse to wear to the picnic."

Judith was staring at her with a strange, startled expression, which Marcia was not able to interpret.

"Of course you wouldn't have done it!" Marcia burst out passionately. "You have so many lovely things. But if your best shirt waist were made of coarse voile with a little cheap lace down the front, and Georgette and embroidery rained down on you from the skies, you'd understand."

"I thought I *did* understand," said Judith, and her pale face made a striking contrast for Marcia's crimson one. "I had just finished it that afternoon, and Mary rinsed it for me and put it out on the line. She meant to press it as soon as it had dried a little. But when she went to look for it, it had disappeared, and Ella, the cook, said she'd noticed a girl walking by and just staring at that Georgette blouse. She couldn't tell how the girl looked except that she was about my age. And then the next day at the picnic —"

The two looked hard at each other.

"Yes," said Marcia in a shaking voice, "I see."

"I knew I couldn't be mistaken about that blouse," Judith continued in a tone of appeal. "And then one of the girls asked you where you bought it, and you looked so confused and said —"

"Yes, I remember; I said it was a present." Marcia put her hand to her hot forehead.

"I hate to go on," said Judith after a moment, "but I've got to tell you something that I'm afraid will make you feel bad."

"What! More?"

"Yes, it's about the C and C C."

"O Judith —"

"We may as well go through with this now. Marcia, since we've started. We girls wanted two new members, and we talked things over and picked out you and Ellen McIntyre."

Marcia waited silently. So she had not owed the invitation to the hypnotic Georgette blouse; again grandmother had been right.

"When Sara Kent proposed your name at the first meeting after the picnic, I opposed your election. I said you weren't the sort of girl we wanted in the club. I didn't tell them why, Marcia, but I said I knew what I was talking about, and they took my word for it. I guess you can't ever forgive me," she added unhappily. "But of course I'll tell the girls that I was mistaken."

Marcia waited a moment.

"We both made mistakes," she said unsteadily at last. "But I think there was some excuse for both of us."

Judith was touched by her generosity.

"Marcia, that's dear of you. There's no vacancy in the C and C C now, but just as soon — no, I won't wait for a vacancy. I'll resign, and you can be elected in my place."

For a little while Marcia was silent; then she made perhaps the bravest speech of her life.

"Judith, as if I'd think of taking your place, or as if the girls would ever let you resign! But that isn't all. I'm afraid the C and C C is too expensive for me."

"Why, it isn't so expensive. Fifteen or twenty dollars a year covers everything."

Marcia smiled. "And that," she said, "would buy my mother the new dress she needs so badly."

Marcia's mother and her grandmother spent considerable time in the next six months trying to account for the change in Marcia; then they gave it up and contented themselves with expatiating on Marcia's superiority over most young people of the present day.

"I dare say fine clothes are all right," said old Mrs. Langworthy. "I didn't have them when I was a girl, and *you* didn't have them; but I don't deny that they're pretty and becoming. It's only when a girl gets to thinking that clothes are a great deal more important than other things that it makes trouble."

"Marcia's not that way," her daughter-in-law boasted, with the beautiful forgetfulness of motherhood. "She understands the importance of other things."

"Marcia!" The shrewd old face creased in innumerable wrinkles. "Oh, Marcia's all right. She takes after her grandmother."

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