

# The Reduction Cure for Kitty James

BY ELIZABETH JORDAN

ONE day, during our study hour at St. Katharine's, Kitty James slipped a note into her Rhetoric and then handed the book to me. It was just after the girls had "produced" my play, so, of course, I wasn't speaking to any of them. But Kitty was not as much to blame as the others; therefore I read her note. These were its enigmatic words:

"Meet me under the big willow at five o'clock. Sit down beside me, but don't speak. Just watch what happens."

I tore up the note quickly, so Sister Irmingarde wouldn't be disappointed if she saw it and tried to get it, and I glanced at Kitty. Her sweet face was pale and wan. I raised my eyebrows and looked politely interested, but Kitty shook her head and kept her eyes on the printed page, which was indeed the last place where one would expect to find them. At the end of any study hour Kitty James can tell with unerring accuracy what every girl in the study-hall wears, and whether she has anything new on, or has done her hair in a different way; but Kitty never knows her lessons, and rarely does she know what the book in front of her is, though she keeps one there for looks.

Kitty told me once with her own lips that she plans all her clothes and her convent "spreads" during study hours, and the clothes of the children she is going to have some day, and how her future home will look, and the kind of ties her husband will wear. She said she invented some "dream ties" for him once—pale blue and pink, with pansies and forget-me-nots painted on them—and gave them to her brother-in-law, George Morgan, to see how they would look "in the flesh." George didn't wear them. He said the dream was one to appall the strongest soul, and that it had given him a permanent and incurable insomnia. He said it just that way. He told Kitty

that every night afterward for weeks, just as he began to sink into an innocent slumber, he felt himself bound hand and foot by painted family ties, and the awful horror of it always woke him up, bathed in a cold perspiration. Kitty felt badly, and tears came into her eyes when she told me about it. She hadn't meant to make him suffer; but she was glad, since some one had to, that she had learned the truth in time, and that it was George who felt that way, and not Algernon. Algernon is what *his* name is going to be.

Of course this hasn't anything to do with the other experience of Kitty's, which I am about to relate if the gentle reader will wait a minute. I put it in to throw light on my heroine's character, the way Arnold Bennett does in his books, when nothing much happens, and you think nothing's going to, and all the time the human soul is being dissected before your poor, blind eyes. Now I will return to Kitty in the study-hall, pale and wan. There will be more references to literary topics and public questions in my future work, though. As I grow more mature in my art I see how wrong it is to make my stories a source of entertainment only, when they might be a source of knowledge, too. Besides, no merely entertaining literature can live.

I met Kitty under the willow at five o'clock. It was not easy, for I had other things to do. But who would fail a dear companion with secrets to tell? Our convent orchestra was rehearsing for the Commencement programme, and of course we were going to play the overture to "Zampa." I had to lead on the piano, and I was expected to practise my piano part *hard*, every day, from half-past four to half-past five, in one of the little music-rooms off the main hall. Though I have a light step and am very swift in my movements, it was not easy to get away, for Sister Harmona, one of the teachers of music, has a dreadfully sus-



MABEL MURIEL CAME ON WITH SLOW AND SOLEMN STEPS

picious nature, and walks up and down the hall, listening, to be sure we are all at work. The din is frightful when we are. "Zampa" from one room, the "Spring Song" from another, Brahms's waltzes and "Parsifal" from others, bits of Chopin and Beethoven and Grieg from the rest—dozens of rooms and dozens of pianos going like mad on different things. Sister Harmona looks quite nervous sometimes, after she has stood it all day. Naturally, I couldn't be practising "Zampa" and sitting out in the grounds with Kitty at the same time, so I compromised. I got Janet Trelawney, who plays beautifully, to go to my music-room and practise "Zampa," so Sister Harmona wouldn't be disappointed when she went by; and I stole off to Kitty and the drooping willow.

Kitty was 'most as drooping as the willow when I reached her. She was sitting alone on the bench as I approached, and she rose and bowed (Kitty has the most beautiful manners!) and motioned me to sit beside her. I did, without a word, and we waited for five minutes, and nothing happened.

I began to get restless. I am nervous and high-strung, like all literary artists, and sitting down without talking rarely interests me. There are so many things to do and life is so short. Kitty saw my

feet moving, and she made a sign, eager and imploring, for me to wait. I waited, and I began to think of a book I had been reading, and how they carried the heroine out dead (I've only read that description three times, but I know it by heart), and I forgot about Kitty and "Zampa" and other unimportant things, as I always do when my mind is on Art.

Suddenly Kitty nudged me, and I saw Mabel Muriel Murphy coming toward us. I started up to go away, for Mabel was the girl who was the stage-manager for my play, and did the very worst things to it, and changed it from a five-act tragedy to a three-act comedy, and made all the characters dance instead of dying when their last sad hour came. Kitty caught my arm and pulled me down on the bench again, and I remembered her note and sat still and waited, though terrible doubts assailed me. Was Kitty James trying to force me to be friends again with Mabel Muriel? If she was, I knew that I must root Kitty, too, from my crushed and empty heart.

Mabel Muriel came on with slow and solemn steps, as if she were following a bier. Her head was bowed on her breast, but I guess she caught a glimpse of us out of the corner of her eye. She faltered when she saw me, as well indeed she might, and one foot started backward

by instinct. She drew it forward again with terrible determination, and came straight up to us, and handed Kitty a little piece of paper. Then she walked away. There was something strangely impressive about it. I felt a cold chill running slowly down my spine, prickling as it passed. That's alliteration, and I'm glad I thought of it. Such touches are what make style.

Kitty opened the note and looked at it. Then she handed it to me. Its words were few and simple. They read: "*Try the lemon cure.*"

My mind is very quick, and everybody says my intuition is simply wonderful; but when I read that note I sat and stared at Kitty like any ordinary stupid girl. She had her finger on her lips, to show I was not to speak. Mabel Muriel was already disappearing among the trees, but I saw Kitty glance quickly in another direction, and I looked, too, and there was Maudie Joyce coming along with measured tread. I could almost hear Chopin's funeral march as I watched her, and I could almost see the dead leaves whirling over the new-made grave, the way they do in the last pages of the sonata.

Sister Harmona says she can't hear them whirl when I play that sonata, and I don't wonder. I can't always, myself; but I hear them plainly when Paderewski or Sister Cecilia plays it.

Maudie hesitated, too, when she saw me, so I realized that, whatever was going on, the girls had not expected me to be in it. I was, though, and this pleased me. I made up my mind that very minute to stand by Kitty to the death. Maudie pulled herself together, walked straight up to us with her head bent, handed Kitty a note, and went away. The note said:

*"Buttermilk will do it."*

Kitty raised her lily hand to show that I was not to speak. I wouldn't have had time to, anyway, for Adeline Thurston

was already stalking toward us, her eyes on the ground and her hands crossed on her breast. She uncrossed them long enough to hand Kitty a note. Then she went away as the others had done, except that she seemed to feel even worse. Of course, Adeline, being a poet, looked worse than the others, too. Kitty and I read her note together, for I simply could not wait. It said:

*"Roll on the floor fifty times every morning and fifty times every night."*

By this time I knew I was assisting at some grim, mysterious rite, so I began to enjoy myself. But Kitty's face was getting redder and redder, and her mouth looked like a little pink hyphen in her face. That means it looked thin and straight, the way a hyphen looks. I hate to explain, but I'd hate worse to have the gentle reader miss it.

A few minutes later Mabel Blossom came along, exactly as the other girls had come, with purposeful and mournful mien, and handed Kitty a note. It was simple and direct. It said:

*"Stop eating."*

Before any more girls had time to come, Kitty took me by the hand and led

me to a shrine away off in another part of the convent grounds. We sat down and waited. Before five minutes had passed, little Josie Gregory, one of the minims, arrived and handed Kitty a note. The handwriting was Jennie Hartwell's, and it read:

*"Walking works wonders."*

Kitty tore the note up, and threw the pieces on the ground and put her heel on them. Almost before she had done it, another minim came with another note, and after that they came and came and came, like leaves in Vallombrosa, as the poet says. That means there were a lot of notes. Sometimes a minim brought them, and sometimes it was an older girl; but, whoever it was, she came slowly and sadly, as if to take one last look



KITTY LAUGHED AT THE THINGS THEY SAID

at the dear face within. You know what I mean. I don't want to put it any more plainly, for, indeed, it is an awful thought; but it is the only one that expresses the way those messengers acted.

The little minims were the worst of all. After they delivered their notes they stood and stared with round, wondering eyes, as if they were waiting for something dreadful to happen. They were, too; for, as we learned afterward, Mabel Blossom had told them with her own lips that if they waited long enough, perfectly quiet, with their eyes fixed on Kitty James, maybe they would see her burst! We didn't know this then, but it made us feel dreadfully nervous to see them standing round us in a circle, and closing in like the wolves around the Russian woman's sleigh when she threw out her children to save herself. I was thinking about the Russian woman and how dreadful she was, as well as about Kitty—I've always been able to think of different things at the same time—when Kitty suddenly rose to her feet and threw her arms over her head and shrieked.

She is a nervous child, and when she begins to shriek she can't stop. So she went on doing it and getting hysterics as fast as she could get them, and the minims shrieked, too, and scattered in every direction, and then watched us from behind trees, waiting for what they thought was coming. I rubbed Kitty's hands and talked to her, and pretty soon I got her quieted down. Then I took her to my room, with the notes she hadn't had time to tear up, and finally I got the whole story out of her. This was it:

Maudie Joyce and Mabel Blossom had made up their minds that Kitty James was getting too fat, so they began to talk to her about it. At first Kitty thought it was a joke and laughed at the things they said. But pretty soon they got the other girls into it, and everybody talked to Kitty about getting stout, and told her it dulled her

brain, and advised her to stop. They said the way to do it was to diet. Kitty got dreadfully tired hearing about it, for she loves food more than almost anything else. After that, when they didn't stop, she got angry, and finally, when they still kept it up, the terrible thing happened that comes sometimes in the case of gentle, beautiful natures like hers—she got stubborn. She told the girls if they didn't like to look at her they could go and look at some one else and leave her alone, and she said she would get fatter than ever, just to show them. Then they began to send her notes and to get the whole school to help them. You see, it had got to be a kind of a game, and a terribly funny joke to every one but Kitty.

All this had been going on for more than a week, and I hadn't known it. But that was because I was hardly speaking to any of the girls, after the way they had treated my play. They came and talked to me every day and tried to make up, and I answered direct questions courteously, and then excused myself and left them. You'd better believe they



KITTY JAMES AND I FORMED A SECRET SOCIETY

didn't like it, either—and of course they had got into mischief and were driving Kitty James into hysterics.

I made Kitty some tea and gave her two big pieces of chocolate cake and some strawberry jam and some fudge, and we read the notes and talked and decided what we would do. I had a lovely time planning. Of course it was my duty to stand by Kitty, who was one against many; and it is a wonderful experience, and all too rare, to have duty go hand in hand with delight, as real writers would say if they were clever enough to think of it. It is surprising how rarely they do think of things like that. Oft, indeed, I see places in their work where I could have said things better. But I am forgetting my heroine, which Sister Irmingarde says is one of my most serious literary faults. I notice it in Henry James's stories, too, for pages and pages—so I don't worry over it as much as I do over my other faults.

As soon as I began to think about Kitty's problem, Kitty stopped trying to. She is a girl it is a pleasure to help. She sat still and ate chocolate cake, and gained two pounds more, she told me the next day, and I thought and thought, till the solution of our problem flashed upon me. To tell Kitty was the next thing, and I did it.

That night we "planned a campaign," as papa says, that would show the girls the error of their ways. While we were in the most interesting part of it the lights went out and the Great Silence fell, and I had to creep alone through the pitch-black convent halls from Kitty's room to mine, a block and a half away. It was no fun, either, in that awful darkness and silence, full of memories of beautiful dead nuns. Every time I find myself alone at night in those long, ghostly corridors, that is what I feel around me—the nuns who have died, silently keeping step with me. I can almost see their black veils flutter, and hear the soft click of their rosary beads one against the other. It does not frighten me; the memory of them is too sweet for that. But it makes me feel very solemn, and I am glad when I get back to my own room and see the stars shining in through my windows.

The next day Kitty James and I

formed a secret society—the Epsilon Sigma; and by sunset every girl at St. Katharine's knew about it and was crazy to join it. But we didn't let them. We confined the membership to ten girls—eight besides ourselves. Need I add that we chose them from among the girls who had had nothing to do with my play or with reducing the weight of Kitty James? We did. We took in Janet Trelawney first. She had been in the infirmary for three weeks, so neither of us had anything against her. Then we gathered in the most brilliant of the other girls—outside of our old set—and I can tell you they were proud and glad when we asked them. I never saw girls so happy and grateful. And of course all the other girls stopped bothering Kitty right off, in the hope that we would take them into the Epsilon Sigma later.

We got permission to go into town in the afternoon, and we ordered the badges from Mr. Whitten—"our genial fellow-townsmen in the jewelry business," the local newspaper calls him. He made them in three days, and they were too sweet—gold ovals, with the monogram E.S. on them, and pins in the back to fasten them to our blouses. Then we spent a lot of money for food.

That night we had the most gorgeous banquet in the history of St. Katharine's. It was in honor of our secret society. Before eating we initiated the new members, and you'd better believe they were ready for the banquet after we got through with them. We had cake and cold chicken and jelly and fudge and pickles and ice-cream and lemonade and Welsh rabbit and potted tongue and deviled crabs and French pastry. We put blankets over the transom of my room, so the Sisters wouldn't be disturbed by our lights, and we ate and ate, and talked in whispers, and invented a secret grip and a password, and I never had so much fun in my life. Every girl there was just bursting with food, and pride because she was with us.

The next morning Kitty James went to the infirmary and stayed two days. It was very inconvenient, when we had so much to do, but Kitty said the banquet was worth it. In the mean time I wrote mamma to send me a box, and I told her what to put in it—cold ham



and turkey and cream cake and jelly cake, and other things just as good. It came the day after Kitty got well, so we had a banquet that night to celebrate her return to our midst. The very next day poor Kitty was in the infirmary again, and the nuns couldn't understand it; but Kitty didn't mind going. She said the second banquet was even more worth it than the first. As soon as she was able to sit up she wrote to her sister, Mrs. George Morgan, asking for a box, and it came right away; so Kitty gave a banquet the night she left the infirmary, and the following morning she went back to it—to the infirmary, I mean. She was there four days that time, and the convent infirmarians began to talk about sending for a specialist to examine her. She got better, though, and by the time she was out George Morgan sent me a box, so the Epsilon Sigma was ready for another banquet.

George is my very dearest friend—far, far dearer than any one else except mamma—and it is the tragedy of our lives that he wed before we had found each other. If I told you what was in that box, you'd never believe it. Chickens in aspic, and candied fruit, and a five-pound box of the richest chocolate creams you ever ate, and loads of preserves. Kitty was out of the infirmary just in time for that banquet, but the next day she was very sick, and the Sisters sent to Chicago for the specialist.



THAT NIGHT WE HAD THE MOST GORGEOUS BANQUET IN THE HISTORY OF ST. KATHARINE'S

All this time our old friends were not idle. They couldn't be, with every other girl at St. Katharine's talking about those banquets and describing them till their mouths watered. Janet Trelawney told everybody they were like the feasts of Lucullus that we read about in history. The day after the last banquet Mabel Blossom and Maudie Joyce and Mabel Muriel Murphy came to me together and apologized again for what they did to my play. I accepted their apology politely. Then I changed the subject and talked about the weather. Mabel Blossom said the food at the convent table was nourishing but monotonous, and I

said I didn't remember much about it, because I hadn't eaten any of it lately.

The girls mentioned the Epsilon Sigma in an offhand way, and I preserved a calm silence. Finally Mabel Blossom spoke up again in trembling tones, and asked whether I wouldn't let bygones be bygones. While she was speaking Maudie Joyce burst into tears and said they had treated my play dreadfully, and that they never could forgive themselves, and they had never been so unhappy in their lives, and she didn't care a fig for my old banquets or my club, but she did love me and always would, and wouldn't I please forgive her and be natural again. She said it all just like that, without stopping, and she kept wiping her eyes till her handkerchief was a little wet ball. Mabel Muriel Murphy was crying, too, by this time, and Mabel Blossom looked dreadfully cross, which with her is the sign of her deepest suffering.

I looked at my dear companions, and all of a sudden my icy heart melted as

if Maudie had taken it into her warm, friendly hands; and I kissed the girls and told them everything was all right, and I meant it. We had a beautiful afternoon together—it happened to be Saturday—and it was exactly like the dear old days. The nuns wouldn't let me see Kitty; she was too sick. I saw her the next afternoon, when she was a little better, and told her how I had forgiven the girls, and begged her to, and to let them come into the Epsilon Sigma. But Kitty wouldn't. She said she had suffered too much, and I guess she had. She said if she had to die I could call them around her death-bed for a last scene of forgiveness; but while there was any hope of life she wouldn't look at them. I knew how she felt. I had felt even worse the terrible day of the play.

Kitty was quite sick for almost a week, and when she came back to us I gave a banquet for her in my room. It wasn't a meeting of the Epsilon Sigma;



Charles Gordon Brown.

THE VERY NEXT DAY POOR KITTY WAS IN THE INFIRMARY AGAIN



DURING THE WHOLE EVENING THE GIRLS KEPT STARING AT KITTY

it was just a celebration of Kitty's recovery; so she let me ask Maudie Joyce and Mabel Blossom and Mabel Muriel Murphy; and I invited the Epsilon Sigma girls, too, for of course we would not desert those who had stood by us in our trouble. Kitty sat at my right, and during the whole evening the girls kept staring at Kitty and me, and then looking at one another with long, meaning glances. They were lovely to her, though, and Kitty forgave them before the banquet was over, and everything was as jolly as it could be. But every now and then the girls of our old set would begin to speak and then stop. I could see that they were dreadfully interested in something that they didn't dare to talk about, and Kitty saw it, too. We were curious about it, but of course we didn't ask any questions.

The next day Mabel Blossom came to my room and sat looking at me for five minutes without speaking. She does that sometimes, and usually it makes me nervous; but this time it didn't, for I saw there was loving admiration in her eyes. There isn't, always. I went on calmly clearing out my bureau drawers, without paying much attention to her, and at last she drew a deep breath and spoke.

"May Iverson," she said, in thrilling tones, "you really are a wonder! I never saw any one like you!"

Before I could ask why she had not discovered this long before, the door opened and Maudie Joyce and Mabel Muriel Murphy came in. They sat down and looked at me, exactly the way Mabel Blossom had looked. There was awe and also a touch of reverence in their gaze. I enjoyed it for a while, but at last I couldn't stand not knowing what it meant, so I asked them. They all began to talk at once, but Mabel Blossom's voice rose loud and clear above the other two, and finally they stopped.

"May Iverson," she began again, "you are a wonder." And she went on to say that in less than three weeks I alone had accomplished something the entire school had worked on and failed in. She told about Kitty James and how they had tried to reduce her weight and couldn't, and all the different methods they had used; and she said I had simply walked in and had a lovely time, and given Kitty a lovely time, and eight other girls a lovely time—and *done it*.

At first I couldn't quite understand, but of course I didn't show this; and pretty soon I began to see what they meant. Besides, I remembered the way Kitty had looked the day before. I put on a calm, superior expression, as if what I had done had been easy.

"But you don't know yet how many pounds she has lost," I told them, trying



to keep pride out of my voice. I didn't know myself, but they did, and they answered like a Greek chorus.

"Eight-e-e-n!" they said, and they drew the word out like molasses candy when you pull it. "We asked the infirmarians."

I will admit to the gentle reader that I nearly fell off my chair when I heard that. Eighteen pounds lost in less than three weeks! No wonder Kitty James had looked slender and willowy!

Then my chest swelled with satisfaction, and you can see for yourself that it had cause. To take Kitty James in hand, and to get eighteen pounds off her in three weeks by feeding her with everything she loved, was a brand-new idea, and it was all my own. I don't believe any one ever thought of it before. Of course, as I strive to be honest, even with myself, I will admit that I hadn't really

thought it out in detail. It was just instinct. But it got results, which is all one ought to ask of any idea. I told the girls there was more to the matter than they knew, which was true. I said the real name of the Epsilon Sigma was the Eating Society, which was true, too. Then I frowned as if I felt disappointed, and I sat thinking hard for a moment, and not one of them dared to speak. Finally I let my face clear. I felt another instinct stirring in me.

"Eighteen pounds is not enough," I said, firmly. "It's got to be twenty. I'll give the biggest banquet of all to-night, and invite you three girls and Kitty and the Epsilon Sigma. We'll eat all that's left of George Morgan's box. There's heaps. By to-morrow Kitty will lose the other two pounds."

And you'd better believe she did!

## Song

BY LOUIS V. LEDOUX

WHAT is the worth of singing?  
To what shall I liken song?  
A bird through the sunset winging;—  
And the night is dark and long.

Agileam arc the golden pinions  
Glimpsed ere the sunset fade,  
Then lost in the dark dominions  
Of the slowly folding shade.

What is the worth of singing?  
Can I lighten the wide world-wrong  
With a leaf on the night wind winging,  
Or the sunset gleam of song?