

# The Cherry Velvet Ribbon

BEVERLY PAGE IS UNEXPECTEDLY REMINDED OF WHAT SHE  
WORE FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

By Mariel Brady

THE embroidery salesman let the strap which he had been adjusting on his bulging sample case slide to the floor. He took three quick steps to the glass-paneled door.

“Say, who’s that?”

Cephas Doolittle, sole proprietor of the Paris Dry Goods Emporium in the sleepy little town of Dorcastle, followed his pointing finger with indolent interest.

“Her in brown?” he inquired negligently, squinting after the slender, erect figure crossing the street. “That’s Beverly Page. Don’t get all het up, George! Old maid, you know. The wife went to school with her, and she’s around the third corner, all right! Good-looker, though, ain’t she? But you want to save your eyes for her niece. She’s easy to look at, I tell you—pretty young girl, sort of clipper-built and yaller-headed.”

The bald-headed drummer grunted a little as he bent for his strap.

“These tank towns make me tired,” he grumbled. “Homeliest married women I ever saw, and all the good-looking ones left to dry up into old maids. What’s the matter with the he-males of this burg, Doolittle? Blind as bats, huh?”

Cephas pursed his loose lips and frowned harmlessly. The slender figure in brown had turned the next corner. He hooked his pudgy thumbs into the armholes of his vest, and rocked slowly upon his square toes and squarer heels.

“Well, now, I’ll tell you, George,” he stated judicially. “There’s some women too derved particular—too cussed particular, if you want to know. That Page girl’s one. She’ll go through the woods with her nose high as a meetinghouse steeple, and she’ll come out with a crooked stick yet, I’ll warrant!”

The traveling man let one knowing eyelid droop significantly on his plump cheek.

“So that’s the way of it!” he observed blandly, picking up his case. “Little Miss Iceberg to all you hicks, eh? Well, I don’t blame her for saving herself for something better—not even after a casual survey of the eligibles around here, I don’t; but all I got to say is, if Broadway once lamped that queen—”

## II

THE queen walked swiftly home. She let herself into the low brown house under the bare maples, and closed the door with a jubilant bang. Her cheeks, usually pale, were a clear pink, and her gray eyes sparkled. She had caught the portly drummer’s look of open admiration, and it had gone to her head like old wine. Women, even the chastest of them, who have been shelved by younger and prettier ones, are gorgeously thrilled by these unexpected tributes. The fleeting hours of beauty are still theirs, and a stranger’s eyes have rendered delightful homage.

“Marie Louise!” she called, with the lilt of excitement still in her clear tones. “It’s fearfully cold out. How’s the furnace?”

A pin-muffled voice came from upstairs.

“I don’t know, dearest. I’ve been so fearfully busy fixing over my orchid voile for to-night. You know there’s a dance after our play, and I haven’t a thing but this old rag.”

Miss Page sighed.

“All right!” she said resignedly. “I’ll see to it. I suppose you’ll want dinner a little early, won’t you? I’ll tell Rhuey.”

She ran lightly down the cellar stairs, wrestled triumphantly with a chronically sulky furnace, and came up to wash her hands in Rhuey’s immaculate kitchen.

Beverly Page was poor. What she did to eke out her meager salary as a teacher no one knew, but the low brown house under the maples sheltered her orphan niece, Marie Louise, and a distant cousin, Rhuea Scofield, who went through life with no money in her purse, but with a perpetual chip on her bony shoulder.

"Oh, Rhuey!" began Miss Page diplomatically. "I smelled that delicious spice cake the minute I opened the hall door. Do you suppose you could have dinner a little earlier to-night? Marie Louise wants to get off to her play by seven. It takes so long to make them up, you know, and of course Marie Louise has the most important part. Never thought we'd own a leading lady, did we, Rhuey?"

Rhuey sniffed. Her thin lips set themselves in a straight line, which matched the rest of her. Miss Scofield's *tout ensemble* resembled nothing so much as a bed slat dressed in gray percale, and her skin looked just like that peculiar wood at the end of a bed slat, too.

"Don't know why I should slave myself sick to get dinner for that pert little snip!" she said acridly. "Never give me no reserved seat for her play, neither! I ain't goin' to set in no gallery. In my purple silk I'm good enough for the front row, or I'll stay to home. She meant it for a slight, Beverly, and she's just as much poor relation as I be."

"Oh, no, she didn't! Marie Louise is just thoughtless and young, and every one spoils her, Rhuey. I've a reserved seat for you—two, if you want them. Shall I help you with dinner, Rhuey? Let me peel the potatoes. You know you hate to."

"You clear out of my kitchen, Beverly Page! I guess I'm able to get dinner yet awhile, but I ain't no slave to drive. Us girls don't have to jump at no Marie Louise's crack of the whip, as I see it. In my purple silk I'm good enough to set next to anybody in this town!"

Rhuey was fifty-eight and indomitably young. Miss Page sighed a little as she looked at the spare, erect figure. She would be older than Rhuey at fifty-eight, if these eternal bickerings kept up.

"Of course," she conceded smoothly. "Well, if you won't let me help, I'll go up and see what our young lady is doing."

Rhuey rattled her muffin pan and set her lips more tightly.

"Our young lady on your side of the

house—don't forget that, Beverly Page! Us Scofields keeps our brains in our heads, not our heels. She'll be a common dancin' hussy on the stage yet, you mark my words! Then you and me'll be alone here, 'ceptin' you take up with that meachin' dominie. He called up again this afternoon, drat him! Wants you should come to-night and help hang all them fool Christmas greens. He can do his own hangin'. I up and told him you had somethin' better to do than climbin' stepladders for nothin'. Told him you was goin' to the High School play with Mrs. Dr. Forbes and Mrs. Hilliard. He can put that in his pipe and smoke it!"

"Rhuey! You didn't?"

Rhuey gave the oven door a militant bang.

"Did so! I don't aim to have no dominie bossin' me. If you've got to have a man around, Beverly, for the land's sake, get a he-man. I never could abide a meachin' dominie nor a pussy-footin' doctor."

Beverly went upstairs quietly. She turned the handle of her own door, and stopped dead short on the threshold.

Before the long pier glass between the two windows was poised an exquisite little figure. A swirl of light green chiffon draped the slender body. Glinting yellow hair, bobbed and beautifully curled, framed the purely tinted, heart shaped little face, and revealed the lovely lines of the girlish throat and shoulders.

"Marie Louise! You've had your hair bobbed! After all I've said!"

Marie Louise smiled charmingly over a satin shoulder. At the age of nine she had definitely given up thinking. Smiling brought the same results, apparently with less effort. How she got along in school was a mystery. She never studied, yet never failed in her work. Every teacher can point out just such an anomaly in her classes.

"Yes, dearest," she agreed prettily. "All the girls have, you know." Her voice was unexpectedly low-pitched, and full of haunting cadences. "Besides, I lost all my hairpins at rehearsal this afternoon. That last solo dance is rather strenuous. Isn't this dress just dear?"

"What there is of it," agreed her aunt dryly, crossing the room.

For a moment she stared down at the beautiful head in abstracted silence. Then she said quietly:

"Marie Louise, after to-night I want you to give up—this sort of thing. You'll be through school in June, and you're going to have college somehow. I want you to make it count, dear. Then, in four years, I'll get you a position in the High School here, and I'll stay home and cook for you, as we've always planned. I can hardly wait for the time to come. If you knew how deadly tired I am of being cooped up with fifty-odd restless, squirming youngsters five days a week, forty weeks a year, and more than twelve years out of a lifetime! I loathe it! I want to stay in my little house and clean silver and make crullers and—"

"Aunty," cut in Marie Louise sweetly, her lovely eyes on one straight lock of yellow hair, "haven't you a curling iron handy? I knew that wretched barber made too quick a job of it. The girls said so. Just curl this for me—that's a love! I'm really sorry you've seen this costume. I wanted to spring it on you when all the lights go out, and you'll see just your little Marie Louise singing and dancing by the pool in the enchanted forest. And, dearest, just think! Mrs. Hilliard is having Rancinelli up just to see what he thinks of me! Isn't that perfectly gorgeous?"

### III

A VERY silent Miss Page made a pretense of eating Rhuey's delicious dinner, helped a pink-cheeked, starry-eyed young niece into a borrowed fur coat, and saw her off in somebody's luxurious limousine. Marie Louise never walked—several somebodies always wanted to drive her.

Silent still, Beverly locked the doors after the flurried Rhuey and her crackling purple silk. Rhuey always went early. Seeing the audience come in was the best part of the entertainment, to her mind.

Half an hour later a still silent, tight-lipped woman stared somberly at her reflection in the long pier glass. A hot bath had rested her, cold cream and ice had freshened her cheeks—school-teachers have to do these things, or the taxpayers would begin to worry about the precious children shut up all day with that sickly-looking Miss Jones.

She had on a black lace gown which had been made over, and made over, and made over. You know the feeling you have when you're inside a gown like that. Bronze hair and charming gray eyes and a cleft chin do not seem to count for much. Besides, when

you are entertaining a large-sized suspicion that your most beautiful air castle is toppling to its fall, and that you've got to keep on and on teaching successive generations of children that the Amazon is the largest river in the world—

Beverly Page looked at her reflection very somberly indeed. Then she opened the closet door and brought out a tan cape, hopelessly out of style, which no self-respecting factory girl would have worn on a bet. What is more to the point, no one would expect a factory girl to wear it; but every teacher has such garments in her closet. The taxpayers would raise more than their eyebrows at a fur coat, you know.

Sighing resignedly, Miss Page slipped her black lace shoulders into the old thing and snapped out the light. The tan cape was warm, anyway, being lined with moth-eaten squirrel fur, and Miss Page intended to walk, and to walk fast. Most school-teachers do.

The High School auditorium, seating about six hundred if you didn't mind squeezing or injury to a pet corn, and five hundred if you did, was jammed and crowded when Miss Page, blinking from the sudden blaze of light after the cold darkness of her walk, slipped off the old tan cape and made her entrance.

Mrs. T. Osborne Hilliard, with too many waves in her coiffure, too many sequins glinting on her expansive bosom, too many diamonds on her pudgy fingers, rose, center front, third row, and waved a commanding cerise fan. Miss Page, in the wake of a starchy young usher, painfully conscious of the glories of his first dress suit, trailed meekly to a reserved seat beside the social luminary of the town.

Mrs. Hilliard's husband was chairman of the Board of Education. It was his only diversion, and the monthly meetings were the only evenings he could get away from his red-tiled stucco bungalow of fourteen ornate rooms and forty-four different kinds of discomfort.

The whole board was present, just at the right of the stage, and rigid with the consciousness of being the temporary cynosure of all eyes. Their quietude may also have been partly due to a fervent desire not to split, publicly, their extremely glove-fitting evening clothes, which smelled to heaven of moth balls and cedar, since these festal gar-

ments were dragged forth from their fragrant obscurity but twice yearly.

Mrs. Hilliard's husband had most unwisely tried to drown his perfume with a deluge of Florida water, with most unhappy results. He sat in wretched isolation at the extreme end of the front row, his fellow sufferers gladly allowing him three chairs for himself and his essences.

The school orchestra nervously blared into something entirely beyond them, the violins being especially suggestive of fifty-seven various keys. The lights went out, came on again, disappeared once more. The green cloth curtains were yanked clankingly aside, and the play was on.

If you were a proud parent with a son or daughter in the cast, the play was simply great. If you had a son or daughter in the school, but not in the cast, it was pretty fair, considering, but why on earth was that poor fish of a Smith boy given the lead? Everybody knew him for a bonehead, and of all the gangling, awkward, overgrown young turkeys! Why, his hands were like hams!

If you were merely an innocent bystander, you tried to recall your own salad days, and made allowances. If you achieved a visit to the city once a year to see Maude Adams or Faversham or Grace George, you yawned and consulted the clock hanging over the bust of Aristotle in the corner.

If you were a teacher in the school, especially a coach, you had cold chills fox-trotting up your spine, and your teeth clenched when that little fool of a Rosamond ruined her scene. The tortures of the Spanish Inquisition would be mild compared to the punishment you would inflict on her idiotic head!

If you were a reporter for the local newspaper, you eyed the performance with a cynical grin, and wondered how much mush you would have to spread over your column account of the affair before the adoring relatives would be satiated.

That is, you did these things until a very wabbly spotlight found Marie Louise, a slender young dryad in filmy green, in the center of a dark stage, and she began to dance. Then you never moved a muscle. You barely breathed. Even the cynical reporter leaned forward and forgot his superior smile. Presently, when the softly parted lips of the dancer widened a little, and a golden flood of melody rose higher, higher, like a lark's song at heaven's gate

on the dewiest June morning of the year, a most unaccountable lump gathered in the young man's throat, and his eyes misted behind his owlish glasses.

When the last high, sweet note ended no one could say. It died away as imperceptibly as a rainbow fades in the heavens; but the utter quiet of that darkened, crowded hall was a perfect tribute to the born artistry of young Marie Louise Page, singing her challenge to destiny. For a long moment the stillness lasted, and then the storm of applause broke.

"Very clever!" purred Mrs. T. Osborne Hilliard, putting down her utterly useless *lorgnon*. "I always knew she had it in her, my dear Miss Page. Rancinelli is somewhere in the rear. He refused point-blank to sit with us. So trying, but you know the eccentricities of genius must be indulged. If he offers our dear little girl an engagement in his new opera, her future is made!"

Beverly's throat contracted painfully. Her hot palms clenched themselves on folds of the old lace gown.

"I have other plans for Marie Louise," she said unevenly. "As you say, she is but a little girl. She has four years more of study, at the least. A singer's life, a dancer's life, even a very successful one, is not what I want for Marie Louise."

"But the little one belongs to the great world. You have no right to keep her from it," a grave voice said.

Beverly Page looked up. A tall, lean man was bending deferentially over her. The mark of the cosmopolite was upon him, from silvered temples to shining boot tips.

The lights had flared up, and people were moving about or talking excitedly.

"Oh, M'sieur Rancinelli!" fluttered Mrs. Hilliard, who made no distinction between French and Italian prefixes. "Let me present Miss Page—Marie Louise's aunt, you know. Wasn't our little thistledown just charming?"

Rancinelli did not lift his eyes from Beverly's troubled face.

"A year with me, and she will be more than charming," he said quietly, with hardly a trace of accent in his even tones. "Do not take it so to heart, Miss Page. Have you not seen that the little one is of the world? What is of the world cannot be harmed by it. It is inevitable that she will go out from your arms. Better with me than many another. The world—ah, she

will stamp her little feet upon its heart, and it will worship her. You have seeing eyes, Miss Page, and have mothered her, she says. Can you not believe that what I say is true?"

Beverly rose blindly.

"I must get out," she whispered feverishly. "Excuse me, please, but I must see Marie Louise."

As she went swiftly down the deserted corridor toward the dressing room, Rhuey's spare figure darted from a side door of the hall, and Rhuey's excited voice hailed her.

"Beverly, wait a minute! What 'd I tell you? A common dancin' hussy! They're all sayin', back there, that that's what 'll come of this night's doin's. I told you so, Beverly Page! You'll sup sorrow with her yet. Don't you wait for me after the show, Beverly. I got company home!"

She was actually bridling. Miss Page stared at her stupidly.

"Who is it?" she murmured vaguely.

Rhuey achieved a blush.

"Mr. Peters, the iceman," she announced proudly. "That was his daughter in pink. Now don't say a word, Beverly Page. If I can git him, I'm goin' to. It's turrible at my age to have no home and be nothin' but a poor relation. I'm sick and tired of livin' in a house full of women, anyway. I like the smell of a man around—always did. He's a decent widow man with his own house and only one girl—a nice girl, too. If I can git him, I'm goin' to. I'm goin' to make a dead set at him, if you want to know. You can be an old maid forever, if you want to, but I want to come first with somebody afore I die!"

With lifted chin and a defiant flirt of the purple silk, Rhuey swept back into the hall, where the lights had been lowered for the third act. Dazed, Miss Page stared back after her for a full moment; then she knocked sharply on the dressing room door.

Marie Louise's exquisite voice answered her. She turned the knob and went in.

Surrounded by flowers, Marie Louise was radiant. She was still in her green dancing dress, the make-up thick upon her oval cheeks and about her wide, brilliant eyes. She flew to Beverly with a little coo of rapture.

"Dearest, you liked me? I was a success, wasn't I? They meant it—that applause—bless 'em! Oh, you can't imagine how wonderful it is to hold the heart of a crowd like that right in your palm!"

She opened her slender pink fingers and then closed them slowly, lovingly.

"Are you quoting Rancinelli?" demanded her aunt coldly. "Get that stuff off your face quickly. You're entirely too keen for this false excitement, Marie Louise. It isn't good for so young a girl, and I want you to think seriously what you are doing. That man, that producer, Rancinelli, will offer you an engagement. My dear, you've lived seventeen years with me in our shabby little home. Can you so easily forget these seventeen years for a stranger's glittering promises? You must go on with your education, Marie Louise. In these days a half educated person has no chance at all. I hope you have not encouraged Rancinelli to believe that I should allow you—"

Marie Louise had lifted her lovely pointed chin. She looked full at her aunt, her eyes level, assured, faintly amused.

"I signed a three years' contract after rehearsal this afternoon," she said clearly. "You seem to forget that I was eighteen last month."

There was a moment of utter, blank silence. Then the girl turned swiftly and picked up an orchid gown from the back of a chair. She shook out its filmy folds with a careful hand.

"There's no use in discussing it, Aunt Beverly. You know how I dislike unpleasant scenes, and I shall never change my mind. I want to sing and dance and live in luxury. Of course, I shall never forget what you have done for me since I was a mere baby. I shall make it up to you in a thousand ways, dearest; but stay here in this narrow, insular town and teach—never! Shall we go out and see the end of the play, Aunt Beverly?"

"No," said Miss Page dully. "I'm going home. My head aches."

"Too bad!" cooed Marie Louise, shaking her white shoulders clear of the green swathings. "Try camphor. Mrs. Hilliard thinks it so good. I'll be home after the dance—my last dance in this stupid little town! Don't wait up with your poor head. Night night, dear, dear Aunt Beverly!"

#### IV

OUT in the intense cold of the December night, Miss Page's numbed brain began to clear. At the junction of Main and Forest Streets she paused and tapped a neat foot on the icy curb. Anger was mounting with-

in her—anger, and a queer feeling of desolation, against which she fought even more angrily.

"Dismissed!" she reflected stormily. "Dismissed like a naughty child! 'Run along home, dearest aunty, and fuss with your foolish headache. Old maids mustn't be out late!' And that old fool of a Rhuey! Utterly lost to shame! A dead set at the iceman! Wants to come first with somebody before she dies! I wonder who you come first with, Miss Beverly Page! And that child! She is of the world, he said, and he is right. I saw it clearly. The world will never hurt her. He is right, that grave, cold man, and I've shut my eyes to it for eighteen years! I've a good mind to go down to the church and make a dead set at the dominie, with his three snuffly children and his leaky parsonage, this very minute. It's either that or a cat and a parrot!"

She turned flashing eyes toward the church. One feeble ray of light flickered there, and suddenly she remembered. The Christmas greens—and every last member of the committee up at the High School play!

"The poor little man!" she murmured remorsefully. "Struggling all alone with those hateful, prickly things! He can't help having hay fever every August, I suppose, and getting egg-on his necktie; but he could help the brown derby and the cloth-topped button boots. No, little man, I can't marry you, but I will help you with those greens. It must be half past ten, but I guess my spotless reputation will stand it somehow."

The Rev. Milo Greene was pathetically glad to see her. He pressed running pine and holly into her deft hands, sniffing thankfully, for the cold church had intensified the perpetual cold in his head. Between snuffles he told her that it was most distressing that the High School play should have conflicted with the Christmas work, but he blamed no one for not coming to help—dear me, no!

His children were in bed with heavy colds. So distressing, just at the Christmas season, didn't Miss Page think so? The boiler had burst again, and the cellar was flooded, so that the furnace had taken French leave and gone out. Ha! Ha! Get it, Miss Page? Joking aside, it was really most distressing in this cold weather.

Another branch of holly there? Yes, a

very good effect, Miss Page, indeed! He trusted Miss Page would have a very pleasant Christmas recess. The dear children were most charming, but a care—a care! Would Miss Page kindly put the large star in the exact center of the arch, and would she mind being left for just a few moments while he took a peep at the poor children? He had a helper in the north gallery somewhere, tying ropes of pine to the organ pillars. If Miss Page needed help—

Miss Page glanced over her capable shoulder toward the north gallery, heard not a sound, concluded grimly that the helper had been talked to death, and mounted the tallest stepladder to its very top.

Patent leather pumps, worn in anticipation of doing the flappers out of a dance or so even at the extreme age of thirty-two, are delightful to look upon, but hardly the most appropriate footwear for climbing stepladders. Firmly clutching the large star of holly and mistletoe, Beverly reached for the exact center of the arch, turned a slender ankle, lost her balance, and went ignominiously down into a pair of extremely well muscled arms clad in Scotch tweed.

"Hurt?" breathed an anxious voice.

Miss Page was painfully hurt. Red-hot pitchforks were jabbing into her ankle. She kept her eyes shut to keep the tears back, and clutched hard at the Scotch tweed shoulder.

"If I should swear, would you mind?" she said, with a catch in her breath. "I'd rather do it than weep all over you. Can't you put me down somewhere?"

With about as much apparent effort as if they were carrying a small child, the Scotch tweed arms conveyed her to the dim light of the amen corner.

"Considering," murmured a deep, pleasant voice in Miss Page's ear, "that I have waited fifteen endless years to have you where you are now, I really couldn't!"

And the owner of the arms and the voice sat down with the superior and dignified Miss Page upon his knees. In a church, mind you! Where, oh, where were the taxpayers who would have been so highly edified at the shocking spectacle? Where, oh, where was Mr. Cephas Doolittle, who had observed that Miss Page was "too derved particular"?

For Beverly Page merely opened her eyes and said a perfectly banal thing—a thing

which any ordinary woman might have said:

"Wha-what do you mean?"

A large but very gentle hand slipped the pump from a silk-clad ankle, which was swelling up like the lady who swallowed separately the blue and the white sections of the Seidlitz powder.

"I mean," said the deep and pleasant voice, "that fifteen years ago I fell in love with you, and I never fell out. We had come here to a choir rehearsal. I sang about as melodiously as a bullfrog, but you were here—the sweetest thing I'd ever seen. You had on a soft white blouse, with a piece of cherry-colored velvet ribbon at the top of it in a modest V. A little curl danced on your white throat just behind your ear. I worshiped it! Once I handed you a hymn book, and my fingers brushed it. I was numb and dumb with the rapture of it; but another chap took you home. Other chaps always took you to places; but I've loved you for fifteen years!"

Indescribable emotions filled the orderly mind of Miss Beverly Page, but anger predominated. She forgot her throbbing ankle in the sudden throbbing of that large ganglion commonly known as the heart.

"Fifteen years! And you've never even looked sidewise at me. I don't believe it! Fifteen years! Why didn't you say so, then?"

"You were the beauty, the courted beauty of the town," he answered gently, still holding her fast. "I was only learning a trade in the factory, and I had a widowed mother to support. The evenings that you spent in dancing I spent in study. Every one said—your mother even said to my mother—that your beauty would marry you to a fortune. What chance had a dull, grave, poor man against the other fellows who swarmed about you—Howe, young Hilliard, Larry Pentacost, Bob Loomis—dozens of rich chaps? I had no chance from the first, but as the years went on, and you didn't marry any of them, I wondered. We were practically strangers after all these years, but I made up my mind, if my chance ever came—"

"Oh!" wailed the indignant lady on his knees. "And you've let me grow into an old maid! I was so desperate with loneliness to-night that I almost made up my mind to marry the minister and those three snuffly children. Yes, I did! Marie Louise is leaving me, and Rhuey is going to make

a dead set at Mr. Peters. Oh, how could you be so mean? I've done the most awful things, too. I've dropped parcels at your very feet in the trolleys, but you let some one else pick them up. I've stayed late at parties, but you let some one else take me home. I've even sent you mushy valentines. I've done everything a woman can do, except propose. I think you're mean! When a man loves a woman, she ought to know it right away. To keep still for fifteen years—"

A firm hand suddenly cupped her quivering chin.

"Do you mean," he said unsteadily, "that you, too—"

"That's just what I mean," replied Miss Page shamelessly. "No one else has ever counted a fig. It's been you every single minute of these fifteen years!"

## V

A SILENCE which took no note of time or place was presently broken by the deep voice, crisp now, yet with a wondrous tenderness underlying it.

"I suppose it's barbarous taste," he murmured, his lips on her soft hair; "but would you very much mind having cherry-colored hangings in the living room?"

"And cherry-shaded lights would be cheerful," replied the softer voice dreamily. "And in the hall—"

The side door banged. A rush of cold air smote them, and the Rev. Milo Greene hurried in.

"The furnace," he began brightly, "is now drawing well. Ruth and Naomi were sleeping soundly, but I had to stay and rub goose grease into Paul's chest. So distressing, that chest of Paul's! And I think the water has gone down at least two inches in the cellar. How true it is, dear Miss Page, that the Lord looks after His own! I have been a trifle worried about our Christmas repast. A widower is so helpless, dear Miss Page; but it was a folly of which I repent. Our dear sister Skidmore has invited me and my little flock to her holiday table. A noble woman, dear Miss Page! And then these decorations! How foolishly worried I was about them, and how nobly our worthy friend, the superintendent of the cloth factory, came to my aid! At this moment he is doubtless working at the back of the north gallery, getting a thousand needles into his kind hands, even as you, my dear Miss—"

He paused in mid flood of his peroration. His nearsighted eyes had caught sight of the Christmas star, leering drunkenly at him on the central arch with a bad list to starboard.

"My dear Miss Page!"

The Rev. Milo's voice was pained. He was one of those men who part their hair seventy times seven times, if need be, until the parting is on a mathematically exact line with the center of the space between the eyes.

"My dear Miss Page! Our Christmas star! You have erred grievously, my dear young lady! It is quite, quite six and one-half inches from the center of the arch!"

He turned his outraged eyes toward the north gallery.

"Mr. Hardy!" he called, in what he meant to be a tenderly arch tone. "Just look down here, please, and I think you will agree with me that for once in her life this charming young lady has done the wrong thing."

But a second later poor little Mr. Greene got the shock of his placid life, for Jerome Hardy, with a very rosy Miss Page still upon his knees, answered promptly from a seat not three yards away:

"From my point of view, dear sir, she has just done the most blessedly right thing in the world!"

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### YOUTH SINGS OF AGE

I WHO am young sometimes awake  
To dream awhile in dawn's white hour,  
To watch day's scarlet fingers break  
Morn's fragile flower.  
Thus, I remember, time must break  
Youth's transient power.

Love songs are penned in every tongue,  
In every tempo, every key;  
In gay and pensive strains are sung  
Youth's amorous plea;  
But, age, no lover's lute is strung  
To stir for thee!

And yet more red than dawning glows  
The evening sky when sunset-dyed;  
The thrush renews at daylight's close  
His vocal pride;  
And none regrets June's fleet, frail rose  
At Christmastide.

I shall not dread thee as the night,  
Bewildered, dreads its strange despair,  
As some old beauty fears her blight  
Of frosty hair;  
I glimpse thee bearing gifts, snow white  
And silver fair.

So I shall be thy lutanist;  
In raptured lay my strings shall thrill  
To pace my steps. Then, at the tryst,  
My wild heart still,  
Thou wilt restore all I have missed,  
My dreams fulfill!

*Nelle Richmond Eberhart*