

**MARIA
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DAVISS**



PHYLLIS

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Phyllis

EAN 8596547337348

DigiCat, 2022

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With Illustrations by

PERCY D. JOHNSON

TO

HELENA RUTH KETCHAM

PHYLLIS

**Author of "The Tinder Box," "The
Melting of Molly," Etc.**

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**NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1914**

TO

HELENA RUTH KETCHAM

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PHYLLIS

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CHAPTER I

The country is so much larger than the city and so empty that you rattle around in it until you wonder if you are ever going to get stuck to any place, especially if there isn't a house numbered anywhere. Our street is named Providence Road and the house Byrd Mansion and I am afraid I'll never be at home there as long as I live. But the doctor says Mother has to live in the country for always, and I'm only glad it isn't any countrier than Byrdsville.

The worst thing about it to me is that this house I live in and the town I live in are named for the lovely dark-eyed girl who lives down in the old-fashioned cottage that backs up on our garden. She moved out for me to move in, just because I am rich and she is poor. I can't look at her straight, but I love her so that I can hardly stand it. All the other girls in school love her too, and she is not at all afraid of the boys, but treats them just as if they were human beings and could be loved as such. That awful long-legged Tony walks home with her almost every day and they all laugh and have a good time.

I always wait until everybody has gone down the street with everybody else so they won't see how lonesome I am. Crowded lonesomeness is the worst of all. There are many nice boys and girls just about my age here in Byrdsville; but they can never like me. I'm glad I found it out before I tried to be friends with any of them. The first day I came to the Byrd Academy I heard Belle tell Mamie Sue how to treat me, and that is what settled me into this alone state.

"Of course, be polite to her, Mamie Sue," Belle said, not knowing that I was behind the hat-rack, pinning on my hat. "But there never was a millionaire in Byrdsville before, and I don't see how a girl who is that rich can be really nice. The Bible says that it is harder for a rich man to get to heaven than for a knitting-needle to stick into a camel, because he and it are blunt, I suppose; and it must be just the same with such a rich girl. Poor child, I am so sorry for her; but we must be very careful."

"Why, Belle," said Mamie Sue, in a voice that is always so comfortable because she is nice and fat, "Roxy said she was going to like her a lot, and she's got Roxy's lovely house while Roxy has to live in the cottage, which is just as bad as moving into a chicken coop after the Byrd Mansion. If Roxy likes her, it seems to me we might. She didn't turn us out of house and home, as the almanac says."

"Don't you see that Roxy has to be nice to her, because if she isn't we will think it is spite about the house? Roxy can't show her resentment, but her friends can. I'm a friend."

Belle uses words and talks like a grown person in a really wonderful way. She is the smartest girl in the rhetoric class and, of course, she knows more than most people, and Mamie Sue realizes that. So do I. I saw just how they all felt about me, and I don't blame them—but I just wish every time Roxanne Byrd smiles at me that I didn't have to make myself stop and remember that she does it because she has to.

"But I believe Phyllis is a nice girl," Mamie Sue said. Mamie Sue reminds me of a nice, fat molasses drop, with her yellow hair and always a brown dress on.

"The city is an awful wicked place, Mamie Sue, even if it is only just a hundred miles away. Let's don't think about the poor thing." Belle answered positively, and they went out of the door.

I wanted to sit down and cry as I feel sure any girl has a right to do; only I never have learned how to do it. Crying with only a governess to listen to and reprove a person is no good at all; only mothers can make crying any comfort, and mine is too feeble to let me do anything but tiptoe in and hold her hand while the nurse watches me and the clock to send me out. Fathers just stiffen girls' backbones instead of encouraging wet eyelashes—at least that is the way mine affects me.

No, I didn't sit down and cry when I found out that I wasn't to have any friends in Byrdsville for the just cause of being too rich, but I stiffened my mind to bear it as a rich man's daughter ought to bear her father's mistakes in conduct.

What made me know that the girls had the right view of the question was what I had found out about it for myself this spring from reading magazines, and I have been distressed and uneasy about Father ever since. His own cousin, Gilmore Lewis, who is a fine man, as everybody knows and as is often published, runs one of the greatest weekly magazines in New York, and he put a piece in it that would have proved to a child in the second reader how wicked it is to be millionaire men. Father's name was not mentioned, but many of his friends' were, and of course I knew that it was just courtesy of his Cousin Gilmore to leave it out.

I know it is all wrong, with so many poor people and starvation at every hand. I see that! But in spite of his terrible habit of making money I love and trust my father and expect to keep on doing it. He understands me as well as a man can understand a girl, and he is regardful for me always. He looked at me for a long time one night a week before he moved down here in this Harpeth Valley, where the air is to keep Mother a little longer for us to know she's here even if we can't always see her every day, and then he said:

"Phil, old girl, I'm not going to take Miss Rogers with us to go on with your solitary brand of education. There is a little one-horse school in Byrdsville that they call the Byrd Academy, and I watched a bunch of real human boys and girls go in the gate the morning I got there. I think you will have to be one of them. I want to see a few hayseeds sprinkled over your very polished surface."

I laughed with him. That is the good thing about Father: you can always laugh with him, even if you are not sure what you are laughing about. Laughing *at* a person is just as rude as eating an apple right in his face. Father always divides his apple. Though rich, he is a really noble man.

But although I didn't cry when I heard Belle talking a course of righteous action into fat Mamie Sue about me, I made up my mind that I would have to have some sort of person to talk to, so I bought this book. I am going to call it "Louise" and do as good a stunt of pretending that it has got brown hair and blue eyes and a real heart as I can. All I have written up to now has just been introducing myself to

Louise. Our real adventures and conversations will come later.

Before I have gone to bed all this week I have been taking a peep out of my window down over the back garden to Roxanne Byrd's cottage and asking her in my heart to forgive me for taking her home, and asking God to make her love the cottage as I would like to be let to love her. To think that I have to sleep in her great-grandmother's four-poster bed that Roxanne has always slept in! I have to pray hard to be forgiven for it and to be able to endure the doing of it. Good-night!

This has been a very curious and happy kind of day, Louise, and I feel excited and queer. I have had a long talk with Roxanne Byrd over our garden fence, and she is just as wonderful as I thought she was going to be. A person's dream about another person is so apt to be a kind of misfit, but Roxanne slipped into mine about her just as if it had been made for her.

The little Byrd boy is named Lovelace Peyton for his two grandfathers, and he looks and sounds just like he had come out of a beautiful book; but he doesn't act accordingly. He is slim and rosy and dimply, with yellow curls just mopped all over his head, and he has blue eyes the color that the sky is hardly ever; but from what Roxanne says about him I hardly see how he will live to grow up. He falls in and sits in and down and on and breaks and eats things in the most terrible fashion, and he has all sorts of creeps and crawls in his pocket all of the time. He pulls bugs and worms apart and tries to put them together again; and he choked

the old rooster nearly to death trying to poke down his throat some bread and mud made up into pills.

That is what I ran to help Roxanne about, and the poor old chicken was gaping and gasping terribly. I held him while she made Lovelace Peyton put his finger down in the bill and pull up the wad he had been trying to push down.

"That old rooster have got rheumatiz, Roxy, and now he'll die with no pill for it," said Lovelace, as he worked his dirty little finger down after the mud and bread; but he got it out and the poor old chicken hopped off with all his feathers ruffled up and stretching his neck as if to try it.

"Oh, Lovey, please don't kill the chickens," Roxanne said in a tone of real pleading.

"I don't never kill nothing, Roxy," he answered indignantly. "If a thing can't get well from me doctoring it, it dies 'cause it wants to. Since Uncle Pomp let me put that mixtry of nice mud and brick dust on his shoe he don't suffer with his frost-bit heel no more. He's going to stop limping next week if I put it on every day. I'm going to pound another piece of brick right now," and he went around the house with the darlinest little lope, because he always rides a stick horse, which prances most of the time.

"Oh, isn't he awful?" said Roxanne; but there was the kind of pride in her voice and the kind of look in her eyes that I would have if I had a little brother like that, even if he was so dirty that he would have to be handled with tongs.

"He's so awful I wish he was mine," I answered, and then we both laughed.

I had never thought, leather Louise, that I would have a nice laugh like that with a girl who was only treating me

kindly to keep from the sin of spite. It was hard to believe that Roxanne didn't really like me when she went on to tell me some of the dreadful funny things Lovelace Peyton does almost every hour. I forgot about her feeling for me and was laughing at her description of how she came home from school one day and found old Uncle Pompey, who is as black and old as a human being can be and is all the servant Roxanne has to help her, cooking dinner with a piece of newspaper pasted in strips all over his face, which was Lovelace Peyton's remedy for neuralgia.

But just as I was enjoying myself so as to be almost unconscious I saw Belle and Mamie Sue and Tony Luttrell coming around the corner of the street past the front gate of Byrd Mansion and down toward the cottage. Nobody knows how hard it is for me to see every nice body my own age pass right by my gate in a procession to see Roxanne when I can't go, too.

Tony didn't see me standing by the garden fence, and he gave the funny little whistle that he calls the Raccoon whistle for the Palefaces and which he always whistles when he wants to signal something to one of the girls. Then suddenly they all saw me, and that politely enduring look came over all three faces at once, though Mamie Sue's face is so jolly and round by nature that it is very hard to prim it down suddenly, and I don't believe she would always trouble to put it on for me, only Belle seems to demand it of her as an echo of her sentiments toward me. Some people can't seem to be sure of themselves unless they can get somebody else to echo them and I think that is why Belle has to keep poor Mamie Sue at her elbow all the time.

But when I saw the politeness plaster spread itself over all their faces at the sight of me enjoying myself like any other girl, I just turned away wearily and started back along my own garden path, back to my own house which I felt that I ought not to be living in. But something sweet happened to me before I left that makes me feel nice and warm even now to think about.

"Please don't go away, Phyllis," said Roxanne, looking right into my face with such a lovely look in her own eyes that it was almost impossible, for an instant, for me to believe it was charity.

For a moment I wanted to stay, and almost did; but if she could be generous, so could I, and I didn't intend to spoil their fun for even a minute, so I just smiled at her and bowed to them as I walked away.

Nobody knows how it does hurt me to be this kind of an outcast! I have lived fifteen years with a sick mother, and a governess and trained nurses, and never a chance of having friends; and now that one is just at my back door I can't have her because useless wealth is between us. Is there no way the rich can turn poor without disgrace? But I've got that smile from Roxanne and I'm going to believe it was meant for the real me. Good-night!

I'm so full of happiness and scare and a secret that if I didn't have this little book to spill some of it out to I don't know what I would do. A secret sometimes makes a girl feel like she would explode worse than a bottle of nitroglycerin, though it makes me nervous even to write the word when I think of what might have happened to Lovelace Peyton if I

hadn't had a father who is cool enough to keep his head at all times and handed that quality down to me.

Tony Luttrell is the leader of the Raccoon Patrol of the Boy Scouts, and he has a star for pulling Pink Chadwell out of the swimming-pool one day last summer when Pink had eaten too many green apples and the cold water gave him cramps. Tony had to hit him on the head to keep them both from being drowned. It was a grand thing for him to do, and everybody in this town looks up to Tony as a hero. Roxanne says the thing that hurts her most is that she can't tell all the boys and girls how brave I am because of the secret which I had to find out when I saved the life of Lovelace Peyton.

"Oh, Phyllis, to think they can't all know what a noble girl you are to risk your life, when you knew it, to get Lovey out for me," Roxanne said, after we had locked things up and got Lovelace to promise never to go near that window again and were sitting on the little back porch of the cottage trembling with fear and being very happy together.

"I don't care what they think about me, Roxanne, just so you will be my friend sometimes in private when the others are not around," I said, in a voice that wanted to tremble, but I wouldn't let it.

"Do you think I would do a thing like that, Phyllis—be a girl's friend in private?" Roxanne asked, and her head went up into a stiff-necked pose like that portrait of her great-grandmother Byrd that looks so haughtily out of place hanging over the fireplace in the living hall in the little old cottage, in spite of the room full of old mahogany furniture and silver candlesticks brought from Byrd Mansion to keep

her company. "I'm going to be your friend all the time, and it is none of the others' business. I have always wanted to be, but you were so stiff with me; and Belle said she felt that you had so many friends out in the world, where you have traveled, that you wouldn't want us."

If I had answered what I wanted to about Belle Kirby, I should have been very much ashamed by this time. Like a flash it came over me that it would be a poor way to begin being friends with Roxanne to make her see what a freak one of her best friends was, so I held the explosion back.

"She was mistaken, Roxanne," I said; and I couldn't help being a little sad as I spoke the truth out to her, for I am fifteen years old, and fifteen are a good many years to live lonely. "I haven't any friends in all the world. We have traveled everywhere trying to get mother well, but I've had no chance to make friends. This is the first time a girl ever talked to me in my life, and I never did talk to a boy—and I never want to."

"Oh, Phyllis, how dreadful!" said Roxanne; and she gave me such a hug around the neck that it hurt awfully, only I liked it. It did feel funny to have somebody sniffing tears of sympathy against your cheek, and I didn't know exactly what to do. Petting has to be learned by degrees and you can't come to it suddenly. But I was happy.

And I'm happier to-night than I ever was in my life, only still scared quite a little, too. I wonder how the boys and girls are going to like Roxanne's being friends with me. How can they hate me if I haven't ever done anything to them? It makes me nervous to think about it, and that combined with the secret and the accident that didn't happen to Lovelace

Peyton make my writing so shaky that I may never be able to read it.

This is the accident and the secret. Of course, I knew that there never was such a glorious person born in the world as Roxanne's grown brother, Mr. Douglass Byrd, but I didn't know what kind of a genius he was. It was something of a shock to find out, for I felt sure he was a wonderful poet that the world was waiting to hear sing forth. That is what he looks like. He's tall and slim except his shoulders, which are almost as broad as father's, and his eyes are the night-sky kind that seem to shine because they can't help it. His smile is as sweet as Roxanne's, only the saddest I ever saw; and his hair mops in curls like Lovelace Peyton's, only it is black, and he won't let it. This description could fit a great artist or a novelist or an orator, but he isn't even any of these; he's an inventor.

The invention has something to do with the pig iron out at the Cumberland Iron Furnaces that father owns in the Harpeth Valley, and Mr. Douglass works for him. It turns it into steel sooner than anybody else has ever discovered how to do it before, and it is such a wonderful invention that it will make so much money for him and his family that they won't know what to do with it. Roxanne is going to tell me more about it to-morrow.

I didn't say anything to keep Roxanne from being happy over her brother getting all that money, but it made me sad. The more money you get the less happiness there seems to be on the market to buy. All Father's dollars couldn't have bought me even one of those hugs around the neck from Roxanne—I had to risk my life to get them. And that's where

Lovelace Peyton and his badness come in. I'm catching my breath as I think about it.

Mr. Douglass has a little shed down in the cottage garden boxed off to make his experiments in. He keeps it locked up with a padlock, and has commanded that nobody is to go even near the door. There is one big bottle that has some kind of nitroglycerin mixture in it that is going to blow the iron into steel while it is hot, he hopes. Roxanne knows it because he showed it to her, and he told her if the cottage ever got on fire to run and get it and carry it carefully away first before it could blow up the town. It must never be jolted in any way. She has a key to the shed that she guards sacredly.

If there is one thing in the world that Lovelace Peyton wants worse than any other, it is bottles. He takes every one he can find and just begs for more. He has a place down by the garden wall, behind a chicken coop, where he makes his mixtures and keeps all the bottles. He's going to be a famous surgeon and doctor some day if he lives, which I now think is doubtful.

I was down in my garden on the other side of the wall from him picking some leaves off the lavender bushes Roxanne's great-grandmother had planted in that lovely old garden, which is so full of Roxanne's ancestral flowers that it grieves me to think I have to own them instead of her. I haven't been letting myself go down there often, because I was afraid she would suspect how much I wanted her to come out and talk to me like she did the day of Lovelace Peyton's rooster excitement; but sometimes I think my dignity ought to let me go and pick just a little of the

lavender, and I go. I went this afternoon, and I believe God sent me and so does Roxanne.

Suddenly, as I bent over the bushes picking, I heard a wail in Roxanne's sweet voice and I looked up quick. There she stood in the back door, as white as a pocket handkerchief, shuddering and pointing to me to look down at the end of the garden right near me.

"Oh, Phyllis," she chattered through her shaking teeth just so I could hear it, "if he drops that big bottle, the whole town will be blown to pieces. How can we save it and him?"

And when I looked and saw Lovelace Peyton, I began to shudder too. He was hanging half in and half out of a little window high up in the shed like a skylight, and the big bottle was slowly slipping as he tried to wriggle either in or out. There was no ladder in sight, and neither of us was near tall enough to reach him. He was beginning to whimper and be scared himself, and I could see the heavy bottle start to slip faster from his arm. We had less than a second to lose. I thought and prayed both at the same time, which I find is a good thing to do in such times of danger. You haven't got time to do them separately. The idea came! I have had lots of teaching by different gymnasium teachers wherever we happened to live for a few months, and I'm as strong as most boys. I know how to do things with myself like boys do.

"Hold your bottle tight, Lovelace Peyton; don't let it fall; it'll be good for mixing in and I can get you loose," I called as I scrambled over the wall and met Roxanne just under the window. I saw him hug it up tight again as he stopped squirming.