

[COMPLETE STORY.]

# The Redemption of Mabel Muriel

By Elizabeth G. Jordan

I may as well admit in the very beginning of this story that none of us girls liked Mabel Muriel Murphy. Perhaps it was her name that annoyed us first. There was so much of it, and Mabel Muriel Murphy made us use the whole of it every time, and somehow it didn't seem to belong together—the different parts of it, I mean. But finally Mabel Blossom—she's my chum, you know, and we're in the same classes at St. Catharine's—finally Mabel Blossom had an idea. She called us all together and told us she had found a use for Mabel Muriel's name. She said it hurt her to see so much of anything going to waste, and that she had been awake most of the night before thinking it over, and it had been borne in on her that the name could be made to fill a long-felt want. She said some of us had brought from our happy homes exclamations learned from our brothers and intended for use in moments of excitement. She said we would recall how the Sisters had stripped us of these, so to speak, leaving us with "nothing but prayer to fill the aching void" (she said it just that way), and then she suggested that we use Mabel Muriel's name instead. Our teachers might be justified, she said, in objecting to "Great Scott!" and "Holy Smoke," but the strictest could not criticise us for using the name of a dear companion and little playmate! And she said to try it for ourselves, repeating it slowly and solemnly, Mabel—Muriel—Murphy, emphasising the first syllable of every word, and see if it wasn't grateful and comforting.

Well, we did, and it was; and before the meeting adjourned we made a yell of it, too, that died away in a long drawn-out plaintive effect. It was great. After that you could hear girls saying it all over the place, and Mabel Muriel herself used to come running because she thought she was called. It made her mad at first—I mean, it annoyed her very much; but pretty soon she got so, up over it and took it as a kind of tribute, and wrote home about it with girlish pride. That was the kind she was, you see, not the least little bit sensitive; and conceded—well, I shall have to wait until I get more experience as a writer before I can describe how contented Mabel Muriel Murphy was.

All this about her name happened a week after Mabel Muriel came to St. Catharine's, but if we had waited a year we couldn't have sized her up better. We were only fifteen, and she was sixteen the month before she entered, but it didn't take us long to read her sadly shallow nature. We girls are studying life and human nature, and if I do say it, there isn't much that escapes our innocent but observant young eyes. Whenever you want insight and intuition and understanding and subtlety, and a lot of other qualities like that, you just go to Mabel Blossom or Maudie Joyce. They'll tell you to come to me, too, but of course I can't say that about myself, and if I have a special gift for seeing into things I don't deserve any credit for it. It's a misfortune. It goes with the artistic temperament, and, oh! how the true artist soul suffers in its loneliness! It is this that has made me turn to the study of humanity and find my comfort and my nepenthe there. Nepenthe means forgetfulness. At Sister Irmingarde was here now, she'd tell me I am straying from the point, and I suppose I am. It's so hard to remember all the rules of literature and keep your plot in your mind at the same time. It's worse than bridge whist. Mabel Blossom says my style is a kind of literary sprint between the rules and the plot, but she hasn't talk. I notice that Sister Irmingarde sometimes reads my stories to the class, and that she has not yet read one of Mabel's! Not that I wish to boast, of course, for true merit is always humble, and I have often told Mabel that the only reason her stories are so bad is that she lacks construction, imagination, and literary talent.

It was Mabel Muriel's trunks that annoyed us next. There were seven of them, and they were piled up in a heap in front of the infirmary, where she had

a room because her mother thought she was delicate and had to be watched nights. That disgusted us, too, for Mabel Muriel was a fat, lazy girl, and she wanted to be in the infirmary so she wouldn't have to get up as early in the morning as the rest of us did. Well, anyway, there were her seven trunks, and I wish you could see the clothes that girl had brought to the quiet temple of learning where we were gathered. Silk dresses, and beautiful evening gowns with low-neck waists, and lace dressing-gowns, and wrappers, and—well, there was no end to them. Every morning Mabel Muriel strolled into class in a different one, and when Sister Irmingarde delicately informed her that simpler gowns would be in better taste on a schoolgirl, she said she hadn't any others, which was all too true. When we discovered what we had surmised from the first, that her family were not people of broad culture, and that her father had made a great deal of money in land, or something, and was trying to spend it all on Mabel Muriel, who was his only child, Kittie James had a friend in the town Mabel Muriel came from, and she said nothing made Mr. Murphy so happy as to have Mabel Muriel ask for things. Mabel Muriel was thoughtful about that, too, and did it, and used to telegraph when letters would take too long. Then he would send them right off by express, and stand around panting with eagerness to do something else, like one of those little dogs that run and get a stick for you. Kittie's friend said he actually wanted to build a house for Mabel Muriel on the campus, so she could have her own servants and "feel at home," but I can imagine the gentleness with which Mother Mary Caroline sat on that!

Of course these things did not come to us all at once, even with our keen intuition. They came slowly, and, my! how we did dislike Mabel Muriel! She snubbed us so, and was so vulgar about her money and her clothes, and so—well, so lacking in all the delicate sensibilities we have been taught are characteristic of a lady. We saw she was worrying the Sisters to death. You see, they had taken her in without realising what she was, and of course it was not easy to send her away. For she never did anything very bad, of course. She was just underbred and disagreeable the whole time, and got boxes from home, and ate and ate and ate and got fatter every minute, and called the nuns around her and fed them, too, and told them how wonderful she was. The nuns, you know, were the tiny girls in the elementary departments, so young that they did not know any better than to respond to the advances and chocolate cream of Mabel Muriel Murphy. So they stood round her like a flock of cute little chickens, and they ate and listened, and of course their poor stomachs got upset and they landed in the infirmary and had bilious attacks. But these incidents, though painful, were not all. There was indeed more to come, and it came like the Fate in those Greek tragedies Sister Edna is beginning to tell us about. It like those Greek tragedies. They are so like life, and life is so wonderful, so terrible. Oh, life, life—But Mabel Blossom says she is perfectly sure I must not bring that in here, so I won't. I let Mabel read my stories as fast as I write them. It is such splendid training for her, Mabel says so, too. She says that if it wasn't for my stories she might keep on writing herself. Those were indeed her words.

Months passed, and we girls were pretty busy. But any time we had after the study of life and our school work was given to disliking Mabel Muriel Murphy. For she got worse with every single week. She kept away from us as much as she could after we had had to drop her, and some of

the younger girls told us she said things about us, and she got duller-eyed and pastier-looking every day. Her clothes were quieter (the Sisters made her send home for simpler things), and she would wipe her pens on the sleeves and the skirts to show how she despised them. She had never been neat, but her hair looked more mussed and her nails were dreadful. It was about this time that Sister Irmingarde asked me to take Mabel Muriel in hand, and I may as well admit right now that I flinched, though my father is a general, and no Iverson ever yet turned his back to the foe. If she had asked me to nurse Mabel Muriel through the smallpox I would have done my best; but to be her friend, to chum with her—! That dash is put in there to show you how I felt.

Sister Irmingarde was very nice about it, of course. She had seen everything, and she knew what was passing in my breast as well as if a typewriter was rattling it all off for her. She said Miss Murphy was too much alone, and that a little time and attention from me might cheer her, and help her in many ways. And she talked about humanitarianism and our duty to each other till I said I would—that I would do it, I mean. However, it did not work. I did my best, but it was all too plain that the calm and refining influence of my society was not what Mabel Muriel wanted. She was evil, in a heavy sort of way, but it was a relief to us both when the experiment was over. I have seen the girls trying to dissolve sugar in lemon juice, and they don't mix very well. It was even so with Mabel Muriel and me. Still, it gave her a claim on me, and once in a long time she would come to my room, smelling of horribly strong perfume and bringing a big box of the candy she was always eating. If there were other girls, she never stayed, and there most always were, of course, so her visits were short and rare. But one night Maudie Joyce and Mabel Blossom and I were looking at some photographs, and Mabel Mu-

ried came, and I made her look, too, and she stayed, and we all talked quite a while. She was quieter than usual that night and didn't say so much about her "paw's" money. And she seemed to be watching us and taking us in a queer way. Finally she got up to go, and it was quite late, and she stayed by the door a little while talking; and with that strange insight I have I knew she had enjoyed herself and was sorry to go; but she went, and didn't come again for more than a week.

I am now approaching with the artist's reverence the dramatic scene of this story. There always is one in my stories, if you remember and Mabel Blossom says there are times when she can't wait for them. One night, a little after nine o'clock, I was to-sing restlessly in my bed, when I heard a very soft rap on my door. I am a nervous and highly imaginative girl, and my brain is so active that sometimes I can't sleep. That night I had eaten one of Maudie Joyce's Welch rarebits and some pickles and a piece of pie and some fudge. I was thinking about the fudge, and almost wishing I had not eaten it, when the rap came. I was scared, for we are not allowed to visit each other at night, and if we were caught doing it there would be a lot of trouble. I got up and tiptoed to the door and opened it, and there, of all persons in the world, stood Mabel Muriel Murphy! I just gasped, but she walked right in as cool as you please and sat down on the edge of my bed. She wore one of her white lace dressing-gowns, and it was dreadfully soiled, and her hair was just the way she wore it in the day-time. She had not arranged it neatly for the night, as we are taught to do. I closed the door and stared at her, and then I said: "Good gracious! why did you come here at this hour? Sister Edna may hear you."

It wasn't very hospitable, of course, but Sister Edna looked after that hall, and I knew she might meander along at any minute and hear whi-spering and come in. Mabel Muriel propped herself against the foot of the bed and stared at me in the oddest way and said:

"I wish she would come in. That's exactly what I want." And then she added, very solemnly, "May Iverson, I've made up my mind to be a lady!"

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