

# THE CHARITY GIRL

## By EFFIE A. ROWLANDS

### CHAPTER I.

"And is it really good-by, Audrey, really and truly good-by? Oh, dearest, I am so grieved to let you go. I don't know what my life will be like now."

The speaker was a thin, nervous looking girl, with large gray eyes, and a weak mouth. She stood with her rough hands clasped tightly together, and tears were rolling down her cheeks, and falling unheeded on her slabby serge gown.

Audrey Maxse also wore an old serge gown, but somehow the garment did not seem to be as shabby or as ugly as that which Jean Thwait had on; her small hands were roughened, too, as with much work, yet their shape was exquisite, the fingers slender and straight, not swollen and disfigured with chilblains like poor Jean's; her little head was poised proudly on her shoulders; she carried herself with a regal air, and gave evidence at this early age of possessing that most rare gift, a beautiful physique.

What a dreary place this Female Orphan Asylum was to be sure! There was an air of gloom in the dirty gray-colored walls; an unappealing sense of sadness and restraint in the unlavishly high-walled grounds, the scrub oaks, the young persons in their dingy uniform of blue serge, with their duster aprons and thick gray stockings. It was called the Girls' Home in Broadhurst, and never was anything under the sun so miserable in the world.

From morning till night the dreary old man idly paced the grounds, or sat on the stone bench, and naturally of respect to an old inhabitant the Major did his best to get the orphan girl well cared for in the future. This done, little Jean Thwait troubled herself no more; she was left to the tender mercies of the matron, and grew up from babyhood to girlhood, working in the gloomy routine of the asylum as hard as though she were of the stronger, not the feebler, sex. Most of her associates on the ward, like her own all respectfully connected, with an occasional aunt or cousin to pay them a visit on the day set apart for this function, and who all with one accord held up their heads and looked down with superior airs on the girl.

How this latter ever got into a home was a miracle to most people. A foundling, the wife and stray child of a vagrant woman who breathed her last in the Broadhurst workhouse infirmary, she was, by general consent, considered outside the pale and therefore ineligible for election into the institution sacred to the memory of the pious widow of a rich Broadhurst tradesman.

Audrey's pride had brought down many a weary pang on her head; her fearless, outspoken disposition was called rebellious; her innate sense of delicacy and neatness became inordinate vanity, and her beauty was the last straw to the heap of objections that the matron and her assistants piled on the girl. Every means had been tried to crush Audrey's proud spirit. Every possible barrier had been thrown in the way of her advance in education, and yet, in spite of all, the girl progressed; her hot pride, her extraordinary sense of self before her, and the chagrin of the matron and her other enemies, at the usual public examinations, held in the charnel-house-like schoolroom, before the Mayor and committee, it was always Audrey Maxse who carried off the prizes for proficiency and general satisfaction.

In all the years she had lived at the asylum Audrey had only one friend, one loving heart to sympathize and help her in her troubles, and this was Jean Thwait. Often and often at night, when the two young creatures were alone in their cold miserably furnished bedroom, they sat and whispered in the dark of the time when they should be free from the miserable pain they called their home.

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### CHAPTER II.

"Think of me always, Jean, dear. Whatever happens, whatever lies before me, I shall love you, darling, till I die!"

Then they kissed each other and Audrey went softly down the stairs, seeing nothing, hearing nothing for the passionate beat of her heart and the hush of sorrow before her sight.

Jean stood with her hands pressed to her breast, and as the specks of the cab carried all that was precious to her away from her, perhaps forever, she gave one moan and fell forward on her outstretched arms.

When the assistant matron came in, scolding and grumbling, as usual, she received no reply from Jean Thwait, and, by bending over the prostrate figure, she saw that the girl had fainted.

As Audrey found herself alone in the cab, driving out of the high iron gates of the asylum, she felt as though she were in a dream. She had never before been driven in any sort of vehicle before, and the curious sensation of being carried over the road at a quick pace added to the vagueness that seemed to envelop her; but the keen east wind as it rushed by at the window awoke her, and with a sigh, she knew it was no dream, but a reality full of excitement, confusion and unspoken pain. The team she had repressed rolled down her cheeks as she thought of Jean left alone in that miserable life. Then her young spirit rose above her grief. She was free, and before very long Jean should be free, too, and they would go away together, as they had dreamed and whispered to often in the night hours. Mr. Thorngate was waiting at the station and spoke kindly to the girl.

"There is your ticket, Maxse," he said, "and when you reach Mountherry you must get out and wait on the platform till a lady speaks to you. She is my wife, and will look after you. I should have taken you down myself, but I cannot leave Broadhurst for another week. Now, you must be a good, diligent worker, and never forget your duty to your employers and to heaven."

She was awakened by a sudden opening of the door, by several voices shouting, and by some person jumping into the carriage and sinking on the seat, breathless, evidently with having run very fast. It was a young man, Audrey gazed at him in startled amazement through her veil. He was splashed with mud from head to foot, but his clothes were perfect in make and fit. He wore rough riding breeches and boots, and had a hunting crop in his right hand. He laughed and brushed some of the mud off his sleeve with his crop. He pulled out his watch and consulted it.

"Just twelve!" Audrey heard him mutter, and she was bewildered to think that she must have slept for something like two hours. She drew back a little nervously into her corner, for the young man had told his arms and was gazing intently at her slender, black-redded figure out of a pair of very handsome gray eyes.

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### CHAPTER III.

Sheila Fraser explained everything in her sharp way, and Audrey, standing modestly in the background, looked in admiration and surprise at the neat, well turned figure sitting easily in the saddle, at the small, oval face under the straight hair, and the coil of red-gold hair that dangled behind her neck.

"How pretty this Miss Fraser was! Her teeth were so even and so white, her cheeks so rosy warm in color; only her eyes seemed cold and hard. They moved about quickly, and to Audrey were just the sharp needles of the needle-maker."

"It is a pity," Mrs. Thorngate assented heartily, for in her youth she had been a first-rate sportswoman, and she sympathized with the girl's disappointment warmly; "but can't you catch them up somewhere, Miss Fraser? Where was the meet?"

Sheila Fraser looked curiously at the slender form in its black cloak and all. "Oh!" she said shortly; she paused a moment, and then addressing Audrey, "you had better go up to Dinglewood at once; ask Bircham; she will tell you your duties here, and—what is your name?"

"Maxse—Audrey Maxse," Mrs. Thorngate replied quickly.

"Well—er—Maxse, you must alter your dress. That funeral dirndl and veil are simply absurd. Please see to that at once."

Miss Fraser bent from her saddle to ask one or two questions contentiously of the vicar's wife, and then her face flushed, and she uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Here he is, after all!" as a horseman came fleetly toward them.

"Hello, Sheila, you here? Why, I thought you would have been at Sherwood Downs at least by this time!"

# UNCLE ETHAN'S ROOSTER.

## HERE IS RURAL CONTENT.

Knowledge is acquired in various ways. Some persons absorb it as a sponge takes up water. Others require the drilling of holes in their skulls to enable it to enter. When Willie Bizby hired a farm on the Maine coast and set out to raise chickens, he absorbed all available information and put it to use. As a result of special food and good care his "white rocks" grew with amazing rapidity, so that in October roosters hatched in May had reached the generous weight of seven pounds. Uncle Ethan Spofford scoffed.

"Those chickens are all paste," he declared to whoever would listen. "Willie is trying to do with this book-learning. I never saw a fellow yet try to get along with book-learning but what he came to grief sooner or later. Chickens that are stuffed the way they are are all paste, as I say. They ain't hardened into good flesh. Come to get a spell of weather, and they're like to waste away. And more'n that, they ain't got enough muscle to scratch for themselves. Get turned out once to hustle their own grub, and they'd stand stock-still and starve themselves."

Uncle Ethan raised chickens himself good old barn-yard fowl that, if hatched in May, could be safely trusted to lay their first eggs no later than next Easter. Uncle Ethan had a big Shang-hai rooster, "Zeke," of which he was wonderfully proud. "Zeke can lick all creation," was his daily boast. One day, looking across the meadow, Uncle Ethan saw a sight that made him chuckle.

"I'd better stroll down the road," he said to his wife. "I calculate I'll see that biggest paste-rooster of Willie's, and old Zeke is loose in the yard. I don't want to hurt Willie, but as I see it, if he was to lose one rooster learning how poor those paste critters are, it would save him money in the long run. I'll be back in half an hour or so."

He ambled amiably down the way, accordingly, although without casting expectant glances over his shoulder while he was still in sight of the two roosters—now quickly approaching each other.

Half an hour later he came back up the road, a grin of expectation on his face. The exhibition that he thought to see was not there. The "paste" rooster, still vigorous, stood vainly on the cooling yard that had been old Zeke, and was emitting lusty crows. Uncle Ethan stopped with the shock of it. Then he hastened to interview his neighbor.

"Ma," he said, apologetically, that evening, "I've been and bought Willie Bizby's biggest and pastiest rooster. It ain't that kind as any good. I might just as well throw away the two dollars and a half I paid for him, as far as getting a good rooster is concerned. But it's right here. The thing to fight torpedo-boats, the navy says, is torpedo-battleships. And so I reckoned if we have got to stay where that nasty sort of birds was rampaging round at large, we better get one of the same kind to defend ourselves."—Youth's Companion.

Here is rural content.