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For everyone who has ever wished  
they could just be like everyone else.



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MAY 1924

BOSTON

Did you not study, Miss Eton?” Professor Whitmore was looking at me over his terribly large, badly smudged, and completely old-fashioned wire-framed glasses. The tufts of wiry white hairs that sprouted from his ears looked like billowing clouds of smoke, and a red stain was beginning to spread along the tops of his sharply angled cheeks.

“I . . . well . . . I . . .”

He looked at me as if hoping I had something of interest to say.

I *had* studied. I was almost positive I had. This time, I’d really meant to. I curled my toes up inside my old T-strap shoes.

“Because, frankly, it doesn’t seem as if you did.” He was looking, quite pointedly, at the big black *D* he’d scrawled across the top of my Theory of Consumption economics exam.

Hadn't I studied? I had. I *know* I had.

That's what I'd been doing in the dormitory when I'd heard someone out in the hall. Thinking it was Martha, I'd opened the door, but the only person I saw was Irene Bennett slipping into the room we used to share halfway down the hall.

I hadn't had the chance to talk to her very much since Mother and Father had decided a room of my own might help me concentrate more on my studies, and now here the year was, almost over. I liked Irene. She was an orphaned scholarship girl whose grandparents lived somewhere far enough away that she never had to see them during the school year, which left her with scads of time to fix her bobbed hair and roll her stockings so the seams were exactly straight and keep her membership in the honor society, all at the same time. She looked just like the actress Colleen Moore, and she behaved like Louise Brooks. She was everything I wanted to be.

Though Irene had always been perfectly nice to me, she'd gotten in trouble several times this past term with the dean. I'd been hungry, so I left my textbook lying on the bed and went to find out how she was and if she had anything in her room to eat, only she hadn't. But what she did have was a *big black eye!* Only I hadn't known it at first because she kept turning away from me whenever she spoke, but I couldn't hear her, so I finally went to stand in front of her, and that's when I saw it.

So I went downstairs to see if I could find any steaks in the kitchen that she could put on her eye, only the cook wasn't there anymore, so I rummaged through the icebox. I didn't find any raw ones, but I did find a cooked one left over from supper, but when I got back to Irene's room, she wouldn't

open the door. I had to pull a bobby pin from my hair and jab it around the lock until it opened, but then Irene told me to go away and leave her alone and yes her eye hurt like the dickens and no she didn't want to talk about how she'd got it.

I offered her the steak, but she said she didn't want it, which made me wonder if she might be ill because back when we'd been roommates, she used to eat everything, just like me, and sometimes we'd even go raid the kitchen at night. I couldn't bring myself to believe her, so I left the plate on her dresser. Once I got back to my room I studied, I truly did . . . until Martha came by. She gave me several pieces of divinity candy she'd brought from home at the start of the week and then told me the girls were getting up a game of mah-jongg down in the lounge and wouldn't I like to come play a match or two.

Wouldn't I! At least for a while.

And so I dove into my closet to look for my silk kimono, did up my hair with a scarlet-colored ribbon, and colored my lips with the new lipstick I'd bought down at the drugstore. When I went down to join the girls, Irene was there dressed in Chinese pajamas. She'd put so much powder on her face and used so much kohl pencil around her eyes you couldn't really tell anything had happened to her. She was sitting in an open window, smoking a cigarette from a long-handled holder like she was some flapper.

When I complained about the smoke and tried to ask about her eye again, she said something about paying attention to my own potatoes, which made me think maybe I'd been wrong about our being such good friends. I convinced the girls to open the rest of the windows to keep the smell out,

but the wind was blowing the wrong way, so the smoke actually came back inside with a bunch of gnats and mosquitoes. Then Irene's cigarette ashes made a mark on the floor and someone said Mrs. Smith, the housemother, was coming, and we dumped the tiles back into the box, clapped the lid on it, and . . . well . . . I just . . .

"You can't tell me you studied for this test."

"I tried to . . ."

"If you would only apply yourself, Miss Eton."

"I did try." I had. Truly. This time I'd tried. It's not as if I hadn't meant to study.

"Not hard enough!" His voice was like the rap of a ruler. My toes curled even more. Enough to give me a cramp in the arch, making my bones feel like they were breaking in half. Ow! I reached down to massage it.

"Miss Eton!"

I sat back up. "Yes, Professor Whitmore."

"If you won't be courteous enough to give me your time and attention, then I will not be able to pass you this term."

Not pass! "But—"

"A D is not a passing grade."

"But you can't—"

"What is it you're hoping to accomplish here at Radcliffe?"

*Hoping* to accomplish? Great things, just the same as my grandmother had as a member of the very first graduating class, and just the same as my mother had and my sister had . . . before she left school in such a big hurry to get married and then went on a year's honeymoon to Europe and came back with a baby in her arms. He'd been such a *big* baby. I never had been able to work out why, because Julia



wasn't that tall and her husband wasn't either, and Marshall himself had grown out of being so big and now he was on the small side compared to the other five-year-old boys I knew. It must have been all the traveling they'd done while she was pregnant. In any case, in spite of the proximity of other more fashionable colleges, the Eton girls went to Radcliffe. Everyone knew that. And it was up to me to graduate because my sister hadn't. And it's not like I wasn't trying, but I still had two years left, and the two years I'd already done had been pure torture. So what did I actually think I'd accomplish at Radcliffe? Very little, just the same as always. "I try, Professor Whitmore. I really do." But somehow, it never seemed to work.

"I suppose you're just like the others, hoping to catch a fine young man from across the Yard at Harvard."

I felt my mouth drop open. "I am not—"

He raised a hand as if to stay my reply. "Quite frankly, I find the whole point of a college education entirely irrelevant when all of you girls graduate and proceed directly into matrimony. It's the rare young woman who can withstand the rigors of a college education. You would not be the first to find yourself unsuited to the academic environment."

I would be in my family. Except, of course, for my sister. Which made it even more important that I prove myself able to withstand the rigors of a college education.

"I have said before and I will never cease saying that I never supported the idea of Radcliffe College. But it can't be helped now. And neither, I suppose, can your family's gift of funding for the new dormitory building."

Maybe, just maybe . . . I held my breath.

He cleared his throat as he looked at me with doleful eyes. I hated that look, though I'd be deceiving myself if I said I hadn't gotten used to it by now. "I have to say I'm disappointed. I had high hopes for you. I don't think it's a lack of ability, Miss Eton. I think it's a lack of commitment. But until you buckle down with your studies, you're wasting my time and your own. As well as your family's considerable resources."

I fixed my eyes on my hands, which had somehow become entangled in the hem of my Nile green silk blouse. "I promise you, Professor Whitmore, on the next test—"

"The next test for you, Miss Eton, will be in the fall, next term, when I expect to find you repeating Theory of Consumption. Even if you happen to have written a perfect final, it still won't be enough to pull up your grade."

"Repeat . . . ?" Had he said *repeat*?

"If I can't pass you, then I have to fail you. You can repeat the class in the fall. I hope a summer away from school will help you reflect upon your failings and give you reason to greet the new school year with a better attitude."

"I *can't* fail this class, Professor!" My mother would murder me, and my father would look at me with such disappointment. Such soul-wrenching sadness. I couldn't let them down. Not again.

"That's the best I can do . . . unless you'd like me to recommend you for disenrollment?" He looked at me, brow raised.

"*Disenrollment!*"

"We professors see more than you might think, as we travel back and forth between the yards. I'll wager you have more than one young fellow you could talk into proposing." He winked. "I do believe there's a prince of a man out there just

waiting for you to beckon. And I truly believe matrimony would be the best thing for you. Think about it, Miss Eton. And let me know what you decide next week. You don't have to come back in the fall." He handed the test to me.

Matrimony! Of all the—! I rose, grabbing the test. "Professor Whitmore, I don't think—"

"But I hope you do, Miss Eton. In any case, I hope you start to soon. Good day, now."



Matrimony! I kicked at a stone on the walkway that led away from the school building, then had to bite back a cry when it failed to yield. Ow! Matrimony, my eye! And to a *prince* of a man. Oh, I could just . . . just about . . . *do something*! I crumpled up the hateful test and threw it at a flock of geese. Or tried to. A spiteful gust of wind blew it right back into my face. I thrashed at it, managing to knock my hat off in the process. And the geese were interested in that, all right! One of them latched onto it and waddled away. I might have tried to chase him, but geese are mean.

Oysters and clambakes! I stamped my foot and splattered mud all over my stockings, so I stomped again for good measure. What did it matter anyway? Who had ever expected anything else from me but disappointment and failure?

Well . . . me, I suppose.

But I always ended up disappointing myself by my failures too. Why couldn't I just think things through before I did them? Why couldn't I just sit still and concentrate? Professor Whitmore was right; if I could just apply myself . . . why couldn't I? Why did I have to be so stupid all the time?

*Love Comes Calling*

One thing was sure. In fall, I wouldn't be here. But not for the reason the professor thought. Getting married? Ha!

I stamped again. The mud gave a satisfying splat.

Double ha!

I wouldn't come back to Radcliffe because I wouldn't *be* in Boston. Next fall, I planned to be in Hollywood.