

Rather A Prig

BY LADY BELL

CHARACTERS:

ELEANOR.

WALTER.

ELEANOR.--(*Calling outside.*) Walter! Walter! (*Running in.*) Here you are, at last! Do come and play in the garden!

WALTER.--(*Who is walking about with a book.*) Certainly not! Don't you see I am deep in study?

E.--But it's play-time.

W.--I dislike play-time.

E.--What a dull creature! Do you mean to say that you never play?

W.--As seldom as possible.

E.--What a pity! I have just got some new reins, and I wanted to play at horses. I do love being a horse.

W.--That is a natural preference. The horse has ever been a favoured companion of man. It is even on record that the Roman Emperor, Caligula----

E.--I will not talk about Roman Emperors during play-time. Come along, I will drag the cart and you shall drive standing up, if you like, as they do at the circus.

W.--That is a custom which dates from the most remote antiquity. Pictorial representations of standing charioteers are found on the Assyrian friezes and the Egyptian tombs----

E.--(*Stopping her ears.*) I will not talk about the Egyptians during play-time. Come, will you drive the cart?

W.--Certainly not.

E.--Then shall we skip? Look, I have a new skipping-rope, which my father gave me last week.

W.--The hemp from which that rope was made was doubtless derived from the flax grown in the province of Ulster, in Ireland, especially in the county of Antrim, of which the principal towns are Belfast, Lisbon, and Carrickfergus.

E.--Oh, bother the county of Antrim and the province of Ulster! I don't care to know where the skipping-rope grew. I want to skip with it.

W.--That is quite a savage instinct; the remarkable agility of the South Sea Islanders----

E.--I won't talk of the South Sea Islanders during play-time. You won't skip, then?

W.--Certainly not.

E.--Then let's be soldiers. I love playing at soldiers.

W.--That is somewhat of an unfeminine instinct, although it is justified by more than one example in history. Thus, Boadicea----

E.--Oh, shut up, or I will run you through with my sword! It's just like a real one. It's made of the most beautiful steel.

W.--Then the blade probably came from the district of Cleveland in Yorkshire, where the iron and steel industries may be seen in their greatest development. You have, doubtless, heard of the steel works of Eston, and the blast furnaces of Middlesborough?

E.--I don't know what a blast furnace is.

W.--Allow me to describe that ingenious construction to you.

E.--No, thank you, not in my play-time. I am going to get some daisies to make a daisy-chain.

W.--You doubtless have a herbarium?

E.--No. I don't believe they grow in this garden.

W.--Oh, too ignorant girl! A herbarium is not a flower, it is a collection of dried flowers and plants.

E.--Ah, well! I haven't one then.

W.--That is a mistake. You should carefully dry the plants and stick them in a book, with a minute description of each specimen written on the opposite page.

E.--I can't stick anything in a book, because Mamma doesn't like me to use her gum, and I have only fish-glue.

W.--Fish-glue is, for certain purposes, a most valuable substance. It has even been known to cure cecity or blindness. Thus, Tobit----

E.--Don't talk about Tobit. Are you coming to make a daisy-chain?

W.--Never.

E.--Shall we play at battledore? I have a heavy shuttlecock and a light one, whichever you like best.

W.--That is because the density of cork varies in a very marked manner. That brought from the West Indies----

E.--Don't talk about the West Indies during play-time. Are you coming to play at battledore?

W.--On no account.

E.--Very well, then, you may stay with your Egyptians, your South Sea Islanders, and your West Indies, while I go and play in the garden. I think you are rather a prig. (*Exit.*)

W.--(*Looking after her, surprised.*) A prig! How odd! I wonder what makes her say that? *Rather a prig!*