

Our Boys and Girls

THE UNAwarDED PRIZE.

Helen Maxon knew she was unbearably proud. A long line of "artistocrats" from her mother's side had bequeathed their haughtiness to her unconditionally. She knew she was ambitious. A long line of "workers" from her father's side had bequeathed their ambition, and with it the peculiar tenacity that would do anything to gain an end. She realized, too, that she was not the kind of girl that other girls liked, and so she did not expect to have many friends. But she had one thought that companioned her more unbrokenly than any other—the memory of Vera Morton.

While attending a Western college the year before, Helen, with a number of classmates, were on a botany excursion one day. They had come to a dead log across a creek, and Vera had unselfishly stepped aside to allow Helen to cross first. The strain had been too much for the log, so when Vera started to cross, it gave way, and she fell, injuring herself so that she had not walked since that time.

It was because of Vera Morton that Helen had asked for a catalogue of prizes as soon as she had entered the Eastern university, and it was because of Vera Morton that Helen had worked untiringly on the senior essay, the prize for which was one hundred and fifty dollars. Vera was to have an operation in the fall, and Helen wanted to pay for it. She could do so by saving her allowance, but she wanted as much of the money as possible to represent real work on her part. It was a real sacrifice for her to sit hour after hour at her desk, and so she chose this way. If she failed, she had at least worked hard.

That day, the third of June, was the day set for the awarding of the prize. It had grown to be the custom for the competitors to keep their names secret from the class as well as from the judges, until the night when the sealed envelopes bearing both the nom-de-plumes and the writers' names were opened. Little had so far been heard concerning the prize, but that day an undercurrent of excitement ran all through the senior class.

"Hello, Helen Maxon!" called an unusually friendly senior. "May I walk to literary criticism class with you?"

Helen responded with her usual aloofness, but Edith Blair was not to be discouraged. She fell in step with Helen and, with her customary lightness, talked of everything she could think of.

"Did you always use manila covers out West for your lecture notes?" she inquired, touching Helen's manila-covered note-book, which she was taking to class.

"Usually," answered Helen.

"Here we use them only for essays," Edith went on, "especially competitive essays. But, then, you can't be expected to know about that, just having come East this year. I wonder," continued Edith, "if you know about the prize that is to be awarded to-night. It is the senior essay prize. The value is one hundred and fifty dollars, but it is not so much the money as the honor that counts. Everybody is excited about it. You must surely come to the 'awarding' to-night."

"Yes," answered Helen, "I have already been informed that the awarding of the senior essay prize is to take place to-night."

By this time they had reached the class-

room. At the end of the hour Professor Watt gave the assignments.

"Miss Blair and Miss Maxon, take this book and report on it to-morrow. I have written some suggestions on a slip of paper inside the book."

Helen took the book. After class Edith came to her and timidly said: "Couldn't we take a walk and look over the book this afternoon? I want to go to the awarding this evening."

"Yes, I suppose it would be better to look it over together," said Helen, with a curious note of condescension. "It would be well, perhaps, to read the suggestions first."

They found the slip of paper, and read:

"Professor Watt: The decision must be made between the essays bearing the nom-de-plumes 'Vera Morton' and 'Virginia Gray.' We are passing them to you for final judgment.

"Committee for Senior Essay Prize."

Clearly the professor had made a mistake. Both girls were shocked. Helen was the first to recover her poise. Edith turned white, then red, and then she did a very unexpected thing. She began to cry. Helen looked at her without the slightest trace of sympathy.

"I see no reason why you should feel so," she said. "It was a stupid mistake on the part of the professor."

"But it isn't that," broke in Edith. "I'm just dead tired, and—Helen Maxon," she said, drying her tears and looking straight at Helen, "do you know who Virginia Gray is?"

"No," answered Helen; and then, in a tone kindlier than she was accustomed to use, she added, "how should I know?"

"No, no, of course you don't," said Edith; then, with perfect abandonment, she added: "I've just got to talk to somebody, Helen Maxon, and even though it is breaking custom, I must tell you that I am 'Virginia Gray.' I chose that as my nom-de-plume because it was mother's maiden name. Now can you understand why I felt as I did?"

And then, without giving Helen an opportunity to answer, she hurried on in her excitement:

"Can you imagine how you would feel so near the prize? Wouldn't you be a little bit nervous? If I don't get this prize! If I don't get this prize!" She seemed to forget Helen was present.

Suddenly turning to Helen, she burst out: "I don't know how I can ever face mother at graduation, week after next, if I don't get this prize. She has sacrificed everything for me, and she has set her heart on my winning this ever since she knew I had entered the competition. The money would mean much, but I know the honor would mean more. I have always come near the prizes, but I have never reached the goal. I worked so hard for this, and I know it would make mother so happy."

"Yes," said Helen, who could not help but show signs of excitement, "what about this other girl—this girl whose nom-de-plume is 'Vera Morton'? She may also need the money. Her heart may also be yearning to please somebody."

"I know, I know," and Edith began to cry; "but she can't possibly need it as much as I do."

"She may need it more than you do, child," and Helen looked upon Edith as upon a small child. "It may be the only one thing she has ever won, and there may be a special reason

why she feels the test of her value depends upon it."

"Yes, I have been one-sided," said Edith; "but it has seemed so big to me. I wanted it so much. I—"

Helen interrupted her.

"Do you want it so much that you would be willing to lie and steal to get it?" The question had a tone of fierceness in it.

"Oh, never that!" and Edith shrank back in horror.

"Then," replied Helen in an even tone, "you cannot comprehend the big wanting a girl can have."

Edith looked at her with wide-opened eyes. "But you can't understand such a wanting, either, Helen Maxon."

"I'm not so sure that I can't," responded Helen.

By this time the girls had walked around the campus, and were again in front of the Arts College.

"I have to see the French professor," said Helen. "I'll be back soon. Wait for me here."

With that she hurried up the steps, but once on the other side of the door she stopped. The halls were deserted, and yet to Helen it seemed as though a thousand unseen forms were there. Some were daring her, urging her on; a few were calling her back. She hesitated, but for only a minute. With her usual decisiveness she went straight to Professor Watt's office. She knew he had a seminary class, so she was prepared for her knock to be unanswered. After glancing up and down the hall she tried the door, which, knowing the absent-mindedness of the professor, she had expected to be open. And so it was. As she supposed, the two prize essays were on his desk. With her love for the dramatic, Helen paused a moment that she might realize to the fullest extent what she was about to do.

Then the thought of Edith patiently waiting outside came to her, and with that thought came the image of Vera Morton as she had unselfishly stepped aside that day near the old log, and waited for Helen to have first place. The image held for a few seconds. Then, with extreme deliberation she turned back the plain manila covers of both essays to disclose the non-de-plumes on the envelopes inside. Choosing one of the essays, she took out the clasps, fastened the typewritten sheets in her literary criticism note-book, which was exactly the same size, and threw the plain manila cover into the waste-paper basket. She was about to leave the office, when she impulsively picked up a pencil and wrote something on a piece of paper. She tucked this inside the manila cover of the one essay left on the desk.

She returned to Edith, and led the way to the gorge on the other side of the campus. Both girls had forgotten about to-morrow's assignment, and talked but little until they stood on the swinging bridge. Far below them the water, that a half-mile above the falls had been flowing calmly, was now rushing with foamy haste to the lake.

"It's just like life, isn't it?" said Edith. "We go along quietly for a while, and suddenly we find ourselves in such a whirl of excitement. I feel as though—O Helen, Helen," she cried, "you've dropped your note-book!"

Helen, watching the note-book as it was caught in an eddy and whirled away, replied: "No matter. I have all my notes except to-day's typewritten at home. You will lend me to-day's, will you not?"

"I'm so relieved," sighed Edith. "Of course,"