

# THE MYSTERY BOX

BY MRS. C. N. WILLIAMSON.

THIS issue of The Sunday C. marks the publication of the third novel in the series of standard books of up-to-date fiction. In this edition is published the first half of one of the most thrillingly interesting books of the day, "The Mystery Box." Next Sunday the second half of the story will be given, thereby completing the book in two issues and making it possible for readers to obtain one of the best books of the day for 10 cents.

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## CHAPTER I.

### WHAT NELLA KYNASTON OVERHEARD AT NO MAN'S.

Cecily Grant was really embarrassingly pretty, from the chaperon's point of view. Every one in the tearoom was looking at her, and it was always so wherever she went. Miss Morley, sipping her tea, which was very hot and made her nose red, wondered whether Cissy was conscious that she was the center of attraction. A man, seeing the girl laughing and talking with her friends, would instantly have decided that she was not; but women know each other's little subtleties, and Miss Morley was not so positive.

This was Cecily's special day. It was Saturday, and on Monday she was to bid good-bye to Mrs. D'Esterre's school. To be sure, it was nearly Christmas time, and on the next Thursday all the girls would be leaving for the holidays. But Cissy was going with her father's friend and hers, Lady Stanton, in advance of the others, and she was never coming back. That was the reason why she had been allowed the privilege of giving a "farewell tea" to the girls (there were only ten) at this favorite place on Bond street.

The mystery was why she had ever come to the school at all; for she had been nearly 18 when she arrived a year ago, older than any of the other pupils, and she had been apparently "finished" already by a governess at home. She was a great heiress, altogether a much more important young person than the rest of her companions, and was not at all the sort of girl who is usually sent to a boarding school—even so eminently "select" a one as Mrs. D'Esterre's.

She had appeared suddenly and Miss Morley, who was a resident teacher of several lower branches and chaperon to the girls in most of their daytime expeditions, had never heard a reason assigned for Cecily Grant's coming, nor had one been assigned now for her going. All that anybody, not excepting those high in authority at Ashburton House, knew about the matter was that after next Monday the most beautiful face ever seen there would be seen no more.

Even Miss Morley liked and admired Cissy in her way. But Cissy was not yet 18; all life was before her, and everything that was best in life was at her command. Miss Morley was 46, had never had any "life" worth speaking of, and had nothing less gray than her past to look forward to; so that her feeling toward the girl was touched with bitterness, like some poor fruit half-spoiled by frost before it has been given a chance to ripen. Somehow she often found herself watching the "beauty of the school" with scarcely acknowledged suspicion, as if waiting, almost hoping, for some unattractive trait to develop.

To-day, although Cissy was going away so soon, was no exception to the rule. She knew that only nature's hand had painted the piquante, sparkling face with blanc de perle and vividly contrasting rose, or darkened the curling lashes and the penciled arch of brow which gave so haunting an expression to the hazel eyes; she was aware that the young gold of the girl's wavy hair had never known bleach, or dye, or curling contrivances; but as she saw how every one looked at her charge, scarcely resisting a temptation to stare, she could not help hoping in her starved, spinster heart that those people thought the girl owed her charms to artificial means. "She is really too striking," Miss Morley said to herself. "She ought to dress more plainly and wear a veil. Why, even at the window there's somebody staring in at her."

As the chaperon made this discovery she frowned at the big plate-glass window a few feet distant, wishing that she had placed the party farther away from it; but it was too late to think of that now. And so intently was the obnoxious somebody gazing at the girl in gray cloth, with a gray "picture" hat, that the magnetism of Miss Morley's frown failed to take effect upon him.

"Obnoxious" was precisely the term for the man. He was of a type which Miss Morley in her character of chaperon particularly repudiated. Once he might have been handsome, but life had carved telltale lines on the dark features, making his one of those "concave faces beaten in and marred by the hoof of sin." His clothes had been good, and might have been traced back to the hands of a smart tailor in whose books they were very likely written down as a bad debt. But they had seen

their best days; and their career gave the impression of never having had any "best days"—in a virtuous sense—at all. "Horrid person! How dare he stand there ogling us?" Miss Morley mentally exclaimed, finding some satisfaction in the plural, though, as a matter of fact, the man had never once removed his eyes from Cecily Grant's face. Cissy had not yet noticed him. She was talking with Dorothy Lane, the girl with whom she was most intimate—if she could be said to be intimate with any one in the school; but just as Miss Morley glanced toward the pair to see what Cissy was doing, Dorothy Lane's eyes roved to the window. She saw the man in the shabby frock coat and once shining tail hat, who was walking slowly past the big window, and she saw, too, what was the attraction. Turning to her friend, she said something in a low voice. But Miss Morley had trained her ears to abnormal sharpness—or where would have been one of her chief qualifications as a chaperon for giddy schoolgirls?—and she heard the words: "There's a tall dark man outside the

window very much interested in you, my dear." A sudden rush of color streamed to Cecily's forehead, making even her pretty ears pink as rose petals. "The little flirt!" thought Miss Morley. "She's not offended at all. She's actually pleased." Cissy did not look out at the window. On the contrary, she lowered her long lashes and took the opportunity of drinking some tea; but there was a half-smile on her lips, and certainly it appeared for a moment as if Miss Morley were right. Then Dorothy Lane spoke again. "Do just take a glimpse, my child. He's got a horrid face." At this Cissy seemed surprised. She even forgot to set down her teacup, but balanced it absent-mindedly in the air. "A horrid face?" she repeated, as if she had hardly been able to believe her own ears. And slowly she turned her eyes to the window. Miss Morley covertly watching all the time. Crash! went the Japanese teacup into his saucer. It did not break, but the tea split over, and all the girls at the three

tables put close together for the party from Ashburton House gave little jumps or exclamations. "What is the matter, Miss Grant?" inquired Miss Morley, with severity. "Oh, nothing—nothing at all," Cissy assured her hastily. "Didn't you ever have a funny, give-away sort of feeling in your wrist? What a crash the poor cup made. Luckily it didn't break. I suppose I don't deserve any more tea after that, do I?" She rattled on quickly in a confused way, as was indeed quite natural, since the noise of the cup coming into such violent contact with her saucer had attracted more attention to her than ever. But instead of blushing as most normal girls would have blushed for their awkwardness, this abandoned girl had turned deadly white. Often Miss Morley had thought of late that Cissy Grant was not looking as bright as she had when she first came to Ashburton House, but never had she seen her as pale as now. "Aren't you well?" conscientiously inquired the chaperon. "Quite well, thank you," replied Cissy,

trying to smile. "Only—I daresay it's coming into this warm place and drinking hot tea after the cold out of doors. I think I must have been a little giddy for a minute. Please don't mind." "You look ready to faint, dear," exclaimed Dorothy Lane. "I think," went on Miss Morley, "that if you are all ready we had better go home." "Oh, no!" ejaculated Cissy. "Surely not yet. We've been here no time at all, and—and it's my last day." "Your last day but two," Miss Morley corrected her. "That's what I meant," meekly. "It's my last party." Afterward Miss Morley remembered those words against Cissy. "It's my last day." But at the moment she was almost ready to give way and allow the girls to finish out their hour at the Bond street tea-rooms, when Cissy herself hal rose, nervously. And if the girl had been white a few seconds before, she was red enough now to atone for it. "Does she want to go after all?" Miss Morley was wondering, in amazement, at so abrupt a change of mind, when her

question answered itself. "She has only given that start, as No, Miss Cecily Grant had no thought of if to rise, either in sheer nervousness or



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