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# What-to-Eat



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# The Minister's Daughter

L. M. Montgomery  
Illustrated by Henry E. Valley

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What-To-Eat



Walter Armstrong found himself belated at twilight near the little Westlands church. He had missed his way and did not know the road back to the hotel. There was a light in the church and a few horses were tied to the fence. He stood his wheel up against the building and went in.

It was a young people's meeting. About a score of young men and women were assembled in the center pews of the badly lighted room. Armstrong's entrance caused a little stir. Some looked around at him wonderingly. The leader of the meeting, a young girl with a sweet, frightened face, grew palpably nervous and made several mistakes in the verses she was reading.

Armstrong dropped into a seat back among the shadows. The people present were all strangers to him, with the exception of a young man who supplied the summer hotel at the beach with "garden truck," whom Armstrong knew by sight.

Three seats ahead of him, with her head bowed devotedly on the hard rim of the pew before her, was a young girl in a white dress. She had magnificent hair of a warm chestnut with a glistening ripple in it. Armstrong, who had a decided weakness for chestnut hair, began to wonder if her face were pretty enough to match it. He was afraid to see it lest it should not be. While the aforesaid young man led in prayer Armstrong mentally fashioned out the face she ought to have if Nature had been true to the eternal fitness of things.

"Very dark blue eyes—straight nose—fairly large mouth—creamy skin with



She went where the organ stood.

color coming and going faintly—that is how it ought to be but won't. I've been tricked before like that. She's fatally sure to have sharp cheek bones and a muddy complexion. Wish she'd turn around."

She did not turn around, but when the prayer was over she rose and went up the aisle to the dim little corner where the organ stood. As she sat the lamplight fell over her face and Armstrong started. After all, it did match; it was the very face he had pictured—only it was the face of a saint whereas Armstrong, being of the world, worldly, had given it a different expression.

He watched her as she sang. He had seen a great many beautiful women, but never one so lovely as

this girl. When the hymn was ended he had forgotten all about the road back to his hotel; he was wondering how he could get an introduction to her.

When the meeting was over he found that some were going to stay for choir practice. He went up the aisle to the man he knew—Ross Nelson by name—and asked him the nearest way back to the hotel. He was looking at the girl at the organ all the time and did not hear a word of Nelson's reply.

"Who is that girl?" he asked, with a nod of his head in her direction.

"That? Why, she's Miss Hastings, our minister's daughter," said Nelson in a surprised tone, as if he thought everybody ought to know her.

"Introduce me, will you?" said Armstrong, coolly, and Nelson towed him doubtfully over. The ceremony of introduction was performed in an awkward, stilted style, and Armstrong bowed gravely.

Sylvia Hastings blushed. The warm inroads of color over her soft, round cheeks were very becoming and Armstrong always declared he lost his heart to her that very instant. But he had to subside into the background almost immediately for the

choir practice began and lasted for an hour. He waited doggedly through it and when it was over asked Miss Hastings if he might walk home with her. Sylvia was too shy to refuse, even if she had wished. She had never had such a request before. Nelson, who had paired off with the meeting leader, and the other couples looked curiously after them as they crossed the moonlight space. It seemed to them nothing short of sacrilege that a young man in a bicycle suit should walk home with the minister's daughter.

Armstrong had no idea how far it was to the Westlands manse, but he hoped it was miles. As a matter of fact, it was a good long walk. Sylvia could hardly be induced to talk at all, at first; when she did it was about the prayer meeting, and she asked him timidly if he were interested in the Christian Endeavor movement. He shamelessly avowed that he was, and floundered helplessly through the deep waters of a discussion upon methods of work into which she inveigled him. He betrayed his ignorance speedily, and Sylvia's eyes gleamed with mischief in the moonlight. Armstrong began to suspect that she was having a little innocent fun at his expense and he wisely refused to discuss the subject further.

When they reached the manse he reluctantly surrendered her hymn book and asked if he might call.

Sylvia blushed again and hesitated. She knew very little about young men. Almost the only ones she had ever met, barring the Westlands lads, were the pale-faced, abstracted "supplies" who occasionally preached for her father and visited the manse. They talked to her, when they noticed her at all, about missions and Christian Endeavor movements and other church matters. This young man was very different; she had found him delightful, but she was afraid her father would not approve of him. There was about him a distinct atmosphere of Vanity Fair of which the good Westlands minister had a holy horror. Sylvia did not know what answer to make.

"I would like to see you," she said at last, "but—I am not sure that father and mother would. They—they—I don't think they like anybody but ministers."

Armstrong laughed.

"I'm sorry that I'm not a minister, then, and I'm afraid I couldn't successfully disguise myself as one. But after all it is your opinion that chiefly matters—to me. Do you restrict your circle of friendship to ministers?"

"I think it is restricted for me," said Sylvia, naively. "Some of them are very nice and some of them are dreadfully stupid."

"I am going to come over and see you," declared Armstrong, boldly. "That is, if you don't actually forbid me."

Sylvia went in, feeling as if she had done something very wicked and very

delightful. She thought about Armstrong all the time her father was having family prayers and by this she knew that she must be a very sinful girl. Also, she dreamed of him that night.

Armstrong had to go all the way back to the church for his bicycle and trust to luck to find his way home. He hummed, "There Is Only One Girl in the World for Me" on the road back until it suddenly struck him that it was too frivolous to be taken in connection with the minister's daughter, so he changed it to "Oh, Promise Me." That suited better and lasted until he got back to his hotel.

He called at the Westlands Manse the very next night and thereby created a commotion in that placid domain. While Sylvia talked to him in the parlor, the Reverend Elisha Hastings and his wife held a council of two in the study. If this creature came to see Sylvia what was to be done with him? The thing was preposterous. Sylvia's natural destiny was a minister. There was even one particular minister in distant prospect already. At all events she must not be allowed to form a friendship with a worldly young man who rode a bicycle on Sunday. Their one white ewe lamb must be preserved from such contamination.

The next time Armstrong called, the Reverend Elisha Hastings himself went into the little rose-scented parlor with Sylvia. Armstrong knew he was being weighed in the balance and he tried to be very careful. He flattered himself that he succeeded, but he underrated the minister's powers of discernment. Once he incautiously spoke of being "within an ace" of something, whereby Sylvia's father knew that he played cards; another seemingly innocent remark confirmed his theater-going propensities. Moreover, the Reverend Elisha suspected that a man with such a pair of legs must be addicted to dancing, and he used slang—which was next door to swearing.

Sylvia, bless her innocent heart, never guessed all her father discovered; but she knew by the set of his back when he went out of the room that Armstrong had been found wanting, and it depressed her greatly. She didn't think she ought to like him so well under the circumstances, but how was she going to help it?

At the end of a fortnight, during which Armstrong had haunted the Westlands manse, had been devoted to the Westlands prayer meeting, and had sat devoutly through four of the Westlands sermons, the Reverend Elisha and his meek, saintly little wife told Sylvia that the young man's visits must cease. Sylvia cried her starry gray eyes half out that night, but she never dreamed of disobeying her parents.

She told Armstrong simply, as they walked home from prayer meeting the next night, that he must not call upon her again.

They reached the garden gate as she said it, and Armstrong gave a gasp. He knew that Sylvia's father and mother disapproved of him, but he had flattered himself

that he could overcome their prejudices. True, he did not know much about the Telegu mission and was not in sympathy with revivals; but he held to the reverence for sacred things that had been inculcated in him in childhood, and he had a natural inclination to all that was good and true.

Also, he had a five-figure income and he did not believe that even an unworldly country clergyman and his wife could be altogether blind to the advantages it was in his power to offer Sylvia.

He could see the minister through the study window, reading calmly and unconsciously by the table. It would have given Armstrong exquisite pleasure just then to have thrown at him one of the big white stones that bordered the garden path.

“Sylvia,” he said, desperately, “I can’t stay away. I shall have to come to Westlands manse as long as you are here. I love you.”

Sylvia dropped her hymn book. It was the first time that anybody had ever said those three wonderful words to her—although, to be sure, there was a certain pale young student, destined to the foreign mission field, whom her father liked, and whom she herself revered because he was so consecrated and earnest minded, who had shown by his actions that he wanted to say them if he could ever summon up enough courage. But Armstrong came out with them plainly and the moonlit landscape whirled around Sylvia.

“Oh, you mustn’t,” she faltered.

“Why not?” he demanded, masterfully. “Don’t you love me, Sylvia?”

He put his arm around her and drew her to him. She was shaken like a rose in the wind. But she must not let him—Oh, she must not let him!

“Don’t you, Sylvia?” he insisted.

What Sylvia would have said, or if she could have said anything, will never be known, for just at that moment the hall-door opened and Mrs. Hastings looked out.

Sylvia wrenched herself free and ran up the path, hoping guiltily that her mother had not seen them. The door closed behind her and Armstrong was left outside.

He stooped and groped until he found Sylvia’s hymn book. Then he went moodily home and slept with it under his pillow—if he slept at all.

The next evening he went unblushingly to the manse and asked for the minister himself. He laid before him a cool, formal proposal for his daughter’s hand; he stated his social standing and prospects; he gave city references; and he wound up with the amount of his income.

He thought it all good ammunition, especially the last. But it was nothing better than blank cartridges as far as the

Reverend Elisha Hastings was concerned. The good Westlands minister was no hypocrite. A millionaire would not have been a welcome suitor for Sylvia if the faintest taint of worldliness clung to him. The impecunious missionary-elect would have stood a far better chance.

He told Armstrong plainly that he could not give his consent and to this he adhered. Armstrong exhausted his powers of persuasion and argument fruitlessly. He left the manse, a defeated man, in a most atrocious temper.

He had not even seen Sylvia. He wondered savagely if they had her locked up. When he got back to the hotel he wrote her a letter.

It was just such a letter as a desperate lover would write, and, had he but known it, Sylvia almost broke her heart over it. But when her cool, calmly worded little note, written at her father's command, came to him he concluded in despair that there was no hope for him.

Sylvia wrote that she was very, very sorry but he must not try to see her or write to her again. Her father and mother knew best and she must obey them. He must go away and not think about her any more. She would always be his friend and she was his truly, Sylvia Hastings.

If Armstrong had thought that Sylvia really loved him he would have carried her off from the manse by main force rather than give her up. But he reflected gloomily that she couldn't care for him when she would dismiss him with a note like that. There was no use in his making a fool of himself any longer. He would go home and become a wise man. Therefore he packed up and went back to the city.

After Armstrong's departure Westlands manse became once more the abode of



He put his arm around her.

peace—outwardly, at all events. The minister and his wife congratulated themselves on an averted danger and sent the missionary-elect an invitation to visit them.

Sylvia felt unhappy and was unhappier still because she was sure it was wicked to feel so. She lost her appetite and her interest in Christian Endeavor work. In short, she moped, and the Reverend Elisha Hastings and his wife thought she was run down and got iron pills for her!

One afternoon, about two months after Armstrong's Waterloo, a telegram came to the manse. Sylvia was alone, her father and mother being away. Telegrams were rarities and Sylvia turned pale when she saw that this was for her. It read:

“148 Sherbourne Avenue, Trenton.

“Walter Armstrong dying. Wishes to see you. Come at once.

“IRENE GLOVER.”

Sylvia dropped the brutal thing and wrung her hands. What was she to do? Her father and mother would not be back before night, and she had never been to the city alone in her life.

Like an inspiration—in fact, I believe Sylvia thinks it was one—came the thought of Aunt Lydia Lennox. Aunt Lydia was an aunt by marriage only and the Reverend Elisha Hastings did not approve of her. She was of the world, worldly, and she was almost a stranger to Sylvia. Nevertheless the latter determined to go to her.

Fifteen minutes later Westlands people were amazed and scandalized to see their minister's daughter running breathlessly up the station road, with her hat on crooked, her jacket fronts flying and a satchel in her hand. It was a mile to the station and Sylvia barely caught the train. In two hours she was in Trenton and ten minutes later a cab set her down at Mrs. Lennox's door. That good lady was not a little astonished when her disheveled niece burst in upon her.

“Why, Sylvia Hastings! What on earth is the matter?”

Sylvia dropped into a chair and somehow sobbed out her story, or at least enough of it to enlighten Aunt Lydia. Mrs. Lennox gasped.

“Walter Armstrong! I knew he was very sick—it is pneumonia, I believe—but I didn't know you knew him. Of course I'll take you to him, you poor kitten. He lives with his sister, Mrs. Glover. But you must have some tea first.”

“I couldn't eat a mouthful,” protested Sylvia. “Oh, don't let us lose any time, Aunt Lydia. Walter is dying and I must see him first—Oh, indeed I must.”

Mrs. Lennox yielded, got ready and took Sylvia to a house whose magnificence would have frightened her had she been in her normal state of mind. Mrs. Glover

greeted Sylvia with secret amazement. She had known and wondered at Walter's infatuation for some girl up the country, but she wondered no longer. Any man might be excused for going mad over a face like that.

"I am so glad you have come, Miss Hastings. Walter is longing to see you. Yes, he is very low, poor boy. The doctor gave him up this morning, but I can't lose all hope yet. The disease itself is killed but he is so very weak—and he doesn't seem as if he wanted to get better."

Armstrong turned his head eagerly on the pillow as the three women entered.

"I thought you would come," he said feebly.

Sylvia went down on her knees by the bed and caught at his hand.

"Oh, Walter, I love you—I love you—and you must not die—or I shall die, too."

Armstrong smiled in a species of rapture and the two older women went to the window and studied the street.

When the doctor came that evening he found such an improvement in his patient that his hopes went up with a rush. Everybody concerned was happy, but Sylvia had begun to wonder what her father would say. When he landed from a cab at Mrs. Lennox's door the next morning she turned very white.

"Just leave him to me, my dear," said Aunt Lydia, comfortingly. "I'll make him listen to reason."



And she did. But how she did remains a mystery to this day. The Reverend Elisha Hastings never told anyone, not even his wife, what his sister-in-law said to him during that memorable interview, and the good lady herself never went into details.

"But such a time as I had to bring that man to his senses," she said confidentially to a sympathetic friend. "Just think, my dear! Here was a young man, the very finest fellow you could find if you went out to search, of good family and worth half a million and that infatuated man wouldn't give Sylvia to him because he was 'worldly

“I thought you would come,” he said feebly. and unregenerate.’ He did give in at last, however, and the child’s engagement is permitted under protest. I mean to keep her with me a good deal of the time before her marriage. It will be pleasanter for Walter.”

Sylvia was married in the fall, and the Reverend Elisha Hastings performed the ceremony with more resignation than he had expected. In his secret heart he still preferred the missionary, but he had the grace not to say so; and Sylvia was so radiantly happy that he admitted that it was doubtless ordered for the best after all.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *The Minister's Daughter* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]