

# MATILDA - FLAPPER

LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

CANADIAN HOME JOURNAL,  
AUGUST, 1920

## **\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

*Title:* Matilda - Flapper

*Date of first publication:* 1920

*Author:* Leslie Gordon Barnard (1890-1961)

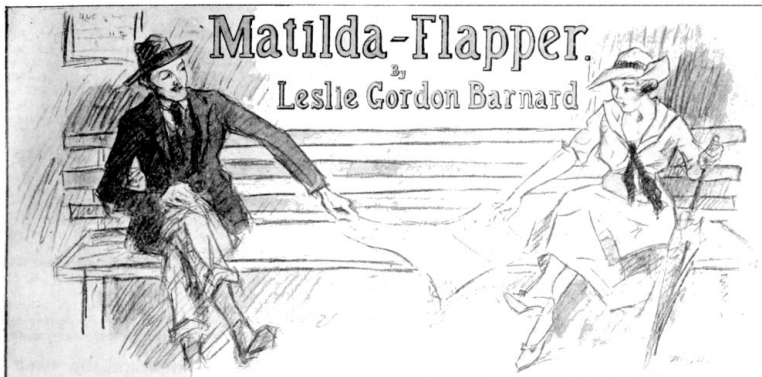
*Date first posted:* Dec. 17, 2023

*Date last updated:* Dec. 17, 2023

Faded Page eBook #20231235

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, Pat McCoy & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive/Canadian Libraries.



ILLUSTRATED BY MANLY MACDONALD

IF MATILDA had not, in defiance of the first elements of good breeding, looked over the old gentleman's shoulder, it never would have happened. But then, as everybody knows, great oaks from little acorns grow.

Matilda, I say, looked over the old gentleman's shoulder. She just couldn't help herself. There was such an irresistibly funny picture in the comic paper he was reading. Also there were several minutes to while away before the train that was to bear her on the final stretch of the homeward journey would arrive at the Junction. Perhaps her interest in the picture made her draw a little nearer than she realized.

Now there are some people to whom such an act is as offensive as a squeaky lead pencil to the average individual. Obviously the old gentleman belonged to this class. Had his spirit not kept pace with his years or had he been a less crusty and self-contained old person the consciousness of a young creature of the genus flapper peering over his shoulder would not have caused any extraordinary repulsion. As it was he fidgeted uneasily, then jerked away suddenly.

Simultaneously came the tinkle of glass on the platform, and a smothered exclamation.

Matilda at once became aware of a very personable young man who had evidently been sitting on the same bench on the far side of the old gentleman, and who was now ruefully salvaging what remained of a pair of eyeglasses.

"I must really apologize, sir. I—I fear I have occasioned you considerable inconvenience." The old gentleman was very red, very dignified, and very uncomfortable.

The young man looked up in time to catch Matilda's glance. Then he did a very reprehensible thing. The young man winked! Now there are winks and winks. There are sly winks, and furtive winks, and distinctly rude winks. But this wink was different—it was a friendly, open thing. Matilda was a carefully brought up young lady but this caught her off her guard, and she signalled back with a smile before she knew what she was about. When she averted a rather flushed face, and resumed her place on the bench, the mischief was done.

"It's quite all right, sir. Accidents will happen. Probably as much my fault as yours. I was just looking around to see—something." Matilda became aware of the fact that the young man had accepted the apology in a commendably gracious way, and had also resumed his seat at the other end of the bench. Former conditions were thus restored—with one exception.

The old gentleman seemed to have permanently vacated. She could see his coat-tails flapping in the breeze well up the platform where he stood reading the train bulletin.

Did you ever struggle between the desire to look and the knowledge that one's duty was not to look? No? Then you are not really human and should not be reading this story. Matilda was very human—as most flappers are—and the struggle was intense. Was he looking her way? If she had been sure that he was not she would have chanced a glance. But she was not sure.

With a sense of duty strong upon her Matilda forced her glance to take in the objects within a limited circle of vision—the hoardings opposite with their glaring announcements of condensed milk, cooking stoves, hosiery and other uninteresting commodities; the poorly-kept platform with its worm-eaten planks and its little pile of luggage and its waiting groups of passengers; and, finally, the station buildings themselves, seeming fairly to exude mustiness and the stale odor of tobacco. Three rounds of this group of prosaic objects and Matilda felt she must complete the circle of vision—or explode!

Then a ray of hope appeared. Matilda's eye was just beginning to travel along the bench when it fell on the humorous weekly which was the original cause of all the trouble, and which—probably in his confusion—the old gentleman had left behind. Her hand slipped over and closed on the magazine. To her horror at this precise moment a masculine hand appeared from the other end of the bench—evidently bent on the same mission. A little tug—a stifled gurgle from Matilda—and an amused chuckle from the other end of the bench.

“I beg your pardon. Won't you take it?”

Matilda looked up, and encountered one of the most engaging smiles in her short career. It was one of those expansive smiles that start at the mouth and spread, and spread until eyes and nose and every feature seem to contribute their share to an expression of all-pervasive good-humor.

“Oh, thank, you.” She found her tongue at last. “But it really doesn't matter. I wish you'd take it.”

“Nothing doing. You got there first.”

“But you—you—”

He laughed.

“I admit I won the tug-of-war,” he said. “But see here—let’s compromise. Can’t we both look at it?”

“Oh, but really I couldn’t.”

“And why not?”

Matilda regarded him in pained surprise.

“Why, we’ve never been introduced.”

“Good heavens—is that all? I was afraid it might be something serious.”

“It’s very important,” declared Matilda properly.

“Absolutely,” he agreed readily. “So let’s get introduced. My name’s Robert—Bob for short. And yours?”

Matilda looked dubious. The young man smiled again. She capitulated.

“Mine’s Matilda.”

“What a pretty name!”

“Oh, do you really think so? I hate it, but I’m named after an aunt of mine. She’s rich.” Matilda, you see, was very young and inexperienced. She thought he was paying her a special compliment instead of using a time-honored formula.

Now had anyone told Matilda ten minutes before that she would shortly be sitting on a public bench sharing a magazine with a young man she had never seen before she would have been properly shocked and not a little indignant. Yet such was the situation she found herself in, with all thought of impropriety superseded by a sense of delicious adventure. Which would lead one naturally to moralize on the necessity of flapperish young people, when traveling alone, strictly “minding their own business!” However, we must stand by the facts of Matilda’s case.

“There’s the picture that caused all the trouble,” she was saying. “You know I’m really to blame for those poor glasses of yours. I shouldn’t have been looking over his shoulder that way—but I was.”

“So was I,” he confessed with a grin.

“Really? How funny. But it is a clever picture isn’t it?”

“That,” he told her, “isn’t the picture I was looking at.”

“Silly!” she chided. “It must have been. It’s the only one on the page. What else could you have been looking at?”

“You!” he confessed shamelessly.

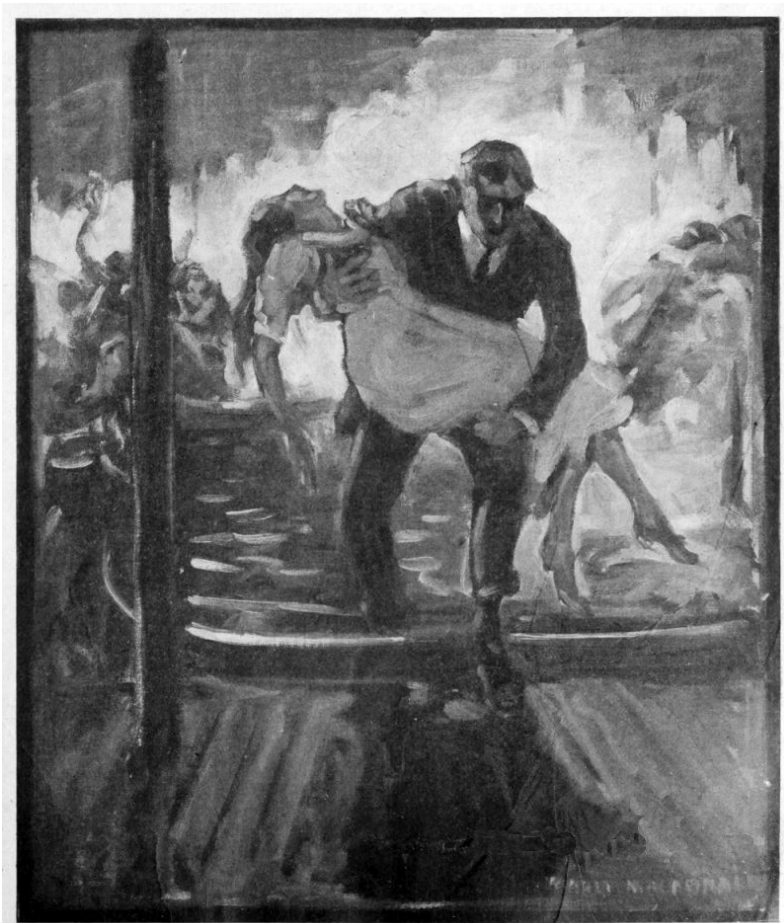
Now the flapper who is unhappy over so obvious a compliment is yet to be found. But at the same time such boldness must meet with summary punishment. Matilda, had she sought to analyze her emotions, would have found many conflicting feelings. Anger probably predominated—but a thrill of pleasure ran through it all. And was there not some justification? Not two hours ago Matilda had looked into her mirror and found the result not at all displeasing. And it is nice to have confirmation of one’s judgment.

Her effort, however, to simulate righteous indignation and maintain an icy aloofness for the next five minutes deceived no one. Worst of all the young man refused to be snubbed. He absently turned the pages of the magazine, and kept up a running fire of comment. In tormenting indifference to the cold silence with which his remarks were received.

At this stage the train came in, and after the usual bustle of securing places—in which emergency a little masculine help is not to be lightly disregarded—Matilda found herself seated beside a young gentleman whose profile she could not help furtively admiring, even if his conduct met with her very conventional disapproval.

For a distinct coolness, you see, still existed.

But it was a two hours’ run from the Junction to the City—and much may happen in two hours.



Bob's arms were around her and she heard him say: "Bear up, little girl; we'll have you out in no time."



## II.

THE band was blaring a recent “victory air.”

The Performing Seals, the Diving Beauties, the Weight Lifting Champion, all were claiming a large and enthusiastic following. On the many mechanical thrills provided by a far-sighted management for a sensation-loving public the afternoon’s business was in full and profitable swing. Strident cries of peanut vendors and side-show proprietors vied with other noise in creating a joyful pandemonium of sound. Wonderland Park was enjoying the popularity that perfect June weather made possible.

“It’s all been so perfectly gorgeous, Bob!”

Matilda’s radiant face as she looked up at her escort gave ample confirmation to her words.

A delightful lunch at a roof garden restaurant, a breezy train ride to the Park, and a long afternoon’s enjoyment of the thrills of Scenic Railway, and Mysterious Maze, and Victory Whirl, and countless other attractions, had seemed like a wonderful dream to a girl just freed from the restraints of a rather exclusive and old-fashioned “College for Young Ladies.”

In spite of misgivings a-plenty and a reproving conscience that would not be lulled into absolute quiet, Matilda looked back and knew she would do the same again if she had the chance. Not with anyone, you know, but then Bob was—so different. He had planned it all on the train, and it was such an alluring prospect of an innocent but venturesome afternoon’s fun that she could not resist it. The fact that she was a day earlier than expected in leaving for home, and had sent no word so that her coming might be a surprise, made detection unlikely. She could take a taxi out to the suburb of Westwood, where her home was, just as though she had arrived on the evening train. Not that she would descend to a deliberate untruth, you know, but if, as was extremely likely, no questions were asked—why! So she argued and almost convinced herself.

“You’ve really had a good time, Matilda?”

“Ever so good.”

“Count me in on that, too,” he said with boyish enthusiasm. “I’ve never had a better. But then,” he added quickly, “you see I never had you along before. That counts for a lot.”

“Honest?”

“Cross my heart!” he said gaily.

“I’m so glad,” she said simply, and meant it.

The afternoon wore on, the sun dipped lower, and still they lingered. A delightful paddle on the artificial lake and winding little stream that led through leafy woodland glades claimed the best part of an hour. Contentment, and with it an understanding silence, fell upon them.

Finally Matilda broke it.

“I’m afraid it’s getting late, and I must be going.”

He consulted his watch.

“Great life!” he exclaimed. “It’s nearly six.”

“Oh, Bob!”—in sudden alarm—“You must get me a taxi and send me home. It’s a long way to go, and I have my luggage to pick up at the check room.”

“Not so fast, little girl. You don’t suppose I’ve found you just to lose you. Look,” he pleaded, “let’s go in the Mysterious Maze again as a finale—it’s quietest in there, and there are some things I want to tell you—and you me.”

Matilda hesitated.

“You’ll get me that taxi right away afterwards. Promise.”

“I promise.”

The transition was soon made from the canoe to the Mysterious Maze with its queer little “boats-for-two” that were carried by the force of a silent stream through narrow tunnels, with strange and grotesque grottoes where weird carvings and paintings alternated with pleasing and unexpected vistas.

“I adore this,” confided Matilda, clinging a little more tightly to Bob’s arm. “It’s so spooky.”

“I’m more interested in you than in spooks,” he laughed, then, more seriously: “Matilda, I’ve tried to give you a good time this afternoon—now do you think you could do two things for me?”

She looked up, eyes big with wonderment at his serious tone. Her words came very softly:

“I’ll try.”

“Well, first,” he commenced, “I want you to promise me you’ll never run off this way with a strange young man again. It’s all wrong!”

Matilda stared.

“Well, I like that,” she declared, pouting. “Who was it told me it was all right?”

“Um—did I? Well, it isn’t done in the best circles, little girl. In fact, it’s a pretty direct route to trouble. This time you happened to draw a chap who tries to be a bit of a gentleman, even if he is an irresponsible ass—”

“Bob!”

“It’s true. It was all my fault. I had no business leading you into this. Promise me—never again.”

Matilda promised.

Bob visibly brightened.

“Good,” he said. “Now my conscience is easier. But do you know the real reason why I asked you this?”

Matilda looked her question.

“Because I’m beginning to find out how much I like you, little girl.”

Intervened a short silence.

“And the other thing you wish me to do?” Matilda’s voice was a trifle shaky.

“To tell me more of yourself and your home. You have to go soon, and I want to know—more.”

“Well, as I told you,” she began demurely, “my name is Matilda, kind sir, and I am just seventeen—or rather I will be to-morrow. My big sister has planned a dance for me to-morrow night. I’m fearfully excited about it. And then I’m so excited, too, about meeting her young man. He’s not long back from the war, and I’ve never seen him, but they say he’s fearfully nice. She seems to think so, anyway. Don’t you think it will be tremendously exciting?”

The young man nodded in a detached kind of way, regarding her with curious eyes.

“You haven’t told me what your surname is, or where you live,” he said quickly.

“Oh, how funny. I forgot all about those details. My full name is Matilda Gartshore, and I live—”

“At 26 Avenue Road, Westwood,” he finished.

“That’s right,” she assented; then in sudden realization of the significance of his words—“But how in the world did you know?”

But Bob did not answer her. He was talking rather to himself.

“Good Lord!” she heard him say. “Isn’t that a heck of a stunt? What in the world will they think of me if they find I’ve been doing this Romeo stuff with the youngest member?”

At this point Matilda sat up very straight and asserted herself.

“You’re a nasty person,” she assured him. “If you’re more interested in talking to yourself like a crazy man than to me, why I—I d-don’t care, that’s all.”

He took her hand in his and looked squarely into her face. A whimsical smile played about his mouth.

“Matilda,” he said, “here’s a pretty kettle of fish. Here am I running around the country with you without even a proper introduction to plead—”

“Well, silly. I’ll forgive you.”

“Um—yes. Thanks. But your family might not be so generous. And you see I know your family rather well, and I’d hate to get in Dutch with them.”

“Oh, then you and I really are sort of acquainted.”

He gave a short laugh, and inquired:

“Do you know what my name is?”

“Bob, of course.”

“Yes. Bob is the first. And the second is Purnell.”

It took Matilda something like fifteen seconds to piece the evidence together. Then she gave a muffled shriek. Purnell! Why, that was the name of her sister’s fiance. A sudden rage shook her.

“I hate you!” she sobbed. “I hate you! Take me out of here at once. I want to go home.”

Probably any other kind of diversion would have been welcome to Purnell just then. But it came in a very unwelcome form. From the tunnel out of which they had just passed issued shrieks and cries of alarm. Purnell gripped the side of the grotto and held the boat that he might the better listen. The cries grew in volume. Presently, out of the dim mouth of the tunnel came another boat. In it were a couple, with blanched faces, the girl tremblingly clinging to her escort.

The man replied to Purnell’s unspoken question.

“Get out quick,” he said. “The place is on fire.”

“Good Lord!” ejaculated Bob. “It’s only made of cardboard.”

The other nodded.

“Fire’s behind us. Beat it ahead as fast as you can.”

In spite of every effort to expedite the passage of the boats, progress was slow. Trembling with excitement more than fear, Matilda did her best to help. Her hands bled from gripping the rough plaster sides of the tunnels through which they passed. But through it all the strange ache that came with the shattering of her first real romance, persisted.

The choking fumes were close upon them now, and every breath was painful. Even the crackling of the flames could be heard and at times little tongues seemed to follow behind them.

Suddenly Matilda gave a startled cry.

“Look, Bob, look!”

Right ahead through the final tunnel leading to the exit smoke began to issue. Even as they looked the hungry flames leaped out and licked at the flimsy fabric of the structure.

Matilda felt her head reeling. Strange shapes danced before her eyes. Bob’s arms were round her now, and dimly, as from a great distance, she heard him say: “Bear up, little girl, and we’ll have you out in no time.” An agony of suffocation overtook her. Then merciful unconsciousness brought release from suffering—and peace.

### III.

MATILDA awoke to a sense of luxurious content physically, but with a vague ache in her heart. She turned lazily in bed and watched the motes in the radiant stream of sunshine that poured in through the window. The cuckoo clock on the stairs below informed her musically that it was twelve o'clock.

Then memory began to reconstruct the nightmare that represented the eighteen hours since six last evening. In a vague way Matilda remembered regaining a measure of consciousness and of seeing dim faces over her. That must have been when they were bringing her home—probably in an ambulance. More recent memories told of the anguished confusion of her home, and of her wan effort to smile at her mother and those who gathered around her and tended her with hands made gentle by love. And then came a seemingly endless period when phantoms haunted her sleep, and fear and joy, and grief and pain, came to her.

Soon these gave place to earlier memories, and the events of yesterday before the ghastly ending were marshalled up and reviewed in every blissful detail. Those hours at least had been hers, and nothing could take them from her. They were her rosary. And always at the end there was the memory—the last she really remembered clearly—when he had taken her in his arms to shield her from the coming flames.

A tray of delicacies borne by her mother interrupted her reveries. It was the beginning of many loving attentions. Her brothers came with brusque protestations of affection and a wealth of unsuitable reading matter. The baby proffered a Teddy Bear and an emaciated rag doll, which, being cherished possessions, resembled the widow's mite. Her father had gone to business, but left his love—which was very comforting when one was so conscious of meriting a scolding.

But it was her sister who brought the best of all—a huge bunch of American Beauty roses.

“Oh, Gladys, how lovely. Who sent them?”

“Bob, of course.” Gladys kissed her gently. “Don’t you think you’re a fortunate little girl?”

Matilda smiled wanly.

“I wonder,” she said. “Gladys, dear, let me see the morning paper. Roy says there’s a big piece about the—fire.”

“If you think you can stand reading it.” Matilda nodded assurance, and Gladys sent Roy for it.

“Here it is, Sis.” Matilda took it and read, in glaring headlines:

## DISASTER AT WONDERLAND PARK

### Ten Lives Lost When Mysterious Maze Takes Fire—Heroic Rescue of Three by War Hero.

Followed a vivid account of the disaster and a glowing tribute to the well-known young broker, recently returned from the front—where he had won several decorations—and who with self-sacrificing heroism had rescued two young ladies and a man by soaking their clothes in the stream and forcing a way for them through an aperture in a wall of the last tunnel, and which was designed to give a fleeting vista of the artificial lake and stream below. Mr. Purnell, the account added, was slightly burned about the face and arms, but was otherwise uninjured. “When interviewed he smilingly declined to make any statement for publication beyond the main facts given above.”

“Then he wasn’t hurt,” Matilda cried, in relief. “I was so afraid. Oh, Gladys, you must be so proud of him.” Her smile was rather wistful.

“I am,” declared her sister, “although I told Jack he would have to give him a good talking to. It was perfectly scandalous the way he carried on with you. I’m glad Jack isn’t built that way. It’s so frightfully irresponsible!”

“Jack?” Matilda puckered her brows. “Who’s Jack?”

“Who’s Jack?” repeated Gladys, in surprise. “Why, Bob’s big brother, and incidentally, dear, the young gentleman who gave me this.”

Matilda’s astonished eyes focused on the glittering gem that sparkled in the sunlight as Gladys held up her left hand. Then her lithe young form rose up from the bed and enfolded her sister in a crushing embrace.

“Oh, Gladys,” she cried, hugging her ecstatically, “you’re the dearest big sister in the world.” And proceeded to burst into tears.

Gladys stared in mystification.

“Well,” she said presently, “if you aren’t the funniest little kitten. But there, you’re all tired out, and must promise me you’ll get right back into bed and take a long sleep. No wonder, too, after such experiences. What you need is lots of sleep. Climb in.” Gladys was intensely practical, you see.

Matilda complied by climbing back under the clothes, and Gladys tiptoed from the room. But the little girl in the bed knew she did not need sleep—she just wanted to think—and think—and dream, with eyes wide open and shining with a wonderful radiance through her tears.



## IV.

WHEN one is seventeen and full of romance, and when one simply adores dancing and a dance is proceeding downstairs; further, when it is one's birthday and the dance was originally designed to celebrate the event, it is rather horrible to remain in bed and be barred from it all by supposed physical disabilities. Add to this the knowledge that the Only Man is down there dancing, and the situation becomes clearly impossible.

Matilda knew it to be so, and proceeded to act in accordance with her convictions. Very quietly, having watched her chance, she dressed in her favorite frock and stole downstairs.

The strains of a dreamy waltz were just commencing when she found him—sitting out in the conservatory in splendid isolation. She crept up behind, and whispered:

“Why so grumpy?”

He looked up and smiled—that wonderful smile that had held her from the first.

“Make it past tense and I'll agree with you—I was feeling grumpy. But I'm not now. Matilda, dear, I won't feel right until I know if you meant what you said last night just before—it happened. Do you remember, Matilda? You said, ‘I hate you.’ That's got to be changed or I shall—go grumpy again!”

But Matilda's eyes were downcast, and her cheeks a little more rosy than usual. When she did not speak, he said quietly:

“Do you know what they're playing, Matilda?”

She looked up quickly.

“It's from the ‘Maid of the Mountains,’ isn't it, Bob?”

“Yes—listen.” Softly he ran over the last two lines:

“Love holds the key to set me free,  
And love will find a way.”

“Matty, dear, that’s the key that has to be used—and only you can use it. Last night you said to me, ‘I hate you.’ Don’t you think you could find a substitute for the middle word? It’s such a pretty sentence—I’d like to hear you say it.”

And, very softly, Matilda said it.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Book cover is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Matilda - Flapper* by Leslie Gordon Barnard]