

What Aunt
Marcella
Would Have
Called It

L. M. Montgomery
1934

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If Aunt Marcella had allowed Glen to bob her hair this story would never have been told because there would have been no story to tell. But Aunt Marcella did not approve of bobbed hair at all. It was flying in the face of Providence for a girl to bob her hair, and . . . so Aunt Marcella said . . . she would be bald in her old age for her sins.

“You will thank me when you are sixty,” she told Glen.

“That is a long time to wait for gratitude,” said Glen darkly.

But Aunt Marcella was adamant, and Glen continued to wear her lovely golden-brown braid hanging down her back like a twelve-year-old schoolgirl of the century’s teens, when she would be eighteen in another month and every bit as modern as Aunt Marcella would let her be.

Aunt Marcella would not even allow her to put it up. It was intolerable. If she could even put her hair up in a lovely soft knot at the back of her neck . . . well, it might dawn on Dudley Wyatt’s perception that she was really grown-up and not the schoolgirl, devoted to dolls, that he considered her and, as seemed likely, would go on considering her until she was that mythical sixty of Aunt Marcella’s warnings.

It seemed to Glen that she had always been in love with Dudley Wyatt, although she had know him only from the age of twelve, when he had come to live next door to them at Nokomis Lodge. Glen always avowed that her legs trembled the first time she saw him, by which token she knew that she had fallen in love. But Dudley took no notice of her. He was all for Isabel. Not that he was in love with Isabel at all. To him, sixteen-year-old Isabel was just one of the two children of the Lindens. But she was a very clever child and he liked to talk to her. Nobody thought Glen had any brains because she hardly ever talked. And at twelve she had been anything but pretty . . . a gaunt, scrawny creature with two sunburned pigtailed. Glen would go hatless, to Aunt Marcella’s mid-Victorian horror.

“What kind of complexion will you have when you are sixty?” she asked. “Besides, I call it ‘Brazen’ to go about without a hat.”

Aunt Marcella never pronounced an adjective without making you see it spelled with a capital.

But even at sixteen Isabel was a beauty . . . a tall, willowy thing with golden-brown hair and big owlsh eyes that were the tint of a copper-grey sea. And, although Dudley Wyatt did not seem to have any kind of eyes for women at all, Glen believed in her secret soul that, if Isabel hadn’t been so pretty, Dudley would not have detected her cleverness so quickly. As it was, he thought her a wonder. Aunt Marcella didn’t. Aunt Marcella did not believe in a woman having brains.

“I call it ‘Unwomanly’ to be so clever,” she told Isabel severely. “Aping the

men!”

“But most men are really very stupid,” said Isabel.

“I call that ‘Flippant,’” said Aunt Marcella, “and I dislike flippancy above all things.”

“Besides, if you are not clever you bore the men after your novelty wears off,” persisted Isabel.

“I have never been a man,” said Aunt Marcella superfluously, “but I think it takes some time for them to tire of beauty. And ‘bore’ was not considered a nice word when I was a girl.”

And then Uncle Maurice’s daughter had died and Uncle Maurice had come home and taken Isabel out west with him. That was five years ago and she had never been back since. But she was still tremendously clever and had graduated with the highest honours. Aunt Marcella called that very “Unfeminine,” but Dudley exulted.

He wrote to Isabel occasionally and took the keenest interest in her career. He also made quite a bit of Glen, but still only as a child who was a dear little thing, rather dumb. Glen knew she was dumb when Dudley was about. She wasn’t going to talk to him as a child and when she tried to talk to him as a grown-up her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. She had a horrible feeling that if she did talk to him like a grown-up Dudley would smile kindly, as at a precocious child, and tell her to run away and tuck up her doll-babies.

Oh . . . Glen clenched her hands . . . life wasn’t fair to women! Why . . . why . . . were men so blind? Couldn’t he see she wasn’t a child any longer? Couldn’t he see the love she had to give him? It was bitter to have such a gift to give and nobody wanting to take it. Glen wouldn’t have minded so much if Dudley had hated her . . . if only he hated her as a woman. She couldn’t go on being regarded as a child.

“I love him, and he doesn’t even know that I exist,” she sighed. “He thinks me somebody who doesn’t exist . . . the twelve-year-old arms-and-legs I was when he came here first. Why can’t I make him see? He won’t see! He looks at me with the condescending kindness one shows a child . . . and then I feel exactly like a caterpillar someone has stepped on.”

That night he strolled past as she sat on the porch and called out teasingly, “Tell me what you are thinking of, Glennie?”

Good heavens, suppose she did tell him! Suppose she called back, “I’m thinking of you and how heavenly it would be if you came in here and sat down beside me and said, ‘I love you, Glen,’ and . . . and . . . kissed me.”

Just what would happen? Well, she knew one thing that would. Aunt Marcella, by the living-room window, would die of frustration because she would not be able

to find an adjective strong enough to describe such behaviour. But even then Dudley would probably only say something like, "You've mistaken me for Clark Adams."

Clark Adams! That immature creature of twenty!

"I don't care for boys . . . I get on better with men," Glen heard herself calling back.

But of course she had really said nothing when he asked her that question. He hadn't expected her to say anything. If only she could have thought of something quite daring to say! Something that a child couldn't think of saying. Isabel, now, could have said a dozen provocative things. Even she herself could have said them to Clark Adams. But she had said nothing . . . had only given a foolish little giggle . . . and Dudley had gone on, his dog slouching at his heels, on one of those long hikes of his that she longed to share. But Dudley had asked her only once and Aunt Marcella disapproved, tilting her hawk nose.

"I call it 'Unladylike' to go striding over the country like a man, or like one of those dreadful girls in knickerbockers," said Aunt Marcella. "I suppose you hardly class yourself among them, Glen."

The joke was that Glen was dying to wear knickers, or do anything else that might make Dudley realize that she was grown-up and beautiful . . . hair just as glossy and golden-brown as Isabel's, eyes just the same coppery grey, shoulders just as smooth and delicious. But of what use was it? Dudley never saw her shoulders.

When Isabel's letter came, saying that she was coming east for a visit, Glen had two reactions. The first was of delight in the thought of seeing Isabel again. The second was a horrible little fear. Dudley had always admired Isabel so much. And now Isabel was coming back, a brilliant M.A., no doubt more beautiful than ever . . . and what would happen to Dudley? Glen cried herself to sleep that night and hated herself for being so unsisterly.

Isabel stopped off in a mid-western town to see a college friend, but two of her trunks came on ahead of her. Isabel sent Glen the keys and would she please take out the dresses and hang them up? Glen did so, divided between delight in the lovely things and envious pangs over the effect they would likely have on Dudley. There was one in especial . . . the orchid chiffon with the black velvet girdle and a sort of pale blue perfume hanging about it. Glen tried to think what she would look like in it. But she did not try it on. Aunt Marcella would have called it 'Rude' to try on other people's clothes.

On the afternoon of the day Isabel was expected a wire came saying that her

friend had persuaded her to stay over for the weekend. Aunt Marcella thereupon decided to spend the weekend with her sister and departed so hurriedly to catch the only train that she had not time to give Glen half as many warnings as usual. Not that it mattered. Glen knew them all by heart.

“You’d better telephone Dudley that Isabel won’t be here tonight. He was coming over to see her,” said Aunt Marcella from the taxi.

Glen went in and tried to telephone. But Dudley’s housekeeper said that he was out and wouldn’t be home till dinner time. He was lecturing before some club on the Peaceful Adjustment of International Difficulties.

Glen ran up to her room with the intention of having a good cry. But when she got there she changed her mind.

“Crying won’t do any good. The girls of Aunt Marcella’s generation cried. I’ve got to do better than that. Now, what can I do to wake Dudley up before Isabel comes?”

Glen sat up on her bed suddenly. An idea had flashed into her mind, a breath-taking idea. Could she . . . dared she? But why not? She looked so much like Isabel when Isabel had been seventeen.

After dinner, when she had eaten nothing to speak of, Glen fled up to her room again. She brought the shimmering orchid dress from the guest-room closet and breathlessly slipped into it. It fitted her to perfection . . . and it was so beautifully long. How lucky Isabel had the new long dresses! Then she twisted her gold-brown hair into a knot at the nape of her neck . . . too big a knot to be fashionable, but Dudley wouldn’t notice that. Isabel’s earrings and necklace went on . . . sparkling amber beads that hung about her neck and over her dress like drops of golden dew . . . earrings long enough to reach her shoulders, sophisticated earrings which Aunt Marcella would have called “Theatrical.” But Glen gave a gasp of delight when she looked in the glass. Oh, she was beautiful! And nobody would ever dream of taking her for a child. What a difference a long dress and a knot of hair made!

She met Dudley in the porch where there was only one dim shaded lamp. He took the hands . . . very cold hands . . . which she held out to him.

“And this is Isabel. I had forgotten how beautiful you were.”

For once in her life Glen was frightened into being clever . . . and “Bold,” as Aunt Marcella would have called it.

“I was afraid you had forgotten,” she murmured. “That is why I came back . . . to make you remember.”

Could she really have said such a thing . . . she, shy, tongue-tied Glen? But she wasn’t Glen; she was Isabel. In putting on Isabel’s dress she seemed to have put on

Isabel's personality. She felt gay, daring, brilliant. And Dudley was so easily deceived. Glen felt a pang of anger because he was so easily deceived . . . because he knew her so little as to mistake her for Isabel. Her anger sent a naughty sparkle into her eyes and a rose-red flush into her cheeks. She would punish him.

"Let us sit down here . . . it's so much cooler and pleasanter than indoors . . . and just talk. We have five years to catch up with. Dudley, have they seemed as long to you as to me?"

"Longer," said Dudley briefly but eloquently. He seemed to find it impossible to take his eyes off her.

"I think I've been homesick every moment of the time I was away," murmured Glen. She made a place for Dudley on the cushions beside her and began to pat his dog, who was nuzzling her knee.

"You've been doing wonderful things," said Dudley, a little absently, looking at the dog. "We've followed your career with pride, as the *Weekly Journal* puts it. I always knew you had it in you to win success."

"Oh . . . success!" Glen sighed and looked sidewise at him. "A girl wants more than that kind of success, Dudley. I've really been wretchedly lonely these past five years. But don't let's talk of me. I want to hear all about you, Dudley. What have you been doing . . . thinking . . . feeling?"

"Shall I tell you what I'm feeling just at present?" said Dudley, bending nearer. "I'm feeling drunk . . . just with looking at you, Isabel. There hasn't been any five years . . . time has gone back . . . we'll begin just where we left off."

"Do you really think we can?" said Glen in a low voice. She was quite furious to hear him making love so beautifully . . . to Isabel.

"I do. I realize some things now that it has taken me five years to realize. Isabel, there's going to be a moonrise in a few minutes . . . let us go out and watch it together. How long is it since we've seen a moonrise together?"

"Just two nights," cried Glen, springing up. "We watched the moon rise Thursday night. Dudley, I can't go on with this . . . I don't know what got into me. I'm not Isabel . . . I'm Glen!"

"Well, I know that," said Dudley, getting up too. "Just at first you tricked me, with that long dress and that hair. Then when Wags began nosing you . . . my suspicious Wags who wouldn't have a word to say to a stranger like Isabel--he's never seen her . . . I knew you for what you were."

"A horrid, shameless little imposter," said Glen piteously.

"The loveliest, sweetest woman I've ever seen . . . the woman I've been waiting for all my life," said Dudley. He had his arms around her now. "The woman I've

never seen until my blind eyes were opened tonight. Thank heaven you're not Isabel. If you were I'd have to have some consideration for your five years' absence and not say everything I want to say tonight. As it is, we're old pals and I can say just what I like and as soon as I like. Because we're going to be new, new lovers, aren't we, Glen darling?"

"Oh!" said Glen. It was a very eloquent speech. Much more eloquent than the cleverest woman could have made. And evidently much more satisfying to Dudley.

"I'm going to tell your Aunt Marcella as soon as she comes back," he said. "She'll say you're too young to be married but don't you let her make you believe it. I've wasted enough time. And now let's go out and see that the moon rises properly."

When Glen went to her room that night she took off the orchid dress and held it to her lips.

"I'm going to ask Isabel to give me this. Oh, I think I've been quite crazy. I do wonder what Aunt Marcella would call my conduct."

Aunt Marcella would have called it entirely "Shameless" if she had ever known of it. But then she didn't.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *What Aunt Marcella Would Have Called It* by L. M. Montgomery]