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WORKS

JESSICA
CAMPBELL

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All boarding houses seemed to specialize in derelict grandmothers and childless widows.

Nosy old ladies with nothing to do but sleep, eat, dress up, go out, come back and eat again.

Being lonely and bored, they concentrated on me.
I was soon very overmothered.

They had only been out in the new world a generation or two,

and my English upbringing reminded them of their own childhood.

They liked my soap-shiny, unpowdered nose,

liked my using the names Father + Mother instead of Momma + Poppa.
Not for one moment would they exchange their smart,

Quick-in-the-uptake granddaughters for me

But they did take grim satisfaction

Out of my dowdy, old-fashioned clothes and my shyness.

That guy needs to wear underwear.

Their young people were so sophisticated.

So independent.
IT HURT THEM THAT I REFUSED THEIR FINERY

PREFERING TO WEAR MY OWN CLOTHES

WHICH I FELT WERE MORE SUITABLE TO AGE AND COMFORT

EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE NOT SMART.

THEM HAD TO ADMIT THAT SOMEHOW I LOOKED BEST, AND WAS MOST ME,

IN MY OWN THINGS.
The landlady's daughter and I were friends.

We decided we would teach ourselves to sew and make our own clothes.

We bought patterns, spread them on the floor of the top landing.

Where our rooms were

Wake up!

And stay awake!

And in which there was not much more than space to turn round.
One day I was cutting on the floor while the landlady's daughter basted.

That you learned the ways of the world.

"No, what flavour is she?"

It is high time....

Spitting out six pins she said, "Seen mother's new boarder?"

"Loud! The old house tabbies are furious at ma for taking her father?"

"The house is big, those who wish to be exclusive can avoid each other."

But we have to live, there is so much competition now."
"The new girl has her own sitting room—double suite if you please!"

I don't like her much but she's in your art school so you'll see her."

Next morning I slammed the front door and ran down the stairs.

I had no sooner reached the pavement than the door re-opened.

And Ishbel Dane, the new boarder, came out.

"Can I come along? I rather hate beginning."
She had large bold eyes, a strong mouth.

You would not have suspected her of being shy, but she was.

She was very smartly dressed, fur coat, jewellery, fancy shoes.

I took her into the school office and continued to the studios.

"Who?" I was asked and nudged by students.

"New boarder at my place."
Adda frowned. She had never liked my boarding house—too big, too mixed.

Suddenly she had a thought.

"Momma is coming! Brother is taking a course at Berkeley."

"No, thanks, I am very well where I am."

Why not take my room?"
ADDIA SAID NO MORE.

SHE WATCHED ISHBEL BUT REFUSED TO MEET HER.

IS COKE OK?

GOD, NO.

HE... WE NEED TO TALK.

IN THE EVENING, I PRACTISED ON MY GUITAR.

A TAP ON MY DOOR.

I HOPE YOU’LL STILL PAY FOR DINNER...

*SOB*

AND THERE WAS ALMOST PLEADING AS ISHBEL DANE VOICED,

“COME TO MY SITTING ROOM AND HAVE A CUP OF TEA WITH ME?”
I WENT WONDERING.

MY "GRANDMOTHER GUARDIANS" IN THE BOARDING HOUSE ADVISED OF ISHBEL DANE,

"NOT YOUR SORT MY DEAR."

HAVING FOUND THEY COULD NOT DIRECT MY CLOTHES THEY WERE EXTRA DICTATORIAL OVER MY MORALS.

THEY WERE VERY COOL TO ISHBEL, CONFINING CONVERSATION TO WEATHER.

ALL THEY HAD AGAINST THE GIRL WAS HER ELEGANT CLOTHES.
Ishbel had made her sitting room very attractive—

flowers, books, cushions, a quaint silver tea service which she told me had been her mother’s.

"Let me help you."

She saw my eyes stray to a beautiful banjo lying on the sofa.

"Yes, I play. I belong to a banjo, mandolin and guitar club.

Wouldn’t you like to join? It helps one.

I have learnt ever so much since I practised with others."
"I'll think."

I knew the grandmothers, landlady's daughter and Adda would disapprove.

Why doesn't it look real?

Later, a show in Ottawa!

When I left, Ishbel took my hand.

"Come again," she said.

"It's lonely. Mother died when I was only a baby;" FATHER BROUGHT ME UP FATHER'S FRIENDS ARE ALL MEN, OLD AND DULL."
I joined the practice club.

Adda was actively distressed, she moved to Berkeley.

My friendship with Ishbel warmed while the old ladies' affection chilled towards me.

Her last shot was "my old room is still vacant."

Trouble was in her eyes, anxiety for me, but I liked Ishbel.

And I knew my friendship meant a lot to her.
I had to go to the music studio for some music.

The club leader followed me out onto the landing.

As I took the roll of music from him, he caught me round the wrists.

"Little girl," he said,

"Be good to Ishbel, you are her only woman friend and she loves you. God bless you!"

His door banged.
Rent'll be late again this month.

I a woman's friend! Suddenly I felt very grown up.

Mysteriously Ishbel—a woman had been put into my care, my trust.

I went downstairs slowly, each tread seemed to stretch me,

As if my head had remained on the landing while my feet and legs elongated me.

On reaching the pavement, I was grown-up, a woman with a trust.

I did not know how or why Ishbel needed me. I only knew she did and was proud.
while I was out, a letter had come.

I opened it.

uh-huh...

I actually have plans tonight.

my guardian thought I had "played at art" long enough.

I was to come home and start life in earnest.

Lord, you cannot ride a dragon!

Can't I?

ishbel clung to me. "funny little mother-girl" she said, kissing me. "I am going to miss you!"
She poked something under my arm, pushed me gently towards my own room.

A great lump was in my throat.

Ishbel was the only one of them all who hadn’t wanted to change part of me—

The only one who had.

Cough

Cough

Cough

No.

Under my arm, she had pushed a portrait of herself.
I came home one week before Christmas.

The house was decorated, there was snow.

Fires crackled in every grate of every room,

Their warmth drew spicy delight from the boughs of pine and cedar decorating everywhere.

There were bunches of scarlet berries and holly.

The pantry bulged with good things already cooked.
They were glad to have me home.

We were very merry.

Two pounds of flour, please.

Ma'am, you are out of credit.

Please... I will repay soon.

All day the postman was bringing cards and letters;

Flitter, flitter, they dropped through the slit near the front door.

Lovely! I'll buy it.

And we all darted crying, "Whose? Whose?"
I got my full share, but there were two disappointments—

beautiful!

No letter from Nellie McCormick,

None from Ishbel Dane.

Ladies! Time to disembark!

New year passed before I heard of either.
Adda wrote, "Nellie McCormick could endure home tyranny no longer, from the boarding house, one of the grandmothers absolutely sniffed in writing, under the circumstances, my dear, perhaps it was best."

She Shot Herself.

Dear Emily Aug. 31, '33

You really must go to Chicago to see the exhibition at the Art Institute—it collects centuries of works from across the globe. Truly one of.

"Ishbel Dane died in the 'Good Samaritan' hospital on Christmas Eve."

A Century of Progress Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture.

Oh...
NELLIE MY FRIEND!

YES, MA'AM.

*COUGH*

CHECKING IN... INDEFINITELY.

COUGH* R.*COUGH*

COME HERE, BOY.

ISHBEL MY TRUST!
I carried my crying into the snowy woods.

The weather was bitter,

my tears were too.
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