

**THE MAIDEN'S
PROGRESS: A NOVEL
IN DIALOGUE**

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The Maiden's Progress: A Novel in Dialogue by Violet Hunt

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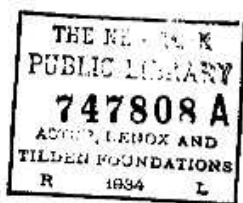
A Novel in Dialogue

BY
VIOLET HUNT



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1894



I beg to thank the editors of *The Sketch*, *Black and White*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, for permission to reprint several of the chapters of this novel which have previously appeared in their papers.

V. II.

ROY WEN
OLIVER
VIA RAIL

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THE MAIDEN'S PROGRESS

CHAPTER I

A girl's bedroom in a house in Queen's Gate. MARY ELIZABETH MASKELYNE, afterward known as MODERNA, eighteen, lying on the bed in a white peignoir. Enter on tiptoe her sisters VERONA and PEGGY, aged seventeen and fifteen respectively.

MODERNA [*sleepily, raising her head*]: What is it? Is my dress come? What time is it?

PEGGY: Sh-h! There, you *were* asleep, though you said nothing should induce you! It's five o'clock, and I've asked Minching, and there's not a sign of it!

MODERNA [*with tragic emphasis*]: I simply can't go if it does not come.

PEGGY: Oh, I dare say it's all right. Mrs. Young never fails. Besides, you could wear your white, or your pink.

MODERNA [*contemptuously*]: The same as you've both got one of! Don't you see that this is a "come out" dress? It's quite different.

PEGGY: I know—got a train, and a waist, and "decollated"! [*Drawing her breath between her*

teeth] : Oh, dear ! I know you won't be our "pal" any more. [*Disconsolately.*]

MODERNA [*seizing a foot of each as they lie on her bed*] : Oh, yes, I shall, girls; I shall, really ! I sha'n't go away from you a bit. You know it will be ever so much nicer for you both when you come out. I shall be able to advise you, and tell you things.

PEGGY : Good gracious, what a plague you will be ! I sincerely hope you will be married off before I come on, or I shall have no peace.

VERONA [*thoughtfully*] : But, I say, doesn't it seem absurd that coming out should make such a difference ! Here are you, you are only a year older than me, and I am taller—but [*hastily*] I don't want to fight !—just a girl like anybody else, and to-morrow—— To-morrow you will be "grown up"; you'll sit in the drawing-room and leave off lessons—you're in the middle of the *siècle de Louis* "Cart-horse" now, I envy you getting out of that—you'll forget how to turn somersaults; you'll neglect your dormice, and leave your birds to Peggy and me; and have secrets with mother, and just be a horrid grown-up woman like the people that come on mother's reception days. Hateful !

PEGGY [*sententiously*] : I read in a book the other day that a woman was an infernal machine.

BOTH THE OTHERS : What do you mean ? Where ?

PEGGY : Study, second shelf from top, near the

door. Such a funny book, all about Woman with a capital W!

MODERNA: It was Carlyle, you idiot!

PEGGY: Not at all. It wasn't history. Shall I see if I can remember any of it? "These delicate creatures, as dangerous as a smiling sea, as wavering as the winds, as subtle as fire. . . In their smiles lurk unknown potentialities of destruction and death. . . Their frown may wreck empires. . ." I forget the rest.

MODERNA [*pensively*]: Is one all that, I wonder?

PEGGY: You! You're not a woman! You look about ten!

MODERNA [*piteously*]: Oh, girls, do I really look so awfully young? It's too bad. Putting me to bed like this is the worst thing possible. If I were tired I should look much older.

PEGGY: Well, you are not resting much. Lie still, old girl, and don't wriggle so.

MODERNA: You are sitting on my foot. Do you know, I don't think men mind our looking young, much—that is, if they are rather old themselves.

PEGGY: And if they are very young, they snub us. Look at Billy Danvers, he never will talk to anybody but Mrs. Mortimer. I don't suppose he will give you more than a couple of dances to-night at Aunt Riddell's, Moderna.

VERONA: Who cares for Billy? There will be

new people. Promise, dear, promise faithfully to tell us all the compliments you get. Every one!

MODERNA: All I can remember. [*Hastily.*] If there *are* any, I mean.

PEGGY: I wonder who you'll dance with? Perhaps you'll meet your Fate?

VERONA [*pensively*]: The Unknown God! Papa says every young girl raises altars to the Unknown God. I wonder—

PEGGY: If Moderna finds a god to-night, I shall think it very silly of her. As if she wanted to get engaged straight off! She ought to have some fun first. Besides, you know, Aunt Riddell's people are all so dull and political; I'm sure the "Unknown God" won't be there.

VERONA: Billy is going, and Mrs. Mortimer, and Mr. Darcy, and the Rensselaers, and Edward—

PEGGY: Ah, but he isn't going till late; he told me so; he's going to finish the Index. Papa wants it done in a hurry.

MODERNA: You seem to be always in the study, Peggy. I am sure you must bother Edward dreadfully.

PEGGY: Not at all! It is a mutual aid society. He helps me with my French exercises, and I cut his pencils for him. Besides, he's papa's secretary and a sort of relation; and it is his business to be useful to me. Papa pays him!

MODERNA : Silly ! he doesn't care for the pay, he's rich ; he comes because he likes grubbing at Ancient Britons with papa. I prefer modern ones. [*Meditatively.*] I sha'n't bother with Edward much. I can see him here every day.

PEGGY : I like Edward, I must say.

MODERNA : All children do.

Enter MINCHING with a dress-box. She nearly drops it.

Mrs. MINCHING : Miss Modernia, your dress has come. Miss Peggy and Miss Verona, what are you doing in here? Orders was that Miss Modernia was not to be disturbed, and Miss Peggy, your boots on the nice clean counterpane ! I'm sure I never knew you was here.

PEGGY : We didn't mean you to, Minching. Here, let us see ! [*They take out a dress, trimmed with lilies of the valley.*]

Mrs. MINCHING [*critically*] : Very young, and very pretty !

MODERNA : Minching, you are sickening with your "young." Let me see if it fits. [*Assumes the dress in feverish haste.*]

PEGGY [*her head on one side*] : Anything would fit you. You're as straight as a board. [*Critically.*] Well, I don't mind it.