

BARBARA'S VAGARIES

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Barbara's Vagaries by Mary Langdon Tidball

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MARY LANGDON TIDBALL

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BY

MARY LANGDON TIDBALL



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ROY W. B. .
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1886 .

BARBARA'S VAGARIES



I.

As Dennis Wainwright rested in a waltz, he found himself the most observed young man in the pavilion. Dennis knew his own advantages, but was wise enough to remember that he did not usually make such a profound impression; and he became aware that his partner in the dance caused this temporary sensation. Though not usually observant, he now closely regarded his companion, and said to himself: "No mistake about it, she does look queer—but she is a pretty creature, and a capital dancer."

The girl that stood at his side was a well-made young woman of a vigorous growth.

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The very motions of her body showed an eagerness, a strength, and an uncouthness more to be expected in an athletic boy. Her dress was so unlike that of the conventional fashionables in the great pavilion that she could not help being remarked. The young woman seemed to have an eye for color, quite too much so, as the very gay effect of blues, purples, reds, and greens, assembled in her costume, testified. The cut of the whole was bizarre, and as though the daring creation of an ambitious country modiste.

To make the dress still more conspicuous, a remarkable flow of light hair fell, unrestrained by present-day conventional laws, to some distance below her waist; and, not content with its natural flow, had been crinkled and *crépéd* until every individual hair stood out at a wide angle from her shoulders.

Quite unconscious of looking queer, of being especially observed, or, in fact, of any-

thing except the novel excitement of her surroundings, she looked up at her partner with a half-rebuking glance of inquiry, and Dennis was not slow to discover that this energetic young lady had no idea of losing another round of the waltz, so he obligingly drew her again into the circle of dancers. When the music ceased, she tossed back her long hair with a reckless movement of head and shoulders. "Well?" another upward glance and a short laugh—"what is it—or are you always solemn at the seashore?" Now Dennis was in the habit of being considered a little too noisy, too boisterous, and he colored when this North Carolina girl found him solemn. At this moment they neared the windows looking to the bay, and caught a glimpse of the full moon reflected there; not giving him time to reply, she dropped his arm, and, with an exclamation half-thrown over her shoulder, slipped through one of the sliding doors that led to the promenade, and running

along its length a few steps, reached a narrow pier which jutted abruptly into the bay near that corner of the pavilion.

For a moment Wainright hesitated, but his real good-heartedness made him follow the girl, and he caught up with her as she reached a boat-house built on the end of the pier. She smiled at him, a pretty smile, as though it was quite a matter of course that he was still near, and, after gazing a moment at the dimpling water, once more turned and slowly sauntered back to the dancing-room. At its entrance they met her good-natured old uncle; and the young girl, placing both hands on his arm, looked up into his face with such a radiant, fearless happiness in her own, that Wainwright—standing aloof—once more admired her.

A little group of young officers, bachelor lieutenants of the fort, had come into his close neighborhood, and one, putting his hand on Wainwright's arm, now drew him to them, with bantering reproaches for

keeping this new sensation all to himself.

Dennis bit his lip and looked a little sulky, hardly knowing whether or not to believe they were making game of him. The young men persisted in their friendly attack, and as they had by this time drawn him to the boat-house, he dropped on one of its rustic seats, and surrendered to the pelting questions of five gay tormentors. "Who is she? Where did I find her? Is she a fixed star, or just a flying meteor? Well, let a fellow breathe once and think twice between questions, and it will be easy enough to tell the little there is to tell." So, after a pause: "I was hunting last summer in the mountains of North Carolina, near the French Broad, you know. Two or three other Washington men were with me, and once we turned a little aside from hunting-trails, and rested at the little town of Harfield. Not much of a place perhaps, but we were hungry, and thought it deserved to be famous for