

**THE CONVERT.  
[NEW YORK-1913]**

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The Convert. [New York-1913] by Elizabeth Robins

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**ELIZABETH ROBINS**

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BY

ELIZABETH ROBINS

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1913

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## CHAPTER I

THE tall young lady who arrived fifteen minutes before the Freddy Tunbridges' dinner-hour, was not taken into the great empty drawing-room, but, as though she were not to be of the party expected that night, straight upstairs she went behind the footman, and then up more stairs behind a maid. The smart, white-capped domestic paused, and her floating muslin streamers cut short their aerial gyrations subsiding against her straight black back as she knocked at the night-nursery door. It was opened by a middle-aged head nurse of impressive demeanour. She stood there an instant eyeing the intruder with the kind of overbearing hauteur that in these days does duty as the peculiar hall-mark of the upper servant, being seldom encountered in England among even the older generation of the so-called governing class.

'It's too late to see the baby, miss. He's asleep.'

'Yes, I know; but the others are expecting me, aren't they?'

Question hardly necessary, perhaps, with the air full of cries from beyond the screen: 'Yes, yes.' 'We're waiting!' 'Mummy promised' — cut short by the nurse saying sharply, 'Not so much noise, Miss Sara.' But the presiding genius of the Tunbridge nursery opened the door a little wider and stood aside. Handsome compensation for her studied coldness was offered in the shrill shrieks of joy with which a little girl and a very small boy celebrated the lady's entrance. She, for her part, joined the austere nurse in saying, 'Sh! sh!' and in simulating consternation at the spectacle behind the screen, Miss Sara jumping up and down in the middle of her bed with wild brown hair swirling madly about a laughing but mutinous face. The visitor, hurrying forward, received the impetuous little girl in her arms, while the nurse

described her own sentiments of horror and detestation of such performances, and hinted vaguely at Retribution that might with safety be looked for no later than the morrow. Nobody listened. Miss Levering nodded smiling across Sara's nightgowned figure to the little boy hanging over the side of the neighbouring cot. But he kept remonstrating, 'You always go to her first.'

The lady drew a flat, shiny wooden box out of the inside pocket of her cloak. The little girl seized it rapturously.

'Oh, did you only bring Sara's bock?' wailed the smaller Tunbridge. 'I told you expecially we wanted *two* bocks.'

'I've got two pockets and I've got two bocks. Let me give him his, Sara darling.'

But 'Sara darling' dropped her own 'bock' the better to cling round the neck of the giver.

Naturally Master Cecil sounded the horn of indignation.

'Hush!' commanded his sister. 'Don't you know his little lordship never did that?' And to emphasize this satirical appeal to a higher standard of manners, Sara loosened her tight-locked arms an instant; but still holding to the visitor with one hand, she picked up the pillow and deftly hurled it at the neighbouring cot, extinguishing the little boy. Through the general recriminations that ensued, the culprit cried with shrill rapture, 'Lady Gladys never pillow-fought! Lady Gladys was a little lady and never did *anything*!' The merry eyes shamelessly invited Miss Levering to mock at Dampney's former charges. But the visitor detached herself from Miss Sara, and wishing apparently to ingratiate herself with the offended majesty of the nurse, Miss Levering said gravely over her shoulder, 'Now, lie down, Sara, and be a good girl.' Sara's reply to that was to (what she called) 'diddle up and down' on her knees and emit shrill squeals of some pleasurable emotion not defined. This, too, in spite of the fact that Dampney had picked up the pillow and was advancing upon Miss Sara with an expression calculated to shake the stoutest heart. It obviously shook the visitor's. 'Listen, Sara! If you don't be quiet and let nurse cover you up, she won't want me to stay.' Miss Levering actually got up off the little boy's bed, and stood as though ready to carry the obnoxious suggestion into instant effect.

Sara darted under the bedclothes like a rabbit into its burrow. The rigid woman, without words, restored the tousled pillow to the

head of the bed, extracted Miss Sara from her hiding-place with one hand, smoothed out the rebellious legs with the other, covered the child firmly over, and tucked the bedclothes in.

'What's the use of all that? Mother always does it over again.'

'You know very well she's been and done it once already.'

'She's coming again if father doesn't need her.'

'There's a whole big dinner-party needing her, so you needn't think she can come twice to say good-night to a Jumping-Jack like you.'

'You ought to say a Jumping-Jill,' amended Sara.

During this interchange Master Cecil was complaining to the visitor —

'I can't see you with that thing all round your head.'

'Yes, take it off!' his sister agreed; and when the lady had unwound her lace scarf — 'Now the coat! And you have to sit on my bed this time. It's my turn.'

As the visitor divested herself of the long ermine-lined garment, 'Oh, you *are* pretty to-night!' observed the gallant young gentleman over the way, seeming not to have heard that these effects don't appeal to little boys.

Sara silently craned her neck. Even the high and mighty Mrs. Dampney, in the surreptitious way of the superior servant, without seeming to look, was covertly taking in the vision that the cloak had hitherto obscured. The little girl followed with critical eyes the movement of the tall figure, the graceful fall of the clinging black lace gown embroidered in yellow irises, the easy bend of the small waist in its jewelled belt of yellow. The growing approval in the little face culminated in an ecstatic 'Oh-h-h! let me see what's on your neck! That's new, isn't it?'

'No — very old.'

'I didn't know there were yellow diamonds,' said Sara.

'There are; but these are sapphires.'

'And the little stones round?'

'Yes, they're diamonds.'

'The hanging-down thing is *such* a pretty shape!'

'Yes, the fleur-de-lys is a pretty shape. It's the flower of France, you know — just as the thistle is the —'

'There, now!' A penetrating whisper came from the other bed. 'She's *gone*.'