

OF PEOPLE

LITERATURE

Fifth Edition



Of People

Fifth Edition

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Each anthology in the Abeka literature series is a valuable tool to the Christian young person seeking to increase his knowledge of good literature. The student will be exposed to a wide variety of short stories, poems, essays, and plays from some of the finest writers of Western literature.

Works included in this series have been chosen for their literary and moral merit. Although Abeka may not endorse the entire content of each selection or the work from which it is taken, selections reflect Christian principles with an emphasis on character-building and life-enriching themes.* Part of the learning process is developing proper discernment according to the truths of the Scripture, realizing that while a Christian may not be able to entirely approve of an author's beliefs, lifestyle, or work, he can appreciate the author's God-given talent.

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**Some selections included in Of People have been slightly edited to ensure that the work is appropriate for a Christian young person. Usually only a word or phrase had to be changed or omitted. See the Of People Teacher Edition for notes on specific works.*

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Other features, such as Check Your Speed, Think It Through, and literary term boxes will help develop important study habits and increase admiration for literature. Think It Through questions, given at the end of most selections, offer questions that aid in developing comprehension skills as you read. Some selections include a reading icon 📖 to suggest that you should read the entire work. Also included is a selection of literary terms that have been highlighted in special feature boxes to enhance your study of literature as you begin to learn the writer's craft. In the back of this book you will find a Glossary that provides an easy reference for these terms. Additionally, the Index of Authors with their titles will help you find a selection quickly and match an author with his work.

Mama and the Graduation Present

Kathryn Forbes

from *Mama's Bank Account*



Papa had been in the hospital, and Mama had taken in boarders to help with family finances. Katrin, who was graduating from the eighth grade, longed for a pink dresser set for graduation. She knew she would get it somehow.

and made bets with each other as to which one of them would be the first to coax her to eat a big, thick steak—medium rare.

During the last week that Papa was in the hospital, we rented the big downstairs bedroom to two brothers, Mr. Sam and Mr. George Stanton.

The Stantons worked in the office of the Gas and Electric Company, and they paid a whole month's rent in advance, which was a very good thing for us. They were nice young men, and after dinner every night they would come out to the kitchen to tell Mama how much they enjoyed her cooking.

After they got better acquainted with Miss Durant, they teased her about her "rabbit food"

Mama was very proud of her three boarders; she listened to their chattering and laughter and said it was going to be fine when we had the hospital bills paid up, and the money back to the Aunts. Then we would get more furniture and more boarders. Enough to fill all the chairs in the dining room. The Stanton brothers said they knew two more men from their place who would like to board with us.

On the day that Papa came home from the hospital, it was like a big party. We all stayed home from school and Mama let Dagmar decorate the table real fancy.

Everything seemed all right again when Papa walked carefully into the kitchen and sat down in the rocking chair. His face was white, and he looked thinner, but his smile was just the same. He had a bandage on his head and he made little jokes about how they shaved off his hair when he wasn't looking.

It was strange, having Papa about the house during the day, but it was nice, too. He would be there in the kitchen when I came home from school and I would tell him all that had happened.

Winford School had become the most important thing in life to me. I was finally friends with the girls, and Carmelita and I were invited to all their parties. Every other Wednesday they came to my house and we would sit up in the attic, drink chocolate, eat cookies, and make plans about our graduation.

We discussed "High" and vowed that we would stay together all through the next four years. We were the only ones in our class going on to Lowell. Lowell, we told each other loftily, was "academic."

We were enthralled with our superiority. *We* were going to be the first class at Winford to have evening graduation exercises; *we* were having a graduation play; *we* were making our own graduation dresses in sewing class.

And when I was given the second lead in the play—the part of the Grecian boy—I found my own great importance hard to bear. I alone, of all the girls, had to go downtown to the costumer's to rent a wig. A coarse black wig that smelled of disinfectant, but made me feel like Geraldine Farrar.¹ At every opportunity, I would put it on and have Papa listen to my part of the play.

Then the girls started talking about their graduation presents.

Madeline said she was getting an onyx ring with a small diamond. Hester was getting a real honest-to-goodness wrist watch, and Thrya's family was going to add seven pearls to the necklace they had started for her when she was a baby. Even Carmelita was getting something

special; her sister Rose was putting a dollar every payday into an ivory manicure set.

I was intrigued, and wondered what great surprise my family had in store for me. I talked about it endlessly, hoping for some clue. It would be terrible if my present were not as nice as the rest.

"It is the custom, then," Mama asked, "the giving of gifts when one graduates?"

"My goodness, Mama," I said, "it's practically the most important time there is in a girl's life—when she graduates."

I had seen a beautiful pink celluloid² dresser set at Mr. Schiller's drugstore, and I set my heart upon it. I dropped hint after hint, until Nels took me aside and reminded me that we did not have money for that sort of thing. Had I forgotten that the Aunts and the hospital must be paid up? That just as soon as Papa was well enough, he must do the Beauchamp job for no pay?

"I don't care," I cried recklessly, "I *must* have a graduation present. Why, Nels, think how I will feel if I don't get any. When the girls ask me—"

Nels got impatient and said he thought I was turning into a spoiled brat. And I retorted that since he was a boy, he naturally couldn't be expected to understand certain things.

When Mama and I were alone one day, she asked me how I would like her silver brooch for a graduation present. Mama thought a lot of that brooch—it had been her mother's.

"Mama," I said reasonably, "what in the world would I want an old brooch for?"

"It would be like a—an heirloom, Katrin. It was your grandmother's."

"No, thank you, Mama."

"I could polish it up, Katrin."

I shook my head. "Look, Mama, a graduation present is something like—well, like that beautiful dresser set in Mr. Schiller's window."

There, now, I had told. Surely, with such a hint—

Mama looked worried, but she didn't say anything. Just pinned the silver brooch back on her dress.

¹ **Geraldine Farrar** (fə·rär')—an American operatic soprano

² **celluloid** (səl'yə·loid)—plastic

I was so sure that Mama would find some way to get me the dresser set, I bragged to the girls as if it were a sure thing. I even took them by Schiller's window to admire it. They agreed with me that it was wonderful. There was a comb, a brush, a mirror, a pincushion, a clothes brush, and even something called a hair-receiver.

Graduation night was a flurry of excitement.

I didn't forget a single word of my part in the play. Flushed and triumphant, I heard Miss Scanlon say that I was every bit as good as Hester, who had taken elocution lessons for years. And when I went up to the platform for my diploma, the applause for me was long and loud. Of course, the Aunts and Uncles were all there, and Uncle Ole and Uncle Peter could clap very loud, but I pretended that it was because I was so popular.

And when I got home—there was the pink celluloid dresser set!

Mama and Papa beamed at my delight, but Nels and Christine, I noticed, didn't say anything. I decided that they were jealous, and felt sorry that they would not join me in my joy.

I carried the box up to my attic and placed the comb and brush carefully on my dresser. It took me a long while to arrange everything to my satisfaction. The mirror, so. The pincushion, here. The hair receiver, there.

Mama let me sleep late the next morning. When I got down for breakfast, she had already gone downtown to do her shopping. Nels was reading the want-ad section of the paper. Since it was vacation, he was going to try to get a job. He read the jobs aloud to Papa and they discussed each one.

After my breakfast, Christine and I went upstairs to make the beds. I made her wait while I ran up to my attic to look again at my wonderful present. Dagmar came with me, and when she touched the mirror, I scolded her so hard she started to cry.

Christine came up then and wiped Dagmar's tears and sent her down to Papa. She looked at me for a long time.

"Why do you look at me like that, Christine?"

"What do you care? You got what you wanted, didn't you?" She pointed to the dresser set.

"Trash," she said, "cheap trash."

"Don't you *dare* talk about my lovely present like that! You're jealous, that's what. I'll tell Mama on you."

"And while you're telling her," Christine said, "ask her what she did with her silver brooch. The one her very own mother gave her. Ask her that."

I looked at Christine with horror. "What? You mean—Did Mama—?"

Christine walked away.

I grabbed up the dresser set and ran down the stairs to the kitchen. Papa was drinking his second cup of coffee, and Dagmar was playing with her doll in front of the stove. Nels had left.

"Papa, oh, Papa!" I cried. "Did Mama—Christine says—" I started to cry then, and Papa had me sit on his lap.

"There now," he said, and patted my shoulder. "There now."

And he dipped a cube of sugar into his coffee and fed it to me. We were not allowed to drink coffee—even with lots of milk in it—until we were considered grown up, but all of us children loved that occasional lump of sugar dipped in coffee.

After my hiccupping and sobbing had stopped, Papa talked to me very seriously. It was like this, he said. I had wanted the graduation present. Mama had wanted my happiness more than she had wanted the silver brooch. So she had traded it to Mr. Schiller for the dresser set.

"But I never wanted her to do that, Papa. If I had known—I would never have let her—"

"It was what Mama wanted to do, Katrin."

"But she *loved* it so. It was all she had of Grandmother's."

"She always meant it for you, Katrin."

I stood up slowly. I knew what I must do.

And all the way up to Mr. Schiller's drugstore, the graduation present in my arms, I thought of how hard it must have been for Mama to ask Mr. Schiller to take the brooch as payment. It was never easy for Mama to talk to strangers.

Mr. Schiller examined the dresser set with care. He didn't know, he said, about taking it back. After all, a bargain was a bargain, and he had been thinking of giving the brooch to his wife for her birthday next month.