

Teens

THE

Teens

BOOK OF

Love Stories

EDITED BY MIRIAM HODGSON



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*The Teens Book
of Love Stories*

Foreword by
K. M. PEYTON

Edited by Miriam Hodgson

A Magnet Book

For JRH and ECH

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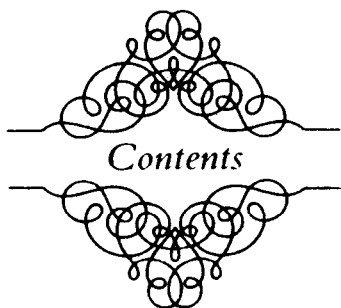
The Teens Book

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of Love Stories*

of Love stories

'She first saw the boy in Red Square. There was no snow yet, but it was bitterly cold. He was certainly good-looking, thought Jane, in a stocky interesting Russian way. Then, quite suddenly, without her noticing, it happened . . . "Meet me" he whispered. And to her amazement, he told her where.'

A wonderful collection of true life love-stories from some very distinguished writers of teenage fiction.



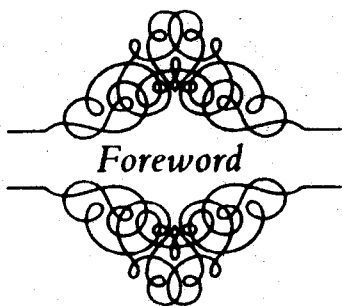
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'She has learned what it is
to love: the greatest lesson, some
people will tell you, that our earthly
life provides.'

A Room With a View

E.M. Forster



When one is first afflicted by the pangs of love at the age of, perhaps, fifteen – or thirteen, or eighteen – the symptoms are not treated with much sympathy by the older generation. 'Calf-love' they call it, and laugh. One's mother can be very patronizing: 'You'll get over it! It's not the real thing – it's only calf-love.' The attitude enflames: what does she know about it? Either she never knew, or she's forgotten. Early love can be shattering at the time. I can remember weeping torrents. 'You can't go out with him, you've got your homework to do. You're too young.' The agony of the boy who isn't interested, preferring one's friend . . . there was one called Colin, who loved my friend and she couldn't stand him. Just my luck – the one who loved me was a phlegmatic young man who worked on a farm and took my hand in his calloused palm when we were muck-spreading. I thought it funny and laughed, and he was mortified. Such cruelty, such pain . . . but the adults see no drama and are irritated by the tantrums, the ecstasies and the despair.

I ran away from home to get married. In those days one had to have one's parents' permission up to the age of twenty-one. I ran away a week after my twenty-first

birthday, stealing my birth certificate out of my parents' desk. I changed trains twice to throw off possible pursuit and met my husband-to-be, as arranged, on Woking station. The following morning we met to proceed to the registry office, but he appeared in a navy-blue suit, which stunned me. I had never seen him in a suit before. I said I couldn't marry him in that suit so he went and changed back into his ordinary clothes.

It seems funny now but it was very serious at the time. It was a real live love story – they are going on all the time. I used to write love stories when I was still at school, and the best one I wrote was about a young woman during the war on her way to Buckingham Palace with her husband who was to receive the Victoria Cross (no half-measures in my stories). The story accompanied them on the journey, and only by what I considered a masterly twist at the end did one discover that the woman was alone, the husband only in her memory, for the award was to be made posthumously. It was a colossal tear-jerker.

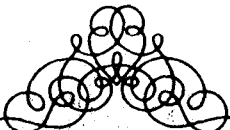
I was very proud of this story and passed it to my friend to read in a French lesson. She read it and passed it on to another interested party, but unfortunately the French teacher, a very fierce lady called Miss Buist, noticed the engrossed reading going on and asked for the document to be delivered to her desk. At the end of the lesson I asked if I could have it back but my request was refused. 'I am confiscating it,' she said. It was my only copy and I was heartbroken. Did she read it? Did it get passed round the staff room to be laughed at, or merely stuffed under a pile of French translation? I never knew. But on the last day of term she gave it back to me with what, as an author, I would have described as an enigmatic smile.

Such sentimental fantasy is not the style today – nor, quite possibly, then. In this age of freedom and scepticism

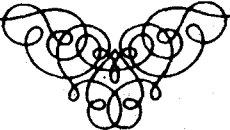
it is much harder to write a love story. Yet, beneath the facade of the moment, human nature remains for ever the same; the quivering uncertainties of early love have not changed. Writers have the same material to use, whatever current style it is fashionable to work in.

So, enjoy these stories, as I have. They all emphasize how much it matters, as it always did, and always will.

K. M. PEYTON



Second-best Boy



It's a shock to find that you dislike your best friend. Posi- tively hate her. There she sat on the other side of the café table, sipping a strawberry milkshake, and shining. Trust her to hog the only patch of sunlight that managed to struggle through the dirty window.

They had met over five years ago, when they were both new and a little lost in the hurly-burly of the Comprehensive.

'Do you know anyone here?' Cathy had asked.

'No,' Rebecca said.

'Nor do I. I'm Cathy Sharwood. Let's be friends.'

And they had been friends, true friends, equals, Rebecca thought sadly, until . . . when had it happened? When had Cathy changed from a fat, cheerful carrot-top into this flower-garden of a girl, with her bright marigold hair, eyes like dark, wet pansies and a mouth like a blooming rose? This honeyed boy-trap, this pretty hypocrite.

She even smelled of flowers now, though that came out of a bottle labelled 'Geranium Girl'. A cheap scent, Rebecca thought, sniffing. And she longed for the old Cathy, who had smelled of soap and peppermint, and whose feet, newly released from hot running-shoes, stank like everybody else's.

'But you must come, you must,' Cathy was saying now, opening her eyes very wide – as if they were not large enough already. The milkshake had left a soft froth, like pink cuckoo spit, on her rosy mouth. 'I said you would. Jonathan's got his dad's car, and he's bringing a friend . . .'

A friend? Forgotten his name, have you? That figures, Rebecca thought bitterly. She'd made up foursomes with Cathy before and she knew that the extra boy would be eminently forgettable. Whether fat and greasy or thin and earnest, he would certainly be both dull and resentful, as unwilling to accept second-best as she was herself.

In the mirror behind Cathy's head, Rebecca saw her own face reflected dimly, like a faded watercolour. Nothing wrong with it. On a good day, she sometimes thought it looked quite pretty. But beside Cathy's glowing face, it appeared washed out, as if her own subtle colours had been drained away to add to the gaudy splendour of her friend.

'Becky, what's the matter?' Cathy asked, her soft eyes looking almost convincingly innocent and bewildered. 'I thought you'd be pleased. Don't you like Jonathan Drake?'

Bitch, Rebecca thought. Don't pretend you don't know. Don't tell me you've never noticed how I blush whenever I see him. Don't tell me you've never noticed how I gulp and stammer if he asks me the time or what's on at the local cinema. Once he rested his hand on my shoulder and I trembled so much that you asked me, in front of him, if I was sickening for something. I could have killed you.

I never washed that blouse. The imprint of his hand is still on it, folded away in a plastic bag and hidden in my wardrobe. How you'd laugh if you knew. You wouldn't understand, would you? Shakespeare would. Dante

would. All the great poets would understand. I love Jonathan Drake. I've loved him for over a year and I know he'll never notice me. Why should he? All the girls at school are in love with him. Except you. You only want his scalp to add to your collection, another heart to hang on that charm bracelet you keep jangling in front of my nose.

Rebecca did not, of course, say any of this aloud.

'Jonathan?' she asked, trying to sound uninterested. 'He's all right, I suppose. Bit conceited.'

'You can't really blame him. I mean, he's very good-looking. Don't you think so, Becky? Madge Hempson says he looks like a Greek god. Though I always thought Greeks were supposed to be dark, and he's so fair. Perhaps she meant a statue. Come to think of it, he is a bit like that photograph of the Apollo statue you've got hanging over your bed.'

'Is he? Can't say I've noticed,' Rebecca lied.

Why are you doing this to me, Cathy, she wondered silently? What have I done to make you want to hurt me? Is it because I got better exam results than you did? Or because I was chosen to be Juliet in the end-of-term play? Or does it go further back, to our first year at Braeside, when my drawing was pinned up on the art room wall and yours wasn't? Have you secretly resented me all these years?

'Please say you'll come, Becky,' Cathy said. 'It won't be the same without you. We've always done everything together . . .'

They had. Swimming together in the summer river, skating on the winter ice, eating peanuts side by side in the cheapest seats of the cinema, cycling over the switchback hills. Once the brakes on Rebecca's bicycle had gone and she'd hurtled down the hill helplessly towards the cross-

roads at the bottom. She'd survived then, with only a grazed knee and a buckled front wheel. Now she felt she was hurtling down a hill again, leaving her childhood far behind her, lost for ever. Her very memories were spoilt. It was like finding a maggot in an apple core: the taste of those years, once sweet, now made her want to vomit.

'Jonathan's calling for us at eight,' Cathy went on, taking her silence, if not for agreement, at least for a sign of weakening. 'You'll have plenty of time to wash your hair. We thought of driving out to that new place by the river. You know, *The Green Willow*. They say it's super. The food's good and there's a disco, and a riverside walk with coloured lights in the trees. And plenty of shadows, too,' she added with a little giggle that called up pictures of kisses in the dark. Cathy and Jonathan . . .

'I feel sick,' Rebecca said, 'in the back of a car.'

'You can sit in front. I don't mind.'

Rebecca stared at her. 'Who's driving, then?' she asked.

'Jonathan. It's his dad's car,' Cathy told her, her face as innocent as an angel's. 'I'll sit in the back with his friend.'

What was she up to? Was she so damn sure of Jonathan that she could condescend to be generous to her poor, lovesick friend? Just for half an hour's drive before she beckoned him away.

Oh Lord, thought Rebecca. Let me beat her at her own game. She stared hopelessly into the mirror. Eight o'clock. Plenty of time before then to have her hair dyed red, yellow or black, to have it cut short or brushed out into a flaming bush. Perhaps her mother would lend her the money to buy a new outfit: tight satin trousers or a swirling skirt. What did Jonathan like?

What he liked was sitting in front of her in a faded cotton dress from Marks and Spencers, with no need for make-up on her flower face, no hair-dye to dull the

glowing lustre of her red-gold hair. No need for false eyelashes or fingernails, no padded bras to push her out or tight belts to hold her in. Cathy's puppy fat had all gone. She was a fully-grown bitch.

'We'll have fun, won't we?' she said.

'Yes,' Rebecca agreed, and thought about pushing her best friend into the river.

At seven o'clock that evening, Rebecca sat in front of her mirror, brushing her newly-washed hair. She had not had it dyed, nor had she bought anything new to wear. Why waste her money? Even if she had her hair dyed green, Jonathan probably would not notice.

Her mother would. Her mother noticed everything: a new lipstick, a pair of high-heeled shoes, a red silk shirt. Ever since Rebecca was fifteen, her mother had been watching her closely, dreading the day when her daughter would bring home a hideously unsuitable friend, with long greasy hair and his shirt open to his navel.

'Where are you going this evening?' she'd ask, eyeing Rebecca's tight black trousers unobtrusively.

'To the cinema.'

'Who with?'

'Some friends from school.'

'Anyone I know?'

'Cathy, Sue, William - just the usual lot. No one in particular,' Rebecca would say, not mentioning Jonathan with whom she was already in love.

'Have a nice time, darling,' her mother would say, relieved.

Now that Rebecca was nearly seventeen, however, her mother's worries had changed.

'You're looking pretty tonight. Are you going out with anyone special?' she'd ask hopefully.

'Just Cathy.'

'Cathy's looking very glamorous nowadays, I must say. Has she got a boyfriend yet?'

'Yes. Several.'

'Oh well, there's safety in numbers,' her mother would say. 'Don't worry. You're very young still. Plenty of time to think of boyfriends when you've finished your exams. I'm glad you're so sensible.'

But her eyes would inspect Rebecca uneasily, as if wondering if there was anything wrong with this daughter who gave her no trouble; who never came home at three in the morning, or painted the walls of her room black and purple, or flounced out of the house in a screaming tantrum, vowing never to return. *Who* was so unlike the daughters of all her friends.

Poor Mum, Rebecca thought. It must be boring for her to ~~have nothing~~ to complain about at her coffee mornings. ~~Perhaps~~ I should have dyed my hair green for her sake - 'You'll never guess what Rebecca did! I could've screamed when I saw her. Her hair! Bright green.'

She ~~smiled ruefully~~ at her reflection. It was too late now. Light-brown hair, pale skin, hazel eyes. The face of a quiet, well-brought-up girl - as dull as ditchwater. Oh well, it was fitting. A second-best girl for a second-best boy. She wondered without much interest what he would be like. One thing you could bet on. He'd have spots.

He did. His name was Peter Swithin, and he had three ripe red spots on his chin. Otherwise he was unremarkable, of average height, skinny, with untidy dark hair, two strands of which hung over his spectacles like windscreen wipers. His eyes were on the small side but at