

# THE CAGE

By Dorothy Canfield

With Sketches by Mary M. Ludlum



HE two little sisters had carried the canaries in their cage out on the balcony. "It's such a lovely day", said the younger. "They'll love the sun and the fresh air."

"But won't it make them feel worse about having to live in a cage?" wondered the older child, anxiously bending over the two chirping yellow birds, flirting their tiny wings and tails and hopping jerkily from perch to perch, excited by the breeze which came eddying over the roofs of the city.

"Why, they *love* their cage", said the younger. "Just see how nice it is. They have everything in it! Their darling little bathtub, and their nice clean grains any time they are hungry, and low perches and high perches, and us to take care of them, and even that sweet little swing that Father brought for them. What more could they want?"

The older child did not answer. While her little sister busied herself usefully in bringing fresh water for the birds, and in giving the cage its daily cleaning, she leaned against the iron railing of the balcony, looking through the curves of its ironwork, far off, away over the roofs. Her eyes were wide and soft. The spring air lifted the curls from her forehead and blew gently across her cheek.

She was looking so far, so far away that (until the other child murmured, "Oh, look!") she did not see a little brown bird, who had flown over the roofs to them and was now perching on the railing at the other end of the balcony.

"Sh-h-h!" said the younger child. Without breathing or making a sound the two little girls stood motionless, their eyes fixed on the visitor. He kept his eyes fixed on them too, but he was not silent nor motionless. He chirped volubly, tilted his tail in a quick, irregular rhythm, and skipped rapidly on his slim, twig-like legs forward and back on the railing.

"He *likes* us! He's trying to talk to us", said the younger child. The older one murmured, "He's asking us ugly giants please to go away."

"Oh you always think something like that", said the younger, petulantly. But she followed her sister into their room, where they shut the window and, hiding themselves behind the curtain, peeped out to see what the new bird would do.

As they moved, he had flown away with a nervous flutter of wings, but the moment the window closed he came back to the railing, his eyes shining, his tail jerking, his tiny ardent body panting and quivering. He was looking at the birds in the cage.

"He's so sorry for them!" said the older child.

"He wishes he had as much to eat as they", said the younger.



*"She was looking so far, so far away"*

The bird now flew to the floor of the balcony and hopped around and around the cage, cocking his head to one side, ruffling his feathers, incessantly chattering. The birds in the cage paid no attention to him, continuing sagely and soberly their usual occupations, hopping up on one perch and down on another, swinging in their little mechanical swing, occasionally cracking a grain in their beaks and eating the kernel with relish.

The children's old nurse stepped into the room now, and the little girls beckoned her to come. She looked, nodded her head wisely, and said, "He wants to get in the cage and live with them."

The older child flung up her head passionately. "Oh no, *no!* How *can* you say such a thing!"

She spoke so loudly that the little bird was frightened, spread his wings in a panic and flew away over the roofs.

"There!" said the younger child reproachfully. "You've scared him away. You never think what you're doing."

"He'll come back", said the old woman.

"No he won't!" said the older child. "No he won't! Never!"

"We'll see", said the nurse, who did not care in the least whether he did or not.

He came back the next day, and the next and the next, flying free-winged over the roofs, through the wide sky, through the spring sunshine, and folded his wings to hop excitedly, chirping and voluble, around and around the cage in which the two tame birds cracked their grains, sipped their water out of their little crockery dish, and swung complacently in their little swing.

The children's father, who was a

scientist, hearing talk of what was happening, came one day to peep out of the window to see for himself. For he had not believed in the least what the children and the old woman told him. He never believed what children and women said. He had told them, "Oh no, you must be mistaken. The two tame birds are both males. The only thing that could attract a wild bird would be a female." But as he looked out from behind the curtains, he saw just what they had described, and for an instant he was at a loss.

His older daughter looked up intently, anxiously into his face. "Mélanie thinks he wants to get into the cage, and live with them. He couldn't want to do that, could he, Father? Not a *bird!*"

The father considered the matter. "Perhaps he's a tame bird, who has flown away from his own cage and can't find his way back."

The older child was even more distressed. "Oh no, no! That would be worse yet! If he'd been in a cage, and knew what a cage was like, he couldn't want to get into another, once he was free!"

"Yes he could too", said the younger. "He'd remember how comfortable he'd been."

"Father!" appealed the older child.

"Father!" cried the younger.

Their father said, scientifically, "Good gracious, children, don't go trying to settle fact by an appeal to authority. I don't know any more about it than you. The only way to get at facts is by experimenting."

The little girls looked blank.

"It's easy. Leave the door of the cage open, and see whether he goes in or stays out."

"Yes, yes", cried the younger, clapping her hands.

The face of the older brightened. She was sure that if the door were opened, the two imprisoned birds would fly away and be free.

They waited till the next day. Mélanie arranged a string to the cage door from inside their room, and as the little visitor went skipping and fluttering about on the floor of the balcony she chose a moment when he was close to the door and, pulling on the string, quickly and noiselessly lifted up the little gate.

The pulses of the older child beat so violently that she pressed her two hands on her heart. A mist came before her eyes. When it cleared away, she saw that the little free bird had hopped inside the cage and was bobbing his pretty head up and down over the grain dish. As she looked, he said, "*Queet! queet!*" in his sweet, shrill voice, and springing happily up on a perch, began to preen his feathers.

The father laughed. "That settles it." The nurse gently let down the door of the cage. The lunch bell rang and they all went off to the dining room.

That night, long after the little girls had gone to bed, the nurse thought she heard one of them cough, and taking a candle in her hand, stepped into their bedroom. The younger child lay sweetly asleep, her rosy face

calm, her long eyelashes sweeping her rounded cheek. The older child, surprised by the light, flung up one arm hastily to hide her face; but not before the nurse had seen her cheeks flushed and glazed with tears.

"Why dearie!" she cried, running to the child's bed. "Darling lamb! Are you sick? Where does it hurt you?"

She put her loving arms about the child and laid the hot wet cheek on her soft old breast, trying to understand what it was that the little girl was saying, so brokenly, so desperately. She could only catch a few disconnected words . . . "the bird . . . the cage. . . ."

"But, dear heart," she said reasonably and consolingly, "the little birdie *wanted* to go into the cage. And he's perfectly happy there. You should have seen how nicely he went to sleep, sitting on his smooth round perch, beside the others, so trusting. Tucking his little head under his wing without a fear. He *wanted* to live in the cage."

The child stopped sobbing, and pulled away from the loving arms roughly. She said sternly, "It's . . . it's his *wanting* to . . ."

She looked at her nurse's face, shook her head, and laying herself down again on her little bed, she turned her face to the wall in silence.

# THE UNPOPULAR EDITOR OF THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

By George Horace Lorimer

THE editor of a popular magazine is unpopular with all critics except those who contribute or who hope to contribute to his magazine. Just as "size is sin" to the average small town Congressman who has never been able to make more than seventy five hundred a year, so is popularity sin to the critic who is unable to achieve it.

Recently a novelist has covered anew this main traveled road of criticism, though one senses under all his strictures a yearning for the fleshpots of the popular magazine. This latest critic, like all the others, builds a straw man that he labels the popular editor, and then proceeds to demolish him. He does not distinguish between the place of the popular magazine and that of the book. He concludes that literature in America is being debauched by lowbrow editors; that they are wilfully barring genius from the public; and inciting promising young novelists to happy endings and crimes of violence to their art.

The real truth is, of course, that all type looks alike to some men. But there is a wide difference, and there should be, between the fields of the newspaper, the review, the popular magazine, and the book. Many fine novels will not stand serialization—the lapse of a week or a month between chapters. Others are written for a specialized audience. But these will find their public and bring a financial

return to their authors if they have any element of vitality.

For every stone that the popular magazine rejects there is a place somewhere. There are magazines that make a cult of dulness; thin little refuges for pink and pallid verse; expensive and degenerate, as well as cheap and nasty, periodicals that cater to the prurient minded; not to mention those reviews and magazines whose Brahmins beat their breasts and proclaim their literary and artistic quality. If among all these a man fails to get printed and if, after being printed, he fails to secure the recognition that every writer craves, it must be that his work is lacking in some vital quality.

In a book, the author accepts full responsibility for what he says; in a magazine his editor shares it with him. The book is bought or left on the stalls on the strength of printed or oral criticism. The magazine goes to all classes, ages, and conditions. The editor must be their reviewer.

However, the inference that the popular magazine does not want good workmanship; that its editor asks his contributors to write down; and that he craves nothing but mush and happy endings will not stand up under impartial investigation. Those who complain most loudly about the popular magazines are, on the whole, kept out not because their work is so good, but because it is so bad; because, though