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## Being A Prefect

Written for  
"The Listener"  
by  
BARBARA DENT



THERE'S a plain, dark, narrow, wood frame round my Dod Proctor's "Morning." But as it tones in very nicely with the sepias of the print, I am well pleased with it. Only as I was looking at it this morning I remembered my mother saying half apologetically, when I brought home the photo of the prefects, "You know, you can only have a cheap frame around it. We can't afford anything expensive."

So she had the prefects' photo framed and hung it in the sitting-room so people could see it when they came, and I had to say thank you, and how pleased I was, though really I was ashamed because I was sure I was only a prefect because they couldn't very well leave me out.

The morning they had read out the names of the new prefects in the hall I had thought, "They'll have to make me one this year. I'm in the Upper Sixth." And I waited trembling, because it would be a terrible disgrace if I wasn't made a prefect in my last year at school, and had to go home and tell my mother, and she had to make excuses about me to people who asked her. So I waited, very nervous, although I couldn't very well see how they could miss me, and I was sure I'd be just as competent a prefect as some they'd picked the year before.

Well, the list grew longer and longer and my name hadn't come, and I was very afraid. Then at the very end they read it out.

The very last name, mine. Just as if I'd been squeezed in at the end, as if they'd looked over the list and thought, "Now, have we missed anyone? Oh, yes. . . . Now what do you think about her? I suppose she should go in." And so they tacked me on at the end.

Somebody had to be on the end I suppose, but I didn't look at it that way. I felt humiliated, and all year I never felt I was a prefect by right, only by special favour.

THERE were quite a few of us for a school of that size. We used to have prefects' meetings in the library—girls and boys separate, of course.

Once we had to call up a third former who had a pash on Leonie, and kept doing silly things so that Leonie would have to notice her, and give her lines or something. Anyway, we called her in, and she stood there with big, goggling eyes fixed on Leonie, and she

wouldn't say a word, and we all got the giggles. First Leonie, then Pat, then Phyl, then me—then all of us. Even the head prefect, and we had to send our third former outside while we recovered.

Then once the headmaster came in, very solemn, and told us that some boys had been caught smoking in the shrubberies, and some girls and boys down in the park together, and he was shocked, surprised, indignant, horrified, and we had to keep a watch and report anything immediately. The shame on the school's name, and in uniforms and everything.

Leonie, who often walked back after lunch with her boy friend, who had left school, was terrified. And we all hastily reviewed our own pasts to see if the blemishes could possibly have been found out.

Talking to boys, and all the rest of it—unforgivable crimes. We all felt very uneasy, but more afraid of being found out than ashamed.

Then I had to speak to one of the fifth form girls for walking down to the train with boys, and she was nasty about it, and said, "You've got a cheek saying that to me when you used to walk to the train every night yourself last year with a boy."

That was logic. And even though I didn't do it now, the boy having left school, I could quite see her point, and it all seemed very silly and stupid to me. But she kept on, and then I had to give her lines, and then she didn't do them and kept on, so we had to have her up at a prefects' meeting.

Of course she hated me after that. I'd made an enemy, and she turned a lot of the train kids against me, so that I was very miserable. I wished I hadn't been a prefect at all, and felt I was a very bad one, anyway.

\* \* \*

THEN towards the end of the year, we all went down to have our photos taken. It was quite a thrill for the girls who had boy friends among the boy prefects, because we were all taken in one group.

We girls all pressed our gyms till the pleats were knife edge, combed our hair, fixed our stocking seams straight, brushed our shoes, pulled our tie knots neat and tight, and smoothed our clean, white blouses. Everyone asked everyone else was she all right, and we were all

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