



CHAPTER 1

Young Ladies Don't

Regina, 1912

“Don't fidget, dear,” said Mrs. Barclay.

Ella made a face. “But this petticoat is so scratchy!” Mrs. Alexandra Barclay smiled fondly at her. Today was Ella's thirteenth birthday and her party guests were about to arrive. Her honey-coloured ringlets were curled into perfect sausages. She had a brand-new dress with a pale blue sash and a matching hair ribbon. Unfortunately the brand-new dress came with a petticoat underskirt made of miles of starched ruffles and bands of stiff horsehair.

“It is good practice to wear a petticoat, dear, remember that,” replied her mother. “And the ruffles give your skirt such a pretty bounce. When you are older you will wear a corset as well as a petticoat.”

Wonderful, thought Ella gloomily. She wished she were a boy. Not because she was a tomboy or anything, but it just seemed that the older she got the less she was allowed to do, at least if she wanted to be considered a proper young lady. Boys

didn't have to look forward to corsets. Boys got to learn how to ride horses and work in a bank and go on trips and order other people around and the older they got, the more of it they got to do. Meanwhile, Ella and her friends had to stop running about, start wearing long skirts, learn all about housework, keep their eyes to the floor and practice perfect manners. Ella's life was becoming as scratchy as her petticoat. But there was no other choice, not when her mother was Mrs. Alexandra Barclay.

Mrs. Alexandra Barclay was considered a high society lady in Regina, and Regina was the capital of the entire province of Saskatchewan, so that made Mrs. Barclay especially important. She was thin and beautiful, her shiny blonde hair always twisted into a perfect chignon. She wore the right clothes, had impeccable manners and a rich husband to boot. But as far as Ella could tell, her mother didn't actually *do* anything. Except spend time making up rules for Ella to follow, of course.

Ella went back to squirming in her chair. Hands folded in the lap; look demurely at the floor; cross ankles but not legs. Ella was reminded every day by some rule or another that her parents were actually British, not Canadian. If they'd come from someplace else she was sure there wouldn't be so many silly rules. Regina was full of people who came from a million different places and Ella was certain none of them had to follow as many rules as she did. On top of that, her father, Mr. Leo Barclay, was the head of the biggest bank in Regina, so he was a very important man. Mother said it was important for his sake to "keep up appearances," which on her birthday apparently required a stupid, scratchy petticoat.

The doorbell rang. Finally! She jumped up from her chair

to run to the front door. Mrs. Barclay frowned, so Ella turned back and dutifully went to stand beside her at the door of the parlour while Mrs. Dudek, their housekeeper, answered the door. Rules, rules, rules. Could she ever remember all the things she was supposed to do?

All the girls from her class at school, along with their mothers, were invited to her party. Ella did her best to remember her manners. There were little sandwiches and cakes to eat, tea for the ladies and hot chocolate for the girls. When Ella was little, there used to be games too but Mrs. Barclay thought she was too old for games now. Luckily there were still presents.

Ella received four white handkerchiefs, one with her initial embroidered in the corner and three with tiny flowers. Useful. There was a “diary of feelings” – “You can write down everything that happens in your life!” gushed a girl Ella barely knew. Ugh. Last thing Ella wanted to do. Another book – that was hopeful. She unwrapped *The Empire Annual for Girls*.

“Lovely!” exclaimed Mrs. Barclay. “There are many good lessons to be had between those covers, Ella.” Lessons? That sounded ominous. If her mother thought it was a good book, Ella was pretty sure she wouldn’t. But she managed a thank you anyway.

There were two china teacups for her hope chest, and even one silver teaspoon from her mother. Ella thanked her politely.

“It takes time to build your hope chest,” smiled her mother. “You’re lucky to be starting so young.” Inwardly Ella sighed. It was hard to get excited about china cups and silver spoons.

Mrs. Barclay raised her eyebrows at Ella. It was time for her speech. Standing up, Ella tried not to tug on the horrible petticoat and began.

“I want to thank you all very much for coming to my party...um, my birthday celebration. And thank you for the lovely gifts. I shall,” Ella glanced over at the teacups, “I shall treasure them and think of you when I use them.” Ella gulped. This was hard, even though she’d practiced. What came next? She looked in desperation at her mother. Ms. Barclay gave a small nod at the tea table.

“Oh yeah. Please help yourselves to more tea and cake.” Mrs. Barclay tightened her lips. Some of her friends held their hands over their mouths to stifle their giggles. No matter, the speech was over.

Just then, there was a commotion at the door. They could hear Mrs. Dudek murmuring to someone and all eyes went to the door. In a rush of bluster two large men stepped through the door and filled the room. All the women looked politely at the floor. The girls, not as well trained, stared at the younger of the two. He was so handsome! The young man flashed a jaunty grin as he bowed to the ladies. The older man was tall with a prosperous belly to offset his small, balding head. He wore pin-striped trousers and a snowy white shirt under a brocade waistcoat and pinstriped jacket. The chain of a gold pocket watch crossed his barrel chest. Anybody could tell just by looking that this was a man of power.

“Why, Mr. Barclay!” exclaimed Mrs. Barclay. “What a surprise! And Mr. Isbister as well!”

“A little bird told me that today is a special day in the Barclay household, is it not?” asked Mr. Barclay, as he looked at his daughter.

Ella jumped up and threw her arms around her father. “I

can't believe you came to my party, Daddy!" Certainly all the guests looked surprised as well. Mr. Barclay was a very busy man.

"I can only stay long enough for you to open..." and with that Mr. Barclay reached into his business case, "this!" With a flourish he presented Ella with a square box, beautifully wrapped and tied with a bow.

Ella tore into the paper, even though she could see her mother frown at her haste. She didn't care – her father had come home for her party! She couldn't believe it. They hardly ever saw him because of all his business at the bank. He arranged loans for homesteaders to help them buy farming equipment. With immigrants pouring into Canada from all over Europe and the United States, business was booming.

Ella gasped. Inside the square box was a magic machine. She couldn't describe it any other way. Carefully she lifted it out for all to see. Her gasp was echoed by everyone in the room.

It was an Eastman Kodak Brownie camera. A camera! Ella couldn't believe it. It was going to be so much more fun than a teacup! The little Brownie was just her size. She looked up at her father with wide eyes, speechless.

"Remember it's not just for amusement, young lady," he admonished. "It's for educational purposes. There are lots of things you can learn about the world through the lens of a camera."

"Thank you, Daddy!" breathed Ella.

"The camera needs to be filled with film. Each film lets you take six pictures and then you have to take the film to the drugstore for developing. I've set up a small account for you at Mr. Duncan's pharmacy, Ella, but don't be foolish with it. Each film costs fifteen cents, so I will expect you to manage the account wisely."

The other mothers had overcome their shock at the wonderful gift and were nodding at Mr. Barclay's words of wisdom. Of course a banker would teach his daughter to be wise about money. Mrs. Barclay said nothing.

"Well then, my dear, enjoy your celebration and I will look forward to examining your photographs soon. Mr. Isbister and I are on our way to an important meeting and must be off to the bank now."

"If I may, sir?" Mr. Isbister stepped forward deferentially, nodding to Mr. Barclay. "Many happy returns of the day, my dear Miss Barclay," he went on, as he presented the birthday girl with a lovely bouquet of hothouse flowers he'd been hiding behind his back.

The girls sighed in delight. Jesper Isbister was the dreamiest fellow in all of Regina, and Ella actually got to live with him! His father back in England was a real live duke and had decided to send his son to Canada to learn all about banking with his old friend Mr. Barclay. Jesper was tall and had dark hair just a little too long and wavy to be proper. His fine clothes made him look like a prince. His warm brown eyes made a girl want to faint. At least that's what her classmates thought. Ella thought they were all nuts.

They had decided that Ella should marry Jesper and become the first Duchess of Regina. Ella always snorted with laughter whenever her friends talked such nonsense. "He's the third son," she'd say scornfully. "Only first sons get to be dukes! Third sons have to make money to add to the family fortunes. That's why he's here, sillies!"

To which her friends would reply, "And what's so bad about

being rich? Either way, you've got the best chance to catch him, Ella!" Sometimes Ella thought her mother was of the same opinion. She was always partnering them up. But Ella thought the whole idea was stupid. Jesper was more like an annoying older brother than a suitor. He teased her all the time. Who would want to marry that?

Mr. Isbister bowed low to Ella and when their faces were close he winked at her. He made Ella want to groan, but knew she couldn't and that was exactly why he did it. He was so cheeky! Jesper grinned at her, then composed his face before turning back to her father. Mr. Barclay smiled indulgently at his young apprentice, then patted Ella on the shoulder and bowed to the mothers. "Mrs. Barclay, ladies. Good day to you all." Ella looked longingly at the door. She'd have preferred going with them to work at the bank to making small talk at her party.

The instant the men were gone all the girls crowded around Ella. "How does it work?" "Take a picture of us!" "Can I hold it?" Ella dug deeper into the box and found the manual. She quickly leafed through it.

"The instructions are forty-four pages long!" exclaimed Ella. "I don't think I can take a picture right away, not if film costs fifteen cents."

"That's very wise, Ella," said her mother briskly, as she took the camera away from Ella. "I'll put it away for now."

Ella knew her mother was right, but as her guests went back to eating cake and sipping hot chocolate her eyes kept straying to the cabinet that hid her new Brownie. She wanted the party to be over. She wanted to read that manual.

Finally most of the goodies were gone, the mothers had run

out of polite chatter and the girls were tired. Ella did her best to remember her “saying goodbye” manners as she thanked everyone for coming. At last Ella and her mother were alone in the parlour. Ella didn’t know what she wanted to do first – get out of her petticoat or study the manual. Comfort won out and she raced for her room, tearing at the ties of the awful garment as she went.

“Ella!” her mother called after her in horror. “Young ladies don’t undress in the hallway!”

But Ella didn’t listen to what young ladies don’t do. She’d probably heard it a million times before anyway. She quickly put on her everyday skirt and breathed a great sigh of relief.