

LILLIAN'S REVENGE

A Story of Feminine Diplomacy

By THOMAS H. CURRY

"LILLIAN, what's this I hear about you?" Lillian looked up, meekness personified. "I don't know," she answered. "What have you heard, father?"

For eight years, ever since the death of her mother, Lillian Morse had made it a point, oft times at a great inconvenience, of being on hand every day to pour her father's coffee, being well aware that her presence at that initial meal of the day enabled her to retain a control over the irascible old lawyer, which she might have long before forfeited by her many vagaries. Many times Mr. Morse had tried to throw off the yoke and control his daughter, but had failed. But now this case was serious. Mr. Morse was positively indignant.

"Last night I met Morrison at the club," he said, "and he informed me that you had gone to work as a reporter on the *Herald*. Is it true?"

"Why, yes, father," replied the young lady. "Don't you remember me telling you that I was going to be a reporter?"

"I do, but didn't I tell you I seriously objected to your doing so?"

"You haven't a right to object, father. Women today are emancipated, and they have a right to follow any profession. They have thrown off the shackles; Mrs. Stevens says so."

"Mrs. Stevens! I might have known that she was at the bottom of this."

"Mrs. Stevens has opened my eyes to the truth, and has shown me that women are degraded by their present condition of dependence on men."

"She has? And I suppose my wishes have no weight with you?"

"Indeed they have, father, where your interests are concerned. But in this case I should feel ashamed and degraded if I yielded. This is a matter of principle with me. You won't ask me?"

"But, Lillian, I do ask you! I want you to give up the idea altogether."

"I can't, father."

Mr. Morse did not care to come to a direct issue with his daughter—an issue in which victory would be almost as bad as defeat. He racked his brain for some way in which to attain his end without an open struggle. An idea suddenly occurred to him. Perhaps it was born of madness, but he did not stop to think.

"Well," he said, "as you know I object on the general principles to your working at such a calling, but perhaps there are some points of view from which it will be all for the best."

"I am quite certain there must be, father," returned Lillian, though in a hesitating way her father's sudden yielding bewildered her not a little.

"Yes," continued the old gentleman, looking down at his plate, and cutting his steak with careful precision. "Yes, I suppose it is just as well, after all. I presume you will take a room down town?"

"No-o, I had not thought of that. I shall stay at home for a time, at least." Lillian was evidently startled.

"Well, of course the wedding won't come off for several months."

"What wedding, father? I'm not going to be married!"

"No, not you. I refer to myself."

"You!" Words could not express Lillian's horror. The universe reeled about her. The sun was darkened, and the fixed stars toppled from their places.

"You are evidently surprised. Surely you must have marked my growing devotion to her."

"To her? To whom?"

"To whom? Well, to think of that! And they say women are keen, and scent a romance from the first. I'll never believe that again."

"But, father, who is it?" demanded the girl again, her heart throbbing wildly. "Who is it?"

"Why, your friend, Mrs. Stevens, of course. Who should it be?"

"Mrs. Stevens!" Lillian sank back in her chair, pale and wide-eyed. Mrs. Stevens to be her stepmother! It was too much. "Father!" she exclaimed. "Are you in your proper senses?"

"Why, Lillian, what do you mean? Is not Mrs. Stevens one of your best friends? Surely you don't mean to make trouble, do you? I warn you not to!" he concluded, angrily.

"Father, please don't—please don't! If you love me, break it off!"

"Why, that is out of the question. How can I break it off? Why, Lillian, girl, I hadn't the slightest idea that you would take it in this way; and, then, if you are going to be a reporter, and keep late hours, and all that, I'll need some one to —"

But, there; it's a matter of principle with me, Lillian, and I should feel ashamed and degraded to yield, even in deference to your wishes."

"Oh, I'll do anything! I'll give up reporting—I'll always obey you! Oh, father, I see it all; I've been so selfish, and —" Lillian flung herself on her father's knees in a passion of weeping.

The old man winked elaborately over her head at a particularly ugly portrait that hung upon the wall. "Well, dearie," he said, hesitatingly, "if you promise to give up reporting, and settle down quietly, I'll see if I can get Mrs. Stevens to let me off."

"You will? How dearly I love you, father! I'll be better in the future than I have been in the past. I don't deserve to have such a good father."

The old man stroked her hair gently. "Don't cry, little girl," he said. "I am sure it will be all right. By-the-way, when you see Mrs. Stevens you had better not say anything to her about this—it might prejudice matters if you do. I'll settle with her." There was a note of anxiety in the old man's voice, which, it is safe to say, his daughter attributed to some cause other than the right one.

"I wouldn't speak to the creature again for anything!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet. "I'll go immediately and resign my place on the paper!"

Mr. Morse hugged himself repeatedly as he went down town that morning, but he would not have been so happy had he known what the fates had in store for him. At the very moment when his chuckles were deepest, his daughter and Mrs. Stevens were sitting side by side in an elevated train, where they had met when Lillian was returning home from the office of the *Herald*, after having manfully resigned her position she had secured with so much difficulty.

Mrs. Stevens saw the girl first, and crossed over and sat down beside her. "How do you do, Lillian?" she exclaimed, pleasantly.

But Lillian drew herself up haughtily and turned away. "Good morning, Mrs. Stevens!" she answered, freezingly.

The elder woman's smile froze upon her face. "One moment!" she exclaimed. "What does this mean?"

Lillian paused for an instant. "Nothing whatever," she replied. "I prefer to be alone, that is all."

"That is all, is it? One day you say I am your best friend, and ask favours of me. The next you decline my hand, and say you wish to be alone. And yet you claim to be a new woman, and want to rank with men. Humph! Men have few enough virtues, Heaven knows, but they do speak out, and don't treasure up spite, as women do. My dear girl, there is some misunderstanding here, and I mean to know what it is. Be a business woman, as you say you want to be, and speak out."

"I don't want ever to be a business woman, nor a reporter, nor anything!" she exclaimed. "I never really wanted to be one. You talked me into it for your own purposes. I care not to be rude, but you know you did."

"Houghty-toughty! What's this? Talked you into it for my own purposes, did I? There's gratitude for you! What purposes did I have?"

"You know."

"I don't know."

"You don't? Why, my father?"

"Well, what about your father? He is a pleasant old gentleman enough, though sadly behind the times. He ought to marry, and give you a stepmother to teach you manners."

Lillian turned away in wrath. "Good morning, Mrs. Stevens. If you will kindly excuse me, I prefer to be alone!" she said.

"Yes, you said so before. Now, Lillian, none of this nonsense with me. I want to know just what is wrong. You can speak frankly. I am old enough to be your mother, you know."

Lillian made a gesture of repulsion. "You never shall be!" she exclaimed. "You think you are sure of it, but father has promised to break it off."

"Break what off?"

"His engagement."

"His engagement? What on earth are you talking about?"

"Don't you know?"

"Indeed, I do not."

A sudden hope dawned in Lillian's face. "Do you mean to tell me that you are not engaged to marry my father?" she exclaimed.

"Good heavens, no! What put such an insane

idea into your head? I wouldn't marry the best man in the world."

"But father told me so himself."

"Your father told you that he was going to marry me?" Mrs. Stevens' tone was one of deep amazement.

"Why, he certainly gave me to understand so."

The elder woman shook her head, with a stupefied air. "I'm sorry to say it, Lillian," she observed, at length, "but the truth must be faced. I have thought for some time that your father was failing. He is an old man, you know, and —"

"Oh, no!" Lillian exclaimed, clapping her hands gaily. "I understand now. He was trying to frighten me into giving up reporting. Oh, how he fooled me!"

"Trying to frighten you? What do you mean? Am I such a bugbear that he should take the liberty of using me to frighten people?"

"Oh, now, Mrs. Stevens, don't get angry! Any stepmother would have been the same. He only took you because you were handy, I know. He—he didn't mean anything uncomplimentary."

"He didn't? Well, I'll make him pay for it, all the same!" exclaimed the other, bitterly. "I always knew that your father abhors me, although he conceals it very well. But he has no right to use my name this way, and he shall suffer for it! If you will keep him quiet, and not tell him that you have told me of his insolence, I'll make him rue the day he thought of it!"

Lillian clasped her hands again. "Can you, really?" she asked. "Poor old dad! You mustn't hurt him, really, you know. But I should so like to turn the tables on him. How can it be done?"

"I must consider. Let's put our heads together and contrive a plan."

A day or two later the plan came to a head, when Mr. Morse entered his parlour, just before dinner, to find Lillian and Mrs. Stevens awaiting him. With a sickening foreboding of evil, he strove to retreat, but Mrs. Stevens forestalled him. "Henry, dear!" she exclaimed, coming quickly forward and extending both hands. "Henry, dear, your daughter, Lillian, has welcomed me to your home, and there is no longer any objection to our union. I am yours; take me!" She stood near him, with downcast eyes, apparently waiting for him to take her in his arms.

Mr. Morse drew back, with a horrified look. "Good heavens!" he gasped, as the perspiration started on his brow, "I—I—Oh, Lillian, what a horrible mess you have gotten me into!"

"Why, father, what do you mean?"

"It's all a mistake, madam! I don't want you to be mine. I don't want anybody to be mine! I—Oh, Lillian, help your father! Explain to Mrs. Stevens!"

Lillian's heart melted at the appeal, but she hardened herself, and replied, coolly: "Why, father, what is the matter? You told me yourself that Mrs. Stevens was one of the sweetest women that you ever met!"

"Yes, but—but—Oh, Lillian, I don't want to marry again. I don't —"

"But, father," persisted Lillian, remorselessly, "you told me about it your own self."

"I was only joking. I wanted you to give up reporting. I never asked Mrs. Stevens to marry me. I never thought of such a thing. Madam, you are honest. Did I ever say a word of love to you?"

"Henry, dear Henry!" murmured Mrs. Stevens, her head still bent downward.

Mr. Morse groaned aloud, and the heart of his daughter was moved by his distress.

"Will you promise never to try to deceive me again, father?" asked Lillian.

"Never! Never! I promise!" cried Mr. Morse, forlornly.

"Well," said Lillian, slowly, "in that case, I think he is sufficiently punished, doctor."

"I suppose so, too," said Doctor Stevens, suddenly looking up. "Although it seems to me, your ideas of punishment need a little revision. Mr. Morse, I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth; but the next time you take liberties with the name of an unprotected woman, remember me, and don't do it!"

"I won't—I mean, I will!" exclaimed Mr. Morse, delightedly. "And, madam, I beg to inform you that, although I cannot marry you, I shall always retain for you the highest respect, and —"

"There, there, no more is necessary! Besides —"

"Besides," interrupted Lillian, "besides, dinner is getting cold."