

Whispering Wings

A Charming Tale of Hope and Love

By LILIAN DUCEY

ILLUSTRATED BY MARCEL OLIS



HE took the three flights to their little Harlem apartment two steps at a time. But it wasn't the athletic effort that made Peter short-breathed as much as the excitement caused by a long cherished desire which suddenly promised fulfilment.

As he fitted the key in the lock and swung through the doorway, he wanted to hoot and shout also. And he thought he couldn't wait an instant longer to tumble it all out for his bride of a month to exclaim over—or just to love him with her eyes, as she often did. How he gloried in that look! He would have moved Heaven and Earth, ripped the stars from the firmament, snatched at the moon and tossed it at her pretty feet (if such deeds were possible) just to see her blue eyes deepen with that warm light which burned for him alone.

And Grace wasn't at home!

It was a profound disappointment, although he knew he was early—early by a full hour. She was probably doing a last piece of marketing; she did wonders with the twenty-five dollars a week which he earned. But she wouldn't have to plot and plan much longer how to make a dollar do the work of two. Not that they weren't having the most wonderful time in the world hunting bargains and deciding on the most advantageous method of securing them—

In anticipation of her delight when he told her that with the next week he would begin to drop fifty dollars into her lap on Saturday nights he did an elephantine pas seul in the middle of the tiny living room. But catching a glimpse of himself in the mantle mirror and realising his exuberance was exceeding the bounds of fitness when indulged in without an audience, he dropped into a chair with theatrically assumed dignity.

NOW the chair that Peter had chosen to receive his six foot, one hundred and sixty pounds of happiness happened to be the chair that stood before Grace's desk—that dear little desk, as daintily fashioned as she. Peter would never write at it on account of his size, and he always regarded it with awe, as he did many of the things which were so intimately hers. For it had so happened that when he had married Grace all he had to do was to "hang up his hat" as the saying goes. This little nest had been hers, and her mother's before that mother died.

He fingered the note paper, slanting largely in the minute pigeon holes. He pressed the pen that lay there to his lips. It made him feel good just to touch the things that she touched. He even drew out the drawer in daring recognition of his rights, the rights their love had given him. And that was how he happened on a little leather book.

WHEN Peter took up the little book it was with reverent fingers. In that same way he was wont to touch a pair of her slippers, or the toilet accessories of ivory that adorned her dresser.

When he began to read he smiled to himself. And over the first page his inward comments were something like this: "Funny little girl—Little angel!—God played her a trick when he gave her to me. But I love her—and I don't care! I may not be worthy of her, but for that matter neither is any other man. So I'll just keep her, hold her against all odds. And I'll rake the earth to give her what she wants. There's nothing I can't do with her to work for. I've ousted Hemmingway. A year at his job and I'll beat out Tompkins too." But when he became thoroughly interested he made no inarticulate comments.

And this is what he read:

"DEAR, dear mother mine! I'm down here and you're up there. But still I mean to write to you. Why not? Indeed I'm even hoping some angel necromancy will touch my written words with light and flash them on to you, and that you'll whisper back—a whisper that will wrap me round with sweet content even though my earthly ears remain too crude to catch it.

"Mother dear, it's only whimsy fancy born of sheer

JUST as you love the glory of an Autumn morn, the beauty of the tinted leaves, you will be happy in reading this wholesome little story by Lilian Ducey. She, herself, needs no introduction to you. She has reflected her charming personality through many a little tale of hope and love and human happiness.

"Whispering Wings" is no exception. It is exhilarating, refreshing. It soothes like the cool freshness of sweet-scented flowers after a summer shower. We pass the fragrance on, to you. We know you will welcome it.

—The Editors.

truths and reservations—Oh yes, I have often failed in frankness!—can never screen me any more. You'll see my naked soul.

"MOTHER, there's more to that last observation than just the grave, cold statement. My soul will have to flower forth and beautify itself, I see. I'll have to prune and snip and clear away many a thought and word and deed. For in the garden of your heart I may have seemed—I'm sure I did!—quite the nicest girl you knew; but now you'll know, Ah me! Ah me! My many meannesses, my vanities, my frivolous desires.

"Mother, I am living exactly as you planned for me that last, long day while I watched the gray of death creep slowly over your features and the brightness fade from your eyes. Our four little rooms are immaculate, and the woman who cleans them for me also attends to my laundry. But oh, how I miss your dainty though substantial meals! And oh, those many little services, a button here, a darn there, the ribbon in my underwear! Ah, why can't angel mothers lend such helping hands? Yes, I miss you, miss you! Great waves of yearning for your bodily presence wash over me every now and then. I can't withstand them. Mother, I want you!—but not only for your helping hands. Mother, I need you! Mother dear—

"LAST Sunday's climax savored, dear, of dirge and dew. I did not mean to end it so. I began so bravely, so sensitive of your nearness, and then suddenly I found myself adrift alone on a sea of lonesomeness out of which no human paddling would take me, and from which I could not even glimpse the truth that there were other shores where angel mothers dwell. I need not tell you, bridging the ineffable has moments when the obvious overshadows it completely.

"And yet, consciously and unconsciously I have felt you during all this busy week,—in the crowd and crush of subway mobs, an invincible armor that secured against defilement; in the sunshine which streamed through the office windows, a warming cheering influence; then at home, in our little home—ah! but here at times, when gloaming meets the night and the shadows creep, to sit imagining you hear a step you'll never hear again and a voice, a voice that is now only the far, faint lingering of an echo.

"Mother dear, the tears are streaming down my cheeks again. My throat aches with them. And in my breast an ache too, where my heart lies.

"But you said I was not to grieve—well I try to obey. You said also that even the death of the best-beloved becomes, after a time,

only an item in the years. I do not even refute that; otherwise how could people live and smile, search for pleasure, dream of happiness, await the onslaught of the years? Yet the void your going has made no invisible angel can invade—and fill. A step, the cadence of a mother voice—no whispering angel wings can quite replace them.

"MOTHER of mine, to-day I packed away your little sewing basket, the many colored silks, the patches. In it was the unfinished doilie that was to adorn our dining table. And I could not help it, but the threaded needle there in place ready for the next stitch, seemed so symbolical of limiting human power, the majesty of death over life. For an instant I said to myself: What is the use?—How futile all things seemed, hopes and fears and aspirations. Why go on? Why not stop—just there, never move, never sleep, never eat? And then I knew. In some vague way it glimmered forth to me: the mighty scheme of things; each living, breathing bit of flesh and blood an atom in Creation's plan, each soul not yet disembodied, a vital spark touched with the witchery of life, one link of an endless chain stretching from the beginning of time on through generation after generation to the last trumpet call of Judgment Day.

"And so I did not pack away that doilie with the basket, for the needle to rust in the linen and the colors to fade in obscurity. No; I realised I must finish the work you began; I must do my part. And when my time comes, God grant I may have added a link to that chain, hands of my hands, flesh of my flesh, to take up the unfinished tasks I too will leave behind.

"ANOTHER Sunday, mother dear! And they are the only days when the hurrying hours are winged to a lesser speed, making it possible for me to turn to this little leather bound book.

"I'm here at my desk—this inviting desk with just room enough for your elbow—this dear, little desk! But then it isn't any more inviting than the rest of the house. Isn't this a dear little home, mother?—these four windows looking down upon an unpretentious city street? Elegance is not its slogan, but cheer and charm and deliciousness. It steals into your eyes and makes your heart glad. We made bricks without much straw, but the result is nevertheless entrancing.

"TO-DAY my heart is brimful, full of many things.

Seated here I am bathed in the glorious spring sunshine. Even city surroundings cannot make me insensible to the season. All of which makes me remember how you always gloried in the less arrogant moods of the years—as you used to call spring and autumn.

"Mother, I feel very close to you just now, as if I might be resting in your arms, the breeze in my hair your breath. The very rays of the sun the quality of warm, human hands—the hands one loves. Are you in it, dear?—part of it? Are you hovering about me whispering sweets that I cannot comprehend, but which make my soul feel buoyant?

"I feel that's so. And feeling so, it compensates in a measure for the personal need of you. But I often wonder whether I will ever have any one else to really love me as you did—not to take your place, for that could never be, but to be part of my life. Perhaps—

"Oh, what nonsense am I drifting into writing!

"Mother dear, one thing is certain: All my life I shall endeavor to live as you would have me live, lending a helping hand where need of one prevails, doing right as I see it and as I think you would see it; then too, I will always crush each instinctive meanness fast as it is born and never, never, be part or party to an act that could cause spiritual (CONTINUED ON PAGE 41)

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