

Fate and Marriage

By Clara Mulholland

CHAPTER XXVII.

Just before Sir Peter arrived Lady Linton was looking anything but her best. There was a frown upon her brow, an angry light in her blue eyes, that sadly spoiled her beauty.

You are so generous; you would let her spend as she pleased. But you have never, wise man that you are, been tempted to such a folly as matrimony. Now, have you?

"Every day he becomes more unbearable," she muttered, clenching her fists tightly. "He may bet and play cards and lose money as he pleases, but if I have a bill a little larger than he thinks fit, he grows stungy and mean to an alarming extent, and there is a row. My drawer is now full of unpaid bills, and the creditors are pressing. He laughed scornfully and flatly refused to pay them, when I ventured to tell him of one or two to-day. So anything may happen unless, my only hope is in Sir Peter Goldsmid. He is rich and generous, and has something to gain by keeping me as a friend."

"My dear Sir Peter," she cried, holding out both hands at once and gliding forward softly to meet him, "how quite too charming! I was afraid, really quite afraid, to dare to send you such a short invitation. But, knowing what a true friend you are—"

"You felt sure I would come, delighted, if only fortunate enough to be free. The fates favored me, and so here I am. You got my telegram, dear Lady Linton, of course?"

"To my joy, yes—whilst dressing a few moments ago."

"His eyes rested for a moment upon the elegant satin gown and rich lace, upon the diamonds on her neck and in her hair.

"A most successful toilette. Your ladyship understands the art of dressing better than any lady I know. You are looking charming to-night."

"But as he made this speech with a view to putting his hostess in good humor, he remembered Margaret's simple costume, and smiled. She required but little adornment. She 'walked in beauty,' but the beauty was all her own, and required neither satin nor lace to set it off.

"Base flatterer!" Lady Linton cried, with an arch glance, far from guessing where his thoughts had led him.

"Not at all. I speak quite truly. The gown is in exquisite taste."

"She sighed, and caressed the lace upon the bodice with loving fingers. 'If it had not to be paid for, yes. But the day of reckoning always comes, Sir Peter.'

"Well, really, and," with a little laugh, "you will ask for interest also, Sir Peter?"

"Not also. That—your good-will and help with Margaret is the interest I require."

"Oh," laughing lightly, well pleased at his easy conditions, "you may be sure I'll do my best. And now, how shall I begin? Shall I get Margaret up to town again?"

"No. Leave her where she is. I saw her to-day. She is happy at Riversdale."

"You saw her to-day? Then you saw my poor Hugo, I suppose?"

"Certainly. He too is happy at Riversdale."

"But frail and feeble as ever?"

"I fear so. And greatly enamored of a young gentleman—a namesake of Lord Linton's, one John Fane, whom Mrs. Danvers has foolishly engaged as steward, and seems inclined to treat as a friend."

"Oh!" Lady Linton glanced at him quickly. "And does Margaret favor him too?"

"I scarcely know. But he is a promising young fellow, and fit for something better than acting as steward. I am taking him into my office. I am going to make his fortune."

"How kind of you! So he is to come to town, and Margaret is to stay in the country?"

"Certainly, the facts pointed that way, and were accepted without dispute at the time. The papers told the thrilling tale, and no one stepped forward to say it was not true."

"Because there was no one to do so." Lady Linton's hands trembled a little as she took up a small vase of roses from a table, and placed it upon a high-standing cabinet. "And I cannot think why you are so anxious to raise the question now," with a reproachful glance, "when you love Margaret, and are so desirous of marrying her."

"Sir Peter smiled, and went over to her side. 'My dear Lady Linton, I merely put the case—imagined what might possibly be true—asked, for the sake of information, whether your husband had any doubts as to the identity of Madeline Delorme.'

"Had he entertained such doubts, it is likely that he would confide them to me?"

"I suppose not. And yet—However, don't trouble about the matter. I am not, you may be sure, anxious to injure Margaret in any way. And if, he laid great stress on the word, 'you help me, and all goes well, I shall never raise the question.'"

"And if you don't succeed?"

"Bah! We'll not think of anything so miserable—I've sworn to win Margaret, and I will. You must urge Lord Linton to favor me—before everyone."

"She raised her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders, then laughed. 'I'll tell him—and shall I mention why it is advisable he should do so?'"

"I trust you will. He will then understand everything."

"He won't like it. And he is anxious that Margaret should marry Lord Kelmford."

"Sir Peter grew suddenly scarlet. 'So he has told me. But he may change his mind. Some one is coming upstairs, Lady Linton, so there is no time for more: I'll expect your little note to-morrow, and you shall not be kept waiting, I promise you.'

"Thank you; you are more than kind."

"The door opened, and Sir Peter turned away.

"I should just say he was, and much more than nice. We'd miss him terribly, Meg, if he went away."

"Margaret forgot the object she was looking for, and started round with a quick flush.

"Went away? My dear Hugo, what nonsense. He's not going away."

"Then she laughed, and, picking up her work again, she said quietly: 'Who put that into your head, I'd like to know?'"

"Aunt Miriam. I heard her praising John yesterday to a lady who was visiting her, and she said: 'I cannot expect to keep Mr. Fane long as steward. He is really fit for better things.'"

"That's true," Margaret murmured low; "I often thought it."

"That's what the lady said; and then she asked if John was a relation."

"Oh, people often ask that when they hear his name is Fane."

"Well, she declared her reason for saying so was his likeness to my father."

"Margaret laughed gaily. 'She was dreaming. Why, John is dark and—'"

"It was expression and a kind of family look. But Aunt Miriam said she couldn't see it, and that he was no relation."

"Of course not. Those Fanes come from New Zealand. Their father was a farmer there. They belong to quite a different family."

"Yes, but John's a gentleman, Meg. Now, isn't he?"

"Yes, to be sure he is."

"It's odd that one gentleman should only be a steward," the child said dreamily, "and another a lord."

"Margaret turned suddenly and kissed him. 'Don't be perplexed and bother your little head trying to fit in puzzles of that kind,' she said, laughing. 'There are stranger things than that in life, Hugo.'"

"There are, I suppose. But, Meg, if John goes away I shall go too. I don't think I could bear Riversdale without him."

"Foolish little boy. Now, that's going too far. But don't worry. He's not going. Have you looked at his photographs yet?"

"Yes; they are very interesting. And some of the groups done when John was a child are puzzling. There's a man—a tall man constantly in them who is like, very like, my father—though handsomer and finer looking. I'll show you one or two and see what you think about it."

"And he began to turn over the leaves of one of John's big albums."

"Don't mind now, dear," Margaret cried quickly, as a large black dog bounded suddenly up to the couch.

"Here is 'Boy.' Mr. Fane cannot be far away, and we must not ask him impertinent questions about his relations."

"I'd love to find he was a relation. I'd like him better than anyone in the world for a brother or cousin."

"Margaret smiled and put her finger to her lip. 'Hush, dear; it's foolish to cry for the moon, remember.'"

Hugo fixed his great dark circled eyes upon her face. 'Moon? I don't understand. John's not a moon.'

"I wonder if he knows Mr. Fairfax?"

"I'm sure he wouldn't know anyone so stupid. John, John, I am so glad to see you," half-rising in his eagerness to greet his friend. "Do you know an artist fellow called Fairfax?"

John shook hands with Margaret, then turned away quickly to the impatient boy. His eyes were heavy and his face pale. The news he had to communicate was painful. The child's affectionate greeting and the girl's look of pleasure as she bade him "good morning" made it more difficult, more trying even than it had seemed on the way from Sturry.

(To be Continued.)

OUT OF DEBT. It helps Betty, you might try it some time, unless, of course, you don't need any help—perhaps you like to wipe dishes! Betty—dear me, how Betty doesn't like to! Although now it isn't nearly as bad, since she made a play of it. It's almost fun now.

When you are ten years old, you can make a play out of almost anything. That is the advantage of being ten years old. You will be surprised how much it helps—ask Betty.

"Come, girls—dishes!" mamma calls, after tea. In the mornings and at noons there are lessons, and mamma washes them herself.

"Dishes! Dishes! Call for Volunteers!" and two volunteers appear. Glory is the older, and washes; Betty wipes. She waits until the drainer is full of glasses and spoons. Then she begins.

"Oh, dear!" she says, "how many debts I owe! I must begin right off and pay 'em up. It will never do to let this go on any longer! There, there's one debt paid a ready. I begin to feel a little relieved. And that's one's paid, and that one, and that one! I'll work very hard, and p'raps some day," sighing, "I'll be out of debt!"

She wipes away busily, a little scowl between her eyes. The tumbler debts, are all paid. The plate and saucer ones come next, and she settles them.

"Why, I'm getting along beautifully!" she murmurs, presently, and the scowl is certainly smoothing out. There is a breathless last minute or two, and then a shout of triumph—"Done!"

The towel waves, Betty dances on her toes, the Gray Princess wakes up and purrs her congratulations. Great times!

"Oh," breathes Betty, "it feel so good to be out of debt!"—Annie H. Donnell.

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