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HAWTHORNDEN

A STORY OF EVERY DAY LIFE

BY MRS. CLARA M. THOMPSON

CHAPTER XXVII

MARRIED IN HASTE

Mr. Benton was seated under the steep of the cottage at Ingleswood, in the early spring twilight, when he read this letter...

"Mr. Benton, I am glad to hear that you are well and happy. I hope you will find the letter I have just written to you interesting and helpful."

"It is too late to hope?" inquired Mrs. Benton, after reading the epistle through without pause or exclamation...

"It is all plain to me, Lucy," he replied, in a voice scarcely audible from strong emotion...

"But is it too late?" again inquired the mother.

"God knows," he said; "if Marion with her powerful will has become entangled with this man, she would hardly be influenced by the judgment or advice of a parent."

Never before had he referred to their own very early and somewhat imprudent marriage, against the approval of parents...

"Will you see her here?" said the Colonel, "or will you go to the library?"

"I will meet them together," he said very angrily; "I will know in his presence the result of my coming."

The Colonel stepped across the hall and ushered him into the room unannounced. Here was a recouper indeed, Stapleton, the thorough, good-natured man of the world...

"Do you know him?" inquired the wife; "the Colonel speaks of reformed habits."

"I knew him well, fifteen years since as a good-natured fellow about town, fast in many ways; he then spent the income of a large fortune in drinking and carousing."

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Mr. Stapleton was impatient; why should a man of fifty years defer his marriage? Matters were perhaps hastened by a report which Dr. Harland maliciously brought home, that a former flame of cousin Tom's had just arrived in town...

It was the closing eve of the month of May, the day before the wedding; a tender letter from her mother was in her hand, couched in those terms which only a mother can use.

It was dusk of a moonlight eve, the lamps were not lighted, and there was great quiet in the room, a silence almost ominous; no one observed the terrible anguish that crossed her brow as she sat gazing into the street...

"Bless my heart!" he exclaimed, coming forward and giving his hand cordially to the young man. "Come in here," he added, and remembering all that necessarily followed this visit, he opened the door into his own private parlor.

"I suppose you came, principally to look after Marion," he said after a pause that was terrible to both. "I hope you may be in time to make matters all straight again; she has gone to ride just now with—my cousin, Tom Stapleton; these constant attentions trouble me, but you know I feel she was safe."

"The hot blood mounted to the temples of the young man as he heard this, there was more to be feared than he had thought; he had not believed that Marion could already put another in his place. At that moment he heard her ringing voice in the hall, and the tones of her attendant as he followed closely upon her steps."

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the bright brown locks were shorn of their lustre, and silver threads were scattered about the temples. He looked older than his brother. Here was a mission for Rosine, a sister's mission, to bring back to the scarred heart of the brother, trust and faith. Diligently she worked at this task through that long summer, waiting for her own restoration to her parents quietly and hopefully, and in the meantime working constantly at that work which the good God had placed directly in her pathway.

There was no word of Laura from the lips of her husband through all that long time, not even in the abandonment of a visit to his grandfather, which Rosine made in company with Captain Hartland, the Doctor hoping that the mountain air of that region might restore his exhausted powers. Twice since his return, Laura had essayed to go to him, but had fainted in the preparation; she had also written two notes, which had been returned to her unopened. Dora could not help her, for the Commodore had been stricken by disease, and was more exacting than ever, not suffering his daughter out of his sight. At length Laura ventured her last effort, she wrote to the Colonel an imploring note, begging him to use his influence to gain her only one interview; it was an humble, beseeching letter, and Colonel Hartland's heart was softened; he called Aleck to his private room, and gave him the note.

The young man only glanced at the first sentence and threw it from him. "Base woman!" he exclaimed, "if she torments me thus, I will take legal measures to be rid of her; if she would leave me alone, I would be content to remain as I am, to save her from shame. Why should I care for her shame?" he added, grinding his teeth. "She gave little heed to it when she gave herself to dishonor—to infamy."

"Then you have no doubt of her criminality?" inquired Colonel Hartland.

"There, sir, is our wedding-ring," he replied, with unmitigated scorn in his voice, drawing the bright circle from his finger—"our wedding ring! given over to the villain to whom she had given herself! Infamous! Do you think I wish to bandy words with her?" he said, striding across the floor in his wrath. Colonel Hartland said no more.

TO BE CONTINUED

ST. ANTHONY OF THE SINGLE ARM

"An' Dehors!" the thin sharp voice clearly cut through the air and an object projected from a window of the house fell upon a rubbish heap. "Meline knew both the voice and its owner. Paul Sehr, the infidel collier, has just moved into the house from his former shop lower down in the village. He was an old resident of the neighborhood who for years had shocked the people by virulent attacks on religion and the Church. Otherwise he was a worthy man and did his work well."

Meline walked slowly to the heap, curious to see what had been thrown there. She walked very slowly, as her health was poor and she was easily fatigued. She looked around for the object cast away, and to her astonishment found it to be a figure of St. Anthony. She picked it up and dusted it reverently with her handkerchief. The figure, a simple one of wood, had had hard treatment, as one of the arms was missing; as diligent search failed to discover the fragment, Meline concluded that it had been previously detached. She walked to the house and tapped timidly at the door. Sehr thrust his head out of a second story window and glared at the visitor.

"M. Sehr," said Meline, "you threw the figure of St. Anthony out of the window. Is it that you do not want it?"

"Why do you ask?" he queried.

"I would very much like to have it, if you do not want it," answered Meline.

"Do I want it?" he cried, sarcastically. "Surely I would not throw away something I wanted! No! I do not want it. Some simpleton like yourself, pardon me, Meline, but it is the truth!—evidently believed there was some virtue in a piece of wood shaped like a man. I do not. Take it, and I advise you to make your fire with it."

Meline was so terrified at the violence of the man that she hurried off with the figure without thanking him for it. She climbed wearily to her little room and sat down on the bed. Her tired feet felt, and how the little walk she had taken had weakened her! She knew she was growing worse each day, and that the dull pain which kept her awake at night and which she bore silently on her mother's account. At times she thought she would think too, that she had not long to live. She had seen her mother turn away and wipe her eyes when she looked at her—and how pitifully Pere Ribot had spoken to her after Mass that morning! Meline was a pious girl, and if she must die, she felt that she had nothing to fear. But, then, came the thought of mother and father—and Ernest.

She and Ernest had grown up together, and today as she sat there so sad and weary, her thoughts flew back to that sunny May day when Ernest had bashfully told her how dear she was to him and she had timidly whispered the word he

longed to hear. Then they had walked to her home, and when he mere had glanced at Meline's face as they entered the door, she kissed her daughter and embraced Ernest. When M. Dourges le pere came in he slapped Ernest on the back and grinned all over his face. M. Dourges was a man of few words.

When, the next Sunday, Ernest accompanied her to his mother's house—the father had died years ago—Madame Perin showed such joy over her son's choice and was so loving and kind that Meline cried for very thankfulness.

There was no talk of immediate marriage—for among the villagers engagements are long and a man and woman must see their way very clearly before they venture on this important step—but was ever a love match so full of sunshine and promise? And now was she to die? She looked at the poor one-armed figure in her lap. "Saint Anthony," she cried, "pray that I may not die. Pray that I may have Ernest!"

Then she placed the figure on a shelf just over her bed.

The summer had passed with its hot days and its thunder and hailstorms, and now the frost sparkled in the morning on the tufts of grass. Winter came swiftly, and by all Saints there had been durrles of snow and the ground was frozen.

In the lee of Cabot's baker shop, sheltered from the cold wind that blew down the street, Pere Ribot and Doctor Lebrun talked earnestly. The priest's face was very sad as he listened to the vehement speech of the doctor, who had a kind heart, though he was rather snappish and gruff, and became violently enraged whenever anyone charged him with doing a kind act.

"And you can give me no hope of Meline's recovery?" asked Pere Ribot.

"Ma foi, how can I? She has a malignant tumor which is dragging her to her grave."

"Can nothing be done, doctor? Is it absolutely incurable?"

"Yes and no," answered the doctor. If she were the daughter of a rich man and could afford the treatment of a skilled surgeon, she might recover. The chances would be in her favor as she lived simply and breathed pure air all her life. That is an advantage she would have over those accustomed to the more enervating life in the great cities. But, then, she is the daughter of a poor peasant—and therefore she must die."

You believe there are physicians who could cure her?"

"Physicians, no—surgeons, yes. There are skilled men in Paris—among them, Professor Maupin, the brother of our esteemed fellow villager, who could doubtless effect a cure by an operation. Maupin has a great reputation and has lost only one or two out of ten in similar cases, and I think he could save Meline's life if the operation could be performed shortly. But it's a question of money, mon Pere—of money!"

"Can you do nothing of yourself?" asked Pere Ribot.

"Sapristi, what am I," cried the doctor—"a plain village doctor. I can set a break, amputate a limb, pull a tooth and handle the cases that come ordinarily within the scope of a man such as myself, but I cannot compare myself with such a man as Maupin. I am not equipped to handle such cases and would absolutely decline to undertake one."

"How much money would be required to procure the services of such a man as Maupin?"

"Such a man would not consider a fee less than two thousand francs—possibly more."

"If we could—" began Pere Ribot.

"But we cannot," interrupted the doctor. "You can dismiss the idea of getting that much money together. Why, not a centime would be left in the village, leaving out Merchant Maupin, of course."

They parted, but from the expression on Pere Ribot's face he had not dismissed the subject.

In the twilight he walked slowly in the direction of M. Maupin's house. He passed for a resolute man, but he was evidently depressed about his mission, for he walked by the house twice before he knocked.

M. Maupin received him cordially. He was, he claimed, a good friend of the Church and frequently made small donations when besought by the Pere, but for individual charity he was not famous. Pere Ribot plunged at once into the matter that had brought him to the merchant's house.

"M. Maupin," he said, "there is now in the village a case where charity is needed and where it would be well placed. Meline Dourges is dying of a tumor which is beyond the skill of Doctor Lebrun. He is confident, however, that such a man as your brother could very likely effect a cure. He is a very famous man, but I hope he is not deaf to the call of the sufferer, and I hope you will lay the matter before him in such words as will influence him to come to the aid of one who is unable to pay for help, yet richly deserves it."

M. Maupin shook his head. "Mon Pere," he said, "you speak as a priest, but you are not speaking as a man of business. With you, money means a new suit once and a while, repairs to your church and the balance to charity. The honesty or professional man has other worries on his back. My brother demands and receives very large fees. He is obliged to live in a style befitting his position and his

expenses are very great. To leave Paris and spend two or three days here on a charitable call might result in the loss of a ten thousand franc fee, besides gravely disarranging his relations with his important clients. I could not ask it of him, mon Pere."

"Not to save a life?" asked Pere Ribot.

"His absence from Paris for two days might cause the death of one of his clients. You see, while he was trying to save this girl he might sacrifice another life."

"If M. Maupin," continued Pere Ribot, who was a hard man to heat, "such an arrangement is impossible if I could get together a fairly substantial sum to pay for a surgeon, would you help us make up the deficit?"

"Mon Pere, you came in a bad time. What with hailstorms in south France and floods in Italy my business is in a bad state. I ask for payment and receive petitions for extension. I cannot readily afford my usual outlay at this time."

Pere Ribot departed deeply disappointed at the result of his endeavor.

It began down about the fish market, did the gossip, and spread over the village as a ripple spreads over a puddle. "M. Maupin has been shot," "He shot himself," "He is dying," "He is dead." He is only slightly hurt." Then time waded a mighty hand and swept away the chaff and the facts remained.

M. Maupin had left the village that morning on a shooting excursion. In crossing over a dyke his gun was discharged and the load went into his leg. Doctor Lebrun was in attendance and had said that in his opinion, the wound was not dangerous.

But it was dangerous and gave no intimation of healing. In fact, blood poisoning was so imminent that Doctor Lebrun sent an urgent message to Professor Maupin in Paris to come at once to his brother's bedside.

The professor was marked contrast to his brother, the merchant. The latter was a smooth-faced, bald man, inclined to complacency, with a manner which was suavely itself. He could refuse a request with the utmost grace—and he refused a great many. The professor was thin, with an abundance of grizzled hair and a stiff grey beard. His manner was forbidding and his words curt and ungracious. His reputation was, however, very widespread, and he was held to be wealthy, and somewhat miserly.

With a few words he approved of all that Doctor Lebrun had done and acknowledged the necessity of an immediate operation. This was performed and the result was most promising.

That evening Professor Maupin took a walk in the village. He strode along, face down, oblivious alike of a splendid winter sunset and the salutation of the passers-by. At the corner of a byway he collided with Pere Ribot.

Priest and surgeon apologized. The one politely, the other gruffly. Pere Ribot inquired after M. Maupin. The professor was about to continue his walk, when the priest interposed. "I wish very much that I could interest you in another case, Professor Maupin."

"Ah," remarked the professor without interest.

Uncompromising to say the least, but Pere Ribot stood by his guns. In eloquent words he pictured the plight of Meline—the utter impossibility of sufficient money being raised to procure the surgical aid which in the opinion of Doctor Lebrun would most likely result in a cure.

"I hold," he concluded, "there is no more princely fee obtainable than the gratitude of deserving people and the knowledge that one has aided one of God's creatures."

"Mon Pere," replied the professor coldly, the calls upon my services are extremely exigent at present and my time is not my own. I regret that I must decline, as I leave for Paris tomorrow morning."

Then Pere Ribot drew his sword and threw away the scabbard. "Have a care, Professor Maupin," he said. "The eminent abilities which you possess are the gifts of God. Beware how you refuse to use those gifts in charity to one of God's creatures."

The professor shrugged his shoulders and continued his walk.

The following morning was very cold, and when Pere Ribot arose at five o'clock to prepare for the six o'clock Mass his teeth chattered. He descended the stairs by the light of a candle, and when he reached the bottom there came a knock at the door.

"A sick call," he murmured, and opened the door. When he saw his visitor he came near dropping the candle in amazement.

Professor Maupin stood on the threshold.

Pere Ribot made him enter and be seated at the same time apologizing for the absence of heat in the room. The professor cut him short.

"Mon Pere," he said, and his words and manner evidenced great perturbation. "I have had a disturbed and restless night. I had a dream—no, rather a vision, as a dream could not have made such an impression on my mind. There appeared to me a figure which I recognized as Saint Anthony. His countenance was sorrowful and the words he spoke reproachful. You have refused the only request I have made of you, were the words I heard. Now, mon Pere, the only call is the one you made last evening in behalf of a young girl and I shall

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