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LUCY DRAKE'S DUPLICITY

The Story of a Scheming Friend

By CLARISSA MACKIE

I had stayed away from Quince Harbor for two months, and, although a small seaport is a dull place indeed during the midwinter season, I felt a longing to go down there in December and see how the cedar clothed bluffs looked with a snowy overdress. I wanted to see the steely blue of the bay under gray December skies; I wanted to hear the harsh cry of the gulls as they wheeled over the water; I wanted to partake of the delightful dullness of Quince Harbor in winter.

Now, Captain Barnabas Fish, my staunch friend and fellow fisherman, companion of many delightful excursions on and about Quince Harbor, had written me a most mysteriously worded letter, in which he hinted at his engagement to Miss Maria Weeks, with whom I had boarded when in the seaport, and suggested that a conversation with me would enlighten him concerning several rather problematical social questions.

"Lord bless you, Miss Telham, I was just wishing for you," cried Miss Maria, running down the walk to meet me. "You came in direct answer to prayer."

I wondered whether it was not Captain Barnabas' unspoken prayer that had brought me, but I paid the stage fare and followed Miss Maria, who was staggering under the weight of my bags, into the warm house.

"How is Lucy Drake?" was my first tactless question, but I was interested in Lucy, who lived next-door to the Weeks' house.

Miss Maria tossed her head as she arose from placing my bags on the floor. "So far as I know, Lucy's all right," she replied rather tartly.

"In the last letter you wrote to me you said that Lucy Drake was to be your bridesmaid," I observed as I removed my outdoor garments with Maria's help.

"Bridesmaid, indeed," she sniffed scornfully. "I did ask her to be, and glad enough she was to accept, never having been so near the altar before in her life—not that way, I mean—and I even offered to provide the gown for her, pink silk with pink roses." Maria loosened my hair and brushed vigorously at the tangles. "Pink silk!" she repeated. "What do you think of that?"

"It would have been lovely," I murmured, "but tell me why she refused to act as—"

"She didn't refuse. She accepted, and the dress is all made and the bouquet is ordered from Smithville. The captain saw to all that himself."

"Tell me about it, Miss Maria. I shall never know until you do," I urged.

"There isn't much to tell, only Lucy has taken full charge of my wedding and is bossing everything. Miss Telham, she actually advised the captain to wear one of his old yachting uniforms and call it a marine wedding. She thought it would be something like the military weddings she reads about in the papers."

"And what does Captain Barnabas say?" I asked curiously.

"I thought he was kinder taken with the idea at first, but now Lucy has talked so much about it that he's tired of it. He don't know what to wear after all's said and done. Not being married before and getting the experience of having had a wedding is a great drawback." She sighed as she led the way downstairs.

"It must be," I murmured, wondering what questions the doubtful captain wished to put before me. "And so Lucy Drake will not be the bridesmaid after all," I said, disappointed at this outcome.

"Oh, yes, she says she will, and I haven't got any objection so long as she don't trim up the church so it looks like the bottom of the ocean. I reckon she'd like to have clogs shells all up the aisle and an orchestra of those little fiddler crabs, with seaweed dripping all around. She even wanted me to have my wedding dress trimmed with dingle shells and seaweed."

"Lucy certainly is romantic," I observed soothingly. "Do let me see your wedding gown, Miss Maria, if it is ready."

"It's all done; it's here in the spare room." This spinster of forty-five years unemotionally led the way to the little bedroom that opened off the sitting room and prepared to show me her simple trousseau.

The wedding dress was of gray silk, pearly gray and almost stiff enough to stand alone. It was made simply, but I knew it would be becoming to Maria, who was plump and pink cheeked, with soft brown hair and dark eyes.

"It is lovely," I said, kissing the bride to be on both pink cheeks. "Don't fret about Lucy Drake. I know it's going to be the loveliest wedding you ever saw!"

"I'm worried about it just the same, Miss Telham. I haven't told you all there is to it. Lucy has been teasing the captain to have Orville Beers for his best man. She's keeping company with Orville."

"Is the captain willing?"

"Mercy, no! Orville and him ain't spoke for twenty years. Seems he and the captain were both after the same girl in the days I mean, and Orville got her. Of course the captain got all over

it, only he's always been mad at Orville because he got the best of him. Orville's wife died last spring, and he's been after Lucy Drake. She hinted that she'd rather have a white silk dress because she could use it later for her own wedding."

When I was alone I could not resist a hearty laugh at the thriftiness of Lucy Drake. She was Maria's age, but the difference in the two women was marked. Maria in her blunt, plain way seemed to behold her marriage to Captain Fish as the start of a new life, a life of congenial, affectionate companionship, with a placid happiness that should last them during the remainder of their half lived lives. Her love for the handsome old captain was sincere to the core. Her contempt for the foolish romantic notions of Lucy Drake was equally sincere. I was vexed at Lucy for intruding her notions in the midst of Maria's quiet little wedding preparations.

The wedding was set for Thursday evening, and because Maria's house was small and because everybody in Quince Harbor would expect to witness the marriage of two such popular persons, it was decided to hold the ceremony in the church. Captain Fish had ordered palms and white flowers from the Smithville florist to decorate the church.

In the meantime Lucy Drake darted in and out of the house her thin cheeks pink with excitement her straight fair hair flying wildly about. She was brimming over with a hundred suggestions to enhance the novelty of the occasion.

"You'll only be married once, Maria," she urged.

"I hope so," retorted Maria loftily. "Do as you please about your own wedding, Lucy, but leave mine alone, please."

"A double wedding would have been romantic," murmured Lucy regretfully.

"You and Orville settled it then?" Maria's eyes seemed to be relieved. I wondered if she did not harbor a small jealousy of Lucy Drake.

"Yes—look!" Lucy held out a thin scraggy hand and displayed on the third finger of her left hand a large amethyst ring. "It belonged to my first wife," she murmured sentimentally. "I'll help you get up a big wedding, Lucy," said Maria generously.

Lucy gave her a queer look. "You can remember what you said afterward," she said and turning on her heel, walked out.

"What did she mean?" I asked.

Maria shrugged her plump shoulders. "I don't know. She's acted queer about this wedding business from the beginning. She told somebody that she had always said she would be married before I was and she would yet—I can't see how she's going to manage it."

Captain Fish asked my advice about the wedding garments he must wear and I answered him frankly, putting aside Lucy Drake's suggestion of the "marine wedding" and taking into careful consideration the time-worn customs of Quince Harbor weddings of the past. Beyond that he made no allusion to any doubts he might have had concerning Lucy Drake and her ideas concerning weddings in general and his in particular.

Thursday was a hurricane of wind and rain and not a soul ventured to cross the long road that led to the west side. Maria had no near relatives and so I assisted her to dress for her wedding. It cleared at six o'clock, and we heard the wheels of the carriage grinding through the wet sand to the gate. The ceremony was to be at half-past six and the reception was to be held after the return of the captain and his bride from their honeymoon.

"I went over to Lucy's, but the house was all locked up, so I guess she has gone—but I didn't hear any carriage," remarked Maria as we drove to the church.

"She probably went on ahead—she will be waiting for you in the vestibule," I said.

It was so. Lucy, gorgeous in pink silk with a pink tulle veil floating above her wisps of fair hair, was in the vestibule, and beside her was Orville Beers, a very short, fat, ruddy visaged man, now dressed in extreme nautical attire, although to my own knowledge he was a plain farmer and could not bear the thought of salt water.

People were gathered about Lucy and Orville, and there was much chatting and buzzing, and it was not until I drew nearer that I realized what had happened.

Lucy Drake had taken advantage of the early gathering of wedding guests to be married to Orville Beers then and there. That ceremony was over. Lucy was married first after all, and for her the wedding decorations had served.

I congratulated the couple with as good grace as my indignation would allow and heard Maria quietly following suit. The people crowded back into the church, and Orville Beers tiptoed squeakily up the aisle to take his place beside Captain Barnabas. I could see the captain's handsome, snow crowned head as he stood there waiting for his bride. His face was quite pale, but he was looking down the aisle toward Maria, who was approaching him. She was walking alone, with her eyes confidently meeting his. Behind Maria minced Lucy Beers, a shallow smile wreathing her face.

As I looked at the two who had been cheated out of their wedding by Lucy's sensational act I realized that they were quite indifferent to that. All that the captain saw was Maria's faithful dark eyes coming to him; all that the bride saw was the loveliest in her captain's eyes.

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