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Old Hagar's Secret

BY MRS. M. J. HOLMES

Author of "For a Woman's Sake," "Love's Triumph," "Purified by Suffering," "A Grass Widow," "Woman Against Woman," Etc.

"Go home, Maggie Miller," she said at last, rising slowly to her feet. "Go home now, and leave me alone. I am willing you should marry Henry Warner—nay, I wish you to do it; but you must remember your promise."

Maggie was about to answer, when her thoughts were directed to another channel by the sight of George Douglas and Theo coming slowly down the shaded pathway, which led past Hagar's door. Old Hagar saw them, too, and, whispering to Maggie, said: "There's another marriage brewing, or the signs do not tell true, and madam will sanction this one, too, for there's money there, and gold can purify any blood."

Ere Maggie could reply, Theo called out: "You here, Mag, as usual?" adding, aside to her companion, "She has the most unaccountable taste, so different from me, who cannot endure anything low and vulgar. Can you? But I need not ask," she continued, "for your associations have been of a refined nature."

George Douglas did not answer, for his thoughts were back in the brown farmhouse at the foot of the hill, where his boyhood was passed, and he wondered what the high-bred lady at his side would say if she could see the sunburnt man and plain old-fashioned woman who called him their son, George Washington. He would not confess that he was ashamed of his parentage, for he tried to be a kind and dutiful son, but he would a little rather that Theo Miller should not know how democratic had been his early training. So he made no answer, but addressing himself to Mag, asked: "how she could find it in her heart to leave her patient so long?"

"I'm going back directly," she said, and, dashing her hat she started for home, thinking she had gained but little satisfaction from her visit, who, as Douglas and Theo passed on, resumed her seat by the door, and, listening to the sound of Margaret's retreating footsteps, muttered: "The old lightheartedness is gone. There are shadows gathering round her, for, once in love, she'll never be as free and joyous again. But it can't be helped; it's the destiny of women, and I only hope this Warner is worthy of her, but he ain't. He's too wild-too full of what Hagar Warren calls bedevilments. And Mag does everything he tells her to do. Not content with tearing down his bed-curtains, which were hung since full twenty years, she's set all things cornerwise, because the folks do so in Worcester, and has turned the parlor into a smoking room, till all the air of Hillsdale can't take away that tobacco scent. Why, it almost knocks me down! And the old lady ground and, as she recounted to herself the recent innovations upon the time-honored habits of her mistress' house."

Henry Warner was, indeed, rather a fast young man, but it needed the suggestive presence of George Douglas to bring out his true character, and for the four days succeeding the arrival of the latter there were rare doings at the old stone house, where the astonished and rather delighted servants looked on in amazement, while the young men sang their jocular songs and drank of the rare old wine which Mag, utterly fearless of what her grandmother might say, brought from the cellar below. But when, on the morning of the fourth, Henry Warner suggested that they have a celebration, or at least, hang out the American flag by way of

showing their patriotism, there were signs of rebellion in the kitchen, while even Mrs. Jeffrey, who had long since ceased to interfere, felt it her duty to remonstrate. Accordingly she descended to the parlor, where she found George Douglas and Mag dancing to the tune of "Yankee Doodle," which Theo played upon the piano, while Henry Warner whistled a most stirring accompaniment! To be heard above that din was impossible, and involuntarily patting her own slipper foot to the lively strain, the distressed little lady went back to her room, wondering what Madam Conway would say if she knew her house was being desecrated.

But Madam Conway did not know. She was three thousand miles away, and the distance between them Maggie dared do anything; so when the flag was again mentioned she answered apologetically, as if it were something of which they ought to be ashamed: "We never had any, but we can soon make one, I know. 'Twill be fun to see it float from the house-top!" and, flying up the stairs to the dusty garret, she drew from a huge oaken chest a scarlet coat, which had belonged to the former owner of the place, who little thought, as he sat in it, that his favorite coat would one day furnish materials for the emblem of American freedom!

No such thought as this, however, intruded itself upon Mag as she bent over the chest. "The coat is of no use," she said, and, gathering it up, she ran back to the parlor, where, throwing it across Henry's lap, she told how it had belonged to her great-great-grandfather, who, at the time of the Revolution, went home to England. The young men exchanged a meaning look, and then burst into a laugh, but the cause of their merriment they did not explain, lest the prejudices of the girls should be aroused.

"This is just the thing," said Henry, entering heart and soul into the spirit of the fun. "This is grand. Can't you find some blue for the ground-work of the stars?"

Mag thought a moment, and then exclaimed: "Oh, yes, I have a grandma's has a blue satin bodice, which she wore when she was a young lady. She once gave me a part of the back for my doll's dress. She won't care if I cut up the rest for a banner."

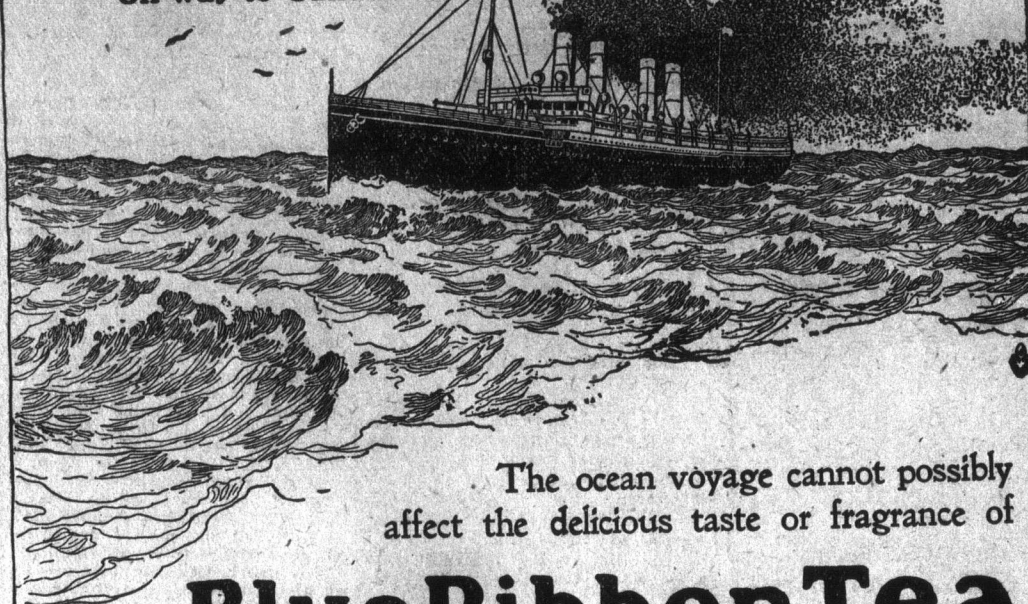
"Of course not," answered George Douglas. "She'll be glad to have it used for such a laudable purpose, and, walking to the window, he laughed heartily as he saw in fancy the wrath of the proud English woman when she learned the use to which her satin bodice had been appropriated."

The waist was brought in a twinkling, and then, when Henry asked for some white, Mag cried: "A sheet will be just the thing—one of grandma's small linen ones. It won't hurt a bit," she added, as she saw a shadow on Theo's brow, and, mounting to the top of the high chest of drawers, she brought out a sheet of finest linen, which, with rose leaves and fragrant herbs, had been carefully packed away.

It was a long, delightful process, the making of that banner, and Maggie's voice rang out loud and clear as she saw how cleverly Henry Warner managed the shears, cutting the red coat into stripes. The arrangement of the satin fell to Maggie's lot, while George Douglas made the stars. Theo looked on, a little doubtfully, not that her nationality was in any way affected, what George Douglas sanctioned was by this time right with her; but she felt some misgiving as to what her grandmother might say, and, thinking if she did nothing but look on and laugh, the blame would fall on Mag; she stood aloof, making occasionally a suggestion, and seeming as pleased as any one when at last the flag was done. A quilting frame served as a flagstaff, and Mag was chosen to plant it upon the top of the house, where was a cupola, or miniature tower, overlooking the surrounding country. Leading to this tower was a narrow staircase, and up these stairs Mag bore the flag, assisted by one of the servant girls; and when the hoisting of the banner had been the culminating point, and, too indignant to sit with them at the same table, she resolutely kept her room throughout the entire day, poring intently over "Baxter's Saint's Rest," her favorite volume when all flurried or excited. Occasionally, too, she would stop her ears with jeweler's cotton to shut out the sound of "Hail, Columbia!" as it came up to her from the parlor below, where the young men were doing their best to show their patriotism.

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