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Marrying Mark

By
VIOLETTE KIMBALL DUNN

Continued

"Too bad," sympathized Elise. "I mean, that you're not staying. I was looking forward to seeing you. But you'll probably be running back and forth—"

"One doesn't run back and forth over two thousand miles," said Dorothy. "And of course my own menage is waiting—"

Valerie searched her French vocabulary for menage. It ought to belong to "menagerie," but somehow it hardly seemed to fit. She had never realized her aunt was such a vast distance away. She had seen her only once in her life before, and that was when her mother and Mark were married.

IV

Valerie dropped her father's hand and moved to where Shirley paused on her way down the hall. She liked to be near Shirley. It wasn't only the strange different perfume that drifted indefinitely about her and drew you like a sort of magnet. There was something else that drew you too. Just as there was something about Elise that pushed you away, it had nothing to do with Shirley. Elise was almost prettier in a way than Shirley, who sometimes practically forgot you entirely when she was interested in something else.

Shirley put an arm around Valerie and bent down to speak. "I think it's marvelous," she said very softly. "I mean for you and Mark to ride it out together. Would you like to come and see me some day? If your daddy—"

"He's my father now," said Valerie. Somehow she felt Shirley would understand without explanations.

"I see," said Shirley. "I was going to say if Mark doesn't mind. We could do—oh, a lot of things. It might be fun."

"It would be lovely. She put her nose a little nearer Shirley and sniffed quietly. A grown-up had asked her to call. There was practically no limit to what might happen.

"I'll call you up," said Shirley. She spoke as if it were a secret.

Valerie felt she must have aged at least ten years. Nobody had ever spoken of calling her up before. Offhand like that. As if there were nothing.

"I suppose you wouldn't forget. Thank you," she whispered hurriedly. Dorothy and Paul, with Elise behind her, were moving down on them. "That is, of course, we're going away—"

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wasn't a mother. I mean, naturally. Some women are and never have a child. Some women never would be if they had a dozen. It's just one of those things. I think Valerie's luck is in."

"I suppose a writer's point of view gets just the least bit—shall we say exaggerated, darling? If you don't mind my speaking frankly—" began Elise.

But Shirley had waved a hand and was halfway around the parking circle.

The will was read on Friday. On Saturday Dorothy and Paul left for home. Catlett, the chauffeur, loaded them and their luggage into the town car and Mark drove Valerie in his roadster. It was one of those misunderstandings by which Valerie found out she was a human being instead of a creature moved by grown-up strings. She stood in the hall waiting listlessly to say good-bye to Dorothy and her husband. The car was already at the door as her aunt paused beside her. Dorothy's mourning seemed to flow in tides around her; Valerie shrank from its contact.

She had lifted her face obediently for her aunt's kiss when Mark swung his long-nosed roadster into the drive. He jumped out and ran into the house. Something fresh and vital seemed to enter with him. Valerie straightened instinctively. It was, she thought, as if a brave sort of breeze had blown into the dim hall.

"I thought it would be better for us to follow you than to try to crowd in," he told Paul. "Hadn't you better get on your bonnet and shawl, Val?"

Valerie wondered if she was dreaming. She looked closely at Mark to be sure he was in his right mind.

"Are you going to take me to the station?" she asked.

"You didn't think I was going to leave you here, did you?" Dorothy opened her lips, but Valerie didn't wait to hear what came out. She was already leaping up the wide stairs toward her room.

"Do you really think this is quite wise?" asked Dorothy.

"Does it really take a lot of wisdom to drive a kid to a railroad station?" he wondered. He hoped he was going to continue to be polite to Dorothy. She was one of those people to whom you never by any chance say what is on your mind, even about the average run-of-the-mill topics of life. But she was pushing him rather close.

She moved closer to him in her heavy black, looking up the stairway and speaking secretly.

"You'll understand that I am a little fearful," she said. "After all, she is my sister's only child. I know Ellen's wish was to keep Valerie from active contact with the world so that when she emerged she would be prepared—"

"For what?" asked Mark. He couldn't quite help it.

Dorothy looked at him with faint pity. "For life, of course. With her slightly neurotic tendencies—"

"Probably it won't do her any harm to drive to town with me," he explained politely. "I'll watch to see that she doesn't hop a train, or get kidnapped, or any thing."

Dorothy shivered. "Kidnapping is nothing to joke about," she said.

"With Valerie as your heir—"

"I'll look out for that too." The surface of tolerance was wearing thinner and thinner.

"I had hoped to have a last talk with you about the child on the way to town," Dorothy lowered her voice again and drew still closer. "Her wardrobe—"

"You mean she needs new clothes?" asked Mark. "I'm glad you reminded me. We'll look some up today as soon as your train pulls out."

"That is exactly what I meant. You see, I've had no time to order all her mourning. She isn't even wearing the dress I got her the day before the funeral—"

Mark blessed the faint thud of Valerie's descending footsteps descending on the stairs above. "She probably forgot," he apologized. "After all, you can hardly blame her at her age—"

It always amazed him that the child was almost fourteen. He would have said at a guess that she was a rather tall and stringy ten. He had always tried to keep his idea about her stepchild to himself. After all, she was Ellen's and his policy had been hands off. And he had really known very little of her. School in the winter an expensive camps in the summer where Ellen's instructions had been strictly carried out, had given them very little contact.

Valerie now came into sight around the bend in the stairs. A blue beret was half on her head and her coat hung by one sleeve while she struggled into the other. Mark caught her just as she stumbled down the last two steps. He straightened her hat and put her into her coat. "Where's the fire?" he asked calmly.

"I was afraid you'd get tired waiting, or change your mind."

"How do you know I've got one?"

She looked up with a quick half glance and then giggled suddenly. "Go on out and climb in," he ordered. "Second car to the rear—seat beside the driver. That's me."

He turned to Dorothy again. The sight of Valerie's eager pointed little face had somehow restored his poise.

"Now—" he followed Dorothy and Paul out to the car and saw them safely inside. He even shut the door himself so there would be no mistake about it. The big car purred smoothly away. Mark went in for his hat and coat and came out again to Valerie.

She longed terribly to tell him how marvelous he was. How much more the perfect father than any she had ever met up. How it sent shivers up her spine to be going away with him—to town, to a railroad station.

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were presently spinning down the drive. Mark caught her eyes on his hands. "You look as if you wanted to know why the wheels go round" he asked. He remembered Ellen's dislike of mechanics, for all her delicate precision. "Do you like cars?"

To be continued

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Rev. Hugh Creaser

Introduced At St. Andrews

ST. ANDREWS, July 27 —(Special)—Rev. Hugh Creaser was inducted yesterday as minister of Greenock Presbyterian Kirk at a special service held yesterday evening. Interim-moderator Rev. D. L. Howson of Fredericton presided and Rev. C. J. St. Clair Jeans, and other visiting clergy were present. A meeting of the Saint John presbytery was held in the afternoon to transact special business.

Mr. Creaser is a native of Lunenburg, N. S., a graduate of Acadia University and Knox College of Toronto, and was ordained at Tyne Valley, where he served for three years. Accepting a call to Picton County, N. S., he served at the old Durham Church four years and then went to St. Andrews Church, Ottawa, as assistant-minister where he spent the past two years. He has been doing special work with young people and was in the missionary committee of the Ottawa Council of Churches and has been a lecturer on religious education at the Ottawa Normal College.

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