

# Maria's Fishing

She Had a Novel Way of Doing It

By CLARISSA MACKIE

"Taint no fishing weather today," said Captain Barnabas Fish when I expressed surprise at his idleness one crisp October morning.

"Too much sea?" I inquired.

He nodded and scratched his gray stubble beard. "Wind's been east for three days now, and that there oily roll would turn my dory hull up'ards in no time. No, ma'am, you can't call Miss Weeks!"

"You can tell her yourself, cap'n," came Miss Maria's sharp voice from the gate. "Here I be!"

"There's some roll on today," he said, looking away over the greenish gray waters of the bay.

"First time I ever suspected you was a fair weather sailor," sniffed Maria scornfully.

"It ain't me; it's the fish," explained Captain Barnabas hastily. "I ain't afraid of weather."

"I shouldn't think the fish would be either, they being more used to the water than you are."

"They won't bite," explained the captain with dignity.

"Fiddle!" snapped Maria so sharply that Captain Barnabas jumped in his sea boots. "How is it I've smelt fish frying over at Lucy Drake's every night this week? Somebody must catch 'em—I'll find out who it is." She turned away and went up the gravelled path to the little white house that faced Quince harbor. After she had slammed the side door I stole a glance at Captain Barnabas Fish.

Leaning against the picket fence, his hands in the pockets of his blue flannel trousers, his blue eyes squinting across the bay at the black line of breakwater, Captain Barnabas seemed indifferent to the anger of the plump little woman toward whom I was sure he nourished a secret attachment.

"Somebody must catch fish for Lucy Drake," I whispered softly. "I wonder who it is?"

A red flush crept from the captain's sunburnt neck up to his ears and disappeared. "Miss Telham," he said solemnly. "It's me!"

"I thought—you said—the fish would not bite!" I gasped indignantly. I was loyal to Maria, for she was a fine soul in spite of her affected crustiness. Lucy Drake I did not like. I turned to the gate, but the captain lifted a huge brown hand to check my departure.

"It may seem queer to you, ma'am, after my promising Maria I'd bring her the first ketch of fish, but I had to take them fish to Lucy Drake!"

"Why?" I asked bluntly.

"'Becuz," he said, with discouraging brevity.

"You could easily have brought some to Miss Maria as well," I said disapprovingly.

"Luck was ag'in it," he returned gloomily. "You may not believe it, Miss Telham, but I been out every day for a week past, and I ain't caught but one fish each day—and that there fish I had to give to Lucy Drake."

"Then you have been out fishing this morning?"

"Do I look like a fair weather sailor, ma'am?" he asked coldly. "I went out at daybreak, and I caught one fish, same as usual, and I suspect that you and Maria will soon be catching the smell of frying fish from Lucy Drake's."

I turned my head toward the neat white cottage next door to Maria's. Surely I could detect a smell of frying fish!

The whistle of the flour mill smote the stillness of the day.

"It's dinner time," observed Captain Fish, and, with the same nervous haste exhibited by all Quince Harborites at the hour of noon, he nodded briefly and plunged down the beach toward the dory drawn up on the sand.

He slept and ate and made his home on board of his schooner, the Indus, named after a ship in the Calcutta trade of which he had once been master.

A half hour afterward I went up the path into Maria's house, sniffing rather guiltily at the smell of frying bluefish, which seemed to emanate from Lucy Drake's little kitchen. To my surprise I caught a glimpse of Lucy Drake's thin nose face at the window, and she was dabbing a handkerchief against her eyes.

When I entered Maria's house I was instantly hungry. On the oval table in the low dining room was a platter. On the platter was still sizzling a delicious looking bluefish, brown and crisp from the frying pan. There were a plate of corn bread and a dish of creamed potatoes and other good things.

Miss Maria flew in from the kitchen, her cheeks a bright crimson and her black eyes snapping with some inward excitement.

"I was just going to call you to dinner, Miss Telham," she said shortly. As we sat down she bobbed her head and uttered a hasty and rather ungracious benediction over the fish platter.

"Have some fish?" she asked shortly. "If you please. So you got one, after all?" I remarked.

"Yes, I got it," she said significantly. "With a silver hook, I suppose," I said, with an attempt at humor.

"I caught it with father's old boat hook, and I fished for it from the buttry window," returned Maria demurely.

I stared. "From the buttry window?" I repeated incredulously.

"Yes," she said crisply and closed the conversation with that monosyllable.

As the meal progressed I noticed that Maria did not eat any of the fish. In fact, she ate very little dinner, but she drank several cups of strong green tea. I could not help associating her gloom with the advent of the bluefish on the table. There was a mystery connected with the catching of this fish that tantalized me.

As I sauntered around the frost-bitten garden I became aware that Lucy Drake was moving listlessly among her gorgeous chrysanthemums. Her delicate face, with its long, thin, pink nose, was dolorous enough. I went out of the gate and walked along the fence by Lucy's flowers.

"Your chrysanthemums are lovely, Miss Drake," I ventured sofly.

Lucy turned toward me. "They are pretty," she admitted, her weak eyes filling with tears.

"You have a cold?" I asked.

"No, oh, no, but I have suffered—a loss." She came close to the fence and leaned over, speaking freely as though glad of a listener.

"I am sorry, Miss Drake. May I ask what it is?"

"My fish," she whispered. "The loveliest bluefish you ever saw. The cat stole it."

"What cat?" I asked mechanically.

"I am not sure whether it was my Snowball or Maria Weeks' Ginger. You see, it was all ready to fry for dinner—settling right on the shelf in the buttry window, and the window was wide open. When I went to get it it was gone." She spoke as tragically as though she had lost a dear friend.

"A bluefish?" I was thinking guiltily of the one I had eaten at dinner, and I had a mental vision of Miss Maria leaning from her buttry window and coolly fishing for Lucy Drake's fish with the late Mr. Weeks' boat hook. I wanted to laugh, it was all so funny and so unaccountable.

"Why should Maria steal—Maria's cat steal your bluefish?" I asked to cover my embarrassment.

"To eat. I would not have cared only—Lucy blushed painfully and turned away her head.

"It is too bad. Perhaps Captain Barnabas could catch another one," I suggested.

"He doesn't seem to have very good luck fishing," she said and hurried into the house without ceremony.

I walked down to the end of the row of low, comfortable houses that straggled along the beach road, and then turning went back to my boarding place. Dinner would be cleared away by this time and Maria taking her afternoon nap. I wanted a nap myself.

When I reached the front door the gate clanged noisily and I turned to see Captain Barnabas tramping heavily up the gravelled path. He came up the steps and stood, grim and unsmiling, beside me.

"Miss Weeks to home?" he asked impolitely.

"I believe so. Come in and sit down, captain." And I ushered him into Maria's sitting room.

To my surprise she was in there, sitting very pale and unhappy looking in a big rocking chair.

"Maria!" thundered Captain Barnabas. And when I would have fled Maria beckoned me to remain. Therefore I hovered near the door, feeling very uncomfortable.

"Don't you 'Maria' me, Barnabas Fish," said Maria coldly.

"Miss Weeks, what did you do it for?" he demanded, fixing his bright blue eyes on her snapping black ones.

"Do what for?" Maria's tone was surprised.

"You see my schooner down there?" Captain Fish pulled back the window curtain and pointed a horny forefinger at the graceful lines of the Indus, anchored opposite the Weeks cottage.

"Yes, I see it. I don't see how I can help seeing it, planted right there in front of Lucy Drake's cottage." Maria was jealous. Now I began to understand.

"I was sitting out there just before dinner, and I had the glasses. I was looking at your house. I was— Captain Barnabas blushed and cast about for an excuse for his lover's foolishness. "I was wondering if Miss Telham had gone for a walk. I was looking, when I saw you, Maria Weeks, steal Lucy's fish off her—with a boat hook!" Did Captain Fish chuckle?

Maria blushed and then paled. "It was my fish," she said obstinately. "You had promised it to me."

"I promised one to her every day until—until she collected her interest money. She's been hard up. Fish ain't so terrible hardy, but they're brain food anyway, and you know Lucy Drake ain't got any too many brains. She needs all the fish she can eat." The captain was trying to cover his own kindness with a clumsy joke. "I promised her a fish every morning. I thought it would be easy to catch a plenty of 'em, but, drat it all, I never caught but one every day, and she needed it, Maria!" His tone ended in an apologetic note.

Maria Weeks arose, conscience stricken. "I took her fish—and she's hungry. I must go and see her at once. She must come to supper and—"

"I will go and ask her, Miss Maria," I said hastily, and as I went I heard Captain Fish's voice growling out some question and Maria's smothered shriek of dismay.

"Oh, Barnabas! I could never keep house on that schooner!"

I knew Maria had caught another sort of fish this time.

# An Orange

By IVAN WITKOWSKY

The Countess Melnikoff was sitting in her boudoir in Moscow, Russia, when the card of Colonel Michalovsky was handed her. She directed the servant to admit him.

"My dear countess," he said, "I have come to ask a favor. Knowing you to be intimate with the imperial family, that the empress esteems you highly, I should be obliged if you would use your influence to secure for my nephew a commission in the navy."

"Colonel, you overrate my influence. I am not often bidden to the palace. Indeed, I fancy I have been forgotten there."

"How can that be when Grand Duke V. is to dine with you this evening?"

"Who told you that?"

"Why, the duke's movements are always known. He informs the police of his engagements in order that they may provide for his safety."

"Do the police consider publishing his whereabouts providing for his safety?"

"They have not published his coming here. I was conversing with one of the police officials about securing my nephew an appointment in the army. This man knows of my acquaintance with you and said to me: 'Grand Duke V. dines with the countess today. If you see her and ask her influence in the matter she will undoubtedly secure a promise of the appointment while he is at the table.'"

"Well, my dear colonel, I am willing to oblige you if I find an opportunity, but you must not rely too much upon me. I wish you were to be a member of our dinner party. I would invite you except that the grand duke, as you know, must have a list beforehand of other guests wherever he goes, and now there is not time."

"I have no especial desire to meet him. But since you are to grant me this favor is there nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing that I think of."

"I have just received a box of fruit from the south. Would you like some for your table?"

"Indeed I would. Fruit at this season is not to be had."

"I will bring it before the dinner is over."

"Can you not send it?"

"Send it? No. Do you suppose I would trust a servant with what can not be bought for love or money? He would either eat it or sell it and say that he had been robbed. I shall bring it myself. What o'clock will your dinner be served?"

"At half past 8. We shall be ready for fruit by half past 9. The grand duke does not like to sit long at table; he is a very busy man."

Michalovsky left her shortly before the dinner hour.

"So the police told my cousin that, did they? I know better. The police do not tell such secrets. Alexis got it elsewhere. But where? He certainly could not have got it from any of the duke's household. The colonel would not use it for any other purpose than the pretended one. But the duke's life is in danger every moment from revolutionists, and if it is known that he is to dine with me tonight he may be assassinated either coming or going. I will send a messenger suggesting that he stay away."

She wrote a note stating that his expected visit was known and begged him not to come. But he replied in person.

"Ah, countess," he said gallantly, "do you suppose fear would cause me to forego the pleasure of dining with you?"

"Did nothing happen on the way?"

"Nothing."

"But I fear for your return."

"Banish it from your mind. I am here to enjoy a pleasant evening with you. Let us throw fear to the winds."

They dined together, and during the dinner the countess asked the duke for the appointment as she had promised.

"At whose request do you ask me for this favor?" he said after promising the commission.

"My cousin, Colonel Alexis Michalovsky."

"Colonel Michalovsky?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Only as colonel of a regiment."

At the moment a dish of exquisite cut glass was brought in on which was mellow fruit, surmounted by a large orange. The dish was set on the table between the two, and the countess was taking the orange from the top of the pyramid when the servant said to her:

"Colonel Michalovsky begs that he may speak to you a moment. It is about the appointment. He wishes to change his request."

But the countess did not hear. On taking up the orange she noticed a small spot where it had been picked from the tree. She held the orange under her nose and noticed a peculiar odor. Then suddenly she saw a tiny flash such as might come from the fuse of a firecracker. There was placed her a finger bowl that had been placed on the table with the fruit. The countess quick as a flash immersed the orange in the water. White as a cloth, she told the duke to run for his life.

"Not while you sit still," he said.

When the bomb was cut open by the police it was found to be an orange skin filled with nitroglycerin. The fuse had burned within an eighth of an inch of the contents.

Colonel Michalovsky tried to escape, but was caught and sent to Siberia.

# A HUSTLING TIME

By M. QUAD

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Five men sat around a supper table in a farmer's kitchen after a hard day's work in the cornfield.

There was Moses Bright, the father, fifty-five years old and a widower; there was Abraham, aged thirty; there was Leviticus, aged twenty-seven; there was Philetus, aged twenty-five; there was Aaron, aged twenty-two. Not a son had left home yet.

"Abraham," said the father as the meal was finished, "there's a widder woman named Parsons bought the Taylor place. She brought with her a span of hoeses, four cows, sixty sheep, eight hogs and fifty hens. She's a hustler. She can mow and plow and chop wood."

"What of it?" asked Abraham.

"You wash up, grease your boots and hair and go down and ask her to marry you. You are thirty years old, and it's time you were married."

Abraham got ready and departed. Moses Bright was boss around that house. The young man arrived at the widow was straining the last pull of milk. He sat down on the doorstep with his back toward her and said never a word. He was in greater fear than as if a bull had been chasing him across the meadow. The widow took notice of him at once and then ignored him for a long ten minutes. Then she stopped singing to say to him:

"Get out!"

Those were blessed words to Abraham. He got. He fairly flew for the first forty rods. When he reached home he found his father sitting in the door, pipe in mouth, and sat down on the nearby wash bench. His brothers had gone to bed. It was five minutes before the father took the pipe from his mouth to query:

"What'd she say?"

"Get out!"

"That was all. There was more corn planting next day, but half an hour before quitting time the father said to Leviticus, who was working next to him:

"Abraham don't know enough to crawl under a haystack when it's raining pitchforks. You go over there tonight and spark that widder."

After supper Leviticus went. It was either suicide or go. He found the widow milking the last of her four cows. She looked up as he entered the barnyard, but neither spoke. The young man stood with his back to the fence and chewed on a straw, and she hummed the air of a hymn as she milked. When she had finished she rose up and asked:

"Any more idiots in this neighborhood?"

"Yes—no—yes!" stammered the young man as he made for the highway and home.

It was potato planting next day. At the supper table the father reached for a third slice of fried pork and said:

"Philetus, lie up and grease up. Four cows, sixty sheep, eight hogs."

Philetus turned pale and lost his appetite, but he obeyed. He found the widow uprooting burdocks in the front yard, and before he could say anything she asked:

"Ain't there another kid named Aaron?"

"Yes."

"Then run home and send him along and I'll start an infant asylum with him!"

Aaron went and came back to shake his head and hear his father call him a dinged idiot. That night the four sons entered into a conspiracy, and it was at the breakfast table that Abraham said:

"Father, the Widder Parsons is a hustling widder woman. Two hoeses, four cows, sixty sheep, eight hogs and fifty hens."

"Waal, what of it?" was asked.

"It's your turn to go sparking."

"Boy, don't gimme any sass!"

"No use to bluff, father. You either go sparking or we quit the farm."

The old man was given the day to consider the matter. When supper was over and without a word to any one he slipped up a bit and took the highway. The widow sat on her doorstep, smoking her pipe. She bowed and made room beside her. Not a word was said for a long minute. Then Moses cleared his throat and remarked:

"Them four dough headed sons of mine seem to think I'd better get married ag'in. And being as you appear to be alone in the world and being I think I'd be happier—"

"Oh, I don't know," interrupted the widow, drawing away a bit. "I'm alone in the world, but I seem to be having a purty good time."

"But them fool sons o' mine—"

"Yes, I know. It's dreadful to have a lot o' idiots around. You don't say it's love at first sight, do you?"

"N-o-o, not skassy, but I'm a hustling man, and you are a hustling woman, and—"

"And you think we ought to hustle in this case?"

"That's about it."

"Then you come along three days from now, after I finish planting my taters."

And when the father got home and found his four sons waiting and grinning he said:

"Two hoeses, four cows, sixty sheep, eight hogs—"

"But what of the widder?" was asked.

"She's mine, and as she don't like children every last one of you can prepare to hustle out o' this and take care of yourselves!"

# The Rev. Mr. Muldoon

By F. A. MITCHEL

"Jack," said Deacon Henderson to his daughter, Jacqueline, "a new minister is coming to occupy the pulpit made vacant by Joruegan, whom you drove out of it."

"Papa?"

"You know very well that you flirted with him, then refused him."

"But I didn't drive him away."

"When he handed me his resignation he told me that it would be impossible for him to live near you and forget you."

Jacqueline hung her head.

"This young man who is coming in his place has been accepted at my invitation because he is painfully homesely. He has fiery red hair and freckles; he is long boned and disjointed."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"A great deal. It is impossible for you to let a handsome, attractive man alone. I expect Mr. Muldoon to repel you by his ugliness. We are getting tired of hunting up ministers for you to make fools of and drive away. We are going to try one of a different kind."

"Why not get an old married man?"

"You know very well what the salary is. If we should do as you suggest we would have a family to support besides the minister, and we are too poor for that."

"Well, papa, if Mr. Muldoon is as hideous as you say I don't think you will be put to the trouble of getting another man on my account."

The first Sunday the new clergyman preached Jacqueline was indisposed and should not have gone to church, but she was so curious to know how homely he really was that she went to hear and see him. He was homelier than he had been painted. Besides his natural blemishes there was an artificial one. When a boy he had fallen against a buzzsaw, which had left a frightful scar on his left cheek. Then when preaching, having made a point that especially pleased him, he would smile, and the contortion his face took on was expressive of a pain in his stomach.

At first it did not seem to Jacqueline that she could endure to look at him. But he had a remarkable intellect and the gift of expressing his ideas in words. For a while she listened to him with her eyes turned away. By degrees she was enabled to endure the sight of him for a few minutes at a time, and before the end of his sermon she had quite forgotten his ugliness.

The next Sunday she was obliged to begin all over again, but the process of getting used to looking upon him, his fiery red hair, his scarred cheek and worst of all that dreadful smile at clinching an argument, required less time than the Sunday before. Moreover, his intellectual part began to influence her. What comprehensive ideas! What heart! What a different way of looking at things from the cut and dried theology that had come down through the centuries! How her heart bled for those whom he pictured driven by their surrounding circumstances into crime. "The children of the poor," he said, "are sent to jail, the children of the rich to dancing school."

And so he accounted for that growing criminality among the children and youth of the land, filling more and more the columns of the newspapers, illustrating their inevitable course by such graphic words as those quoted. Jacqueline went home from church and all the rest of the day was thinking on that fearful procession of little children with but one path before them, and that leading to crime. And mingled with this picture was the face of the minister, but one engaging feature in it—sympathy lighted by protest against this human injustice.

For a time Jacqueline tried to stop her ears against this childish wail. Any effort to relieve it seemed hopeless. But she was at last won over by the minister's exhortation to work under the inspiration of faith and leave the rest to Providence. And so under his direction she became the leader of an association of women workers in the field of charity. While the handsome, gentlemanlike pastors of her church had discoursed to her from the pulpit upon theological principles that had been wrangled over for ages and at other times had poured soft nothings into her willing ear this "fright" by a sympathy for his fellow beings had unconsciously walked by a straight path to her heart. The hair was still a fiery red; the scar, the excruciating smile, were as hideous as before, but not to her, for she did not see them. They had been obscured by a divine light that emanated from the spiritual part of this repellent body. One day the deacon, Jacqueline's father, said to her:

"Jack, I have noticed that you are taking a great interest in the work inspired by Mr. Muldoon. I brought him here thinking that his ugliness would protect him. I fear that it has failed."

"Father," said the girl impressively, "when again you choose for such a purpose a homely man to occupy the pulpit of our church I would advise you to select one without the gift of intellectuality and the divine attributes of a real Christian. If you intend to warn me it is too late. But this time it is he who has won the game, not I. Last evening while here he asked me to be his wife, and I gladly consented."

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