

Watch Night Romance

By OLIVER LEROY

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MARY MORTON was the happiest girl in New York. It was a glorious night in June. Arthur Wainwright had just hidden her good night, and she returned to the little parlor to turn out the gas before retiring to her room. For a moment she seated herself upon the old fashioned sofa where both had sat that night when Arthur told her what she knew already—that he loved her.

She had told him that it was her fancy to be married on New Year's eve while watching the old year out and the new year in. "Splendid!" Arthur had said. "Besides, the firm has promised me a considerable increase in salary beginning with the new year. How happy we shall be in that cozy little cottage I have in mind up in the Bronx."

When Mary arose next morning and looked into her mirror it seemed to her that the utter happiness of her heart had made her face more beautiful.

"He deserves the most beautiful woman in the world," she murmured. "He is so high minded, so honorable, so noble!"

The housemaid tapped at her door and left a letter. Mary kissed the envelope before breaking the seal. It read:

Dearest—I have lost \$25,000 belonging to the firm, which I was to have deposited yesterday, but on account of a street car delay I reached the bank too late. They will never believe me. It means disgrace—probably imprisonment—if I stay here. I have thought it all over, and I am going to disappear, so far away, change my name and try to earn money to pay back this sum. It will take me years and years no doubt. I release you, and God knows I want you to be happy. Simply forget me.
 ARTHUR.

Stunned by the blow, the girl sank into a chair. She thought it over. There must be some other way. It

returned to the parlor he said with feeling:

"I do not believe, Miss Morton, that you have the slightest guilty knowledge of this affair, and, though it looks bad for Mr. Wainwright, I can see that it was quite possible for him to lose the money."

"Thank you, Mr. Sherwood," said Mary. "You will help me, then—help me?"

"My present duty is to try to find Mr. Wainwright."

"Find him?" she cried. "Find him for me. They can't prove that he stole the money, while I am sure that in time it will be found. Then—"

"But if a dishonest person finds it or has found it?"

For a moment she was overcome by



"HE DESERVES THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN THE WORLD."

her forehead. Then she sat up, right and said:

"Mr. Sherwood, only last night Arthur Wainwright sat upon that sofa, in the very spot where you are sitting now, and talked with me about our future happiness as man and wife. We were children together in the town up the state where we were born. We met again a year ago in this great

city. We have been much together since. I know that he is incapable of doing what he is at present accused of doing."

"I do not accuse him, Miss Morton. I simply do not know."

"But I know, and I shall stand by him."

"Even if you should come to know that he is guilty?"

"He is not guilty!" almost shrieked the girl.

The young detective departed, expressing the hope that all would come out well. Miss Morton was grateful.

Senior Partner Meredith was mistaken when he intimated that Wainwright would be in jail by night. A young man of high intelligence and quick perceptions, he apparently had escaped from the city and from the country.

Young Sherwood called at the boarding house a few days later to report progress, he said. Plainly touched by the beauty of Mary Morton and by her poignant grief, he lingered a little while to speak words of comfort to the girl.

"I shall call again if anything turns up," he said.

Nothing turned up, but he did call again and again during the next few months, always acting the part of a courteous gentleman. One evening he said to Mary:

"You may be pleased to learn that after the first of next month I am to be the assistant chief of detectives."

"I am very glad to know it," she replied. "I believe you are an honorable man and deserve promotion."

"Thank you," he said rather awkwardly. "You see, I—It brightens my prospects."

"Mr. Wainwright was to have been promoted, too, next New Year's, as you know," the girl said sadly, "and we were to have been married on New Year's eve."

"Yes," responded Sherwood, plainly embarrassed. "Miss Morton, I am going to start tomorrow on a long voyage. I shall be gone two months, and I shall think of you often. When I return I may be able to do something for you. You will regard me as your friend?"

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"Certainly. You have been much kind."

It was the last day of December when Mary received a note from Sherwood. He wanted to call that evening. It was to have been his last night, she recalled, and her heart was truly sad. Perhaps Sherwood could tell her something that would be of comfort—something about Arthur. She bade him come.

The assistant chief of detectives arrived late, explaining that important business had detained him. He talked about his voyage. He had been to Australia on an official mission. He had visited the great red lands, where some men make fortunes in a day and others toil for a lifetime without striking it rich.

"Now, Miss Morton," he said, his voice shaking with emotion. "I have hoped to come here upon my return and ask you to be my wife. You know surely that I love you. I cannot help that. But I know you are true to him, and I have ceased to hope for myself. If it were in my power I should gladly do something to prove my great love for you. I—"

"If what, Mr. Sherwood?" the girl asked eagerly.

"If we could prove that Wainwright lost that money," he said.

Sherwood sat upon the old sofa, the girl occupying a chair near by. He leaned heavily against the back of the old fashioned piece of furniture, and it creaked loudly. A gap opened between the seat and the back. Sherwood put his hand down into the opening to ascertain if he had indeed lost the money. "Well, somewhat," he pocketed. He ejaculated, drawing forth a bag, the wallet. "Where?" Arthur Wainwright—his name is cut in!

"Open it, quick!" the girl cried, leaning forward tensely.

One by one the detective counted out twenty-five bills of the denomination of \$1,000.

"Miss Morton," he said, rising, "you win; no, you win."

"But Arthur—can we find him?"

"I have found him. I arrested him in Australia at the gold fields. He sold his claim for \$200,000. He said that was not enough, and he was eager to stay a little longer, but of course I had to let him go. He is now at the Vandewater hotel. I let him stay there overnight for your sake and his own recognizance. Let us go and meet him."

Together they went out into the night. It was another glorious night for Mary Morton. As they passed by the "Little Church Around the Corner," where so many romantic marriages have taken place, they observed that a watch meeting was in progress. It was within half an hour of midnight. In the doorway stood a tall, bearded man, looking within upon the impressive scene.

"Where is Mr. Wainwright?" cried Sherwood.

"I don't see him. Where?" excitedly cried the girl.

"The man with the beard. Hey, Wainwright!"

The man turned suddenly at hearing his Australian name. A moment later the lovers were embracing. The flippant, unknowing people who stood about the door snickered.

The little party entered an unoccupied vestibule, where Sherwood told Wainwright about the finding of the money. Then the detective excused himself, went forward and consulted with the pastor of the church. Just after the solemn bells pealed the midnight hour and the new year was ushered in the pastor requested the congregation to remain seated.

And Sherwood, who had earned the place of honor, was best man.

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