

HOLDING A HUSBAND

Adèle Garrison's New Phase of
REVELATIONS OF A WIFE

CHAPTER 327

THE REASON MADGE THREATENED LILLIAN WITH "THE IRON HAND."

I tried hard to answer Lillian's question concerning Dr. Pettit's apparent interest in Miss Foster with as casual a manner as she had employed, but I was miserably conscious of a heightened color and embarrassed eyes, though my words were inoffensive enough.

"He is quite mad about her as far as I can judge," I replied, "and I don't wonder at it. She is very attractive."

I had overdone it. I saw that by the amazed look which flashed into Lillian's eyes and out again, an expression so evanescent that one less used to her every lineament than I never would have observed it. And her answering words held a distinct sting.

"That is most fortunate, isn't it?" she said. "You'll not have to bother about him here. He always has seemed to me such a nuisance."

From any other woman in the world I should have resented this speech as impertinence. But I knew that Lillian always scrupulously held aloof from any comment upon affairs not her own, and that she would not have spoken as she had unless she had observed something in my demeanor which she felt called for a fillip to my common sense.

My reaction to her attitude was prompt.

"He was all that," I said. "But I imagine Miss Foster will have him reduced to a pulp before she gets through with him."

What Lillian intended.

"She looks capable of doing the job thoroughly," Lillian replied, then changed the subject abruptly, an action for which I mentally blamed her.

"What are your plans for tomorrow?" she asked.

"To investigate every possible renting prospect within ten miles of Sag Harbor," I replied promptly. "I mean to be in the saddle at daybreak or shortly thereafter."

"So early?" she replied, and I turned and scrutinized her closely, struck by something odd, indefinable in her tone.

She was smiling faintly, but her lips were pale, and there

was the exhausted, pain-stricken look in her eyes which I had seen there once before when she frightened me by her sudden collapse in Marvin. I realized with sudden conviction that the journey and the excitement attendant upon the removal to the Hospital of the woman across the road had sapped her strength, and that I must guard her against a recurrence of that collapse.

"Yes, just so early," I replied. "But I'm going to steal out so quietly you'll never hear me, and I want you to promise—"

"Never hear you!" she interrupted scornfully. "Why, I'm going with you!"

"Not in a million Sundays," I retorted with determination. "I'd like to take Marion along if you'll let me have her, and I'm going to extract a triple-locked promise from you that you'll rest all day."

A Hopeful Toast.

There was no surer proof to me of Lillian's poor physical condition than her answer to my little speech. If she had possessed half her usual strength and self-control she would have paid no attention whatever to my ultimatum. She would simply have announced her determination to go with me in a manner which would have admitted of no argument. But instead, her protesting words were faltering, half-hearted.

"A good night's sleep will set me up," she said, and I noticed that she did not deny her patient need of rest. "And you'll need me tomorrow."

"Not one-tenth so much as I'll need you a little later," I struck Lillian with my derogatory reflection as to Jerry's ability to produce a home upon a minute's notice.

In Marion's childish eyes, Jerry Ticer is a hero, and there is nothing impossible for him to perform.

"All right, Marion," I said, smiling down at her eager, upturned face. "We'll try once more tomorrow, and then we'll see what Jerry has."

"I hope we can promise the playroom, Marion," I said smiling at her pretty enthusiasm, but before I had proceeded far upon my quest I began rapidly to revise downward my rather exacting requirements for comfort in a home, and the playroom was one of the first things I mentally threw overboard.

She put her hand to her eyes uncertainly. When it came away I saw that tears were standing in her eyes.

"I suppose you are right," she said falteringly. "But oh! Madge, this is awful! I'd rather be dead than not able to do things as I used to do."

I looked at her purposefully with a grim, mocking, little smile.

"You're talking now exactly

as if the good Lord had removed nine-tenths of your gray matter and put the rest in the wrong place," I said sternly. "I need no further proof that you'll have to have an iron hand over you, and that—"

"Yours is the milt, I suppose," she countered with a smile. "Lillian will have ceased to breathe when she cannot make a jest over her own hardships."

"Exactly! Go to the head of the class," I retorted. "And now, as the first instance of the iron hand's rule, you will go directly to bed. I'll attend to Marion when she comes in, or rather I'll go and drag her from that fascinating couch in the barn yard. I expect a rather strenuous day tomorrow, and I'd like to get to bed early myself. Here's a toast in this nice cold water. To the home I'm going to find tomorrow."

CHAPTER 328

WHY MRS. TICER BEGGED
MADGE NOT TO WORRY

Alas! for both my boast and my toast. My next day's quest for a home was a fruitless affair, from which I returned fatigued and disheartened.

On account of Marion I had not fulfilled my threat to start at day-break but it was at an extremely early hour that the child and I fortified by one of Mrs. Ticer's excellent breakfasts, turned out of the farmhouse gate into the road. I had persuaded Lillian to let Marion sleep with me, so that we got off without awakening her from the profound restful slumber into which she had fallen soon after I had insisted upon her going to bed.

"Oh, Auntie Madge!" the little girl exclaimed as the car sped down the road, "I think this is wonderful to go hunting houses for you. It will have to be a big one, won't it? For you have to have so many bedrooms. And are you going to have a playroom for Junior? He's most big enough now for a playroom. He's just getting lots of toys. And if he had a playroom I could come over and take care of him when you were busy, and you wouldn't have to know he was in the house."

"I hope we can promise the playroom, Marion," I said smiling at her pretty enthusiasm, but before I had proceeded far upon my quest I began rapidly to revise downward my rather exacting requirements for comfort in a home, and the playroom was one of the first things I mentally threw overboard.

"Did you get anything?" Mrs. Ticer called as they started to walk toward me.

I shook my head dumbly, for I was feeling more strongly every second the reaction from my long and fatiguing day. Mrs. Ticer and Lillian looked at each other, then Mrs. Ticer spoke.

Without Luck.

For I soon found that the housing conditions near New York were reproduced in this east end of the island. During my quest, I learned that many families, finding it impossible to get decent living quarters within the commuting zone had seized the opportunity to give their children the many advantages of the wonderful section, and had rented or bought all the available houses in every village. True, the bread-winner of the family, with business or profession in the city could only join his loved ones at weekends, but most of the people left stranded by the sudden demand had no choice in the matter. They simply were driven like the dove forth from the ark of their old-time security, and traveled until they found a resting place.

My sympathy with that Biblical dove approached the teary point as the day wore on, and I found no trace of any place to rent either in Sag Harbor or any of the neighboring villages. Determined to leave no stone unturned, I conscientiously investigated the places for sale also, realizing that I might be compelled to purchase a place if I could not rent one, but I soon found that all

the homes suitable for a family such as mine had been taken. The ones that were left were either country estates, prohibitive in size and cost, or tiny cottages, utterly impossible from my standpoint.

"Don't You Fret."

As I turned toward the Ticer farm at last reluctant to give up the quest, but warned by the sun that it was growing late, I felt utterly beaten, and more than a little frightened. What in the world was I to do? If I could find no place at all I would be compelled to auction all my cherished household belongings, and face the prospect of boarding for an indefinite time.

Marion nestled close to me and spoke softly, reassuringly. "Don't you worry, Auntie Madge. Jerry Ticer will find you a place. He said if I didn't find anything to come to him, and he'd tell me where there was a house that would be just right for Miss Graham, but it would need considerable fixing up."

Her childlike, unconscious imitation of Jerry Ticer was imitable. I paid no serious attention, however, to her words, for I knew Jerry to be—as his mother expressed it—"chuck full" of the most ridiculous and far-fetched schemes. If he had a building in mind for me it was probably of the general dimension of an abandoned hen coop.

But, of course, I did not wound Marion with any derogatory reflection as to Jerry's ability to produce a home upon a minute's notice.

In Marion's childlike eyes, Jerry Ticer is a hero, and there is nothing impossible for him to perform.

"All right, Marion," I said, smiling down at her eager, upturned face. "We'll try once more tomorrow, and then we'll see what Jerry has."

But I knew that there would be no shadow of use to try again on the morrow. I had exhausted every possibility, and I was so fatigued myself that even the terrifying problem before me was beginning to be dwarfed by need of rest and a warm supper.

As the car turned in at the gate Lillian and Mrs. Ticer appeared upon the veranda.

"Did you get anything?" Mrs. Ticer called as they started to walk toward me.

I shook my head dumbly, for I was feeling more strongly every second the reaction from my long and fatiguing day. Mrs. Ticer and Lillian looked at each other, then Mrs. Ticer spoke.

Without Luck.

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