DARLING FOOL

by MABEL McELLIOTT

CHAPTER XLIII

e whom?"

regained her composure after le. "Like Ellen Willard—or— Sandra." Her tone had a wealth erness in it, a deep, abiding

rles' tone was contrite. "Mon- I didn't mean that. You know I I'm sorry."

would not, could not, forgive the injury. All the pent-up pride illness of the past few months over her and, putting her head on the desk, she wept bitterly. hovered over her, desperately

"No, no, don't touch me. You're all —all of you!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"Everybody in this wretched place." words came between sobs. "At you were so nice—wonderful. I never had known anyone like But now you're like all the rest. away! I never want to see you ..."

Presently she was able to raise her to dry her eyes. Charles stood ting her wretchedly.

"Monnie, if you'd only listen—"

She shook her head with tragic dig- "You can't do anything now. ve done the worst. I shall never it—"

...r forgive, added her sore heart.

• • •

Monnie dressed half-heartedly for evening of her visitor that even- He had said his train would ar- at seven and he would call di- ly afterward. Monnie was not ing very clearly of him. Over over again she rehearsed the of the afternoon. Words, ex- sion, gestures—all were printed her brain. She looked at herself ly in the mirror, her eyes dark- at the thought of Charles' How had he ever dared? Oh, would show him! He thought the of her anyhow. She might as give him reason for thinking it. y came in as she was putting the ing touches to her hair.

"Nice," commented the younger sis- briefly. "I like your hair that way. you look frail and interesting." grinned, gamin-wise.

"What's this king of finance like, ..?" Kay demanded, dropping the bed and propping her chin on linked fingers. "I'm dying to see if the country clubbers thought had bagged such a big bird they'd on our doorstep."

"He's—well, he looks like a movie ...r's idea of a Wall street man." confessed, wrinkling her "He knows what he wants. he goes into a restaurant all waiters jump."

"Mmmm-mm." Kay sighed deeply. he's a man after my own heart. I am bossy."

"He's so rich it scares you." Mon- said after a pause. "But he's nice ...e of it."

"Like him?" Kay watched her idly. "...h, yes." Monnie polished her ...

"You don't seem awfully enthusiastic." "Don't I? Well, I can't help that." family is splendid and I'm very ... to see him.'"

Kay rolled over on her back and re- at the ceiling. "Home Town Girl Wins King of Wall Street," she ...ed sweetly. "Hung With Ropes ...Diamonds."

"Don't be an idiot." Monnie tight- her lips, remembering the man had held her in his arms only a short hours before. Charles would She would show him.

Arthur Mackenzie asked her to ...y him tonight she was going to "Yes."

• • •

GOING down into the neat little parlor Monnie was abruptly con- ...s of the room's shabbiness. The had long since faded, its bright, ...al pattern lost. They had bought couch in the corner the year ...y died and somehow, since, there had never been enough money to re- cover it. There was a worn place on one of the cushions. The curtains were spotless, like everything else in Mrs. O'Dare's home, but they had quite obviously been patched and darned. There were scuffed marks—the sort small, sturdy shoes make—on all the chairs and on the upright piano.

How shabby, Monnie thought with a pang, all this would look to the ur- ban eyes of her distinguished visitor. Ah, but she could change all this in the twinkling of an eye if only she wanted to! No longer need her mother ruin her eyes over fine mending, pro- longing the life of damask and wool. No longer need the table be set with cracked, chipped china. The O'Dares could have silver and fine linen. Her mother could have luxury beyond her brightest drems. Monnie considered that she had known the wildness and despair of first love and it had brought her nothing. Arthur Mackenzie would bring her the calm, assured devotion of middle age. Along with this he could offer her security and assur- ance.

These thoughts raced through Mon- nie's mind as, before the mirror in the hall, she touched her hair nervously, smoothed her frock.

"What are you thinking of?" Kay asked.

Monnie made a sweeping gesture. "Wondering what he'll think of—all this."

"Won't like it?"

"Won't—?" Monnie wrinkled her nose. "I don't much care whether he does or not. I was thinking how dull this place must be for Mother. She knows every worn place in the rug, every scratch on the furniture. I was wishing I could make a clean sweep of it all, get her new things."

• • •

"D'ye know," Kay interrupted with an air of sagacity, "I don't believe she minds so much—not as we do. Every bit of it—the shabbiness I mean—is home to Mother. We're al- ways going about, seeing other peo- ple's things and being envious. But she never complains."

"Just the same I'd like to be able to get her new things," said Monnie sturdily. 'And someone to help her— to wash dishes and do the heavy part of the cleaning. She must have washed millions of dishes in the last ten years."

"Not for me!" yawned Kay lazily. "I never mean to wash any. When I'm an old maid I shall live in one room —a studio—and have a maid in a gray uniform to wait on me."

"That would be nice," Monnie agreed dreamily, straightening a pic- ture. "Where is Mums, by the way?"

"She ran across to Mrs. Cox' with some broth. Della is sick with flu or something."

"I wish she'd rest once in a while," Monnie complained. "The never stops. It worries me."

"She doesn't want to," Kay told her older sister. "She loves doing the things she does."

"I guess you're right. But I want her life to be easier, just the same," Monnie persisted.

Kay sprang to attention at the sound of the bell. "Guess that's your man."

"Don't run away, please!" Monnie besought. "I'll feel such a fool. Ans- wer the door like a good girl."

Kay complied, looking, in her blue frock, like a modern angel with a halo of fair curls. Kay had charming man- ners, Monnie reflected, listening to her sister's fluty voice in greeting. Yes, Kay had a great deal of prom- ise. Unless Monnie did something about it, though, her sister would be buried forever in this small place. There were all sorts of reasons for Monnie to accept Arthur Mackenzie. And no obstacles. Wouldn't it seem idiocy now for her to refuse him? If he still wanted her, of course. And she rather thought he did. His letters of ing to him.

(To Be Continued)

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