

DARLING FOOL

by MARCEL MCELLOTT

CHAPTER LXVI

They stood there, flaring at each other. The man, tall and lean, straight, his eyes darkened with something very like fury. The girl, golden, in a dress of some soft stuff, her head thrown back, eyes wide.

She, coming to the door of the room, stared for a moment, her comprehension dawned in her eyes, and, unseen by both combatants, slipped away.

"What business is it of yours I marry?" Monnie O'Dare retorted defiantly.

Charles, two steps below her on the narrow flight of stairs, looked up at her. She was so lovely, so angry. He did not answer her. He was in love with you from the start.

Did she know it. At any rate it was sweet to hear him say the words. They were what her heart had been hungering for. In all the world there seemed to be only this tall young man with the fine head and the purposeful voice.

"I knew where I stood with you," Charles went on. "I knew how you felt about—him."

Monnie shivered. Had she, indeed, forgotten Dan already? No, this was something quite different from what she had felt for Dan Cardigan. All that old love and longing had been mixed up, somehow, with her thwarted and poverty-stricken girlhood. Hadn't there been, in all of it, some desire to "show" Belvedere? Had she wanted Dan for what he stood for? No—she told herself passionately. It wasn't that. She had really loved him, with a girl's love. She had set her heart on him.

They hadn't been in the least suited to each other. Their marriage would have been a disaster. But opposition had made their infatuation only stronger. With her new, sharply matured viewpoint she saw all this. Something of all this she tried to tell her lover, haltingly.

"It's not that I've forgotten Dan," she said loyally. "I never shall. He belongs to my youth—"

Charles, wanting to laugh at her young solemnity in this, took her two small hands in his own and said gravely:

"I never dared before to ask you if I had a chance, because of Dan. When he was alive I felt you were wholly his. And after he died, well, then, I was afraid you had dedicated yourself to his memory. You were almost like a nun, remote, spiritual. It was only after I discovered this Mackenzie chap was in the running again that I decided I might have a chance. But you were so stiff—so unapproachable."

She drew herself up at this, pretending to be angry.

"It was you who were stiff, and all that talk of the girls you went about with, the parties—"

Charles laughed in delight. "Jealous little cat!"

"I'm not!"

After an interval of murmuring, Monnie straightened, saying in a scandalized tone: "Do you realize what time it must be? Mother will think we're quite mad."

He helped her to her feet and she swayed against him.

"What am I going to say to Arthur when he calls?" she wailed, perplexed. "Oh, Charles, I was going to be so cool, so wise! I was going to do wonderful things for the family with Arthur's money. Why can't I be like that? My heart always runs away with my head."

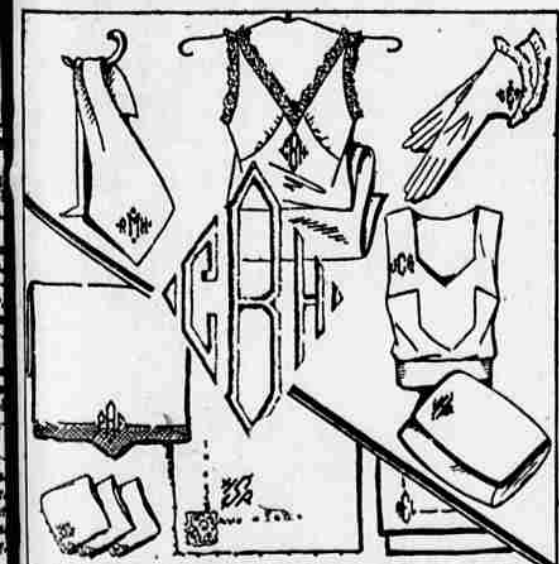
"Don't worry about that," His tone was so odd that she twisted about to stare at him.

"What do you mean?"

"My dear," demanded Charles, striking an attitude. "Don't you realize you're marrying a blooming capitalist?"

(To Be Continued)

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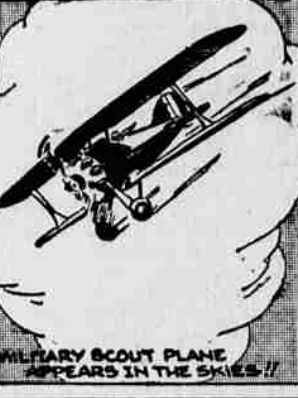
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