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HER DOWRY

It Was Discovered After the Wedding

By MARK TRAVERS

It was 11 o'clock at night. Hackstaff entered his living room and, throwing himself into his chair, sat gloomily thinking. He had just come from Mildred Thorne's. He had proposed to her and had been refused.

His refusal was a more bitter disappointment to him because he had expected an acceptance. There had been a good deal of backing and filling on Mildred's part, but that is not unusual in courtships. Hackstaff had noticed that if he met one of her balkings by a balking on his own part she had come round very quickly. But all the while Mildred was listening to the dictates of her heart. Her mother was telling her that if she married Hackstaff she would prove herself a fool.

Mrs. Thorne was an old woman. She had accumulated some funds by saving—no one knew how much. She and her daughter lived in the house on the hill where Mildred had been born and lived very plainly. They owned the place and raised on it all they ate. Consequently their expenses were confined to what they wore, and they seldom bought any new clothes.

Mildred knew a great deal about her mother and her mother's affairs that the world did not know. She knew that her mother was a miser; not only that she was a miser, but that she was in constant terror lest she should lose her savings. Her husband had been unlucky as an investor, and his wife had no confidence in ever getting back any funds that were put out at interest.

But Hackstaff knew nothing of all this. He was a young farmer much interested in putting his farm on a paying basis. His was not the haphazard way of the uneducated farmer. He had taken a course at an agricultural college and when he put seed into the ground, barring effects of weather, knew exactly what it would produce. He was aware that Mildred was obliged to live economically and supposed that this was because she had very little to live on, which, since there was no income except what the place produced, was true. Hackstaff lived alone. If he could have won Mildred Thorne the world would have looked very bright to him, for he had everything to make a home except a wife, and, having set his heart on her, he would be satisfied with no one else.

He sat on the night of his proposal brooding over his disappointment and thinking of the dull, lonely life before him. Mildred had accompanied him to the door and bidden him adieu there. She seemed to share his disap-

pointment or, at least, to sympathize with him in it. He had not gone far from the house when he heard Hector, the watchdog she always let loose before going to bed, bark. Then all was still.

At 1 o'clock in the morning Hackstaff still sat brooding. He did not go to bed because he had no desire for sleep. Suddenly there was a ring on the telephone bell that sounded at that time of night when all else was still like an alarm. Wondering who could be calling him at such an hour, he sprang to the instrument and took down the receiver.

Shrieks and the bark of a dog.

"Great heavens! That was Hector's bark!" It had been the last sound he had heard from the Thorne place after his departure, and there was no mistaking it for Hector's. The shrieks, the barking, the sounds of a scuffle receded as though to another room. Hackstaff called, but received no answer. The only sound he heard was the ticking of a clock.

Out into the night shot the young farmer, descended the declivity into the valley between his house and the Thornes' and ran up the hill. He found the front door open, but all was dark within. Climbing the stairs three steps at a time, he stood in the upper hall and listened, for he could see nothing. He always carried a box of matches in his pocket and, striking one of them, opened a door.

Mildred was lying on the floor. The light of the match glimmering before her eyes roused her, and, seeing Hackstaff bending over her, for an instant she seemed to be trying to collect her faculties; then she grasped Hackstaff's wrist with a frantic grip, and the flame of the match went out.

"There are matches on the bureau," she said, endeavoring to regain something of her equanimity.

"Are you hurt?" asked Hackstaff, groping.

"I think not. I must have fainted."

Lighting another match, he lit a candle standing on the bureau. By this time Mildred was on her feet, but she seemed unable for a time to collect her faculties. Hackstaff begged her to tell him what had occurred, but she made no reply.

Then came the muffled moan of a dog. Hackstaff was sure it was Hector's bark. It served to recall to Mildred what had happened. She attempted to break away from Hackstaff, but he held her.

"Tell me what to do," he said, "and I will do it. You are not in a condition to act yourself."

"Let me go," she said hysterically. He released her, and she staggered to her mother's room. Hackstaff following with the candle. Opening the door, Mildred found her mother in bed bleeding from several wounds. Hector, who had been shut up with her, was licking them.

A few words was all the explanation recorded Hackstaff at the time. A man had effected an entrance into the house. Crossing the yard, he had evidently been too quick for Hector, but the dog had followed him into the house. Mildred, hearing her mother scream, had gone to her and, taking in the situation, had grasped the telephone receiver and had only time to

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