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WELLNER'S

JEWELERS SINCE 1868

Marrying Mark

By VIOLETTE KIMBALL DUNN

Continued

"Naturally. In the course of my visit with a dozen different women yesterday I made a point of questioning them. They were all my sister's friends. Women of wealth and position. They assured me, all of them, that if present conditions continued here they would refuse to allow their children to remain friends of Valerie."

Lucy had no way of knowing that this was the purest fiction, invented at the moment to bolster up a falling argument. She couldn't, of course, tell that Dorothy and Elise had spent a quiet gossipy afternoon in Elise's apartment.

She stood and clasped her hands tightly. If this were true—if she were really hurting Valerie—there was only one thing to do. But I'd have to speak to Mr. Alexander first," she cried. "Don't you see? It's only fair to both of us. How can I just sneak away as if I'd done something I was ashamed of?"

"Are you really so ingenious? Or do you suppose I am?" smiled Dorothy. She was winning just when she supposed she had lost. She got up and faced Lucy. "Don't you know what would happen, with the hold you have on him? To say nothing of your influence over Valerie. Can you honestly believe my brother-in-law would let you go if you talked to him about it?"

Lucy longed to say she knew he would. She thought harder and more painfully than she ever had before. At last she lifted her eyes and looked into the greenish-yellow ones staring at her.

"No," she said. "He's much too decent. I'm sure he wouldn't."

"It's something in your favor that you admit it, Mark has always been wax in the hands of attractive women. And of course you must have a certain kind of charm for men—"

"Lucy went to the door and opened it. "This is still my room," she said. "Will you kindly leave it? I don't know if I shall ever forgive you or not. But I don't have to listen to you any longer or see you—"

Dorothy found herself at the door without quite knowing how she got there. She fancied she heard a faint footfall in the hall, but when she glanced out there was no one in sight.

"I—hope you won't—"she began. "I'm sure you wouldn't like me to ring for Chiltem?" suggested Lucy. She wondered how much longer she would be able to hold back the tears that choked her.

"You wouldn't dare—"

"Oh, yes."

Somehow Dorothy was in the hall and the door was locked.

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Lucy allowed herself a storm of tears. She buried her head in the cushions of the couch and cried her heart out. When she began to gether breath once more, she got up and washed her face. Then she began to pack. Plans formed and unformed in her mind as she worked. And suddenly she knew what she would do. If she was going, she must go at once. If she waited to see, Mark again she would never find the courage. It took her only a short time to get her things together. She had bought very little in the way of clothes. A few dinner dresses and some sport things. A fur coat when winter came. Now that she had stopped crying she worked in a sort of numbness. Later on she knew that she would feel and suffer. Now she only packed mechanically.

Within an hour her luggage was ready and standing at her door. She looked around the charming rooms. They were the only real home she had ever known. The gay furnishings were in place but they already wore an air of empty expectancy. She walked over to her desk, pulled out a sheet of note paper and sat down. She wrote and tore up a dozen notes. What could she say to Mark? At last she took a fresh sheet and wrote quickly. She couldn't even begin it. She only said:

"Don't hate me for going. And don't think I don't know all you've done for me. I could never tell you how grateful I am. I didn't realize it was a mistake—my being here. I'm leaving this check for the Ark. I'm really very rich—a big salary, and I've saved such a lot of it!"

"Lucy" She found her check book and drew a check on the Allington bank for a hundred dollars. She didn't know the Ark had cost Mark three times that. She thought she was overpaying him, and was glad.

She found she couldn't write to Valerie at all. She found a snapshot taken only the week before by Valerie, Lucy and McTavish on the terrace. She wrote at the bottom. "With all my love, Valerie darling, Lucy."

She ran with it to Valerie's bedroom and put it on the dressing table. She opened Mark's sitting room door almost timidly. It was the first time she had ever crossed the threshold. Even the air seemed filled with him. She ran to his desk and propped the note there, with the check folded inside.

Pain almost past bearing knotted her throat. A handkerchief with an embroidered "M.A." lay unfolded on a chair where Mark had dropped it. She picked it up, and held it for a second against her face. Then she thrust it deep inside her sleeve.

To be continued

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