

The Beautiful Coquette

BY LAURA JEAN LIBBEY

(CONTINUED.)

"As a last request, I say to you, darling, until you hear from me, always think of your poor, unhappy Margaret at her best!"

There was no signature to this tear-blotted epistle—indeed, it needed none.

Carefully placing the note where Aurelia would be sure to see it, directly she entered the room, Margaret stole quietly to the door.

"Good-bye, old room!" she sobbed, turning back waveringly for one moment when she reached the threshold. "Even in my dreams in my after-life I shall see that little white bed, that rug—the stand, with the little cracked mirror over it; that vase, with flowers, on the window sill; my little black trunk, and the sloping roof, with its whitewashed rafters. You are to be my home never again, little room—for the old farm has passed into a stranger's hands."

Margaret could not utter another syllable, her heart was so full; and turning quickly away, she hurried down the narrow passage. At Aurelia's door she paused.

"I am doing it all for the best, dearest," she sobbed below her breath. "I know you will censure me bitterly; but, oh! I could not marry Mr. Phelps—not even to please you."

With quiet footsteps, Margaret passed out of the house.

As she shut the wicket-gate behind her, the clock, in a far-off belfry, slowly, in measured strokes—told the hour of ten.

She had plenty of time to reach the cross-roads, for the New York train did not reach there until a few moments of midnight.

She took the path which led to it in a roundabout way over the hills; though there were many other paths much nearer it, she chose this roundabout route because it would take her past the old churchyard, where her mother lay.

She reached it, and passed swiftly through the tall gate into the enclosure.

She knew her way perfectly well; she walked on, shivering, though it was a summer's night, quietly among the green graves of the quiet, sleeping dead. She knew no fear, but went up to the green, grassy mound, under which her young mother slept.

Margaret sank down upon her knees on the mound, and buried her tear-stained face in the long, cool grass.

"I am going away, mother," she sobbed, "but, oh, you, whose white soul is in heaven—you, who are perhaps, looking down even now upon your unhappy child, know that it is best. Ah, mother, how often I have wished that you had taken me with you when you left this cold and bitter world; but it is too late for repining now. Perhaps you had some good reason in wanting me to live."

"There will be no one to train the white roses over your grave when I am gone, and no one to brush away the cold white sheets of snow when winter comes. I am never coming back until my last hour is near, mother; then I am coming back to die upon your grave, with my head lying above your cold, pulseless heart; and then, maybe they will bury me beside you."

Long and freely her pent-up tears flowed.

Then she aroused herself to the necessity of the present. She must go at once if she were to reach the cross-roads in time for the New York express.

The face of the heavens had changed since she had been kneeling there. The moon had hidden her pale face behind lowering clouds, which had spread slowly, shutting out the light of the golden stars one by one.

The trees swayed to and from each other; the air freshened, and as Margaret looked up at the dark sky, a few raindrops pattered down upon her white face. She always said to herself ever afterward that they were her angel mother's tears up in heaven—that her young mother was sorry for her, and grieved that her life had been so much drearier than the lives of other young girls.

There was the usual number of passengers on the northern-bound train, but the slim young girl who boarded it at the cross-roads, robed in a plain, coarse brown dress, with simple jacket and cloth cap to match, did not attract special attention.

The train moved slowly out from the station, and as the last lights of the village faded from her view in the thick blackness of night, Margaret bowed her fair head and wept like a child.

A full realization of her position swept over her aching heart. She was face to face with the great, hard, cruel world, to battle with it for her daily bread, and she was going to that great metropolis that she had read of and dreaded so much. Yes, alone and unaided she was going to New York City—she, whose whole life had been spent on the quiet, peaceful old farm, and whose thoughts of life and the people in it

were as pure and spotless as the white lilies in their native vales.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Aurelia was not an early riser, consequently it was not until a late hour the next morning that she discovered Margaret's flight, and her amazement knew no bounds. She had never dreamed that—even driven to extremes—gentle, docile Margaret would have recourse to such a measure as this.

Aurelia's anger was great, as she read the letter hurriedly through which she found pinned to the cushion on the little dresser.

"I am glad," she exclaimed heartlessly, as she crushed it in her little pink palm, and flung it from her, "that she left me the money, anyhow. I don't know what in the world I should have done without it."

The thought never troubled her as to what Margaret was to do without it; Aurelia's first thought was always of self.

She knew that she would be obliged to follow Margaret's directions—board until she heard from her; and to tell the truth, this sort of lady's life rather pleased her; she wished that Margaret would make enough to keep her boarding forever.

"A sorry time I shall have now with old Phelps," she muttered. "I do not know how I am to tell him that Margaret has gone. I'll look over her letter again, and see what she has to say!" but a thorough search of the room failed to disclose the crumpled up bit of paper.

"Now what in the world could I have done with it?" exclaimed Aurelia, greatly puzzled. "I am sure that I flung it down on the dresser; but the question is, where is it now?"

Aurelia made another search of the small apartment, with an equally fruitless result.

The truth of the matter was, a passing sportive breeze had caught the wisp of paper up, and had carried it out of the window, depositing it directly at the feet of Silas Phelps, who was advancing rapidly up the gravel path.

"Hey, what's this?" he muttered, stooping to recover it. "A letter, by all that's wonderful! I wonder if some of the young men of the village have been writing to Margaret?" and a sudden, jealous fire leaped up in his heart in an instant, burning as fiercely as if he were six-and-twenty, instead of over sixty.

Adjusting his spectacles on his nose, Farmer Phelps smoothed out the crumpled page, and slowly, line by line, mastered its contents; and by the time he reached the end of the note, no words can describe the rage into which he had worked himself.

"Gone! She has fled—to escape marrying me!" he cried, grinding his teeth together in awful fury. "But I'll show her and hers what it is to

may last and lose with Silas Phelps. Lord! I'm too old a man to be made a fool of by young women. There's some trick behind this, and I know it. No doubt she's in hiding somewhere, and hopes to have me make the proposition that I'll settle a cool hundred thousand or so on her if she'll only come back. But I'll do nothing of the kind—I'll buy the affections of no young woman. Not me," and, fuming with anger, he knocked heavily on the door of the farmhouse.

Aurelia answered the summons, and a slight cry broke from her lips on seeing who stood on the threshold.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Phelps? Please walk in and take a seat," she said, trying to speak unconcernedly, adding: "I suppose you come to see Margaret? I'm awfully sorry to say that you can't see her just now."

Silas Phelps looked at the girl keenly.

For answer, he walked deliberately up to the table and spread out Margaret's letter before Aurelia's confused eyes.

"I picked it up on the walk," he said, harshly, "and I read it, so don't be trying that there game—tryin' to make me believe your sister's about the house when you know she isn't, and when you know, too, that she ran away rather than marry me."

"Well," said Aurelia, with cool audacity that exasperated Silas Phelps, "seeing you know all about it, there is no use in my denying that Margaret has gone, and to tell the truth," she added to herself, "I cannot blame her much."

Low as this soliloquy was muttered, it reached the old man's ears.

(To be Continued.)

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1894	6,597,336.30	359,783.12
1895	6,797,391.05	435,113.55
1896	7,039,323.43	507,348.19
1897	7,236,555.75	548,321.09
1898	7,544,227.02	574,224.75
1899	7,991,042.63	576,807.50
1900	8,482,038.00	586,040.24
1901	9,013,082.63	607,932.00
	Premium Income.	Total Income.
1893	\$ 964,201.08	\$1,261,930.51
1894	989,552.73	1,296,145.86
1895	1,040,240.77	1,353,713.38
1896	1,107,779.45	1,421,686.70
1897	1,182,965.15	1,525,630.16
1898	1,278,649.29	1,665,430.85
1899	1,444,862.27	1,833,919.16
1900	1,575,176.25	1,959,882.01
1901	1,735,036.06	2,105,141.94
	Notices of Death.	Amount of Insurance in Force.
1893	\$456,000	\$35,914,417
1894	452,628	36,312,041
1895	498,969	36,932,148
1896	418,436	38,086,849
1897	604,811	39,943,575
1898	571,316	42,222,364
1899	600,206	46,054,820
1900	594,110	50,191,853
1901	685,472	52,945,044

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