

THE CHRISTMAS BRIDE

By Grace Livingston Hill

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WNU Service

SYNOPSIS

Young Gregory Sterling, having made a fortune in the West, reluctantly returns to his home town, and takes a luxurious room at the Whittall House. In a park, he sees a girl sitting on a bench suddenly keel over, and rushes to her rescue. He takes her to a hospital, where the doctor pronounces the case starvation. Gregory engages a private room and a special nurse, Miss Gowen. While Gregory considers endowing a hospital room in memory of his mother, for the free use of strangers, he finds a purse beneath the park bench where the girl had sat. Opening it, he finds it empty except for a letter addressed to Miss Margaret McLaren, 1486 Rodman street, with a blurred Vermont postmark. Reaching Rodman street, he talks to a disagreeable landlady, who insinuates Miss McLaren gave up a good job because of her boss' behavior, and that three weeks' rent is overdue. Gregory pays the rent. He then reads the letter, signed Grandmother, thanking Margaret for the money she sent. When he reaches the hospital to make arrangements for the endowment, he finds the patient improved but insists on leaving immediately to find a job. He tells her of the room endowment, and guarantees to get her a good job by Monday. Greg ponders on methods of doing good with his money, and writes Roderick Steele, a Virginia minister he met on the train, for possible guidance. After church, he goes to the hospital, tells Margaret he is giving her a job himself, and that in the morning they will rent an office in a rooming house known to Miss Gowen, and get to work. The following morning the head nurse returns from a vacation, ignorant of the endowment room, and insultingly questions Margaret's rights there, and tells her to get out. Margaret, till sick, leaves and finds refuge in a railway station, considering her next step. Meanwhile, on a small Vermont farm, Margaret's feeble old grandparents worry about her, and lament the wickedness of the city, and the need for Margaret to work there in order to pay the interest on the mortgage held by hard old Elias Horner. Horner arrives to demand full payment by four days after Thanksgiving. Back at the hospital, Miss Gowen discovers Margaret's absence.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

"Oh, it's you, is it, Miss Gowen? Well, I wondered when you'd turn up. Just what have you been trying to put over on the hospital authorities, I should like to know? Letting a charity case into our most expensive private room that had been under special orders for one of our best paying patients?"

Miss Gowen's pleasant eyes flashed fire.

"I had nothing to do with letting my patient into the room," she said, "she was there when I came on the case. I understood that she was placed there by orders from the office. I have nothing to do with that, but I do have to do with looking after my patient. Will you kindly tell me what you have done with her? I will go to her at once and you can settle the other question with the people who put her there. Where is she?"

"I'm sure I don't know," was the cold reply. "I told her that I would give her five minutes to dress and get out of the hospital if she was able to go. If she wasn't I said I would have her moved to the ward where she belonged. She seemed to think she could go, so I hope she has gone. You'll probably have plenty of chance to explain to the office. The idea, a girl like that in that room!"

"What do you mean, a girl like that?" asked Margaret's nurse, now thoroughly roused. "She was a lovely girl. I never saw a lovelier." "You being the judge!" sneered Miss Grandon. "Well, we'll see whether the board of directors agrees with you when it comes to a showdown."

"This isn't a reform school and we don't keep our most expensive private rooms for young women who run around with strange young men who pretend they are paying for it, and tell lies about memorial rooms."

"But it is a memorial room," said Miss Gowen breathlessly, "the bronze tablet is expected to arrive today!"

"Oh, so that young fellow put something over on you, too, did he? I begin to see why they never made you a head nurse!"

Miss Gowen grew white with anger, and her eyes grew dark with indignation for an instant. Then she turned and strode away down the hall to the stairs and disappeared, while Miss Grandon watched her with a supercilious smile.

Miss Gowen inquired of every nurse and attendant who had been about during the last half hour, but none of them had seen Margaret McLaren, except a man down in the front office who thought he had seen a young woman come down the stairs a few minutes ago and slip hurriedly out of the street door.

The nurse went out in the street, up and down, wildly, in her uniform,

the cold wind blowing her hair untidily about her face but there was no sign of her patient.

She dashed back into the hospital and interviewed all the nurses on her hall, but no one had seen Margaret leave.

At last, filled with chagrin and embarrassment, Miss Gowen took her way to the telephone booth and tried to call up Greg.

Now Greg had arisen early, for he realized that he had many things to set in order if he was to be honestly a business man before he took on a secretary in earnest.

He had spent much time in his room formulating plans, for he felt keenly that this girl would be suspicious of him if his mind appeared to be in chaos regarding his business. How could any man think in a noisy place like this? Thundering of trains, clang of trolley cars, whir of motors, bang, bang, bang of fire engines, whistle of sirens.

He felt that the first and most important thing was to get that tired, sad little girl located in a comfortable room, and somehow provide her salary in advance so that she would be relieved from financial worry. Perhaps it was almost time to send more money to those old people who had written her that pitiful little letter he had read.

So he had taken out pencil and notebook and set down in order exactly what he had decided to do and what he meant to say to the girl about her salary. That was the most difficult matter he would have to deal with, for he foresaw that the girl would not be willing

cheeks, angry tears, baffled tears, and a look of frantic despair in her eyes.

"There he is now!" he heard her say, and the head nurse turned to look haughtily at the man who had dared to invade her sacred precincts and disarrange her order of things.

"She's gone!" said Miss Gowen to Greg, suddenly smothering her agitated face in her handkerchief.

"Gone?" said Greg. "Yes, gone!" said Miss Gowen, catching her breath in a kind of a sob. "I suppose you'll blame me, but I never dreamed any such thing could happen. They drove her out while I was at breakfast. They told her this wasn't a memorial room and you had lied to her."

"Who did that, Miss Gowen?" asked Greg, his voice coldly steady, his gray eyes alert, his firm jaw set in a way that made him a formidable foe. "Who dared to tell her that?" Greg's voice somehow resembled the blue of steel in a gun pointed straight at a vital part.

Then up spoke the head nurse with her most important air:

"I did!" she said coldly. "I am the head nurse. I discovered that someone had put over a gigantic fraud on the hospital, and I made it very plain to the girl who had presumed to accept a private room that she was not wanted there. I offered to have her moved to the ward where she belonged if she was unable to leave the building but she declined most ungraciously."

Greg's eyes were fixed upon Miss Grandon now, and there seemed to be points of light in them that made them burn like fire. Miss Gowen watched him startled. She wondered if the head nurse realized how angry he was. Suddenly he put up his hand and interrupted the hard, cold explanation.

"I see!" he said in the stern tone used. "You need not say anything more now. We'll deal with that afterward. The point is, where is Miss McLaren now? Don't let's waste any more time!"

Three nurses and an interne had gathered up the hall listening.

Just at that point a doctor arrived on the scene, the doctor who had taken the case when Margaret McLaren had been brought in, and behind him walked a white-clad man from the office below with a workman in his wake, who carried a large bronze plate.

"This is the room," said the white-clad attendant to the workman, pointing toward the open door of the room where Margaret had been such a short time before. "The plate is to be on the door," he said. "Yes," said the workman. "I measured it for the door panel. I guess you'll have to ask these folks to move."

"What's all this?" asked the head nurse sharply, swinging around upon the workman.

"Just a bit of work to be done here, Miss Grandon," explained the attendant.

"But I don't understand!" said the head nurse sharply.

The doctor stepped forward pleasantly, yet with an air of authority, to explain.

"This room has been made a special memorial room, Miss Grandon," he said. "This man has the bronze plate for the door."

"Bronze plate!" said Miss Grandon, the color rising suddenly in her face. "Memorial room! What do you mean? And when could this possibly have been done?"

"This was done Saturday morning at that special meeting that was called to arrange for the extra nurses in the baby ward. It was the donation of Mr. Sterling, a native and former resident of our city. Let me introduce him to you, Miss Grandon, Mr. Sterling. And now, Mr. Sterling, how is your patient? I understand I am to have the pleasant duty of dismissing her from our care, I've just been studying her report card and it couldn't be more satisfactory."

Miss Grandon's face was a study in sudden crimson and Greg acknowledged the introduction only by another stern, steady look. Then he turned to the doctor.

"I'm sorry," he said gravely, "there seems to have been some very unkind work going on here and our patient has been driven away. I'll leave you, doctor, to find out who is at fault, while I go out and try to find the patient. I have no time to lose. I am very anxious

about Miss McLaren, and if all I hear is true I'm afraid she will take pains that we shall never find her again. Are you coming to help me, Miss Gowen?"

The doctor looked from one to another in perplexity, but Greg walked quickly away to the elevator with the nurse, and the groups about dissolved hastily, so that Miss Grandon was left to face the doctor's accusing eyes alone.

CHAPTER V

The taxi was chugging away at the door and Greg put the nurse in it. She had come just as she was, except to stop long enough at her room to snatch her cloak.

Greg had given the order to the driver to go around the streets that were nearby to the hospital, and as they drove he looked down at the nurse and found her weeping softly.

"Look here, now," he protested, "you mustn't feel that way. It certainly wasn't your fault."

"Oh, but I can't help feeling it was," she said, brushing away the tears.

"But let's forget that now. Let's find Miss McLaren first. We can make it up to her. Where do you think she would go first?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Gowen.

"Do you think she would go to her old boarding place and try to get her things first?" asked Greg.

"No, I don't think she would," said Nurse Gowen. "I think she would hunt a job the very first thing."

"There!" said Greg soothingly. "don't blame yourself. How would she go about getting a job as early as half past eight? Most places aren't open that early, are they?"

"Well, not many. But there are employment offices."

"Then let's go to the agencies in this region. She couldn't have walked far. She was too weak."

So they visited every agency in the neighborhood, but found no trace of Margaret.

"Well, perhaps we'd better try her old boarding place now," said Greg at last.

"I don't think she'll go back there till she has a job," said the nurse again. "She's very proud, and she told me how disagreeable that old landlady was. But, of course, it wouldn't hurt to try."

So they drove to Rodman street and interviewed the human dreadnaught again.

"Miss McLaren was to have left the hospital today," said Greg politely, "I am wondering if she has returned here yet or has gone to some friend's house. I have a message for her."

"No, she ain't here," said the old woman, looking him sharply over, and then taking in the white-capped nurse in the taxi. "Has she got a job yet? I don't want her back unless she has a job. I can't stand waiting fer my money."

"Miss McLaren has a job," said Greg firmly, "but I don't think she intends to return here to stay."

"H'm!" said the old woman sourly. "I suppose you put her up to that!"

"I think Miss McLaren will probably come or send for her things very soon," said Greg, ignoring her insinuation and speaking with far more confidence than he felt.

They drove away into the sunshine of the day that was to have been so very pleasant for them all, filled with trouble and perplexity.

"Have you any other suggestions?" asked Greg, looking at the nurse with the expression of a boy who had lost his best treasure and didn't know where to hunt next. "Did you tell her the address of the place we were going this morning to look at rooms?"

"Why, yes, I did!" said Nurse Gowen, hope springing into her eyes again. "I told her all about it. She asked what part of the city it was in and I gave her the name of the woman and told her what rooms she had."

"Well, shall we try your friend?" said Greg.

So they drove to the house where Nurse Gowen's friend lived and saw the pleasant double parlors that might be had for an office, and went upstairs to the big back bed-sitting room, with a bath adjoining, that might be had for his secretary, and Greg said he would take them on the spot. The board was to begin the day his secretary arrived.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

He Smiled

HE SMILED—and his home was a place of happiness.

He smiled—and the children ran out of their way to greet him.

He smiled—and his co-workers in business worked better than in any other place of employment.

He smiled—and his business clients and callers spoke well of him, and his business increased.

He smiled—and followed the smile with a brotherly handclasp; and those who were discouraged and downcast went out and took a new grip on life and their work.

He smiled—and while the years rolled on, he grew younger, because—he smiled.

Favorite Recipe of the Week

A DESSERT that looks very pretty, that tastes better than those grandmother used to make, that's made all in a jiffy—that's a milk pudding. Besides all this, if it's a milk dessert it's bound to be good for the whole family, too.

Apple Custard Pudding.
6 medium-sized apples 1½ cups sugar
apples 1 teaspoon nutmeg
5 eggs 1 teaspoon vanilla
3 cups milk ½ teaspoon salt

Peel and core whole apples and place in a buttered casserole. Save the whites of two eggs for meringue and beat remaining eggs together lightly. Combine with milk and flavorings. Pour over and around apples. The apples must not rise above the top of the liquid. (It may be necessary to place a smaller pan on top of the apples to hold them down into the liquid.) Bake in a pan of hot water about 1 hour at 300 degrees Fahrenheit. When custard is set, cover with meringue made of 2 egg whites, 4 tablespoons of sugar, and 1 teaspoon of vanilla. Brown at 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

YOU CAN THROW CARDS IN HIS FACE ONCE TOO OFTEN

WHEN you have those awful cramps; when your nerves are all on edge—don't take it out on the man you love.

Your husband can't possibly know how you feel for the simple reason that he is a man.

A three-quarter wife may be no wife at all if she nags her husband seven days out of every month.

For three generations one woman has told another how to go "smiling through" with Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. It helps Nature tone up the system, thus lessening the discomforts from the functional disorders which women must endure in the three ordeals of life: 1. Turning from girlhood to womanhood. 2. Preparing for motherhood. 3. Approaching "middle age."

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Disregard the Slight If slighted, slight the slight and love the slighter.—Spurgeon.

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contain an added
ALKALINE FACTOR

A Companion Choose an author as you choose a friend.—Dillon.

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BACKACHES NEED WARMTH

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Allcock's Plaster brings blood to the painful spot... treats backache where it is. Allcock's lasts long, comes off easily. It is the original porous plaster... guaranteed to bring instant relief, or money back. Over 5 million Allcock's Plasters used. 26¢ **ALCOCK'S**