

The Dollar Bride

by Mary Inlay Taylor

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SEVENTEENTH INSTALLMENT

"Don't touch me, Helena," Richard said, not ungently, looking down at her kindly, "it's diphtheria."

"I don't care!" she cried, "you're worn out—where's the nurse? Who's that? Why—Nancy Gordon!"

Nancy, facing them sullenly, felt that she looked a fright.

"I came in because of the storm," she said sharply, "I'm going now!"

"My car's up the road. Page, help Nancy over the hill; she's exhausted, too," said Helena sweetly, "been sick nursing all night, I suppose."

"No, she hasn't; she can't stay, and you can't either, Helena," said Richard sharply. "Roemer, can you take a message for me? Send my man down here."

"Of course. I'll phone—I reckon some wires are up. Mrs. Haddon, you're coming with Nancy and me."

Nancy, at the door, looked back full in their faces. She was outlined against the sunshine, small and slight and mightily defiant.

"I'm not going in the car, I'm going on foot," she said flatly. "Richard, I'll send the nurse, if she can leave her case."

"Nancy—Richard took a step forward, but she never turned her head. They could see her walking straight and steadily across the wet path to the road.

Page uttered an exclamation and ran after her. Nancy was at the top of the hill when he overtook her.

Unconsciously the other two stood at the door and watched. They saw Page reach her and Nancy turned, said something and walked on. But the young man, nothing daunted, pressed close behind her.

Helena, watching and listening keenly, heard the fierce catch in Richard's breath. Then she looked up at him and stood still, her heart beating heavily against her breast. All the life and the light had run out of his look. "A lover's quarrel," she said lightly, "they were together yesterday at the inn. It was a quarrel that made her run out—he's been mad looking for her."

Richard stood rigid. Helena's hand tightened on his arm. She dared it all in one toss of the dice!

"Page is a good fellow," she said dreamily, "and—it's a pity—I don't think she's worth it, is she?"

He turned and looked straight into her face. "I love her!" he said with magnificent simplicity. Then he shook her hand off. "You'd better go home at once, Helena. You'll get diphtheria here."

She broke down wildly clenching her hands against her breast, her long eyes blazing the anger at him.

"I wish I could," she panted, "I wish I could."

But even her fury did not move him now; he sent her home.

Helena was late coming home that day. Haddon had returned from the bank, and was sitting in his study when he heard his wife enter the house.

"How's Polestar?" she asked lazily. Haddon stopped smoking for a moment. "He's going to get over it. I sent for Arliou—first rate man, you know. That confounded boy!"

Helena laughed hysterically. "It wasn't the boy's fault," she said. "I've been out with Page Roemer searching for that girl—you know she ran out of the inn in the rain? Page is in love her, and I had to help him find her. Where do you suppose she was?"

Haddon shrugged. "How the devil do I know With Morgan I suppose."

His wife started. A new and rending suspicion laid hold of her.

"You look fagged out. Better get Johnson to make you a stiff cup of coffee," he advised coolly. "You look all in."

"She was with Morgan. She'd gone into that wretched Kinney woman's shack. The child's down with diphtheria. She and Morgan were there all night, if you please, taking care of that child!"

Haddon threw his head back and laughed heartily.

"Mighty convenient to have diphtheria sometimes, isn't it?"

His cool enjoyment of a thing that was biting into her very soul infuriated Helena.

"You met Nancy Gordon in Washington—I mean, you saw her there once, King," she said slowly, with studied coolness. "I remember your saying something—what was she doing there anyway?"

He laughed shortly, a malicious light showing in the back of his eyes.

"She was with Dick Morgan, that's all," he answered her dryly. "They left her together—the day I went to register at the hotel. I've never said a word about it—and, look here, Helena, you can't either. Mind that, I won't be party to a scandal!"

"Why?" she asked in a smothered voice.

"They'd registered as man and wife, that's all!"

Helena drew a long breath. Before his eyes she grew as white as a dying woman. He half rose from his chair with an inarticulate exclamation, but she rallied, straightened herself and stood erect. He sank back in his chair with a foolish laugh, like a man in sudden relief from pain.

His wife was summoning all her strength to walk slowly to the door. She must be alone! Something in the suppressed fury of her look warned him; he knew he had been rash.

"Helena!" he said sharply. "What is it?"

"Mind not a word of this!" he said sharply, "no scandal involving me—even in hearsay."

She looked over her shoulder at him with an odd twisted smile.

"Do you really think I care—one way or the other—about that girl?" she asked scornfully.

"No," he said dryly, "but I'm pretty damned sure now—that you do—for the man."

She had her hand on the door and she met his eyes with fire in her look, and hatred. But she said nothing.

Up in her own room, Helena was sitting on the edge of her bed, white teeth set hard. She was going over and over those crazy moments when she had made a fool of herself, and lately—yes, lately she had been no better than a mendicant begging the alms of love!

And all the while it was Nancy Gordon! He loved the girl! Yet the tide of her hatred was turning—not on him—but on Nancy. Nancy was a woman, and Helena knew where to strike a woman. Fury rose in her like a tide.

Before she knew it, before she had time to think of the incredible wickedness of what she did, she went to the telephone.

Old Major Lomax, just recovered from his prolonged attack of gout, got to his desk and began to figure on William Gordon's indebtedness to him. Not even the house had quite wiped out Gordon's initial plunge. It wasn't like Gordon. Of course there was a reason.

Lomax had his own suspicions, fed up by letters from his cousin in the trust company. Old man Beaver had conceived a chronic distrust of young Gordon. "Going on another bat, I think," he wrote Lomax. "something eating the boy—women or wine or something, can't make it out. Don't lend the old man too much."

Major Lomax rubbed the end of his nose with his pen. He was thinking of Nancy when he heard the front door shut violently and the rush of feet in the hall. Angle came in, dropped into a chair by his desk and began to cry. The major eyed her for a moment, then laid down his pen.

"What's the matter? Shut off the water-works! What's wrong now, child? Who's hurt your feelings?"

Angle dashed away her tears, choking and gasping.

"I'm not hurt, I'm mad!" she said fiercely. "Uncle Robert, they're saying things—perfectly awful things about Nancy Virginia."

The old man picked up his pen mechanically and added up two sets of figures. His niece strangled another sob.

"It's about Richard Morgan—it's—it's perfectly awful, Uncle Robert."

One thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine plus—"The major suspended his pen.

"Tell me the whole business, Angle."

The girl's eyes fell before his. "It's a horrid thing, uncle!"

"Humph! Where did you get it?"

Angle told him. The woman had a good name, not much of a gossip either, she had it on good authority. "Everybody knows!" Angle sobbed. "I—I'd like to kill Dr. Morgani!"

"You haven't told me what it is yet," said her uncle dryly.

"I hate to soil my mouth with such talk!" his niece cried, her face aflame.

Little by little the old man drew the story out of her. It had grown since Helena started it, and it was very reasonable.

The major drummed on his desk with his fingers, his eyes fixed on the distant view from his windows. He had known Richard from boyhood. Not a usual boy, a good deal

of man always, the major thought. "It's a damned lie, Angle," he said finally.

"Of course it is!" she agreed, "and you've got to stop it, Uncle Robert."

The major patted her hand. "That's right! I like to hear you, but you can't stop women's tongues, child. You'd better get Nancy to come out with the truth. That's the way to meet it."

"As if she had anything to tell—she can't have!" Angle turned indignant eyes upon him.

He shook his head. "No! But there's something at the bottom of it, too much smoke, Angle."

It was ten days before Haddon heard the story, a garbled story, but he came home white with rage.

"By God, Helena, if I thought you'd started this!" he stormed fiercely, finding her alone in her room.

She looked him over from head to foot, beautiful and insolent.

"Do you imagine you were the only one to read that register?" she asked cuttingly.

He recoiled in spite of himself. Of course he had been a fool and flown off the handle about nothing.

"No," he answered coldly. "Lord!" he said, "women are the devil!" and he heard his wife's laugh, as he shut the door.

At first, Nancy suspected nothing, but she felt a change, subtle, complete, chilling. The old friendly atmosphere seemed to recede and leave her marooned. She fancied that it had something to do with Polestar, Haddon had made a great deal of that incident, he had discharged Henry and told the whole story. Major Lomax overtook her one day on her way home.

"Going down to Warrenton tomorrow to spend the day with Angle and her cousin?" he asked pleasantly.

Nancy smiled. "Why, yes, Angle asked me—she says her cousin told her she might bring a friend. There's a cross country race, isn't there?"

The old man nodded. "Angle won't ride, I've forbidden her. She can't keep her seat on one of Jack Fuller's horses, I believe you're a reckless young devil, Nancy. I suppose you'll go it strong?"

The girl's face brightened perceptibly. "I love to ride, major, and—I love horses."

"Hum, didn't think about sparring race horses though?" he observed dryly.

Nancy's cheeks blazed red. "Major, they've made such a fuss about that—I can see it, the very way people stare at me!"

The old man stopped short, leaning on his cane, and peered at her.

"That isn't the reason people stare at you, my child," he said gravely.

Nancy lifted startled eyes to his face; what she saw there frightened her.

The major drew a pattern on the ground with his cane.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Timely Farm Questioned Answer'd At State College

Question: When will Farm and Home Week be held at State College this summer?

Answer: Farm and Home Week will begin officially on Tuesday morning, July 31, and last through Friday, August 3. However, there will be an evening meeting on Monday, July 30. Full information about Farm and Home Week may be secured from Charles A. Sheffield, secretary, State College Station, Raleigh.

Question: What causes limberneck in poultry and is it contagious?

Answer: Limberneck is caused by

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the birds eating decomposing flesh or other protein substance. Usually it is caused by the chickens eating dead birds, a dead rat or some such material. Decomposed or moldy mash will sometimes produce the condition. Limberneck is not contagious and the outbreak may be handled by confining the birds until the trouble is located and then treating the flock with Epsom salts.

The grebe can fly through or under water as well as it can in the air.



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