

# The MYSTERIOUS LANDLORD

By RICHARD Le GALLIENNE

Do you believe in dreams, Margot?" "Fancy your asking me such a question," answered wise-looking little Margot, turning her big blue eyes almost reproachfully on her friend: "Of course, I do!" She was a serious, rather cery little creature, with quite a nimbus of golden-brown hair about her head, and an eager, delicately shaped face, which however, was so dominated by her great eyes that, like some flowers, she seemed to be nothing but eyes. Looking at her, one might well believe that if there were any ghosts about, or any spirit faces in the wind, Margot would see them.

Her friend Phoebe Somerset was a tall, graceful girl, with dreams, too, in her deep-brown eyes, but they were the dreams this world can fulfil, and the beauty of her exquisite face was the beauty of this world—if any beauty is really of this world. I mean that, whereas the beauty of little Margot's face was the beauty of a fairy, or a spirit, the beauty of Phoebe Somerset was the beauty of a beautiful woman of this and no other planet. Her brown hair was very thick and glossy on her head, but it was just beautiful human hair, and it made no strange light about her head and laughing and her regular features and creamy skin and laughing lips were all, so to say, concretely beautiful without being in the least mysterious. She was as demonstrably beautiful as a rose, and her face might have seemed a little characterless, but for its look of exceptional intelligence, and the observant eyes of humor that lived in her eyes and at the corners of her mouth.

"Fancy your asking me such a question. Of course, I do!" Margot had said. "Well, I don't, you know, Margot." "You pretend you don't—or, perhaps, you think you don't, like lots of other people. But in your heart you do."

"I wonder if I do," said Phoebe musingly. "Well," she added presently, "you're going to laugh at me, but I certainly had quite an amusing dream last night, and I can't help thinking about it. You, little wise woman, shall tell me what it means."

"Well," Phoebe began, "I thought I was swimming—"

"Oh, that's a good dream," Margot eagerly interrupted. "Swimming is great good fortune—any dream-book will tell you that. But, go on."

"Yes, I was swimming, and swimming with wonderful ease and pleasure. I shall never forget the joyousness of it, the happy sense of power I had. I swam just as easily as a bird flies, swam on and on with indescribable elation. It seemed to me I could never tire, and that I had only to wish to swim anywhere and any distance I wanted. First I remember that I was swimming in a river with the greenest of grassy banks and the brightest rippling water. Then I seemed to have come to a great harbor, and was swimming in and out among the keels of enormous ships; and next I was right out to sea. I shall never forget how blue and fresh the water was, and how the sun shone, and how wonderfully lonely it was, and yet how perfectly safe I felt. I remember the sun setting, and the moon rising, while I still swam on and on till it seemed I fell asleep somewhere in that sea. I remember waking up for a moment, lazily opening one eye, and dreamily seeing the stars above me, and feeling my body swaying luxuriously in the heaving water. Then I rested back into it again, and when I next awoke, the sun had risen and there, a little way off, was an island all white sand and palms, and I swam to it, and presently a big breaker carried me like a shell and laid me upon the beach. I sat up and looked around. The trees were not palms, as I had thought. I had never seen any trees quite like them. All I can remember of them was that they were wonderfully green, and that they were clustered thick with shining leaves. Also they seemed filled with invisible birds, which made the whole island ring with their songs. I have never imagined anything so perfectly happy as the sound of those birds singing out there in the middle of the sea. There seemed to be nothing on the island but the trees and the birds. Not another living thing, except myself. Presently I stood up and, just a little afraid, walked over the sand up among the trees. And there streamed out from the trees a fragrance of such sweetness that I can no more describe it than I can describe the sweet singing of the birds. A soft breeze blew like a happy sigh over the island, and as it passed among the trees the hidden birds seemed to sing together like the ringing of innumerable golden chimes. But still I could see no birds, and suddenly I saw that there was fruit shining under the leaves, clusters of a small golden fruit that glittered with an, almost blinding radiance where it caught the light."

Phoebe stopped a moment. "And now," she continued, "the mischievous Puck of dreams had, of course, to turn the whole beautiful dream into a jest—for what do you think the fruit under the leaves turned out to be?"

Margot couldn't guess. "Wedding-rings!" answered Phoebe laughing. "Just plain, earthly, guinea-gold wedding-rings." "Well!" said Margot. "Well!"

"Yes, just wedding-rings, and it wasn't birds at all that made that wonderful chiming—it was just the breeze playing among the wedding-rings—but I must say," added Phoebe laughing, "I never heard such sweet music as they made; I can hear them yet—chiming, chiming there on that green island right away in the middle of the sea."

"Well, that's not a very difficult dream to read, is it?" said Margot. "You mean I'm to be married this year, or some such nonsense, I suppose. It was too silly for such a pretty dream to end like that. You must be sure never to tell anyone about it. They would say I was dying to be married."

"And, aren't you, Phoebe?" asked Margot, coming closer to her friend, and looking up into her face with wily innocence. "Margot!" almost shrieked Phoebe, taking Margot by the shoulders, and shaking her with mock indignation. "You perfectly awful child. What do you mean? I dying to be married! Why?"

"Yes, dear," Margot interrupted, smiling, "we all know that you could have been married over and over again, and that you've had as many proposals as there are wedding-rings on your island. But don't you see that having rejected almost every kind of man possible, your case grows the more desperate." "Not exactly desperate, Margot—say exciting." "Well, exciting then, and the harder it seems to find the more anxious, or anyway curious, you become as to what, when he does arrive, the wonder-man will be like." "Yes, I wonder what he will be like. I wonder," said Phoebe dreamily. "Have you no idea, no picture of him in your mind?" "Not the least. I shall know him the instant I set eyes on him, that's all; and my heart will say, 'There he is; he has come at last.'"

"Suppose he were never to come?" "But he will. I know he will come." "He doesn't always, you know—I don't think mine will ever come," said Margot wistfully. "You silly child. What do you mean?" "I mean that I want the impossible." "So do I," answered Phoebe, laughing. "We all want the impossible; and, if we want it hard enough, it surely comes to us one day out of the sky."

But little Margot shook her head incredulously. "I shall never marry," she said with a solemn shake of her head. Margot was just nineteen. "I wonder what it is that makes the difference between the man we reject and the man we marry," said Phoebe after a pause. "I mean: Take a number of nice men; they have all, we will say, attractive qualities. Gifts and good looks, manliness and so forth, are all fairly equally divided amongst them. Yet one of them is your man of destiny, and the rest are a million miles away. I'm sure any girl might have been proud of the love of some of the dear boys that have loved us, Margot—and yet, here we are two old maids, heart-whole and fancy-free. Oh, Mr. Fairy Prince, where art thou, this fine spring morning?"

"I think I know what it was we missed in those dear boys, as you call them," said Margot presently. "They hadn't the power of appealing to our imagination." "Love," she went on, like a little wiseacre, "wants something more than love and devotion and a good home. It is very silly of it, but it's true all the same. Love wants romance. And somehow or other, those dear boys haven't been able to give it to us so far. I dare say they make the best husbands, but if we were to marry them, there would always be a pining deep down in our hearts for The One We Should Have Waited For."

"I do believe you are right, Margot. I had never thought it out before. I never quite knew why I couldn't marry Jack Spender, for instance. You know what a dear he is in every way. He's so strong and good and brave and true and clever and handsome and rich and everything. . . . I was tremendously fond of him, and yet. . . . yes! you are right—we are waiting for the man who appeals to the imagination."

"And perhaps when he does come," added Margot, "we'll wish he hadn't!" "Ah, no!" said Phoebe, with a sudden serious light in her face. "He can bring us no sorrow so great as the sorrow of his never having come."

"Margot," she continued presently, with an unthought softness and shyness in her voice. "Shall I confess another silly thing? Will you promise never to tell a living soul—and not to laugh at me?" Margot promised, and Phoebe drew her to a secluded corner of the garden, and pointed to a bed of golden crocuses, particularly vivid and thickly massed together.

"Do you see those crocuses? Do you notice how they are growing—in what shape, I mean?"

"Yes," said Margot. "Oh, I can't tell you. It's too childish. But don't you see—they make a perfect ring!" "Yes," said Margot, rather puzzled.

"Well, that is my wedding-ring. I planted them three or four years ago, and I said to myself that whenever they came up in an unbroken circle, that year I should meet him—him we have been talking about. Two Springs they came up with gaps here and there—so I knew he wasn't coming those years; but this Spring—look at them, Margot."

It was true; they made an unbroken ring of shining gold. "And you call me superstitious!" laughed Margot, kissing her. "Well, between your dream and the crocuses, there seems no doubt, poor Phoebe, that your hour has come. By all the omens, the Prince is already riding toward you on his coal-black charger. I think he must be very near. I feel almost as if he were in the garden."

"No; if that were it there would be more of them," Phoebe had decided. "No, these are evidently some old sentimental memoranda."

"It's a shame," said Margot; "he ought to have labelled them, oughtn't he?"

"Let us go and see if he is hiding in the pavilion," said Phoebe laughing, as she led the way up a grassy slope to a little shingled house that stood at the edge of a pine wood overhanging the garden. This was Margot's first visit to the Priory, and she was looking round the shelves of the pavilion with delighted recognition of many a favorite volume. "What a delightful person your landlord seems to be!" she exclaimed.

"Doesn't he?" "Do you know anything about him?" "Nothing except that he lives in Italy. His wife died here, I believe and he has not lived here since." "I wonder if this is her picture," said Margot, looking at a pastel of a delicately beautiful face hanging over the mantel.

"I have often wondered," said Phoebe. "I suppose this is his writing," said Margot, pointing to the name, "Robert Stanforth," written on the fly-leaf of one of the volumes. "What a fascinating hand!"

"Isn't it?" said Phoebe. "Why, it's all like an enchanted palace—just like Cupid and Psyche," continued Margot. "You are the princess, and you come here finding everything prepared for you, just as if some thoughtful hand had done it all on purpose, and you go from room to room, everywhere feeling the touch of the unseen hand—but the master of it all is nowhere to be seen."

"Yes! I almost expect to find him sitting here sometimes, and see him raise his eyes from his book, as I open the door. I have half feared sometimes lest I

"We might enquire of the house agent," she added, mockingly. "Perhaps he would write and tell the landlord that two charming and romantic young ladies are lying to know what he means by having two unexplained butterflies so conspicuously on his mantel-piece."

"You absurd thing!" rejoined Phoebe; "but he is irritating, isn't he?" "One day as the friends were looking among the stranger's books for something to read, a sheet of paper fluttered on to the floor. Margot picked it up. It was covered with the same small writing as the "Robert Stanforth" which stood on the fly-leaves of some of the books.

"I think I may read it—don't you think?" asked Margot. "It doesn't seem to be anything personal. Only poetry." And Margot read: "Always keep the dream, Though each hope you had Life should take away, Never part with that— Though naught else remain— Never lose the dream. Still, oh, still, the dream!"

"Let the others laugh— Nothing but a dream! Eyes like fairy pools, Dreams shall keep you girl; Dreams shall keep you pure. Never lose the dream."

"I wonder if he wrote that himself?" said Phoebe. "Evidently not. He has only copied them. They are signed by another name."

"I'm glad." "Whatever for, you strange child! Don't you think they are rather sweet lines?"

"Yes! But I'm glad he didn't write them." "What on earth for?" "Well, I don't want him to be a poet." "You don't want him, Phoebe. Why, I believe you're falling in love with him."

"Nonsense," retorted Phoebe, with quite a deep blush nevertheless; "but it doesn't fit in with my imagination of him for him to be a poet."

"A poet!" said Margot, her big eyes shining with dreams. "If ever I were to marry I should wish to marry a poet—"

"Marry a poet, Margot? Your bitterest enemy couldn't wish you a more cruel fate. Poets are wonderful lovers, Margot, but God never meant them to be husbands."

"Is that why—" began Margot, and stopped short. "Why what?" asked Phoebe. "Nothing," answered Margot, with a certain vague impulse of self-protection, "poets nowadays don't look like poets. They make a pose of looking as commonplace as they can, and hate anyone to take them for what they are. Their aim seems to be to look as like commercial travelers as possible. Perhaps it is the natural desire of greatness to escape attention, and to go incognito, like kings, with check suits and big cigars. I'm sure the man who wrote those lines looks like a volunteer or a bank clerk and prides himself on it. The poets my friend looked the part as well as played it. They were proud of it—just as a soldier is proud of looking a soldier—"

"How would you like to marry a soldier?" interrupted Margot. "No," Phoebe shook her head. "Soldiers have no humor. They are too serious."

"It's rather a serious profession, isn't it?" "All professions are serious. I should dread any man who had a profession. It would be sure to show on him somewhere like a uniform."

"But a man must be something," protested Phoebe. "I suppose he must," answered Phoebe. "What a professional man, not a medical man, not a lawyer, not a man, or a soldier man, or a sailor man, not a man, or a man of anything—only a man!"

"How about a nobleman—driving on his estate with Phoebe in pursuit?" "But, whatever Phoebe's opinions on the subject, poets and poetry, it is a remarkable fact that she went to sleep that night, she was saying to herself: "Always keep the dream. Though all else may go, Never part with that— Never lose the dream."

It was a recognized institution among her friends that every Friday evening she "talked" by "the cards." Usually looks askance, is regarded by card players particularly favorable for the practice of their art after dinner on Fridays, Margot was one of a little group of young, and even old, people to consult the sybil—for it is a strange thing, old people are no less interested in the game of young. Margot's solemnity of manner on these occasions was almost indescribable, and she was a firm believer in her own gifts as a diviner, and to her credit so many well-authenticated instances that one could not well escape a certain nervousness in consulting her. She had a way of making that made the least superstitious lady of voluntary respect to her prognostications of the future.

Phoebe always affected a certain haughty cynicism as they sat down to the table and Margot over to her the twenty-eight cards, looking blue and cut three times. "Suppose we assume the preliminary words to be true," the skirmishing of fate, so to speak, shortly to have a letter. This is perhaps not all things considered. Then I'm sure a small is coming to me. Of course, I am going to take journey—to buy a hat in London, perhaps, mustn't forget that I am to have a surprise."

"Be quiet, Phoebe; how can you expect the tell anything when you approach them in such Now, listen," and Margot would begin.

On this particular Friday, Margot was unusually impressive, and though she wouldn't confessed it for the world, Phoebe was a little bit full.

"Some one is going to tell you a lie," began impressively pointing to the three knaves. "Never mind that. Tell me about the King and the Dark Man," said Phoebe.

"Did you remember to wish?" asked Margot regarding her friend's fidgety hands. "Yes, I wished, she said with a smile, but Margot was so sorbed in her friend's future as hardly to be answer. Presently she came out of her study.

"Your cards are wonderfully bright to-night, she said solemnly. "You hold your wish, which is— and with a rapid gesture she indicated fortunate conjunction of the cards. Then she reading the mystic scheme of hearts and diamonds pictured kings and queens.

"Look," she said presently, pointing to the cards. "Do you see those three aces? The hasty news. And well! Did you ever see any that I Phoebe, listen! A dark man is coming to your wish—to your wish—"

"To my wish—nonsense," said Phoebe, "what this mean? The king of clubs, as you can see to the nine and ten and ace of clubs. That a dark man is coming across deep water. More than that, the ace of hearts so close means coming to the house, and the three of hearts he is coming to your wish. There are you of clubs—and he is a club-man, too—the king. Do you see?"

"My wish!" protested Phoebe again. "No, well, there are the cards," said Margot. "Come into the garden," said Phoebe, rising. "Look how the moon is shining the trees."

"Yes! Let us go and see if it is shining wedding-ring," assented Margot wickedly, went into the garden. The crocus ring was glittering with dew-diamonds. "Oh, the ring is covered with tears!" Phoebe.

"No, only diamonds," said Margot, reassured. Next morning at breakfast Mr. Somerset from a letter he was reading. "No, don't read that! Phoebe, listen! A dark man is coming to your wish—to your wish—"



"DO YOU BELIEVE IN DREAMS, MARGOT?"