

Lydia's Legacy

A Parrot That First Brought Trouble, Then a Husband

By CLARISSA MACKIE.

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Lydia Thorne read the letter three times before she fully understood its meaning. Conched in the heavy phrasology of a country lawyer, it announced that the widow of her uncle, Sidney Ransom, had died a short time ago, leaving to Lydia a legacy. The lawyer went on to state that, although Mrs. Ransom had never seen the niece of her husband, she had been greatly impressed by reports of her kind and amiable disposition, and so to her loving care she left—her pet bird, a parrot.

To Lydia, who detested parrots as noisy, ungraceful creatures, this legacy fell as a calamity in her quiet, well-ordered existence. She scarcely read the badly written postscript, which stated that the remainder of Mrs. Ransom's estate had gone to a favorite nephew of her own.

The parrot arrived in a crate. There was a tall perching stand for Polly in the crate with the cage, and the parrot was soon at home on the perch, a chain secured around one leg and fastened to the stand.

Lydia found her new companion the source of much amusement for several days. He learned to call her by name, and at times it almost seemed as if she had a human companion in her lonely life.

Her house was situated at the end of the long village street, and few came to her save when there was dressmaking to be done, but Stillwater was near a large city and most of the women bought their clothes in the ready-made shops, so Lydia did not have much to do.

It was the spring of the year, and Lydia worked much in her garden. Many times Polly sat near on her perch, shrilly defiant of the wild birds that hovered curiously about him.

Lydia was digging among her pansy plants one morning, transplanting the little green shoots from one bed to another.

"You're growing old, old, old!" shrieked Polly, with sudden vindictiveness and a dreary foreboding in his tone that startled his new mistress.

She turned wistful brown eyes in his direction. Lydia Thorne was no longer young, but she still retained a certain sweet youthfulness of expression, and her brown hair showed not one thread of gray. Perhaps it was because her heart would never grow old, for at thirty-eight Lydia was younger than many women at eighteen. She never thought of her age, but now, when Polly repeated himself in a sudden fury of words, she felt that they must be true.

"You're growing old, old, old as the everlasting hills. Never mind, Lyddy shall marry Stephen, and then everything will be all right. Oh, gee!" Polly made a savage peck at a saucy blue jay who had ventured close to his perch and sent the bandit bird screaming to the top of a tall elm tree.

Polly scratched his ear reflectively. "Poor old Stephen!"

Lydia was interested. "Who is Stephen?" she asked.

"Stephen's a fool. He must marry Lyddy. Then everything will be all right," cackled the bird.

"What nonsense!" cried Lydia indignantly. "What does the bird mean?" She wondered often after that, for Polly seemed to find great comfort in speaking of the unknown Stephen, and, through Polly, Lydia learned that Stephen was a good boy and a credit to his family and if he would only go and see Lyddy he would at once fall in love and marry her.

Then one day came a letter from a cousin in another village inviting Lydia to come and spend a week with her, and, having heard of Polly's arrival, she extended permission for Lydia to bring her legacy.

This Lydia was loath to do, for the parrot's cage was heavy and most unwieldy, and she did not really care enough for the bird to carry it about the country. Nevertheless none of her neighbors seemed willing to undertake its care, so one bright morning found Lydia and Polly speeding cityward in the railroad train.

The parrot proved a diverting companion, and it seemed as if they had scarcely started before the train drew into the noisy station where she had to change cars.

Lydia was walking through the long building, carrying the heavy cage in her already tired arms, when Polly set up a violent outcry.

"Stephen! Stephen! Oh, Stephen, wait for Lyddy!" he shrieked frantically.

A man crossing diagonally in front of them paused and looked curiously at the parrot.

"That's a good boy, Stephen. Marry Lyddy and everything will be all right. Such a handsome Polly!" The bird was uttering to and fro, and Lydia found difficulty in holding the cage upright.

The stranger approached and lifted his hat. "I am sure Polly is an old friend of mine," he said courteously. "He recognizes me, and—"

Tired Lydia flashed indignant eyes upon him. "No," she said coldly. "The man turned away with reddening cheeks. He had a nice face, Lydia admitted to herself, but she had been brought up to beware of fascinating strangers, and this individual was the nearest approach to a fascinating stranger Lydia had ever chanced to meet. Polly added tumult to confusion.

"Stephen! Stephen! Be a good boy—marry Lyddy and everything will be all right!" he screamed. Lydia was almost hysterical as the stranger paused again and thrust a finger between the wires of the cage. Polly clung to the finger, crooning softly. With a sudden movement Lydia thrust the cage in the man's arms.

"Take him if you want him! I'm sure I don't!" And then, unheeding his sharp exclamation of surprise, she darted away in the hurrying crowd. She was quite breathless when she reached the home of the cousin that afternoon and found it difficult to explain the absence of Polly.

"I left him behind," she said evasively, and with this explanation Mrs. Brent had to be content.

During the next few days Lydia wondered what had become of her parrot. She was ashamed of her impatience toward the stranger and thought somewhat ruefully that Aunt Susan Ransom would have considered her a shrew rather than a kind and amiable person had the good lady seen her fill temper on the day of her journey.

The second evening after her arrival as they sat at tea Mrs. Brent broke the silence that had fallen between them.

"Queer, wasn't it, that Susan Ransom should have left everything to Stephen when he don't need the money and just left you that parrot to take care of? Never saw Susan in your life, did you?"

"No," said Lydia, "but I used to write to Uncle Ransom, and then after he died I kept up a correspondence with Aunt Susan. I quite liked her too. She used to write about the parrot, but I never dreamed she would leave it to me. I never liked parrots much."

"I guess you could have used some money," remarked Mrs. Brent, stirring her tea thoughtfully. "Stephen don't need any more'n he's got."

"Is Stephen the nephew?" faltered Lydia, with very pink cheeks. She was thinking of Polly's allusions to "Stephen."

"Of course—Stephen Wood. Queer you never knew his name. Susan thought a sight of him, and begged him day and night because he never got married. He's doing real well in the city—he's in the coal business and is making money hand over fist."

"Have you ever seen him?" asked Lydia in a queer voice.

"Land, yes! Good looking too. Tall and lean, with clean shaved face and bright blue eyes—colors up like a girl when he's embarrassed. He always seemed to think a lot of that parrot. I visited there once, you know. I should think he'd have wanted it. I'm disappointed you didn't bring it, Lydia. They say it's a very clever bird. I shall be in Stillwater before long, and I'll see him then."

Lydia was doubtful whether Mrs. Brent would ever see the parrot again, although Mr. Wood might return the bird to her if he knew where she might be found, for now she knew it was Stephen Wood who had stopped and spoken to her that day in the railway station.

After all, the visit did not turn out to be as enjoyable as Lydia had anticipated.

The little house seemed very lonely when Lydia returned to Stillwater. May had come, and with it the smell of apple blossoms and young clover. Lydia leaned over the gate and watched the golden cloud of dust that preceded the rumbling stage. The evening train was in, and presently, after the stage had carried the mail to the postoffice, she would throw a shawl about her shoulders and go down after her newspaper and letters.

The stage rolled past. The driver waved his whip at her, and her gaze followed the vehicle down the long street into the village. She did not hear footsteps approaching from the opposite direction, and as she turned her head Polly's familiar voice broke harshly on the still air.

"Here we are, sir! Well, well! He's a good boy, Stephen, and marry Lyddy!" Polly's voice died away in an indignant squawk as a strong hand reached in the cage and chastised him.

It was Stephen Wood bringing Polly home.

"Mrs. Brent told me you had returned home, and so I have brought the bird back to you, Miss Thorne. I am sure you must have thought me impudent that day in the station. Of course you did not know me, but I recognized Polly's voice, and should have made myself known to you at once."

"I was very rude to you," said Lydia gratefully as she opened the gate to admit him, "but I was very tired, and I was a little tired of Polly just then, and it all happened so suddenly. You understand?"

"Of course I understand. Polly is tiresome most of the time, but he has many good qualities. If he had not recognized me that day I would not have the pleasure of returning him to you," said Mr. Wood.

"They sat down on the steps, and the man looked admiringly at Lydia, pink and glowing and sweet as one of the apple blossoms overhead.

"Be a good boy, Stephen, and marry Lyddy, and everything will be all right," shrieked Polly suddenly, and there was such a note of prophecy in his raucous voice that Lydia's brown eyes fell before Stephen's steady blue ones, and this time Polly went unheeded.

PAPERING THE HOUSE

When a Weak Play Appears in a New York Theater.

PROPPED BY FREE TICKETS.

The Judicious Distribution of "Complimentaries" by the Manager Secures Well Dressed Audiences and Saves the Appearance of a "Frost."

Long before the curtain goes down at the end of a new production, the manager has decided, in his own mind, whether he has a success on his hands. But he does not mean to announce his opinion in either event. If he believes the play is a "frost" or even a slight success the house for the next few nights must bear every outward evidence of prosperity.

In other words, he must "back the line" of adverse criticism by "papering the house." For a week at least he must make a "front" in the orchestra chairs, no matter if there is desolation in the box office. Let him make the public believe the new play has attracted a large number of patrons for six or eight performances and there is a chance of enough business to prop up a forced run of a few weeks, which may help things on the road. This means that "paper" or free tickets must be judiciously distributed.

Every manager of a theater has a large circle of friends. This may be due partly to his possession of a certain personality, but undoubtedly the business he is in has in itself an attraction for many. A majority of these people will accept passes when they are offered; some are not above asking for them, while still others—but these are rare—will "buy tickets when complimentaries are not tendered."

When the manager has a play that is in danger of going to pieces for lack of patronage he sends tickets to all these friends of his and whenever possible obtains a promise that they will be used by the persons to whom he gives them. It is not difficult to extract such a pledge. Being on terms of more or less intimacy with the manager, the favored ones know he will be likely to see them in the theater or if they are not there that he will take note of those who do not use the tickets. He keeps a record of the seat numbers opposite the names of those who should occupy those particular chairs and can tell at once when hospitality has been abused.

Another class which sees many plays in New York city gratis is to be found in department stores. Nearly every director of a theatrical company—no distinct from a theater manager—is on cordial terms with the heads of departments in large retail mercantile establishments. Each of these heads will accept from six to a dozen pairs of tickets occasionally to distribute among his subordinates.

Often it is possible to get rid of 200 tickets or more in a day in this way, and when this is repeated, in four or five stores the manager is sure of the attendance of an appreciable number of well dressed young women in the newest millinery and style of coiffure, each with a respectably attired cavalier and all on their best behavior. These people may not be ultra fashionable, but they will not disgrace their environment.

Unless the theater manager is acquainted with the department heads, however, it is not an easy matter to give away tickets in such an establishment. The average clerk in a large store, especially of the feminine gender, is suspicious. She does not understand such open handed generosity, and there must be a lot of explanation to convince her that in offering something for nothing the manager has not some sinister design. As for the male clerks, if he gives them any directly they are sure to tell every one what a pull they have with the manager and poster him for tickets ever afterward, particularly when he has a success, with "the free list absolutely suspended."

It is far less of an undertaking to buy a hundred dollars' worth of low priced goods than to make a present of two tickets apiece to a dozen persons behind the counter. The telephone girls, stenographers and manicurists look askance at free tickets from a stranger, although when their confidence is won they will generally accept them with due gratitude.—Theater Magazine.

Purdie's Panacea.

Tom Purdie, an old manservant in Sir Walter Scott's household, used to talk of the famous "Waverley Novels" as "our books" and said that the reading of them was the greatest comfort to him.

"Whenever I am off my sleep," he confided to James Skene, the author of "Memories of Sir Walter Scott," "I have only to take one of the novels, and before I have read two pages it is sure to set me asleep."

Plenty on Hand.

"Have you ever wondered about your husband's past?" "Dear me, no. I have all I can do in taking care of his present and worrying about his future."—Boston Herald.

Domestic Note.

"I've noticed one thing." "And what is that?" "When one gets loaded it's usually his wife who explodes."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

Our own anger does us more harm than the thing which makes us angry.—Sir John Lubbock.

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