

# The Dollar Bride

by Mary Inlay Taylor

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FIFTH INSTALLMENT

"If you stay—if they come to get you before you pay it back—it will kill them both—I mean father and mother. You must go, Roddy!"

"You're a trump, Sis!" he said thickly, "you've saved me—I feel like a brute to let you do it, I—I'll go, but I've got to tell them first, I mean the governor and mother."

"I'll tell them!" Nancy shivered. "You can't stop for it—if you lose this train—they might arrest you, they may be on their way now!"

She kissed him suddenly. "Oh, Rod, be good now!" she sobbed.

He could not speak, but he wrung her hand; then the gate slammed and he was gone.

Nancy rose slowly, steadying herself an instant with one hand on the old bench where she had sunk, and then she went slowly into the house.

Her mother was sitting in a rocker by the window, her face hidden in her hands. Her father sat in the same chair where he had slept that morning. His gray hair was standing up on top of his head and he had not shaved; he looked older than ever.

He stared around at Nancy. "Where's Roddy?" he demanded hoarsely. "Where's he hiding? I haven't seen him this morning—my God, I can't think where he got his streak from—my son a common thief!"

"You sha'n't say that of Roddy!" Mrs. Gordon cried for the hundredth time. "It isn't true he never meant to take it, it's some mistake."

He meant to pay it back!" "Yes," her husband assented harshly, "he did. You're right about that, Sarah, I never knew a thief who didn't mean to pay it back. They all do!"

"We've got to pay it back then!" his wife sobbed, "we've got to save him—if I take the clothes off my

back. If Roddy's sent to jail I shall die!"

"Die?" Mr. Gordon raised his haggard face and stared at her, "I'd rather see Rod dead this minute than a common thief. God knows I wish I had him in his coffin now—nailed down tight!"

"Papa!" Nancy's tone startled him, he raised his eyes again to her face, his lips twitching with intolerable pain.

She swayed toward him, her blue eyes beautiful and soft; she loved him in his agony. She understood it. He had lost his pride in his son and he was too poor to pay; he was thinking of her and of her mother. Nancy's lips shook but she commanded herself.

"Papa," she said softly, "Mama—" she held her hands out to them tenderly. "I've come to tell you—Roddy is safe; he's got the money, all of it, and he's gone to pay it back. I think he'll get there before they even find it out."

Her father merely stared, incredulous, but her mother uttered a choked cry.

"Oh, Nancy! How did he get it?" she lent him all that?

Nancy held her breath. If she told them, she did not know what her father might do. He loved her, he might take it hard, he might even go to Richard about it, and he could not pay it back, it would ruin him. She looked from one worn white face to the other and her eyes misted; she was doing it for them, she knew it now, for all of them—because she loved them so much it was an anguish to see them suffer.

"I borrowed it, Mama," she answered softly, "I got it and—and Roddy and I will pay it back."

Mr. Gordon half rose from his chair. "Who did you get that money from, Nancy?" he demanded hoarsely.

Nancy backed away from them; they were both dazed but their eyes

followed her. "I can't tell you today," she gasped, "that's part of it—the pledge, I mean, but I'll tell you next week."

She broke away; she must not tell them, she dared not—yet! She turned a little wildly and ran out of the room.

Nancy lay quite still, face downward on her bed, hands clasped close over her eyes, shutting out the light. Her head ached terribly, it ached so that the throbs ran down through her body and shook her with anguish. It was fearful, yet it was a blessing, while it ached like that she could not think. If she tried to think she would remember that she had promised to marry Richard on Monday. She did not want to think.

Through her went the crashing and rushing of Roddy's train going to New York; she felt as if the steel wheels passed over her and left her bleeding. She had saved him, he would get there in time to pay the money back, they would never know. And she had spared the two downstairs too.

It had crushed her father to think of his girl shamed for her brother. Nancy's lips twitched with pain at the thought; he had looked so like death in his sleep. The feeling had come to her with a horrible swift surprise—her father was growing old! She clutched at her pillows, shaking. Her world might tumble down and she would have no one left—no one but—it was too much.

She rose on her elbow and stared out of the window with pain blurred



Nancy stumbled to the window and looked.

eyes—Richard! She gave a little cry and plunged her head down again into her pillows, sobbing and shaking with fear.

Then the pain in her head began again and she stopped thinking, she lay after a while very still and limp, like a shot bird unable to use its wings. Sheer exhaustion, a sleepless night and the long racking of her nerves had told. The girl had fallen into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

She was still sleeping when her mother quietly opened the door and came in. The huddled figure on the bed startled her; there was something in Nancy's very attitude that suggested misery and apprehensions. Mrs. Gordon came hurriedly across the room and touched her flushed cheek and her hot forehead. She had the skillful mother hands and she knew the feel of fever.

Nancy started up on her elbow. "What is it, Mama?" she cried feverishly.

Her mother shook her head. "Nothing at all now dear. Papa went out to the bank for awhile, he had to do something. He wanted to come up here and see you but I stopped him. Don't you think you ought to tell him—about the money you borrowed, Nancy?"

Nancy, sitting on the side of her bed now, slipped her arms about her mother's neck, laying her cheek against hers.

"I'll tell him—I'll tell you both next week—I promised that. Oh, Mama, don't ask me—I was so glad to get it for Roddy."

Mrs. Gordon drew a long breath, a sob in her throat; her face puckered and quivered with tears like a child's.

"Oh, Nancy!" she sobbed.

They clasped each other weeping. They held each other for a long time and then Mrs. Gordon felt the girl's hot cheek. She drew back, looking at her.

"You're ill, child!"

"Only my head, Mama, I didn't sleep last night."

Her mother rose. "You lie down," she said gently, struggling to herself again. "I'll get you a cup of tea."

The hot tea and toast revived her a little, and the touch of her mother's hands on her hot forehead soothed her. She felt like a child again, being comforted after a hurt.

"Don't go yet!" she whispered, and in the twilight Mrs. Gordon sat

## Traveling Around America



Photo Grace Line

HAPPY DAYS

SEAGOULDERS welcomed December 5th with as much enthusiasm as landlubbers. The 12-mile limit wavered and in some cases disappeared. And ships flying the Stars and Stripes revealed bars as completely stocked as those of their foreign sisters of the sea.

One of the most advantageously located of all the sea-going bars is this one on the Grace Line's Santa Paula. It is tucked away in a corner of the club where the bridge players and dancers hold forth—not far from the beach deck, where sun bathers and swimmers spend the day. And it has risen from the ranks of the gloomy lower decks to the sun-bathed breeze-swept heights of the promenade deck.

For a long time beside her daughter's bed, holding her hand.

They did not talk much. The older woman was thinking of her son; the girl, of tomorrow. But after a while they heard the front door open and Mrs. Gordon rose hurriedly.

"There's Papa; I'll go get his dinner for him. I hope he can eat! You needn't come down, child, if your head still aches."

Nancy let her go; her head did not ache so badly now, but she was glad to escape her father's questions.

She had work to do. She packed a handbag with a few things she would need and she hurried, tumbling things over. Her wardrobe was small enough; she had not much choice, but she selected the simplest things she had, a dark blue serge and a plain hat.

The moon had risen splendidly and across the window was stretched the long branch of the pine, etched black against the silver sky. It was very still in the house. Nancy knew her father and mother had finished dinner. They were sitting in the library now, on the other side of the house. She could not even hear their voices, but the pine tree swinging a little, tapped on her windowsill. Then she heard another sound, soft and sweet but penetrating, the faint notes of a love-song strummed on a guitar. Page! The girl trembled like a leaf; he had come, of course, with his guitar.

Nancy stumbled to her window and looked down. The moonlight made the old garden like day. Below her, the grass-plot looked as if a hoar-frost had whitened it. Nearer still was Page Roemer.

Nancy looked down at him. How tall and slim he was—so much lighter in build than Richard. She could see his clean-cut profile and his white forehead. He strummed on the guitar again, calling her with the old soft notes appealing to Nancy answered. Page stopped playing instantly, and in the moonlight she saw the joy in his face.

"Come down, Nancy; it's a lovely night!"

She clung to the windowsill. "I can't, Page, my head hurts terribly."

"The moon will cure it. Come down," he pleaded, "I've got something to say to you tonight. Nancy please come down."

Nancy knew what he had to say to her; it had been trembling on his lips so long, and he had delayed it—because delay is sweet. They liked to wait; an unspoken love was so much more tender, more illusive, more desirable than mere words. But now it was too late.

"I can't come down tonight, Nancy. No, really! Didn't mother tell you?"

He drew down his brows anxiously. "Yes, but I didn't believe you'd stay up there a night like this. Nancy, when I came?" he added gravely.

She trembled. She could make no more promises! "I—I don't know—don't ask me tonight, Page, my head aches so!"

He looked up earnestly. He could not read the eyes so far above him, but he felt a change, an in-

his voice pleaded. "I can't Page, I—good night!" she waved her hand to him. "Cruel!" he said, and then: "tomorrow, Nancy!"

She did not answer. She was



Where he stood, with his face lifted and unshadowed, she saw him plainly.

leaning against the window now, watching him go. He swung his guitar under his arm, waving his hat to her. But half-way to the gate she called to him.

"Goodbye Page," she called to him softly, "goodbye!"

She could see his figure receding down the long quiet street. He was going out of her life and he did not know it. It was incredible but it was true.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

Among those who suffer from irregular employment are the presidents of Cuba, where they recently have put a new man on the job about every month.

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