

# The Dollar Bride

by Mary Inlay Taylor

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## SECOND INSTALLMENT

Roddy Gordon, who has gone to New York to make his fortune, returns home to confront his parents and his sister Nancy with the fact that he has stolen fifteen thousand dollars from the bank where he works to help "the loveliest woman in the world" and will soon be found out unless he can return it. "But I love her," declares Roddy to his angry father. "I'd steal for her, I'd die for her—" "A pretty story!" shouts his father. "You've broken your mother's heart, you've disgraced your father and your sister—your young sister. Look at her, a girl in the morning of life—with a thief for a brother!" Now go on with the story.

"Roddy—my son, my son!" He recoiled violently. "My God, what was I going to do? I—" he turned stupidly, blindly, groping for the door. "I'd better go out now and—hang myself!" He groaned.

"Oh, my boy, my poor boy!" his mother cried after him, trying to reach him, trying to hang on to him with mother hands that never give up.

Be he did not look at her, he fumbled at the lock of the long French window, found it and, tearing it open, he walked out over the sill like a blind man. They heard the soft thud of his plunge to the ground below.

Mrs. Gordon's sobs came in gasps. "Oh, William, what have you done? You've driven your own boy crazy—he—he'll kill himself—I've got to stop him, I've got to—I—" She was trying to climb out.

But Nancy caught her, thrusting her back with a firm young hand. "I'll go. Stay here. I'll go—I'll stop him—leave it to me!" She pushed her back gently, looking over her head at her father.

The light outside was ghostly; white squares of ground with black shadows etched where, in the daytime, there were tall shrubs and nemlocks.

Nancy stood still, too, rooted to the ground, listening, her heart in her throat. Then she heard the faint crunch of gravel in the path behind the lilac hedge. Roddy was there, of course, she might have known it! She fled lightly, making no sound, in his direction and overtook him at the end of the garden; it opened there—through a broken gate—on the river meadow.

"Roddy," she called to him. "Roddy—wait!"

He stopped short and turned, the moonlight whitening his haggard young face.

"Don't come near me, Nancy," the young fire-branded said harshly. "you'd best keep away from—a dirty thief!" She came up, panting. "Rod, you're killing Mama."

That reached him; he put his hand up with a despairing gesture and pushed the lock of hair out of his eyes.

"I wish to the Lord I'd shot myself in New York!" he said hoarsely.

The anguish of his tone went to his sister's heart; they were close of an age, she was just twenty-one and they had always been together. She clung to him, shaking.

"Roddy, are you sure they'll find out right away? I mean those people in New York—before you can put the money back?"

"Oh, they'll find out! They've got an accountant there—old Beaver. He never liked me, he's got his nose to the ground like a hound now—looking for the trail. I think he knows already."

"Then they might come after you—arrest you—tomorrow?" Nancy shuddered, remembering the time; "it's after twelve now—it must be. Today then!"

He nodded. "I don't care any more; I've had all I want from father. I reckon I can take everything now—even handcuffs."

"He didn't mean it, he didn't mean half of it, he's mad and crazy with grief about it! You mustn't go, not this way, Roddy. Mama can't stand it, you know how she feels—you're all she cares for!"

He choked, irresolute. "I won't let father—I won't stand for it—he's insulted the woman I love, a beautiful, good woman, whom he's never seen! I—Nancy, what did I do? I was wild—did I really try to strangle him?"

She nodded, pressing her lips firmly together to keep from crying.

Roddy looked down strangely at his own hands, stretching them out. "Lordy, I might have killed him—I—did I clean forgotten myself."

Nancy tugged at his sleeve. "Come back, Roddy!"

He shook his head. "I'd do something worse if he called her names."

"You needn't go in there; go up to your own room; you're tired out. I'll tell Mama—that's all."

He stood irresolute. "It wouldn't be for long anyway—" he said at

last. "Don't tell him if I do stay tonight—tomorrow—" he laughed wildly—"there'll be a jail ride tomorrow, Nancy!"

It was long past midnight; morning was in the air and the frost seemed to strike to the marrow in the girl's bones. She shook with a chill of fear.

"Rod, why did you take it?" He did not answer for a while; he stood staring at the ground, his face distorted in the moonlight. He looked a mere boy, but his misery had made black rings around his eyes.

"Nancy, you know I didn't mean to keep it. I took it little by little at first. I—well, there was a reason for it even then. I was going to put it straight back, but I couldn't. I took some more. There are some queer people there. Nancy, you wouldn't understand—curb-brokers. I thought I'd make enough out of the second bit I took to return the whole sum, don't you see? It was gambling, of course, but I wanted to get rich, too. You get that way New York; you just have to get rich quick! And I—well, I loved her and she won't marry a poor man."

"She made you steal!" "That's a lie!" he said brokenly, "she couldn't, she's beautiful, she has such wonderful eyes. Nancy, they're like jewels, topazes, you know."

"She was in dreadful trouble, she had to have money—she told me about it, her poor old father might have gone to jail—through a mistake, you know, and it took all the money to save him—she was so grateful, so broken when I got it, Nancy. She was going to pay it all back—she will yet—she feels dreadfully because she can't right off. She feels as bad as you do, but she's grateful—I did it for her, to save her, Nancy. I'd do anything for her—I'd go to hell for her!"

"Rod!" "I would!" he cried passionately. "I love her. My God, Nancy, you don't know what love is, it runs through your veins like fire! When I look into her eyes—I'd give my soul for her, I'd— He clenched his hands, shaken with passion, a mad boy, mad with love. "I've saved her anyway! They can send me to jail—jail's nothing, death's nothing, shame's nothing—if you can give yourself for the woman you love!"

He choked, clenching his hands again, and Nancy said nothing. She stood looking at him. She thought she knew something of love, too, but—to steal for it!

For a long moment they were dumb, then she spoke hesitatingly. "If—if we could only raise it—the whole of it—right away—The trouble is—if we do, it would clean us out and Papa's too old to begin over again."

"I won't have that!" said Roddy quickly. "I don't want a cent from him—and he can't do it, Nancy, he's got something weak about his heart; anyway, he's too old—why, they'd fire a man as old as he is in New York!"

"They must be cruel in New York!" "They are; that's it, Nancy, they get you and they break you. They

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Miss Thelma Twiford, of Norfolk, Virginia, an employee of the Smith-Douglass Company, makes good use of the cotton bags in which her company packs fertilizer. For work around the house, she has designed a neat apron, as well as a work suit. Many farm women are doing the same.

have no hearts. I can see how they'll break me—even old Beaver with his nose to the ground. He wants my place for his nephew and he's going to get it."

Nancy's hand clung to his shoulder. "Roddy, you can't go to jail," she whispered with white lips. "I won't let you!"

He smiled at her, an odd, twisted smile. "You can't help it, Sis, I've got to go. D'you remember old Major Lomax? He was always sending his enemies to jail to crack stones!" Roddy laughed hysterically.

"I think he knows about this Rod. I met him tonight and he asked about you—in such a strange way."

"They'll all know presently. How they'll talk, Nancy, all the old fogies, and the girls, too."

"Roddy, you're only twenty-three. How long will they keep you in jail?"

"It's grand larceny. I reckon that's ten years in New York."

She gave a stifled cry, clinging to him. "His face was ghastly in the moonlight, like a white mask, and his eyelids twitched nervously."

"Don't cry!" he said harshly. "I'll be old when I come out—thirty-three—and done for. They never forget a fellow with a jail sentence. I—well, there's a way out of it, Nancy, a way for the family honor—too. I reckon father thought I'd forgotten it, but I haven't—I've seen it all the time. I—" he laughed bitterly—"I'm working up to it."

She tightened her arms about him frantically; she knew. "Roddy, you can't—you won't!"

He laughed at her, his lips twitching like his eyelids. "Father meant that—he knows he means it now—he thinks I'm a coward because I didn't."

"Rod," she clung to him, "not tonight—promise me, Roddy, not tonight! Come in—you needn't see

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where he had slept as a boy—suddenly leaped on him and pinched him with a sharp little pain, a needle thrust beside the great pain he carried with him. He groaned.

"I'll stay, Nancy, until—until I have to go," he said thickly, "for her sake—Mother's I mean."

Mrs. Gordon's relief at Roddy's return made her yield to Nancy's persuasion.

"Let him be in his room for a while, Mama. He's worn out, perhaps, he'll sleep a little—if papa doesn't break out again."

Her mother had come upstairs with her to see Roddy, and Nancy had coaxed her away from his door and into her own room. No one had thought of sleep that night and it was daylight now. The soft gray of the dawn crept in like a mist, and they heard suddenly—in their broken pauses—the twittering of the birds in the vine outside the window.

Mrs. Gordon sank into an old armchair beside her vacant bed, hiding her face in her hands. She was a mere huddled heap of misery, and Nancy saw her shoulders rise and fall with the struggle of suppressed sobs. The whole figure, the disheveled head and the blue-veined hands, tore the young girl's heart.

"Don't," she whispered, patting her shoulder, "please don't!"

Her mother raised a haggard face, blurred and puffed with weeping.

"Oh, Nancy, what shall we do? What can we do? I've lived too long!"

"Hush, don't say such things." Mrs. Gordon drew a long sigh, wiping her eyes.

"Lie down, Mama," she advised her softly, "please go and lie down. If you're ill you can't help Roddy at all."

But her mother only sank lower in her chair.

"I can't rest," she said, and then, petulantly: "leave me alone, Nancy, I don't want anything in the world

but my boy!" Nancy turned silently and went back into the hall, but not to her own room; instead she went cautiously downstairs. The light was still burning there and she saw her father sitting bolt upright in his chair beside the blackened hearth. She went softly into the room, drawing nearer step by step, staring at him in silent terror. She thought he had died in his chair. He had not. He looked old and gray and broken, and his mouth hung open like a dead man's.

### CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

A state association of beef cattle producers was formed at a recent meeting held in Asheville with D. Reeves Noland as president.

Three new bulletins are available free of charge to citizens of North Carolina on application to F. H. Jeter, agricultural editor at State College. The bulletins are: Extension Circular 197, "Spraying For Control of Apple Blight"; Experiment Station Bulletin 292, "Crop Response to Lime and Fertilizer on Muck Soil," and Technical Bulletin 44, "Hematology of the Fowl."

The size of the seed piece used in planting the Irish potato crop has been of concern to Beaufort County growers for some years. This year they are running several field tests to find out the size that will give the highest acre yield, other things being equal.

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