

Fair Exchange

She Had Her Way

By CLARISSA MACKIE

"I can't understand why you hang on to that old chair, Peleg Morse!" exclaimed Mrs. Weed pettishly. "Any one would think it was some Lewis Quincey foiderol like what Judge Folsom sets such store by."

"I like that chair for the same reason that you want it, Maria," returned Peleg with irritating slowness of speech. "General Putnam sat in that chair."

"That fact—if it should be true, and I don't believe Putnam was ever in these parts—don't make the chair any more desirable," argued Maria. "I want that chair because it's a real Windsor and exactly matches my other one. You don't need it, Peleg Morse. I should think you'd be glad to let me have it."

"My sister Sarah thinks it ought to go direct to her," said Peleg with heavy finality. "I'll thank you for another biscuit, Maria."

Once a month Peleg Morse came and had supper with the Widow Weed. And as the two sat there on either side of the daintily laid round table this matter of the ancient Windsor chair owned by Peleg Morse invariably came up for argument.

Maria Weed had a mania for collecting old furniture. She bought and sold and traded back and forth until she had become a shrewd bargainer. She always gained something by every transaction, and in that manner the method of livelihood solved itself through Maria's fad.

"I shall never be happy till I get it," Peleg began Maria once more as she poured out another cup of tea from the britanna teapot.

"Get what, Maria?" asked Peleg anxiously. He was watching Maria's fresh, comely face and thinking how perfectly the little woman filled that place at the head of the table.

"The chair, Peleg, of course."

"Better the old chair!" grunted Peleg, aroused to anger at last. "Maria Weed, you've nagged me about that chair for the last five years."

"What if I have?" retorted Maria good naturedly. "I want it."

"I'd like to have that britanna teapot of your grandmother's," said Peleg, with a happy inspiration. "but I wouldn't think of asking you to part with it."

"So you like this teapot," mused Maria, looking it over and carefully weighing its attractions against the Windsor chair of Peleg. "I recollect now that you always did admire it some. Want to trade?" she ended suddenly.

"Trade what?"

"Your chair for my teapot."

"You wouldn't do it, Maria? That teapot belonged to your mother and your grandmother before her."

"I want the chair, Peleg."

Peleg threw up despairing hands. "Very well, Maria Weed. You may have the chair, and you can keep the teapot, too. I don't want it. I'll send the chair over in the morning, and now, although I ain't usually the unsociable kind that sits and runs away, I guess I'll have to go along. I just recollect some important business matters that I've got to attend to tonight. I thank you for a very fine supper, Maria—and good night!"

And all in one breath, as it were, Peleg Morse, usually slow and difficult of speech, uttered these remarks to his astonished hostess, pushed back from the table, took his hat and overcoat from the hall rack and creaked out of the side door and down the path, while Maria stared, aghast at the suddenness of his going.

Maria knitted alone by the fire when the dishes were done that night. The checkerboard remained undisturbed on its shelf in the walnut bookcase. The pitcher of sweet cider that was to accompany crisp doughnuts later on, would not be needed.

"Fiddlesticks!" cried Maria irritably and knitted faster than ever. "I'm willing to pay the man for the chair or trade it out. I might as well have it as for the dust to accumulate on it in his garret. As for Sarah Penny wanting it, everybody knows she never set any store by old fashioned things, and if I wait till Peleg Morse dies and Sarah inherits it, why, I might have to wait years!"

The next morning a small boy trundled a large wheelbarrow unsteadily into Maria's yard, and from it he unloaded the Windsor chair that tradition said had once been sat upon by General Putnam of Revolutionary fame.

Maria was out on the porch instantly, eager and excited. "So Mr. Morse sent it over, did he?" she needlessly asked.

"Yes'm," said the boy as he pocketed the nickel she gave him.

"What did Mr. Morse say when he sent it?" pursued Maria curiously.

"The boy looked embarrassed. "I don't know just what he said, Miss Weed, only it was swearing of some kind."

"Swearing? Why, Leander Platt, ain't you ashamed to say such a thing about Peleg Morse? Him a deacon in the church too. I don't believe it!"

"It's so," insisted Leander, growing very red in the face. "I heard him with my ears."

"They must be bad ears to hear things like that, Leander! I'll see your ma and tell her what stories you make up," scolded Maria. "Peleg Morse is a good man."

"Ma heard him too," said Leander stolidly.

"Humph!" sniffed Maria incredulously.

"She said she was scandalized," added Leander as he picked up the handles of the wheelbarrow and departed. Maria pushed the chair through the kitchen and dining room and straight to the place she had prepared for it opposite her own Windsor chair.

Standing on either side of the wide hearth, they looked very comfortable and inviting, and, together with the shining andirons on the hearth, the tall clock in the corner and Maria's mahogany sewing stand, they were in harmony and satisfied Maria's soul.

Later in the morning she spied Leander Platt strolling past and called him within. Into his hands she gave the britanna teapot carefully wrapped in tissue paper.

"Take that to Mr. Peleg Morse," she said, "and then come back, and I will pay you for the errand."

Leander hung back. "It ain't no use for me to go down there," he protested. "Mr. Morse, he went away this morning!"

"Went away? Where did he go?"

"He went down to the city to visit his sister, Mrs. Penny. I saw him get on the stage, and he told ma he was going."

"Well, I never!" declared Maria breathlessly, and she hastily bestowed a doughnut on Leander and sent him on his way.

"I'd like to know what he means by that," puzzled Maria as she carefully set the teapot away in the parlor cupboard. "It's the first time he's been away from home in five years, and it's queer he never said a word to me about it last night. Maybe he'll send me a postal card."

But Peleg Morse did not send Maria a picture postal nor any other message, although she heard rather indirectly from him through Leander Platt, who had charge of Peleg's flock of chickens during the deacon's absence.

"I guess he's having a good time," said Leander one day. "He wrote ma he'd been to the moving picture show five times already."

"Good land!" commented Maria uneasily. "That's kind of unbecoming in a deacon."

"I'll bet it's fun," retorted Leander enviously.

So Maria had the Windsor chair, but she was deprived of Peleg Morse's company on those festive evenings, for he remained in the city all winter. Maria had plenty of time in which to reflect upon her selfishness in depriving Peleg of the ancient chair which was the pride of his scanty collection of furniture when she married and the elderly bachelor had to be content with what was left and what he could buy.

"I don't know," reflected Maria one spring afternoon, "but somehow it seems as if I'd rather see Peleg Morse sitting here in the old willow rocker than to see that empty Windsor chair over there!" And that was a strange declaration for Maria Weed to make. But she was subdued in many ways, and one of the ways was that she rather lost her greediness for old furniture, and another was that she learned that human companionship was more to her than empty polished wood, and that the society of Peleg Morse was most of all desirable to her.

"What a silly I was!" snipped Maria at her reflection in the mirror that evening.

A half hour later a knock came upon the side door, and when Maria threw it open who should enter but Peleg Morse himself, looking very fresh and rather dandified as to clothes, for he wore a new gray suit with a pink in his lapel, and in his hand he carried a gray felt hat.

"Well, Maria, it seems good to get back again," he said after they had exchanged a few commonplaces concerning his return.

"Indeed?" asked Maria tartly. "I enjoyed those postal cards you sent, Peleg."

Peleg blushed uncomfortably. "You know I didn't send any, Maria Weed."

"Why didn't you?"

"Oh—I guess I was some put out about that chair," he hesitated Peleg, opening the Windsor chair unfavorably.

"Well, you can take it home—I'm tired and sick of the thing—I hate it!" quavered Maria, dabbing her knitting work into her eyes.

"So, so," breathed Peleg, astonished. "I thought you wanted the chair, Maria?"

"I did—but I thought maybe you'd come and sit in it sometimes," retorted Maria, knitting furiously.

"Hum!" For a few seconds the room was very still. Then somehow Peleg Morse found courage to tiptoe over to Maria and place a timid hand under her round chin. "See here, Maria," he said awkwardly. "I been staying away on purpose. I was mad about that chair. I knew you wanted it, and I had it stowed away because I wanted to give it to you for a wedding present. I provided you'd marry me. But, concern it all, I couldn't get my dander up to ask you to have me, and I declare if you didn't nag it out of me before the truth! Now, what would you have said if I had asked you to marry me?"

"I might have said yes," said Maria happily, "only you went off and left me and didn't say a word."

"Well, I guess I must have gone to pick out a good place to spend a honeymoon," explained Peleg glibly, "and I've got it, too, Maria! We'll go to New York and go to the moving picture show every night in the week. What say?"

"Yes!" said Maria.

The Lost Ring

A Story Containing an Easter Lesson

By REGINALD D. HAVEN

I had devoted myself during the winter to Marjorie, and Marjorie had accepted my devotion. Indeed, her preference for me was very plain. I remember that on one occasion at a meeting of our assembly, an association formed for dancing, when, having been absent from the city, I had not secured partners, Marjorie deliberately turned down two men on her list and gave their places to me. Neither of them grumbled, for she was considered as my best girl.

When Lent came and all gaiety ceased I took Marjorie to theaters and other amusements, and the only reason I didn't propose to her was that I didn't quite see my way clear to support a wife. I thought I would best let the matter run on as long as I could manage to do so without misunderstanding or danger of losing her, for I had made a start in my profession and expected my clientele and my fees to steadily increase.

One of our set, Ed Darby, invited a dozen of us to spend the week end, including Easter Sunday, at his father's place in the suburb of Enfield, Marjorie and I to be of the party, Easter is a favorite season with me, as it is with most persons, especially when the spring opens, as it usually does at Easter, for after a long winter, when the days are very short and the sun stands small and low in the south, the opening of spring is delicious. I love it best when certain green things, like the crocuses, break through the last snow left on the ground, as though they couldn't wait for it to get out of the way. So we all anticipated a joyful few days at Darby's.

I arrived about 7 o'clock—too late to dress for dinner. Ed sent me to my room, where I tidied up a bit, and passing a lavatory on my way downstairs, I concluded to go in and get the dirt of my hands. While standing by the bowl I saw on the slab a diamond ring.

How many are there of us who have not at some time or times done something that afterward made us wonder how in the world we could have been so foolish? I was or believed myself on the threshold of a delightful visit. I had just made a very large fee—enough to furnish a house—and had decided to propose to Marjorie, who, I did not doubt, would accept me for a life partner, and I was brimming over with happiness. Some girl had left her diamond ring in the lavatory and I would take it, keep her on the anxious seat for a time, thinking it had been stolen, then spring a surprise on her by producing her ring.

I admit that in nine cases in ten, or if you like, ninety-nine in a hundred, such an innocent joke would come to no harm. But it is to be remembered that during the time of taking the property and producing it something may happen to place the joker in the position of a thief. One wouldn't think of taking a thousand dollar bill at a bank for sport, and he should no more take a diamond ring in the same spirit.

I slipped my hand in my vest pocket and went down to dinner. A jolly company was assembled, and after waiting and being saluted by them I waited for some girl to suddenly start and exclaim, "God gracious, where's my ring?" But the dinner proceeded without any intimation that the property was missed, and after while the matter slipped my mind. During the evening it occurred to me several times that I would better not wait for the ring to be missed before producing it but on each occasion something occurred to distract my attention. The consequence was that when we separated for the night and I went to my room I found it in my vest pocket where I had placed it before coming down to dinner.

Then for the first time it occurred to me that perhaps the loser of the ring might have gone to the lavatory for it. I had not found it and, supposing some one had appropriated it without publishing the fact had taken steps to detect the thief. I have never since ceased to wonder why I did not go at once to Darby's room, hand him the ring and tell him how I had found it. I would surely have done so, but I didn't know where his room was. It was that since surprised me is why I didn't rouse the whole household rather than go to sleep with a piece of property in my possession that I was liable to be accused of having stolen.

I had known what had occurred, I had known when it occurred, I had known the owner of the ring, remember Ed while at the table of having taken it off her finger in the lavatory while she washed her hands, and it occurred to her that she had not put it on again. Feeling for it, she found it not in its place on her finger; but, being one of those girls who are timid about doing anything unusual, she refrained from leaving the table to go for her property till after dinner, when she did so and found it gone.

After thinking the matter over she reported the loss to Darby. He, suspecting that the ring had been appropriated by a servant and not caring to give the thief time to get away with the property, telephoned for a detec-

tive to come at once. While we were all making merry during the evening in the drawing room Ed was consulting with the detective in the basement, and the detective proposed a plan which Ed reluctantly accepted. I say reluctantly, for detectives are democratic persons, just as liable to look for a perpetrator of crime among those of high as well as low degree.

Considering what was hanging over me I slept soundly. The first thing I did in the morning was to go to the vest that I had hung on the back of a chair the night before and put my hand in the pocket to be sure the ring was there. I was thunderstruck to find it gone. Though I knew just where I had placed it I felt in all the pockets of the vest and in all the pockets in the suit I had worn the night before. The ring was in none of them.

The stupidity of my action in taking the ring and not producing it at once now rushed upon me, filling me with wonder. I, a man twenty-six years old, in full possession of all my faculties, a lawyer familiar with the dangers of placing oneself in a position of suspicion of having violated the law, to have deliberately appropriated a valuable diamond ring and kept it in my possession all night, made me doubt but that I had been suddenly transformed into some one else and that person had been born a fool.

But what should I do?—What could I do? I should have gone to the host at once and made a clean breast of it. Had I known what had occurred I would have done so, but, though I appreciated the position I was in of liability to be accused of stealing, my mind was largely occupied with my responsibility for the lost property and having to spend a large sum to replace it. I was lawyers learn not to give away our cases by precipitate action, and I went down to breakfast determined to keep my own counsel till the proper moment.

Ed Darby was on hand, and instead of greeting me cheerily he barely spoke to me. Marjorie, who sat opposite to me, tried to greet me as usual, but seemed constrained and looked troubled. The meal passed with very little said by any one. Darby appeared to be striving to be cheery to the others, but his eyes were full of gloom. I don't know how I appeared, but I have no doubt that I made a splendid picture of a convicted thief, though any brazening up on my part under a clear conscience was doubtless taken by those who knew what happened for callousness in crime.

I made up my mind that as soon as breakfast was over I would go to Darby and have a talk with him in order to find out what had developed, but he forestalled me as soon as we left the dining room and were alone together, beckoning me to follow him. He took me to his bedroom, shut the door and locked it. Then for the first time he gave way to his feelings. He opened me by saying that he had been convinced by proving conclusively that a man he had considered his friend was a common thief. Then he told me that during the night a detective had entered his room and had found a valuable ring that belonged to one of his guests in his vest pocket.

My professional habit led me, now that the worst was known, to proceed deliberately. I asked him how many of the party knew what had occurred, and he said most of them had heard of it and the rest would learn about it at once from those who knew. I assured him that I was innocent, but would like a little time to prepare my defense. To this he replied that I could have as long as I wanted, for in any event I would not be prosecuted under the law. I would only suffer in the opinion of those present, since he would exact a promise from all to refrain from speaking of it.

Realizing that my only defense was the story of my talking and keeping the ring as I have told here, I asked Darby to assemble his guests in the drawing room and I would make my explanation. He did so, and I made as good an effort as I am capable of making. Indeed, I doubt if I could have made as good a one in favor of a client under the same circumstances. The effect on my hearers was like playing on different musical instruments—some will give out harmonious strains; others are irresponsive to the touch; some back discords. But the response that burst upon me like the tones of an organ on an Easter morning was given me by Marjorie. When I concluded with the words, "With this I must leave each and all of you still to believe me an honorable man or a thief," she advanced from the far end of the room, where she had taken position screened by others, moved directly toward me and put out her hand.

From the moment I decided upon my course till this action of Marjorie's I had felt hardened to hear what she had in store for me. When I felt the pressure of her hand and looked into the fondling eyes, despite all my will power, my own eyes became moist.

She had turned the scale in my favor those who believed my story first followed her example and drew in their wake those who did not, and the opinion soon became unanimous. I had made up my mind, whatever the result would be, to leave at once. But every one present gathered round me and begged me to remain. But not till they sent Marjorie to me to add her influence to theirs did I consent.

On Easter morning we all attended divine service together, and I think the incident in which I had been the principal actor added a fervor to our devotions. The case differed somewhat from the teachings of the church in that, instead of there having been something to be forgiven, there was something to be believed. The latter may not appear as often as the former, but it is none the less divine.

My Lecture on India

It Achieved a Remarkable Result Who Was Intended

By DONALD CHAMBERLIN

When my wife and I were returning to get on a steamship early in the morning we had to deal with the heavy steaming industry was not as profitable as it had been and was better taken care of by those who had better to see. Wholesale robbery had become less lucrative since most banks were done by means of checks on banks and less with gold dust. The grub-dependence was being transformed into the butterfly confidence man.

But before he could be a desperado he had to be a devotee himself to the science of guile. In other words, he was both. We had one man in our party who was the most dreaded of the many who had terrorized us and who at the same time the most ardent avenger. His real name was not known, though many of the names in our party were on record with the sheriff. Therefore he acquired the sobriquet of The Red. He had an unusual fancy for wearing different characters. He once made a fine haul by presenting a capitalist out from the coast looking over the ground with a view to establishing a bank. On another occasion he represented himself as an agent of the postoffice department. In this he was not so successful, for he was caught before he had any plunder. But he did not hesitate to kill the man who caught him, and nothing was gained in the affair by law and order.

One day a man rode into town who said that The Red was unscrupulous in the region through which he had passed. He had a mathematical mind. When asked how he knew the fellow was The Red, he said he had met the man and at once knew him for The Red, whom he had seen.

I had done some work as deputy sheriff for which I had been commended and was asked if I would undertake the job of going out to try and bring in The Red, dead or alive. I think the professor was for dead, since alive meant a trial and a possibility of the prisoner's escape either by lack of evidence or an artful design. I signified my assent, determining that I would fight fire with fire. In other words, I would play a part just as The Red was playing a part.

I donned a black broadcloth suit and white cravat, intending to pass myself off for a missionary collecting funds for the board of foreign missions. We had had such a man among us recently, and I succeeded in getting some private documents he had left behind him. These I read carefully in order to be able to talk intelligently on the subject of foreign missions. Mounted on the meekest looking horse I could find, my saddlebags filled with the printed matter, a Desiringer pistol slung in each coat sleeve by an elastic cord, I started out to find The Red.

I was obliged to travel fifty miles before I found him, but was not displeased to get so far from home that I would not very likely be recognized. Though I usually wore a beard, I was now clean shaven. I tracked The Red to a house that was quite deserted for that region and found him at work painting funds for the missionary work of building a church. He had been invited to stop with one of the most respectable citizens and was evidently on the way to make an excellent success.

I inquired as to those citizens who were most interested in The Red's church building scheme and, selecting one, Abner Smith, called upon him, introduced myself as James Ridgeway, missionary in India, and, telling him that I had come among the people of the town to raise funds for foreign missions, asked his assistance. He replied that I had arrived at an important time, since an effort had been started by the Rev. Mr. Swartout, who had also recently come to town to build a church. I suggested that Mr. Swartout and I might possibly work together, since we were both in the same service, and I would like Mr. Smith to bring us together. He consented and with the usual western hospitality invited me to be his guest during my stay in the town.

That same afternoon I was introduced to the Rev. Mr. Swartout, whom I at once recognized as The Red by a description of him I had secured before leaving home. He was a rather tall, sharp-faced man, with black hair which he wore quite long. His eyes were a steel gray, and on meeting one of his own pretended calling he looked through it with a suspicion which though not noticed by others present was not lost on me. But I at once set about convincing the reverend gentleman that he had nothing to fear from me, especially in his church building enterprise, by offering to work with him in his own scheme.

"Let us first lay the foundation," I said earnestly, "by building a church for these good people. After the church is finished there will be ample time to do something in missionary work. For my part I shall not attempt to raise any funds here, but will gladly remain for a few days and give you all the assistance in my power."

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