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The Lost Bridegroom.

BY MARGUERITE TRACY.

HOWELL had just ordered a new full dress uniform to be married in. He tried it on when it reached him in San Francisco, all the way from Annapolis by express It was without a flaw, and had those little changes in galloon, buttons and so forth, that new secretaries occasionally design for the benefit of the army and navy tailors. Of course, for a second lieutenant to get a uniform which cost a month's good hard pay just to be married in would have been an extravagance not to be countenanced, when the wedding could be set for the morning, if they chose; but Howell looked forward to a few months of shore duty, if not for a year or two, and on shore duty, in nine cases out of ten, a dress uniform is indispensable—for official affairs and dinners and dances.

That evening he went to Oakland to see the girl,and report on its safe arrival.

"Have you heard from Colton?" she asked breathlessly, before she permitted him to drop on the veranda step. "I've gotten all the bridesmaids, and you have all the ushers except Colton; everything is settled, and there's no reason why it should be postponed again."

Howell looked at her in joyful perplexity. "I don't know what to say, Grace," he began finally. "You know, Colton was my room-mate at the Academy, and we promised each other solemnly that the first one to marry would have the other as best man. That was when he was engaged to Madeline Langworthy, before he 'bilged,' you know."

"I never forgave Madeline for throwing him over," she said, watching the breeze flutter some leaf shadows across the moonlit lawn. "It always seemed to me the cruelest thing a girl ever did,and Madeline wasn't a flirt. I wrote her a bitter letter, and she never answered. I've never heard from her from that day to this." She roused herself. "But have you heard from Colton?"

"Not a word," said Howell, playing with one of her ribbons. He was silent for a moment, thinking how much luck some people have, while other people seem to miss it all. "I've written everywhere. When he left the Academy he promised to write, but I only got one letter from him, from Southampton. I guess he stayed abroad. One of the men at the club told me, a few days ago, that he had signed as a common seaman on a liner. But I don't think so. He would have come to his friends before that, don't you think?"

The girl shook her head slowly. "Madeline was heartless to let him go just because he failed in his examinations," she said irrelevantly. "She ought to have stood by him."

"Perhaps he broke it off, when he found himself without prospects," Howell suggested.

"She shouldn't have let him."

"Poor chap," said Howell. "Well I've done my best to get him, dear; and I don't think we can postpone our wedding on the chance of his getting word and coming. But I hate not to have him. I always felt that there was the making of a great man in Colton. I can't understand his going under, as he seems to have done, for, hang it, people don't get lost in a little place like this world."

"I believe I hate Madeline," said Grace again irrelevantly.

"If he had only cared for someone like you," began Howell, and then bethought himself that there was really in all his wide acquaintance, no one quite like her. But he did not say it aloud. He only bent and kissed her, and they fell to arranging the wedding for the Monday of the following week, because he was a navy man and she was an army girl, and in the army and navy it is well to do things quickly, on account of orders from Washington, which come when they are least needed or desired.

The moonlight did all that it could for them, and the deep sweetness of flowers, with which the garden was filled, hovered about them. The thought of Colton, of misunderstandings,of separations and the mystery of disappearence, made them grave. They could not help taking themselves very seriously.

"I'll come in to San Francisco to-morrow," she said, and they arranged a rendezvous. Then he kissed her and went back to San Francisco.

Next morning he received orders detaching him from the "Texas," and ordering him to something large and uncouth that lay sunning itself in San Francisco harbor and that was bound on a threee years' cruise, protecting odds and ends of American interests in the South Sea Islands.

He telegraphed to Grace, went out to the monitor and became a mere line in the papers, inserted every few months, when they cabled to the department or were reported by passing ships.

A friend of Howell's who was to have been one of the ushers, went to see Grace in Oakland. He was sorrier for her than for any other girl he had ever had to console, and he had had several. She was so plucky. But then, as he realized that she was an army girl, he understood. It is good to be born to the service.

"I've never even heard of the old tub," she said to Murcheson.

Murcheson grinned. "We call her the "'Outcast,'" he said. "In fact it's so long since she's had a decent name that no one in the navy would know her by one. If you call her the 'Ishmaelite' or the 'Devil's Darling,' every navy man will recognize the ship. She was built by the mile about the time of the 'Constellation' and the 'Guerrierre.'"

"But I thought she was a monitor?"

"I believe she is," said Murcheson, with the resignation of a man who might expect similar orders at any moment. "Next to a submarine boat for three years, commend me to a monitor. Do you suppose there's any chap at Washington that has cause to hate poor old Howell?"

"He never had an enemy in the world," she said quickly.

"And he'd just bought a new dress uniform, too." Murcheson said it as if, in the general deplorable aspect of the whole affair, the dress uniform really counted. "A Sandwitch Islander will draw the gold-braided sleeves of his uniform over his beautiful legs, while his wife picks the bones. Ah, well, Miss Dunlap, you may be ordered somewhere to morrow. There's always that comfort.

"Yes," she said slowly, thinking of the gray-haired captain who had taken her in his arms when the news came, and said, 'My little girl—my little girl, it's all in the service."

She looked at Murcheson with a courage that almost brought the tears to his eyes. "Yes," she repeated, "and Papa can take me with him."

For two eventless, weary years, the disreputable old monitor had taken her way among uncharted islands in God-and-man-forsaken waters. Ill-manned, ill-officered, ill-starred, she scraped over coral reefs and consorted with pearl fishers and, when there was positively nothing else to do, chased turtles for a pastime. The crew became sullen, the wardroom officers painfully polite. The captain never had been fit for the command of anything but a collier.

The department at Washington lost track of her, and it was small loss until something happened which suddently aroused the whole country from the west coast to the Norfolk Navy York, from the Gulf to the Great Lakes; while foreign powers looked up from their quarrels for a moment to see how that big, peaceful United States would take it.

The United States did not know. It wanted war. It didn't want war. It wanted to hear from McKinley. But the goverment paid no heed. It was very busy preparing for a war which every navy man knew would be fought out entirely out on the sea, and which every army man knew must be pushed right into the enemy's country. And in this crisis every available stick and spar belonging to the navy was hunted up; while in the army you could almost hear those poor exiles at lonely military stations, like Fort Clarke in Texas, hopefully polishing up their sabres.

There was not a child of three in the whole country that had not heard of the blowing up of the "Maine" in Havana Harbor. But the "outcast" lay tucked out of sight behind a coral reef somewhere, and the dispatches ordering her back to San Francisco with all speed gathered dust in the Honolulu office.

It was a turtlefisher who finally brought her the news that war was declared, and the "outcast" awoke, bristled suddently with importance, and put to sea.

Wardroom messmates who had not been on speaking terms for months excitedly measured their chances of being detached and ordered to Havana. Charts were hauled out of the navigator's room and spread on the wardroom table and pricked with pins representing U. S. battleships. Bronzed sea rovers in the gun-crews prayed in unconscious uncouth blasphemy, that they might reach the scene of action and be first to have "a hot time" with the Spaniards. It was a curious and significant fact that there was not a man of them all who gave a thought to the "outcast; in fact there was not a man on board of her who would not gladly have seen her sink to the bottom of the Pacific, if he could have been reasonably sure of rescue and transfer to a battleship or a cruiser.

So the "Outcast" took care of herself.

All monitors are bad sailors, having been intended by Providence to protect harbors and blockade unfriendly ports. But bullied by the edge of a typhoon and driven by the cheif engineer, whose heart held nothing for her but contempt, the "Outcast" could have given all other monitors cards and spades. She nosed like a ground-hog, she plunged like a terrified cow in a pasture; she forgot that she was not specially designed for sub-marine travel. She disabled two storkers and made the captain very sick.

Nights of misery followed days of discomfort and that bereft even the ex-

[Continued on Third Page.]

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