

# Wanted: a Wife



by  
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LETTER in hand he made his way through the gap in the hedge, reading again the small script of the handwriting. It was half past eight and the postman had just left his batch of mail and the first letter he had read had been *this!*

The old rose garden was all abloom and throwing out the peculiar sweetness of dew-drenched petals; a small breeze from the harbor slapped him in a friendly fashion on the shoulder; up in the big larch a starling whistled; the sky was blue as a robin's egg; the very air was full of a naive expectancy. It was one of those perfect early summer mornings which hint blandly that it is a good day for something to happen.

And something *had* happened with a vengeance!

With a preoccupied scowl he swung across the lawn toward the next house. His face scarcely lightened when a fresh voice called to him and looking up he espied a smiling face poked out one of the upper windows. It was a blooming face with a dimple in the chin, stanch, gray eyes and a head of rebellious, tow-colored hair, all framed by a purple wisteria that trailed its flowery bower above

the window.

"Hello, Ed," she called brightly. "I'm 'most ready. I'll be down in a minute."

"Oh, no matter about the sticks this morning," he called back with none of his customary enthusiasm. "Can't go out on the links."

"Why not?" she questioned in a disappointed voice, hanging out to cast down a look of concern on the top of his sleek, brown head.

"Come down and I'll tell you," he returned lugubriously.

"Well—what is it?" she asked just an instant later as she came flying out the door and, vaulting over the veranda rail, landed lightly by his side.

"Aunt Emmeline is coining," he replied slowly.

She knotted her forehead in a puzzled fashion, eying him questioningly.

"The fact is, Madge, I'm in the deuce of a hole!" He surveyed her healthy, bright-skinned, sympathetic face doubtfully.

"Go on!" she ordered cheerfully.

He laughed sourly.

"I've got to have a wife inside of an hour."

"A *wife!*" she repeated in a bewildered voice, "inside of an hour!"

"Precisely."

She stared at him, a shade in her candid eyes, a hint of something in her face that made him stare back.

"Of course I haven't known you long," he stumbled on somewhat blindly, "but I wonder if—you'll help me out."

"Help you out," she repeated in a still more bewildered voice.

They had started toward the veranda and were now ascending the steps. He dropped into a chair, and she sat down in the hammock, sitting upright, eyeing him inquiringly. The morning seemed to beam even more brightly, and out in the harbor a small tug towing along a heavy barge tooted encouragingly.

"For a day—just for a day," he specified anxiously.

"But—how?" she asked, still puzzled.

"I've *got* to have a wife," he emphasized.

"And you've always been such a good fellow, Madge. No nonsense, and we've golfed and fished and been such good pals—"

She shifted her gaze to the expanse of blue water sparkling with white caps which showed below the fringe of trees, looking very thoughtful. Then her eyes snapped. "*Of course* I'll help you," she said as though it were a foregone conclusion, and rather reproved him for making so much of it.

He heaved a sigh of relief.

"I didn't think you'd go back on me, Madge," he said. "A girl that's a good sport like you—"

She cut him short with a gesture. "Just explain the case," she said in a businesslike fashion.

"Well, you see," he responded slowly, "it's this way. Aunt Emmeline is a good old sort, but she's dippy, dippy as blazes about—getting married. It's a regular bug with her.

And she's been at me steadily for the past five years. I've promised and promised, faithfully. But I'm a bachelor still, you observe."

"Very much so," Madge agreed demurely.

"Well, about two weeks ago she wrote that she had been planning a trip around the world, but had about decided to give it up as she hated to leave for an extended trip until I was safely married—didn't want to leave me all alone in America."

"Well?" asked the girl as he hesitated.

"Well, I telegraphed her to go ahead with her trip. That I'd just been married—suddenly."

Madge laughed softly, but he did not join in her mirth. "It's no joke," he snapped, "just read that."

He thrust a closely written letter toward the girl. "Read it," he repeated.

It was a long effusion in which Aunt Emmeline's heart overflowed with joy that her nephew, her *favorite* nephew, had at last taken her advice and got married.

At the last moment I have changed my plans and canceled my passage from San Francisco so I can come on to New York and see you both before departing for foreign lands. Expect me on the morning of the fifth, dear Edward. My train will arrive at ten o'clock and I shall be able to spend the day with you and your dear wife. It may be for the *last* time. Travel is hazardous. Heaven *alone* knows what may happen. But my mind is at rest now that my *dear* boy is *actually* married. Your telegram put me in quite a flurry. But I have arranged all my affairs in case anything should happen to me and I have telegraphed and engaged passage so I can sail from New York on the 6th. I shall be with you only one day, but oh, how much that will mean. My fondest love to you and your darling wife. Your affectionate,

AUNT EMMELINE.

"Well?" he asked sharply, as Madge lifted her eyes from the letter.

"I'll see you through," she replied. "It won't be bad for only a day."

"By George, you're a sport, all right, Madge!" he exclaimed fervently. "It was

wrong of me, of course, but I didn't want the old lady to lose her fun on my account—"

"Don't worry," Madge advised cheerfully, making no criticism. "I'll play the part for Aunt Emmeline so she'll start on her travels with a light heart. It will be fun," she added, the dimple in her chin coming roguishly into evidence.

"You can count on *me*, when *your* turn comes!" he exclaimed gratefully.

"Pooh!" she scoffed lightly. "I shall be careful to get into no scrapes. Now be off. Time's short and you've got to go over and meet her."

"Wait," she called after him, as he was making tracks for the gap in the hedge, "are the servants all right?"

"I'll fix 'em!" she called back, with a wave of good comradeship as he disappeared among the shrubs of the old estate where he kept bachelor hall.

For a few moments Madge sat swinging slowly to and fro in the hammock, her forehead drawn into an intent pucker, her eyes full of thought. Then she arose and walked into the house, making straight for her own room where she put her unruly hair into order and after a minute survey of the dresses hanging on the hooks of her closet, selected a blue, ruffled affair with a grimace and stripping off her comfortable middie and short serge skirt, proceeded to array herself, changing her rubber-soled tennis shoes for white kid pumps and, when the transformation was complete, making a small face at herself in the glass.

It took no diplomacy to explain matters down-stairs, for there was no one at home, and she strolled in a leisurely fashion across the lawn, through the hedge, repeating to herself as she went up toward the old-fashioned house: "Mr. Holloway—Mrs. Edward Holloway!—that's *me!*" with a laugh. She entered the front door and with perfect *sang-*

*froid* walk through the rooms.

It was now ten o'clock.

Aunt Emmeline must be just arriving. It would take an hour to get out to Staten Island. An hour! Madge smiled in anticipation of what that hour would bring forth! But the big drawing-room looked too bare and stiffly in order, there was a horrible masculine litter in the library, the whole place appeared shockingly uninviting.

She ran out into the garden for roses and scattered them about in vases, opened windows to let in the warm, sweet air, tidied up and rearranged the furniture, and slipping back home selected a load of feminine trinkets which, when dropped here and there, gave a touch of her own personality to the old rooms of Holloway's house.

An hour later, all in readiness, the scene carefully set for the little comedy, she stood in the doorway, calm-eyed and smiling, as Ed's machine swung up the drive and came to a halt before the steps. He jumped to the walk, casting one approving glance at the figure in the doorway—at the blue, ruffled gown, the glistening, tow-colored hair, the steady, smiling gray eyes. Madge certainly made a stanch little bride. There was not a flicker of her demure lashes, not a shade of uncertainty in her direct gaze.

"Aunt Emmeline," he said, helping the tremulous spinster up the steps, "this is—eh!—Madge."

With the faintest blush Madge stepped forward with an air of welcome and was immediately folded in Aunt Emmeline's fervent embrace. Then they were all walking into the hall, Madge doing the honors quietly, assisting Aunt Emmeline to remove her bonnet, her veil, traveling coat, see that her money was safe in the chamois bag tied round her neck, that her glasses and smelling salts were in her bag, that her handkerchief and umbrella were safe, and listening to the

outpourings of her heart.

"To think," she said, at length satisfied that she had not been robbed en route from Oklahoma, "that you've actually got married, Edward. I can't believe it. Now, dear,"—to Madge—"you really must sit down and tell me all about the wedding. The naughty boy"—shaking her finger at Edward—"never gave me a hint. I don't even know the day!"

"It was on the—er—twenty-fifth of May," Edward replied in response to an appealing glance from Madge, while Aunt Emmeline seated herself comfortably in an armchair, and lifted her mild, blue eyes expectantly.

"Only ten days ago," she cooed. "Where did you go on your wedding tour?"

"To—er— Well, the truth is we cut out the wedding trip—"

"Cut it out?" Aunt Emmeline's blue eyes bulged. This was an innovation. "A wedding without a tour!" she murmured incredulously. "Dear me! Well," recovering slightly, "you can show me the wedding presents, and your—trousseau. I do like to look things over. You'll get my present in a few days," she added mysteriously, settling back with an expression of duty well performed on her soft, plump face.

"I — tabooed the presents," Madge stated calmly.

"Tabooed the presents!" Aunt Emmeline adjusted her glasses and surveyed the bride incredulously. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"It's getting to be quite the style," Madge responded, with a demure glance at Edward.

"Next you'll be telling me there were no bridesmaids," Aunt Emmeline said.

"We *didn't* have any bridesmaids," Madge laughed.

"No bridesmaids!" Aunt Emmeline ejaculated. "For Heaven's sake! What next! Has the wedding dress gone out of style, too?"

Madge wisely omitted to reply to this question.

"Oh, well," Edward broke in hastily, "it's all one so long as it's over, Aunt Emmeline."

But Aunt Emmeline was by no means so easily satisfied. "If I'd only been here," she mourned. "All I've got left to love in the world, all, and not here to see him married. If I only *could* have witnessed the ceremony."

Aunt Emmeline took recourse in her handkerchief again, but lifted her head suddenly, gazing at her nephew tearfully. "Couldn't you go through it again, for me?" she asked beseechingly.

Edward eyed her blankly.

"Were you married—in church?"

"No-o," he admitted.

"At the bride's home—by the family pastor?"

"No-o," he had to admit again.

"Where *were* you married?" Aunt Emmeline asked, curiosity getting the better of her tears.

"We—er—why—at the City Hall," Edward stammered.

"*What!*" Aunt Emmeline ejaculated, sitting bolt upright, speechless, aghast.

Edward repeated the information lamely.

"Isn't there any minister in this neighborhood?" she asked severely.

"Yes," Edward conceded, "but I don't—just hit it off with him—" Then, as Aunt Emmeline's mild, blue eyes commenced to harden, he went on hurriedly, "and he's away now—on a vacation. Madge's family are Episcopalians and father was a Baptist, so we sort of—er—compromised by—"

"No one in *our* family was ever married without a minister," Aunt Emmeline stated, her whole maidenly heart rising in revolt.

"But it's perfectly legal," Edward argued.

"It doesn't seem right to *me*. Don't you think you ought to have a minister repeat the service?"

The masquerading bride and groom stared at each other in dismay.

"I sha'n't feel satisfied till you do," she asserted obstinately.

"But—but—" Edward objected haltingly.

"Then I could witness the ceremony," she said in a satisfied voice, as though the matter were all settled.

The two stared at each other again, nonplused.

Aunt Emmeline leaned back in her cushioned armchair and folded her hands with an air of finality. "I shall never be satisfied until you do," she said. "Until you are united by a minister I sha'n't have a minute's peace of mind. There's no use in my going on board the steamer. I couldn't sail with this on my mind."

It was evident that the cherished sentiments of a lifetime had been rudely shaken. Aunt Emmeline closed her eyes and asked if the window shade might be lowered. She was very much upset. All in vain the June sunshine and the red roses and Madge's solicitous attentions. All in vain the little, comedy which had been so nicely staged.

The two stole away and whispered together in the hall.

"What are we going to do about it?" Edward asked.

"It's a poser," Madge confessed.

"Could we bluff it through somehow?"

"Might try," she nodded.

"You *are* a sport!" he declared. "Game for a mock marriage?"

"Sure!" stoutly.

"I hadn't any- business to get you in this scrape," he said self-accusingly. "I was a selfish pig to propose it to begin with. Now we're getting in deeper and deeper."

"We've *got* to pacify her. If she stays it will be worse."

"Great Caesar! I should say so! Suppose I could get one of the fellows over on the links to act the part of a minister?"

"Go on over and see," she advised.

"Have to run down to the Borough Hall and get a license," he chuckled "We'll *both* have to go. But we'll be back in time for you to fake up a bridal costume."

Struck by the humor of it the two confederates stood and grinned at each other joyously. They could picture it all—the mock wedding in the handsome old room, the sentimental aunt, the solemn young clergyman, and the celebration when all was over and Aunt Emmeline dispatched for foreign parts.

It was a mad, merry, funny game of make-believe for a perfect June day that tickled their fancy. It put one over on golf, or polo, or motor racing, or teas at the country club. Edward went dashing off across the lawn to the garage, and a moment later they whizzed down the drive in his runabout. It was a short matter to secure a license, and soon Madge was speeding homeward in a taxi, while Edward, folding the important document carefully and placing it in his pocket, made a quick run to the links.

There he found two or three of the fellows in the clubhouse doffing their clothes for a shower. Graham, the likeliest victim, was sitting on the club piazza drinking ginger ale.

"Look here, Gram," Edward said, losing no time, "I've got a proposition to put up to you."

"Fire ahead," Graham responded nonchalantly.

Edward poured, with a few quick fire details, the story of the morning into Graham's ears. "Now," he asked in conclusion, "will you impersonate the part of the minister?"

Graham drained his glass dubiously. "Can't you get somebody else?" he crawfished weakly.

"Mean you don't want to officiate?"

"Rather not."

Holmes and Fisher and Judson lounged up

just then and Edward placed the case before them. They argued it for fifteen minutes. But no one seemed keen for the part. They were a rugged, wholesome lot and with one accord fought shy of doing anything irregular. One after another the fellows drifted in and congregated on the piazza, but Edward's scheme met with little favor.

They all knew Madge. She was a popular girl, and they all were possessed with scruples. The chances were getting hopeless when a tall, slender young man climbed the steps, and started to enter the clubhouse. Graham hailed him, and he joined the group. "Spin your yarn, Ed," commanded Graham. "Mr. Burton is a new member, but maybe he can help you out."

Burton listened to Edward's story and all the arguments for and against, and sat gazing thoughtfully over the sunlit green.

"I'm in the deuce of a fix," Edward said. "And I've got to get out of it some way. It's growing serious."

"And you think a sham marriage will solve the trouble?"

"Sure."

"And the girl is willing?"

"Perfectly game," Edward asserted enthusiastically. "She's a bully sort, Madge is."

"Why don't you marry her—in earnest, I mean?" Burton asked.

"Never happened to think of her that way," Edward replied, surprised at this turn. "Don't know as she'd have me."

"Known her long?"

Edward had lapsed into a brown study and hardly seemed to hear the question. "Why, no," he answered with a start. "Six months maybe. We've been great chums."

"I might—help you out," Burton said thoughtfully.

"Say, that's mighty fine of you, old chap, helping out somebody who's practically a stranger to you." Edward said.

Burton smiled. "Haven't promised yet," he reminded. "But I'll go up to the house and see the girl."

"Fine. Jump right into my machine and we'll be off."

"You'll get into difficulties, I'm afraid," Burton observed as they purred along the road toward the Holloway place, "if you can't show a license."

"That's where you're wrong!" Edward cried triumphantly, thrusting his hand into his pocket and pulling out the license he had obtained at the Borough Hall. "Here's the fateful contract, correct in every detail—Edward Holloway, aged twenty-eight—Margaret Somers, aged twenty-two, *et cetera*."

Burton examined the license seriously, looking up as they bowled round a curve on two wheels and shot up the smooth driveway to the Holloway house.

"Nice place," he commented, as his gaze swept over the fine old trees, the beds of brilliant flowers, the peace and security which hung like a benediction over the whole. "A fellow like you *ought* to get married."

Edward glanced across the extensive grounds, an odd look of acquiescence in his eyes. "Guess you're right," he muttered under his breath. "There's Madge," he added, pointing to a figure waiting on the piazza. He pulled up the machine by the steps and jumped out. "The Reverend Burton, Madge," he said with a laugh.

Madge curtsied with mock respect.

"My! But I'm glad to see you!" she exclaimed to Edward with a gasp of relief.

"Had a lively time with Aunt Emmeline?"

She nodded, with a glance at Burton.

They walked together into the hall and sought out the maiden lady who was still reclining in the armchair. She adjusted her eye-glasses and looked over the Rev. Burton critically.

"Just managed to get some one at the last minute, Aunt Emmeline," Edward explained hastily, "Found him up at the links—the Rev. Mr. Burton," he introduced, smothering a chuckle, "the curate of—All Souls Church."

Burton shook hands gravely with Aunt Emmeline. "You will have to excuse my non-clerical appearance," he apologized. "I had no time to prepare for the ceremony. Mr. Holloway was anxious that I should come here at once."

Now that she had gained her point, Aunt Emmeline merged into a fluttery state betwixt smiles and tears. She was ready to excuse anything except not having the knot properly tied between Edward and Madge. Burton wore a dark suit, immaculate linen and his gravity was unimpeachable. Aunt Emmeline heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

"I'm—afraid I shall have to trouble some one for a prayer book," Burton said. "I haven't one with me."

Madge nearly giggled. Burton was playing a strong part.

"May I offer you mine?" she asked.

He turned his sober gaze upon her, regarding her attentively.

"Thank you, I shall be very glad to have it," he said, stepping after her as she slipped out into the hall. Madge turned and viewed him questioningly, when they were out of earshot. "I shall have to go over home for the prayer book," she said. "I live next door."

"Wait a moment," Burton said, still retaining his heavy manner, "you are perfectly willing, I suppose. If you have any objections to seeing this through—"

"Objections? I should say not!" Madge answered decidedly. "You don't think I'd see Ed in a hole like this without giving him a hand, do you?" with a fine inflection of scorn.

"He banked on you," the Reverend Burton observed.

"Did he?" A tender shadow deepened in

Madge's candid, gray eyes. For an instant she gazed abstractedly across the hall.

"You ought to really marry him," Burton said earnestly.

The flush on Madge's clear cheeks blazed into crimson. She laughed a little tremulously. "Shall have to wait till he asks me," she threw back as she ran out the door and across the velvet lawn to ward the gap in the hedge.

For an instant Burton stood gazing reflectively after her flying figure. Then he returned to the cool, old parlor where Aunt Emmeline was selecting a spot for the bridal pair to stand and directing an agitated manservant how to change the furniture about and build up a bower of roses over the great carved mantel above the fireplace.

Edward was in session with the cook adding a few hastily concocted dainties to the already much belated lunch, and making a rush order for his chauffeur to take to the confectioner's. There must be some sort of a bride's cake and a great bowl of punch in which to drink her health.

A festive atmosphere was commencing to spread through the house. Aunt Emmeline, with a blush rose in her faded hair, Edward adorned with a white bud in his buttonhole, Burton with devoutly crossed hands, waited for the bride.

The mellow gong of the clock in the hall struck the half hour after two.

There was a soft pat of footsteps down the stairs. The faintest rustle outside the door. Then came the bride.

She was dressed in white, all in pure, delicate white, which fell in simple lines down her girlish figure. In her hand was a small, white prayer book and on her flaxen hair was fastened a white motor veil which hung in shimmering folds down her shoulders and over her pale, strangely sober face.

Burton stepped forward and took the prayer-book. Edward, with one intent almost

startled glance, placed himself beside the bride. Together they stood in front of Burton who had taken his position in front of the bower of red roses.

The air was dense with their fragrance. Outside the window a robin trilled a note or two. Aunt Emmeline sobbed. Madge swallowed a lump in her throat. Edward pressed her cold hand.

It was very real.

His voice rolling solemnly through the room, Burton commenced reading the service.

He did it very well.

Edward's lips twitched. He no longer felt like laughing.

It was a well-simulated wedding ceremony.

Word by word, Burton read the beautiful Episcopal service.

Edward and Madge made the responses.

With downcast eyes she promised to be his loving wife.

With a forced air of bravado he promised to be her loving husband.

Nothing was omitted. Even the plain gold ring was produced. It was placed upon Madge's finger.

Yes, it was very real.

Both gave a tense sigh of relief when the ceremony was concluded. Turning, they faced Aunt Emmeline.

"Dear—children," she sobbed; her maidenly bosom heaving tumultuously. "I hope you'll be *very*—happy."

Edward tried to carry it off with a laugh, but somehow the laugh wouldn't come. In the depths of Madge's gray eyes was a troubled cloud. One pearly tear took its course slowly down her pale cheek.

Even when the impromptu wedding breakfast was served on the flower-decked table in the dining-room, the cloud did not lift. Edward toasted the bride in a shaky voice. Aunt Emmeline wept into her glass. Burton

was wrapped in more solemnity than ever. The comedy had petered out.

Aunt Emmeline alone remained blissfully unconscious. She led the bride away from the table, gasping out sobs and broken words of emotion.

"The dream of my life has been fulfilled!" she exclaimed. "I have seen my dear boy married. He will have the influence of a good wife. A load is taken off my poor mind. I can die easy now. The money that has never done me any good, will upbuild a happy home."

The word "money" touched another chord. Out of Aunt Emmeline's overflowing heart was born a new idea. She hunted up her bag and fumbled in it eagerly.

"My dear Dr. Burton," she said, extricating a check-book and fountain pen, "I want you to accept a little gift from me to use for the poor of your parish."

Aunt Emmeline filled in a check and signed her name with a pleased flourish. "There!" she cooed complacently.

Edward stared at Burton.

"In commemoration of this happy day," Aunt Emmeline said sentimentally, handing the check to Burton.

Burton accepted the check with a grave bow. He carefully folded it and placed it in his pocket-book.

"I thank you," he said. "You are very generous."

Edward followed Burton out into the hall after an affecting adieu from Aunt Emmeline and a frightened nod from Madge.

"You don't mean to say that you are going to keep that check," he ejaculated, as Burton made no move to pass it over.

"Certainly," Burton responded coolly. "Why not?"

"Why not!" Edward chortled. "Why man, it's carrying things too far!"

Burton paused on the piazza, gazing out upon the well-kept grounds meditatively. "I'm

a stranger to you," he said with slow dignity. "But I'm ready to give my credentials. Please call Mrs. Holloway."

This title for Madge gave Edward a start. He went for the girl. "Go ahead," he said shortly, when they had returned and stood eying Burton.

Burton looked from one to the other hesitatingly.

"Marriage is a pretty serious thing," he remarked. "It should never be turned into a jest."

Edward scowled. Madge looked thoughtful.

"When you approached me over at the club about the matter," Burton went on gravely, "I fully appreciated the difficulty you were in, but at the same time I saw no way out of it except—"

He waited an instant, weighing his words, scanning their faces.

"Except," he continued firmly, "by a bona-fide marriage."

"Oh, what's the use!" Edward exclaimed impatiently.

Burton went on, ignoring the interruption. "You two seemed well fitted to each other. It seemed only a matter of time before you would arrive at this conclusion yourselves. It was merely anticipating events. I considered the possibilities carefully. And — I married you *in good faith*."

"What are you talking about!" Edward said wrathfully. "This is altogether too much of a joke. Who are you?"

"I am the new assistant curate of All Souls Church," Burton retorted quietly.

His manner carried conviction.

"And you mean—" Edward cried in consternation.

"I mean," the Rev. Mr. Burton responded in a matter of fact voice, "that you are man and wife—*man and wife!*"

And with this bomb rending the gay

summer air, the Rev. Burton doffed his hat and sedately made his way down the steps and disappeared among the shrubs which bordered the walk.

It was Aunt Emmeline's voice which finally broke into the heavy pall of silence hanging between Madge and Edward as, overcome by the shock of Burton's statement, they stared into each other's pale faces.

"Where are you, dear children," she called. "Can't you let auntie share your happiness?"

They heard her footstep in the hall and presently she peeped archly out the door. "Try to run away?" she asked. "Wish your old auntie was anywhere except here? Ah, it was a romantic scene," she purred, rolling her mild, blue eyes ecstatically. "I shall never forget you two standing there before the altar of roses. And that dear, young curate put such *feeling* into the service. Beautiful! Beautiful! And the perfect day! Heaven smiles upon you!"

"I think," Madge said slowly, "that I had better take off my—veil and dress."

"Yes, dear," Aunt Emmeline responded, dropping her gaze from the blue sky back to earth again. "It is five o'clock and I want to go on board early. Supposing you just give me a cup of tea at six and then you must *both* come over with me."

"Oh, yes, I'll drive you over," Edward answered, with a doubtful glance at Madge. "Feel like coming, too?"

The bride blushed painfully. "Yes, I'll come," she said, in a faltering voice.

"Then when I am all snugly ensconced in my cabin, you two can ride back *alone!*" Aunt Emmeline added playfully.

And so the program was carried out. Another hour of constrained silences, of valiant effort to bluff it through, and Aunt Emmeline was motored to the ferry and escorted aboard her boat. And after a

prolonged leave-taking and kisses and tears and confidences about the long planned trip around the world and more kisses and tears and exclamings over the fruit and flowers and candy with which Edward had filled her cabin, Aunt Emmeline called them back for a final adieu.

"I've made you my sole heir, Edward." she said. "You and Madge will have all." And, while Edward was stammering a reply, she leaned forward, a faint pink stealing up into her faded cheeks, and whispered: "If the first is a girl— will you name it after—*me*?"

And what could Edward do but promise while Aunt Emmeline hung tremulously to his neck and Madge stood by blushing furiously.

And *then!* They were riding back *alone!*

Riding alone and in silence. Moonlight drifting down from a yet unclouded sky. The lights of St. George left behind. A green wood on either side the road. A caressing breeze full of the smell of the sea.

"Madge!" Edward exclaimed desperately.

She was looking away into the deep shadows which lurked in the moonlit woods and would not turn her head.

"*Madge!*" he repeated. "What can I do? Can you ever forgive me! How— Oh, good God!" he ejaculated, his voice breaking

miserably. "What's the use of pretending?"

"But what if I *do* care, Madge?" Edward said slowly. "What if I found it out all of a sudden? What if this business woke me up to the truth?"

She turned her head now, giving him a sharp survey.

"Don't *lie!*" she said curtly.

"No matter what your feelings are, I know mine. It wasn't any joke when I stood up with you before Barton. I was dead in earnest. It's too late now, I suppose. I've muffed the finest thing that ever came to me and I've got to take my medicine like a man. But I'm glad you're my wife, little pal. I wish it was going to last. When you chuck me—"

His voice broke again. He clutched the wheel grimly and sent the machine on at a furious rate toward the dim line of hedge which bordered the old Holloway place.

Up through the trees could be seen a friendly, warm light, like that of a guiding star, shining out from the open doorway of the house. In front of Madge's house Holloway slowed up, but before he had quite stopped, out of the darkness a hand came settling softly over his.

"Drive on," said Madge, gently, "*home.*"