

FOR LOVE'S SAKE.

It was more for her mother's sake than her own that Meta Crossdale consented to be Leon Parker's wife. He was old enough to be her father, but owned considerable property, and as she respected him, she thought in time she might learn to love him.

Mrs. Crossdale's death gave Meta a chance to postpone the wedding, for she was not satisfied that she loved her elderly admirer enough yet to become his wife. In the meantime she went to live with a maiden aunt in the city, who was the leader of an interesting literary and artistic circle.

Here, for the first time in her life, Meta had an opportunity of mingling with some of the brightest minds of the metropolis, and she made many congenial acquaintances during the winter.

The year of mourning was nearly over, and Miss Crossdale was thinking of Meta's trousseau, when disastrous news came from some property in which Leo Parker had invested heavily. I have not space to enter into all of the details, but the result was given in his own words to Miss Crossdale:

"When my just liabilities are all paid I shall be a poor man, and must commence the world over anew. You know me well enough to be sure I will not hold Miss Meta to her engagement, but I can not see her yet. You must tell her."

And Miss Crossdale, not unwillingly, understood the commission.

"It was all very well," she said, after telling Meta all the facts, "for you to marry Leon Parker at the time you were first engaged to him. You had no prospect of making any better match, and you were very poor. But since he releases you I think you had better accept his offer. I will tell you now, Meta, that when I die you will be wealthy. If you are wise you will remain single, as I have done. But if you marry you can let your heart choose, for you need not marry for money. You do not love Leon Parker?"

But Meta made no answer. She crept away to her own room, pale and shivering, wondering why the world was so cold and empty. All winter she had been comparing Leon Parker with the younger men who had assembled at her aunt's, many of them drawn there more frequently than ever before by her own fair face. She had met literary men whose brilliant intellect won her hearty admiration; artists who had seemed to her above common humanity in their heaven-born gift; musicians who had made her heart glad with their wondrous harmonies. Some there were who had let her see that were she free she might claim their life's devotion; some who might have touched her heart had not Leon Parker held her promise.

But now that he had given back that promise, and must fight fortune again, she felt her heart crying out against the sacrifice. He had offered her luxury and made her mother's illness a bed of flowers, had sought her happiness in every hour of their long friendship.

She thought of him in some humble home, working to conquer fortune alone! She pictured him turning from the day's toil, and returning to his small room, his coarse dinner, alone!

Alone! always alone, for she knew no other love was possible to him. In his prosperity she had carelessly put her hand in his, to share the life of ease and luxury. In his adversity she stood thinking of taking back her promise!

With streaming eyes and trembling fingers she wrote to him.

"Dear Leon: You will let me call you Leon now? I wronged you once, not so very long ago, for I promised to be your wife, only because you offered me wealth and a devotion I scarcely understood. I was very young, very inexperienced, Leon, and I did not understand how solemn and sacred a trust I was so carelessly taking. I ask you now to forgive me that I would have repaid your love so poorly. But if you do forgive me Leon, do not leave me, for I love you! Do not think I am bold or unmaidenly, for I would be in your eyes only what you can love. I did not know until Aunt Maria told me you had given me back my promise that I had learned to love you. Perhaps if there had not been this fear of losing you I should never have known how desolate the loss would make my life. Do not fear that you will find me fretful, if we are poor. I know how to economize, and have never been rich, so I dare hope I can help you, Leon, not to be a burden to you. But if you can still love me let our marriage be upon the day we had named—for I can not give you up."

She took the letter down stairs and put it silently in Miss Crossdale's hand, and that prim maiden, after reading it, kissed her whispering:

"May you be very happy, dear child. He is worthy of your love."

So there was a wedding in April, and the bride went contentedly to a small house, with a maid-of-all-work, instead of to the grand home Leon Parker had lost. But there was happiness there the grand house might have missed, for Meta had learned the secret of her own heart and Leon Parker knew that his wife came to him for love's sake, and not for money.

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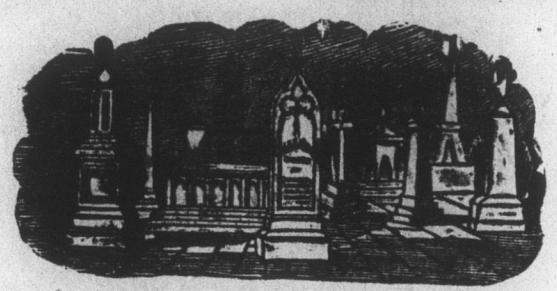
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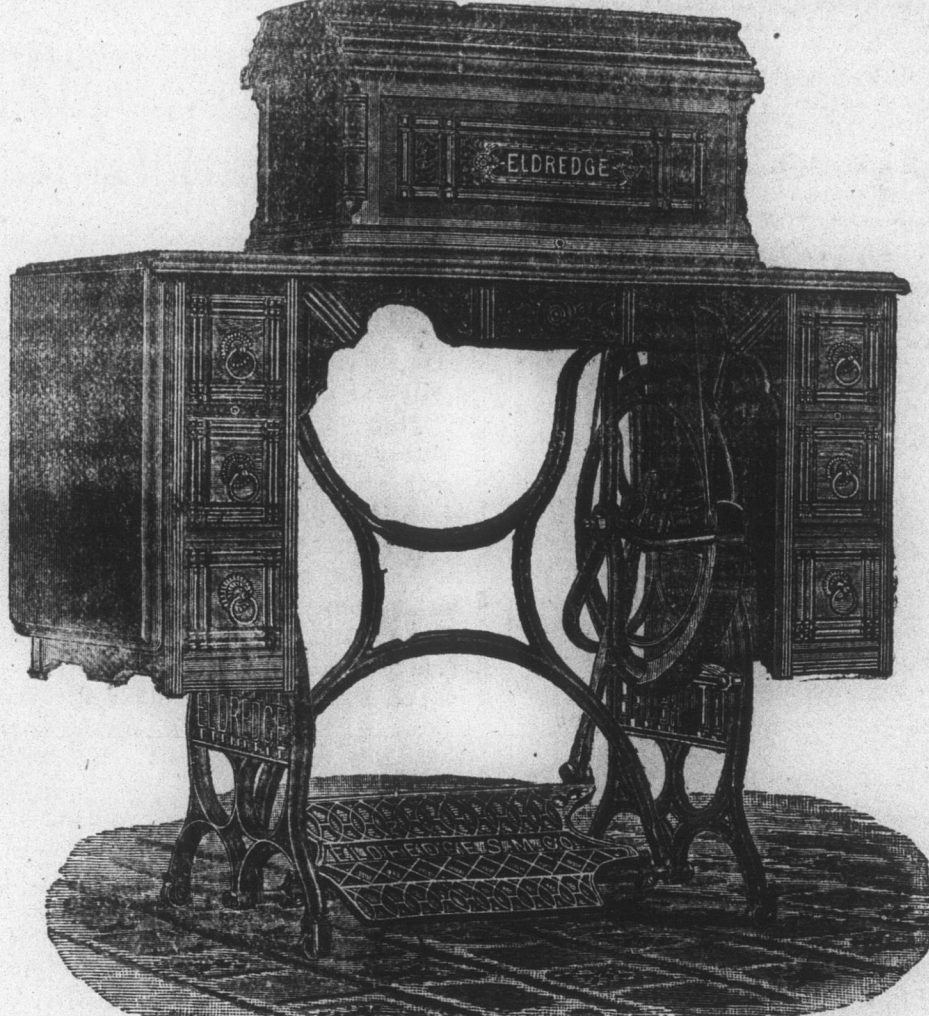
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