

# WHAT MARTHY PREDICTED

By SUSAN HARTLEY SWETT

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"I really believe that *Marty* is a witch," said my aunt. "She said in the last fortune she told for me that I was going to receive a present that would surprise me, and from an unexpected quarter. And who'd ha' thought that Cousin Sabrina Woods' daughter, that I never saw and scarce ever heard of, would set up and send me a present?" Another time, when she cut the cards, she told me that I was going to be real fortunate in some money matters, and so I was, for the very next week his brother died and left me this place. I wish I knew whether something she told me the last time would come true."

My aunt took a good look at herself in the glass as she breathed this wish, and anxiously arranged some airy little curls which were grouped tenderly about her smooth but too high and not especially intellectual-looking forehead.

Nelly, my sister, laughed. "She's always predicting presents and money, and it would be very strange if she did not get it right sometimes," she said rather scornfully.

"What does a child like you know about such things?" exclaimed my aunt angrily.

Nelly was 19, and besides being very pretty, had a good stock of common sense, as everybody remarked, but my aunt was always pleased to call her a child.

Nelly made no reply, but my aunt made haste to say that "of course she didn't believe in fortune telling, as a general thing, but the cards ran very queer sometimes, and *Marty* read 'em wonderfully."

All that morning my aunt seemed to have something more usual upon her mind. She was airily playful and deeply meditative by turns, and with a knot of gay ribbon at her throat astonished us by her juvenility and sprightliness.

"Joe," she called to me after dinner, "I wish you would go over and ask *Marty* Doane if she's won't come to supper to-night. Say that I'm going to have plum fritters, and that she mustn't forget to bring her cards."

Nelly and I exchanged glances, and when my aunt had left the room, she said with a sigh:

"Oh, dear, I wish Aunt Jane wouldn't have such notions."

"But I'm glad she has," I replied.

"*Marty* is fun, and there'll be four or five kinds of preserves for supper."

*Marty*'s appearance was not impressive enough to give one great faith in her powers as a seeress. She was fat and rosy and had a funny little nose which looked as if it had been an afterthought and had been made with putty and stuck on.

My aunt had supper at an earlier hour than usual, so impatient was she to get at the fortune-telling. And, while Nelly was doing up the supper dishes, my aunt drew two chairs into a distant corner of the room. *Marty* produced a not over clean and slightly worn pack of cards from her pocket, and the important sitting began.

"Let me see; there's a dark complected man that has a real good heart for you. Don't seem's if he lived close by; no, there's a wood. I can't see's there's no water between ye. I ain't certain that you know him."

"He's tall, a real personable man, and it 'pears as if you'd meet him first where there was something par-ticklar goin' on," pursued *Marty* after a little interval of breathless waiting, "and judgin' by the cards 'round him, he's got lots o' money. My, just look at them ten-spots, 'bout every one in the pack! Seen's as if he must be a 'squire; yes, I know he's a 'squire by the way the cards run—there's books full an awful lot o' people he has to deal with and—

"Mightn't he be a minister?" interrupted my aunt, her eyes very wide open.

"No, there's too much confusion, 'round him for that, and he don't look a mite like a schoolmaster. Seems as if he was an old bache-ler. Now, I'll give 'em a real good shuff' and you cut 'ag'in. Yes, plain enough. There, I can tell ye who the old bache-ler 'squire is now; I never thought of him before. It's *Marty* Canning over to *Fowler's Falls*. He's about 40, he's a bache-ler—and has got an end o' money. He's tall, too, and looks for all the world like the feller in the cards."

"But I never saw him," said my aunt, looking rather doubtful. "I've heard he was real haughty, too, and wouldn't even speak to common folks 'less he took a notion."

"Well, you don't call yourself common folks, do ye?" replied the wily *Marty*. "You're pretty-lookin' and genteel enough for anybody I—"

"I was thinking of going over to *Fowler's Falls* for a few days next week," faltered my aunt, looking very red in the face. "I haven't made a visit there for a long time, and I'm always being invited."

"You've got folks there, ain't you? Why, ain't it your cousin that manages the 'squire's place?"

"Yes, but I don't know I shall go to his house. I've got a lot of other friends at the Falls, and Mr. Rollins, the hotelkeeper, is a relative of my husband's—distant, but I've always resolved not to speak to her about it, or at least, Nelly did, and cautioned me with a great deal of impressiveness to be silent on the subject."

We started for *Fowler's Falls* the next Tuesday, my aunt in her bonnet, so like the fresh young spring in its tender coloring. There were four other passengers occupying the stage when we entered. Two fat old ladies and two men; one little old man who was evidently a stranger in the region and was interested in the rafts and boats sliding down the rapid river, of which we caught glimpses through the pine woods all the way, and the other a rather distinguished looking man of about 40, or perhaps younger, who was leaning back in a corner with his hat pushed far down over his eyes. He seemed to be rather drowsy, but still conversed at intervals with the little old man, who wished to know about everything and seemed to be unable to keep silent for a moment. The old ladies talked too, or at least one of them did; the other, we were informed, was kinder stage-sick and discouraged.

"You goin' to stop at the Falls?" said the talkative old woman, addressing my aunt.

"Yes, I'm going there for a visit."

"Be you? Well, now, I know about everybody at the Falls, and probably I'm well acquainted with your folks, if I might take the liberty to ask who they be?"

"I'm going to visit 'Squire Canning's folks," said my aunt with a little self-important nod of the head, and in a little, mincing voice, "but to day I shall put up at the public house and get cleaned up and rested a little before I go to see any of my folks."

The old lady glanced from my aunt to the man in the soft hat with a look of amazement. My aunt's statement seemed to have a strange effect upon him also, for he started visibly, and looking my startling relative full in the face, said:

"Madame, pardon me, but may I ask your name?"

"Certainly," simpered my aunt; "that is Benson. The Widow Benson, that is."

Nelly kept her head resolutely turned toward the window, apparently absorbed in the landscape, but I could see that even her ears were crimson.

"So you know the 'squire? he said with that amused spark in his keen eyes.

"Oh, yes, indeed; I—"

My aunt faltered a little, for she really was not accustomed to such fabricating.

"Pray, what do you think of him?" he inquired.

"Well, I don't know I want to discuss my friends in a public conveyance," she replied, reflecting something like mockery in his voice.

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