

MARGARET DONLIN'S ROMANCE

Margaret Donlin was thirty years old, but she did not look it—not though a keen-eyed observer might have discovered an occasional grey hair in the abundance of her shining tresses. She had been in the employ of Barnes and Son ever since, at eighteen, she had been graduated from the Commercial Department of St. Mary's Academy.

Margaret's parents had died while she was an infant, leaving barely enough to support their child until she was prepared to make her own way in life. But the good Sisters of St. Mary's found the orphan an apt pupil, and had little difficulty in fitting her to occupy a position of responsibility and trust. Barnes and Son were not long in discovering that they had secured an inestimable treasure in their new office assistant.

Quietly observant, kindly of manner, and especially noted for punctuality and fidelity to duty, Margaret soon came to be regarded almost as a member of the firm. For not only did she faithfully discharge her own especial duties, but, from having filled so many vacancies in emergencies, she was familiar with the details of every department of the store. She was ever ready to serve all purposes—to wear the transformations and other accessories of the hair department, exhibit the dresses for a dress sale, pick up the glass and soothe the ruffled feelings of the old lady who mistook her own reflection in the plate glass mirror for her sister, and in her hurry to catch her before she was lost in the crowd, gouged her umbrella into the glass and cut her hands and face, and repair the damage caused by a messenger who fell backwards into the pyramid of palms and ferns which filled a prominent place on a state occasion. She had earned for herself the title of 'utility woman,' though she was down on the pay-roll as private secretary to the owner and his son.

Neither had she been with the firm long before she came to know their needs so well that her advice was sought on all occasions. The manager contrived that Margaret should see every girl who applied for a position, and as she had a preference for refined, cultured girls of quiet attire and simple hair dressing, Barnes and Son became noted for the quality of their saleswomen. The quality of the customers changed accordingly, and it was soon noised abroad that the firm did business with the most exclusive people in the city.

Through Margaret's influence, the girls' lunch time was so fixed that they were off duty in sections for an hour in the middle of the day. They were provided with a good lunch quite within their means, and the rest room was plentifully supplied with rockers, couches, and reading matter. This humane and generous treatment resulted in loyal and faithful helpers who would go through 'fire and water,' if necessary, for the firm.

Next, Margaret proposed making a roof garden on the top of the building for the small boys who wrapped bundles and served as messengers and who were constantly getting into trouble during lunch hour. The garden was surrounded with a deep wire screen and the youngsters were allowed to play ball there for half an hour when they had finished lunch. The penalty for bad conduct—no ball game that day—worked like a charm.

After years of such rich service to others, Margaret discovered that she might at any time become either wife to the elder Barnes, who was a widower, and step-mother to the younger—which position she did not desire; or wife to the younger and daughter-in-law to the elder, a position she would gladly have accepted had the circumstances been different. But when she found that both father and son loved her, she held counsel with herself, and decided she would marry neither. First, because neither was a Catholic; next, she did not intend to cause discord between father and son, whose relations were those of comrades; and lastly, she had no desire to have Jack marry his stenographer and thus contract what might be considered a mesalliance by his social equals; nor would she submit to a snubbing from them. Obviously, the proper thing was

to resign and seek another position where she would cease to be a menace to the peace of the Barnes' household.

But the plan met some obstacle each time it was broached, so years came and went and Margaret still stayed despite the difficulties of the situation.

Meanwhile, one of her objections was removed. Both men made a study of Catholicity and embraced it. This, Margaret learned only by accident. The firm were about to give their annual all-day trip on the lake to their employees, their friends and families, and Sunday was chosen as the only day on which all could attend. It was the hour of starting that caused the discussion. Jack had said 6 o'clock, for they were to breakfast on board, and Margaret had hesitated. Assigning the hesitation to its rightful cause, Jack said: 'We have 5 o'clock Mass at the Jesuit church, Miss Donlin, won't that do?'

This was a revelation to Margaret. She was amazed at the turn affairs had taken, though it was really she who was responsible. It was Margaret's attitude with regard to hearing Mass on previous occasions which had caused both gentlemen to look on Catholicity with interest, and finally to embrace it.

Still, the fact that she held both men's affections caused the girl much dismay. Consciously, she had done nothing to make such a situation possible. She had never even dreamed of the older Mr. Barnes in the light of a suitor, but she had known almost from the first that the son was attracted to her. Yet her resolve not to permit their names to be connected was firm.

Circumstances had made it easy for Margaret to resist some of Jack's attentions. When she began to work, she still lived at the convent—the Sisters insisted that she stay for a while at least. Gentlemen were not received by young ladies staying at the convent, and the early hours prevented Margaret from accepting invitations to the theatre or other late entertainments. She gave no notice when she changed her abode and Jack never took advantage of the change. To his frequent invitations to ride, or to dinner, or lunch, Margaret proffered some excuse until he ceased to importune her.

Nor would the girl accept any gift except the veriest trifle. Once when a consignment of wraps had come in, Margaret expressed admiration for a fur coat. Mr. Barnes, senior, had ordered it sent her with his compliments. She thanked him cordially, but it came back within a few days, presumably for alterations. She never claimed it and the act was never repeated.

Things went on in this way till the winter of Margaret's twelfth year with Barnes and Son. The girl was kept continually on the alert to thwart the declaration she instinctively knew to be hovering on Jack's lips. During January of that year, however, Margaret found it difficult to persistently refuse to be taken home in the cutter and to be called for in the morning. But she succeeded in gaining her point till one such refusal brought her to terms.

One noon the city was caught in the grasp of a terrific blizzard. Soon the streets became deserted save for a few unfortunate stragglers, while the snow continued falling fast and thick, drifting as it fell.

Before the storm had gathered full force, all the employees in the store were put aboard cars, with the injunction to telephone, if possible, as soon as they reached home. As Jack passed out to put a party of young women on a car, he said to Margaret, 'Wait till I come back, I'll take you home.' She did not obey, thinking all she had to do was to go to the corner and board a car.

But even getting as far as the corner in such a gale was no easy matter. It was impossible to see far enough ahead to read the names on the cars and she had to let a number pass before she found her own. When it did come it was crowded and did not stop. She trudged on, knowing it would be fatal to stand still, until finally, well-nigh exhausted, she boarded a car, which had been held back by a tie-up. The blinding snow obscured the street names, and she was several blocks beyond her street corner when she left

Ken. Mayo

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