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*Miss Alice Berry*

# The NORMAL ECHO



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## AN ODD MARRIAGE.

Maude Shelby had been left an orphan in babyhood, and had been reared by an old maiden aunt. She had seen absolutely nothing of the world and was, in fact, very young for her years. In appearance she was slight and pretty, but her dress and manners signified the influence of the spinster aunt and also the imprint of suburban environment. She was ignorant of all the ways of the world, for her only education had been through a governess; and never had she, for one moment, been left to rely upon her own judgment.

As the lawyer read to her her aunt's will, which would leave her penniless should she fail to marry before she was twenty-four, he thought, that to cast this helpless girl, in deep mourning, out into the world would be unpardonable.

Having heard the will read, she looked at the lawyer in a helpless way and said, "Mr Glace, I am afraid I do not understand it."

"It means," said the lawyer, "that your aunt was an old fool and that you must be married before you are twenty-four, or you will lose twenty thousand dollars a year."

"Now," he said, "What are you going to do about it? Are you engaged?"

"I don't know what that is," said the girl, simply.

"Don't you know anyone who would marry you?"

"Not anyone that I want, but I will do my best to find someone."

And so she did in her own childish way. She tried several of her acquaintances, but with no success. Then she decided to go to New York and select from the countless thousands. It was Wednesday when she started out on her difficult task. The car in which she rode to the city was comparatively empty. Her very forlorn appearance attracted the attention of a good looking young man in smart dress and cloth cap. He remarked something about the weather and offered her a paper. But her childish impulse was to tell him her troubles. So she said, "No, thank you. You are very kind, but I am too worried to read."

"Indeed," said the young man, "I am very sorry to hear that, perhaps I can help you."

"If I knew you better I might ask you, but you are a perfect stranger."

He smiled to himself and asked if she were traveling alone.

"Why, yes, don't you think I am old enough? I am nearly twenty-four."

"Oh yes," he replied, "you are nearly as old as I am."

"Are you married?" The question was asked abruptly.

"Heavens, no! Are you?"

"No, but I want to be," she said, earnestly.

The young man collapsed. He had not expected anything like this.

"Well, I must say you are very frank about it."

"Oh, please don't think I'm forward. It is not my fault. I just must be married by Saturday night or lose twenty thousand dollars a year, and I am going to marry some one if I have to pay him for it."

"Are you engaged yet?"

"No, I am going to New York now to get my lawyer to help me."

"Why, that is impossible," exclaimed the young man. "You do not realize what such a thing would mean."

"I do, too. Now, why couldn't you marry me? I suppose you could use the money as well as any one. Marry me and I will pay you five thousand dollars a year, and you may leave on the same day for South America, where you say your business calls you. We need never see each other again."

Charlie Vale fidgeted, blushed crimson and gasped, "I could use the money all right, but not at the price. No, I couldn't possibly do a thing like that."

Maude looked as though she were going to cry.

"Then, I've got to find some one else, and the time is so short."

"I'm sorry for you. I'm half a mind to marry you to save you from some scamp you would be most likely to find in New York."

"Oh, do! I would be so obliged to you!"

"Well, we will go up to your lawyer's and see what he thinks about it," said Mr. Vale.

Mr. Glace, Maude's lawyer, questioned the young man, sent for Vale's attorney, and together they talked over the situation. The two lawyers decided that it would be an advantage to both parties, and so the wedding was arranged. The ceremony was held in Mr. Glace's office, and without any preparation on Maude's part. She wore an ill-fitting dress of black; her wealth of golden hair was combed smoothly back.

After the ceremony, the young man's income was fixed and the bride and groom parted. Mrs. Vale went to live with the lawyer's family in the city. Here she saw much more of the world, and under the motherly care of Mrs. Glace she became a beautiful, accomplished and self-reliant woman.

Five years had gone by since the marriage, when one day Mr. Glace announced to Mrs. Vale that her husband was coming home to have the marriage set aside.

"Well," said Maude, "he has a perfect right. He married me out of chivalry and I must be equally kind in giving him his freedom."

"Do you want to be free from him?" asked the lawyer.

"No, but he must not know. I must not see him."

When Mr. Vale came, he made no attempt to see his wife. He had become independently rich and had begun to realize what he was missing by being married to a woman he did not love. Every beautiful woman he saw seemed to mock him.

The night he arrived in New York he went to the opera and sat opposite a middle-aged man and a beautiful young woman. He contrasted her beauty with that of the woman he had married and bitterly denounced his folly. The next morning he presented himself at Mr. Glace's office to arrange for a divorce. To his great astonishment he recognized the lawyer as being the gentleman he had seen the night before. After the business was arranged, Mr. Vale casually asked, "Did I not see you at the opera last night?"

"Probably so, I was there."

"Your daughter with you?"

"No, not our daughter; only a very good friend who lives with us. A charming young lady, don't you think?"

"Indeed I do. It's a pity the girl I married didn't have some of her charm."

The lawyer's eyes twinkled as he casually asked, "Do you know many ladies in New York?"

"None. I feel very much alone here."

Mr. Glace gave him a cordial invitation to dine at his home on the following day, and Vale eagerly accepted.

The lawyer told his wife about his plans that evening, and cautioned her not to tell Mrs. Vale.

Mrs. Glace kept the secret, but had the young lady dress in her most becoming frock for the dinner when the guest was expected. When Mr. Vale entered, his wife did not recognize him, but rose to greet him as a stranger. Mr. Glace stepped forward, took Maude's hand, placed it in that of her husband's and said, "Mr. Vale, permit me to introduce you to your wife, Mrs. Vale." They were both dumbfounded.

"My wife? This woman my wife!" stammered Vale, as he turned to Mr. Glace.

But Mr. Glace had gone.

ETHEL SMITH, '15.