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"Dockage"—There's Millions in It—and the
Farmers Pay. See Page Four

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Margaret Ann's Mother

L. M. Montgomery

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adge Hamlin and Howard Sherman came down the long, elm-shaded street together. It was a holiday and they had been celebrating it by a stroll in the park and a look at the bicycle races. Miss Hamlin was sub-editor of the *Ladies' Banner* and was as clever and charming as she was handsome. Howard Sherman was clever, too, if he was not exactly handsome. He was the junior member of a law firm and was known to be well on the way to fame and fortune; consequently, he was much sought after by mamas with eligible daughters. At present he and Miss Hamlin were excellent friends; their fellow-boarders at Mrs. DeHaven's would have unanimously declared that they would soon be something more.

The other boarders were loitering about the porch of Hillside Hall as Miss Hamlin and her escort turned in at the gate. There were Ned Mitchell, the government clerk whom everybody liked, and Fred Owen, whom nobody liked. Then there was Mrs. Austin, the pretty plaintive widow, who had thorns beneath her roses and who didn't like Miss Hamlin, and, lastly, there was foolish, frivolous Nellie Stirling, who was not too foolish to be spiteful nor too frivolous to be malicious and who cordially envied Miss Hamlin.

Miss Hamlin paused on the porch. The group had been laughing, and Ned Mitchell was looking roguish, which was circumstantial evidence that he had been mimicking somebody.

"Oh, Miss Hamlin," said Nellie Stirling, "there's the funniest old body up in the parlor. You should see her. I'm certain her bonnet came out of the ark, and she has a huge carpet-bag beside her. Ned struck up a conversation with her, and he says it was very amusing."

"She isn't a bad old soul, you know," put in Mitchell. "Good and motherly and all that. But her grammar—and her accent! She is shrewd, though—wouldn't give away her name or business. But I fancy the maid made a mistake in showing her into the parlor. Probably she came to call on the cook."

Miss Hamlin had listened indifferently.

"Possibly some country relation of Mrs. DeHaven's," she suggested.

"If so, I should say the poor old soul didn't get a very gushing reception. She has been sitting there for two hours and looks tired to death."

Miss Hamlin passed on into the library. Mrs. DeHaven met her, looking rather flurried.

"Miss Hamlin," she said, "your mother is here. She came after you went out and

said she would wait. She is up in my parlor—I asked her to take off her things, but she said she would rather not until you came.”

Miss Hamlin had turned crimson and then pale, but she only said, “Thank you, Mrs. DeHaven,” and went swiftly upstairs. But not to the parlor. Instead, she fled up a second flight to her own room, shut the door and sat down on her bed. In the mirror before her she saw herself reflected—handsome, graceful, well gowned. And she saw plainly enough, also, the figure in the parlor below—short and dumpy and bent, in the old scant, ill-fitting alpaca dress, the faded shawl and ancient bonnet—with bony hands and wrinkled face—her mother.

How Mrs. Austin and Miss Stirling would sneer! How Fred Owen would stare with unconcealed and supercilious disgust! And Howard Sherman, the fastidious and critical, what would he think of her mother? Well, he would not forget that he was a gentleman, he would not act as the others would. But he would quietly cease his attentions to her and look elsewhere for a mother-in-law.

Suddenly she got up with a determined face. “I won’t do it,” she said aloud. “It would spoil everything. I’ll go down and put the whole case frankly before mother. She’ll see how things are and she’ll be quite willing to go quietly away to some nice boarding-house for the night.”

She took a step toward the door and then paused. What was it she was going to do? Was she actually ashamed of the dear old mother to whom she owed so much?

She turned again and went over to the window. Pushing aside the lace draperies, she looked out on the maple boughs and over them down the vista of misty blue streets. She had not always been Miss Hamlin, B. A., sub-editor of the *Ladies’ Banner*. It was not so very long, as years go, since she had been a little girl in print dresses and sunbonnets, living with her widowed mother out among the country hills, in the little brown house hidden by apple-trees. They had been poor, and life was a hard struggle for her mother, who managed the little farm and strove to shield her daughter from the hardships she herself had known. But they had been very happy there. Then, when she had grown into a big girl, clever and ambitious, she had gone away to school and after that to college. The little mother had worked and pinched and planned at home, denying herself all luxuries and even comforts for the sake of her daughter.

Madge Hamlin had not been ungrateful, nor was she idle. In vacation she taught school, and at college earned some money by her pen, in addition to the scholarships she had taken.

When Miss Hamlin got her position on the staff of the *Banner* she did not forget her mother. She wanted her to come and live with her in town. But Mrs. Hamlin said

she would not be contented there and preferred to keep to her farm. So every summer Madge went home to spend her vacation in the old village among the friends of her girlhood.

“If mother had spent on herself all that she spent on me,” said the girl, “she would not be so queer and old looking now—and I wouldn’t be where I am. I ought to be proud of her—and I *am* proud of her. She is the best and dearest mother ever a girl had. I wonder if those people down there would do one tenth as much for me as my mother has done.”

She went down to the parlor contritely. At the door she paused unseen, looking at the shabby, dusty little woman, sitting forlornly at the further end, and so oddly out of place in the fashionable apartment. She ran forward. “Mother dear,” she cried.

“Oh, Marg’ret Ann!” The old woman rose eagerly. Her face brightened at the girl’s warm greeting. “So you’re glad to see me, Marg’ret Ann?”

“Oh, yes, mother. I am so sorry I was out. Why didn’t you let me know you were coming?”

“I didn’t know myself till this morning. I’d been kinder hankering to see you for ever so long. I hain’t been awful well lately and I missed you awful. I just felt as if I *must* come up and see you.”

“That was right. How tired you look—and dusty. Why didn’t you ask Mrs. DeHaven to take you right to my room? You could have had a bath and a nap.”



“She ran forward. ‘Mother dear,’ she cried”

The old woman hesitated. “Well, Marg’ret Ann—I didn’t know—some way—I kinder felt lost here. I didn’t expect such a stylish place. The folks all seemed so tony—and everything so dreadful high class—it just come over me that you mightn’t want a queer, awkward old body like me coming in among your fine friends. So I

thought I'd just wait here and see what you said, and if you thought I'd better go somewhere else and not disgrace you."

"Oh, mother," said the daughter with a pang of self-reproach, "no, indeed, I am not ashamed of you. Don't I owe everything to you?"

"I didn't think you'd be. But I didn't want to do anything that'd injure you, Marg'ret Ann."

"You must come to my room now, mother," she said gently. "You'll have time to bathe your face before dinner and I'll brush your hair. You must be very tired."

With a sigh of relief, Mrs. Hamlin sank into a rocker in her daughter's room and looked about her with a keen, appreciative eye.

"This is an elegant room of yours, Marg'ret Ann—not much like that little old one of yours out home, 'way up under the eaves, is it?"

"No, mother. And yet, do you know, I love that little old room out home far better than this one. And sometimes—very often—I just long to fly back there and be your own little girl again, to have you sing me to sleep and hear the poplar-leaves rustling outside."

Mrs. Hamlin patted the hand lying on her shoulder.

"It's just the same as when you left it, Marg'ret Ann. I'd never have a thing changed. All your little pictures and traps are there, and your old chair. When I get lonesome, I go and sit there and fancy I kin see you a-setting there, reading or writing as you used to do."

"Come, mother, it's dinner-time—you know dinner at night is the custom here."

All feeling save love and tenderness had vanished from the girl's heart. She drew the bony, knotted hand through her arm and led Mrs. Hamlin down to the drawing-room. There was a decided glitter in her eyes and an unmistakable ring in her voice as she said, "Mrs. DeHaven, this is my mother."

Mrs. DeHaven rose to the situation like the true lady she was. Mrs. Austin smiled and said sweetly, "*So glad to meet our dear Miss Hamlin's mother.*" Nellie Stirling giggled audibly and Fred Owen stared superciliously. Ned Mitchell shook hands with boyish heartiness, and Mr. Sherman, in the background, bowed in grave silence. Miss Hamlin felt relieved when dinner was announced.

Mrs. Hamlin was at first too overcome by the splendor of the table appointments and the variety of the courses to talk, but this soon wore off. She had a good deal of the assertiveness that belonged in a refined way to her daughter, and possessed the same faculty of making herself at home in all circumstances.

She talked wholly to her daughter about the folks at home and the various interests of her farm and dairy.

Mrs. Austin listened with a covert smile and occasionally shrugged her shoulders at Ned Mitchell. But Howard Sherman maintained an unbroken silence. When dinner was finally over, she took her mother to her room again.

“Now, mother dear,” she said, slipping down on a cushion at her mother’s feet, “let me lay my head in your lap and play I’m your little girl again.”

The older woman passed her toil-worn hand caressingly up and down the bright waves of auburn hair. “I’m so sorry, mother,” said Miss Hamlin after a while, “but I’ll have to leave you alone for an hour or so. I must go up to the office. The issue goes to press to-morrow. You won’t mind, will you?”

“Bless you, dearie, of course I won’t mind. I wouldn’t want you to neglect anything. I’ll go down to the parlor and chat with some of the folks. That yellow-haired young chap seemed real nice and sociable to-day.”

Silence fell between them for a few minutes. A sense of rest and tender protection filled Madge Hamlin’s heart as she sat with her head in her mother’s lap. There was nothing so dear as a mother. She reached up and pulled the hard hands down to her lips.

“There’s nothing so good and true as your love, after all, mother. I wish I could see you oftener. I’m afraid I’m growing hard and selfish.”

It was nine o’clock when Miss Hamlin came down from the *Banner* office. She had been detained longer than she had expected. A fine mist was falling; the streets were wet and slippery. It was not often she had to stay late, and when it was necessary, Howard Sherman was always on hand to see her home. He was not there to-night.

“If he is so easily frightened away as that, perhaps it is just as well he should be,” she said to herself.

Miss Hamlin paused in the hall to remove her rubbers. Out through the door floated Nellie Stirling’s voice.

“Did you ever in your lives see anything so funny as old Mother Bunch?”

“I fancy our beloved Marg’ret Ann won’t hold her head quite so high after this,” laughed Mrs. Austin. “Yet she actually seemed proud of the old lady.”

Miss Hamlin fled to the library.

She pushed open the door and there sat her mother and Mr. Sherman. The latter rose.

“I was sorry I could not bring you home this evening,” he said, “but I have been trying to entertain your mother. She was rather lonely in your absence.”

“That’s a real nice young man, Marg’ret Ann,” said Mrs. Hamlin confidentially when they got upstairs. “I like him real well. Is he your beau, Marg’ret Ann?”

“Dear me, no, mother—at least—I don’t know—”

“Mebbe you don’t, but I have my guesses, child.”

Mrs. Hamlin decided to go home next morning on the early train. Mr. Sherman and Madge went to the train to see her off. When it had rumbled out, they walked down the cool street and out under the elms, where Mr. Sherman asked his companion a certain question. But it was not until long afterward that he told her how he came to.

“Do you remember the day your mother came to Hillside Hall? I heard what the others said. I wanted to see what you would do. When you brought her down so proudly, I knew then that you were loyal and true.”

“And what if I had failed you?” asked his wife.

“Then—then—I am afraid I should never have asked that question under the elms.”

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Margaret Ann's Mother* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]