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**MELISSA FREES HER MIND ABOUT
THE DEAR DEPARTED.**

Mrs. Merriwd's maternal maiden aunt Jane found her bereaved niece still in her morning negligee, although it was nearly ten o'clock. It was a handsome, cobwebby negligee, with a big cherry-colored bow at the throat to relieve its more or less funeral black, and Mrs. Merriwd looked well in it, having a fair skin and a figure that was plump, but not too plump. There was a tray on a tabouret by Mrs. Merriwd's chair, and on the tray were the mangled remains of two lamb chops and some crusts of toast, which, with an empty chocolate pot and milk pitcher, seemed to indicate that grief for the departed Mr. Merriwd had not destroyed the appetite of his sorrowing relict.

"My poor darling!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, fervidly.

Mrs. Merriwd removed her very neatly stockinged ankles from the elevation of a supplementary chair and arose in time to meet her relative's sympathetic rush and tackle. "Auntie," she said, extricating herself gently, "I'm awfully glad to see you, but please don't cry on me. I catch cold so easily. Take off your things, dearie, and have some breakfast and then tell me where it hurts. Here, I'll help you."

With a few competent jerks, the young woman divested her guest of her hat and wraps, which she tossed out to a davenport. "Now for the cats," she said, pressing the buzzer beneath

not knocking anybody, you know, Auntie."

"I always understood that he was very kind to you, Melissa," remarked Aunt Jane.

"He was," assented Mrs. Merriwd. "He never even offered to beat me. He used to think he had a talent for sarcasm, poor man! and I suppose he imagined that he was stabbing me in all kinds of tender spots when he talked about the way I managed the house and spent his hard-earned money; but he meant to be kind. All he wanted to do was to show me what a silly, careless, vain, criminally extravagant creature I was, so that I could reform. And I could always get money from him by going through his pockets when he was asleep, bless him! Really and truly, he wasn't hard to manage and I certainly miss him. Poor Henry!"

"I should think you would miss him!" said Aunt Jane, rather severely.

"He snored a great deal, and I miss that," sighed Mrs. Merriwd. "He was what you might call a regular and rhythmic snorer, Henry was, and it had a lulling effect after I got used to it. Now I've got to get accustomed to the quiet and lying a-bed as long as I want to. There's so much in habit, auntie, and that's one of the blessed compensations of married life. You never saw Henry, and that picture I sent you didn't show the wen on his nose. The photographer retouched it out along with the wrinkles, but it was an awfully big wen and I couldn't



"AUNTIE, WHY THE PEARLY DROPS?"

the table. "You've had your breakfast, of course, which means a wing of the chicken left over from yesterday's shoe-box with a sliver of dill pickle and a slice of stale bread and butter. Perhaps you had a cup of coffee at the station, but I wouldn't bet high on it. If you are going to live with me and take care of me you've got to gradually accustom your self to food. Sit down, Auntie, and lean back. Don't be afraid of breaking the chair. 'Elsie,'—this to the maid—"hustle on some breakfast for aunt Jane. Something good. We'll lunch downtown. Now Auntie, please tell me why the pearly drops?"

"Poor Mr. Merriwd!" said Aunt Jane, with a sigh.

"Oh yes, I see," said Mrs. Merriwd. "You feel bad on his account. Well, it was a shame he had to go. Still, dearie, you mustn't let it overcome you. From what the minister said, there can't be any doubt that he is in a better land, and he certainly had a great deal of trouble in this. He's at rest now. I didn't tell the girl whether you wanted tea or coffee."

Aunt Jane looked shocked. "Melissa," she exclaimed, "I don't believe you are a bit sorry!"

"Auntie dear," said Mrs. Merriwd, "when poor Henry died, I assure you I was the sorriest lady you ever saw, but I can't keep on being sorry forever. It's nearly three weeks ago now and the sharp edge is beginning to get worn off a little."

"Weren't you happy with him?" asked Aunt Jane, sharply.

"It depends on what you call happy, dearie," Mrs. Merriwd explained. "When you talk about a happy marriage, it generally means that the high contracting parties wait until the hired girl is back in the kitchen before they begin to throw the queenware, and that they don't call each other anything more venomous than 'my love' in public. At that, Auntie dear, they may have their little differences and be conscious of some slight shortcomings and weaknesses in one another. I won't say that I wasn't happy with poor Henry, but being with him while he read the produce market reports in the cozy winter evenings wasn't rapture, nor yet ecstasy—not as I understand the terms, and

look at it without shuddering at first. But I got used to that, too, just as I did to the way he ate his soup. This morning when I let the water run out of the bathtub it almost brought tears to my eyes, and I'm not a very sentimental person, as you know."

"I wondered if you really loved him when I got your wedding announcements," Aunt Jane mused. "You didn't tell me much, dear, except about the bridesmaids and your dress; but I hoped you did, even if he was so much older than you."

"He was only thirty years older," Mrs. Merriwd said, "and everybody told me that he was better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave. Of course some old men are better looking than others and don't have intermittent dyspepsia and a chronic frown. But poor Henry had his good points, and it's very sad to be left a widow. If it wasn't for being in comfortable circumstances and having nobody to tell me what I must do and what I mustn't, and being at liberty to enjoy myself as much as I please, I expect I'd feel perfectly wretched. But now I've got a nice, sweet chaperone and we'll let poor Henry keep on resting. You'll have your troubles, Auntie. There are three of them already and as soon as I emerge from my seclusion, I suppose these will be more."

"Melissa!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, in tones of horror, "you don't mean to tell me that you are thinking of marrying again already?"

Mrs. Merriwd laughed. "We'll see what they are like, dearie," she said. "I don't expect to marry again, but if I can find a man who's young and good looking and kind and generous and prosperous and clever, with no bad habits, I may change my mind, on one condition."

"What's that?" asked Aunt Jane.

"That I take a fancy to him," replied Mrs. Merriwd.

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Translated.

"By the way, what has become of the old water wagon?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's a constellation now, along with the Great Bear and the Dipper."

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