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## Short Stories For Evening Hours

### THE CONSPIRATORS

"Of course, I can understand my wife's position in the case," the judge said. "She wants her only daughter to marry a man with money, and you haven't any. So this is my plan: I'll settle a good round sum on you and you can marry Roxane and live happily ever after."

"Oh!" Oliver's face was bright with hope, "you are very good, sir."

"But you mustn't tell Roxane where you get the money," the judge pursued; "she couldn't keep it from her mother."

"But I ought not to deceive my future wife."

The judge banged a heavy fist on his desk. "Don't be foolish," he said sternly; "it's the only way."

"But—" Then before Oliver could proceed with his objection a clear voice asked, "May I come in?"

"Roxane!" exclaimed the two men.

She stood hesitating on the threshold, a slender little thing with her fair hair puffed out under a plumed hat.

"Mother is waiting in the motor," she said, breathlessly. "We are on our way to the charity bazaar and I want some money."

The judge kissed her. "Now it's Oliver's turn," he teased.

"Oh, father," she reproached him with a sob, "you know Oliver and I have had to break our engagement because mother won't hear of it." And she hid her face on the judge's shoulder.

The judge glanced at Oliver. "Tell her," he commanded, and the boy began a halting tale.

As he proceeded Roxane interrupted. "You mean that some one has left you a fortune?"

Oliver nodded.

"Where did he live?"

"I'm not sure," the boy stammered.

"I wouldn't inquire too closely into it, Roxane," the judge advised, hurriedly. "The less said about that relative of Oliver's the better."

With her face shining the girl went swiftly to her lover. "Oh, Oliver, Oliver," she said, "how happy I am!"

For a moment he hesitated, then he gathered her into his arms. "It's worth everything to know that you are mine, Roxane," he said, huskily; "it's worth everything to know that you are mine."

The rustle of silk skirts in the hall brought him out of his rhapsody.

"It's your mother," warned the judge, and when the rather stout lady in mauve entered she found two solemn young people on each side of the judge's desk. That Roxane's plumed hat was slightly over one ear and that a golden hair strayed across Oliver's coat collar were details which escaped her.

"I thought Roxane was never coming down," she panted.

"I found Oliver here," Roxane explained, "and, oh, mother, a rich relative has left him a fortune."

"A fortune—Oliver?" scoffed the stout lady. "Why, he hasn't a rich relative in the world."

"The fact remains, my dear," the judge asserted, blandly, "that he has had a fortune left him by a distant cousin."

"What cousin?" was the demand.

"You needn't tell me, James."

"Tut—tut," the judge cautioned, "don't accuse the boy of lying."

"I'm not accusing anybody," Mrs. Vandiver stated; "I merely asked you what cousin, James."

The judge inquired his forehead. The sudden arrival of the ladies of his household had not given him time to perfect details.

"I'm not sure of the name, Abbie," he stammered; "perhaps Oliver can satisfy you."

But Oliver weakened. "I think Mrs. Vandiver is right," he said, unsteadily. "Until I can offer satisfactory proof of my good fortune it will be well for me to give up Roxane."

"Oliver! The wall was from his betrothed. But he went on, "There may be some mistake."

"Of course," said Mrs. Vandiver, with aggravating sourness; "come on, Roxane," and she dragged her unwilling captive from the room.

Left alone, the conspirators stared at each other.

"Now you've done it," said the judge, disgustedly; "why couldn't you bluff it out?"

"Not with Roxane's trusting eyes on me," said Roxane's lover.

"Well, if you knew Roxane's mother as well as I do," the judge growled, "you would know that it's the only hope."

After a depressing silence Oliver ventured: "Perhaps if you approached her differently you might get better results."

The judge smiled. "How do you mean?"

Oliver blushed. "Oh, well, I've some time thought, sir, that if you appealed to your wife's sense of romance—"

"Abbie's sense of romance!" the judge ejaculated.

"You must have some memories that would make her feel tenderly toward you—toward us—"

"It has been so long," the judge murmured, and found himself suddenly curious as to when he had ceased to think of Abbie as the princess in his fairy tale. When had he ceased to write sonnets to her ringlets, odes to her eyebrows?

"You see, I'm afraid we're beyond romance," he murmured. "She wouldn't understand."

"It seems to me," said the wise young Daniel, "that a woman is never too old to resist an appeal to her heart."

The judge pondered. "I asked her to marry me on October 15, twenty-two years ago."

"There," Oliver exclaimed, "and today is the 15th, and tomorrow is an anniversary. Oh, you've got to take advantage of that, judge."

"I took her to ride in my buggy," the judge rambled on, sheepishly. "There was a big, round moon—"

He stopped suddenly. "But, of course we've grown sensible since then," he said, wistfully.

"Well, you just ask her to go tomorrow," Oliver recommended, and the judge gave in.

The next evening he presented himself at the dinner table armed with a long paper box.

"For you, my dear," he said to his wife, as she came in with Roxane heavy-eyed and pensive.

The box, being opened, showed rose carnations.

"The nearest thing I could get to pink," the judge explained.

"Why pink?" his wife demanded.

"Abbie," he reproached, "have you forgotten that twenty-two years ago you wore pink?"

Mrs. Vandiver's expansive features expressed a blank surprise. "What happened twenty-two years ago?"

"I know," Roxane interrupted. "There's the picture on father's desk—you have on a blue dress and a bunch of pink—you said you looked that way when he asked you to marry him."

The blush that stole up toward Mrs. Vandiver's gray curls gave her a curious look of youth. "Why, James," she faltered, "did you really remember?"

"Yes," said the judge, feeling that had he never forgotten life would have held deeper meanings.

Mrs. Vandiver came around and kissed her husband. "Thank you, dear," she said, with a gentleness that made Roxane stare.

After that it was not hard to propose a ride by moonlight, and Mrs. Vandiver, consenting, came down in a blue gown that became her elderly plumpness almost as well as that other blue gown had set off her girlish figure.

The judge's electric runabout replaced the buggy of long ago, and as they went quickly through the city and out into the country roads that astute gentleman refrained from any mention of Oliver and Roxane. All his talk was of things of the past.

"How happy we were, Abbie," he said at last, and his wife responded, wistfully, "Very happy, James."

A golden moon hung above the dark line of the hills. The air was sweet with the spiciness of the pines. The judge was thrilled with bygone emotions, and his arm went comfortably about his wife's waist.

Then in the rapture of the restoration to her place of romance of the Abbie of long ago he forgot Oliver—forgot Roxane.

He was brought back with a shock when Mrs. Vandiver said, as they turned toward home; "I've been thinking of Roxane; if she really loves Oliver I don't know but I ought—"

"Of course you ought," said the judge, promptly; "give them your blessing and let them be as happy as we are."

"I am afraid that Oliver has been fooled by some of those firms who hunt up lost heirs," the lady pursued. "Of course, Oliver was sincere, but I don't think much of the fortune story."

"No," mendaciously. "It didn't seem probable."

"You can settle something on them after they are married," said Mrs. Vandiver. "We haven't any one to leave it to but Roxane—and—and it would be nice to have them engaged on the same day that we were, Jimmie."

"Jimmie! The magic of the youthful appellation made the judge feel like a colt."

"Let's get them married, and you and I will go off and have another honeymoon," he proposed, jubilantly. "We will have the time of our lives."

The ripple that came from his

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wife's lips was a silver echo of the golden laughter of other days.

"We will," she said, and lifted her face to him in the moonlight, "and now let's go right home and tell the children, Jimmie."

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