

# The Girl Who Proposed.

A Leap Year Story -- By M. W. LAW.

I am about to make to you; you will agree with me, I am sure, that, situated as we are, you and I owe a debt to society which we can only pay by rendering all the service in our power; by so ordering our lives as to make them in the highest degree useful to the community in which we live.

We have known each other all our lives, and I believe I may say we are congenial in our tastes, and harmonious in our views of life and its responsibilities.

You regard marriage, as I do, seriously; and believe that silly conventionalities and sentimentalities should not be allowed to hinder a rational choice in a matter so serious. Remembering your words on this subject, I ask you to join your life to mine, that we may together labor for the good of humanity.

In full confidence that you will understand this offer, and give it your thoughtful consideration, I await your answer. Yours cordially,

HELEN GRACELEY.

The young man to whom this missive was addressed, pondered long upon it with a puzzled brow; he laughed a little, but his face clouded again as he once more scanned every word of the familiar hand-writing.

"She's full of those ideas she brought from college," he said to himself; "of course—I agreed with her—why not? I thought I had better wait till she forgot her high-flown notions a little—but—she has forestalled me—with a vengeance; dear little innocent—blessed goose! But,—it's a devil of a position,—when you come to look at it; I can't refuse, and mortify her pride, and how can I take her up on such a proposition? She'll be sure to think after a while—that I took a mean advantage. Still—I will have to accept—and trust to luck, so—here goes."

My Dear Helen:—I am very proud and happy that you think me worthy to walk by your side through life, and help you in your generous schemes for making the world better.

I most gladly accept—dear Helen—and agree with you that we are quite justified by all the conditions, in assuming this responsible position in society, as soon as practicable.

I hope to see you soon, and talk over these serious matters. Meanwhile I hold myself loyally at your disposal, and am ever,

Devotedly yours,

MORTON STEVENS.

Helen was aware of a slight chill as she read this letter, but—"Of course," she mused, "It is all right; he takes it just as I could have wished him to. There is to be no sentimental nonsense; I could not have endured that—it would have been an impertinence. But—he understands me—perfectly."

In the days that followed, it seemed to Helen that she met Morton Stevens everywhere, even in the most unwonted places; he was always in a breathless hurry, had no time to talk, and in his eye she sometimes caught a glimpse of a light that made her heart quail, she knew not why.

She was aware that she avoided his too fervent hand-clasp; that she talked too loud, very fast, and not remarkably well, during their brief encounters, and why—O—why did she find it so hard to look her old-time playmate in the eye, as she had always done; how had they suddenly lost the genial comradeship of their childhood? However, she explained it to herself; the change in their relations—they must have time to readjust themselves! it was of course,—for the moment, a little awkward.

"When we have had a good long talk," she assured herself, "this embarrassment will disappear; I will ask him to come to-night."

Her distracted lover groaned over her invitation, but it was imperative and he dared not try to evade it.

"It makes no earthly difference what she says—or does to me," he said to himself, thinking tenderly of his love, "if I can only get along without

hurting her,—that's what I'm afraid of,—I'm such a clumsy fellow."

All that day Helen was very busy; she caught her breath from time to time with a sharp sigh, and a quickened pulse, and when she ran up to her room after dinner, she looked anxiously in the glass, pulling her hair this way and that, and turning slowly around before the long mirror. Finally, with a frown at her own vanity, she stood quite still, and gazed seriously, almost sadly at the charming image before her; at the tall, slight figure in its simple white gown; the graceful brown head; the soft, pure outlines of the young face, then long and earnestly into the large, clear gray eyes. Suddenly the brightness of those eyes was quenched in a rain of tears that ran over her firm little chin, and dripped on the fluffy front of her gown; she leaned wistfully toward the weeping face, murmuring—"It's very serious—you are really nothing but a silly girl—you—with your airs; I am very tired of you," and she pressed her forehead against the cool glass.

"I wonder what he really thinks?" she said aloud, and a flush burned in the tips of her ears, and spread across the whiteness of her neck. She roused herself as the door-bell rang, and wiping her tears away, descended, with her most stately step, to the parlor, where her affianced husband awaited her, with his heart in his mouth, and his hands icy cold, breathing prayers to all his saints.

That evening was a long agony of embarrassment to them both; in vain she started serious conversation on various topics; in vain he ventured to speak of their future; she could find nothing to reply to him, and he simply leaped to meet her statements, with an eager assent, that left her with nothing further to say; and all the while, he gazed—and gazed at her as if, she angrily declared to herself, she were something ever, she explained it to herself; the change in good to eat, and he—starving.

There was a burning anxiety in his eye, and a strangeness in his voice, and from time to time he mopped his brow with a handkerchief that visibly trembled. As the clock struck ten, he promptly rose and sought his hat.

"O—must you go?" Helen asked ruefully, feeling that the evening had been a dismal failure.

She said it with a little wistful, appealing regret that pierced her lover's heart like an arrow from Cupid's own bow, and he was beside her in an instant.

"Helen," he cried, in a voice tender enough to melt a marble Venus, but Helen drew back, harder than any marble ever quarried, immediately.

"I mean," the wretched young man faltered, "I only wanted to express a sense—my sense—of gratitude—of appreciation—for the honor—Helen," with another burst, "I am sure we shall be very happy—"

"I have thought very little about happiness," said Helen severely, "I think it is unworthy"—she looked at him sternly.

"O—certainly—certainly," the culprit hastened to agree, then picking up a little spirit again, "but I shall be perfectly happy; I am afraid you'll have to allow me—to be happy—Helen—I shan't be able to help it," Helen smiled indulgently.

"Of course," she said, "we shall be good comrades—as we have always been; and we shall enjoy our work together; O—here are some plans—Richter lent them to me—and I want to show them to you; they would do—I think—on Wells street—"

She took a large roll of paper from the table and Morton helped her to unroll and spread it.

The house was quiet, and as the two bent over the plans, side by side, and Helen pointed and explained, the old feeling of comradeship began to creep back over them; they were not trying to look into each other's eyes now, and Morton was, for the first time, really interested in what Helen was showing him, in what she was saying, as well as in herself. This was in his line; he warmed to the subject and talked well.

When at last Helen raised her head, she faced him with a little joyous laugh; it was their first moment of sympathetic communion in the new relation.



**B**UT—WHY NOT? Marriage is simply a contract; it is—socially—an important—a necessary institution; we have cumbered it with a great deal of sentimental nonsense—but it should be treated as a purely business arrangement; that is the only rational way to treat it."

"So you don't believe in falling in love," said pretty little Marjorie.

"I expect to love my husband—of course," said Helen loftily, "but I shall not make an offer of myself—before hand; and I shall choose myself; I will not be a chattel."

"That," shrieked the girls in duo, "Do you mean to say you will—pro-*pose*?"—Helen did not understand," she said freezingly, "it is useless to attempt to explain." She turned from the laughing offenders with a jestic courtesy, and left them to discuss her proposition at their leisure.

In her own room, Helen paced lightly to and fro, communing with herself. "I have known him all my life; he is good—and honorable—and—very—not displeasing to me.

He respects him,—and he,—I am sure,—respects me. It will be suitable; both his people and mine are pleased.

It can help him; I will get him to tear down the awful tenements on Wells street—and we can build—O—how many things we can do—with money—and mine.

She ought not to wait; Morton is getting into light panty; he does not take the serious view of—that I expected of him; it is time we were king—for the good of the world—instead of amusing ourselves; I will write—now; he will understand me—I am not afraid"—and thus it happened that on the following morning Morton Stevens received the following:

My Dear Morton:—After our long talk a few days ago on sociological questions—especially on marriage—I am sure you will not be surprised, whatever your answer may be,—at the proposition