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Peg o' My Heart

By
J. HARTLEY MANNERS

A Comedy of Youth Founded by Mr. Manners on His Great Play of the Same Title — Illustrations From Photographs of the Play

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SYNOPSIS.

Frank O'Connell, young Irish patriot, is shot and wounded by British soldiers while making a home rule speech. He is aided by Angela Kingsnorth, an English society girl, who defends him.

Angela takes O'Connell to her brother's home and helps to nurse him. He recovers and he and the girl become fast friends.

O'Connell when well is sent to jail for disturbing the peace. He finally writes Angela that he has finished his sentence.

O'Connell and Angela wed. She has espoused the Irish cause. Her brother, a member of parliament, is very angry.

The happy couple come to America to live. A daughter is born to them. Angela's brother refuses to help the couple in any way. Angela dies.

O'Connell names his daughter Margaret and calls her "Peg." O'Connell receives a most important letter from England, which perplexes him.

O'Connell allows Peg to visit England at her uncle's request. The elder Kingsnorth's heart had finally softened toward his dead sister's little girl.

Peg goes to the home of the Chichester family in England at the direction of Mr. Hawkes, Kingsnorth's attorney, as Kingsnorth suddenly dies.

She first meets Ethel Chichester and Brent, a married man in love with Ethel. She interrupts them by accident in a secret meeting.

Ethel is enraged at Peg and haughtily dismisses her from the drawing room, sending her to the servants' quarters. The Chichesters have lost their money in a bank failure.

Hawkes arrives and reads the Kingsnorth will. It leaves most of the fortune to Peg and offers liberal pay to any one who will undertake her education and social training.

Mrs. Chichester finally agrees to bring up Peg in return for the money promised, although she openly despises the shabby young girl.

Peg is heartbroken at the cold reception given her by the Chichester family. She is much impressed, however, by the luxury of her surroundings.

CHAPTER XIX.

Peg and Jerry.

PEG went haphazardly around the room examining everything, sitting in various kinds of chairs, on the sofa, smelling the flowers, and wherever she went Jerry followed her at a little distance.

"Are you going to stay here?"

"Mebbe I will and mebbe I won't."

"Did your aunt send for you?"

"No, me uncle—me Uncle Nat."

"Nathaniel Kingsnorth!" cried Jerry in amazement.

Peg nodded.

"Sleepin' in his grave, poor man."

"Why, then, you're Miss Margaret O'Connell?"

"I am. How did you know that?"

"I was with your uncle when he died."

"Were ye?"

"He told me all about you."

"Did he? Well, I wish the poor man 'ud ha' lived. An' I wish he'd 'a' thought o' us sooner—he with all his money an' me father with none an' me his sister's only child."

"What does your father do?"

Peg took a deep breath and answered eagerly. She was on the one subject about which she could talk freely—all she needed was a good listener. This strange man, unlike her aunt, seemed to be the very person to talk to on the one really vital subject to Peg. She said breathlessly:

"I don't often cry," she said.

"Sure me father can do anything at all—except make money. An' when he does make it he can't kape it. He doesn't like it enough. Nayther do I. We've never had very much to like, but we've seen others around us with plenty, an', faith, we've been the happiest—that we have."

She only stopped to take breath before on she went again:

"There have been times when we've been most starvin', but me father never lost his pluck or his spirits. Nayther did I. When times have been the hardest I've never heard a word of complaint from me father nor seen a frown on his face. An' I'm sick for the sight of him. An' I'm sure he is for me—for his 'Peg o' My Heart,' as he always calls me."

She uncovered her eyes as the tears trickled down through her fingers.

"Don't do that," he said softly as he felt the moisture start into his own eyes.

"I don't often cry," she said. "Me father never made me do it. I never saw him cry but twice in his life—once when we made a little money an' we had a mass said for me mother's soul an' we had the most beautiful candles on Our Lady's altar. He cried then, he did. An' when I left him to come here on the ship—an' then only at the last minnit."

In a moment she went on again:

"I cried meself to sleep that night. I An' many a night, too, on that steamer.

"An' I wish I hadn't come—that I do. He's missin' me every minnit—an' I'm missin' him. An' I'm not goin' to be happy here ayther.

"I don't want to be a lady. An' they won't make me one, ayther, if I can help it. 'Ye can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear,' that's what me father always said. An' that's what I am. I'm a sow's ear."

She stopped.

"I'm afraid I cannot agree with you."

She looked up at him and said indifferently:

"That's what I am. I'm a sow's ear."

"When the strangeness wears off you'll be very happy. You're among friends."

Peg shook her head and said bitterly: "No, I'm not. They may be relations, but they're not me friends."

He turned to Peg and said:

"When they really get to know you, Miss O'Connell, they will be just as proud of you as your father is—as—I would be."

Peg looked at him in whimsical astonishment: "You'd be? Why should you be proud of me?"

"I'd be more than proud if you'd look on me as your friend."

"A friend is it?" cried Peg warily. "Sure I don't know who you are at all," and she drew away from him. She was on her guard. Peg made few friends. Why this man calling himself by the outlandish name of Jerry should walk in out of nowhere and offer her his friendship and expect her to jump at it puzzled her. Who was he?

"Who are ye at all?" she asked.

"No one in particular," answered Jerry between gasps.

"I can see that," said Peg candidly "I mean what do ye do?"

"Everything a little and nothing really well," Jerry replied. "I was a soldier for awhile; then I took a splash at doctoring, read law, civil engineered in South America for a year; now I'm farming."

"Farming?" asked Peg incredulously.

"Yes. I'm a farmer."

Peg laughed as she looked at the well cut clothes, the languid manner and easy poise.

"It must be mighty hard on the land and cattle to have you farmin' them," she said.

"It is," and he, too, laughed again.

She started up the staircase leading to the mauve room.

Jerry called after her anxiously:

"No, no, Miss O'Connell! Don't go like that."

"I must," said Peg from the top of the stairs. "What will I get here but to be laughed at an' jeered at by a lot of people that are not fit to even look at me father? Who are they, I'd like to know, that I mustn't speak his name in their presence?"

Suddenly she raised her hand above her head, and in the manner and tone of a public speaker she astounded Jerry with the following outburst:

"An' that's what the Irish are doin' all over the wurrld. They're driven out of their own country by the English an' become wandherers on the face of the earth, an' nothin' they ever earn 'll make up to them for the separation from their homes an' their loved ones!" She finished the peroration on a high note and with a forced manner such as she had frequently heard on the platform.

She smiled at the astonished Jerry and asked him:

"Do ye know what that is?"

"I haven't the least idea," he answered truthfully.

"That's out of one of me father's speeches. He father makes grand speeches. He makes them in the cause of Ireland."

"Oh, really! In the cause of Ireland, eh?" said Jerry.

"Yes. He's been strugglin' all his life to make Ireland free, to get her home rule, ye know. But the English are so ignorant. They think they know more than me father. If they'd do what me father tells them sure there'd be no more throuble in Ireland at all."

"Really?" said Jerry quite interestedly.

"Not a bit of throuble. I wish me father was here to explain it to ye. He could tell ye the whole thing in a couple of hours. I wish he were here now just to give you an example of what fine speakin' really is. Do you like speeches?"

"Very much—sometimes," replied Jerry guardedly.

"Me father is wondherful on a platform with a lot o' people in front of him. He's wondherful. I've seen him take two or three hundred people who didn't know they had a grievance in the wurrld—the poor cratures—they were just contented to go on bein' ground down an' trampled on an' they not knowin' a thing about it—I've seen me father take that crowd an' in five minutes afther he had started spakin' to them ye wouldn't know they were the same people. They were all shoutin' at once, an' they had murther in their eye, an' it was blood they were afther. They wanted to reform somethin'—they weren't sure what—but they wanted to do it, an' at the cost of life. Me father could have led them anywhere. It's a wonderful power he was. Do ye like hearin' about me father?" she asked Jerry suddenly, in case she was tiring him.

Jerry hastened to assure her that he was really most interested.

"Well, so long as yer not tired I'll tell ye some more. Ye know I went all through Ireland when I was a child with me father in a cart. An' the police an' the constabulary used to follow us about. They were very frightened of me father, they were. They were grand days for me. Ye're English, mebbe?" she asked him suddenly.

"I am," said Jerry. He almost felt inclined to apologize.

"Well, sure that's not your fault. Ye couldn't help it. No one should hold that against ye. We can't all be born Irish."

"I'm glad you look at it so broad mindedly," said Jerry.

She stood restlessly a moment, her hands beating each other alternately.

"I get so lonesome for me father," she said.

Suddenly, with a tone of definite resolve in her voice, she started to the stairs, calling over her shoulder:

"I'm goin' back to him now. Good-by!"

Jerry followed her, pleading insistently:

"Wait! Please wait!"

She stopped and looked at him:

"Give us one month's trial—one month!" he urged. "It will be very little out of your life, an' I promise you your father will not suffer through it except in losing you for that one little month. Will you? Just a month?"

He spoke so earnestly and seemed so sincerely pained and so really concerned at her going that she came down a few steps and looked at him irresolutely.

"Why do you want me to stay?" she asked him.

"Because—because your late uncle was my friend. It was his last wish to do something for you. Will you? Just a month?"

She struggled with the desire to go away from all that was so foreign and distasteful to her. Then she looked at Jerry and realized, with something akin to a feeling of pleasure, that he was pleading with her to stay and doing it in such a way as to suggest that it mattered to him. She had to admit to herself that she rather liked the look of him. He seemed honest, even though he were English. After all, to run away now would look cowardly. Her father would be ashamed of her. This stuckup family would laugh at her. Instantly she made up her mind.

She would stay. Turning to Jerry, she said:

"All right, then. I'll stay—a month. But not any more than a month, though."

"Not unless you wish it."

"I won't wish it—I promise ye that. One month 'll be enough in this house."

"I am glad you're going to stay."

"Well, that's a comfort, anyway. Some one 'll be pleased at my stayin'."

CHAPTER XX.

A Real Friend.

A DOOR slammed loudly in the distance as Peg talked to Jerry. Peg distinctly heard her aunt's voice and Alaric's. In a moment she became panic stricken. She made one bound for the top stairs and sprang up them three at a time. At the top she turned and warned him:

"Don't tell any one ye saw me."

"I won't," promised the astonished young man.

But their secret was to be short lived.

As Peg turned Ethel appeared at the top of the stairs, and as she descended, glaring at Peg, the unfortunate girl

A Door Slammed Loudly in the Distance as Peg Talked to Jerry.

went down backward before her. At the same moment Mrs. Chichester and Alaric came in through the door.

They all greeted Jerry warmly.

Mrs. Chichester was particularly gracious.

"So sorry we were out. You will stay to lunch?"

"It is what I came for," replied Jerry heartily. He slipped his arm through Alaric's and led him up to the windows.

"Why, Al, your cousin is adorable!" he said enthusiastically.

"What!" Alaric gasped, in horror. "You've met her?"

"Indeed I have. And we had the most delightful time together. I want to see a great deal of her while she's here."

"You're joking?" remarked Alaric cautiously.

"Not at all. She has the frank, honest grip on life that I like better than anything in mankind or womankind. She has made me a convert to home rule already."

The luncheon gong sounded in the distance. Alaric hurried to the door.

"Come along, every one! Lunch!"

"Thank goodness!" cried Jerry, joining him. "I'm starving."

Peg came quietly from behind the newel post, where she had been practically hidden, and went straight to Jerry and, smiling up at him, her eyes dancing with amusement, said:

"So am I starvin' too. I've not had a bite since 6."

"Allow me," and Jerry offered her his arm.

Mrs. Chichester quickly interposed.

"My niece is tired after her journey. She will lunch in her room."

"Oh, but I'm not a bit tired," ejaculated Peg anxiously. "I'm not tired at all, an' I'd much rather have lunch down here with Mr. Jerry."

The whole family were aghast.

Ethel looked indignantly at Peg.

Mrs. Chichester ejaculated, "What?"

Alaric, almost struck dumb, fell back upon "Well, I mean to say!"

"And you shall go in with Mr. Jerry," said that young gentleman, slipping Peg's arm through his own. Turning to Mrs. Chichester, he asked her: "With your permission we will lead the way. Come, Peg," and he led her to the door and opened it.

Peg looked up at him, a roguish light dancing in her big, expressive eyes.

"Thanks. I'm not so sure about that wager of yours. I think yer life is safe. I want to tell ye ye've saved mine." She put one hand gently on her little stomach and cried, "I am so hungry me soul is hangin' by a thread."

Laughing gayly the two new found friends went in search of the dining room.

"Disgraceful!" ventured Ethel.

"Awful!" said the stunned Alaric.

"She must be taken in hand at once!" came in firm tones from Mrs. Chichester. "She must never be left alone again. Come quickly before she can disgrace us any further today."

The days that followed were never to be forgotten ones for Peg. Her nature was in continual revolt. The teaching of her whole lifetime she was told to correct. Everything she said, everything she looked, everything she did was wrong.

Tutors were engaged to prepare her for the position she might one day enjoy through her dead uncle's will. They did not remain long. She showed either marked incapacity to acquire the slightest veneer of culture—else it was pure willfulness.

The only gleams of relief she had were on the occasions when Jerry visited the family. Whenever they could avoid Mrs. Chichester's watchful eyes they would chat and laugh and play like children.

Her letters to her father were at first very bitter regarding her treatment by the family. Indeed, so resentful did they become that her father wrote to her in reply urging her, if she was so unhappy, to at once return to him on the next steamer. The month she had promised to stay was drawing to an end. But one more day remained. It was to be a memorable one for Peg.

Jerry had endeavored at various times to encourage her to study. One day he gave her a large, handsomely bound volume and asked her to read it at odd times and he would examine her in it when she had mastered its contents. She opened it wonderingly and found it to be "Love Stories of the World."

It became Peg's treasure. She kept it hidden from every one in the house. She made a cover for it out of a piece of cloth, so that no one could see the ornate binding. She would read it at night in her room, by day out in the fields or by the sea. The book was a revelation to her. It gave all her imagination full play. Through its pages treaded a stately procession of kings and queens—Wagnerian heroes and heroines, Shakespearean creations, melodious in verse, and countless others.

All through the month Christian Brent was a frequent visitor. If Peg only despised the Chichesters she positively loathed Brent. Peg was waiting for a really good chance to find out Mr. Brent's real character. The opportunity came.

On the night of the last day of the trial month Peg was lying face downward on a sofa reading her treasure when she became conscious of some one being in the room watching her. She started up in a panic, instinctively hiding the book behind her. She found Brent staring down at her in open admiration. Something in the intentness of his gaze caused her to spring to her feet.

"The book must be absorbing. What is it?" he asked.

Peg faced him, the book clasped in both of her hands behind her back, her eyes flashing and her heart throbbing.

"You mustn't be angry, child. What is it, eh? Something forbidden?" and he leered knowingly at her. Then he made a quick snatch at the book, saying, "Show it me!"

Peg ran across the room and, turning up a corner of the carpet, put the book under it, turned back the carpet, put her foot determinedly on it and turned again to face her tormentor.

Brent went rapidly across to her. The instinct of the chase was quick in his blood.

"A hiding place, eh? Now you make me really curious. Let me see." He again made a movement toward the hidden book.

Peg clinched both of her hands into little fists and glared at Brent, while her breath came in quick, sharp gasps.

"I love spirit!" cried Brent.

"I love spirit!" cried Brent.

Then he looked at her charming dress, at her stylish coiffure, at the simple spray of flowers at her breast. He gave an ejaculation of pleasure.

"What a wonderful change in a month! You most certainly would not be sent to the kitchen now. Do you know you have grown into a most attractive young lady? You are really delightful angry. And you are angry, aren't you? And with me, eh? I'm so sorry if I've offended you. Let us kiss and be friends." He tried to take her in his arms. Peg gave him a resounding box on the ear. The door opened, and Ethel came into the room.

Peg hurried out through the windows.

Brent turned to Ethel.

"My dear!"

Ethel looked coldly at him.

"Why did she run away?"

Brent smiled easily and confidently:

"I'd surprised one of her secrets, and she flew into a temper.

"Secrets?" was all Ethel said.

"Yes. See." He walked across to the corner and turned back the carpet and, kneeling down, searched for the book, found it and held it up triumphantly. "Here!" He stood up and opened the book and read the title page:

"'Love Stories of the World.' 'To Peg from Jerry.' Oho!" cried Mr. Brent. "Jerry! Eh? No wonder she didn't want me to see it! Jerry! So that's how the land lies! Romantic little child!"

Ethel looked steadily at him.

"Why don't you go after her?" and she nodded in the direction Peg had gone.

"Ethel!" he cried, aghast.

"She is new and has all the virtues."

"I assure you"— he began. "Really—Ethel"—

"Were you 'carried away' again?" she sneered.

"Surely you're not jealous—of a—a—child?"

"No. I don't think it's jealousy," said Ethel slowly.

"Then what is it?"

"Disgust!" She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. "Now I understand why the scullery is sometimes the rival of the drawing room. The love of change!"

He turned away from her.

Ethel watched him quietly.

"Chris, come here!"

He turned to her.

"There! It's all over! I suppose I have been a little hard on you." She held out her hand.

"My nerves have been rather severely tried this past month," Ethel went on. "Put a mongrel into a kennel of thoroughbreds and they will either destroy the intruder or be in a continual condition of unsettled, irritated intolerance. That is exactly my condition."

Brent sat beside her and said softly:

"Then I've come in time?"

Ethel smiled.

"So did I, didn't I?" and she indicated the window through which Peg ran after assaulting Brent.

"Don't! Please don't!" he pleaded.

"Very well," replied Ethel complacently, "I won't."

"I'm sorry, Chris," remarked Ethel finally, after some moments had passed. "A month ago it wouldn't have mattered so much. Just now—it does. It's been horrible here."

"A month of misery for me, too," replied Brent passionately.

"I'm going away—out of it. Tomorrow!" he added. "To Petersburg—Moscow—Siberia"—

"Oh, the cold places!" She paused, then asked, "Going alone?" He whispered almost into her ear:

"Unless some one—goes with me! Will—you—go?" And he waited breathlessly.

She thought a moment, looked at him again and said quietly, "Chris, I wish I'd been here when you called—instead of that—brat."

Continued in next week's Banner.

Notes Not Elaborate.

The bishop of St. Albans wrote that on a certain occasion he heard Bishop Wilberforce describe with such singular eloquence and power the effect on the soul of the clearing away of intellectual doubts that he begged to be shown the manuscript from which his friend had been preaching, as he wished to copy certain portions of the sermon.

Wilberforce handed him the document, turned to the page which contained the passage spoken of by the bishop and showed him a sheet of paper inscribed with the single word—fog.

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12-

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