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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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"A child of her age?" said Mrs. Chichester.  
"Child is it?" cried Peg vehemently.  
"Margaret" and the old lady attempted to silence Peg with a gesture.  
"Plaze let me go. I'll study me head off tomorrow if ye'll only let me dance me feet off a bit tonight. Plaze let me!"  
The old lady raised her hand commanding Peg to stop.  
"It was most kind of you to trouble to come over, Jerry, but it is quite out of the question."  
Peg sprang up.  
Jerry looked at her as if imploring her not to anger her aunt any further. He shook Mrs. Chichester's hand and said:  
"I'm sorry. Good night."  
He turned and saw Peg deliberately pointing to the pathway and indicating that he was to meet her there.  
Peg, left alone, hurried over to the windows and looked out into the night. The moonlight was streaming full down the path through the trees. In a few moments Peg went to the foot of the stairs and listened. Not hearing anything, she crept upstairs into her own little mauve room, found a cloak and some slippers and a hat and just as quietly crept down again into the living room.  
She just had time to hide the cloak and hat and slippers on the immense window seat when the door opened and Ethel came into the room. She walked straight to the staircase without looking at Peg and began to mount the stairs.  
"Hello, Ethel!" called out Peg, all remembrance of the violent discussion gone in the excitement of the present. "I'm studyin' for an hour. Are ye still angry with me? Won't ye say 'Good night?' Well, then, I will. Good night, Ethel, an' God bless you."  
Peg's little heart beat excitedly.  
The one thought that beat through her quick brain was:  
"Will Jerry come back for me?"

**CHAPTER XXIII.**  
The Dance and Its Sequel.

JERRY met Peg at the foot of the path when he saw all the lights disappear in the house.  
They walked across the lawns and meadows on that beautiful July night, with the moon shining down on them.  
Once at the great hall his mother put the gauche little Peg at her ease, introduced her to the most charming of partners and saw that everything was done to minister to her enjoyment.  
It was a wonderful night for Peg. She danced every dance, she had the supper one with Jerry, she laughed and sang and romped and was the center of all the attention. What might have appeared boldness in another with Peg was just her innocent, willful, child-like nature. She made a wonderful impression that night and became a general favorite. She wanted it to go on and on and never to stop. When the last waltz was played and encored and the ball was really ended Peg felt a pang of regret such as she had not felt for a long, long time.  
"Oh, I am so happy, so happy!" she cried as Jerry led her back to her seat at the conclusion of the last dance.  
"I wish I could make the world one great ballroom for you," said Jerry earnestly.  
"Do ye?" asked Peg tremulously.  
"I do."  
"With you as me partner, dancin' ivery dance with me?"  
"Every one."  
"Wouldn't that be beautiful? An' no creepin' back after it all like a thief in the night?"  
"No," replied Jerry. "Your own mistress, free to do whatever you wished."  
"Oh," she cried impulsively, "wouldn't that be wonderful!"  
His mother had come across to say "Good night" to Peg. In a few moments his sisters joined them. They all pressed invitations on Peg to call on them at Noel's Folly and, with Mrs. Chichester's permission, to stay some days.  
Back across the meadows and through the lanes, under that marvelous moon and with the wild beat of the "Continental Waltz" echoing from the ballroom, walked Peg and Jerry, side by side, in silence. After a little while Peg whispered:  
"Jerry, what were you goin' to say to me when yer mother came up to us?"  
"Something it would be better to say in the daylight, Peg."  
"Sure, why the daylight? Look at the moon so high in the heavens."  
"Wait until tomorrow."  
"I'll not slape a wink thinkin' of all the wonderful things that happened this night. Tell me—Jerry—yer mother and yer sisters—they weren't ashamed o' me, were they?"  
"Why, of course not. They were charmed with you."  
"Shall I ever see them again?"  
"I hope some day you'll see a great deal of them."

They reached the windows leading into the living room.  
"Good night, Peg," he said.  
"What a hurry ye are in to get rid o' me! An' a night like this may never come again."  
Suddenly a quick flash of jealousy started through her.  
"Are ye goin' back to the dance? Are ye goin' to dance the extra ones ye wouldn't take me back for?"  
"Not if you don't wish me to."  
"Plaze don't," she pleaded earnestly.  
"I wouldn't rest aisy if I thought of ye with yer arm around one of those fine ladies' waists as it was around mine such a little while ago—an' me all alone here. Ye won't, will ye?"  
"No, Peg, I will not."  
He bent down and kissed her hand reverently.  
At the same moment the sound of a high power automobile was heard in the near distance.  
"Take care," cried Jerry. "Go in. Some one is coming."  
Peg hurried in and hid just inside the windows and heard every word that followed.  
As Peg disappeared Jerry walked down the path to meet the visitor. He came face to face with Christian Brent.  
"Hello, Brent," he said in surprise.  
"Why, what in the world—" cried that astonished gentleman.  
"The house is asleep," said Jerry ex-planetarily.  
"So I see," and Brent glanced up at the darkened windows. Jerry remarked:  
"Just coming from the dance? I didn't see you there."  
"No," replied the uncomfortable Brent. "I was restless and just strolled here."  
"Oh! Let us go on to the road."  
"Right," said the other man, and they walked on.  
Before they had gone a few steps Jerry stopped abruptly. Right in front of him at the gate was a forty horsepower automobile.  
"Strolled here? Why, you have your car!" said Jerry.  
"Yes," replied Brent hurriedly. "It's a bright night for a spin."  
The two men went on out of hearing. Peg crept softly upstairs. Just as she reached the top Ethel appeared from behind the curtains on her way down to the room. She was fully dressed and carried a small traveling bag.  
Peg looked at her in amazement.  
"Ethel!" she said in a hoarse whisper.  
"You!" cried Ethel under her breath and glaring at Peg furiously.  
"Please don't tell any one you've seen me!" begged Peg.  
"Go down into the room!" Ethel ordered.  
Peg went down the stairs into the dark room. Ethel followed her.  
"What are you doing here?"  
"I've been to the dance. Oh, ye won't tell me aunt, will ye? She'd send me away, an' I don't want to go now, indade I don't."  
"To the dance?" repeated Ethel incredulously. Try as she would she could not rid herself of the feeling that Peg was there to watch her.  
"To the dance?" she asked again.  
"Yes, Mr. Jerry took me."  
"Jerry took you?"  
"Yer mother wouldn't let me go. So Jerry came back for me when ye were all in bed, an' he took me himself. An' I enjoyed it so much. An' I don't want yer mother to know about it. Ye won't tell her, will ye?"  
"I shall most certainly see that my mother knows of it."  
"Ye will?" cried poor broken hearted Peg.  
"I shall. You had no right to go."  
"Why are ye so hard on me, Ethel?"  
"Because I detest you."  
"I'm sorry," said Peg simply. "Ye've spoiled all me pleasure now."  
Poor Peg turned away from Ethel and began to climb the stairs. When she was about halfway up a thought flashed across her. She came back quickly into the room and went straight across to Ethel.  
"An' what are you doin' here—at this time o' night? An' dressed like that? An' with that bag? What does it mane? Where are ye goin'?"  
"Go to your room!" said Ethel, livid with anger and trying to keep her voice down and to hush Peg in case her family were awakened.  
"Do ye mean to say ye were goin' with—"  
Ethel covered Peg's mouth with her hand.  
"Keep down your voice, you little fool!"  
Peg freed herself. Her temper was up too. The thought of why Ethel was there was uppermost in her mind as she cried:  
"He was here a minnit ago, an' Mr. Jerry took him away."  
"He?" said Ethel frightenedly.  
"Mr. Brent," answered Peg.  
Ethel went quickly to the window.

reg sprang in front of her and caught her by the wrists.  
"Were ye goin' away with him? Answer me!" insisted Peg.  
"Yes," replied Ethel vehemently. "And I am."  
"No, ye're not," said the indomitable Peg, holding her firmly by the wrist.  
"Let me go!" whispered Ethel, struggling to release herself.  
"Ye're not goin' out o' this house tonight if I have to wake every one in it."  
"Wake them!" cried Ethel. "Wake them. They couldn't stop me. Nothing can stop me now. I'm sick of this living on charity; sick of meeting you day by day, an' implied insult in your every look and word, as much as to say, 'I'm giving you your daily bread; I'm keeping the roof over you!' I'm sick of it. And I end it tonight. Let me go, or I'll—I'll!"—And she tried in vain to release herself from Peg's grip.  
Peg held her resolutely:  
"What d'ye mane by insult? An' yer daily bread? An' kapin' the roof over ye? What are ye ravin' about at all?"  
"I'm going," said the distracted girl.  
"Ye'd take him from his wife an' her baby?"  
"He hates them, and I hate this! I tell you I'm going."  
"So ye'd break yer mother's heart an' his wife's just to satisfy yer own selfish pleasure? You'll stay here an' he'll go back to his home if I have to tell every one an' disgrace ye both."  
"No, no! You must not do that! You must not do that!" she cried, terror stricken. "My mother mustn't know. She mustn't know. Let me go. He is waiting, and it is past the time."  
"Let him wait!" replied Peg firmly.  
"He gave his name an' life to a woman, an' it's yer duty to protect her an' the child she brought him."  
"I'd kill myself first!" answered Ethel through her clenched teeth.  
"No, ye won't. Ye won't kill yerself at all. Ye might have if ye'd gone with him. Why, that's the kind of man that tires of ye in an hour an' laves ye to sorrow alone. Faith, he'd ha' made love to me if I'd let him."  
"What? To you?" cried Ethel in astonishment.  
"Yes, to me—here in this room today. If ye hadn't come in when ye did I'd ha' taught him a lesson he'd ha' carried to his grave, so I would!"  
"He tried to make love to you?" repeated Ethel incredulously, though a chill came at her heart as she half realized the truth of Peg's accusation.  
"Ever since I've been in this house," replied Peg. "An' today he comes toward me with his arms stretched out. 'Kiss an' be friends,' sez he, an' in you walked."

**CHAPTER XXIV.**  
Enemies No Longer.

ETHEL sank down into a chair and covered her eyes.  
"The wretch!" she wailed.  
"The wretch!"  
"That's what he is," said Peg. "An' ye'd give yer life into his kapin' to blacken so that no decent man or woman would ever look at ye or spake to ye again."  
"No! That is over! That is over! I hate myself!" Ethel cried between her sobs. "Oh, how I hate myself!"  
"Ethel acushla! Don't do that! Darlin', don't! He's not worth it. Keepe yer life an' yer heart clane until the one man in all the wurld comes to ye with his heart pure, too, an' then ye'll know what rale happiness means."  
She knelt down beside the sobbing girl and took Ethel in her arms and tried to comfort her.  
She helped her cousin up and supported her. Ethel was on the point of fainting, and her body was trembling with the convulsive force of her half suppressed sobs.  
"Come to my room," said Peg in a whisper as she helped Ethel over to the stairs. "I'll watch by yer side till mornin'. Lane on me. That's right. Put yer weight on me."  
She picked up the traveling bag, and together the two girls began to ascend the stairs.  
Ethel gave a low choking moan.  
"Don't, dear; ye'll wake up the house," cried Peg anxiously. "We've only a little way to go. Aisy now. Not a sound! S-sh, dear! Not a morsel o' noise!"  
Just as the two girls reached the landing Peg in her anxiety stepped short, missed the top step, lost her footing and fell the entire length of the staircase into the room, smashing a tall china flower vase that was reposing on the post at the foot of the stairs.  
The worst thing that could possibly have happened was just what did happen.  
Peg instantly made up her mind that they were not going to know why Ethel was there.  
Ethel must be saved and at any cost.  
"Holy mother!" she cried. "The whole house'll be awake! Give me yer hand!"  
"An' yer cloak, an' yer bag!" Peg began quickly to put on Ethel's hat and cloak. Her own she flung out of sight beneath the great oak table.  
Continued next week.

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