

# APRIL ESCAPADE

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

## SYNOPSIS

Mary Kate and Martin are the only working members of the Widow O'Hara's household. Martin is studying medicine to Germany, but lacks of money prevents Christopher Steynes, a friend of Mary Kate's, from being able to go to Germany. Steynes proposes to Mary Kate that she play the part of his wife for one night, in order to get the money for Martin's trip to Germany. Mary Kate agrees. She meets Steynes in Burlington and they go to dinner at Gordon Rountree's house, where they meet the Countess and her daughter. The Countess is puffed when she is told Steynes is married.

## CHAPTER XVII.—(Cont'd.)

"Mary is the wife that I don't know he has," the Countess said unflinchingly, aggrievedly. "When we meet him in London, he say nothing of this wife Mary's have now."

"As a matter of fact they gave us all a surprise!" Gordon said in a comfortable, confidential tone, leaning toward his right-hand neighbor.

"Mrs. Steynes, you're not related to the Virginia Selby, are you?" said Mrs. Ridley, who was. "You're the living image of a portrait that hangs in my Grandfather Goldborough's house."

"No, I was a Deane," Mary Kate said calmly. Gordon and Christopher, who had both halted with soup spoons in air, resumed their meal.

"Now, when Mrs. Ridley and I were in Russia," said Doctor Ridley, with pleasant pomposity, as he turned toward the Countess Marks, "I made up my mind to get a bowing acquaintance, at least, with your language. The chief difficulty for us Americans, I believe I am right in saying—"

Marka gave him a look of hate; he saw nothing amiss. It was his duty to talk to his lady for a while, and talk to her he would. He was a trifle overweight, as was also his wife, up there next to the head of the table, in pale blue satin. They smiled contentedly at each other when the roast came along.

Now and then he looked with great satisfaction at the beautiful girl who was taking the foot of the table. Lovely creature! She was quite a picture in that old-fashioned gown. Lucky fellow, young Keyes or Sayles or whatever his name was.

"Do you play golf, Mrs. Steynes?" The young men were all discussing an approaching golf match.

"No, but I want to!" And she glanced dutifully, loyally at Christopher.

"You've delayed your trip to China?"

"Only over one steamer—yes."

"I think you had better that your husband take you, too!" the Countess, listening from the other end of the table, put in venomously. "You know this men they forget their good little Mary wives, when they come to Russia!"

"Oh, I shall go this time," Mary Kate, who was beginning to enjoy herself in a frightened sort of excited way, said amiably.

"Some day you are not afraid—" the Countess pursued, "that someone show you the letter he write?"

Mary Kate glanced unsmilingly at Christopher again.

"I know he's a terror," she admitted mildly.

It was all so smooth. It was all so easy!

"We have almost three good bridge tables for after dinner," Gordon Rountree, who was a man of one idea, at least as far as evening amusement was concerned, said wistfully.

"Oh, I'll watch!" Mary Kate offered eagerly. "I'll really like to sit beside Chris' chair and watch!"

She hadn't seen it coming, but the name sounded smooth and natural. Her sapphire eyes moved; Chris Steynes was looking at her with an odd expression, an expression that brought the uneasy, puzzled color up into her cheeks.

"Let's all cut in!" said one of the young men.

"Sure, have two tables, and we'll cut, Gordy."

"Telephone old van Antwerp—he's right across the road here, he loves bridge!"

Mary Kate's mouth went suddenly dry; her hands were cold. She felt her heart thump heavily, sickly.

"He's in town, I telephoned about an hour ago," the host said, and she could breathe again. But what an escape! Her palms were wet, and she felt the blood that had receded from her face return again.

"You're like Mary Queen of Scots," Chris said. "You know they said that when she drank wine it could be seen, through the transparency of her throat."

"I don't think, if I drank ink, it would show," Mary Kate said amusedly.

"You ask me when we sail? We sail on Sunday," said the Countess heavily, in a pause. "We go to my country—to Russia, where my girl will marry with her cousin. He have no money—his property is taken away by the revolutionists—but what can he do? If nine lives are not here, he will be dead!"

The daughter, who spoke English at least as well as her mother, now proudly and protestingly interposed a few rapid words in her own tongue, and glancing scornfully about her at the company, lapsed into silence again.

## CHAPTER XVIII

The room was hot; she was glad to step through one of the opened dining room windows, after the meal, and let the dark sweet night air cool her hot face, and whisper eagerly to Christopher, who followed her onto the terrace.

"Do the ladies leave the men now, the way they do in books? Because it's being alone with her that scares me."

"No, the ladies don't leave the men now, the way they do in books," Christopher assured her, leaning down close over her and repeating her words in an odd tense whisper. He spoke mumbly, laughing. "Gordon's wild for bridge, said the Countess in a regular wolf for it," he said. "We'll play, right away. Do you want to be put at a table with those boys?"

"Please, but—Mr. Steynes is it working, do you think?"

He was flapping the silver ribbons on her violets, to and from, against her shoulder.

"Is what?" he asked, inconsequently, foolishly.

Mary Kate looked at him sharply. Was he intoxicated. But no, he was merely a very handsome, blond, perfectly ordinary young man in evening dress, speaking and laughing in rather mysterious confusion, his face close to her cheek.

Streaks of light came from the house, out to the terrace; she was in a shaft of it, but she could not see his face very well.

"You said—" he muttered.

"Is it working? Our plot?"

"Oh, working!" he echoed. He was suddenly, to her relief, his business-like self again. "It's simply a knock-out. Can't you see that for yourself? The old girl was staggered, for a few minutes, now she's off on a new track. We'll complete the job with that lunch tomorrow, probably. She's sort of siding out of it now."

"Oh, I'm so glad."

"It's simply perfect. I tell you. Come on back, and carry on," Christopher put an urgent hand under her elbow, and Mary Kate went back into the warmth and noise of the brightly lighted rooms, to play cards.

The experience was proving ridiculously simple. Nobody seemed to doubt her position, or be interested in the exact proof of whatever it was, or seemed to be. The men chuckled over polo, golf, motor cars. Mrs. Ridley was a vague, gentle, remote sort of lady, principally concerned just now in the cut for the deal.

Mary Kate had a hilarious rubber with Joe Davey and the Ainslee brothers. It was just like playing bridge at home, with Cass and Martin and some other player, except that now and then she could look up tonight, and see reflected in a great mirror the black coats of the three men, and the ivory and satin and glittering hair that was herself.

The Countess and her daughter were playing rapaciously at the other tables; Chris played a first rubber with them, and then drifted over to Mary Kate's table and sent Harry Ainslee back to take his former place.

"Oh, no cut! Mary and I have to be partners."

"Cut for the deal, then. Mrs. Steynes gets it."

"What are you playing for?"

"Only a cent," said Joe Davey, who had never earned one.

"And I'm ahead—look, more than two thousand points!" Mary Kate exclaimed innocently.

"You pay her losses and she takes her gains—that's the way my wife manages," young Ainslee said feelingly.

"Mary always wins," Chris said. They played a hard rubber, for Mary Kate was determined to impress him, and bid desperately and took chances. Hardly was the last point scored when the four enthusiastically commenced again; Christopher played a reckless game, but on this particular occasion all his risks were justified, and he could sit back in great satisfaction at the end of the game.

"Any more?" Mary Kate asked eagerly.

"Well, what do you think? It's now one o'clock."

"It's what?" she was amazed. "Oh, gracious, oughtn't we go?"

They left all the table litter for the servants, the girl observed, nobody gathered up ashes and cards and abandoned score, as somebody would have done in the little parlor at home, nobody straightened chairs and shut up the green table.

They all strolled into the adjoining rooms, where the card games were also finished, and there were general good nights.

(To be continued.)

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