

Clementine - Isabel L. Martens



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Common born, Clementine Pennington, has the face of a madonna and the manners of a lady, handicaps when it comes to securing employment. Cast out without letters of recommendation by her deceased employer's son, her funds almost exhausted, her search for a position futile, she faces the very real possibility of being homeless and penniless. London's cruel wet winter is almost upon her. Desperate, she interviews for a position as housekeeper in a gentleman's country home. Her previous position as lady's companion in no way qualifies her. She will dissemble as necessary to secure the position and pray that good intentions and hard work will overcome her lack of experience. Surely, the requirements in a rustic's household will be minimal. Lord Alexander Silverton, offspring of the 8th Earl of Chatham, has chosen to become a solicitor rather than join his peers in idle pursuits. His boyhood companion, Lord James Tansy, 5th Duke of Denby, widowed and recently blind, has commissioned him to hire a housekeeper. Neither Tansy nor Clementine realizes that Silverton's true mission is to find Tansy another wife. Silverton has made it his life's work to look after Tansy, solve his problems for him, and leave him free to pursue his outstanding musical talent. Prior to his accident Tansy had enjoyed a world renown reputation as a

pianist. Silverton completely entralls Clementine during the interview. Never has she encountered such a specimen of masculine perfection. His well groomed, prematurely white hair, framing handsome features, plus his elegant bearing and flawlessly tailored attire make him the fulfillment of her every day dream. In addition, he is charming, intelligent and humorous. He waves aside her lack of letters and they spend an hour in pleasant conversation drinking stimulating Turkish coffee. Many of his questions seem unrelated to housekeeping, but she answers all without hesitation. She is not so blinded by his enchanting presence to forget her dire circumstance and artfully skips around many half truths. But when he tells her that her employer will be Lord Denby, she admits to her deception. Her conscience will not allow her to press such a falsehood on a man of Denby's fame. She's well acquainted with his musical talent, her own father having also been a pianist. In truth, she knows nothing about housekeeping save what she's observed at Lady Agatha's where she's lived since the age of thirteen when Lady Moorland became her father's patroness. After taking both Clementine and her father into her household, it is Lady Moorland who raised Clementine like a lady, seeing to both her education and her social polish. When her father died, Clementine stayed on as Lady Agatha's companion. It was understood that Lady Agatha would help Clementine secure a proper husband. But the years slipped by and Clementine remained unmarried and without prospects. Now she is well on the shelf. Her beauty and high polish holds prospects of her own social level at a distance and her lack of rank keeps men of Society from considering her. Silverton brushes aside her lack of experience and hires her. With his clerk, Raymond Stanley as her escort, she sets off for Denby's country home in the Highlands. She deeply regrets the necessity of leaving London and all possibility of encountering Silverton from time to time. She is somewhat appeased, however, by his invitation to contact him by letter if she has any questions regarding her position. Neither mentions the fact the Society does not allow unmarried men and women to correspond. These are special circumstances, are they not? As it turns out, Clementine has many questions.

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