

## THE SCHOOLMASTER'S BRIDE

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has lived in it for many years. The winds blow around it mournfully and the gray rain beats upon it, and the white mists come in from the Gulf to enfold it. And the moonlight falls over it and lights up the old paths where John Selwyn walked and planned, that happy, busy summer.

THE sand dunes were not far away, the sea tempests blew over them and the sea spray smote upon them. But a thick spruce grove protected the garden which the schoolmaster made for his bride. The gate of it was between two large fir trees, the hinge on one, the catch on the other.

"This gate will shut out all the world but my friends," he said to me one evening. "How she will love this garden! There shall be a white sisterhood of lilies here by the gate and over yonder we shall have a gayety of poppies, the silken ladies of the garden. My schoolgirls have set out yonder rose-bushes for her, pink for her cheek and white for her brow and red for her lips. I wonder if to-day has been kind to her."

At last the new house was finished, waiting only to be sanctified by love and joy to be a home. One dim, star-lighted twilight he took me over it. It was furnished very plainly. The men and women who loved him had sent many simple, wholesome gifts to the new house for his bride. Even blind and crippled old Aunt Margaret Kennedy had woven for her a basket of the sweet-scented grass that grows on our sand dunes. There were logs in the big fireplace ready for the lighting.

"We shall sit here," he said, "just she and I, alone with the twilight and the sweetness. But sometimes we shall let a friend come in and share it. You will be our most welcome guest, Andrew."

"Perhaps Mistress Selwyn may not want me," I said, rather churlishly, not knowing then what an added wealth of friendship Persis Gray was to bring into my life.

John Selwyn only laughed. Knowing her as I did not, he needed to waste no words refuting so silly a speech.

It was the first of July when the house was finished. The schoolmaster began to count the days like silver beads on a rosary. We saw him walking alone by the shore and in the beech wood, and said to each other kindly, "She will soon be with him now."

She was to come with mid-July, but she came not. This was not alarming. Vessels were often delayed many days and even weeks beyond their expected time. The time lagged away. The *Royal William* was a week—two weeks—three weeks, overdue. As slowly and subtly and remorselessly as a sea-fog stealing landward fear crept into our hearts, fear that grew deeper and deadlier as the weeks lengthened out. The time came when I could not bear to look into John Selwyn's eyes. They were so terribly like what Mercy Selwyn's must have been at the stake. He said little, even to me. He had taken me into his joy, but he could not take me into his sorrow. My soul was at that time washed empty of every wish and hope and desire save that I might see the *Royal William* sailing up the harbour. He taught school as a man in a dream and then hurried to the shore. One dark, streaming night, when the white waves were ravening on the black strand, they said he walked on the shore until morning. We did not torture him with expressions of sympathy; but everything else tortured him. When he saw a faroam wreath tossing he thought of a woman's white arm flung for an appealing moment from the wave. The seaweed ribbons seemed like a woman's floating hair. Every heart in Lindsay ached for him. He never went near the house he had made ready for his bride and the weeds grew wild and thick in the garden, where the petals of the last red rose were scattered by a September wind. Summer was over and the schoolmaster's bride had not come—never would come now.

"There is an hour in which a man might be happy all his life could he but find it. But I cannot find it, lad," he said wildly, when I met him one evening in the beech grove overlooking the sea, where he had been wont to walk and dream of her. His looks frightened me. I knew people said he was losing his mind.

"The *Royal William* may come yet," I said stupidly. "Ten years ago the *Georgina* was a month overdue, but she came at last. The *Royal William* is only seven weeks overdue."

"Oh, I shall see Persis again," he said, with a strange calm I liked less than his wildness. "I have only to wait very, very patiently and I shall see her coming to me from yonder shore and the garland gold of her hair mirrored in that still pond."

Suddenly he gripped my arm so savagely that I flinched.

"Boy, boy, I cannot bear it!" he whispered hoarsely. "I picture a hundred deaths for her. The ship may have caught fire. I shall go mad soon. Pray that the agony I feel may never be your portion."

HE rushed away from me shoreward and I did not follow him. I went home and wept, though I counted myself a man.

A great tempest ravaged the Gulf for the next three days; on the evening after it abated I went to the shore. It was clean-washed after the storm and not a wind stirred, but the surf was dashing on the sand in a splendid silver turmoil. The schoolmaster was there, gazing

eastward across the tossing water; he and it were the only restless things in all that great stillness and peace. But presently he gave over his moody striding and leaned with folded arms against a great upstanding red rock worn smooth by long buffeting of wind and wave.

The sunken sun had sucked all the rosy light out of the great blue bowl of the sky and twilight came down over the white foam before us. Behind us people were singing in a harvest field.

I spoke to the schoolmaster, but he did not answer. I looked fearfully into his gaunt face. It was very white and set, and his great hollow eyes were gazing past me unseeing. I knew not what they looked at, but an icy feeling crept over me and I drew a little away from my friend.

"John! John Selwyn!" I cried imploringly. Then, like a frightened child, "Waken! Waken!"

Slowly the fixed stare faded out of his eyes. Slowly he turned his head and looked at me. I have never seen anything so transfigured and glorified as John Selwyn's face at that moment.

"All is well, lad," he said. "Rejoice with me. I have seen the *Royal William* coming around East Point. She will be here by dawn. Tomorrow night I shall sit with my bride by my own hearth fire."

Did he see it? God knows. I doubted. I was only a boy and knew not what marvels great love and great pain may compass. But I know that in the first faint gray dawn of the next day I awakened to find my father standing by my bed; and on the cheeks of that stern man were tears.

"Rise, Andrew," he said. "Malcolm MacNaughton has brought word that the *Royal William* is outside the harbour."

We lived some distance from the harbour and, although I lost no time, almost every soul in Lindsay was there before me, for the tidings had spread rapidly. The schoolmaster was there, standing apart from us all, his hat drawn low over his face. He had, as I learned later, watched there all night, in a glad confidence. No one spoke to him; he had known his own bitterness and we might not intermeddle in his joy. Many women were weeping and the eyes of many men were wet. There was little talking. It seemed as though the sea had given up its dead.

IT was a lovely dawn. The sky in the east was all rosy-silver and the sea beneath it dancing ripples. The grass was green and dew-wet on the cliffs. Birds do not often sing in September but one sang that morning in the wind-beaten firs near the old wharf. Over the harbour bar hung a milky mist; then the rising sun rent it apart and made a rainbow of it. And as it did so the *Royal William* came through it, sailing swiftly before a fair wind over a glistening pathway through the transparent air. We went mad for a little while, at the sight, and cheered wildly. Then again we kept silence as the gray, battered ship came onward up the channel and at last furler her sails in the long desired haven.

Two women came ashore, the captain's sonsy wife and one other, a tall girl wrapped in a dark cloak. We had but a brief glimpse of her ere she was folded in John Selwyn's arms and led away. I remember that we were all a little disappointed. We had looked for, I know not what, radiant beauty; but this girl, with her hair all closely hidden in her dark hood, was pale and worn. Only her eyes were very wonderful as for one instant they swept over the waiting crowd. They were sea-blue and star-like—the eyes of a woman a man might die for. They haunted my fancy as I went home, leaving the others to crowd around the crew of the *Royal William*, and listen to their tale of the fearful storms and accidents which had all but brought her voyage to a disastrous end.

That night, in James MacNaughton's house, John Selwyn and Persis Gray were married at early candle-lighting, and every man, woman, and child in Lindsay was there to see it. Some had been saying, through the day, that the schoolmaster's bride was not very bonny after all; but they never said it again. Flushed with her happiness, she was a sight to make an old man young. She wore a wonderful dress of rose brocade such as we had never seen in Lindsay, nor ever saw again, for Mistress Selwyn did not wear it after her marriage, going quietly clad in home-spuns like our own matrons. But that night she looked the queen, with a foam of laces on her full bosom and her heavy coils of shining, pale-gold hair pinned closely over her head. All the pain and joy of past generations had bequeathed to her a legacy of love and loyalty, and it shone in those wonderful eyes of hers and lighted her face like a rosy lamp shining through alabaster. The hardships and dangers of her long, lonely voyage were forgotten; only perfect trust and exquisite happiness breathed from her as she clasped her bridegroom's hand and took her vows upon her.

They walked to their home in the September moonlight, and Persis Selwyn's hand kindled the fire on their hearth-stone. We left them sitting before it, hand in hand, even as the schoolmaster had foreseen.

Every child should be taught a proper sense of values. Teach this by giving him an allowance and requiring him to supply some of his own needs from that allowance; then if he fail to make provision for these wants, let him go without.



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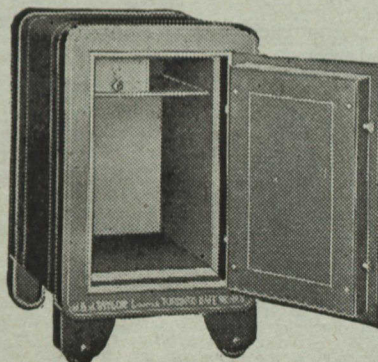
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