

read. Her experience had known courtships galore begin in that kitchen at that very dish-washing sink, and they had inevitably terminated fatally.

Naturally her hurried search for sympathy gravitated toward the McCoy hacienda. She burst upon the assembled family with indignation bristling in her manner.

"It's that deceivin' cook of mine and Pete Sanderson," she choked. "They're washing dishes together, and this the very first day she came."

"Ain't they washing them clean?"

McCoy wanted to know innocently. "Clean!" echoed the ruffled proprietor of the Kelly House. "I don't know and I don't care."

"I don't reckon Pete will break many of them. He's an awful careful man."

"I expect that's about enough guessin' for you," scoffed Mrs McCoy, with a glance of good-natured contempt at her worst half, after which she devoted herself to the point at issue. "Who'd a thought it of Pete Sanderson, after he'd grown bald-headed without so much as looking cross-eyed at a woman?"

"Dish-washin' ain't no royal road to matrimony," opined McCoy.

"That's all you know," returned Mrs. McCoy aggressively. "Dish-washin' is as dangerous to single folks when they get together in bunches of two as measles is to children in school. Yu might say that every last one of them girls of Sarah's married right from the dish-pan!"

"I'm certainly disappointed in Paradise," sighed Mrs. Kelly. "She looked so meaching and touch-me-not I'd a made plumb sure she would have said 'Scat!' to any of them that hung around."

McCoy reached for his soft felt hat. He was close to the door and sure of his escape before he fired his last broadside.

"Sanderson's a right white man, and his ranch can keep a widow without the need of a mortgage. I reckon I'll happen down street and congratulate him."

Mr. McCoy's exit was hurried.

"I declare I'm that out of patience with her," continued Mrs. Kelly. "I knew soon as I set eyes on her she was tough and wiry, so I took her just because she was so pale and had lost all her good looks. It was 'most the same as lying to me, for I declare, sure's you live, Marianna, the hussy looked real pretty a-washing dishes so kind of flustered before that good-

for-nothing man, and him 'most old enough to be her father. There was little spots of pink in her cheeks and her eyes were shinin' right bright."

"Well, if that don't beat all git out," sympathized Mrs McCoy. "And only this afternoon she looked like she'd lost her last friend on earth."

Mrs. Kelly, returning home an hour later, found no comfort in the sight of the little group seated on the kitchen porch. Paradise leaned against one of the posts, her tired face turned toward the moonlight. But Mrs. Kelly noticed that the gray eyes included in their orbit the genial weather-beaten countenance of the ranchman. She observed also that Sanderson in his shirt-sleeves, had in his arms the sleeping figure of John Quincy Meeker. His coat was wrapped carefully round the manikin, and he was holding him as tenderly as if he had been Dresden china.

"Quite a happy party," reflected Mrs. Kelly bitterly, as she marched past them to the front piazza.

Snatches of their talk drifted to her. The conversation for the most part consisted of silences, so to say. If the widow was shy, Peter was more so. But Mrs. Kelly was irritably aware that songs without words were easily sung under Alberta's starry velvet sky. A picture of the widow's grateful eyes—she was the kind any fool could win by being nice to the child, her mistress decided—and the cowman's gentle friendly face rose to torment her. The idea—and they not even acquainted till that afternoon! She made up her mind to have a word with Paradise Meeker after Peter had vacated his claim on the porch.

But this Sanderson seemed in no hurry to do. It had been seventeen years since he had last "been settin' to a gal," as they used to call it back in his Ontario home. The soft magic night worked wonders with him. A new keen rush of youth was surging delightfully through him. He was not old—only forty-three. What had he meant by contenting himself with a renunciation of home-ties? As the little fellow in his arms cuddled closer in his sleep the tenderness that flooded him was fierce in its rapture.

"He's a right dandy little man, ma'am. It's shorely funny how kids wind their tiny fingers round a fellow's heart."

The widow's reply was inarticulate, but Mrs. Kelly was certain that her faithful dog-like eyes were thanking him for being fond of her darling.

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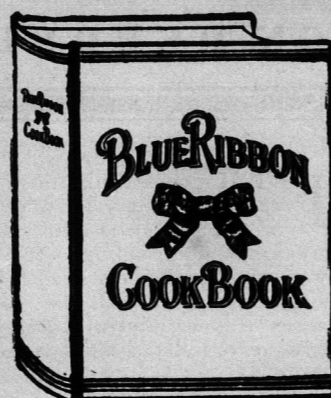
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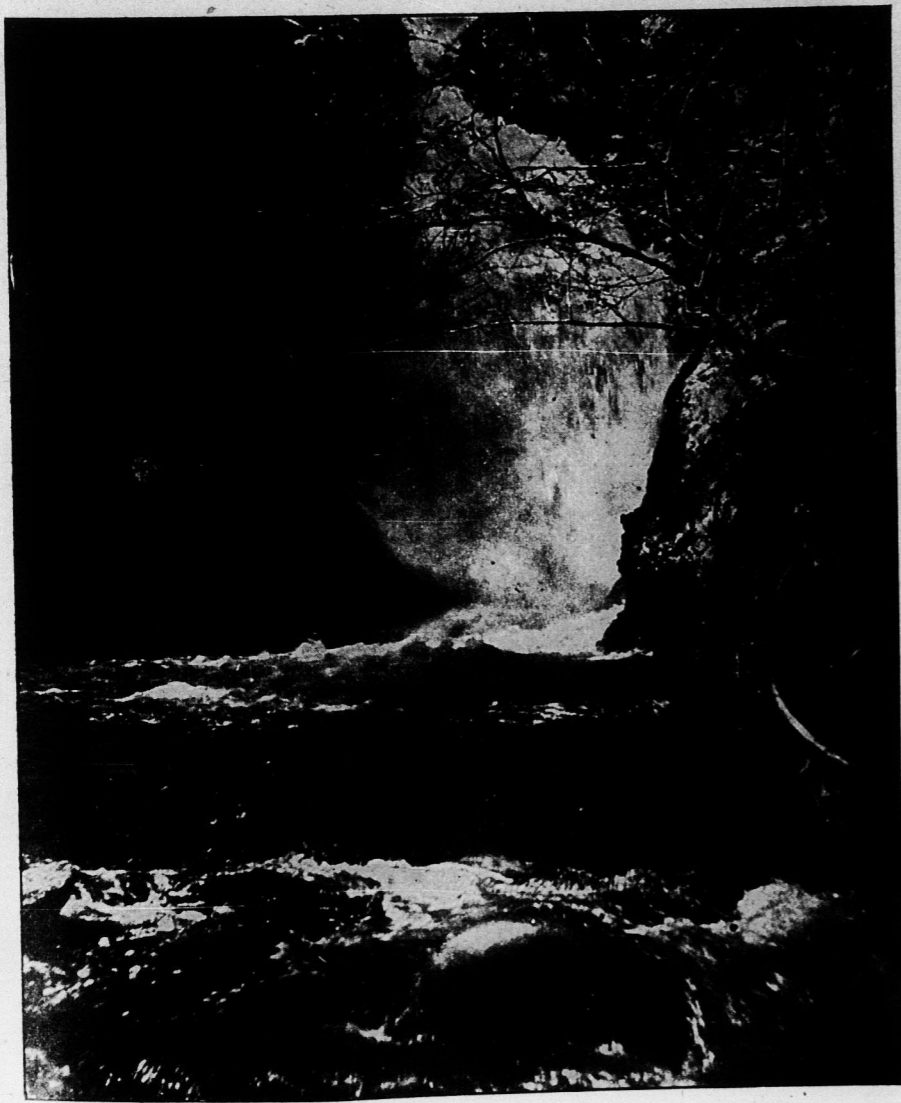
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