



A Fight Against Odds.

(Kate Anderson, in the 'Union Signal.')

CHAPTER I.

The Kilgour family were seated around the dinner table. The dining-room was a picture of cosy comfort, and the dinner of crisp bacon, mashed potatoes and early asparagus had evidently been enjoyed. As Mrs. Kilgour is dispensing the dessert of rhubarb pie she wonders aloud why Claude is so late.

Mr. Kilgour, leaning back in his chair, looks happy and satisfied. He wears the uniform of a railway conductor. His train, the Wabash flier, starts east at 1.48 p.m., and he does not get home until 2.20 a.m., so this dinner is really his breakfast, for he does not rise until eleven o'clock. A portly, handsome fellow, with pleasant blue eyes, he looks almost as young as his eldest son, Ralph, seated at his left.

Ralph is a square-jawed, resolute, rather solemn-faced youth who appears several years older than his actual age—barely twenty-one. On a guess you might venture him to be either a Methodist theological student or a speculative devotee of philosophy. In actual truth Ralph is a rising sport—the pet, intimate and confidant of the racing and gambling set of a decidedly fast and sporty border town. Underneath his quiet and rather heavy-set exterior rests a dominant and peculiarly winning personality, which makes him a favorite with men of all classes, while a certain will power and strong common sense steer him clear of the pitfalls among which he daily treads. Strange to say, though in close and constant companionship with men addicted to all the vices of the 'horsey' type, Ralph does not drink because 'that sort of thing is so beastly disgusting, don't you know.' He does not smoke because he cannot bear tobacco—'makes me sick as a dog.' He does not gamble because he 'can't afford it. It's the ruination of good sport, anyhow.'

Perhaps Ralph Kilgour's example had done more to ruin certain of the soft-headed youth of Riverton than that of any ten weaker men, for in attempting to follow his dangerous leadership along the path that he trod with such robust confidence, they found, to their sorrow, that out of a thousand there was but one Kilgour.

Beside Ralph sits the daughter of the household, a winsome girl with chestnut hair, wonderful eye-lashes shading lovely brown eyes, and a skin like a pink rose-petal. There is nothing remarkable about Alice save her dainty beauty and a social ambition which has cost her many a heartache. How could she dream that there were keener pangs in store for her than the snubs of a banker's daughter or the cold recognition of lawyer Lireby's angular young wife?

Willie is a wiry, skinny, eel-like youth of seventeen, with a screwed-up face, twinkling brown eyes like his mother's, and a certain sweet, engaging personality. He is just now very much in love with Dr. Meredith's daughter, an estimable young lady some eight years Willie's senior.

All eyes are turned as the hall door is banged open and a small boy dashes in, calling, 'Is everything eaten up, mamma?'

Claude is well worth a second glance, for a handsomer, finer looking lad is seldom to be seen. His boyish young form is as straight as an arrow. Even at the immature age of twelve, his wonderful chest and shoulders, narrow hips, and tapering feet give promise of almost perfect manly symmetry. A noble head crowned with a wealth of short yellow curls (which Claude hates), a high forehead, great blue eyes with extreme beauty of feature and coloring make Claude a mark whithersoever his handsome limbs

may carry him. He is, indeed, known in his native town as the 'Infant Apollo,' a title bestowed upon him by a Detroit paper in describing his prowess at a small boy's international running-match held a few years earlier.

Claude is a good and a gifted boy, the ecstatic pride and joy of his own family, scarcely less so of his teachers and associates. He is head-boy in the second form of the collegiate. He is soprano soloist in the vested choir of Little Trinity. He is his Sunday-school teacher's darling, and his boy-friends' hero.

The Kilgours are not a religious family, nor yet one of exalted moral ideals. They take pride in being square and upright in all their dealings, and in a respectability amounting to a certain style and position in their little city. The children have always attended Little Trinity Sunday-school, and the boys have all belonged, as a matter of course, to the Trinity Boys' Brigade, graduating as they grew old enough into the ranks of the Frontier Fusiliers. Ralph had been of the gallant Riverton Sixteen who had gone to South Africa with the first contingent, where he had distinguished himself for conspicuous bravery at Paardeburg, and since his return he had been granted the rank of lieutenant.

'Well, I must be off,' remarked Mr. Kilgour, at last rising from the table.

'Take care of yourself, Will,' said his wife, lovingly. 'Have they dismissed that drunken engineer yet? Why don't you report him?'

'Come, now, Nellie, you wouldn't want me to be the means of firing the poor wretch!' laughed Kilgour as he kissed his wife's cheek and pressed it to his for a brief moment.

'Good-bye, Allie, dear,' kissing his daughter, 'I've got you that pass, and you can start on your jaunt as soon as Wednesday.'

'Good-bye, my dear boys. Be good lads,' and he shook hands with them each, running his fingers through Claude's bright locks.

What instinct was it that made them all, even to Ralph, follow their father to the porch, and kept them everyone watching his gay footsteps till he disappeared round the corner of Brossoit avenue? They could not know that this was the last time they would ever see their bonny, noble-hearted protector alive.

Ere noon on the morrow the agonized wife and children were crouched around the closed coffin holding the mangled remains of what had once been husband and father.

In one other home in the little city, two old heart-broken parents and a stricken sister were weeping for the untimely taking away of an only son and brother. Walter Gray had been fireman on the ill-fated Number Five, and was the only support of aged parents and invalid sister.

In St. Thomas two other households were plunged into grief that cannot be told.

And the cause of this woeful desolation? The engineer was intoxicated!

It is but a fortnight later, and again we find the now sad-faced little group gathered about the dinner-table. As they try to swallow the appetizing fare before them, each thinks of the jolly feasts of by-gone days, and the food chokes them.

Finally Ralph pushes away his plate, and speaks: 'It's like this, mother, the insurance, with what is in the bank, amounts in all to barely \$4,000. The question is, shall we take \$2,200 and pay off the mortgage at once or let it run on the remainder of the term, or sell out and rent elsewhere?'

'Don't let our home go!' they all spoke in chorus. 'Dear father took such pride in the place.'

'We're all agreed, I guess, on that point. Well, mother, shall we pay up at once, or let it run? We're paying Morton six per cent, and until we can see our way clear to a safe investment, that almost swallows up the bank interest on our entire resources.'

'O Ralph, dear, it wrenches my very

heart-strings to think of letting your father's home go, but don't you think it an undue extravagance for us to keep a handsome little property like this in our present circumstances? We could live very comfortably indeed in a much less pretentious house and neighborhood.'

The boys gathered round their mother.

'No, indeed, mother darling, as long as we fellows live you'll never leave the home which father intended as a gift to you on your silver wedding.'

(To be Continued.)

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