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TO HIS MAJESTY  
KING GEORGE V.

**CHAMPAGNE**

too; but I think Kenneth will turn out all right."

There was a long silence, broken only by the low lapping of the waves, and the whisper of the breeze passing through the fir trees; the bars of red and purple had faded out of the sky, and the moon shone with a cold, luminous whiteness.

Peggy shivered. "Aunt Pragg, are there no happy marriages?" she asked piteously.

"Of course, child—thousands of them. But those are the ones we don't hear about. There is no happiness so perfect as a true marriage, no misery so great as a false one."

"It is so difficult to tell beforehand how it will turn out," breathed the girl. "It—it—frightens me, Aunt Pragg."

All at once tears glistened in her eyes, and she rose suddenly and kissed her aunt.

"You will help me, auntie, won't you?" she said rather wistfully.

"You bet I will," replied Miss Pragg with energy, as she rose from her seat and entered the house through the open French window.

Margaret Assitas lingered a moment longer on the balcony, looking out into the gathering darkness; then, with a stifled sigh, she turned and followed her aunt into the lighted room.

#### CHAPTER XV.

#### Country Life.

THE following morning, Margaret was up and out early. She delighted in the old-fashioned grounds of Appletree House. Dawdling in and out of the rose garden, she plucked heavy blooms for the breakfast table. Her basket was soon full of every shade in red, crimson, damask, pink, and pale rose; there were creamy white and pale yellow ones as well. Rambler roses climbed over the old stumps of big trees which had been cut down, and ran along trellised arches. The perfume of the blossoms scented the whole garden, and Margaret drew it in with delicate enjoyment.

Passing from the rose garden, she paid a visit next to the little vinery which supplied the table with black grapes. Then she carried in her spoils to the housekeeper, and was busy arranging big china bowls full of roses when Miss Pragg made her appearance in the breakfast room.

"What! have you been out already, Peggy?" exclaimed that lady with a laugh, as he stood for a moment watching the active girl. "I thought I was unconscionably early this morning." She drew out her watch and consulted it with an air of virtue.

"I simply had to get up," declared Peggy, as she kissed her aunt; "it's a positive crime to stop in bed on such a glorious morning. I've been in the garden an hour already."

Peggy was trying to bolster up a top-heavy bloom that would persist in toppling over.

"Did you ever see such roses, Aunt Pragg? They are positively too heavy to hold up," said the girl happily.

"Jackson seems afraid to cut them back, as he ought to do," replied Miss Pragg with a critical air. "I think they all want pruning heavily."

"They are simply perfect," declared Margaret, burying her nose in the fragrant bowl which she had now arranged to her satisfaction; "and I am simply starving. Do ring, auntie, and let them know you are down."

Miss Pragg was saved the necessity of doing this by the entrance of the old butler, bearing, with great dignity, the silver coffee pot.

The morning meal over, Margaret was out in the gardens again. She amused herself with searching the strawberry beds, and captured large berries hidden under the leaves—for the climate was marvellous and, combined with the fertile soil, the sea-air and the almost perpetual sunshine, the seasons seemed to get completely mixed, so far as fruit and flowers were concerned. Strawberries ripened in September for the second time, violets bloomed in October, and roses were still plentiful at Christmas.

Margaret passed through the rose

garden again into the orchard, where the apples hung thick upon the trees and, stretching up her arm, plucked the rosy fruit from the low boughs, eating it without plate or silver knife, and declaring it tasted all the better for the absence of these conventional adjuncts.

She stood listening for a moment to the creaking of the windlass, as the under-gardener drew up water from the well; then she walked across to the outbuildings and, opening a door, called to "Roy," the big, brindled bulldog, who nearly knocked her over in his huge delight at this attention, as he gambolled around her with elephantine clumsiness.

She stooped down to pat the dog, and then turned back to the garden.

"We are going for a walk, Roy, just to find out how everybody is!" she explained.

Roy testified his delight at this announcement by nearly knocking her down again.

"You are really too rough, Roy—you must behave like a gentleman," she admonished, as she picked up the soft, corduroy cap and replaced it on her head, whence it had fallen during his last onslaught.

Roy wagged his tail and showed the whole of his fine set of teeth in a broad grin, lifting up his doggy brown eyes adoringly to her face.

"You darling," cried the girl, stopping to pat him again; "you are glad to see me, aren't you, dear?"

Roy showed unmistakably that she had quite inadequately stated the strength of his affection.

John Grey, standing at the door of the motor shed, watching the tall, slim figure in her country tweeds and soft cap, drew in his breath sharply as she stooped to caress the dog.

"You darling," repeated the girl softly, as the bull-dog looked up into her face; and the man went white to the lips, and turned hastily into the shed.

"A BEAUTIFUL woman—and an ugly dog," muttered John Grey savagely. Yet under ordinary circumstances he and Roy were the best of friends.

Captain Pragg was very fond of Roy, for he was a pedigree dog, and had won several medals; but the exigencies of the Indian climate made it imperative that he should be left at home. The dog was a reserved and dignified animal, and allowed no liberties to be taken with him; even the servants who daily attended his wants were rather afraid of him, for he looked very formidable at times. But no matter how long an interval elapsed between Peggy's visits to Appletree House, Roy never forgot her, and always had a boisterous welcome to give.

They were making their way now along the country lane, Peggy smiling to the rosy-cheeked children who bobbed curtesies as she made her way through the tiny village in the direction of a country vicarage standing by itself in the midst of fields. Truth to say, it was rather a dilapidated cob building, very damp, and covered with virginia creeper of a deep bronze and blood-red colour.

Several cows were in the field which they had to cross, and Roy looking askance at them, and being by nature discreet where horns were concerned, kept close to Peggy's side, walking with staid dignity.

Arrived at the wooden gate of the vicarage, Peggy turned to give him some necessary instructions.

"You are not even to look at a cat, Roy, or I shall have to leave you outside, fastened to the gate." The dog hung his head dejectedly.

"Remember you are a visitor, and the cat is at home, and you must behave like a gentleman, or I can't bring you out calling with me." Roy lifted his brown eyes wistfully to hers, and wagged his tail encouragingly.

The girl patted his glossy coat and, pushing open the gate, passed up the garden path. A big, yellow cat, sunning herself on the window sill, scrambled up an adjacent tree so quickly that she looked like a flash of golden light. Roy did not show by the flicker of an eyelash that he had

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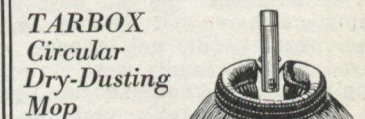
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