

"As Lord Raybourne is only a volunteer I wonder he does not draw back at the eleventh hour," Lady Emily said, as she stooped to fasten her shoe-lace.

"Oh, he would not think of it now," Lady Winterdyne repeated, with emphasis. "That would be too like a school-girl, especially after Colonel Mostyn's kindness. He must go and take his chance. When are we to see you again at Winterdyne?"

"I do not know. I have enjoyed my visit very much—only it has convinced me that when one has been long excluded from society it is best not to seek readmission. I am forgotten in twenty years, Adela; in twenty more, as I said the other day, there will be a new *regime* at Studleigh."

"Emily, I wish I could convince you of your sinfulness in taking such a gloomy view of life."

"If I am gloomy, God knows that I have much to make me so," she retorted, passionately. "You who have never had a wish disappointed or a desire unfulfilled, even now, cannot sympathise with the sorrows of a woman who has never entertained a hope which has not been blasted, nor fixed her affections on an object which was not wrested from her."

The momentary brightness which change of scene and company had infused into that gloomy mind had passed away, and Lady Winterdyne began to find that, instead of doing good, she had but added to the care and disappointment of her old friend. She felt conscious, though she reproached herself for it, of a strange sense of relief when the carriage rolled away. It was as if a cloud had lifted from the house.

"What were you saying to your cousin to make him look at you so oddly in the hall?" Lady Emily asked her son, as they drove away.

"Not much, mother," Will replied, with an evasiveness very unlike his usual quiet frankness.

"I can scarcely believe it. He looked as if you had astonished him very much; and, if that were possible, moved his heart."

"It was something only concerning him and me, mother," he answered, quietly. "It will be better if you do not insist."

"And if I do insist on knowing?"

"Then I must tell you. I was only reminding him what a precious and important life he carries in his hand, and asking him to be careful of it. He is brave and daring to foolhardiness, just as Sir Randal says Uncle Geoff was before him."

"Your aunt should be a proud woman to-day, Will. Surely her highest ambition will be satisfied now?"

"I do not think that she had that kind of ambition, mother; but she must be satisfied, especially when the Winterdynes have behaved so splendidly."

"You don't grudge your cousin his bride, then? She made no impression on you at all?"

"None, in the way you mean, though I admire and like her," Will replied, and again the dark, dusky red mounted to his cheek.

"Nor Raybourne his, I presume?" she said, merely out of curiosity.

"No, that is, not now. I have made up my mind that I must live a lonely life, save for you, and, believe me, mother, I want no other."

"Do you mean to say that that dark, proud girl, so like her mother that I could not bear to speak to her, has won you, Will—that if it had been possible you would have made her mistress of Studleigh?"

Will turned to his mother with a gesture of dissent and a look of inexpressible weariness. "Mother, why drag these things into discussion? You wring admissions from me, and then make yourself miserable over them. Let us try to be happier and more contented with each other, and try to believe that I have scarcely a wish beyond your care and comfort."

"I want an answer to my question," she reiterated, with that exasperating persistence which had grown upon her of late.

"Then I do love my cousin Evelyn as a man loves but once in life, as my father loved you; but, even had there been no Raybourne seeking to win her, I should have kept in the background. I should never have asked her to be my wife."

"You could scarcely expect her to look favour-

ably upon you with such a brilliant settlement within her reach," Lady Emily said, with bitter sarcasm. "I like the boy; he has his father's frank, outspoken, independent way, but his sister takes after her mother's family; she has that strange, still, reticent way peculiar to the Abbots. I hope she may get on with Lady Winterdyne, but I doubt it."

"Mother, I think it will be well if we do not speak of my cousins; if, in our conversation, we agree to ignore their existence," said Will, with slight sternness. "I hoped better things of this visit. Yes, I hoped that the mist of years would be cleared away, but it was mistaken hope."

"Rachel Ayre has too grievously supplanted me in my son's affection to be forgiven," Lady Emily said, as she sank back in her seat. "But she can afford to despise and laugh at me now."

Will Ayre looked through the open window of the carriage on the sunny autumn landscape with a dark cloud on his face.

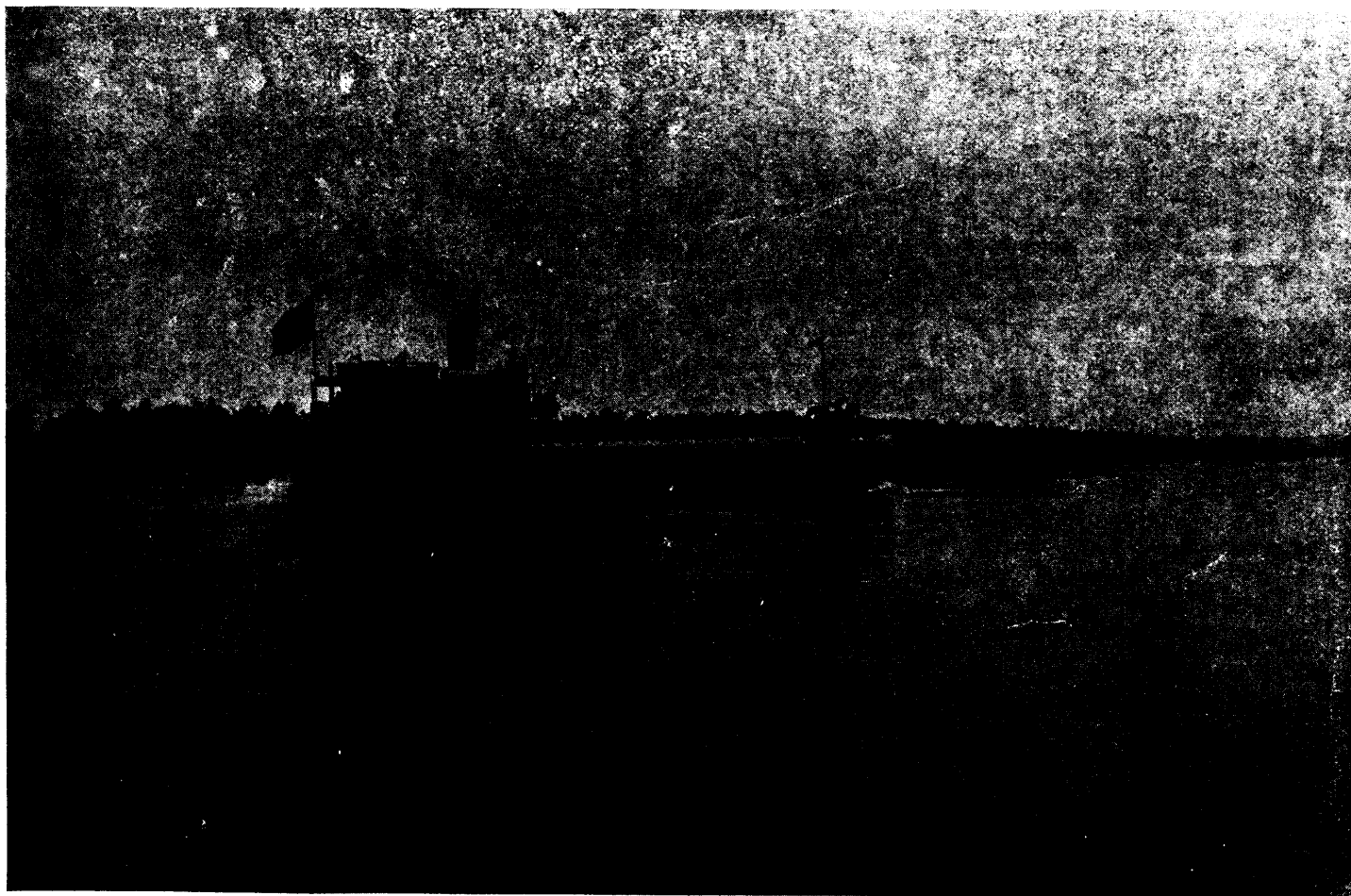
"Why should you be so watchful over your cousin's welfare?" she pursued. "Suppose the worst, and that he lost his life in the war, it could not matter much to you."

"Perhaps not. I was thinking of the place, mother. We know Clement, and what manner of master he would make. Of the distant heirs we know nothing." Will answered in as matter-of-fact a tone as if he had been discussing some neighbour in whom they had but a trivial interest. His mother answered nothing, but her face grew ashen grey as she listened, and she pressed her handkerchief to her pale lips to still their trembling.

She was to be pitied.

The certainty that his life would be short had been so long with Will that, like other familiar things, it had ceased to concern him much. He forgot for the moment that what seemed in truth only a slight hardship to him, since he could never have a full and perfect earthly existence, was the setting of the sun in his mother's life.

(To be continued)



A NEW CRAFT.
WHALE-BACK BOAT GOING THROUGH THE THOUSAND ISLANDS, ST. LAWRENCE RIVER.
(Messrs. Murray & Son, photo., Brockville.)