

A June Romance in Muskoka

By M. E. Denison.

"To have, to hold, to love, you,
Forever and a day—"

Lightly sang Dorothy Blake. Her companion glanced curiously at her from under the brim of his tourist's hat.

"How young and how buoyant she is," thought he with a sigh. He felt a stir under his breast pocket while he watched the rhythmic motion of her slight figure as they slowly rounded the curve at the top of the little hill.

The snatch of song died away on her lips as she suddenly stood still and gazed spell-bound before her. At the foot of the hill, not fifty feet away, a tiny bay nestled contentedly into a shrub-fringed bank. Just beyond the bay the blue waters of Lake St. Joseph stretched out to meet the still bluer sky. Woolly white caps rode on the waters as lightly as the fleecy clouds floated in the sky.

Eric Grant still watched her. He had visited Muskoka each summer for ten years and although its beauty still charmed him he had grown accustomed to it.

"Oh," breathed Dorothy in a whisper, "Isn't it beautiful?"

He nodded his head in assent as her brown eyes met his. A little breeze played with her curls and blew them in confusion about her face and forehead. Again he was conscious of a peculiar flutter in his breast.

"See those water lilies. Aren't they lovely?" She spoke half to herself, almost forgetting him.

"Yes, they are lovely," admitted Eric. He was thinking of brown curls and two brown eyes. He turned to reassure himself and smiled meditatively.

"How I wish—" she began regretfully.

"What do you wish, Miss Dorothy?" he queried.

"Quite an impossible thing, Mr. Grant. But how I wish my Walter could spend two whole weeks in this country with nothing to do the live-long day but ramble through these delightful woods, pick posies, gather curios, hunt bugs, and go boating, bathing and swimming as I

have. Poor boy." Again she spoke half to herself. Then gazing absently before her, she lapsed into silence.

Eric felt chilled. He did not know if he were called upon to say anything or not. But since he could say nothing sympathetic he too looked across the bay and silently watched the little mad caps dancing. He felt moody and admitted it to himself.

Her Walter? Who was he? Her lover he supposed. It was likely such a girl would have plenty of admirers, especially among those of her own age. Evidently this Walter stood highest in her favor. Perhaps he was a nice boy, but he didn't care for him. But why? He need not care. It didn't really make any difference to him. Of course not. But—was it possible?

He glanced quickly down at the girl beside him. The unconscious beauty of her—the woman of her. He caught his breath as he realized what she meant to him. For one dizzy moment he struggled against the revelation, then resolutely he pulled himself together.

"Quit it, you fool," he told himself. "What business has a grouchy old bachelor falling in love with a girl of twenty anyway, especially when she is already in love with another fellow and in all probability engaged to him. Anyway, you've only known her two weeks and she's leaving to-morrow. Surely you knew better."

He straightened up and the lines about his Scotch mouth grew tight. With a little laugh he turned to her.

"You seem greatly pleased with this Muskoka, Miss Dorothy," he remarked awkwardly, almost nervously.

"I am, particularly with this locality. I never saw anything like it," she answered.

"Would you care to go down?"

"Please."

Taking her arm he assisted her down the hill. The descent was not so difficult as it was rough.

"If all these stones were chunks of gold," ruminated Eric.

"If all the gold the world could hold on land and on the sea, Were all my own, just mine alone How useless it would be—"

sang she. Her voice was well trained and Eric loved to hear it. He stood below her and listened as she finished.

"What need have I for wealth, and why Should I such things pursue, When you are near, to love me dear, The world is mine when I have you."

Quietly she hummed the last two lines over to herself. Eric was irritated. Was she teasing him? One look at her face convinced him she was not. She was looking absently across the lake.

"Thinking about him," he concluded bitterly. He had a habit of jumping at conclusions. As a matter of fact, Dorothy was regretting her holiday was so near an end. She had enjoyed herself in Muskoka. Such rambles! Suddenly it came home to her she had enjoyed the society of Eric Grant quite as much as the holiday—perhaps even more. Yes, it would be decidedly lone-some to go back home to it all to grind, grind, grind in the office for another year. Of course there was Walter. He was a darling, but he wasn't Eric Grant.

The last note died softly away. Somehow her thoughts and that song produced a headache. She loved him. Of that she was certain. She was surprised at herself and mortified as well. Her love was unasked. What if he suspected? She glanced quickly at his face. Good gracious, how cold it appeared! Had he suspected?

"Do you know the song?" she asked. Anything to break this awful silence.

"No, I don't," he answered grimly. He impatiently kicked at a small stone.

What blunders. Dorothy was almost ready to cry.

"Shall we go on?" he asked quietly. Without a word she gave him her hand and took a step forward. Then the catastrophe happened. Her ankle suddenly turned over, giving her a nasty wrench. With a little inarticulate cry she sank to the ground.

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