

The Lucerne of the Canadian Rockies

By Elizabeth C. Hazelton

"SO we're going to Lucerne, are we, Violet?" The speaker, Dr. Heathcote, pioneer physician as well as pioneer homesteader of a settlement on the eastern edge of Central Alberta, was about to celebrate retirement from practice by taking his first holiday since he landed in Canada fifteen years ago. Choice of location he left to Violet Tremaine who, having recently completed homestead obligations unfulfilled at the time of her husband's death and secured tenants for her farm, had just moved to the Heathcote home. She was going to take the place of the daughter hoped for but never received and the daughter-in-law living too far East to be neighborly.

"Where is this Lucerne?" queried the Doctor's wife, tucking into a satin bag the crochet yoke she could have finished in another fifteen minutes. If her eyesight was unusually keen considering her three-score years, she could not trust it in the shadows of the May evening. "I believe there's a Lucerne in Quebec, but we're not going all that distance," she added almost apprehensively.

"Lucerne is in the Canadian Rockies."

Nodding confidently to his wife, Dr. Heathcote observed blithely "The name Lucerne caught her." An expressive smile and an affirmative nod constituted Mrs. Heathcote's answer, while the doctor leaned back in his chair, stretched his legs, and hung on to his briarwood as though it were the best thing on earth.

Violet smiled too, without, however, offering further explanation. The subject was dropped, and soon they were all absorbed in the discussion of home matters needing adjustment previous to departure the first day of June.

Acquainted with her from her birth, Dr. Heathcote knew a few things about Violet that some people did not know. One of them was that in the middle of a crying spell such as he had always maintained she would have outgrown early had she been blessed with brothers and sisters, she had hung over her father and for the hundredth time sobbed her lament that her name was Mary Jane—not Mary, not Jane, but Mary Jane. She had stopped short at her surname, for in the innocence of her eight years she doubted not but some day she would have a chance to change that. John Longcake, a tradesman, because his father and his grandfather had done business in the same shop before him, and a resident of a southwest suburb of London because his wife, the daughter of a professional man, turned up her nose at the draper shop on Walworth Road and the living rooms above it—had drawn his child to him and gently inquired what name she would have chosen, whereupon she had snuggled her head on his shoulder, dried her tears on his cheek, and breathed into his ear "Violet." With a new name she had gone to a new school. Who beside herself, however, had estimated the fullness of her new life?

Half a dozen years later, Dr. Heathcote, along with her father, mother and aunt, had watched a trembling candidate kneel before the Bishop of London and had seen her quiver at the touch of the prelate's hand on her head. Before the ceremony he had popped in at the confirmation class and heard his god-daughter mumble, with downcast eyes and flushed cheeks, her response to the question, "What is your name?" Yet, who except herself heard her spirit cry "Violet" or saw her soul enshrine itself in the ray that was hers?

Another thing Dr. Heathcote knew was that two years prior to transplanting his family from London to Canada, a bride-to-be upon attaining her majority had slid out of her Clapham home one morning and been married by special license a month ahead of the date set for her wedding, in order to prevent a certain rector singing out, "I publish the banns of marriage between Gerald Massey Tremaine, bachelor, and

Mary Jane Longcake, spinster," for the first, let alone the second and the third, time of asking.

Albeit, there were things that Dr. Heathcote did not know. Only two people had ever known that before Violet and Gerald acknowledged an introduction in a Clapham sitting-room, their eyes had met and their hearts had communed amidst the vibrations of the National Gallery. To Mrs. Heathcote, a long suffering mother had confided that Violet wasted hours staring at landscape paintings and that the National Gallery had given the girl a hankering after a box of paints and a mania for making "daubs." Only Violet knew that the same aspiration which by fits and starts had moved Gerald, steadily possessed her.

Not until Gerald had passed to the region unseen, yet always near, did Mrs. Heathcote learn that his widow was legally Mary Jane. The smile with which Mrs. Heathcote met her husband's observation "The name Lucerne caught her," arose from knowledge that acquaintances of the Longcake and Tremaine families had never hesitated to express the opinion that Violet married Gerald for the sake of his name.

Within a few days, Dr. Heathcote, his wife and Violet were being whisked toward a new world. That they were bound for Lucerne was all the Heathcotes knew; that they would leave the train at the second station in British Columbia (now the first station, Yellowhead station having been recently destroyed by fire) five miles west of the Summit of Yellowhead Pass was all that Violet knew. Notwithstanding her anxiety to reduce their baggage to the essentials of a camp kit, she had included a kit that had lain for years hidden though forgotten, a box of paints, paint brushes and easel.

Late in the evening they reached Edmonton. There Violet sought information concerning Lucerne. She might have been asking about another planet the way people looked at her. After an hour's wait, westward passengers were ushered into another Grand Trunk Pacific train, one that penetrated British Columbia as far as Fort George some two hundred and thirty-six miles northwest of Yellowhead Summit. That they were allotted a section in a coach named "Lucerne" struck the Heathcotes as a coincidence. To Violet the circumstance was like a shade in the picture she was going to paint.

Upon awakening next morning, their breath was fairly taken away. Ahead, to the north and south towered piles of irregular glistening peaks. Taller and taller, bolder and bolder became the heights until the train was in the midst of them. Alongside the track flowed the Athabasca River, going as fast as the train, only it was going the other way, toward the Arctic Ocean. From north and south came creeks to swell the Athabasca; now and again the river expanded into a lake. Before they were well into Jasper National Park, the doctor and his wife had exhausted their vocabularies and Violet had lost her hearing as well as her speech.

At Jasper (Park headquarters), which was reached about half-past seven, the train stopped forty-five minutes. Up and down the platform the Heathcotes promenaded, keeping close to the train fearful lest it might start up. Meanwhile, Violet made inquiries about Lucerne. She gathered that the Canadian Northern Railway (building through Yellowhead Pass, around and beside the western slope of the Rockies down to Kamloops thence to Vancouver) had chosen Lucerne as a divisional point; that ground was being broken for a townsite; that a man and his wife had opened a restaurant; and that Mack the squatter living on the point jutting out into the lake below the Grand Trunk Pacific station, had put up tents for a party whose stay had been cut short. Anyway, it was only twenty-two miles from Lucerne back to Jasper, where there were first-class accommodations. At that junc-