

## The Stroke of the Lachine Four.

"Who is he, Hal?"

"The stroke of the Lachine four."

"I am no wiser than I was. What do you mean?"

"Is it possible, Sis, that you have come to the mature age of eighteen years and don't know what the Lachine four is? Why, it's a crew!"

"A crew—then, he's a sailor!"

Hal Birkett's boyish laugh rang out clearly.

"Oh, Sis, where were you brought up? He's the stroke of the Lachine four, I tell you—pulls the stroke oar, you know."

Enid opened her blue eyes wider, and said nothing. She didn't know; in fact, she had an idea that the Lachine four constituted a sort of ferry between Lachine and other points on the River St. Lawrence, above Montreal, for the convenience of summer visitors, and that the stroke was a sort of captain on a small scale.

"What is his name?" she asked, presently.

"Charlie Dwight," replied Hal.

"A pretty name for a ferryman," observed Enid, coolly.

Harry stared at her in blank amazement.

"Yes," he rejoined, slowly, "a very pretty name for a ferryman."

Ten minutes later he left the house for a run on his bicycle, and Enid was alone. She picked up a straw cone hat with a bit of white mull twisted around it, and walked slowly out of the cottage and down to the water's edge, where a light, handsome skiff lay, pulled up high and dry, awaiting the return of its owner. She looked at the skiff musingly. It was a beauty, in its way, but Enid was not thinking of its beauty; she was thinking that the first time she wanted to go to Montreal she might hire the owner of the pretty skiff to row her to Lachine, which was but a short spin down the river, and take the train thence. As she turned this plan over in her mind, a firm footfall sounded on the stony path behind her, and before she had time to beat a retreat a tall, muscular young man in semi-nautical rig was at her side.

"Pardon me," he said, observing Enid's slightly embarrassed expression. "Are you in need of a boat? If so, mine is at your service."

"He speaks as well as he looks," thought Enid; then replied: "No, thank you, not to-day; but, to-morrow or the next day, if it is fine, I want to go to Montreal, and shall need somebody to row me to Lachine. You row people up and down the river, don't you?" she added, observing that he did not answer at once.

Charlie Dwight had listened in absolute amazement to this cool request; but when she put her final question a light broke in upon him. He pulled his moustache to hide the smile that he could not restrain, and replied:

"Oh, yes, nearly every day; but I am sorry to say that I shall be away from here for a few days. If I can be of any service to you next week—"

"Very well," Enid interjected, promptly. "Monday morning, at ten o'clock. Can you come then?"

"Certainly."

"Ah, thank you. Good afternoon." And the young lady gracefully turned to retrace her steps, while Charlie Dwight pushed his skiff out, jumped in, and with a few vigorous strokes was well out and down the river. Then he rested on his oars, and laughed, and looked back at the girlish figure in white sauntering over the grass towards the little cottage, and laughed again; then dipped his oars once more into the water, glowing with red and gold in the sunset, and pulled rapidly down towards Lachine.

That evening Enid complacently related her afternoon's adventure to Hal, who grew more wide-eyed at each sentence and, finally, fairly gasped:

"Enid, what were you thinking of! Dwight is a gentleman."

"I don't care what he is," energetically. "You say he rows people around the river; you said, this afternoon, that he was a ferryman."

"I—said—he—was—a—ferryman! Oh—h!" groaned Hal. "I said he was the stroke of the Lachine four."

"Once for all, Hal, what is the Lachine four, and what is the stroke?"

"Oh, depths of feminine ignorance! Then, once and for all, Enid, the Lachine four is a crew of four fellows who are spending the summer at Lachine, and who row for pleasure, not money—amateur, you know. Why, they are among the richest, finest fellows in the whole place! Dwight strokes the crew—well, he's a sort of leader, you know. Why, bless your innocent heart, Sis, every child in Montreal, and every infant in Lachine knows all that! How did you ever escape hearing such things?"

"I lived in S—, miles from any possibility of rowing, from my tenth year until this week, as you know, and I never read newspapers. I suppose that accounts for it," said Enid, dolefully. "Now, what am I to do, Hal? He will come on Monday."

There was so much distress in her tones that Hal took pity on her. "Never mind, Sis," he said consolingly, "I'll go to meet him, if he comes, and pass it all off for you. I'll tell him I fooled you a little bit."

For the next few days Enid could not rid herself of the thought of her unfortunate adventure, and although she was keenly alive to the ludicrous side of it, that did not save her from feeling the annoying awkwardness of her own position with regard to that mysterious individual—the stroke of the Lachine four.

Monday morning dawned uncompromisingly fair and beautiful. A light west wind blew laughing ripples on the blue, broad river, and the sun rose high in clear skies. When his first rays pierced the cottage shutters and played around Enid's fair head, the blue eyes opened slowly, and then—prosaic fact—their owner's mouth opened too in a prolonged and satisfactory yawn, and finally gave utterance to the following, "Monday! To-day he comes!"

The thought of that appalling "he" was sufficient to drive away the last trace of drowsiness, and it was not long before Enid was out of doors in the sweet summer morning. After breakfast, with a final appeal to Hal to remember his promise, and be on hand to welcome the Lachine skiff, she left the house and strolled down to the water's edge to take a survey of the river.

There was a comfortable looking row-boat lying there, the bow run up on the shore, the stern idly rocking in the ripples. A chain from the bow was attached to a stick driven into the ground.

Enid inspected the boat critically. It wasn't Mr. Dwight's skiff, that was certain. His was a light stained wood—this was painted red and was, moreover, much larger. "Mr. Stafford passed the house this morning; it is probably his," soliloquized Enid as she stepped into the boat and made her way timorously down to the stern, while Gypsy, Hal's Gordon setter, frisked around in delight. She looked down the river—there was no one in sight. Indeed, it was much too early to expect the skiff. Then she seated herself in the bottom of the boat, resting her elbow on the stern seat, and found it in no way uncomfortable. The air was intoxicatingly fresh and full of a pure fragrance; the faint splash of the water on the side of the boat soothingly monotonous.

Enid drops her head on her arm and gives herself up to passive enjoyment. The sun rising higher makes the air warmer; the water splashes idly on the boat with its soothing monotony; away in the distance the 'caw' 'caw' of the crows resounds through the clear air. Gypsy pricks up his ears for an instant to listen to them. Farther and farther away sounds the faint splash of water to Enid's ears; distant and still more distant the echoing 'caw caw.' Gypsy is worrying at the stake to which the boat is tied—he jumps at it playfully and then runs away, then comes back and attacks it once more. Now he has it out. Taking it in his mouth, he runs down to the side of the boat, dog-like, to exhibit his prowess. But his fair mistress doesn't even notice him, although he stands in the water with his fore-feet on the side

of the boat. Finding that there is no one to applaud his exertions he drops the stake in the shallow water and jumps away from the boat, giving it a little shove as he does so, which loosens its hold slightly—and still Enid sleeps. The breeze stiffens gradually and the water splashes more loudly on the boat. Slowly but surely the little waves are loosening it; every one finds it more nearly free. Now, one, the strongest yet, comes and lifts the stern, there is a little slip of the bow from the shore, and the red boat glides almost imperceptibly out. Why does not Enid awaken! It is only a few feet out now; she could easily wade ashore and pull it in after her. But no—her fair head rests peacefully on her arm, the wind plays with her hair, and still she sleeps, and the red boat drifts on outward, downward. Now the current catches it, and with a little swifter motion it glides down the river, farther and farther out.

A crow flies overheard, flapping dusky wings in the sunlight, and its *caw*, *caw* resounds harshly. Enid opens her eyes—instantly the truth dawns upon her, and she sits bolt upright. With whitening face she sees the shore, and the dreadful space of dancing water between. Then she looks at the oars, hopelessly, helplessly, a total stranger to their use; for aught that her trembling fingers can do, they might as well not be there. A gasp of horror escapes from her pale lips as the awful thought of the rapids strikes coldly upon her mind. Long before they are reached she knows that the irresistible strength of the current will preclude all possibility of anyone coming to her aid. Oh, it is awful to be so utterly helpless! To look at the sunny, rippling water, the quiet shore, and the blue sky flecked with white clouds, and no one, none to aid! "Oh, God help me!" the words came hoarsely from her parched lips. Is there none to help? Listen—what is that!

Echoing over the water comes the ringing sound of a strong man's voice. It thrills every nerve in her body. She looks—there on the shore is a tall, lithe figure—even at this distance she knows it is Charlie Dwight, the stroke of the Lachine four, looking out over the water at his red boat drifting down the river, and carrying with it a girlish figure in a white gown and fair, wind-tossed hair.

It takes him but an instant to decide. He must run down, and then swim out and head the boat off. Enid makes imploring gestures in response to his cry, and then sees him tearing down the shore over all manner of obstructions, as only a trained athlete could. Now he pauses on a little headland, and the next instant is in the water. Enid kneels in the bottom of the boat with one hand on the stern seat and the other grasping the side, with face set, and every nerve tense, watching her rescuer drawing nearer, nearer, but oh, so slowly. If she could but for one minute delay that resistless tide! How fast, how terribly fast it is bearing the boat down! Unless he can head it off all is hopeless, and he as well as herself may be drawn down to the rapids. The wind has risen, and the waves splash noisily on the boat. Now, he draws nearer, nearer. Oh, will nothing hold the boat back until he reaches it!

Enid looks with the fixed gaze of a last hope at the approaching swimmer. Now she can see him distinctly, his dark, earnest eyes fixed on the boat as he strains every nerve to reach it. The boat is gaining. He is only two yards off, but it is passing him. With the energy of despair, Enid leans as far forward as she dare, he grasps her hand and the next instant is beside the boat. "You're all right now," he says in a reassuringly calm tone, "stay where you are," and he makes his way to the bow and climbs dexterously over it into the boat. In less time than it takes to tell it, he is in his place, and has a firm grasp of the oars. Now he bends to his work and gives a strong, steady pull, another and another. The boat quivers, stands still, and now—oh, Heaven-sent relief—begins to move against the stream. Enid crouches there, pale and speechless, her great blue eyes fixed on the oarsman. What a glorious thing his physical strength seems to her as his strong arms propel the boat up the river! Now he has drawn nearer to the shore, they are out of the force of the current, and there will be no more hard pull