

Under the King's Bastion

A ROMANCE OF QUEBEC

Serial Story written for the
CANADIAN HOME JOURNAL By "HAROLD SAXON"

CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.



E thought possibly he might turn her attention to himself from pique, for the party were leaving in a few days, and if he could change her opinion of Carleton, and hinder a meeting between them, he was sure the latter would be too hurt and proud to ask for an explanation. Once away from Quebec, he flattered himself he could explain everything, even his devotion to Edith, and make her believe in his honesty of purpose. He awoke from his reverie to hear Aline asking him if he had seen anything of Mr. Sinclair: "He was to have been up here this evening," she was saying, absently, "and we have not seen him for three days."

"Oh," said Clifford, deliberately, "I dare say he has run up to Montreal to see his lady-love."

"His what?" asked Aline, incredulously.

"His lady-love; it seems he had one hidden away all the time. Pretty deep fellow, Sinclair. You may remember my telling you that he was not a lady's man, so I was amazed when he told me one evening that he was going to be married."

"When did he tell you?" said Aline, slowly.

"Oh, I forget exactly when. Wait—yes, it was on our trip up the Saguenay."

"The second evening?" Aline said quickly.

Freud appeared to meditate. "No," he answered, after reflection, "it was the first evening after he got on board at Riviere du Loup. He had had to stay behind to meet this girl on some early train. I believe," he went on, bravely inventing as he entangled himself more deeply in the maze.

Aline's eyes grew bright and hard, but she only said, with well-feigned indifference: "Indeed, Mr. Sinclair has never hinted such a thing to us, but then, of course, we are mere acquaintances." Then she changed the subject, and as soon as her aunt appeared, left the conversation to her, and retired early on pretence of a headache. Clifford left soon after, being afraid to approach the subject of money, as he might easily have done; and on his way home his doubts returned, and he was inclined to curse himself for a fool. If all the world is divided into "fools" or "knaves," he must certainly have belonged to one class or the other.

"I am sure it is all nonsense," he said, irresolutely, "and if the worst comes to the worst, I'll say I only did it to tease her, but won't Carleton Sinclair be furious?"

The poison he had cunningly distilled into Aline's ear was doing some work, though not altogether in the way he intended. She told herself she did not believe it, yet he had broken his promise to her that evening, after not seeing her for three days. And, surely, after that evening on the boat he should have said something more. His manner, when he made this appointment, had caused her to think he meant to say it this very evening. Could it be true? If so, she would never trust a man again. She certainly did not

like Clifford, but what could be his object in telling her a falsehood. Through all her despondency and perplexity, however, one thing was perfectly clear to her. Carleton might be bound to another girl, might even marry her (Aline shivered a little at the thought), but his love, she saw, had been given to herself, and nothing could rob her of the comfort of that fact.

Mrs. Fortescue was quite worried when Aline confided in her next day. Not only had she taken a strong liking to Carleton, but she was extremely fond of her pretty niece, and felt responsible for her happiness, so that she blamed herself unsparingly for not making every enquiry about the young man.

"I don't think it is true, my dear, though I presume Mr. Clifford has some reason for saying such a thing. I must take the first opportunity of finding out, and in the meantime, if you will be guided by me, you will not see him, even if he should be in town and should call."

Aline felt the advice was good, and remained in her room that evening, which happened to be Sunday, finding it very dull and miserable. Of course, Sinclair did not come, and she was forced to believe he really had gone out of town. Down in the sitting-room, one of those chance coincidences were taking place which occur oftener than we think in real life. A cheery little old gentleman, a new arrival, commenced a conversation with Mrs. Fortescue, and gave her a description of the Quebec of fifty years ago, for it appeared he was an old resident. Speaking of the changes he noticed on each recurring visit, he remarked that he scarcely knew any of the present generation of Quebecers—only occasionally he saw a face whose inherited features reminded him of the companions of his younger days. "All the old people are either dead or have long ago moved westward," he remarked, musingly. "My coming now is just to see my godson, a young Sinclair, whom I must look up to-morrow."

Mrs. Fortescue uttered an exclamation. "Is his Christian name Carleton?" said she.

"Just what it is," answered the old gentleman, beaming on her. "Now, I daresay you have run across him in this small place."

"Yes, I have met him, and he seems a very nice young man," said Mrs. Fortescue, guardedly.

"That he is, madam, as fine a lad as I know; and likely, from what I hear, to make his mark in the world."

"He seems clever," answered Mrs. Fortescue, and seizing the moment, added casually, "he is engaged to be married shortly, is he not?"

"Well, that is what I have come down to see him about now, to tell the truth. I have always laughed at him for not caring for woman's society, and told him he would soon be an old bachelor like myself, though not for the same reason," said the old gentleman, with a sigh, for he had loved Carleton's mother. "However, some time ago I received a letter from him, telling me he had fallen in love at last, and wishing to know if I thought he was justified in asking any girl to share his small means with him. Such rubbish. In my day, madam, young people married early, worked hard, and made small means do till they earned larger; but times are changed—times are changed," said the old man, testily.

"Then, I suppose, he lost no time in proposing?" enquired Mrs. Fortescue.

"I haven't heard from him since. I wrote him a line to give him my blessing, and tell him how pleased I was to see him so sensible, and then I went out to the Coast, and by this time he is probably engaged to her—married, in fact, for aught I know to the contrary. When these deliberate fellows once get started, there is no knowing where they will stop," he answered, nodding his head knowingly.

"Well, I think I can assure you he has not taken the final step," Mrs. Fortescue said, masking her anxiety. "What is the name of the young lady?"

Her new acquaintance ruminated for a moment and then said: "I am very stupid about names—never could remember a new one, though it was repeated often enough in the letter, too, I remember. I saw he had it badly. Stay, perhaps I have it here," fumbling in his pockets. "No, I haven't, either," he said, a second later, "it's in my valise, that's where it is. I'll look it up and tell you to-morrow, if you would like to know."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Fortescue, rising to say good-night, "I have a particular reason for asking," and she retired to her room with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The morning post brought Aline a note from Carleton, which she devoured with sparkling eyes. It ran:

"MY DEAR MISS ALINE.—Clifford will have told you, as I asked him, that I sprained my ankle slightly a few days ago, and thus was unable to keep my engagement with you yesterday. Let me make my own apologies now, and tell you how long the time has been since last Wednesday. I cannot believe that this is only Sunday. It seems weeks, at least, since I saw you. I wonder if you have thought again of that last evening on the Saguenay boat, and perhaps considered me presumptuous for saying what I did. I hope not, for your displeasure would be hard to bear. I think I shall be able to get up to the Chateau on Wednesday evening, and till then will you give me an occasional stray thought, and

Believe me to be,

Now and always,

Yours devotedly,

CARLETON SINCLAIR.

September 9, 1899.

Just before Aline received this note, Mrs. Fortescue was having another interview with the old gentleman. "Good-morning," he said briskly, coming into the drawing-room, where she sat with her work. "I am just setting off to discover the whereabouts of my godson; and, by-the-by, here is the letter, and the girl's name. Let me see"—adjusting his eye-glasses—"some new-fangled thing; plain Mary and Jane are not good enough now-a-days, it seems. Here it is—A-l-Aline, it looks like; Aline Darrell. Why, bless me, madam, anything the matter?" he enquired in astonishment, as Mrs. Fortescue rose suddenly, and began to shake his hand vigorously, while his glasses fell off his nose and the letter found a resting-place on the carpet.

"Excuse my impetuosity, my dear sir," said Mrs. Fortescue, laughing. "If you will just sit down a moment I will explain everything."

And half an hour later Aline found them there, was duly presented, and informed, as the kindly shrewd eyes looked at her approvingly, that this was Mr. Sinclair's godfather, of whom she had heard him speak. She blushed with surprise, and looked so altogether charming that old Mr. Stanton gave her a place in his heart at once; and then hearing the news in Aline's note, he