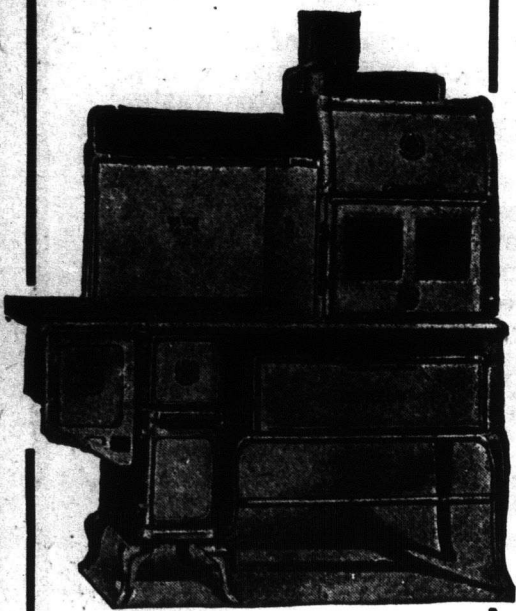


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The Beacon Light of Love

By R. B. Forsyth

AS the morning breeze drifted lazily over the shining levels of the lake, it wafted on its wings fresh moist odors of land and water. It fanned, too, the weather-beaten face of Jake Summers, as he issued from his cottage and shuffled down the flower-bordered walk; his cap thrust rakishly over one ear; his pipe sending forth placid little spirals of smoke as he went.

Overhead the gulls wheeled and screamed and played in mad frolic. Beyond him on the sand, with upturned keel, lay the comrade of his many lake journeyings, the fishing smack "Margaret Ellen," from which the pungent, not unpleasant odor of coal tar with which he had been besmearing the boat the previous day, greeted him. This work he must complete in readiness for the season's fishing, which began the next week.

With painstaking care he began to fill the seams of his fishing smack with coal tar. To him his boat was like an old friend. It merited the best attention and would repay a kindly act twice over. "How like a human crittur a boat is," he ruminated, as he filled one gaping chink after another! "Human nater gets all warped and dry jest for lack of a little tendin'—a little lovin'!" he soliloquized.

At length the work was completed. It had been tiresome work, too. His back ached with the unusual strain, his fingers were almost numb; but he stood back proudly to survey his handiwork.

"Fit for the governor," he said, speaking aloud, "and his worship might be honored by the invitation."

"What's a worship, grandad?" It was the childish prattle of little Meg Talover, who placed her hand confidently in his big powerful paw. "What's a worship?" she persisted.

He caught her in his arms. With the freedom of special license she pulled his cap from his head, tufted his long thickly matted grey hair; pulling it down into his eyes and then, with deliberate impertinence, made vicious stabs at his long, plainly-formed nose. Then, satisfied with her handiwork, she looked up the lake toward the town dimly seen from the distance. It was the terminus of the C.P.R.—the daily boat supplying the needed connection with the opposite end of the lake.

"Boat coming, grandad?" but already his trained ear had detected the regular thug, thug, of the gasoline engine and the eye could detect the bilge of streaked gasoline smoke from the exhaust. In the wake of the approaching yacht the long, even roll of lake water fell in regular line, like well disciplined troops marching in perfect time. The next ripple went scudding across the lake to break on the boulder-strewn shore beyond.

Two men were smoking in placid content under the canvas of the outer deck. Their summer clothes and jaunty careless air bespoke leisure and wealth. Jake lifted Margaret to the ground and watched the yacht head in to the pier.

"Tell mother we shall have visitors," he whispered, but outwardly he smoked on in seeming indifference.

"We are looking for Jake Summers, Fisherman Jake," I believe they call him," the elder of the two remarked with the easy offhanded manner of much practise in meeting men. "We were told his cottage was near."

Jake shuffled his cap from his head. "If it's 'Old Jake' you're fer wanting, I'm your man. Maybe you would walk over to the cottage yonder, gentlemen; wife Elspeth has fresh buttermilk, new-churned, that can't be beaten in these parts. Most people find it refreshing after the heat of the sun."

"You are in luck, Jake," the younger man said. "Gad! I wish it were I. Then mine for the Orient. But now it's nothing but legal phrases, the wise saws and modern instances of the immortal Bard of Avon."

The first speaker continued. There was dignity in his bearing and firmness in his tone. Men looked at Franklin Wilson of the legal firm of Wilson, Thomas, Charman and Smith, the second time and they seldom forgot his voice.

"As we wish to see you and your wife alone we shall accept your invitation."

Jake led the way across the sand to the cottage. What possible errand could these lawyers have?

He undid the latch of the clumsy wooden gate which fell back on its creaking hinge as if to make way for its visitors. The snap-dragons lifted their heads gaily in greeting, as they passed up the flower-bordered walk with its row of shining white stones; Jake's own artistic touch. Pansies clustered in gossip groups at their feet, scarlet bleeding-heart lent its daze of color to the scene and musk added a touch of old-time perfume to the garden patch.

Elspeth met them at the door. "Come right in and visit for awhile," she exclaimed.

"The gentlemen will be sittin' for a while, mother, and a glass of buttermilk to refresh them after their journey will go good."

She led the way into the stuffy little parlor beyond. There were home-woven rugs on the floor. Glaringly large portraits, each in its heavy gilt frame frowned from the wall, and the wax flowers and peacock plumes on the mantel gave it a bizarre, but not un-homelike touch. In the corner, placed with exactness, the hair-cloth sofa and home-made feather pillows contributed a touch of comfort, somewhat veiled behind the severe air of the whole room.

"This is Mr. Haley Smith of our firm," the elder man went on. "I am Franklin Wilson of the legal firm of Wilson, Thomas, Charman and Smith, and we have come to interview you on an important matter."

Elspeth sat down. It was a most perturbing occasion, and no warning—not the slightest. Her poor head was sadly addled. Mr. Wilson, however, allowed little time for mental commiseration.

"Do you remember John Arbutnot?" he asked.

"Aye, Aye," replied Jake, "right well I do. He stayed with us for ten days or so after the launch accident at Willow Point. The rocks there are worse nor usual, you may know and what with the engines not workin' at the right time, and all the high wind, drove them fair on the rocks and the launch was smashed to kindlin' wood while I'm tellin' it. Well, to make a long story short I got him ashore and what with chill and exposure he was put to bed. Elspeth did her best with linseed plasters and hot drinks and he was round in no time, though the doctor said he might easily hev' been much worse exceptin' for good handlin'."

"That's Jake all over—he will have it, it was all due to me," broke in Elspeth, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, through sheer excitement.

"And you had no word from him since?" queried Wilson.

"Tuts, no," Jake went on, "there wasn't a Christmas passed but he sent us a check for fifty dollars, though why, I don't know, savin' last Christmas none came and every one we have, put by for Meg when she needs school; as we trust she will."

"And none came last Christmas?" Wilson queried. "Take it from me John Arbutnot never forgot a friend who had done him a good turn. He contracted fever in the holiday season—pleurisy followed, then double pneumonia and he never recovered." He paused.

"He, however, made his will. He was childless, as you perhaps know. His wife died years before and he left his fortune, property and all to two old folk, Jake Summers and wife."

Wonder, amazement and incredulity chased each other across the faces of the old folk. Their faces were a study far too wonderful for description.

"Shall I read the will?" he asked. Then without further introduction he began. It was a wonderful legal document, the phraseology far beyond their simple minds, but gradually the truth dawned upon both; they were the heirs of the Arbutnot estate.

"In the event of your not accepting the bequest," the lawyer concluded, "the property passes to the Children's Home.

"It is one of the finest residential sites in the city on Laurier Avenue in the Shaughnessy Heights Suburb. Its location speaks for itself."

Then, having fulfilled their mission the lawyers bowed themselves out leaving two very dazed, very perplexed folk behind them, surprise giving place to perplexity, perplexity to consternation in turn, while the sun in sheer wantonness sifted through the windows unmolested upon the pink and green roses on the carpet, unnoticed by the frugal housewife.

This period of inaction, however, was bound to meet its reaction in decisive movement and before long the old folk, after much deliberation, decided that Jake should look into the matter for himself, visit the Arbutnot home and the final decision would then be made.

CHAPTER II.

Thus it came about that Jake Summers, owner of the fishing smack "Margaret Ellen," having packed his canvas telescope, took the morning ferry for town. Very solemn and formal he felt as he kissed Elspeth good-bye at the landing, forgetting even to smile over Meg's injunction to bring back "something fit for the governor."

There was a queer little catch in his throat as he made his adieux and Elspeth suspected that something resembling a tear stood out in his blue eyes at the parting, but she made no comment.

With Meg, she watched the form of her husband leaning over the rail until the ferry had disappeared around a bend in the river and was lost to sight.

But the city, with its confusion of noises, its endless streets, its smoke and dust, brought only a feeling of dismay to the old man. His first thought was to go back on the next ferry, but with the thought that Elspeth herself should not be denied these things which he affected to despise, he turned his face flint-like to the heart of the city.

Here everything was confusion, busses in interminable line, noisy street cars, monster creations of brick and stone, glared at him from all sides. Everyone was hurrying. There was no opportunity for an idle chat with a neighbor. Passers-by did not even seem to know that he was one of them.

A policeman in buttons proved to be his refuge. "If you don't mind helpin' an old man, I want to get to Laurier Avenue," he exclaimed to the traffic policeman.

The policeman looked interested. "What number did you say?" Jake fumbled carefully through his pockets. At length the card which the lawyers had left was produced. It was 2048 Laurier Avenue.

"This is your car right here," the policeman remarked and Jake, glad to be moving, stumbled on board. He did not hear the policeman's whispered direction: "Put him off at the 20 block. Son's a coachman or chauffeur or something of that kind, I guess."

Past wide-bordered avenues, lined with maples, away from roar and smoke and confusion of the city. This was better, thought Jake. "20 block!" the conductor called. "Shall I help you alight?" Then leading the way with the canvas telescope, he ushered him into the free air outside, depositing the telescope on the curb beside him.

A strange sinking of the heart seized him. All around were immaculately kept lawns, marked here and there by gaudy springs, rhododendron and other flowering shrubs. A fountain played through the mouth of a silly bronze boy beyond. Footpaths led through "verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways" nowhere. And the houses were so large! He had read of Norman castles. They could not have been much larger than these, he thought. There was still the rivalry of feudal barons but it was a war of show, of striving to outdo one's neighbor.

After much stumbling, he found 2048. This was the place. It was, if anything, bigger and worse than the others. Elspeth would surely wear her fingers out trying to keep it in order.

He shuffled up the steps and took courage to pull the door bell.

"Mercy, man, go to the side door!" Marie, the French maid exclaimed. "Or