



A large stout man whom she had never seen before.

THE pony-cart bowled smoothly along the pleasant shady road in the direction of the village a mile or so away, and its sole occupant, Miss Honora Hall, slim and upright, the reins held tightly in her black-gloved hands, leaned forward from time to time, peering anxiously ahead to watch for the first hint of train smoke. Not that the approaching railway-crossing held any terrors for one of her admirably circumspect nature. No flight of the imagination could have pictured Miss Honora taking even a two-hundred-yard chance with the slowest freight on the line. Her present quandary was born of a doubt as to whether her clock had been fast or slow or just right, and of whether the four-fifteen might not pull in before she could reach the depot.

Clothed according to her custom in the fashion of a bygone era, Miss Honora nevertheless presented a distinctly attractive appearance. It may have been sheer personality, or it may have been just the little suggestion of lace at the throat of her rather dingy frock, or the general impression she always gave of being well brushed. At any rate, she wore her garments "with an air."

The countryside was wrapped in the sleepy calm of a mid-afternoon in June. A few farmers had already begun the cutting of their hay, but beside the far away sounds of this industry nothing else gave audible signs of life unless it were the drowsy hum of bees. The St. Lawrence, quiescent and deserted save for one or two silvery sails in the distance, seemed to sleep too. The islands looked like emerald gems on a sapphire gown. Miss Honora however scarcely noticed these things. She was pre-occupied with thoughts of her little "orphelin de guerre" who was coming on the train this afternoon. Would Edme like her? And above all else would she, Miss Honora, prove herself capable of properly bringing the child up? Fond of children as one may be, that fact in itself hardly implies success in dealing with them, hardly indeed constitutes the right to adopt one. Yet, already she had seemed to shed a number of years. So potent is the influence of youth! Miss Honora's rather severe expression softened every time she thought of the child and she decided that she must grow young again for Edme's sake.

So fields of daisies, and fields of ripening grain and apple-orchards and groves of sugar maple whirled by and Miss Honora saw nothing of it all. She was planning school and even college and a bit of travel for little Edme! The child should have everything. She should have everything that she herself had missed. Only six weeks ago an unexpected legacy had fallen into Miss Honora's lap—through the death of an almost forgotten uncle—and she was now on the street called Easy, though by no means in "the plute class" as Jimmie Guthrie would have said. Her rather vague intention of someday adopting an orphan became, therefore, crystallized. The protege idea was within the bounds of possibility at last! So, reasoning to herself that it was virtually her duty to do unto someone else even as she had been done by, the morning after the news of the legacy had come she had written to the prefect of a small town in France and had asked him to send her an orphan, "a girl orphan and of a gentle and tractable disposition, pretty if possible though of course that is quite secondary." What a time Miss Honora had had with the French replies! What a searching of old school French-English dictionaries! And into what a state of seething excitement the village and neighborhood had been thrown! Miss Honora's act was approved by some and censured by others. Some thought her losing her grip. Others pitied the prospective orphan-protege, and only hoped

Miss Honora realized her responsibility. All domestic feuds were shelved *pro tem*, and every gathering sat upon the deliberations, commenting, prophesying and "calculating"; and some there were who thought it odd that only Miss Honora Hall should have been philanthropic enough to act upon the hint given in the advertisement in the Family Star: "Get your orphan now and start him right with a good Canadian education!" So many wealthy farmers round too! Oh, well, most of them were too durn tight, that was what—closer than a bark to a dog (or was it a tree?)—but Miss Honora had ever been generous-dispositioned "jest like her Paw before her," though she was said to be getting sourer and more "sot in her ways" every day, living all alone like that.

Miss Honora was early enough after all, for the very good reason that the train was a trifle late. So, as she approached Matthew Stubbs' place just outside the village she slowed the pony to a walk and straightened the hat-of-a-dozen-seasons into place. Suddenly she caught sight of Matthew himself just turning out of his gate in his new car and she jerked on her lines and stopped the pony dead, on the pretext of arranging part of the harness. This ruse was made in order to avoid having to bow to Matthew. Miss Honora never did more than bow to him, had not held speech with him since a certain summer evening ten years back. And he never varied in his punctilious and cold return of that bow.

"It's lucky that Guthrie boy called out to me about the train being late," she said to herself. "I'm sure I'd have run right into Matthew. . . . Now I wonder what's taking him out in the middle of the afternoon like this, and half his early hay yet to cut . . ."

But she didn't have to speculate long as to his probable mission. He drove straight to the depot and she maintained a steady, leisurely speed—at least the fat pony must have thought it speed on such a warm day, for he was a lazy little brute and needed the spur of a gentle whip-flicker at most times—in Matthew's wake.

WHEN the train arrived there was the usual group of villagers and station loungers to surge forward on the platform and watch the exciting, though daily, entertainment of the mail bags being thrown off and on. Some of them seemed to spring from nowhere at the last. To-day there were more than usual, and Miss Honora, greeting friends here and there, began to weave her way down to the passenger car at the end, with difficulty. People pushed and jostled her. Twice she got in the way of a truck full of milk-cans. By this you will judge, and quite correctly, that Miss Honora was unaccustomed to meeting trains.

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Little Edme, the last letter had stated, would be in charge of a nurse who was on three months' leave and who was bringing a number of war orphans out to Canada. Therefore Miss Honora watched for a nurse-like person first.

There were a number of children to get off, it appeared. At least half-a-dozen of them were little girls, but these were each accompanied by a parent or big sister and proved, before long to be summer visitors to Maplewood. Miss Honora couldn't see any child who resembled the

picture the prefect had sent her—until turning at last in disappointment she found herself face to face with two tots of about five to six, a boy and a girl. The girl was undoubtedly Edme. She had the same flower-like face and long dark curls of the photo. But the boy?

The nurse had hurried up. "Is this Miss Hall? Well, these are the children," she said, and next moment had to run back, for trains do not tarry long at stations such as Maplewood.

Miss Honora was all of a tremble. She stooped and kissed the children hurriedly.

"I speak English—a little," offered Edme, bashfully. "This is Marcel (pulling the still more bashful boy forward) and he is a good boy, *mais tres* he is—what you call weary. You must excuse."

Edme smiled, and in her bewilderment Miss Honora didn't know that the smile was a direct reflex of something in her own face which had struck a responsive chord in the child. It was a trusting smile.

What followed immediately is better told by Mrs. Butler, who was occupying a point of vantage in the forefront of a staring group nearby.

"The train starts to pull out an' the nurse calls out somethin' about a letter which would 'explain,' but Honora gets frustrated an' makes as if to lift the little boy on board again. But he yells an' takes on so she can't do nothin' with him an' the little girl chatters a perfect stream o' French. Away goes the train with that nurse smilin' an' wavin' her hand an' lookin' sorta relieved that two o' her young charges are safely placed. 'Dear me!' says poor Honora, 'I only wrote for one child. There must be a mistake.' She looks real puzzled an' I was just goin' to step up an' offer to take the wee boy home with me when who should come tearin' up like an amiable tornado, but Matt Stubbs! 'Sorry I'm late,' he puffs, 'but I ran across to the blacksmith shop. This is the boy, I suppose?' Honora straightens up, but habit is strong on her an' she says nothin'. Matt asks the boy his name an' says: 'Aha, you're the little man who's to come an' stay at my house.' An' believe me, that kid looks up an' quits howlin' an' puts his chubby paw in Matt's. The little girl who is clingin' to Honora's hand leaves her an' goes over an' takes Matt's other one."

The narrator paused here the better to enjoy the expressions on the faces of her audience—which was the Maplewood Ladies' Knitting Club, meeting in her home next afternoon.

"Well, Honora breaks the silence o' ten long years," she continued, fairly purring in her importance, "by askin' Matt what is the meanin' o' this, an' Matt speaks up very cheerful an' offhand: 'Why, I believe, as far as I can make out, they've sent us a brother an' sister.'"

"Us?" says Honora, stiffly. "Uhh," replies Matt, coolly. "Surely you didn't think you had a monopoly on French orphans!" Well, Honora's face is sure a study, an' Matt himself wears an on-scrutable look, kind o' stubborn, an' a dreadful silence falls on them for maybe five minutes. The kids play tag round them, but always keep closer to Matt I notice, an' bye-an-bye Honora makes an impatient movement, pulls down her veil again an' picks up the small satchel o' the children's. 'Hold on!' says Matt, 'maybe the boy's things are in that too.' Honora turns on him: 'Matthew Stubbs, you don't mean to say that you propose to look after a five-year-old child!' she cries, 'a child that's liable to get whooping-cough an' measles, an' chicken-pox, an' maybe fall into the well besides! What do you know about children?' 'I know as much about them as you,' he returns. 'I've had as much experience.' Then he tells Edme to go with the lady there, but she shakes her head."

DURING this narrative there was, of course, very little knitting done. One or two of the club members dropped stitches steadily and Miss Gates attempted to put a toe where a heel should have gone, while one and all they hung breathless on the words of Mrs. Butler. She continued to relate how Edme and Marcel refused to be separated, of how Matt Stubbs bribed them with quarters, of how Honora entreated them with tears, of how the loungers gazed and grinned and nudged each other and of how, finally, it was decided that the children go with Miss Honora until the little boy should be induced to leave his sister. Matt bundled them all into the pony cart, promising that he would come for Marcel in a day or two, when lifted up his voice again and Matt had to take it back and the barn, and of the nice pair of collie pups he had, and folks, and who could make the grandest cookies with the big rush of the haying was over. At this Marcel talk instead of the big swing he was going to put up in of the Jap cook at his place who was so fond of little sugar on top.

Well, as Mrs. Butler observed when the club its first curiosity appeased, began to gather up the dropped stitches, Honora Hall actually managed to smile on poor