



BY
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[CONCLUDED.]

"Ha, John! I thought you men never noticed these things. I have observed it for some time."

"Well, Maggie, I have seen many a worse pair. Though they are both poor they are the kind to get along in this country."

"By the way, mother," broke in Bob, "Herb was asking me an awful lot about Mab to-day. He wanted to know what her father was, where she lived and all about her—I wonder if he was acquainted with her in England, because when I told what we knew he said, 'Good heavens! it must be the same.'"

"Well," sagely remarked old Clifford, "he might have known her. I forget what part of England he hails from."

"Why, don't you remember, John?" exclaimed Mrs. Clifford. "He knew the Rev. Henry's wife's people, and they live at Reading."

"Well," rejoined her husband, "Reading is not such an awful distance from Hampton Wick."

And then he and Bob went out to bed down the horses for the night.

Some three weeks after this old Mr. Clifford said to Bob at supper:

"How is it that it is such a long time since we have seen Seymour? I expected he would have been up here to give me my revenge for that game of draughts he beat me in, the rascal."

"Oh, I have asked him in often, but he has always had some excuse."

"Well, you had better tell him I think he is afraid to try conclusions with me again," said the old gentleman.

During this conversation Mrs. Clifford is watching the play of Mabel's countenance. On the mention of Seymour's name she notices the colour mount to her cheeks, which the good lady has fancied have become paler within the last fortnight. The blush d's away, leaving her cheeks a shade paler than before, and her mouth twitches slightly as she hears of Seymour's excuses. These are all the signs Mrs. Clifford sees, but she draws conclusions from them.

On the same evening that this scene is being enacted at the Clifford homestead, Herbert Seymour is sitting in his bachelor residence, musing before his stove. He has been sitting that way for the last two hours. Presently he gets up and, throwing his pipe on the table, exclaims:

"I am a fool, a big fool? What does it matter? She is no more responsible than I am. No, she is not to blame; she is absolutely innocent. But I—I have been making an ass of myself. It is not my fault that I am broken-fortuned; it will be

the result of my own folly if I am broken-hearted. What an idiot I have been to let my silly pride and resentment put me to the pain I have been undergoing for the last three weeks. Yes, I will do it!"

CHAPTER IV.

Tappington Settlement is all agog, for the Templetons, that numerous family, are giving a "house-warming" in their large, new, but partly finished house. A dance is not of such frequent occurrence in a North-West settlement as to cause terpsichorean satiety amongst the rural votaries of pleasure, and consequently the "R.S.V.P." on Mrs. Templeton's invitations did not cause that good lady to receive many regrets of inability to be present.

The Clifford party is starting out for the evening's enjoyment. Unfortunately, there is not room in the family bob-sleigh for all; one must be left out. But, happily, Herbert Seymour drives up and is able to offer Miss Fairchild a seat in his conveyance.

It is rather strange that the Cliffords' crowded sleigh seems to proceed at greater speed over the snow-clad prairie than does the comparatively lightly laden vehicle of Mr. Seymour. What may be the cause of this it is not necessary to waste time in surmising. It is a fact, and is merely stated as such.

The occupants of the dilatory conveyance do not seem to have much to say to each other for the first few minutes of the drive; but at length the driver apparently addresses a remark to his companion which is evidently answered in a monosyllable. Several other short questions seem to be put with a like result. Presently the driver appears to be entering into a long and eloquent address, the team still further slackens its pace, the reins are transferred to the whip hand and the disengaged arm steals round the back of the seat—perhaps to arrange the robes on the other side without disturbing his companion. The communication is doubtless a most important and confidential one, for the two heads draw nearer and nearer to each other during the course of it. The two figures are now so close together that it is difficult to distinguish their actions or the words which the right hand one is rapidly pouring forth. At length the torrent of eloquence appears to have expended itself, and there is a moment's pause. It is impossible to say what answer the left hand figure gives, or, indeed, whether she answers at all; but suddenly the arm of her com-

panion which has been arranging the rugs behind her encircles her waist, the heads which were in such close proximity before now touch, and the clear, crisp air resounds with something suspiciously like a kiss. The driver seems now, for the first time, to realize how slowly his team is going, the whip cracks joyously over the backs of the accelerating animals, the sleigh bounds forward with twice its former velocity, the Clifford equipage is shortly passed and left behind and the Templeton mansion is soon after reached.

The Templeton's ball is an undoubted success. Tired of the dance, a couple are standing in the refreshment room.

"You are quite a stranger here, are you not, Mr. Fitzgerald?" remarks Miss Fairchild.

"Aw, yes, you know," replies her companion, "I've only been out here a fortnight."

"I suppose you don't know many people yet, then?"

"Aw, no, not many; the Templetons and Seymours are the only people I really know. Seymour, by the way, seems to be a great friend of yours, Miss Fairchild. Awfully decent fellow, Seymour. He and I were at Oxford together. Dreadful pity about his having to give up the Bar. I suppose you know the story?"

"No, I never heard exactly. It was some financial difficulty, I believe, wasn't it?"

"Yes; you know he had quite a lot of money left him when he came of age. He entrusted it to a stock-broker to invest for him, who put it into some South American railway or mining concern. Company smashed up, of course; all these South American companies do. Herb lost all his money; old Fairchild killed himself; awful scandal on the exchange. By the way, quite a co——"

Fitzgerald has only just time to break the fall of his companion as she drops fainting to the floor.

"My God! My God!" he cries. "What is the matter? What have I done?"

Mrs. Templeton, who is in the room, at once rushes to his aid. Mrs. Clifford is hastily summoned and comes, followed quickly by Seymour.

The efforts of the two ladies are much more practical and successful than those of the gentlemen, but it would be impossible for any men to exhibit more frantic anxiety than do Seymour and Fitzgerald (particularly the former) for the fainting girl's speedy recovery. Explanations are, of course, not at present possible. On the first sign of returning consciousness Seymour at once advances and, taking her hand, cries:

"My darling! My darling! What——"