

Cupid's Deputy

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Mildred Low

now, only I don't want to die. I too have a wife and youngsters—like your pal 'way down in Province Valley. I've been thinking, Nat, what chances I've missed—how a man like myself might do great things with his money."

The guide nodded. "That's true," he said. "I wonder what you'd do if you had your chance again?"

"I know three things I'd do?" answered the millionaire, still in a quiet voice. "There's a poor quitter down in Texas whom I broke to make my pile. I'd set him up again. Then there's your pal in Colorado—I'd fix him o.k. Last I'd come into these hills, and bring my kiddies here, where they could grow up with God and nature—straight and clean, as men are meant to be."

The guide bit his lips. He was staring with fixed intentness into the great distance, a new expression upon his handsome face. "Sorry I can't help you, Mr. Andrews," he said. "Those are three mighty big ambitions I'd give my hand to see carried out. But I'm afraid there's no turning back now."

How long they waited neither knew. The city man again broke the quietude. "Nat," he said, "my muscles are done. I can hold on no longer. You can't get me out, but have a shot at saving yourself. I'm finished, anyway. Good-bye and good luck."

His cramped arm withdrew the knife from his hold, and before Nat's very eyes he severed the rope. Helplessly Nat witnessed the sickening spectacle. The millionaire spun downwards, turning as he fell, to vanish head foremost over the edge.

The guide shrugged his shoulders. Relieved of the tremendous load on the rope, new life seemed to pulse through his twitching muscles. Rolling on his back he hacked with his heels, and secured a precarious hold, then breathlessly he loosed the pick, for one hair-raising instant knew himself to be in dire peril, then struck higher and held. Again he hacked and again he struck—every six inches gained being a nightmare of peril and suspense. The sweat streamed from his face and dropped upon the ice; he had seen one man go out, and the horrible vision retained possession of his mind. Yet cautiously, steadily, coolly, without haste yet in deadly earnest, he proceeded upwards.

It was over three hours later when the guide, all but exhausted by the nervous suspense, reached softer going. Here he was better able to obtain a foothold in the rotten ice, and shortly he was safe.

Nat Hilderwood straightened up his six feet of magnificent manhood and peered down into the giddy space below. "Somewhere down there," he told himself, "lies something that might have developed into a man, but instead he became a millionaire. Well, I guess it's up to me to find him."

He began the descent on his gruesome mission, till, reaching a point of observation at the head of the glacier, he withdrew his field glasses and looked long and carefully. Then suddenly a gasp broke from his lips. There, not thirty feet below the edge of the glacier, at the point over which Andrews had disappeared, lay a wide fissure filled with snow and rotten ice. It stood out from the face of the precipice, and from its extreme edge, hanging outwards into space protruded something on which Nat's glasses were focussed. He looked again and again—it was a human arm!

Nat put his hands to his lips and uttered the long "Hi-ooo" of the mountaineer. Perceptibly the arm moved, and Nat's heart gave one great bound. Porson Andrews, instead of falling into eternity, had been caught by the projecting fissure, and was alive!

How Nat, by the skilful use of his ropes, singlehanded, rescued and conveyed back to safety the millionaire, and how Andrews, having gazed into the eyes of death had read something within them that remodelled his whole life, need hardly be detailed. Let it suffice that next fall three comfortable looking bungalows stood near together at the foot of Hooded Crow Mountain. In one lived the millionaire, now white haired and thoughtful, with his free and happy children—living a clean life, indeed, the kind of life that men were meant to live; in another lived Nat, still a coolly independent bachelor; and in the third, on the high road to strength and fitness, lived Nat's pal.

MRS. Richard Carleton was telephoning. "Is that you Winifred? Oh Winifred, I want you to come over this evening. Mr. Devenish is in town; you know, that nice Irishman I told you about. He has just phoned to ask if he may call and I promised to introduce him to some of my girl friends. You'll help me out, eh? That's right. I have already been singing your praises to him, so look your prettiest and make yourself very agreeable."

"O, you're sure to like him," she resumed a moment later. "He's a splendid fellow; comes of an awfully good family, has travelled a great deal and is very interesting to talk to. * * * Will he like you? Why, of course. You're just the style of girl he admires. He has a great eye for beauty and says he hates these loud, mannish, sporty, suffragette sort of women."

A little figure huddled wearily in a big armchair near the open fire-place listened with half-closed eyes to the one-sided conversation.

Mrs. Carleton's next remark was delivered in very decided tones.

"Nonsense, my dear. Never mind if you can't find anything to say. A girl that's as pretty and as clever as you are does not need to talk. All you need is to be a good listener. That's what a man prefers in a wife. * * * Oh, he told me so and asked me to help him

"Because I can't, child. Last night when Mr. Devenish was here, you buried yourself in a book for the first part of the evening and then went to bed at nine o'clock. And to-day at luncheon, you hardly spoke a word, and before we were finished flew off without even properly excusing yourself, with those boys and girls that were making such a noise in the hall. I was quite ashamed of you. Mr. Devenish is an old-countryman and not used to that sort of thing, and he had half suggested your going to the matinee, too. I'm sure he must have thought you very rude. One expects a come-out young lady, eighteen years of age, to be a little less childish in her behavior."

"Oh, auntie, I'm sorry, but lunch was so late and the afternoons are so short and I did not want to lose a minute of the skiing."

"Well, you might have given up the pleasure for once and have gone with Mr. Devenish to the matinee, when he was kind enough to ask it."

"But, auntie, I did not know he really meant it and it was the last chance I had of skiing with Bertie and Kenneth. They go back to school to-morrow. Fancy being stuck in a theatre with an old foggy like Mr. Devenish all this lovely afternoon! I think Winifred was there; I saw her going off with that Binks chap."

"Poor Winifred! That awful creature; how he does pester her with his attentions!

ously about, but she looked so pale and ill and childish that her aunt had not the heart to scold her.

"Oh, no," she said, laughing, "he's not more than thirty, but there's the dinner-gong, so I must go. Good-night, child; you certainly would be better in bed, you do look very woe-begone. I'll tell Maggie to bring you some hot milk and a biscuit, and do take your things upstairs with you," she added as she left the room.

"Poor little Mirabel," she mused, "she's not pretty at the best of times, but when she is not feeling up to the mark, she's anything but attractive. I am rather glad my nice Irishman will not see her tonight. It would put the finishing touch to the impression he has already received. But he can't help falling in love with Winifred."

Maurice Devenish was certainly a handsome fellow, and apologized so prettily for trespassing again on his old friend's good nature, that she was more than ever convinced of the soundness and multiplicity of his virtues.

"That—ah—other engagement, it—it fell through," he explained, "and I felt sure you would not grudge a poor lonely westerner like me the pleasure of spending another evening in your delightful society."

"Indeed, I am awfully glad you are here," Mrs. Carleton replied. "My husband was obliged to go out, but I have a young friend coming in that I want you to meet: Winifred Marsden, the girl whose photo you admired so much."

"Oh, ah, yes: is she really? How splendid!"

His tone and manner seemed rather blank, but his hostess put it down to a sort of natural shyness at the thought of meeting the girl of whom she was convinced he had been dreaming rapturous dreams.

"Every man has a streak of shyness in him," she used to say, "and you never can tell when it will crop up."

The weather was a safe topic and the subject of winter sports he eagerly seized upon.

"Miss Mirabel got back safely from her afternoon skiing expedition?" he enquired casually.

"Oh, yes," was the absent reply as his hostess rose to greet a tall and graceful



The Reward of Valor.

find one. Yes, I have chosen you. You are just the girl for him. He's quite a catch, you know!"

A merry laugh followed the next brief pause.

"For Mirabel? Oh, she would not suit him at all. She seems such a child, you know, and anyway I never can depend on her. She's been off skiing all afternoon with a lot of boys and girls, and has just come in with a bad headache from a fall she got trying one of those awful jumps. I expect she'll kill herself some day, but I can't help it. She was always such a tomboy. * * * Well, I'm glad you can come. Be early. Mr. Devenish is going off to-night on the eleven o'clock train, so the evening will be short, anyway. * * * Oh, no; he'll be back again in a few days. He means to spend some time in the east. * * * Yes, don't be late.

Au revoir."

"Well, I'm glad that's settled," said Mrs. Carleton cheerfully as she hung up the receiver. "If he had told me yesterday that he would be over this evening, I would have had things arranged before this late hour, but I understood him to say that he had some other engagement. However, it's all right now that Winifred can come. He admired her photograph immensely and I know he is awfully interested in her. I do believe that is why he invited himself here again this evening. I fancy I must have told him she might be coming in."

"But, auntie," came plaintively from the depths of the armchair, "what made you say you never can depend on me?"

I never knew anyone that was so persistent—or so impossible."

"He's good-looking, rather, and they say he's lots of money."

"But Winifred isn't the sort of girl to be attracted by that; he's not her kind at all. He is so frightfully common and I am sure he bores her to distraction with his talk of boots and shoes, or pickles, or whatever it is that he sells. Winifred ought to marry a prince, with her beauty and her talents."

"Yes, of course, nothing's too good for Winifred," Mirabel heartily agreed, "she is lovely. Some girls seem to have all the advantages," she added wistfully, and she buried her face again in her cushions.

"How is your head, dear?" asked her aunt. "Will you have any dinner?"

"Oh, no, I couldn't eat. It does ache dreadfully. I'll have to go to bed again to-night, but you don't want Mr. Devenish to marry me, anyway, so it does not matter."

"Indeed, I would be very glad and think you would be a pretty lucky girl to get him, if you were not such a baby about everything."

"Auntie, that old man! Why he must be forty and he's almost bald."

In her amazement at such a proposition, Mirabel sat up straight in her big armchair. Her rough scarlet skirt was quite short and showed an ugly tear, the result of a scramble through a barbed-wire fence that afternoon. Her blouse was crumpled and pulled away at the belt, her collar and tie were all awry and her curly hair sadly dishevelled. Cap, mittens, sweater and overshoes were scattered promiscu-

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