

you could do that kind of thing as well as most folks, if it pleased you. In fact, there was an artistic finish to the climax that suggested your usual thoroughness."

"It did?" said Witham grimly, remembering his recent visitor and one or two of Courthorne's Albertan escapades. "Still, as I'm afraid I haven't the dramatic instinct, do you mind telling me how?"

Dane laughed. "Well, it is probable there are other men who would have kissed the girl, but I don't know that it would have occurred to them to smash a decanter on the irate lover's head."

Witham felt his finger tingle for a grip on Courthorne's throat. "And that's what I've been doing lately? You, of course, concluded that after conducting myself in an exemplary fashion an astonishing time it was a trifling lapse?"

"Well" said Dane dryly. "As I admitted, it appeared somewhat out of your usual line; but when I heard that a man from the settlement had been ejected with violence from your homestead, what could one believe?"

"Colonel Barrington told you that!"

"No," said Dane; "you know he didn't. Still, he had a hired man riding a horse he'd bought, and I believe—though it is not my affair—Maud Barrington was there. Now, of course, one feels diffident about anything that may appear like preaching, but you see a good many of us are following you, and I wouldn't like you to have many little lapses of that kind while I am backing you. You and I have done with these frivolities some time ago, but there are lads here they might appeal to. I should be pleased if you could deny the story."

Witham's face was brim. "I'm afraid it would not suit me to do as much just now," he said. "Still, between you and me, do you believe it likely that I would fly at that kind of game?"

Dane laughed softly. "Well," he said, "tastes differ, and the girl is pretty, while, you know, after all they're very much the same. We have, however, got to look at the thing sensibly, and you admit you can't deny it."

"I told you it wouldn't suit me."

"Then there is a difference?"

Witham nodded. "You must make the best of that, but the others may believe exactly what they please. It will be a favour to me if you remember it."

Dane smiled curiously. "Then I think it is enough for me, and you will overlook my presumption. Courthorne, I wonder now and then when I shall altogether understand you!"

"The time will come," said Witham dryly, to hide what he felt; for his comrade's simple avowal had been wonderfully eloquent. Then Dane touched his horse with his heel and rode away.

It was two or three weeks later when Witham, being requested to do so, drove over to attend one of the assemblies at Silverdale Grange. It was dark when he reached the house, for the nights were drawing in; but because of the temperature, few of the great oil lamps were lighted, and the windows were open wide. Somebody had just finished singing when he walked into the big general room, and he would have preferred another moment to make his entrance, but disdained to wait. He, however, felt a momentary warmth in his face when Miss Barrington, stately as when he had first seen her in her rustling silk and ancient laces, came forward to greet him with her usual graciousness. He knew that every eye was upon them, and guessed why she had done so much.

What she said was of no moment, but the fact that she had received him without sign of coldness was eloquent, and the man bent very respectfully over the little white hand. Then he stood straight and square for a moment and met her eyes.

"Madam," he said, "I shall know who to come to when I want a friend."

Afterwards he drifted towards a group of married farmers and their wives, who, except for that open warranty, might have been less cordial to him; and presently, though he was never quite sure how it came about, found himself standing beside Maud Barrington. She smiled at him and then glanced towards one of the open win-



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