

Dave's Legacy

By Edith G. Bayne

BEFORE the war broke out Billy Beach and I had been in partnership in a snug little diggings out at Jumping Horse Canyon in the Rockies. We had a general store and sold everything from hay-scales to needles and thread, and in addition, negotiated the post office affairs for the district.

Jumping Horse was in the very heart of the mountains, at a point on the railway where all the bohunks from the lumber camps used to drift in on Saturday nights and order up heaven and earth—with a bit of the other place thrown in. Our trade was fairly brisk, and our yearly turnover satisfactory, but somehow we never succeeded in making the money we had dreamed of and Billy particularly was always rather discontented.

Billy was a good deal of a mystery to us. Although he was my partner I really knew very little about him. He never talked of his private affairs. His accent told us he was English and not very long "out," but beyond that fact everything was conjecture as far as we were concerned. Now I'm English myself, but having been in Canada for more than twenty years I have learned how to pronounce the letter "r" and I don't try to tell the Canadians how we do things at home, because that is one of the surest ways to get in wrong out here.

Billy was handsome. He had flashing dark eyes, jet black hair and beautiful teeth, and was as slim and straight as a young poplar. He was about twenty-four. Everything in skirts, from squaws down to little schoolmisses, was in love with him.

"Billy," I said one day. "It is a very strange thing that you have never married—a good looking lad like you!" I shall never forget the look on his face as I spoke. He turned quite pale and there was a peculiar expression, half pain, half fright, in his eyes.

"I say you know," he said after a moment summoning up a smile to cover the distress and embarrassment on his face, "I say, you know, quite spoofing, old chap, you're not married yourself and charity begins at home."

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"Who would look at me when you're around?" I returned ruefully. "But I'm sorry if I've put my foot in it."

"Oh, that's all right," he said, hurriedly. "But you see—something that took place at home in England two years ago has bungled things for me—as far as marrying goes. I—oh well, you wouldn't understand I guess."

"Tell me if you think it will make you feel better. It won't go any further, needless to say, but if you don't care to say anything about it, it will be just the same," I said.

"Well—the fact is, old top, I'm married. The pater got into the deuce of a fix over money matters two years ago and he and the mater insisted on me hooking up with a rich girl—daughter of a wealthy soap manufacturer." "You married her?"

"Yes, and a swell life I led! Good heavens! It gives me the pip even to think of it now. One year of Hades—and then I bolted! I came out here and I've been trying to forget ever since."

"She must have been a shrew for sure," I remarked. "Shrew! She was a she-shark! Temper! Whew!" I was about to pursue the topic further, with the idea of learning more about Billy's past but a customer came into the store at this juncture and put a stop to our conversation. I was sorry for poor Billy. I was really very fond of him. There was almost a father-and-son affection between us, for I was nearly old enough to be Billy's dad.

Two score consenting years have shed

Their utmost blessings on my head, And now, behold a gruff old back With spectacles and greying thatch! As to the specs I only have to wear them if I am reading fine print.

Billy's real name, he had confided to me once, was Algernon William Beauchamp.

"But I say you know," he had said, "For heaven's sake old chap call me Billy Beach. I haven't told another soul what my full cognomen is but something in your honest old mug inspires confidence."

"Thanks," I said. "That name," he had resumed, "scarcely fits in with the bushwhacking life we lead."

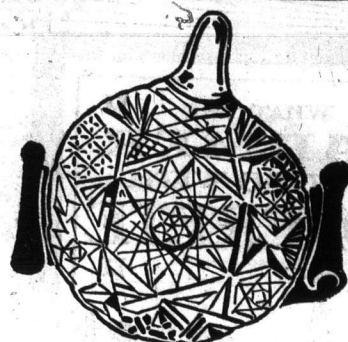
"No," I agreed, "it smacks of London drawing rooms and a monocle and a lisp, doncherknow, eh what? And I know you don't want to be taken for that kind of a johnnie." After we had pooled our resources and gone into business I used to watch Billy covertly, as he peddled sugar and tea and pickles and cheese and nails and axe-handles and rope and paint and crockery and every other conceivable commodity, over the counter. And I could see that he wasn't born to the trade exactly, for underneath the tan and the callousness, his hands were small and his skin of fine texture, and he persisted in keeping his nails as well manicured as a Regent street "nut."

I felt that, instead of wearing overalls and flannel shirt and cowhide boots and a Stetson, his proper get-up should have been a frock coat, spats, tall silk hat and cane. Then came the war. I tried to enlist but they turned me down on account of a bit of weakness in my chest. Billy said he would enlist if he could go straight over to Flanders, but he balked at the idea of sticking around in England for weeks, and perhaps months.

Just as he was hesitating in the matter, a letter arrived for me one morning that turned our thoughts into quite another channel. The letter was from my old pal Dave Harvey of the old mining days. I had almost forgotten him. He was dying he said, and would I look after his little girl, as he had absolutely no one else to leave her with?

"Nell doesn't know I am so near my end," the weak and trembling hand had written, "but the news will soon have to be broken to her. The doctor gives less than three weeks. I ob-

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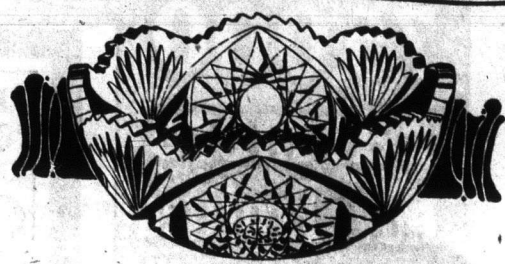
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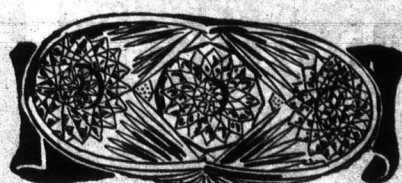
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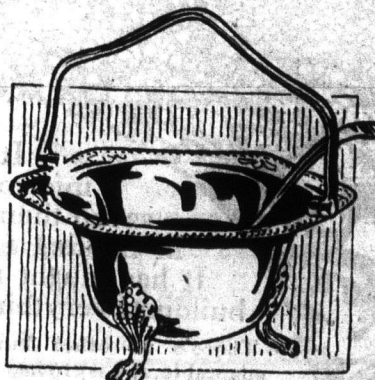
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