

The Queen's Birthday anniversary was a general holiday, and consequently the road to the Woodbine was thronged with all manner of vehicles. Everything on wheels was pressed into service. It was essentially the people's day. The remaining events of the "meet" would be more exclusively under the patronage of the fashionables.

Steve Fairlie drove tandem, and chafed at the tiresome necessity of keeping his place in the procession of express carts, busses, carriages and family rigs, jaunting along in a leisurely, happy-go-lucky style. A stream of empty hacks poured back to the city for other "fares," and, besides, the cars were rolling by on the double track, being run on a three minute service, so Steve could only growl sullenly and impatiently fume at the hearse-like gait. The grays were frothing and champing at the bit, and he was longing to "let them out."

Fairlie had thought of asking the Lairds to drive with him. It would have been such rapture to have Zela sitting beside him. It might be for the last time. A horse-race was proverbially a toss-up, and Osceola had no "cinch." Steve's lips twitched at the memory of his wrongdoing. The pang of remorse was eclipsed by a happy smile as he allowed his mental vision to indulge in a dream of the "might have been." He realized that Zela worshipped him, and he knew that he loved her with all the strength of that devotion which exalts the object of affection into a divinity. Fairlie had been sceptical about the possibility of love, and at first regarded his infatuation in the light of a silly dream—a phantasy of the imagination. But the dream was so sweet, that he had no desire to be awakened to the tame existence of a purposeless past. Ah! if time could only roll back and give him a chance to undo that forgery. What would Zela think of him when the newspapers announced "the latest sensation." It maddened him—the possibility of her condemnation—her reviling him as a felon. The world that knew him would affect to be sorry at his down-fall and luckless career, but the world soon forgets. The world is as selfish and unforgiving as the individual, and only respects whilst it fears. That one misdeed would blind the eyes of his erstwhile friends to all the kindly qualities of Fairlie's heart. He looked for scant charity from public opinion, and his realization of the fickleness of humanity—reprobating to-day the respected and esteemed of yesterday—had hardened his nature into callous indifference. The world might think as it pleased, but his world—Zela—would she also point the finger of scorn?

Scarcely cheery thoughts for the owner of Osceola. But living is a lie. Who

seem as they are? Fairlie carried a grief-burdened heart, but appeared gay and lightsome. He went around, hand-shaking and jesting. His face, though, was flushed with excitement—and something else that he had taken to steady his nerves. Steve's apparent cheerfulness instilled confidence into his friends, and the constant calls for Osceola at long odds made the pool-sellers wary, and Osceola was placed on more even terms with the favorite. Fairlie had put up all his money, before the betting veered in favor of his horse.

If Osceola won, he could square with Grant, and Zela would be his. Steve hadn't prayed for a long time—so long that he had nigh forgotten the morning and evening invocation to the Deity learnt at his mother's knee. He felt like doing so now, but rejected the idea as cowardly and sacrilegious. He had never sought the solace of religion in prosperity, why should he do so now on the threshold of possible ruin?

The bugle trumpeted the signal for the horses to get ready. There was a burst of applause, as the favorite—Dorothy—pranced past the grand stand. The Canadian mare was a noble looking animal, with gracefully arched neck and freedom of stride, and her pedigree read through a long list of celebrated old English sires and dams.

Osceola—Fairlie's equally high-bred purchase from a Texas stable—was being led, still hooded and blanketed.

Positions had been tossed for, Dorothy having the advantage, being placed nearer the inner course, by several removes, than Osceola.

"Rufus, you must get to the front at once," Steve whispered, as the darkey descended from the weighing scale in the paddock. "You may be crowded out. There are so many starters."

"I've a liked to bin closer to Dorothy. I'll hustle to keep widin sound of her heels."

Fairlie accompanied the jockey to the track. Osceola was soon saddled. There was no rearing, no prancing. The Texas mare stood as docile as a lamb, whilst Rufus vaulted into the seat.

Steve found Zela Laird promenading with a trio of lady friends in the enclosure fronting the grand stand. He promptly walked up, and experienced no difficulty in detaching her.

"I've committed something shocking—wicked—glaringly naughty," confided Zela, as soon as they were alone.

"I'm quite accustomed to your exaggerations, and I know that your alleged moral turpitude will dwindle down to something tolerable, and, at the worst, excusable. Anyhow, I am prepared to be shocked, so exploit your sin," replied Fairlie.

(To be continued.)

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