

MIWASA

A Vision of the Future of the Northwest

Truth is the most amusing thing in the world.

—Steele Caybourn.



THE magazine lying in Mary Strangway's lap by a coincidence strange to her, contained side by side with her latest published paper, "A Better Order of Things," a much illustrated account of Miwasa, the city beautiful of the Northwest, which owed its inception and all its beauty to the meteoric

young captain of industry, Steele Caybourn.

Mary rose and went to her desk. From an open drawer she took a photograph and looked long at it. Out of the faded, yellowed card smiled a boy's face: a curiously attractive, plain boy with poignantly eager eyes. She turned the card over, and on the back was scrawled in an execrable boyish hand: "To Mary, Steele Lawrie Caybourn"—and a date, twenty years old.

The arrival of the disturbing magazine had interrupted Mary's work. On the desk lay a page of her strongly-marked, angular handwriting, broken off in the middle. Now, the thought of her work as compared with the brilliant achievements of her old friend was causing a bitter little smile. Socialism a la mode, Mary was calling it, diluted, sugared socialism that society liked the taste of and paid for well. In the early days she had been carried away by the wonder of the new beliefs; and the reading public had clamoured for the ardent young apostle—possibly relishing the youth and ardour in mistake for the socialism. Since that time her mind had travelled far; but her readers were still demanding what she had first given them; and she had to accede to the demand; for the girl who had embraced socialism on a safe five thousand a year, had by one of the plays of that inveterate practical joker, Fortune, been reduced to what socialism earned her. She found her point of view altered.

Mary was in one of her black moods. In every avenue of her mind she was confronted with a sickening sense of failure. She told herself bitterly she was only a sham socialist; her softly-nurtured body had begun to look for pretty, foolish things and lazy days and frivolous amusements from the very moment they had been taken from her. Worse than this, it was whispered to her with damnable iteration that she was not an intellectual woman at all, that she had chosen the wrong path and was starving her better self. She felt terribly alone. True, she had kept her old friends who came to see her and gossiped endlessly about their silly husbands and their spoiled children; likewise she had a number of newer literary acquaintances, who gushed over her to her keen discomfort; but her own self had sailed leagues from the former, and had never been within hailing distance of the others.

Mary thought these bitter reflections had been started by the obvious comparison in the magazine, of Lawrie's work and hers; but as she stared at the photograph a deeper thought obtruded itself, to be instantly banished with a frown for the blush which accompanied it. She would never have admitted it to herself that it was all due simply to a longing for Lawrie, the dear, headlong Lawrie of old, whether he were a thriftless rover or a billionaire.

They had graduated from college at the same time, agreed that the world was out of joint; and agreed that they were appointed to set it right. Presently they began to dispute about the means. Eager Lawrie had ever a new plan before the latest one matured; while Mary plodded, and won her little niche on the stairway before Lawrie mounted the first step. This had estranged them; Mary remembered with another blush, that she had patronised Lawrie the least bit. He commenced to wander; Africa, Japan and Athabasca. He had been actor, schoolmaster, farmer, editor by turn.

One day when he was thirty years old and Mary twenty-eight, he came tearing home in his old mad way to demand that she marry him out of hand. He had been in at the sensational discovery of coal, iron and petroleum in the Peace River valley, and was assured of becoming of the class they had united in despising, the plutocrats. Mary was furious at his assumption that wealth would tempt her to forsake her darling theories. There had been a royal quarrel; Lawrie had returned to the Peace River and Mary to her work. It was shortly

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after this her trustee died, and her little fortune was found to have vanished into thin air.

Seven years had passed since then; her life had been a quiet record of small successes; Lawrie's career one of exceptional brilliance. He became a great captain of industry as he promised; and immediately started the erection of his wonderful city. It was said he had surrounded himself with a school of young architects, painters and sculptors like a grand duke of the renaissance. One could hardly take up a periodical without reading of the wonders which had arisen under their labours.

Mary sought among the pages of the magazine again; not for the pictures of Miwasa, nor for her own paper; but for an advertisement which had caught her eye. It was the announcement by a famous tourist agency of an excursion to Miwasa to leave in a week for the mid-winter carnival. She pondered over it for an hour. Who shall say what course her thoughts pursued? At the end of that time she rose decisively and from its pigeonhole in her desk, took her savings-bank book.

The sleeping-cars bearing the excursion from New York pulled into the station at Miwasa towards the end of the afternoon, and the travellers gratefully trod the fixed earth after four days travel overland. Distinguished among those who alighted from the train was a graceful, black-clad woman, who glanced nervously about her as if, in the language of the detective stories, she were anxious to escape observation. Mary's heart was fluttering with an agitation which, under the circumstances, she told herself was perfectly absurd! As if the great lord and patron of Miwasa were likely to be at the station to meet a personally-conducted excursion!

Motor-busses were waiting for the excursionists in the court-yard. It was very cold; but as still as only winter days in the dry North can be. Mary and her fellow-excursionists had no hesitation in ascending to the seats on the roof of the bus, though the state of the thermometer would have surprised them. Leaving the station and turning into a bridge spanning the railway tracks and the river beyond, a full view of the city was spread before them; and exclamations of wonder and pleasure broke from the passengers.

It was that perfect moment in the lingering northern twilight when light enough remains in the west to reveal all the colours of earth subdued to a mysterious pearly loveliness; yet enough darkness to permit men's little lights making a brave show. The city raised its towers on a high bluff across the river, under a sombre glowing sky. Every street and every house was hung with the lights of the carnival, which sparkled through the gathering dusk like yellow jewels of a supernatural fire.

Here and there on the river were cleared patches of ice on which skaters disported themselves, with great bonfires for light and warmth. Down the river a long oval was marked out on the ice by more lights; and from here, people were streaming home from the races. Near the other end of the bridge was a slide on the hill, down which flew toboggans and adventurous persons on skis, while above the bridge, on the ice in the centre of the river, stood the loveliest object of all, a wonderful fairy castle with countless fantastic towers all built of pale green ice glittering with thousands of lights, the whole as beautiful as a dream.

Leaving the bridge, a street of small shops carried them to the top of the bluff. Everything was brilliantly lighted; and the sidewalks filled with holiday-makers. The buildings were no more expensive than those of the small streets of other towns; but the principles of sound design and just proportion informed the whole. The effect in a new town was surprising. Then turning into a broad avenue skirting the edge of the bluff, they encircled the capitol, a small but perfectly proportioned pile, springing as naturally as a flower from the highest point of the bluff, and found themselves in the famous Aspen Way, the thread on which the builders of Miwasa had strung their choicest gems. At the top of the Way stood the first of the famous groups of statuary, Heroism, represented by a splendid woman striding forward with a banner. On a lower plane, all pressing eagerly forward, were half a score of smaller men's figures:

Nelson, Wolfe, Canrobert, Sidney, Paul Jones, Gordon, Greville — glorious leaders of forlorn hopes! It was too dark to recognise the rest; or Mary's eyes were blurred. She remembered whose favourite heroes these were.

With more and more lights, the snow, the sleigh-bells and the exquisite buildings on which such loving pains had been spent, the Aspen Way was fairyland indeed. It was less than a quarter of a mile long, and all the buildings, dedicated whether to Education, Science, Art or Amusement, were part of the same scheme. At one end the vista was closed by the capitol; at the other end, an equally beautiful structure filled the eye; Mary presently learned it was the municipal building. One of the most interesting structures was the Auditorium, owned and conducted by the Public Entertainment Fund, a favourite scheme of the founder of Miwasa. "Crime," said Steele Caybourn, "is but the result of insufficient amusement." So the beautiful Auditorium held within its capacious walls everything that could be devised to furnish healthful diversion to the citizens.

Half-way stood another of the famous groups, an ideal conception of Miwasa, who was represented as a beautiful, grave housewife with a distaff. She could see it imperfectly in the gathering shadows, but something in the aspect of the grave seated figure stirred Mary strangely, and she resolved it should be the first spot to be revisited alone.

At the end of the Aspen Way they turned into a wide, semi-circular space before the municipal building. This was the brightest spot in the whole bright town; the arc of the circle all the way round was filled with fine shops. Five streets radiated like spokes from a hub; the hub itself was formed by the third of the great groups—Mirth. Redfield's, their destination, was the centre of gayety in Miwasa on the eve of the carnival. The hotel, built somewhat after the style of an old English inn, with an ample courtyard, occupied the farthest segment of the circle to the right. A wave of warmth and talk and music met the weary excursionists as they entered the hotel.

That night she saw him. It was at the Lieutenant-Governor's ball, for which the members of the excursion had been provided with tickets to the gallery. Looking on at other people's entertainments was not precisely to Mary's taste, but in the end her pride succumbed to the temptation of seeing him from such a point of vantage, and she went. It was a brilliant scene indeed; but Mary had no eyes for it: he was there; straight and tall and almost as boyishly eager as ever. The vivid glance of his eyes, which lent his plain face its peculiar attractiveness, was perhaps saddened; his blonde hair had turned a little ashy; that was all the change. He was talking as none but Lawrie could talk, to a brilliantly bejewelled lady, whom Mary thought was barely a lady. She was glad to observe he had not made the mistake of becoming fond of her; Mary knew the symptoms in Lawrie.

The other excursionists were talking about him, and presently Mary heard the question she longed and dreaded to have answered:

"Is he married?"

"Not yet. He is in mortal terror of match-making mammas!"

"Not yet, you say. Is that lady—"

"Bless you, no! That's Mrs. Yarbrugh. They say she's—"

The rest was lost in a whisper. Mary was not interested in Mrs. Yarbrugh. She waited with feverish impatience for the original inquiry to be resumed.

"Then who is it?" was asked.

"I don't know her name. They say he has an orphan in view."

Mary hastened home for fear of betraying her feelings. She was furious with herself for caring so much. She could not attempt to disguise the fact any longer. She did care; and that was the root of the whole matter. The admission that she had made the long, long journey simply to see him, was a bitter pill for her pride to swallow.

Later that night Mary, a little more resigned in mind, sat at her window gazing at the graceful figure of Mirth flinging her arms to the moon, and

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