



RESUME.

Peter Rutherford, a wealthy young Montrealese, visits an aunt in a small Ontario town. A business communication takes him to the post office on a night when a blizzard sweeps the town and, confused by the violence of the storm, he turns by mistake into the home of Margaret Manners, whose acquaintance he has an opportunity of improving before her brother arrives to show him on his way. By chance circumstance, Peter decides not to mail a letter of proposal written to a girl in Montreal, and later drops it in the Manners home, where it comes into Margaret's hands. Next day, when he calls, Margaret returns the letter to him, and he is intensely relieved to find it has not been sent upon its way. A sleighing party is being arranged and Peter is persuaded to prolong his visit to take part in the event. By mutual consent he becomes Margaret's escort in the drive and by so doing incurs the enmity of a man from whom the girl has been accepting some small attentions and who has taken for granted the acceptability of his suit. Margaret confides to Peter Rutherford her fear of this man and the unpleasantness of his attention in spite of which it is her brother's wish that she should marry him. Peter has a faint and disagreeable recollection of having seen Klein before but cannot recall the exact circumstances.

REALLY? Still one never knows, you know. About to be engaged, you say. I was glad to see you with him, Margaret, because I think him much nicer than—some others."

"If you mean Mr. Klein, I agree with you," said Margaret calmly.

"Really? Well dear, don't think me interfering, but I can't help hoping—"

But just here the good-natured hostess was called away and Margaret never learned what it was that she couldn't help hoping.

Meanwhile the object of their conversation, cheerfully chatting with Klein, was becoming exasperated. Do what he would he could not succeed in surprising his adversary off his guard and the memory he sought still eluded him. Of one thing only he felt certain—he had never heard the man talk before. His low, pleasant voice struck no answering cord, awakened no haunting recollection. It was the eyes that seemed familiar and the straight nose and the rugged, obstinate chin. The mouth? Ah, he couldn't see the mouth. Could it be possible that it was the mustache which prevented full recognition? For an instant Rutherford held the thread of memory in his grasp, then Klein spoke and it was lost again.

The evening wore on in the usual way, with a little dancing, a little flirting and a great deal of laughter and youthful nonsense. Peter, rather to his surprise, found that he was enjoying himself very much. To be sure he couldn't always dance with Margaret, nor could he always sit in some convenient nook and talk to her, but the knowledge that she was there, that his turn for a dance and a talk would come was more than sufficient and if the other young ladies with whom he danced and talked were to him little more than necessary puppets, it is certain that nobody knew it but himself. Indeed, had he realised it, he was scoring a very pronounced social success, eclipsing even the well-known brilliancy of Mr. Klein, lately the standard of gentlemanly excellence in Banbridge society.

Margaret watched his enjoyment with puzzled wonder. Not knowing the cause, the effect was perplexing and when she heard his boyish laugh respond to some inanity from the stupidest girl in the room she marvelled greatly. As a matter of fact Rutherford was in the mood to laugh at anything or nothing.

Society in Banbridge is somewhat primitive and not given to unseemly hours, so at what seemed to Rutherford an absurdly early hour the dancing became desultory and finally stopped altogether and the self-appointed helpers began to dispense coffee and angel-cake before starting on the return drive.

Peter, who by dint of clever skirmishing, had succeeded in establishing himself close to Margaret's corner, declined, in spite of blandishments, to help wait and in excuse told a story of a former experience which was so funny that Margaret's merry laugh rang out and Klein, who was dispensing

coffee, was unfortunate enough to spill a little over Mrs. Matheson's black silk dress.

His apologies were prompt and graceful and the next moment he handed Margaret and Rutherford their cups with a smile and an enquiry as to what they were finding so amusing.

Margaret watched him doubtfully as he moved away.

"He doesn't seem to care a bit," she said to Peter with a high of undoubted relief.

"Perhaps," said Peter hopefully, "he is more of a gentleman than we have been giving him credit for. At least he has sense enough to conceal his feelings."

"I'd rather believe that he has no feelings to conceal. I don't like the idea of concealed feelings. In Mr. Klein's case I am sure they would be dangerous."

Peter sipped his coffee tranquilly.

"I think," he decided, "that we have been allowing our imagination to run away with us. You remember what you said about the probability of his trying to do me out of my homeward ride? I hope you won't feel neglected but he really has not mentioned the subject."

"I suppose my pride ought to be hurt," she said, "but somehow I don't mind it a bit. Don't you think you had better go and see about the horses?"

Rutherford rose instantly and as he did so a slight feeling of dizziness made him cling to the back of his chair.

"Mr. Rutherford's coffee must have been too strong," laughed one of the pretty waitresses as she hurried by.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Margaret, looking up.

"No. I felt dizzy for a moment, too much excitement for one so young, I suppose. Will you get ready, Miss Manners? I'll have the horses around in a quarter of an hour."

But though he succeeded in concealing his indisposition from Margaret, Peter was really feeling inexplicably ill. He made his way across the room and touched one of the young men, whom he knew, upon the arm.

"Say, Clarke," he said, "take me off somewhere will you? I'm feeling seedy."

Eddie Clarke, fortunately, was a sensible young man and seeing from Peter's white face that he was quite in earnest he steered him quickly and quietly from the room.

"Sit down here," he said, placing him on a sofa in a deserted room. "I'd better get Mrs. Matheson. She'll know what to do and she never makes a fuss."

Rutherford roused himself a little.

"Don't say anything—don't let anyone know, I've reasons—promise."

"Sure," said Clarke, wonderingly, and hurried away.

When a few minutes later he returned with their hostess they found Rutherford lying in a dead faint upon the floor.

Mrs. Matheson was not a woman to wonder first and act afterward.

"Run to the room at the top of the stair, Eddie," she said briefly, "and fetch me the water pitcher and the glass-stoppered bottle from the dressing-table."

At the foot of the stair Clarke almost ran over Klein, who was returning to the kitchen with a trap of empty coffee cups.

"What's the matter?" asked Klein quickly, "anyone sick?"

"Sick!" said Eddie laughingly. "Do you think this is a hospital? Look out, you'll smash those cups if you hold them like that!"

On the return journey he looked to see if the hall were clear before he descended, for though he did not know Rutherford's reasons for desiring secrecy, it had been quite evident from his tone that they were weighty ones.

IT was not long before Peter began to revive under the judicious treatment of Mrs. Matheson, but his senses came back slowly. When at last he did realise where he was and what had happened, his first question was:

"How long have I been here?"

"I should think about ten minutes," said Mrs. Matheson.

Rutherford forced himself into a sitting posture. He felt very weak and tired and his head had a peculiar sensation of not belonging to his body, but the dizziness was passing. Mrs. Matheson, who was genuinely concerned, pressed him not to attempt to stand.

"You must not think of moving, Mr. Rutherford," said she in her kindly way. "Is there anything I can get for you? I presume you are subject to spells like this."

"Never fainted in my life," said Rutherford truthfully. "I can't imagine what went wrong. If it hadn't been for Clarke there I would have made a nice show of myself. Say, Clarke, will you do me another favour and get out the horses?"

"Sure," said Clarke cheerfully, with an understanding grin. "But I guess some one will have to drive you home."

"Undoubtedly," declared Mrs. Matheson, "that is, if he is well enough to go home at all. Miss Manners will have to go in some one else's sleigh; there were a few gentlemen without partners—but I think the best thing would be for Mr. Rutherford to stay here until the morning."

As she spoke a sentence of Margaret's wandered through Rutherford's steadying brain.

"Be sure you are not beguiled into changing partners for the drive home."

In a flash he saw, or thought he saw, something which steadied his hand and sent the blood rushing through his strengthening frame. He managed to laugh quite naturally.

"Why, Mrs. Matheson," he said, "you surely don't intend to punish me for the trouble I have caused by making me lose my moonlight ride, do you? As a matter of fact I am perfectly well and quite capable of managing my own horses. Do go along and get them, Clarke. I told Miss Manners I'd be ready in a quarter of an hour."

Eddie Clarke went off laughing, but Mrs. Matheson lingered.

"Do you really think you can?" she asked concernedly.

"I know that I must," answered Peter gravely.

Mrs. Matheson sat down on the sofa by his side.

"I'll get you a glass of wine," she said. "It's home-made but it will do you good. And remember, if the horses prove too much for you Margaret is a good driver."

Then with a motherly pat of understanding she hurried off to get the wine.

CHAPTER IX.

MARGARET TAKES THE LINES.

When Rutherford had left the room, presumably to bring the horses, Margaret, with a little sigh of relief that the evening was over, slipped away upstairs. As she searched for her coat and furs in the crowded cloak-room she felt quite ready to laugh at her anxieties of the afternoon. In retrospect, the look of rage on Klein's face might easily have been but the transitory anger of a hot-tempered man who finds himself in a humiliating position. To fear an attempt at reprisal seemed little less than ridiculous. She smiled at herself in the mirror with a new feeling of confidence in her own powers. She wondered how she could have been so foolish as to have been afraid of Klein, or of any other man. She was free, had always been free, and in her present mood even the delusion of servitude seemed incomprehensible.

It took some time to find and adjust her wraps and when at last she reappeared the stipulated fifteen minutes were well over. Expecting to find Rutherford waiting, Margaret prepared a merry excuse for her tardiness as she ran downstairs. But there was no sign of her escort either in the hallway or in the parlours.

Instead, Mr. Klein, smiling his shallow smile, came up and offered her a chair. Margaret took it laughingly, declaring that she was prepared to wait five minutes but no longer.

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