

The Prospector

A TALE OF THE CROW'S NEST PASS.

BY

RALPH CONNOR

Author of "The Sky Pilot," "Black Rock," "The Man From Glengarry," "Glengarry School Days," Etc.

CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

"This is absurd!" she cried at length. "It's preposterous, and it must end now and forever. I forbid absolutely anything in the way of engagement or understanding. I will not have my daughter tie herself to a man with such prospects."

"Wait, mother," said Shock, putting his hand out toward the old lady, who was about to speak. "Mrs. Fairbanks," he continued, "far be it from me to take advantage of your daughter in any way, and I say to you here that she is as free now as when she came into this room. I shall not ask her to bind herself to me, but I will be false to myself, and false to her, if I do not say that I love her as dearly as man ever loved woman, and come what may, I shall love her till I die."

The ring in Shock's voice as he spoke the last words thrilled everyone in the room.

"Ay, lad, that you will," said his mother proudly.

"Oh, ain't he great," whispered Brown to Betty, who had her excitement had drawn close to him.

Betty responded with a look, but could not trust herself to speak.

The moment was pregnant with possibilities.

As Shock finished speaking, Helen, with an indescribable mingling of shy grace and calm strength, came and stood by his side. For the first time Shock lost control of himself. He flushed hotly, then grew pale, then with a slightly defiant look in his face, he put his arm lightly about her.

"Time for that train," said Brown, who had slipped to the outer door.

"That is," he continued in his blishest manner, "if you're going."

With a quick grasp Helen turned toward Shock. He tightened his arm about the girl, and putting his hand upon her shoulder, turned her face toward him and looked down into her face.

"Good-bye," he said gently. "Remember you are free, free as ever you were. I have no claim upon you, but don't forget that I will always love you. I will never forget you."

"Good-bye, Shock," she replied in a low, sweet tone, lifting her face to him. "I will not forget. You know I will not forget."

She slipped her arm around his neck, and while his great frame trembled with emotion she held him fast. "I'll not forget," she said again, the light in her great grey eyes quenched in his quick rush of passion. "You know, Shock, I will not forget." Her lips quivered piteously.

Then Shock cast restraint to the winds. "No," he cried, "you will not forget, and you are mine!"

He drew her close to him, held her a moment or two, looking into her eyes, and as she lay limp and clinging in his arms he kissed her on the brow, and then on the lips, and gave her to his mother.

"Here, mother," he said, "take her, be good to her, love her for my sake."

He put his arms around his mother, kissed her twice, and was gone.

"He'll never get that train," cried Betty.

"Take the carriage," said Mrs. Fairbanks shortly, "and follow him."

"Come along! hurry!" said Betty, catching Brown's arm.

"The station," cried Brown, seizing Betty's hand and crushing it ecstatically, "may I embrace you? It's either you or John there."

"Do be quiet. It seems to me we have as much of that sort of thing as I can stand. Wasn't it awful?"

"Awful! Awful! Right!" grasped Brown, hugging himself. "Haven't had a thrill approaching that since the McGill match, and even that was only a pale adumbration of what I've just been through."

"I'm sure I don't know what to think. It's so dreadfully startling."

"Startling!" cried Brown. "Come now, Miss Betty, you don't mean to say you haven't seen this growing for the past six months?"

"No, truly I haven't."

"Well, that's only because you have been so occupied with your own affairs."

"Nonsense," cried Betty indignantly, with a sudden flash of color in her cheeks. "You're quite right."

"I don't care for anything now," cried Brown recklessly. "My prayers, tears and airm-giving haven't been without avail. The terrors and agonies I've endured this last few days lest that old blackhead should take himself off without saying or doing anything, no man will ever know. And he would have gone off, too, had it not been for that lucky fuke of your mother's. Do you mind if I yell?"

"Hush! Here, let my hand go, it's quite useless," said Betty, looking at that member which Brown had just relinquished.

"John," gravely enquired Brown, "are you using both your hands?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," enquired

the astonished coachman, half turning round.

"Here, do stop your nonsense," cried Betty in a shocked voice.

"Oh, all right, John, this will do," said Brown, seizing Betty's hand again, as John gave her attention to the horses.

"I say, pull up beside Mr. Macgregor there, will you? Here, Shock, get in. You'll find your chair, you old bloke, come along, don't gape like a sick duck. Get in here. You have got to get that train now."

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bless you. Report to me in six months."

The convenor looked at his fingers after Shock had left, spreading them apart. "Well, what the chap grips he'll hold until he wants to let it go," he said to himself, wrinkling his face into a curious smile.

Now and then as he walked along the trail he turned and looked after the buckboard heading toward the southern horizon, but never once did his missionary look back.

"I think he will do. He made a mess of my service last night, but I suppose he was rattled, and then no one could be more disgusted than he, which is not a bad sign. His heart's all right, and he will work, but he's slow. He's undoubtedly slow. Those fellows will give him a time, I fear, and again the convenor smiled to himself. As he came to the brow of the hill, where the trail dipped into the river below, he which the little town lay that constituted the nucleus of his parish, he paused and, once more turning, looked back at the diminishing buckboard. He won't look back, eh? All right, nay, man. I like you better for it. It must have been a hard pull to leave that old lady behind, but I don't mind her. There are just two of them. Well, we will see. It's pretty close shelling."

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