

Of the Same Mind

Written for The Western Home Monthly by W. R. Gilbert

through the grand old mountains. He also mentioned the Old Prospector; how proud the latter was of his little bungalow, and how eagerly he was awaiting the coming of his niece, that he might once again enjoy the blessing of a real "home."

When Miss Jessie Stewart received the two letters she promptly read, then again many times re-read, Jim's letter. This done, she opened Old Dick's; and having perused it, she immediately answered both. The first one, "To My Dear James," assured that happy person that she would have everything in readiness to begin the journey as soon as her school duties would permit; that she would proceed to Winnipeg, and there await his coming. The second to "Dear Uncle Dick," thanked him for his generous offer, and agreed to become mistress of his little home, providing that he could make room also for a very dear friend of hers, if that friend could be persuaded to go; and that she would sail for Canada as soon as school closed for the summer vacation. "Bring your friend, and come along," cabled Dick upon reading this letter. "She won't need any persuadin' when she sees 'Jasmine Cottage,'" he added to himself.

One glorious June evening the Prospector impatiently paced up and down the wharf at Hard-pan Ridge, awaiting the arrival of the steamer "Kuskanook." His niece had telegraphed that he might expect her on that date.

"Wish Jim Saunders was here. Wonder what he went to Winnipeg for anyway," grumbled Dick. "Oh, there comes the boat now. Hope that friend o' Jessie's ain't too high-toned for the little home."

As soon as the steamer had tied up at the wharf a number of passengers stepped from the gang-plank. Among them was Jim, and by his side a graceful young woman whom he introduced to the Old Prospector as "my wife."

"What!" exclaimed Dick. "Excuse me; wish ye much happiness," extending both hands towards those of the happy couple. "But ye did take m' breath away. Never dreamt ye was off on sich a' errand, Jim." Then glancing once more hurriedly over the group of passengers, he remarked in a disappointed tone that he had been expecting his niece on that boat but evidently she had not come.

"Would you know your niece if you saw her?" smilingly inquired Mrs. Saunders.

"Course," said Dick. "Ain't I looked at her picter, times without number?"

"She may have changed since it was taken."

"Well, bein' as it's ten year since it was took, perhaps she might."

"And she has, Uncle Dick. I knew you as soon as I saw you, from the photo which you sent me five years ago."

"What!" ejaculated Dick. "Ye're plumb sure?"

"Yes," and she drew a small photo from her satchel, and held it before his astonished eyes.

"Well I'll be blessed!" grabbing each of their hands. "An' this Jim's yer husband. Hooray! Come on home quick," as he observed the curious eyes turned in their direction.

"But," said Jim in a puzzled tone as they partook of the dainty evening meal set on the rose-embowered porch, "there's one part I haven't quite figured out yet. I thought your niece's surname was Powell."

"No," answered the old man, "Jack was only my half-brother. My mother married James Stewart about five year after my father died, an' Jack was their only child. He was always just like a real brother to me."

"I see," said Jack plucking a rose from the bowl in the centre of the table, and twining it among the dark curls beside him. "So you have a nephew now, as well as a niece."

"When's that friend o' yer's comin'?" suddenly inquired Dick, turning to his niece.

"He's here now," laughed she, nodding towards Jim. "You see, I didn't tell either of you, but thought I'd surprise you both."

"Good!" shouted the old man, bringing his hand down forcibly on the table.

"Well, well," chuckled Old Dick, as he laid his head upon his pillow that night. "Wonders 'll never cease. After many days I've got m' little home; m' niece, she's a fine lass," then drowsily, "and Jim, he's a brick!"

THERE is an ancient adage anent, the "best laid schemes of mice and men"—I find it very true. I am forever making "schemes" which all too often "gang agley".

On a particularly sunny afternoon, when it was close and stuffy in the studio, I had made up my mind that for at least a week there was to be nothing but good solid work—no gadding, no trips up the river.

It was rather heroic of me, for through the open window, the sunshine was beckoning me. I sighed feeling very disinclined for work. But work I must, therefore I "set to" with renewed vigor.

But just a quarter of an hour, after that I heard a letter dropped into the box.

A minute later I had read it—it was from mother.

I frowned, turned it over, read it all through once more, and groaned.

I could remember the freckles very distinctly. There was absolutely nothing interesting about her. Doubtless she was worse now—more freckles.

That she would be enthusiastic there could be no doubt. I'd had previous experiences. They all have boundless "enthusiasm," worse luck. Ye gods, what a prospect!

Again there was the studio. Was it in a fit state wherein one could unblushingly receive a lady visitor—one or two of the pictures must be turned to the wall.

I referred to the letter. There was no mention of the date of arrival—no doubt I should have a note from the girl. Tomorrow I would get Mrs. Meakin to tidy up a bit. With another sigh I began to clean my brushes and palette. Then I fell on the varied collection of things lying about—of course, there is a proper place for everything, but when one lives alone,



Hudson Bay Mt. and Glacier, B.C.

It was very trying. When I had made up my mind to make up for lost time, and resolutely turn over a new leaf, up come the mother—metaphorically speaking—with someone, and a country cousin at that, with the request that I will "show her London."

I sat a moment staring blankly at the letter:

"My own dear boy—Only a line to tell you the L'Eskange's niece is coming up to town with them for a few weeks."

"You know Mrs. L'Eskange cannot get about much and I should like Nora to have a good time; so as you are old friends—you two young people—I have promised that you will do the honors, and will take her about as much as possible. As you have old Nurse as housekeeper, I have told Nora it will be quite proper to go and see you. No time for more.—Your loving Mother."

Good heavens! So I was to be saddled with a flapper, and just now, too! I put the letter in my pocket, with very ruffled feelings.

Old friends—well that was a decade ago, of course. She was a long-legged, awkward girl, with an untidy pigtail of sandy hair and a nose covered with freckles.

one has a way of putting down the object on hand upon the nearest available space, whether it is your hat or a pound of butter, and the result after a time becomes bewildering.

The bell of the outer door "whir-ir-ed" loudly with startling persistency—I glanced into a mirror—there was a smear across my nose and my hands were dirty. Just in time! I remembered that it would only be Browne, the dealer, who was anxious to look at some sketches.

The latch on my front door was locked back, therefore I shouted:

"Come in! That you, Browne?" I said. I was stacking a pile of canvases against the wall.

"D'you think you could let me come to your place to-morrow about the sketches? I'll bring them along. Can't spare time now. Have a beastly confounded ——" There was a little burst of suppressed laughter behind me.

I faced round suddenly, and got pretty red I suppose, because it wasn't Browne after all, but a strange girl. She was very slender, and had Titian hair and dark eyes, and the prettiest face I had ever seen.

"I—oh, I beg your pardon!" I said haltingly. It was a horrid situation.

"But—er—I'm afraid I—that is, I fancy you've mistaken the number or something!"

"I don't think so," said the girl, and came a step towards me.

"In that case," I said gravely, and conscious of the smear on my nose, "What can I do for you?"

"Well,"—she laughed again, "You—you might ask me to tea!" And then she put out a ridiculously small hand in an awfully swagger long white kid glove.

"Teddy," she said severely, "do you mean to say you have not recognized me yet—Nora—and such old friends as we are too? I really thought you would welcome me with open—that is, I mean joy."

I pulled myself together and seized her hands. "Why, of course!" I said with enthusiasm. "I am delighted; and if you will grow up into a beauty—but you've caught me fairly on the hop. You see, my old housekeeper, has been sick so I sent her to her brother's place."

"What, Nannie?"

"Nannie—far-famed for certain cream cakes. Meanwhile I exist with a personage who 'does' for me daily—I was just trying to produce something like order out of chaos. But I didn't expect you so soon, therefore behold me suitably covered with shame."

"How absurd!" she was pulling off her long gloves. "I shall insist on helping you—I'm not going to interrupt. Do you think you could find me an apron for work? Which is the kitchen? Please let me!"

I indicated the apartment and followed her meekly.

An hour later, the whole aspect was changed. Everything was in its place. We had discovered a lace tea cloth, a long forgotten birthday gift and now it graced our tea table. There were my Sevres cups too, and a plate of delicious toast—made by Nora.

I sat looking at her absently now. Here was a case of the ugly duckling, and no mistake. Not that this brilliant, charming person could ever have been plain—my ideas must have been distorted long ago. The sandy locks were now a wonderful red-gold, like burnished copper, all little tendrils, beneath a cute little hat—oh, where was the country cousin of my imagination?

"You know," she said, "you've not altered a bit—in looks I mean. But I hear you're something of a woman hater."

"Don't you believe it," I said, "I—er—rather allowed that idea to get about, because—well—for several reasons."

"Yes," said my companion enquiringly. What lovely eyes she had—they invited confidence.

"Well!" I reached for my pipe, "D'you mind if I smoke? Thanks. What was I saying? Oh, ah, yes. Well, for several reasons. You see for one, I'm mostly with men—not very used to girls—I'm always rather afraid of women—more or less."

Suddenly she laughed, and lifted a hand to arrange her veil.

I caught a gleam of diamonds on the third finger of her left hand.

"Some chap is lucky!" I said, indicating it. She stared at it.

"Ah,—you mean, oh, the engagement finger, of course! Thank you for a pretty compliment, kind sir." And then she grew quite grave: "Don't you believe in Platonic friendship?" she said. "I assure you that a girl can prove to be every bit as good a 'pal' as a man to a man. Won't you let me convince you?"

I took her hand.

"It's a compact," I said heartily.

"Then," drawing her hand, which I had been holding an unnecessarily long time, away—"we're going to be the best of pals!"

The rest of the afternoon was borne away on wings. I showed her my pictures, and then we arranged that she should sit to me, the first sitting to take place next morning. And then I took her to the hotel at which she was staying.

Three weeks had passed. My venture into the realms of platonic friendship had proved a gigantic success. It was a joy to go to a show with somebody who could see things from your point of vantage. Here was a girl who was just a "good comrade." It seemed of course a pity that she should be engaged, she was so young and—

On the last afternoon but one of her visit we went on the river—the day was lovely. Nora was wearing blue, and was distractingly pretty.