

The Heir to Beecham Park

CHAPTER XXIII

"I cannot offer you great love," Stuart went on, taking her hand. "I will not deceive you, Vane—it is buried in the past; but I will give you affection, devotion—true and sincere devotion, if you will accept it. The gift is poor, Vane. Reject it if you will."

"Reject it, Stuart!" murmured Vane turning her luminous blue eyes on him. "No, I accept it, for I love you—I have loved you through it all, and I am happy at last!"

Stuart pressed his lips to hers; and the compact was sealed.

Miss Lawson kept to her word and departed on the following day for Hurstley, despite all Margery's pleading and wishes. The short visit had been a great pleasure to them both. To Margery the very sight of her governess had brought back a wave of her brief past happiness, and unconsciously soothed her; and Miss Lawson had felt her heart thrill with pride and gladness to see her pupil grown so fair and lovely a woman and surrounded by all that she could desire. Yet the strange sadness in Margery's eyes would haunt her. What could be the secret that had destroyed her girlishness and brought such an expression to the young face? Miss Lawson pondered this deeply, but could arrive at no solution of the mystery, and indeed would have been no little astonished had she learned what link it was that bound Margery's heart to Hurstley. She knew the girl had been acquainted with Stuart Croobie; but that fact was not strange for Stuart had a kind word and smile for every one in the village, and Margery, of course, shared this general friendship with the rest.

Lord Court had welcomed Miss Lawson warmly and courteously, and even in their brief meeting a mutual liking sprang up between them. The earl was delighted to see the flush of pleasure, called up by her presence

on Margery's face, and he added his entreaties to his wife's to urge the governess to stay longer; but their pleadings were vain, and Margery could only kiss her true friend and let her depart, having first extracted from her a promise of an early visit to Court Manor.

The afternoon on which Miss Lawson left was gloomy and wet, and Margery felt sad and a little lonely as she sat with her books and work. Her husband had gone to the club before luncheon, and she had decided to make the best of a long afternoon when the door opened and he appeared.

"Do you feel inclined to go out, my darling?" he asked, tenderly, bending to imprint a kiss on her brow.

Margery looked up inquiringly. "Because," he explained, "I shall like to take you with me to call on an old friend who is ill. I had no idea he was in England. As a rule, he is wandering round the world in a most extraordinary fashion. But I saw Nettoway at the club, and he told me Gerant has been down with rheumatic fever for the last six weeks and was quite alone. So I looked in on him for a few minutes, and, having mentioned my young wife, he guessed me to bring you around to see him, if you had nothing better to do."

"I will go with pleasure," replied Margery, rising. "Who is he, Nugent?"

"Sir Douglas Gerant, I knew him years ago in England; but we met abroad principally, and I liked him very much. He is a peculiar, almost unaccountable man, but so kind and good—as tender as a woman and most unselfish. For these weeks past he has been very ill; but he would not let his people know, and has been attended only by his servant, who has been his companion in all his travels."

"And he would really like to see me?" queried Lady Court, putting her dainty work into its basket.



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"He seemed to wish it. I happened to mention that I was married; and when I spoke of my happiness, he said in his old abrupt manner: 'Bring her to see me, Court, if she will not be frightened by such an old savage; so I came at once. But if you would rather not go—'

"Oh, I should like to see him!" broke in Margery. "Poor man, all alone! And I have nothing to do this afternoon. I will not be long, Nugent."

With a tender smile the earl watched her graceful figure slip through the doorway; then he walked to the fireplace, and, leaning his back against it, gave himself up to pleasant thoughts. The careworn look, the expression of trouble and pain was gone from his face; hope seemed written

on every manly feature, and the handsome, dark eyes flashed with a light of gladness that spoke plainly of his altered life.

Margery was soon back, she had put on her sables, a round cap of the same rich fur surmounting her red-gold curls, and for once she wore no veil. She had determined to hide herself no longer. She had nothing to fear; it was she who had been wronged and insulted. Pride lent her strength, and she felt that her eyes could meet Vane's clearly and coldly now, even though her heart still ached with the pain Stuart Croobie had caused.

The earl settled her comfortably in the carriage, and then stepped in himself.

"This weather is terrible," he said as they started. "Once this law business is settled, Margery, I think I shall take you to a warmer climate, to see the sunshine and breathe the scent of flowers."

"There is one pilgrimage I must make before we do that," returned Margery, in a low voice. "I cannot rest till I have visited Enid's grave."

The earl raised his little black-gloved hand to his lips. "You speak only of my heart's thoughts, my own; but I hesitated to take you to the manor in this wet, gloomy weather. I thought the sunshine would—"

"Sunshine is beautiful; but the manor is home, and is near her."

Margery smiled faintly; she was compelled to speak these words, for she felt almost overpowered by this tender devotion, and suffered miserably as she thought how poorly she could return it. Henceforth it mattered little to her where she lived; but, if her choice of the manor brought him pleasure, she was glad.

"Home!" repeated Lord Court, tenderly. "Ah, Margery, you cannot know what a wealth of happiness there is in that word! Thank you, dear, for uttering it. Yes, we will go home."

They were silent after this till they reached a quiet street in an unfashionable quarter, and presently the earl handed Margery into the doorway of a tall, gloomy-looking house.

"Gerant always stays here," he said, as they went upstairs. "Will you remain here, my dearest, till I see if he is ready to receive you?"

Margery smiled, and waited in a room that looked cozy and picturesque in the fireglow. The walls were hung with weapons of all nations; a heterogeneous mass of quaint, curious things were grouped in corners; carved and painted gourds were placed here and there, with ivory ornaments and rare bits of china. It represented a strange contrast to the dull, ordinary exterior of the house, and Margery found much to attract her till her husband returned.

"Now, my darling, come with me. Loose that heavy cloak, or you will be too warm; and, if the old man asks you to sing, will you gratify him?"

"With all my heart."

Lord Court led his wife across a passage, and pushed open a door hung with curtains. The room that she entered was almost dark, but Margery saw a low, flat couch pulled near the fire, with a gray head resting on the pillow. She could not see the invalid's face properly, but a faint something in the dark eyes struck her as familiar.

"I have brought my wife to see you, as I promised, Gerant," said the earl, cheerfully, leading Margery to the couch.

"It is kind of you to come, Lady Court," the sick man answered, in a faint, weak voice. "I have known your husband a long, long time—years, eh, Court?"

Where had Margery heard that voice before? It sounded familiar, faint and husky as it was.

"I am very glad to come," she responded, simply, and took the chair the servant pushed forward.

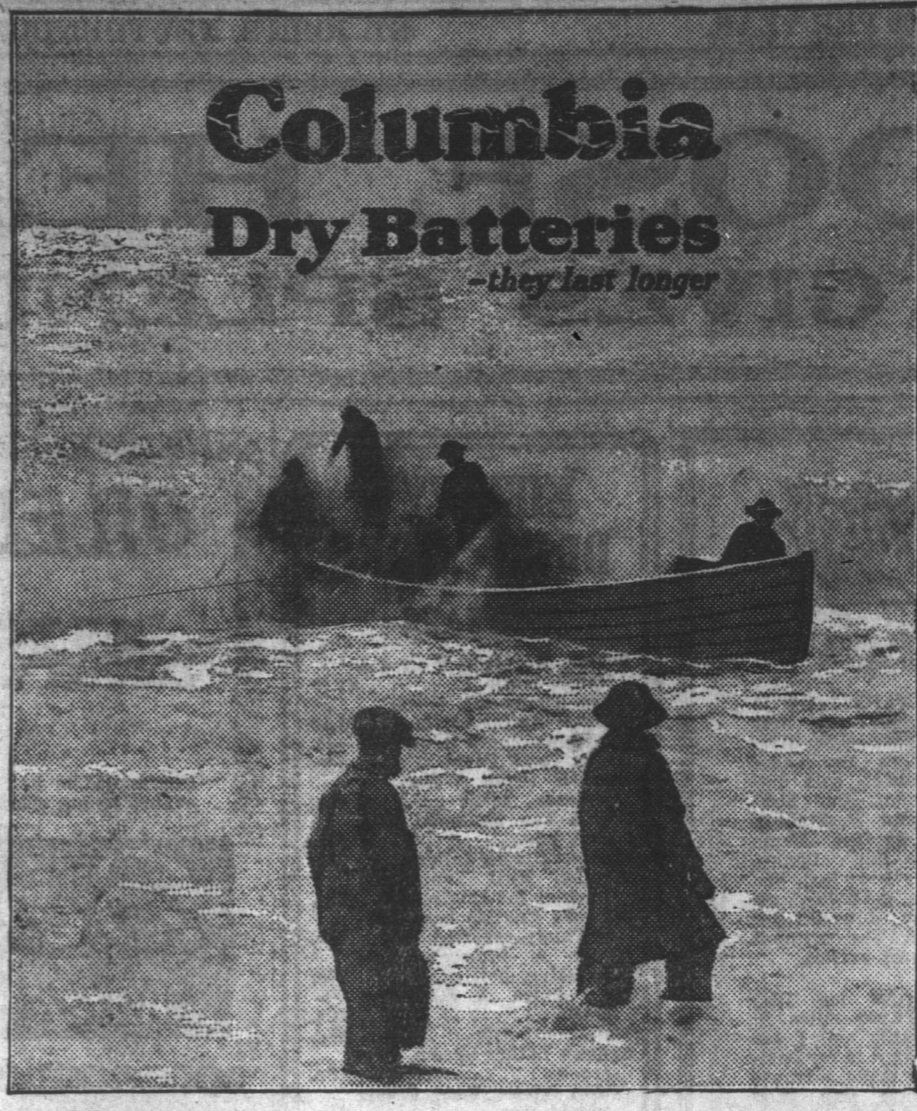
"And Margery will sing for you, if you like."

"Margery!" whispered the sick man, and then he tried to raise his head from the pillow. "Margery!" he repeated.

"I think Sir Douglas is ill," said Margery, rather frightened, turning to the servant.

"It is weakness, my lady," returned the man. "Let me raise him a little," said the earl. "I think he wants to speak." In a lower tone he added to the servant: "He's much weaker than he was this morning; what is it?"

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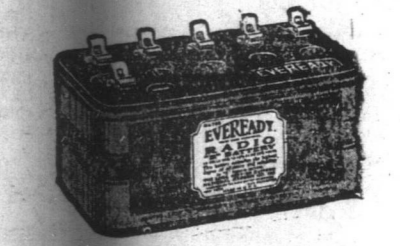
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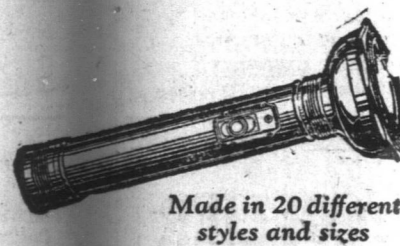
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SIDE TALKS.

By Ruth Cameron.

WOMEN, THE THING-WANTERS.

How many more things women want than men? Women are the great Thing-wanters of the world.

Men want a few things for themselves, and beyond that they want the distinction of giving their women folks more of the things that they want than the man next door can give his. But for themselves they want comparatively few things.

Women Always Want a Million Things. If you, my Feminine Readers, doubt that, consider your difficulties when you have to find out what to give your man for Christmas or for his birthday.

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A new pun for your ben would delight you. Would it delight your husband? Table linen you would adore for a gift, he is going to eat off the table as often as you, but imagine his face if you gave him a dozen napkins!

"Gifts For Men."

A window of a department store in which before Christmas were displayed suggestions for gifts for men brought this difference between the sexes most vividly to my mind. There were a dozen other windows in the shop crowded with every kind of dainty and alluring thing—I imagine that practically every article in those windows was something that some woman craved.—But the single window which was devoted exclusively to gifts for men—how scantily it was set forth! Just the same old things, shirts, ties, fancy stockings, cuff links, belts with an initial buckle, pipes and pipe racks, smoking stands, silver cigarette and match cases, silver flasks.

Women are unquestionably the Thing-Wanters of the world. Men want money more because it stands for power, for success, and for security; women want it for the things it will buy.

What Could He Do With Money?

In one of Dorothy Canfield's novels the hero who has been working for the woman he loves is set adrift in the world by a broken engagement and suddenly he wonders what he is working so hard for now. "The point was he realized that Martha had, all women had, some definite use to make of money. It bought things they wanted and thought important—suburban houses, and mahogany twin beds, and what not. The only use he could think of for it was to use it over and over again to make more money. And then what? It didn't seem much of a life to do that over and over."

Doubtless it is for some good use that our sex is fitted with this craving for things. Probably it is part of the sex instinct and the home-making instinct on which our civilization is founded. . . . But then even the good instinct can be carried too far. I think most of us could curb our thing-wanting instinct somewhat with ad-

vantage both to our immediate family and to the whole economic structure.

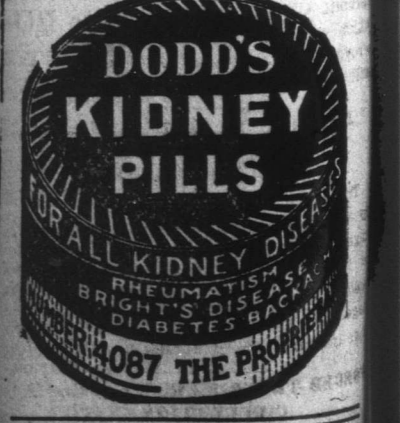
Smythe Plunged Into the Seine

Canadian Canoeist's Feast Applauded By Large Crowd.

PARIS—George Smythe, a Canadian canoeist, bearing his canoe with him in his descent, jumped off the bridge of the Invalides into the Seine to-day, and although the craft shipped considerable water, he succeeded in hauling it out, righting it, and paddling it to the shore to the accompaniment of cheers from a big throng.

The Seine was high from continuous rains, making the distance from the level of the bridge to the water about thirty feet, but the swift tide accentuated the difficulty of the feat. Smythe was forced to swim alongside his canoe for nearly six hundred yards in freezing weather before he succeeded in emptying it.

Smythe is a former flight lieutenant of the Canadian army. He came from Sydney, N.S., to New York in 1924 and in November of last year he crossed the English Channel in the same canoe. He is now on his way to Rome on an all-water route, the canal, the River Rhine and the Mediterranean.



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