

## The Twilight Hour

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Patrick Kirk

OVER THE Bow Valley ooded the infinite tranquillity of the sunset hour. The west was a calm, stilly sea of many tinted gold, pierced here and there by the snow-capped Rockies and bordered by towers and battlements of pearl-grey and smoky-purple clouds.

On the point of a hill overlooking the valley, Fraser McCartney and Jeanette Clark had reined in their horses, and were drinking in the placid beauty of the scene.

"What a picture!" said the girl. "If I could only paint those cloud effects and that slumbrous haze! I've got oceans of sketches to take with me to New York, but I'm longing every minute to pay excess baggage on another one."

"I wish you wouldn't go tomorrow," said the man, with a yearning note in his voice. "If you would stay, I'm sure you would soon grow as enthusiastic about Alberta as I am."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't. You were brought up on the optimistic ozone of the country. It makes the little cow town of Calgary seem like a metropolis, and the vast stretches of lonely prairie a populous plain. Your years in Toronto do not seem to have cured you of what we used to call your 'virulent Westernism.'"

"You're the condensed essence of cynicism," said young McCartney.

Jeanette was young enough to enjoy being thought cynical, soured and disenchanted. She knew there was no Santa Claus, and was delighted at her fiancé's perception of her wisdom. But not for worlds would she have acknowledged feeling flattered.

"What is that?" she asked, as they started their horses towards the river in the distance. "Something druggists keep in a bottle?"

"Imagine a druggist, or anyone else, keeping you bottled up. You'd effervesce," laughed Fraser.

The "condensed essence" was offended. She preferred being thought cynical, and urged her horse along the trail at a pace that precluded conversation.

Three years before, in the dawn of the twentieth century, Fraser McCartney had gone to Toronto to study law. There he had met and wooed Jeanette Clark, the charming and artistic daughter of one of his college professors. An engagement followed. Before the betrothal was announced came the sudden shock of the death of Fraser's father, a rancher in Southern Alberta. The young man was called home and the burden of managing the ranch fell on his shoulders. His brothers, Jack and Duncan, aged ten and twelve respectively, were too young to be of much help to their mother. Mrs. McCartney, a slender, delicate woman whose years of lonely, pioneer life had robbed her of strength and broken her courage, clung with all the remaining strength of her nature to her stalwart, chivalrous son. Fraser had a short, sharp struggle with himself and then he uncomplainingly took up the burden of his life.

Jeanette, who had been building up air castles in which a brilliant young lawyer and his artist wife held high festival, felt that her position as the wife of an Alberta rancher would be vastly different from what she had planned. Her visit to the McCartney home had dispelled her last illusions. Her artist's soul gloried in the wide sweep of the horizon, in the sunset effects, and the golden tints of the ripening grain, but her woman's instincts rebelled against the lack of luxury to which she had been accustomed, and what she termed the loneliness and emptiness of the lives of the prairie women. Jeanette decided that she could not marry Fraser for some time, and determined to have a year or two of study at some art centre before she settled down to married life in the country.

As the two riders turned a sharp bend in the trail by the river bank, they came suddenly alongside of a wagon piled high with settler's effects. In the shade of some poplar trees a thin, worn-out looking woman was trying to hush a baby to sleep, while the man, a home-

steadier on the way to his distant quarter-section, was struggling to more securely rope some of his household belongings to the wagon.

Fraser, with a murmured "Excuse me" to Jeanette, jumped from his brown gelding and went to the man's assistance. When their task was completed the two men talked a few moments of the possibilities of wheat growing in Southern Alberta, a subject in which Fraser was deeply interested. The girl, meanwhile, made friends with the baby. Then the homeseekers climbed again to their wagon and the riders remounted. At that moment came the warning toot of an automobile horn, and for a few moments Jean and Fraser were busy quieting their horses.

The automobile was one of the first to be brought to Alberta and was the property of a prominent hotel man in a near-by town. It was the first motor car that the homeseekers had seen and they stared in astonishment at the passing wonder.

It was to the settler's wife that Jeanette directed her companion's attention. There in the purple twilight, gaz-

ing with weary eyes at the rapidly disappearing automobile, she seemed to the romantic girl to embody the spirit of the pioneer women — a tired, plodding womankind — gazing with wistful eyes at the triumphant progress of the outside world.

As the settler relaxed his tense grip on the reins and his horses started along the trail, Jeanette turned impetuously to her lover.

"Can't you see, Fraser," she said passionately, "I want to belong to the automobile class and not to that of the prairie schooner."

Perhaps it was the glamor of the deepening twilight — it may have been the witchery of the girl by his side — but practical Fraser McCartney waxed almost poetic. "Remember, dear, when you weary of the rush and the glare, when the dust gets in your eyes and the choking in your throat, come back and we'll take a quiet journey in our prairie schooner up the Bow Valley."

### PART II

It was the twilight hour of a summer's day two years later. Time had made little change in the Bow Valley. The snow-capped Rockies raised their heads like sentinels guarding the treasure in their foot-hills. The sunset was as beautiful as on the evening of the last day Jeanette Clark had ridden down the

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