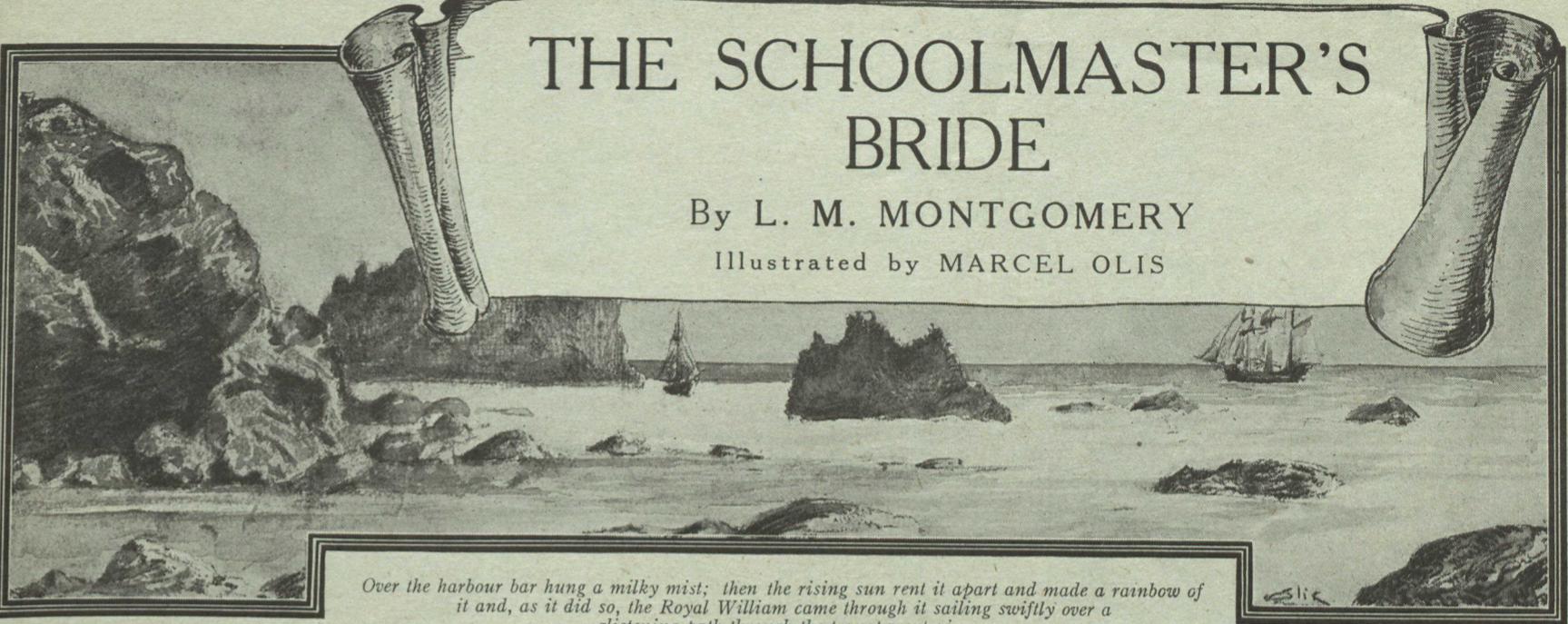


# THE SCHOOLMASTER'S BRIDE

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Illustrated by MARCEL OLIS



Over the harbour bar hung a milky mist; then the rising sun rent it apart and made a rainbow of it and, as it did so, the Royal William came through it sailing swiftly over a glistening path through the transparent air.

I HAVE been thinking to-night of the schoolmaster's bride. A man must die to forget her, or the schoolmaster either, for that matter. They were the two people who made the deepest impression on my life. Now, in my late evening, I think of them a great deal, recalling for my own delight their words and looks and loveliness. They died some twenty years ago, neither of them living to be very old, which I think part of their good fortune. But to me they and their love story are of yesterday; and, in my fireside musings, while my grandchildren romp around me, little recking what is going on in grandfather's old white head, I like to relive that summer in Lindsay when the schoolmaster waited for his bride, and built a home for her.

John Selwyn came to teach school in Lindsay when I was a boy of sixteen. He was an Englishman, but very different from the usual run of derelicts who came from the Old Country to teach school in Prince Edward Island in those days. They had brains, and knew their trade when sober—else it had been, God help the poor scholars! But they were not like John Selwyn. He was young and stalwart and handsome. I remember him as he was when he spent that first fortnight in my father's house; for, as was the custom then, he "boarded around" and my father, Alexander Kennedy, was Secretary of the Board of Trustees. He was very tall, with gray eyes that turned black in excitement, or with deep feeling; women thought his mouth very beautiful, but I liked it for its strength and tenderness and humour. He was full of courage and pity and noble enthusiasms. He was my senior by eight years, but from the first I loved him as David loved Jonathan. My soul was knit to his. I owe more to John Selwyn than to any other human creature. I was too old to be spared to school, save for a few weeks in winter; but I was his pupil, none more earnest and eager. We read and walked and talked together. He quoted poetry for me which I had never heard, Byron and Scott and Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, those giants of old time; even kindly and tender Mrs. Hemans, for in those days a man was not ashamed to quote Mrs. Hemans. He told me tales of history and romance and chivalry. Never shall I forget the delight with which I listened to those old legends on moonlit evenings by the silver sea. He filled my mind and soul with his own aspirations and ideals, as a full vessel might pour of its fullness into an empty one. He made me; he was more my father than the dour, black-browed, sternly-upright but cold man to whom I owed mere existence. Wherefore I loved him with a varied love, son and comrade and pupil, all in one. But this is not my story; and I only tell of what he did for me and was to me that you, who read of him, may understand what manner of man he was.

One spring evening I met him by the pond, near the little log school-house. It was a clear, apple-green night. There was a milk-white mist on the edge of the sea with a young moon kissing it. The ceaseless voice of many waters came up from the tawny shore. The chill and freakish wind of sunset was shrilling in the old year's dry grasses on the dunes between the pond and the Gulf; there was an emerald mist on the willows of the creek.

And there was a light on John Selwyn's face and a flash in his eyes that I had not seen before.

"I've been up on the hill, looking at the sunset through the beeches, Andrew," he said. "Come into the school-house and sit with me awhile. I have something to tell you."

We went in. The schoolmaster lighted a candle and stirred up the logs in the fireplace. They were still glowing, for the day had been cold and he had stayed, after school let out to study. He gazed so long into the fire, smiling, that I thought he had forgotten what he meant to tell me. But at length he looked into my eyes.

"I've a sweetheart back home, lad," he said.

I had thought he must have, for he had never taken any notice of even our prettiest Lindsay lasses, and they would have been so willing that he should, poor girls! "Her name is Persis Gray," he went on, "and she is coming out to me. Think of that, Andrew."

I was glad for his sake and said so. For my own, I was not so glad. I was afraid she might come between us.

"Thank you, Andrew. I wanted you to be the first to

know. When you see her you will realize what a fortunate man I am."

"She is very beautiful, I suppose?" I said.

"Beautiful?" He laughed. "Don't start me on that subject, Andrew, or you'll think I'm daft. If a diamond and a ruby could be fused into one the result might symbolize her. She would have come out with me if it had not been for her old uncle. He was an invalid and had cared for her when her parents died, and she felt she could not leave him. I thought she was right, though I loved him as little as he loved me. It was a hard parting, and it has been a hard waiting. But her uncle is dead and she is free. Her friends do not want her to come, but she is coming in spite of them. Think of the courage of her—and the trust! God make me worthy of it, Andrew. Some day I hope you'll love a woman as I love Persis.

It's the greatest blessing a man can have. Before I met her my life was very hungry. Now it is nourished to the full by her love. And she is coming to me!"

His happiness was so great that I warmed to it and rejoiced with him.

"When do you expect her?" I asked.

"She sails on the *Royal William* late in June, so she should be here by mid-July. God grant her a fair passage. I must set Carpenter Johnson to building me a home for her. Her letter came to-day. I knew before I opened it that it held good news. I saw her a few nights ago."

"You saw her?" I asked stupidly.

He looked at me queerly.

"Ay, lad. I saw her. You don't understand, I've never told you. But I have a gift, lad, a gift—or a curse. Who knows? My poor great-great-grandmother, Mercy Selwyn, must have found it a curse. She had it, and they burned her for a witch because of it, Andrew—burned her on the hill behind the town back home."

"What is the gift?" I asked wonderingly.

"Certain weird seizures come upon me at long intervals," he answered slowly. "The scientists call them trances, I

believe, but they understand them as little as the rabble that burned my ancestress. As a child I had them and my poor mother worried greatly over it. As I grew older I ceased to talk of them for I saw that people looked queerly at me, though they could not haul me to the stake because of them. I see things in them, lad—things that are happening—things that will happen. Sometimes they have been a comfort to me—sometimes a horror. I have not had one since I came to Lindsay until four nights ago. I was sitting here, so, gazing at the dying fire. It faded from before my eyes, and in its stead I saw an old room I know well in England. Persis was there, gazing at me with tears in her eyes; but behind the tears I saw a radiance and a joy. The vision passed quickly, but I knew it foretold good news of my love."

"You dreamed it," I said uncomfortably. Somehow, I did not like to believe in his gift. It seemed to set him apart from common humanity in a rather uncanny fashion. Had I lived two hundred years sooner I daresay I would have been as bitter a persecutor of poor Mercy Selwyn as any.

He smiled.

"No, I did not dream it. But we shall not talk of this again. You will not be so much my friend if you think much of it. No, don't protest, lad. I understand, and I do not blame you. There are times when I scarce feel friendly to myself because of it. Such a power has a bit of divinity in it, whether of a good or an evil divinity, who shall say? And we mortals all shrink from a too close contact with god or devil."

I did not quite understand him, but I willingly let the subject drop.

Soon all the Lindsay people knew that the schoolmaster's bride was coming, and all were glad because they loved him. Every one sympathised with him in the building of the new home which went on apace. He chose a site for it not far from the school-house, within sound of the rhythmic thunder of the sea. The old house, for it is an old house now, is still there, looking seaward through its small windows. But no one (Continued on page 43)



All the pain and joy of past generations had bequeathed to her a legacy of love and loyalty, and it shone in those wonderful eyes of hers and lighted her face like a rosy lamp shining through alabaster.