

"What a rotten little hole this is," said Tony savagely. "The women are all cats!"

"I suppose you know that the—ah—cats have hung your scalp at her belt," returned Mrs. Shane, mockingly. "Does she say 'yes' or 'no'?"



THE MAGPIE'S NEST

By ISABEL PATERSON

Illustrated by MARY ESSEX

New Readers Begin Here

DREAMY, and living much in the dreams she fashioned from the old romances she read, Hope Fielding lived in a world unreal, but real to her.

To her father's lonely ranch in Alberta came three strangers, talking of the railroad that was coming through; one of these, Conroy Edgerton, who had a daughter about Hope's age, sent her a box of chocolates. When the railroad did come, Mr. Fielding, who was a path-maker and not a money-maker, moved back farther north.

Hope was ambitious and needed money to pay her way through the Normal School. She went to the city and engaged as housemaid in a hotel where Evan Hardy—one of the men—was boarding. Here Conroy Edgerton came and she recognized him instantly. He was interested and they met a few times. Jim Sanderson—a boarder—had been pursuing Hope for months and finding her alone made himself so objectionable that she knocked him down with the butt of a revolver. Then she left the hotel and went home.

Hope taught school and found life flat and unprofitable; she made friends with Mary Dark and Mrs. Patton, and with Allen Kirby, who happened to be Edgerton's chauffeur. He took her motoring until Edgerton came—then Edgerton took her. Edgerton offered to send her to college but Hope refused. Ned Angell took her to the Tennis Club dance, where she met Tony Yorke. She also saw Jim Sanderson, but kept her self-possession and appeared not to recognize him.

Hope and Mary Dark took rooms together, and presently Hope became engaged to Tony, but the engagement was not announced. Mr. Edgerton's daughter, Emily, came to visit her father and after a dinner at Mrs. Shane's paid her duty call, meeting Tony again.

CHAPTER XI.

AVIN fizz, quick, Tony," said Mrs. Shane, yawning and stretching out a trim pair of ankles. "She's a darling child—but ten minutes more and I'd have expired. *Dio mio*, to think that ten years ago I was just like her!"

"The grace of God has stretched a long way in ten years," said Tony cryptically, going to the sideboard. She smiled vaguely, losing the allusion. When she smiled, Cora Shane was singularly sweet. The ten years seemed to melt into the dimple at the corner of her red mouth; the curve of her cheek was

flawless; even her bulk—she was a large woman—only gave her an infantile softness. And her lovely, lucent, sapphire eyes seemed to gather a tender light. One forgot that she had an ugly nose and no waistline.

"Oh, yes," she assented, musing. "Really, really, I was the *nicest* child—By the way, any progress?"

"Nothing new," said Tony. "Didn't friend husband report?"

"Yes, but you saw Edgerton afterward. Pull hard, Tony. It means Europe for me. I don't want to wait three years, as I must if this falls through. Besides, I'd like to see you win."

"It's good to have a friend," said Tony, and, as she took the foaming glass, kissed her wrist. It was only his way; she knew it—but she liked it.

"How I'll hate to give you up, Tony," she sighed.

"Well! Is Lent approaching?"

"Oh, don't be stupid. I was just thinking ahead. This will cut your rope; you'll go away too, or marry. High time you did, and stop philandering. Seen Miss Fielding lately?"

She prided herself on her bluntness. And she did not miss the quick, calculating look he flashed at her.

"Oh, twice a day or so," he assured her jestingly.

"Rather *apropos des bottles*, aren't you? You do get the weirdest hunches, Cora."

"I thought you might have, with the Edgertons," pursued Mrs. Shane coolly. "What do you make of that, anyway?"

"Of what?"

She shrugged. "Oh, you know what people are saying. A man in his position, too! Men are all fools."

"Guilty in general," said Tony. He was gazing at a pattern of the wall-paper. "But do be more explicit. Who's been doing what?"

"Really, how should I know? Eleanor Travers was here yesterday, and was absolutely up a tree about the invitations for their dance next week—you're going, of course. Some one has said something. Wanted to know if she should ask Miss Fielding. She has to ask the Edgertons, and Mary Dark, and Lisbeth Patton. Either way, she's afraid of committing a *betise*. I told her I'd ask the devil if I wanted. But I only shocked her." She laughed.

"But what did she hear?" asked Tony gravely.

"I tell you I don't know. Jim Sanderson has some story; says he used to know her—"

"Jim?" said Tony, darkening. "Did he tell you so?"

"No. I had it all second, third, fourth hand. You ask him. And she goes out in Edgerton's car."

"What a rotten little hole this is," said Tony savagely, because she did go out in Edgerton's car. Had he not seen her once? "She goes out with Miss Dark sometimes. In the motor, I mean. And she's known him for years. There's a clever girl, that Miss Dark. I believe she could almost swing this deal for us. The women here are all cats—saving your presence, ma'am." He wanted to turn it off lightly. And he wanted to hear more, if more there were.

"Oh, well, I have nothing against her," conceded Mrs. Shane handsomely. "She seems a queer little waif; I've never heard her say a word but yes and no. Ned Angell led us to expect an intellectual prodigy. And of course you know the—ah—cats have hung your scalp at her belt. Does she say yes or no?"

"Both, as you observed," returned Tony promptly, his surface unruffled. "Damn the cats!" So he sold her, with that kiss on Mrs. Shane's wrist ten minutes before. "She is clever, really; sketches the quaintest things."

"Why couldn't she turn the trick for you," asked Mrs. Shane amiably, "if Mary Dark won't? And then there's still another chance."

"Show it to me," said Tony.

"I said it was time you married. There's Emily. What more could you ask?" She studied him covertly.

"Cora, you will absolutely drive me to a blush," said Tony equably. He was inwardly conscious of a slight exasperation, a feeling that Cora was capable of forgetting good taste. "I could ask no more, and should get a great deal less. Why are you so set on springing the fatal trap on me? What have I done to you?"

"Stolen my young heart," said Cora, with a ringing laugh. "Never mind; at my age it isn't serious. But if you had sat out three dances with me the first time I saw you, heaven knows—"

He reddened.

She said no more. But, after he had gone, she was distinctly irritable, pondered over her dinner, and snubbed her husband until he took himself off to the club. And her own idle suggestion took root in her mind. Emily Edgerton—why not? Could he be such a fool as to be thinking seriously of Hope Fielding? A little outsider! That was her grievance, crystallised. Those who credited the report that she had a deeper right than mere friendship over Tony forgot how exquisitely selfish

(Continued on page 36)