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"Edmund," she asked, "why didn't you marry? Was it because of me?"

Sebright smiled.

"One likes to think it," he said, "but, honestly, it wasn't that."

Her face cleared.

"I've always had you a little on my conscience," she said with half a smile.

"No need," said he. "Sometimes I've worked it out. I took three years to recover, and then—I simply hadn't time, and a second shot's not so easy as the first."

"Why don't you marry now?"

"Who would have me?"

"Who wouldn't?" said she.

"I know," he answered, "I've met 'em."

All sorts of inappropriate people—all the old maids in London, for that matter."

"You always saw the humorous side of things, Edmund."

"It saves one from dwelling on the other."

The colonel looked at her even more whimsically.

"This is good enough; and they are going to give me a brigade—I've often thought of seeing you again," he pursued,

"and I knew we would be good friends. One likes to meet one's youth again. But that first thing was pretty impossible. You were eighteen and had just left school. I was twenty-one and had just got my commission—and very little else. Your people were quite right to say 'No' and cut off everything. I've often given 'em credit for it—reluctantly," he added with a smile, "from their point of view."

real, and reality's the only wear. That's where I envy you, really. Women do score there. And to have 'em when you're young—that must be pretty ripping."

"But you've got other things," she ventured.

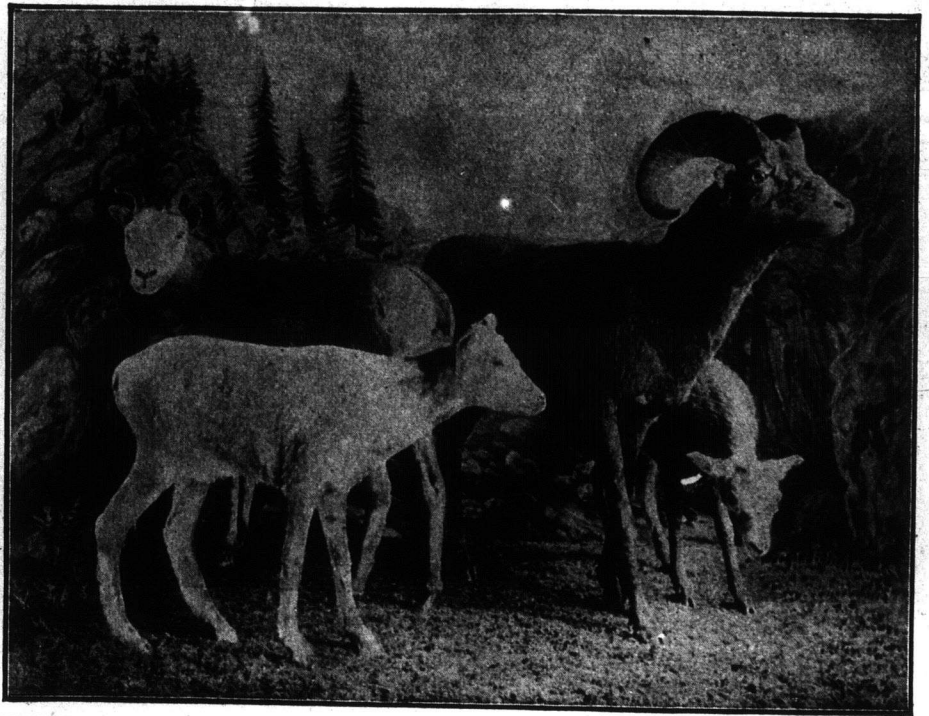
"I've been successful, made a career, eh?" and he smiled again. "One must have something, Olive!" he said laughing. "I couldn't have what I wanted, so I've had this instead. It's not much fun, really—except for the old maids. They enjoy it like anything."

"But the things you've done in Burmah and on the frontier?"

"That's nothing. Do you know, Olive, I've never cared. That's the whole secret. The married men were thinking how to win and how to save their skins, and I was only thinking how to win. I rather had the pull of them."

The room was all but dark. The firelight showed him sitting there, almost in silhouette, with cheek and chin out-blotted by a hand.

"I've done what people call 'reckless' things," he pursued, "done them alone, mostly. There was that nine days' ride with Arnold's message asking for help. It got me my first step. There was nothing much about it in the papers. There never is, except by a fluke, or when you've done something showy like this last thing. Reckless, was I? All I felt was the freedom of those days and nights and the goodness of being alone. Sometimes I heard the pop of a rifle and the



Rocky Mountain Sheep

She smiled, too, remembering—remembering.

"It was pretty mad," said he; "all those garden-parties at Halesworth, and my getting into the box-hedge, because of the governess, after I had been forbidden the house—what a queer good-bye we whispered! Were you ever caught? And letting the pony down when I was trying to make a good impression on your mother—pitched her out, didn't I? Hardly the right sort of impression that was!"

And Olive still smiled, remembering—remembering. Jack Golding had done none of these foolish, ardent things, but had come in at the front door like other people.

"And the five bob I got for the poem about you? And King who was my bosom friend in those days? Such an honest ruffian!"

"What's become of King?" she asked, laughing.

"He lives in America and is hen-pecked."

"And you're not even that!"

They both remembered a hundred foolish things that were their youth.

"And Unica who befriended us—I've forgotten her real name—and Mrs. Perch who told our fortunes—what's become of them?"

Unica and Mrs. Perch had vanished.

"I've been pretty constant," he said, reading her thoughts. "It's easy to be constant out there, one meets so few women—unless one particularly wants to. I haven't wanted to very much," said he.

"And now I'm glad to think you've got the children as well. That's jolly nice—better than all our memories. Kids are

queer siph of a bullet, and, just for the fun of the thing, I answered 'em with my Colt. And sometimes men gave chase; and then I rode away. It was like a game, and those others were my playfellows. And deep down in my heart—for we're all of us two people—I was saying, 'I can't very well shoot myself, can I?' There was the fellow who rode laughing, and the fellow saying that."

The colonel paused. Olive's drawing room head vanished, and he was again on a good horse with Arnold's message next his heart, and the wilderness round about him.

"I never knew why I volunteered for that until to-day. I thought it was a thousand to one against me, but it wasn't. I've been like that for years, and never quite understood—And now, suppose you give me a cup of tea?" he ended.

He turned on the lights and rang the bell for her.

Behind the man with the tray entered a slim, tall girl, fair, light-stepping, and clear-cut as a gem.

She had not seen Sebright, but he had seen her.

This must be Olive's "big girl," the one that had left school yesterday—to him it was a vision restored from twenty years ago. He stared at her, literally stared at her. Olive had been like that, as fair, as exquisite, as graceful.

"I've put my hair up, mother," she said; "what do you think of it?" and she turned round.

Then she discovered the colonel, and would have fled.

"Lucy, this is Sir Edmund Sebright, a very dear old friend of mine."

Mrs. Golding watched them and felt