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The Revolt From Four Walls

By C. COURTENAY SAVAGE.

CHAPTER I.

Madeline Wardell was startled to the point of dropping her sewing when her husband entered the room. Her surprise at seeing him was quite justified. It was only half past two on a week-day afternoon.

"I didn't hear you come in," she exclaimed, half angrily. "What's the matter? Are you sick?"

He shook his head to indicate that he was not ill.

"Has the office shut down?" This time she positively snapped her question, but she could not hide her anxious tone.

"No—the office is still going on—," he said hesitatingly. Then with deliberation: "I've quit, that's all."

She swung round in her chair, and picking up her sewing for a minute or two she busied herself with her stitching. Wardell stood opposite her, watching the flying needle and apparently thinking of nothing else.

"Well," she said finally, without looking up, "what do you mean, you quit? Have you a new job or did somebody hand you a million dollars? Don't forget that rent day comes the first of the month—and I'm not going to hand out one cent of the money I've saved. I've done without things—and saved, and—"

"Nobody has asked you for anything—no one ever has," Guy Wardell said sharply. "I've provided for you—and well. I'll still do so." He turned on his heel and went quickly from the room.

Madeline Wardell—Mad, as most people who knew her intimately called her—went on with her sewing. She was putting the buttons on a new dress, and as she had decided that,

unless she wore it, she could not go to the card party that evening, it was a case of hurry. Her thoughts kept pace with the needle. Had Guy suddenly gone crazy? Dear knows she had often thought him odd—but this was the limit—walking home and saying that he had quit his job. Had he done it just to be mean to her? An unhappy crisis in their lives had made her believe that the man she had married was quite capable of being mean to her. For months her mind had been on the defensive, ready to find and exult over any flaw that showed on Guy's character.

"If he won't support me, I'll go right home to my people," she thought—and the idea pleased her. She even began to mentally tabulate what she would take with her in the way of clothing. She was still tabulating when her husband returned to the room.

"Mad," he said quickly. "Mad—don't you feel different these days? Different towards me—different towards the whole world? Different towards yourself?"

"How could I help but feel different towards you, you act so crazy?"

"It's the spirit of the times. We're only mirroring in our lives what is happening everywhere. The unrest is general."

She looked up at him—puzzled.

"Say, are you crazy?"

"No, only in revolt."

"Oh! Like the Bolsheviks?"

"Not exactly," he laughed. "Though I dare say that they have been more or less responsible. You see, Mad, I've been thinking about this all winter—about how I hated to go on with the grind—the getting up in the morning, getting dressed in the same set of clothes, catching the same interurban for Warren's Falls every week-day morning, sitting in the same chair at the same desk, making out bills for the same goods to the same people. Then coming home to the—"

"To the same home and the same wife?"

"Possibly—though I don't intend to change my wife. The revolt hasn't gone quite so far as that. What are we getting out of life? My salary's been raised but what's sixty a week? It doesn't buy much and the monotony is getting the very life and soul of me. Nine hours a day—six days in the week. Sundays I'm too lazy to get out of the house into the open fields. That isn't what we are made for. The earth—the sky—the living things—they're natural, not office walls."

"But we've got to eat and that means work."

"Yes—work. It isn't work that men mind. It's plugging away day after day at a work they don't like because it isn't natural. When I went into town this morning, I looked out of the window and saw the men in the fields. There are going to be some good gardens," he went on almost wistfully, "even if the men are on strike. When I saw some of the patches the men had spaded, I got to thinking it over. It seems to me that those gardens are the greatest reason why the strikers aren't in any hurry to get back to the mills. It's because they're working out of doors, under the sky, instead of in the roar of the machines. When I went out to lunch, I walked down to the park. You know, they're having a community garden there—and the men were all helping."

"Do you really think you'd like to work in the fields?" Mad was not complaining now. She was questioning—she was thinking very rapidly.

"When I got back from lunch the place was deserted." Wardell ignored his wife's question. "There wasn't a thing to do—there hasn't been any thing to do for two weeks. The strike has settled that. So I sat there, looking out in the sunshine—and thinking—thinking—of what it must be like up at the Point."

The Point was a long arm of land that stretched itself into the north-east coast of Georgian Bay. There the earliest Wardells had settled and there Guy still held ownership to some thirty or forty acres of land and a more or less dilapidated house, half stone, half timber. They both loved the old farm—it was their place of vacation.

"It must be spring up there now," continued Guy wistfully, "and my cousin, John Baker, told me last year that if the small fruit was cared for, if the apple trees were looked after, that the old place ought to make a good financial return."

He looked keenly at his wife, but she gave no sign.

And the more I've thought of it, the stronger my sense of revolt against this life grew. Finally to-day I knew that I couldn't stand it any longer. I knew that I couldn't stay in four walls—I don't care if it will hurt the business at the mill—I don't care if President McTee gets mad—I don't care for anything. I've thrown over

all the old life, and I'm going up to the Point and start to live. We've not lived."

For several seconds Mad did not answer.

"I wonder," she said slowly.

"Wonder what?" he questioned sharply.

"About starting life over again. It sounds so easy—but law and order—"

"I'm not talking about law and order. I'm not upsetting law and order."

"Yes, you are—upsetting the order of a big business by walking out. I don't know whether it's right or wrong—but do you want me to come to the Point with you?"

"Want you? Well, I hardly dared to think that you—," he paused, laughing.

"In fact, I'd thought of how you'd probably go home to your people. I didn't think that you'd—at least, I feared—"

"That I'd come with you?" she finished his sentence. "Well—I will. I'll be a change from this life. You see, I'm in revolt with you."

A week after Guy's sensational revolt from office work, the Wardells were driving from the little station, where the train had left them, along the muddy spring road. In almost every field they passed men were busy plowing and harrowing, while here and

there a more venturesome man was planting. Every apple tree was bright with blossoms. An occasional cherry tree still held bloom. Along the hedges before the homes of the farmers were bushes of brilliant lilacs.

Birds of every description hurried with their nest-making, and here and there a squirrel or chipmunk, venturesome after the long winter's sleep, sat inquiringly on the stone wall and watched them in their mucky progress. The house was in more than fair condition and the ground was rich. Guy had written his cousin, John Baker, a prosperous young farmer, asking to have his best field plowed and harrowed and this he knew had been done. It was planting could start at once. The not from this four or five acres of land that they expected to make their expenses but from the fruit which Guy knew would bring a good price at the village cannery. Years before, when Guy had been a boy in his middle teens there had been wonderful strawberry beds, hedges of black and red raspberries and small fruit trees, plums, pears, quinces, to say nothing of the orderly rows of apples of every variety. Now there was mostly underbrush, though the past years had told them that the fruit was of a finer variety than the ordinary wild fruit.

(Continued in next issue.)



Woman's Interests

A "Merry Heart."

It seemed to me when the woman told me her reason for marrying the man she decided upon, that her judgment was lame. She was a widow, of course, or she wouldn't have reasoned it out—you never do the first time, you just blithely leap in.

"He's always cheerful, and he says the little pleasant nothings you like to have folks say to you. You may know perfectly well they don't mean a word of it, but it smooths things out, and keeps you feeling pleased with yourself. And that's half the battle, isn't it?"

To marry a man because he said "soft nothings," when you had already been married once and knew that life is real and life is earnest in double harness, seemed to me the height of folly. There were other men who would have liked to console that particular widow. They had bank accounts and steady jobs and income property and pleasure cars, while this wight was a better spender than he was an earner, and his only piece of property was mortgaged. But the widow passed over the substantial qualities of her other admirers, and married the man who was always cheerful.

That was five years ago, and I've been watching the outcome of the marriage. Reluctantly I've had to admit that she made the better choice, for the man still keeps cheerful, still supplies her with the compliments her soul craves, and still keeps her happy. They are little better off financially than they were five years ago, he is one of the many who didn't profiteer by the war. They have managed to keep up, but not to get ahead, but as they look at it, getting ahead doesn't count.

The main thing is that the home atmosphere is always sunny. And after all, isn't that the supreme proof of a successful life? What good is money if it can't buy you happiness and laughter? Why have houses and good furniture and automobiles if they just bring lines between your eyes, and add to your cares and anxieties? After all, it isn't the things which we possess that make us happy or unhappy. It is the spirit in which we approach life. And the woman who married for good cheer instead of for money showed her good judgment.

I believe it was Johnson who said, "It is worth a thousand pounds a year to be able to look on the bright side of things." No matter who said it, he could have multiplied that thousand by a thousand, and not made it too much. The power of being cheerful, not because we foolishly ignore conditions, but because we refuse to be conquered by conditions, is worth more than all the wealth in the world. And it is a power that all too few people possess.

There are two sorts of cheerfulness, and we often fail to differentiate one from another. There is the cheerfulness of young children, who know no troubles, are filled with laughter. This sort is shared by some adults who either lack the power to see conditions which do not affect them directly or seeing them, take the attitude that it is none of their affair, or that it is the will of God, and therefore should not affect their happiness. And there is the better form of cheerfulness, which seeing and knowing the misery in the world, resolutely sets itself against discouragement and keeps cheerful in spite of conditions which cannot be overcome. It is this cheerfulness which we should all cultivate as a protection against the petty irritations of every-day life. It is the only thing which can keep us from growing pessimistic, morbid, introspective, and can save us from falling into a loveless old age.

Little annoyances are bound to come to all of us. No one can count on a life free of the daily grind of little things which vex and annoy. But we can lessen the pin pricks if we take them good naturedly, if we cultivate smiles instead of frowns, laughs, instead of groans, determined to be of good cheer, no matter what comes.

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To his surprise, a very seedy-looking individual at the back of the church shuffled to his feet and remarked, with a smile, "Look here, gus'nor, I know there's a catch somewhere; but come on, who was he?"

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