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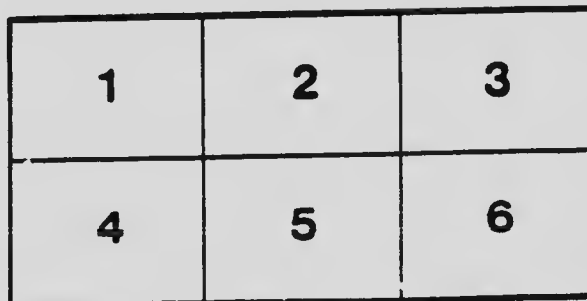
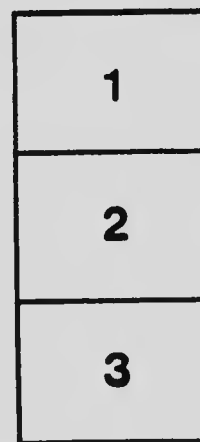
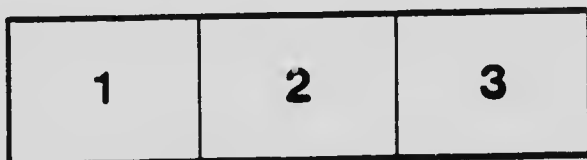
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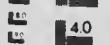
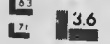
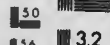
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**GRAYDON OF
THE
WINDERMERE**



EVAH M^cKOWAN

9 1/2 Wm. H. L. Co. (





GRAYDON OF THE WINDERMERE

EVAH McKOWAN



GRAYDON OF THE WINDERMERE

BY

EVAH MCKOWAN

AUTHOR OF "JANET OF KOOTENAY," ETC.

McCLELLAND AND STEWART
PUBLISHERS : : : TORONTO

POPLAR

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The writer wishes to acknowledge indebtedness to Mr. Basil G. Hamilton, of Invermere, for assistance in becoming acquainted with the valley of the Windermere.



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GRAYDON OF THE WINDERMERE



GRAYDON OF THE WINDERMERE

CHAPTER ONE

THE PARSON'S GUEST

SAMUEL GRAYDON was weary of the journey; weary of the sounds and odours and joltings of the Imperial Limited that carried him swiftly across the prairies of Saskatchewan—or no, his timetable told him that he was now in Alberta—wary of the sight of far-reaching level lands that seemed ever to swing in giant circles as the telegraph poles sped by.

A man on the opposite seat eulogised the wheat belt and painted its future in glowing colours. Many fellow passengers shared his enthusiasm, but Samuel Graydon regarded the far-off horizon with apathetic gaze. He now understood the feelings of the young settler of whom he had heard, who went into his shack every once in a while just to look at the walls.

But the hot July day was wearing on; the prairies could not last forever. It was comfort-

ing to recall that his destination was a place that would offer greater variety of scenery. To reassure himself he got the paper out and looked at it again. Yes, that was it—"Windermere Valley." A valley would provide just the rest and change he needed after days of such monotony. That Kent had located in a valley was a fact of sufficient significance to bring him again to par in his uncle's estimation.

At last they halted at the prairie city where the Crow's Nest Pass train awaited those passengers who were to cross the mountains by the more southern route. Other than a few well-dressed and jovial drummers, Samuel Graydon was the only traveller to make the change.

"towing away his handsome alligator bag—a token of the affection and esteem in which he was held by his eastern congregation—he followed the others to the smoking compartment of the car; not that he cared for smoke, either first or second hand, but for the sake of the society of someone to whom the country was not so new and confusing.

His very evident puzzlement, as he pored nearsightedly over his time-table, led a stout man near to enquire:

"Can I help you, sir? I know this country pretty well."

"I, er—I am looking for the route to Windermere."

"Windermere! You're off the track, man.

You've got to take the boat down the Columbia from Golden—main line."

"But I was told, distinctly, that I could save time by going up by stage from the Crow's Nest Line."

"H'm. Guess that's right, too," the other answered, rolling a cigar in his fingers. He had never before travelled in the smoker with a parson and he was uncertain as to whether or not he should offer his companion a cigar, or whether it would be quite the thing for him to smoke his own.

"But the other's a nice, lazy trip," he went on. "No rush, is there? You're holidaying, I take it."

"I am, yes; in a way. I was just making ready to take my usual holiday—though not nearly such an extensive one as this—when I discovered that a nephew of mine, from whom I had not heard for ten years, and whom I had thought lost—in the deeper sense of the term—is living in this Windermere Valley, and in circumstances that make it imperative that I get to him without delay."

The other regarded his cigar in sympathetic silence.

"My name is Graydon," the little man said. "Samuel Graydon."

"Glad to meet the Reverend Samuel Graydon," the other greeted, shaking his hand warmly. "My name is Gates. You were saying?"

"About my nephew—yes. I brought the lad up almost from infancy, his parents being gone, and

came to regard him as I would my own son. He was a lively and high-spirited lad and required a firm hand and much discipline. Under this discipline and our watchful care, he seemed to me to develop qualities that made it most fitting that I prepare him to follow in my footsteps. With that end in view, I sent him to college.

"You can perhaps imagine my chagrin and disappointment when, at the end of his third year, I learned, quite inadvertently, that he had turned aside from the course laid down for him, and was regarded by his professors as a most promising pupil in the science department—engineering."

"Good for him!" The stout Mr. Gates was by this time blowing smoke rings ceilingward. "Well—that is, I mean—of course you were glad to have the boy follow his bent."

"But the deceit, sir, the deceit! Allowing me to spend my money under the falsest pretences!"

"Doubtless he intended repaying you."

"Oh, he has done that. Every cent and more. He proved himself to be a Graydon as far as that went. I desired to return the surplus, but he had given me no address, except that, on his last check, there was exchange from a place called Windermere."

"He came west, then."

"It seems so; ten years ago. He found out that I was on my way to the university to take him to task, so—I did not find him. After the estrangement of all these years, you can imagine my sur-

prise and delight when, only a week ago, on the eve of my annual holiday, I noticed in our Church paper that W. K. Graydon, formerly of Toronto, had completed the term of probation in a small church in the Windermere Valley."

"An odd pursuit for an engineer."

Samuel Graydon's face was alight as he thought of his nephew.

"Such initiative!" he exclaimed. "Such pluck! Alone and unaided! You cannot wonder that I hasten to effect a reconciliation. I greatly respect his not telling me of this until he has put himself where I wanted him and thus made amends for the wrong done me. It will give me great pleasure to surprise him at his post, and to aid him with every means in my power."

The stout Mr. Gates, slouched down in his chair, studied the ceiling for some time.

"He's been a student, you say, all this time," he said.

"Yes; studying while on probation."

"H-m. I know something of a missionary student's life. It gets me how he supported himself and sent you more money than he owed you. Sure there ain't a nigger in the fence somewhere?"

"Sure of what, sir?"

"I mean—it's a most remarkable thing."

"Remarkable. That is exactly what I say to myself, every time I think of the boy. *Most* remarkable!"

CHAPTER TWO

W. K. OR K. W.?—ALL THE DIFFERENCE

THERE is something companionable and friendly and almost human about mountains; something almost human about their moods of sullenness, of laughter, of tranquillity, of storm.

Away from his usual haunts, a veteran mountaineer feels always a sense of loss and detachment. Hour by hour he misses the ever-changing beauty of the peaks. Mere friends and relatives cannot hope to take the place of companions of such closeness and constancy.

But, viewed by the Reverend Samuel Graydon in the very early hours of the next morning, the snow-tipped Rockies conveyed no message of friendliness—they oppressed him rather with a forbidding loneliness. Their very height and magnificence added to his desolation. Even touched with the roseate hues of a July dawn, they failed to move him. Instead they seemed to stand grim sentinels between him and the well ordered existence he had so recently quitted.

The only comforting thing upon which he could fix his mind was the gleaming line of rails that stretched away into the foothills—a metal ribbon

that bound him, and made possible his returning, to all that he held most dear.

He sat and shivered in the waiting Windermere stage—a dust-laden auto of a very early model—little realising that in a very few hours a chill such as he was feeling now would be more than welcome.

Two men were tinkering about various parts of the car and the snatches of their conversation that reached the passenger did little toward reassuring him. One of them seemed to doubt that the car would be able to make the trip at all.

“You’ll never get up Thunder Hill with it in the wide world,” he said.

“Got to, that’s all,” was the response of the other, apparently the driver.

Samuel Graydon decided that he liked the driver. There was something refreshing about the good nature with which he met the salutes of passers-by who stopped to admire his “Rolls Royce.” But the omissions and pauses in his conversations were puzzling to the passenger, who had no way of knowing that, in other company, the young man was wont to express himself much more expletively.

He wondered if they two were to be the only ones to make the trip and finally questioned the driver, who had given his name merely as “Jimmy.”

“Yep, just you and Frenchy,” the other answered. “I had more, but when they saw this

layout they decided that, after all, they needn't go up this trip. I want to tell you that I admire your pluck."

"I fear that I must confess to a slight feeling of trepidation, but I suppose that if the car makes the trip at other times——"

"Oh, this one doesn't. It has been in the Old Men's Home for years. But my regular bus is up for repairs. Axle gone. Got to wait for another from Calgary. But there's a dance up country to-night that I asked a girl to go to, so you can see that it's a matter of life and death. I got to make it."

"How long did you say it would be before your regular machine would be running?"

"Now just you sit tight. We'll make this trip in fine shape. As I said, I've got to be there. All set, Frenchy?"

After a final kick at each wheel the driver switched on his magneto and wound the crank, whereupon, with a terrific roar, the engine came to life. The manipulation of some very noisy gear-shifts accomplished protesting motion on the part of the car. The ninety-mile journey had begun.

Soon the foothills had engulfed the car. Turning northward it wound among them; dipped into valleys where the night-cool still clung; climbed steep ascents at the top of which the warmth of the rising sun was grateful; crossed sparkling

rivers and sped through park-like tracts of virgin spruce and tamarac.

Gradually, even a little unwillingly, the beauty of it all was borne in on the heart of Samuel Graydon and he found himself soothed and comforted.

Never having been a man who cared to travel, it was practically his first experience of the dreariness of being alone in a land of strangers and strangeness. It had so oppressed him on the night before that it was only the thought of what the visit must mean to his nephew that had prevented his taking the next train for home.

But now as the car made its way through woodlands, fragrant with summer flowers from which their advent stirred up clouds of butterflies, he began to feel glad that he had come, if only to have marvelled at the beauty of it all.

Even as the July sun warmed the men in the front seat so that they soon took off their coats, Samuel Graydon was so touched by the grandeur of his surroundings that he shed his prejudices against what he had always considered a wild and heathenish country.

He found comfort in the thought that the Author of the wonders of mountain, lake and forest was the same Creator that had called into being the quieter beauties of his eastern field.

By this time the attention of all three was drawn to the car by virtue of their sense of smell. At the end of the long, gruelling climb up Wasa

Hill Jimmy swung the car to the roadside. The odour of burnt oil filled the air.

"Well, what the——"

"Dickens," finished Jimmy for the Frenchman, bending on him a warning and baleful glare.

Then, having unscrewed the cap from the radiator, he retreated in haste, thus avoiding a stream of water that spouted to a height of three feet. Progress was delayed till a broken fan-belt could be mended and the engine cooled into good nature.

Between Wolf Creek and Sheep Creek little diversions caused by a broken spring, a cracked spark-plug and a flat tire occupied some time, in the latter case augmented by a leaking pump.

The mild tenor of the conversation during the delays had been record-breaking, but the tension was beginning to tell, so that when, just a mile past the Sheep Creek road house, the engine slowed up and stopped quite of its own accord, the Frenchman's emphatic exclamation went unreprieved.

"You're out of gas, man," he went on.

"Out of nothing. I've ten gallons yet."

"Well, you won't have long. Look!"

The driver looked, in a repressed silence which almost brought on apoplexy. Under the car the antediluvian gas-pipe was neatly severed, allowing a little stream to escape to the dust of the highway.

A turn of a tap shut off the supply from the

roadway, but did not solve the problem of getting it to the engine.

"Adhesive tape, he mends everything," the Frenchman offered. "Got any?"

"Not a scrap," was Jimmy's rueful answer. "I brought a needle and thread, a glue pot and some hay wire. I thought I could keep her together that way. I completely forgot drug supplies."

"Likely I can get some back at Ben's. It's just a mile; I'll go and see."

He swung off, taking a short cut through the trees, and moving with the grace of an animal of the wilds.

The driver pushed his hat to the back of his head and glanced up at the snow filled crevices of Mount MacGilvary.

"Great country, this," he offered. "Ever been in here before?"

"No. This is my first visit. I agree with you that it is wonderful."

"It's that all right. Going up on business?"

"I am on my way to see my nephew. It is possible that you know him—K. W. Graydon."

"Go on! So you're a relation of K. W.'s. I can see now that there is a resemblance. Well, it's a fine nephew you have. They don't make 'em any better. I've known him ever since he came into the country. In fact he went up with me on my first stage trip—a three-day, team affair in those days."

"And how is my nephew coming on?"

"Coming on? Why, famous! His ranch is the pick of the entire valley. And he has some ponies there that can't be beaten in the whole country."

"But—er—do such things go with the life of a minister of the Gospel in the west?"

"What d'ye mean, a minister——" Then, after a puzzled pause, light dawned on Jimmy.

"Oh, I see. You must mean the sky-pilot up at the head of the lake. There are two Graydons living here, you know. And come to think of it the names are pretty much the same; spelled different or something. They're always getting their mail mixed and, of course, I get the blame. Without meaning to I seem to give all the religious stuff to K. W. and the more secular matter to the parson. Well, well. So you're the other's uncle. And here I thought I saw a sure enough resemblance to the Graydon I know."

"Do you not know my nephew?"

"Yes—some. Of course, our routes don't cross much, as you might say. But he's a damn fine chap, they tell me."

"Well, I am glad to hear you say so—that is—I mean—yes, I am quite glad to hear it. I wonder if the boy has changed a great deal. It is a long time since I have seen him. I was educating him for the ministry, but he thought otherwise and came west suddenly. Then, just recently, I found that he had followed my wish after all. That is why I am on my way to see

him. It is odd that I should have mixed his initials. My memory is not so good as it once was."

After a noisy but uneventful climb up Thunder Hill and an hour's run along the high plateau that looks over the Upper Columbia Lake, Jimmy brought the car to a halt at the top of the crag that edges Dutch Creek.

"Ever see anything like it?" the driver asked.

Scores of square miles of country lay spread below them; Dutch Creek with its border of chalky cliffs, the turquoise expanse of the lake and, beyond that, ranks of hills melting into the blue of the sky—a panorama gorgeously colourful.

"Earl Grey stood on this spot," Jimmy told his passenger, "and proclaimed it to be one of the finest sights in the world."

"I should not wonder if he is right," the other answered.

"Of course," the driver offered, "it is only fair to say that up in Field there is a spot where they say the Duke of Devonshire said the same thing. The Earl of Minto picked this view up at Sicamous, while, over in the Okanagan, they try to take our own Earl Grey away from us.

"But bring on your Royalty." Jimmy snapped his fingers. "We've room for the whole outfit. Hello, who goes below!"

Away below a rider, who was only a speck in the sweeping landscape, had reined his horse at the edge of Dutch Creek bridge and allowed it to

follow its inclination to wade out to knee depth in the swiftly flowing stream. Here it drank deeply, raising its head occasionally to gaze up stream at a group of unbroken steeds that seemed to mock their cousin in captivity.

Jimmy regarded the rider through his field glasses, then put them down suddenly with a quick exclamation.

"It's the Sky Pilot—your nephew," he said, getting out to crank the engine. "Likely he's on his way to Findley Creek. I'll get down in time to meet him on the bridge."

As they made a hasty and breath-taking descent, Samuel Graydon felt his heart pounding with excitement at the prospect of the meeting. The ten years' estrangement were suddenly as nothing.

The horse in the river turned at sight of the car and splashed its way to the bank, meeting the stage at the edge of the bridge with a nervous, hesitating side-step.

A nice-faced, pleasant-looking young man with thick glasses soothed the animal as he greeted the occupants of the car.

"Hello, Grayden!" Jimmy hailed. "See who I have in the back of my car to-day."

Then Jimmy noticed that the glance that the young man turned on his passenger was blandly devoid of recognition, and, on turning to look at Samuel Graydon, he saw that consternation had

replaced the eagerness that had lighted up his countenance.

"Are you not going to introduce me?" the young minister asked.

"Well, but what— Don't you know your own uncle?"

"I have no uncle, Jimmy. Is this something in your humorous vein?"

"Not this time. I have a fare here who thinks he is on his way to see W. K. Grayden, a preacher in the Windermere. If you ain't that I'll eat my hat."

Then, turning to his passenger:

"You want to meet the preacher. Here he is."

"This man is not my nephew," Samuel Graydon stated, almost accusingly. Then to the rider:

"You are not K. W. Graydon."

"No, I am not. K. W. Graydon is the rancher who lives by the lower lake. My initials are W. K., and my name is spelled with an 'e.'"

"But it is in the paper!"

From a small satchel the older man produced a folded paper which shook in his hands, so great was his excitement.

"Or, no," he said. "I was mistaken. It is W. K. But they are so very much alike! After all these years I had forgotten whether the boy's name was Kent William or William Kent."

Then suddenly the enormity of his mistake came to the traveller. He seemed broken and overcome.

"Then," he exclaimed, "it is not true that my nephew has followed my wishes! He still goes his way in darkness!"

"Kent Graydon is the best friend I own," was the driver's warm retort. "No one can tell me he walks in darkness—whatever that is."

Then, seeing the young minister's evident puzzlement, he elucidated:

"You see, Mr. Graydon here wanted to make a parson out of Kent when he was younger. They didn't agree about it and Kent lit out. After ten years the uncle sees your name in a church paper and it is so near his nephew's name that he thinks Kent has changed his mind and gone in for preaching. Also his own nephew had once sent him a check from Windermere. So he puts two and two together, packs up and beats it for the valley, to be met by a preacher that is—you."

"A most regrettable mistake," the young man said. "Still——"

"But," the visitor almost wailed, "what am I to do? This time and money wasted——"

"No time and money is wasted that brings a man to the Windermere," Jimmy stated. "I'll just take you along to your nephew's ranch and you can surprise him just as well as though he were a preacher. Know whether Kent is home?" he asked, turning to the young minister.

"I—no, I think he is not. I believe he has gone for something he needs for sinking a well. You know there has been trouble between him and

McNulty over the line fence. McNulty fenced the stream away from Graydon's animals and he retaliated by cutting the wires. I believe there is talk of an arrest over it. It is most unfortunate. I think Kent should reach home soon after you get there—if he is not intercepted."

"By the police, you mean?" Samuel Graydon enquired, hastily.

"Yes. But it is hardly likely. Doubtless McNulty is bluffing, in which case I should perhaps have not mentioned the matter at all. I hope your meeting will be felicitous."

"Felicitous! I come thinking to find my nephew a shepherd of souls; I find him wanted by the police for an offence against the laws of his country. What *am* I to do?"

"I would suggest that you hear the evidence before making a judgment," remarked the young man respectfully. "We hold your nephew in the highest regard."

"We sure do," seconded Jimmy. "We'll get along to the ranch. I am sure that Kent can clear the air for you. Crank her up, will you, Frenchy? So long, Graydon. Watch out for your horse!"

An hour later the car swung to a gateway by the roadside and halted.

"This is your nephew's home," said the driver. "Kent will probably not be back till evening. Go in and make yourself at home. Sorry not to carry in your bags, but I am late as it is. Leave

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them by the gate and send the Chink down for them. Look savage and yell at him or he may not do it. He's a kind of a one-man dog. Yes, fifteen dollars. Thanks. Glad to have met you."

And the Reverend Samuel Graydon was left alone in a land of strangers, although, presumably, none of them were about—except a "Chink" at whom he was to look savage and yell.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PARSON BREAKS THE LAW

THE prospect thus presented to Samuel Graydon pleased him so little that it was with great reluctance that he opened the gate and set his bags inside. Once there he paused to look about his nephew's ranch.

He had never been very certain as to just what the word "ranch" defined. In this case, for all that was visible from the roadway, it might just as suitably have been called a park. Of agriculture, as he understood it, there was not a sign.

A grassy slope led up to a large and comfortable-looking log bungalow, whose wide porch invited one with swinging hammocks and chairs of Japanese grass. Dotted about the slope were a few large, shaggy pines; each standing alone as though holding aloof from the others, and with an individuality all its own. At the foot of the slope, where the visitor stood, was a cool grove of poplars that added to his feeling that he had entered a park. Even the rustic gateway was quite similar to what he had seen in just such places.

A name was set in the arch over the gateway;

failing to decipher it, he went outside again to view the letters from the positive side.

"Equestria!" he murmured. "Ah, yes; to do with horses. Very poetic of the boy, very."

Then, letting his eyes stray to the surroundings of Equestria—to the blue lake that lay to the westward, with a poplar-shaded road leading down a draw to the water's edge; and farther on to where the soft blues of the landscape beyond the lake seemed to gather something from its shimmer—the green blue of the bench-lands, the dark blue of the foothills, the purple blue of the Selkirks and, over and above all, the azure blue of the sky—looking at all this Samuel Graydon reflected that even though, as it seemed, the land did not lend itself to the pursuit of agriculture, his nephew might easily be pardoned for having bought it to secure the view from his front porch.

"Where every prospect pleases," he quoted to himself, "and only man is vile."

Then, the mention of vile man having brought his mind back to the present, he looked about for a place where he might sequester his bags until someone stronger could be induced to carry them up to the lodge.

A small clump of juniper that grew beneath the poplars appeared to be the most likely hiding place, but he found it to have been already fancied for that purpose by a very handsome ruffled grouse. He started violently when, on his parting the branches, she whirred out from them and

rocketted away among the poplars, her drumming sounding deceitfully afar as she came to rest on a tree from which she could see what happened to her nest.

Had the stranger understood the message of the wilds he must have reconsidered his last quotation. The presence of a nesting bird so near civilisation was a splendid tribute to the sportsmanship of men who voluntarily heeded provincial game laws.

Had his ears been properly attuned, he would have understood the language of the scolding jay that had alighted on the gatepost:

“Why do you hide your bags, you tenderfoot! Man in the mountains is not vile. Nobody even locks their doors.”

The main room of the log house was what the owner described as a “he man’s room.” The walls of beautifully hewn logs were weathered to a brown that made a harmonious background for the heads of deer and other trophies of the chase with which they were adorned. In the place of honour over the big stone fireplace was the noble head of a Rocky Mountain Sheep—its horns curved regally, its expression most arrogant. This head was the principal reason for the two thousand dollars’ insurance that was carried on the furnishings of Equestria’s lodge.

The only parlour trick that the owner of it all required of a visitor, high or low, was that he be able to walk across the floor without disarranging

the paws or stumbling over the heads of the skins of bear and cougar that were scattered over it.

The rest of the furnishings were devoid of non-sensical frills. The chairs were built to hold the heaviest weight and to last a lifetime. On a large solid table were two lamps with green shades, tobacco jars and many magazines, these arranged in the order that best pleased the Chinaman who officiated.

There were some interesting-looking books that made the visitor think pleasantly of the chairs on the porch, and stuck in the walls everywhere were snapshots, always of horses, singly or in groups, still or in motion.

Even the ingenious rack of elk-horns on which reposed guns of every known variety could not prevent the visitor from pronouncing this to be a most delightful habitation.

Finally a feeling of hunger—a sensation that prompts more animals of all kinds to brave danger than all others put together—caused him to venture in the direction of the kitchen in search of tea.

He found a place that gleamed with much white granite-ware, shelves on which reposed many tin cans of various natures, freshly scrubbed, unpainted floors and tables—and emptiness.

Nothing was visible that a hungry man might eat. No one was visible that might prepare something.

From here the intruder stepped to a wide stone

porch at the back, where a quick exclamation escaped him. Back at the gateway he had wondered if it would not be possible to reach from his nephew's house and touch the mountains, so closely did they seem to rise behind it. So it was with astonishment that he beheld a sweep of meadows and hayfields that led back for at least a mile before the ground began to rise into the gentle slopes of the foothills.

And here were his nephew's horses, of which Jimmy had spoken in such glowing terms! Well, the man had been quite right. From the dainty dappled pintos to the huge and glossy percherons the denizens of Equestria were superb.

Not only had the visitor never seen such a handsome group of animals—he had never seen horses of any kind acting in so odd a manner. Instead of peacefully grazing on the grassy slope about the barn as one would naturally expect, they were lined up against a wire fence, their heads facing south, and were crowding each other, none too good-naturedly, for place.

Going over to the fence, Samuel Graydon pieced the situation together. On the other side of the fence, almost within their reach, there flowed a crystal clear stream of mountain water.

Flattened ears and tossing heads of two or three of the nearer animals induced him to see the discretion of further making his examination on the other side of the fence. It was his first acquaintance with barbed wire, and it ended

by making him think of Martha at home and of her dexterity with a needle and thread.

Skirting along the other side of the fence, he looked for a gate that might be opened. He found the place where a gate had been, but the wires of the fence now ran across the opening, in disregard of the usual purposes of a gate.

Samuel Graydon's own thirst made him acutely sympathetic with the apparent distress of the animals, and, on observing the torn flesh of some where the malignant spikes of the wires had caught them as they vainly reached for water, suddenly he became militant.

He remembered having glanced into a shed near the kitchen where tools of every sort were neatly arrayed. While far from being an authority where tools were concerned, he did at least know a pair of wire-cutters when he saw them. It was, therefore, only the work of a few moments before the wires that obstructed the gateway were severed. The almost solid mass of horse-flesh surged through and spread along the brook, drinking deeply and noisily.

From his satisfaction at having done a merciful deed, Samuel Graydon was rudely awakened by a sound behind him; a sound that might have been a word, but was certainly not one contained in his vocabulary.

"Who you? What you do?" inquired an astonished Chinaman whose slit-like eyes were round with excitement.

"I found these poor beasts half dead with thirst. I simply made it possible for them to come in and drink. I cannot see how there can be harm in that. At any rate, I have always been a member of the S. P. C. A., and I am prepared to stand by my actions."

The excellent sentiments expressed were utterly lost on the Oriental. He did not understand a word of what was said, but he understood the situation.

"Hell to pay!" he exclaimed. "Hell to pay!"

Whereupon he turned and trotted back to the house as though anxious that he should not be found anywhere near when the time came for payment.

Then it was observed by the benefactor of animals that his act had just been discovered by a group of men on the other side of the meadow, a group who seemed to be engaged in digging a well. After seeming gesticulations of surprise, two men sprang on horses that stood near and came to where he stood in the opened gateway.

The bewildered astonishment on their faces as they drew rein prompted further explanations. They listened in silence to his narrative and, when he had finished, looked at each other solemnly for as much as two minutes.

"Well—GOOD-NIGHT!" was the final exclamation of the more versatile of the two.

It will never be given to Samuel Graydon to know to what extent the presence of what he would

term "the cloth" raised the moral tone of the conversation at that moment. Knowledge of it would have partially dispelled the feeling he had that his trip had been all in vain.

Then, still without a word, the two men picked up their reins and proceeded systematically to herd the unwilling animals back into their own pastures. The sagacity of the horses that the men rode in rounding in the frisky colts; their swiftness in overtaking any that thought to make a dash for freedom and the whistled commands directed to what seemed to be the leaders of the band were marvels in the eyes of the man who stood and watched.

So engrossed was he with it all that he did not note the sound of approaching hoofs; not till the head of a horse almost touched his shoulder did he turn and discover his nephew. But if his surprise was great it was as nothing compared to that of the other.

Slowly the young man swung from his saddle, too bewildered to speak.

"Yes, Kent, it is I," the older man said. "I do not wonder that you are surprised to see me in this place."

"Well, Uncle, I certainly must admit that I am. One would scarcely expect anyone who dislikes travelling as you do to venture so far as this."

"That can quickly be explained, but, in the meantime, I feel that I could eat a little of something, if it would not trouble you too greatly."

"Certainly not. I feel that way myself. I smelled doughnuts as I passed the kitchen, and Wong can make real tea. Just excuse me one minute."

He had a few low words with his men, after which one of them led off his horse, and the other very gingerly took from him a parcel of some sort tied up in a sack and proceeded in the direction of the place where they were digging the well.

"How is Aunt Martha?" dutifully inquired the nephew as they turned toward the house.

"I left her very well, Kent. She is most anxious for news of you. I think it will be best, when I write her, to say nothing of the fact that I found you in danger of arrest for an offence against the laws of your country."

"So you know about that," Kent said quickly. "Has anyone been here?"

"No. I have only just come. We were told on the way up."

"Well, it is certainly good of you not to mention it to Aunt Martha. If you do that for me, I will refrain, when I write to her, from mentioning that I found you committing the same offence, and that the police are apt to want you, too, if McNulty saw what happened to his fence to-day."

"But who is this McNulty, Kent?"

"Suppose we leave unpleasant subjects till later. I am most curious to know to what I owe the honour of this visit."

So, while tea and doughnuts were dispensed,

38 GRAYDON OF THE WINDERMERE

Samuel Graydon told of the misleading notice in the paper, of his and his wife's pleasure that their nephew had decided after all to do as they wished, and of his decision, for that reason, to come to see him.

Excellent tea had brought about a frame of mind wherein the speaker was able to take a more lenient view of his nephew's conduct than he had heretofore done. He began for the first time to feel curiosity as to what had brought about the boy's change of course.

"You've never regretted your decision, my boy?" he inquired, when his cup had been whisked away by the watchful Chinaman.

"No, Uncle. Of course, I was sorry to disappoint anyone who had been as good to me as you and Aunt Martha, but I have never felt that I did other than right."

"Could you tell me how it came about?"

"Changing my mind at college, you mean? Or—well, I don't think one could call it that, for I had never really made it up for myself. And I saw as soon as I got there that the other fellows who had the Church in mind were different from me—older, mostly, and more serious. I was just a raw youth, if you remember, without much in the way of ideals. Looking myself over, I didn't seem to stack up as good material for a shepherd. I still am of that opinion.

"There are those hereabouts who would say that, as a sheep, I stand pretty much four square

to all the winds; there may be those who would put me in the goat class, but I am sure that all would agree with me on the leader question.

"Well, just as that idea was taking shape, I formed a freshman friendship with a Ronald Rolson, a son of the big mining man on the coast here. He, like me, was a stranger in the city and he roomed next me in the dorm. We went for a long walk one night and, as we were at the stage of confidences, he told me of his ambitions to become an architect—ambitions that were so strong that he was flying in the face of his father's wish that he become a mining engineer, and was quietly electing the subjects that would further him in his chosen line."

"You are not the first young man to be misled by college friends," his uncle interposed.

"Nor the first to be set right either. Of course, I admired him tremendously; there is something about him. I thought his course the manly thing, although I could not understand why anyone would turn from the fascinations of engineering, but he is responsible for my determination to elect my own course. I was sorry to take your money on false pretences, but of course I meant to repay it all."

"Ah, well," his uncle returned, "that part was all right in the end. Perhaps it was all for the best. So you were a friend of Ronald Rolson. I see the young man sometimes. Quite a society man he has become."

"I wouldn't say that we are particularly friendly. The intimacy soon ended—ended really on the night of the memorable walk of which I told you. In our interest in our discussion of careers we found ourselves as far as Jarvis Street. Strolling down this we came to Senator Milburn's place, where a big wedding reception was in progress. A daughter of the house had married into the near-nobility, and you may be sure that all the fine clothes in the city were there to see the event. It was our first glimpse of anything of the kind, so Rolson and I vaulted the hedge and crept back among the shrubbery to where we could see the ballroom.

"We had only been there a minute when a younger daughter—I searched the papers afterwards till I found that her name was Alleyene—came tiptoeing through the shrubs. She would be about twelve, I should think, and in the moonlight and the finery of a flower-girl she was the most fairylike creature I had ever laid eyes on.

"She was a good sport, too: didn't scream or think we were burglars. She told us how exciting it was to be a flower-girl at a big wedding and told us of some extensions and improvements that she was going to have at her own wedding. And then and there Ronald Rolson and I each made an unalterable resolve to be the chosen man when that event took place. Once outside the hedge again we confided this resolve to each other and, I remember, walked home by different routes.

We have gone pretty much in that way ever since."

During this narrative Samuel Graydon had been sitting where he could see the businesslike efforts of two of his nephew's men at repairing the damage recently done to the wire of the fencing. He breathed a sigh of relief when at last they picked up their tools and moved away.

"And now," he said, without any comment on the tale he had just heard, "will you explain how you have managed to build up such a fine herd of animals when your only means of getting them to water has been to break through your neighbour's fence?"

"That device," Kent explained, "is comparatively recent. I had a stream of my own over where the men are digging a well, but it had been drying up for some time and last spring it stopped altogether. Then I made arrangements with Dale, who owns the next place south, to curve the line fence so that part of his stream was on my side. That worked all right till this McNulty, who has a heavy mortgage on Dale's place, brought his stock and is taking out the arrears of interest in rent.

"Two weeks ago, when I was back at my work on the new highway in the Sinclair Pass, McNulty straightened out the fence and shut the water away from my animals for several days. The poor brutes were pretty badly off."

"Shooting would be too good for a man of

that kind," Samuel Graydon exclaimed in heat.

"Take care," Kent counselled. "I wouldn't want to have to tell Aunt Martha anything like that on you. And remember that you are in the civilised West, where such things are not done, all books to the contrary."

"But had you no men about to look after the horses?"

"The two regular riders were back in the hills with a part of the herd, but I had left my best animals here in charge of an old veterinary that I keep as a sort of special nurse. But he was in bed, so drunk that he did not know what was going on."

"But you have the lake. Why not drive them down there to drink?"

"They do not like the water, for one thing. The mountain stream has spoiled them. When we drive them down, they forget that they are thirsty and spend their time in thinking of ways to gain their freedom—the unbroken ones, that is. Three are still at large since our last visit to the lake.

"We have been digging a well all week. I felt sure we would strike water on the old creek bed, but there has been no sign of it yet. So, night before last, we cut the fence again; but I rather think the moonlight was too bright.

"I have decided now to go back to the source of the stream. Once, on a hunting trip, I came across the source of my stream and I noted that

the water ran from a clift in the hillside, dropping on a sharp rock that divided it so that part of it ran northwards coming round Elk Hill to my place, and part of it turned southwards and, after running a little way, dropped underground. The Indians call this the 'Lost Stream.'

"Dale's brook comes from the ground a few miles farther down, and I have always felt that it is the Lost Stream again. The fact that his has grown larger as mine has diminished has strengthened the idea. So to-day I went up to get some dynamite and I am going back to the spring to find out, and if it is as I think I will be able to turn it my way again. And if McNulty really intends doing anything about the wire cutting it will be best for me to be out of the way before anyone comes looking for me."

"Wouldn't it be better to meet them and pay whatever fine——"

"It may be something stiffer than a fine, by the time they add up the three instances. And I must get this job done first of everything."

"But still I do not understand it all, Kent. Why should this man McNulty object to your herd's drinking from a small part of the Dale brook, even if he has a lease of the place?"

"His objections are not to the animals' drinking, but to me. He takes that way of showing it."

"Then why not buy or rent the place yourself, and secure the water in that way?"

"You have the right idea, Uncle, and it is what I would do if it were possible. But McNulty has a stipulation in the mortgage that the place may not be sold or rented to me without his consent. The rock bottom reason is that he wants to marry Molly Dale and wants to keep the mortgage as a lever to coerce her. He hates me because—well, he has an idea that I stand in his way in Molly's eyes. Get it?"

"I think I do. He fancies that the girl is fonder of you than of him. Is she?"

"We have been good pals for a long time, but nothing more."

"I would not be too sure. There is something attractive——"

"Uncle, *don't*. Nothing embarrasses me so much as to be told that I look like Apollo."

"I wasn't going to say that."

"I'm never sure. Someone did once. And being a woman, she is alive to tell it. That is one subject that is taboo. But now I must go. I will tell the Chinaman to do you well as to eats, and, for the rest of the time till I get back, get lots of rest and sleep.

"I am sorry to leave just as you arrive, but you will see that it is imperative. Do not mind being alone. You are in the safest place you ever were."

"I shall try not to mind. When will you return?"

"It will be two days, I fear. When I have

finished with the spring, I will ride over the hills to the Pass and tell Cunningham—he is the engineer in charge—that I will want a few days off to visit with you. I will sleep in my cabin there and come back the next day.”

“Where is this Pass that you mention?”

“I will take you back some day to see the whole thing. In the meantime I think it as well, should any visitors turn up looking for me. that you do not know where I can be found.”

CHAPTER FOUR

MATRIMONIAL CAMPAIGN PLANS

“SPEAKING of Angels——” is a saying that goes back past the days of psychological research into the times of superstition. An acquaintance, strangely and suddenly recalled to mind after a lapse, perhaps of years, is found, later, to have been in the neighbourhood at the instant the memory of him had come. Explained or unexplained, the phenomenon has always been there.

But, while Kent Graydon probably accepted the modern theory of psychic currents, it would certainly have surprised him, as his horse began to climb the foothills and he took a last look over the valley to where the Hotel Invermere gleamed whitely amid the green on the opposite bank of Lake Windermere, to know that at that moment rooms ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen were on the books as being occupied by Senator and Mrs. Horace Pelham Milburne, Miss Milburne, Horace Pelham Milburne, Junior, and a Miss Harwin,—all of Toronto.

Senator Milburne had just entered their private sitting-room with the mail that had come up from the landing where the Columbia River boat

was wharved. There were several letters for each member of the family and a box addressed to Miss Milburne and bearing the name of a Calgary florist.

Mrs. Milburne laid aside her letters for a weightier matter.

"Has it been settled about Junior, Horace?" she asked her husband.

"How d'ye mean, settled?" enquired the Senator, already deep in frowning perusal of a type-written letter.

"Whether he is to be accepted on that—job."

Mrs. Milburne was so accustomed to saying "office" or "post" or "commission"—none of which seemed exactly the appropriate word to use when a lad in his teens contemplates going out as a junior rodman in a survey party—that she brought out the word "job" with the utmost distaste.

"Certainly it's settled," he answered. "I settled it—long ago."

"I thought it remained for the engineer in charge to accept him after he had tried the work. Has he done so?"

"He has. I just saw Cunningham now. He says the boy is taking to it like a duck to water."

The expression on the Senator's face was one of entire satisfaction, but his wife sighed resignedly.

"Well, I'm sorry," she said. "I am sure I cannot see how we are to exist here for the entire

summer. We should be so much more comfortable at Banff. Besides, I do not believe that it is any place for him—Windermere, I mean.”

“Well,” her husband answered, “I will admit that a spot that is any place for that young man is hard to find. But, if what Cunningham tells me is true, he is nearer it here than he usually is. And a good job here is preferable to idleness at Banff—or anywhere else.”

“But the men with whom he will be associated!”

“Straight as a string. Hard as nails. I know everyone of them. They’ll take a lot of nonsense out of him.”

Here the Senator flipped his letter into place in a manner that would have ended the interview with anyone else.

But Mrs. Milburne was not anyone else.

“But I should think you could find the same work for him at the Banff end of the road,” she said. “Then we could all stay there. I understand that a number of distinguished people are there already.”

With a movement of impatience her husband gathered his mail and rose.

“Here I am again,” he said. “Running round in circles over a matter already settled—*settled*, I said.”

He retired with emphasis to his own room, whereupon his wife, with another sigh, opened her desk and set about the opening of her mail.

In this her first procedure was to sort out those

letters that bore the earmarks of being of the greatest social import. This, together with the fact that she alluded to their little ten by fourteen sitting-room as the "salon," is probably as good a description of Mrs. Milburne as could possibly be given.

"Have you discovered about the flowers, Alleyne?"

This enquiry she directed at her daughter who, having finished with her mail, had resigned herself to the depths of a comfortable chaise and was idly watching her cousin, Claire Harwin, as she arranged long-stemmed American Beauties in a deep green jar.

"Ron sent them," Alleyne answered languidly.

"You had word from him?" Mrs. Milburne had brightened visibly.

An exasperatingly indifferent nod was the answer she got. Alleyne Milburne was a beauty with all the perquisites that are supposed to attend that state.

"Well," demanded her mother, "what does he say? Is he to join us?"

"For a month's golf and fishing. He will be down on to-morrow's boat. Likely there is a letter for you, too, but read this." She tossed an envelope into the older woman's lap.

"I do not want to read your letter, of course. But I am so glad that he will come. I feared that he might not. The Webbs tried desperately to secure him for a tour of Hudson's Bay. The sum-

mer will not seem so wasted after all—that is, if you are disposed to be sensible.”

“Mother, *please!* I feel another of those talks for my own good coming. I do hope you won’t let Claire hear you say such things.”

Claire Harwin picked up the last of the fallen petals and turned toward the door.

“I will run down for some water for the roses,” she said.

“Nonsense, Claire,” Mrs. Milburne said. “The boy will bring water if you ring. Beside which, I have no objection to your knowing of my plans for Alleyne.”

Claire seated herself by a window in silence.

“As Claire and I both know exactly what you are going to say, how would it be not to discuss it?” Alleyne proposed. “Matrimonial campaign talks are so—well, cheap.”

“Cheap!” Mrs. Milburne drew herself up ominously. “Cheap! Those are the very words your sister Hester once used when I desired to speak for her good. *Now* she thanks me every day she lives for what I said. At that time she fancied herself in love with a man with neither a past nor a future.”

“You mean that Holmes man? He was stunningly good looking. Fred isn’t?”

“Hester may supply most of the personal beauty in their household, but if Frederick supplies an exquisite setting for her it is all that one can ask.”

Alleyne shrugged.

"Fancy pouring coffee for a homely man, or an insignificant one!" she exclaimed.

"Alleyne!" There was the utmost alarm in Mrs. Milburne's voice. "You positively must get these absurd and ridiculous ideas out of your head. This foolish notion you persist in that a man must be handsome in order to be eligible is something that you will rue some day, mark my words.

"If Hester had cared to pour coffee for what you call a stunning-looking man, she might be doing it now—in a little flat with no elevator. I have kept track of that Holmes man. Whereas she is now pouring it on the terrace of her country place in Surrey, and enjoying it just as much as though her husband were up to your foolish standards. Beside; all this has nothing to do with the case in point. Roland Rolson is neither homely nor insignificant."

"He's not so bad as Fred, of course. Neither is he so good as,— ay Wally Williams."

"Wally Williams, as well as a number of good-looking young men upon whom you waste too much of your time, spends more than he earns every week of his life. A young man whose father has to cover the difference between his earnings and expenditures has very little thought of matrimony."

"And as for Ron——"

"Before leaving for the West, Roland asked my advice about buying Belleview, in Rosedale, and

confessed to owning Humber Island for a country home. A man does not think of these things unless he contemplates selecting a life-partner."

"I hope, mother, that you did not throw me at his head."

"Of course not. I gave the contrary impression, if anything. But I do not mind telling you that I think it possible to settle matters this summer, and I shall expect you to be sensible."

CHAPTER FIVE

WHEN A CABIN BECOMES A SHRINE

"PEL," Alleyne Milburne complained, "didn't you say that your camp was only five miles in? We've gone all of six."

"Great guns, sis! I said *four*. We've gone a little over two."

"Well, I never can do two more. I'm all in."

"What is it now? When you had walked half a mile you thought your breakfast must have disagreed with you. At the end of a mile it was the dip in the hot springs that was making you feel weak. At a mile and a half it was the altitude——"

"Mother warned me that the altitude would be too much for my heart."

"Fiddlesticks, Al! I'll bet your heart is right as rain. Pink teas, high heels and all that sort of thing is what is the matter with you, if you want to know the truth."

"Tea isn't pink, Pel. I think I have told you that before. I don't wonder that mother is disgusted with this wild and woolly pose of yours. You're amusing everyone."

"If I please my boss, I guess I can stand amus-

ing the family a little," was Pel's unperturbed retort.

"Do you listen to him!" Ronald Rolson remarked to Claire Harwin, with whom he walked behind the brother and sister. "How impressionistic is the mind of youth. He is a different lad from one short week ago; citwesterning all these veteran westerners. His mother says she was afraid of it."

"Oh, well," Claire allowed, "we must let my aunt prove to be correct in something. Everything else is so different from what she anticipated."

"Rather!" he answered. "If I didn't know better I'd accuse her of having gotten her ideas of the West from the moving pictures. Instead of yelling cowboys shooting out the lights, she finds herself in a comfortable and artistic hotel where the other guests are so distinguished that they don't care whether she is Mrs. Melbourne or not. I think the bored English Colonel, the temperamental French artist and the New York steel magnate have quite put her on her mettle."

"Her mettle has not really been tested as yet," his companion rejoined. "But one of the drivers went up to Golden this morning to meet a wealthy count who is coming in with a view to buying land for a hunting lodge. I think," Claire added with a dimple of mischief, "that that is the reason aunt decided not to come at the last minute."

Ronald Rolson groaned.

"Don't I have the rotten luck! I thought that

if I got Alleyne away from that crowd of good-looking summer porch asses I might get things settled. And here we run into a nest of majors and counts and things to distract Mrs. Milburne and no end of fine-looking ranchers, surveyors and all that to take Alleyne's eye. Things look no brighter than ever."

"Do you really want them to?"

"I thought everyone knew that I did."

"Well. Faint heart never won fair lady."

"I know. But I don't want to spill the beans for good. Sometimes I think Alleyne might consider it, but her mother's influence is pretty strong. I haven't found out where she stands on it."

"No, aunt is clever."

"She is what?"

"She is really very kind-hearted. And the count may be married for all we know. In any case he is probably not the type to appeal to Alleyne, in which case——"

"Why wasn't I gotten up to look like a stage hero in the beginning?" he complained.

"You're not bad at all, Ron. Cheer up! If you like I will find out that every good-looking man in the place has a wife somewhere."

"Well, if you think that would keep Alleyne from admiring them. But you sort of do cheer a fellow up. Hello! What's up?"

"She's a quitter," the junior Milburne explained. "Not even able to do four miles."

"Four!" Alleyne exclaimed; "it's *ten*. I've a blister on my heel and my head is simply splitting. And I've just sprained my ankle. You can all go on and leave me here to die."

"We can't leave you here."

Senator Milburne and Cunningham, engineer in charge of the bridge, had been a little way in advance of the party but came back on seeing Alleyne determined to rest on the low rail of a little rustic bridge.

The engineer showed a kindly and courteous concern. His face was a perfect mask for his surprise at the high heels and silk hose worn by the heroine.

But Pelham Milburne read his thoughts and spoke them.

"If you had worn a decent pair of boots like Claire, now! But what are you going to do? We can't very well carry you two miles."

"Might I suggest——" the engineer interposed. "A friend of mine has a cabin just a hundred yards up this side stream. He has trapping rights up the pass and spends a part of the winter here. Would you mind waiting there till we return?"

"Is it clean?" Alleyne asked.

"Absolutely. But come and see it."

Slipping out of the offending pumps, Alleyne Milburne walked in the wake of the others, treading the needle and moss carpeted trail in her silken clad feet. Their guide swung the door open and they peeped inside.

Clean the room certainly was, and orderly.

From a narrow bed of boughs there came a spruce and nerve-soothing odour, although the source of this was hidden by a Navajo rug of gorgeous hue that warmed and brightened the interior and took away the crudeness from the simple and roughly made furniture.

"It looks clean," Senator Milburne ventured rather dubiously. "Surprisingly so. I should think she would be quite all right here for a few hours."

"Gee, sis. Smell this rug! Nothing but good soap and spruce to it. You ought to smell the blankets I sleep under!"

"Well, if you brought me all this way to do that— But go along. Claire and I will be all right here—if you are not too long."

"But, my dear daughter! Claire will have to come with me. No one gets as good results with the camera."

"Then leave Pel."

"But, gee, dad! I want to 'interduce' you to the fellows and show you the layout. That is what I had you all come for."

"Oh, go along. All of you," Alleyne exclaimed petulantly, quite overlooking the one member of the party who wanted to remain but whose inherent chivalry prevented his being the one to mention it. "If Mr. Cunningham assures me that this—er, couch—"

"Er, couch!" Horace Pelham Milburne, Junior,

groaned deeply. "Er—davenport! Er—chesterfield! My dear 'sis, you're in the hills now. That is a *bunk*."

"It is quite all right, I assure you," the engineer interposed.

"Then go, all of you. All I want is peace and a chance to sleep—if the bears will let me."

"They seldom come into the cabins in the daytime," Mr. Cunningham assured her dryly.

After which Alleyne was left in possession of the cabin and the voices of the on-going party, sounded lonesomely farther and farther away.

Some time later, light footsteps on the soft turf outside made Alleyne sit up very suddenly and brush her hand across her eyes. The fragrance of the spruce must have acted as a prompt sedative, for she realised that the deep and dreamless sleep from which she had just been wakened had begun almost as soon as her head touched the pillow.

She tried to focus her mind on the sounds that had disturbed her.

Outside there was the sound of more footsteps, the creak of a saddle, and a man's low voice caressing a tired horse. Then the door was opened with a movement of authority, and a man who had to bend his head to clear the doorway stood inside the cabin.

As the effect of the dazzling sunlight left his vision and in its place came seeming impressions

of a girl—a girl whose red-gold hair, adorably tumbled, seemed to gather and hold all the light in the small room, whose star-like eyes were wide and startled—the man closed the door slowly and leaned against it almost weakly.

His startled exclamation of “you!” might well have surprised a maiden two thousand miles from the haunts that usually knew her.

Alleyne swung her feet to the floor, slipped her toes surreptitiously into her pumps, then looked for her hat as she tried to bring order out of chaos with her hairpins.

“This seemingly unwarranted intrusion is the result of my inability to finish the walk back to my brother’s camp,” she told him. “Mr. Cunningham suggested this cabin, where I might rest until the others came back. He did not seem to think that you would mind, Mr—— I am afraid he did not tell me your name.”

“I am Kent Graydon. You are Alleyne Milburne. Finding you here in my cabin is nothing short of a miracle.”

“I was just getting round to an apology.”

“Please do not. My cabin is honoured. I shall hereafter consider it a shrine.”

With a little surprise Alleyne regarded the originator of the graceful remark. Quite a bit like Wally Williams would have done, she meditated, only in Wally the speech would have bordered on the satirical, whereas, in this man, it

seemed to come as a simple and sincere statement of a fact.

"I wonder if you are hungry," he said, hunting among his keys for one that would unlock a cupboard in the corner.

"What a mind-reader you are!" she said. "Was that how you knew my name? Or did you meet the party?"

"No. I met no one. I have just come over the hills from Tegarts Pass way. But we do gain a sort of sixth sense, working here in the hills."

"Indeed! I wish I had it. There are some things that I would like explained."

"For instance, how you come to find a photograph of yourself in my table drawer," he ventured, bending to touch a match to the kindling in the little box stove.

"I was merely looking for a gun," she told him, colouring vigorously meanwhile.

"What I mean is: you would be interested in an explanation of how I came to be in possession of a photograph of you at all."

"I must admit to having gotten the start of my life."

"Do you like baked beans?" he asked, examining his tin larder.

"I do; although I never knew it till this minute. Go on."

"About the picture. Getting it was a simple matter. I saw a reproduction of it in the Satur-

day society section of a Toronto paper, with Freeman's name in the corner. I wrote him asking for two. I keep the other over at my ranch. I told him that I was a lonesome trapper in the Rockies and that the face reminded me of my daughter. But I think it was the twenty iron men I sent him that was the crowning argument. You're not offended?"

"I'm tremendously flattered. But why a picture of me?"

"Because you're you."

"But other girls are they. And the *Town News* is full of pictures of good-looking ones."

"Let it be. I have a collection that suits me. They are all you: in a bathing suit, in a group at Muskoka, on a horse in the park—I've taken every paper that could have a glimmer of news of you for years."

"But *why?*"

Conversation was suspended during the turning of some flapjacks that were browning in a pan. Breathlessly she watched him catch them deftly after having tossed them almost to the ceiling.

Then, when the bacon had been crisped to perfection and they sat at the tiny table, she returned to her last question.

"Who is out here with you?" he asked without answering her.

"Out where?"

"In the Windermere."

"Oh, all of us; dad, mother, and my brother. He is working in a camp two miles up."

"That is my camp. So that new chap is your brother. I've taken quite a fancy to him."

"He has just taken Dad up to see it all. And my cousin Claire Harwin and a friend. Pelham has turned terribly western, to everyone's surprise. A while ago he was trying to look like a man of the world, or something a great deal beyond his age. But he has always had a great deal of energy to be expended in some direction."

When her host had made tea and discovered some marmalade, Alleyne said:

"You haven't answered my question *yet*."

"That is why I asked about your people. I will answer it after you have come to know me better, and after I have met your mother."

"Mother can be very hard to meet at times. She detests being introduced to handsome young men."

"That needn't affect me."

But a remark of that kind always brought the blood mounting to Kent Graydon's forehead.

"I fear so," she said. "And getting away with it as you do in a rig of that sort would make it all the worse."

"But tell me why."

"Oh, it's me. I am supposed to pay too much attention to looks and too little to expediency."

"H'm."

"Aren't you glad to know it?"

"To know what?"

"You *are* obtuse. To know that I am partial to men who are handsome."

Her eyes, which had sent him a dazzling glance, were now veiled behind long lashes. For just a moment Kent wondered if he were being made the sport of a practised flirt.

"Aren't you?" she repeated.

"Well, I don't know," slowly he weighed his answer. "Because you are sure soon to meet someone much more so. And I don't want you to stop thinking of me then."

"I will be supposed to stop thinking of you the minute my party comes back from the camp."

"But you won't."

"No, I do not believe that I will. And, if you really wish it, I'll try to think of a scheme for your meeting mother. She is usually amenable to management. I have often found Pel to be the best lever. A word to the wise is, no doubt, sufficient."

CHAPTER SIX

YOUTH GETS A GRIP ON LIFE

MRS. MILBURNE awaited the return of her family, sitting on a rustic seat in the delightful gardens of the Hotel Invermere.

The bustle attendant on the arrival and disposal of the person and effects of the Count d'Orono had recently died down. Most of the hotel guests had strolled toward the boathouse or were on the links. With the exception of the honeymooning couple, whose low voices came from the vine-covered pergola as they took their after-dinner stroll, she was the only one about.

Her book idle in her lap, she gazed where Lake Windermere, touched with the soft lights of evening, wandered southward among the converging foothills of the Rockies and the Selkirks. Across the lake to the east the colours that brightened the surface of the water glinted again from the facets and peaks of the Rockies.

To the north she saw the last rays of the sun streaming into the valleys that led back into the heart of the giant range. In which of these valleys, she wondered, was the Sinclair Pass? Even as she watched, the sun's rays receded until they

touched only the topmost peaks. A deepening blue gloom was closing in on all that she held dear in the world.

From that she went on to wonder why the party had not returned; what calamity it could be that kept her husband past his dinner hour. The possibility of his obtaining food to suit him at the camp where her son worked did not occur to her. Instead came a convincing picture of their car turned upside down at the bottom of a gulch.

Why had she not gone with them? Suddenly she knew that, without her restraining hand, their rashness had been boundless. And she had had a stupid day at home alone. The count had proved to be a fussy man who snapped his fingers incessantly and kept demanding to be put in room ten—Mrs. Milburne's own room—which he had apparently had at some other visit. He looked quite as though he might have a wife at home, and anyhow, was certainly not the type of man at which Alleyne might be induced to look a second time.

And even when the tourists did return—if, indeed, they did—they would, she knew, leave behind them the one round whom centred the greater amount of her affection. For, while Mrs. Milburne entertained toward her husband a very proper and wifely sentiment, and her attachment for her younger daughter had crystallised into an ambition that spared no pains, her regard for her only son was of such depth that it amounted to adoration.

To think of him left among strangers in the wild depths of those hills! No, she would not think of it. She would get a car the first thing in the morning, go in and get him and take him away from these hills, behind whose deceitfully beautiful front there lurked hidden and unnameable dangers.

In the back of Mrs. Milburne's head she knew that she was letting the lateness of the party get her into a state of nerves. Also she knew that, however bad the nerves became, she would *not* hire a car to bring her son back until his father was perfectly willing that he should come back. For, though Senator Milburne put his foot down but seldom, it did not remotely occur to any of his family to try to gainsay him when he did so.

One such instance, occurring a month before, had been the cause of their spending the summer in the West instead of at Gateport, their usual summer home.

It had been occasioned by the receipt of Pelham's yearly school report—a report that complained of the boy's leadership among the other pupils; leadership that tended all in the wrong direction.

"Look here, Louise," her husband had stormed. "The boy's going straight to the dogs, and no wonder. His upbringing is nothing like what I had, and it's all wrong. Too much money. Perfectly correct school, but little real work. It's a

systematic effort to ruin his character, and it's beginning to succeed already."

"Why, you've known Dr. Braithwaite for years," she had exclaimed. "To talk of his ruining a boy's character!"

"What's it all leading to?" he had asked. "What do you want him to be?"

"I want him to become a cultured, honourable gentleman," had been her statement. "And I hope that you do, too."

"Well, I wouldn't mind that so much. But I am afraid he will miss it and turn out to be an afternoon tea hero—if nothing more vicious. First of all I want him to be a man—a thoroughgoing, upstanding, self-reliant man. And I'm going to take him in hand this summer and see if I can't get a start made on it."

"He is high-strung by nature. You will never manage him in that way."

"In what way?"

"You—haven't told me yet."

"I haven't got it worked out myself yet. But don't make any plans for the summer until I do."

"I have no plans for the summer, except to go to Gateport as usual."

"We won't go there. That fool crowd do him no good."

And here, two thousand miles from home, swallowed in mountains that were now cold blue and forbidding, the boy faced the result of his planning.

What if—

The roar of an arriving car cut short the fresh train of mental catastrophes. The pergola cut off the main entrance from her view, but she strained her ear to catch the sounds.

“There she is!” cried the voice that she wanted most in all the world to hear, and, coming along the porch and easily vaulting its rail, her son hurried across the lawn.

Mrs. Milburne saw her husband and the girls, with a merry wave to her, go into the building, but all that she wanted was to greet her boy and have him with her.

“Pelham, I am glad you’ve come!” she exclaimed. “I was just thinking of you back in those forbidding——”

“Oh, mumsey, they’re not. They’re—they’re *great*. And friendly! They sort of protect a chap. I just came down to tell you about it all. I’ve got to get up at five to get back for work, but I was sure they wouldn’t tell you about half of it.

“Mr. Cunningham let me come down to the gap this morning to met them. Mr. Graydon, my real boss, is away. It sort of took me amidships that you hadn’t come. I did want you to see it, Mother! The entrance to the gorge is the finest sight in all the world, I’m sure. The road goes through rocks that rise up like a doorway for hundreds of feet. Beside the road, away below, Sinclair Creek tears by. You just hold your breath, it is so grand.

"Then you go on up the gorge till you come to the hot-springs. They have a big cement pool there, and hot! Claire and Al couldn't stick the hot water at all, but there were old ladies rolling round in it and enjoying their rheumatism. Then we went on to the camp. The canyon walls beside the road are queer shades of orange and crimson, and the green trees grow out of the rocks in the funniest places. And there are Indian pictures right on the face of some of the steepest rocks, put there by the aborigines, God knows how long ago."

"Don't say that son. I do not like it."

"Cunningham said that when I asked him, and it sounded all right, too. His language is always decent, even if it is forcible.

"And just think, Mother; when we finish this job you can drive right through to Banff in scenery just like that. A million-dollar view around every curve. They call it the California-Banff Bee-line Route. It makes a fellow feel sort of chesty and all that to think he is in on it all."

Mrs. Milburne was silent. She realised that her son was at one of the turning points of his life—a point where his mother counted for really less than she would like to do. Still, Mrs. Milburne was a sensible woman, all told. She shook off the feeling of loneliness that assailed her with the reflection that, at least, he was here telling her of it all. At the present moment he was

crowding into the rustic seat with her in a way that he had always had when he wanted to wheedle her into giving him something a little against her will.

"Now listen, Mumsey," he coaxed. "Try to bear what you are going to hear like the good old sport you really are."

"Make it something that I will like to hear, then, son."

"Well, mother, it's this," he was choosing his words with all the diplomacy of which his seventeen years was capable. "You know Dad has never particularly approved of Braithwaite's school."

"Your father has the highest admiration for Dr. Braithwaite, Pelham."

"Maybe he has. But I heard him tell you that the school was going to make a useless dude of me if you didn't watch out.

"So, Mother, couldn't I just stay here for this winter? Now don't look horrified till I have finished. It would be great. They are going to push the road four miles farther before the snow. Then I have a chance of a lifetime to get on with a gang that is making a map—down the old Kootenay trail for the whole winter. So you see by next year, with the experience I'd have had here, the matriculation Dad insisted on before I went to Braithwaites, and the money I'd have earned, I'd have a good start to begin——"

"But my dear boy, there is no need for you

to waste your young years in earning money for your education. Your father can look after that. Or, if not, there is the money from your grandmother that I laid away for the purpose of getting you children started in life."

"Oh, I knew I didn't *need* to earn it, but I'd sort of like the sensation. And I heard Mr. Cunningham say that there was the making of a man in me if there hadn't been too much money about. *Can't I stay, Mother? Please.*"

"Pelham, don't. It isn't a single bit of use. Do you imagine that I would ever have a night's sleep with you alone in these mountains? Under a snow-slide, likely; but anyhow with terrible dangers and temptations about."

"Temptations, Mother! They almost feed me out of a bottle at the camp. Down at Camp Two they wouldn't let me in on a game with just a five-cent ante."

"Gambling isn't the only thing I mind."

"Well, very few of the men drink—or not so Dad would notice it."

"I am very glad if these men have some regard for your youth. But disreputable women——"

"Mother, what an imagination you've developed. I do hope you don't tell any of the people who live here and love it that you think all the good things are in Toronto and all the bad ones out here. They know better and they are apt to be amused at you."

"You are side-stepping the question, son."

"No, I'm not, Mother. But even if the woods were full of them, you should worry. Mr. Graydon says that that sort of thing is all right for a damned fool."

"Your companion's language, Pelham——"

"Now who's side-stepping? But I've not heard you object to the same thing in Dad. And Graydon merely speaks the truth. He lectured me like a Dutch uncle the day I went in. You know how much I like that as a rule, but what he says sort of hits a fellow between the eyes—and sticks."

Later the boy joined his father, who paced the wide porch that ran round the building as he smoked his bedtime cigar. He lighted a cigarette and when his father glanced sharply at it, remarked:

"Just a farewell one and to finish out my package, Dad. Then the next one I smoke will be on my twenty-first birthday."

"I hope you mean that, son. They're bad for a growing boy."

"So Graydon says. Says no one on earth can do me so much good as I can do myself by letting them alone, till I'm grown up at least."

"You're so much like a man to-night that I feel like offering you a cigar. But I guess I can wait till you are twenty-one, too. I liked the look of Graydon. He's a good man to be with."

"He's a good man to be *like*, Dad. I didn't

break it to Mother; I tried to get at it, but didn't seem to; but I'm going to be an engineer."

"It will mean being out of the city a lot, you know, boy."

"But it means being in on big things; building highways and bridges, reclaiming deserts and no end of interesting stunts. They're not silk-shirt jobs, of course, but there's something gripping about it all."

His father smoked in silence for a time, then:

"I really think, Pelham, that it must have been an inspiration from on high that led me to bring you here. It would be a happy moment in my life to see your name stamped on something nationally big some day. If you're sure you're on the line you like, follow it hard and make yourself a big man in it. We'll manage mother somehow."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PARSON FIGHTS TEMPTATION

AFTER watching the retreating form of his nephew out of sight, Samuel Graydon followed the younger man's advice and sank into one of the deep grass chairs on the porch to rest—to rest and perhaps to have a short sleep until Wong should announce the dinner.

The chair was restful and felt much like the well worn armchair that adorned the little side porch of his snug home in the eastern city. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine himself there.

Let's see, this was Saturday—how very long ago last Saturday seemed—Saturday at somewhere around five o'clock. He would have finished his preparations for Sunday and would be resting in his armchair on the side porch.

He dwelt on the way to a fashionable quarter and at this hour the big limousines and sedans would be making their way homeward from shopping expeditions. It always rested him somehow to watch these cars, with their well-dressed women, eagerly discussing their purchases or wearily silent as the cars glided smoothly by.

The aroma of roasting beef that drifted from

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Wong's kitchen made him think of Martha's Saturday night dinner—they always had a good dinner on Saturday night. Some students usually dropped in, jokingly asking Aunt Martha, as they called her, to put some water in the soup. He hoped that Colbert wouldn't come this time. Colbert, for a man with the ministry in mind, had a most atrocious taste in ties. That last one of bright green—but anyhow Colbert was jollier company than Brooks. He must really tell Brooks, some day quite soon, not to take himself and his work *too* seriously. A certain amount, of course—but what in the world was wrong with Martha's canary? He had never known the thing to—

With almost a wrench he sat up and opened his eyes to examine the bird. But Martha's canary receded to a tree-top and turned out to be the screaming and impertinent jay that had first greeted him on the gatepost. With rather a dizzy feeling Samuel Graydon saw breadth and depth of beauty all about him; trim city streets, gliding limousines and Colbert's ties were on the other side of a continent. His eyes, following the swift, sudden flight of the brilliant-hued scolder as it darted toward his nephew's barn, met a pair of bright, almost staring human eyes that were regarding him intently from the corner of the porch.

"I thought you had gone to sleep." The owner of the staring eyes came up on the porch and, rather hesitatingly crossed to the chair where the visitor sat.

Samuel Graydon had often been alluded to as a young old man, so active and well preserved was he at the age of sixty-eight. Quite the opposite from this, the man who stood before him would have been described as an old young man—a man of fifty whose pace of life had stamped on him a look of seventy.

His hair and straggling moustache were snow white, his expression uncertain and rather pitiful. Samuel Graydon noticed, as he reached for a chair, that his hand shook uncontrollably.

“You’re from Ontario, they tell me,” he ventured in a voice that was rather thin but not uncultured.

“Yes, I have just come from there. I am Kent’s uncle.”

“So he told me. I am surely glad to see anyone from Ontario. I can’t talk about it to many here; they break in and talk about the scenery out here. This is all right if you’ve been brought up to it. But *you* know—you know what a rail fence overgrown with dogwood is, or a marsh full of marigolds in June. And you’ve scuffed your feet in a lane where red maple leaves come almost to your knees. I can’t make them see it here, but you know—you know.”

“Yes,” his listener agreed. Back in the days of his boyhood Samuel Graydon had known all of this, and the thought of it was restful to him now.

“You ought to see them fish out here,” the

quavery voice went on. "They put on high rubber boots and whip the stream with a bamboo rod and a different kind of fly for every hour in the day. And they have a reel that costs ten dollars, maybe. If the fish don't bite for this kind of nonsense, they put the pole in a velvet case and go home, for it isn't sportsmanlike to fish in any other way.

"But I needn't tell *you* what real fishing is like. *You've* turned over a moss-grown log where the earth-worms are fat and white. *You've* gone up a stream where the birch and cedars keep it cool on the hottest day, and the moss and violets deaden your footsteps. And you've let your line in and watched the cork float lazily down the stream, till it bobbed when a trout slid out from under a log. And over under a stump fence your dog dug out a ground-hog. That's fishing, by jimminy; that's *fishing*."

"You describe it as though you know it."

"Know it! I've done it—scores of times. I had my own bush with my own little stream—all on my own farm. I have it all yet if I could get it."

"If you could get it?"

"*If I could get it*. My wife's sister and her father are on it now. I can't live on it with them—no one could—and I can't get them off.

"It all started when my Caroline was taken bad with diabetes. Her sister Sally came to take care of her and her father came along so as not

to break up a devoted family. They did not in the least mind breaking up my family; in fact, it seemed to give them endless pleasure. I tried to keep sober so as not to worry Caroline too much, but with that pair in the house it was almost more than could be expected of a mere human.

"They got her to make me promise to make a home for them after she had gone. Of course, I did whatever she asked. Then when I got thinking what a fine time we were going to have I went out and got drunk. They wouldn't let me see her at the last. They told her a lot of lies about how glad I would be when she was gone and she went away believing them.

"And there they still are. Living with them got to be so bad that I couldn't do it at all except about half seas over, as someone has poetically put it. Finally I listened to Sally's sharp tongue for the last time. I'd been drinking so much that all my veterinary's practice had fallen away, so there was nothing much to keep me. I lit out and came west.

"Your nephew needed a good man with his horses; I am a good man, so here I am. That's why his horses' coats shine so. I feed 'em right. I watch their teeth and their hoofs—and Kent looks after me."

"But do you mean to tell me that you get nothing from your farm?"

"Oh, yes, I rent the farm. They just have the house and garden. And I'll get *them* some day

soon. The old man's eighty. He can't last forever. Then I'll go back." A look of almost ludicrous cunning came into his face. "I'll go back. Sally is a fine temperance woman and she's the pink of propriety. And if she isn't able to see that she is behaving scandalously in staying on the place with an old man who is drunk, the neighbours will soon tell her. It's about all the fun I have now—thinking about it."

"But, my dear sir," the Reverend Samuel Graydon interposed, "I really must expostulate. Can you not see that by these acts you are ruining a fine manhood? Don't you know that strong drink is the greatest curse——"

"Don't I know it? *Don't I know it?* Say, do you know it? Anything about it?"

"I have made a most exhaustive study of it. In fact——"

"Do you *know* anything about it?"

"N-no."

"Do you know anything about fighting temptation?"

"I hope I overcome any——"

"Did you ever really *fight* one?"

"No, possibly——"

"Then I can be of real help to you, too. I've done a lot of good in my day by just showing people how to really fight a real temptation. The people who are platform orators about it seldom know what the real thing means. I could show them. I can show you.

“You see, when these crazes come on I can fend them off for days—sometimes weeks—if I know that someone else is doing without something, too. It sort of braces me, you see. Kent has helped me lots of times. He puts aside his tobacco—he never drinks—any time I ask him, and sticks it out as long as I do.”

“I hope my nephew does not approve of your——”

“Approve of it! Of course not. Neither do I, for that matter. He doesn’t approve of it, but that doesn’t hinder his doing all he can to help me. But I don’t like to impose on him too much. And sometimes others need it more. The two boys back in the shack gave up poker for a whole month to help me. But one morning, right after payday, they thought that a rooster had crowed at midnight to bring them luck, so they got into a big jack-pot that night and let me down.”

“Then there is the Honourable, on the next place up. He thinks that, while it is all right for a man to drink, he needn’t necessarily be a beast about it. So I gave him an extra hard dose. To stick it out without either beer or tobacco for as long as I did without my Scotch. I ran a pretty long session that time. I saw that it was doing him a lot of good. But he was a good British sport. I fell first. He understands me a little better now. A meal without his beer is a pretty poor thing to him.”

“But are there no cures?”

"Kent has sent me for the Gold cure twice. And he has me on the Indian list—interdicted, I mean. Besides he puts on a fight whenever I suggest it. I wish he were here now. I feel that I need him."

"I wish he were, too," truthfully averred his listener.

Something in the hard glitter of the other's eyes frightened and shook him. He was face to face with the most realistic moment in all his study of temperance and moral reform.

"I wish I could help you," he earnestly stated.

"You can. Where does Kent keep it?"

"Keep what?"

"It. He has some."

"I do not know. But that is not the kind of help you need."

"Don't tell me that I need Divine help that I can't see. It may be Divine, but it has got to work through human hands. But perhaps you could fight this with me."

"I fear that my doing without gambling, drinking or smoking would cause so little effort that——"

"Oh, of course I don't mean anything of that sort. But you could give up something you are extra fond of, say—butter."

"*Butter!*"

The man's uncanny prescience in hitting on the very thing he could least easily get along without made Samuel Graydon think that there must be a streak of madness in him.

"It isn't silly, in the least. I always get people to do without what they want most of all. That is what *I* am doing, you see. Miss Toule, a good soul who has bunions and rocks in her chair on the porch most of the time, stayed out of her rocking chair for three weeks once to help me. She'd been lecturing me pretty hard on the evil of my ways, so when I showed her a way that she could help me, she couldn't very well refuse. But she came down with a nervous breakdown after three weeks, so I'm not sure whether I did her the good I had intended or not.

"Another time, when Kent had gone away for a month, Grayden, the young English missionary student, came to reason with me to try to keep me sober. I explained how I work this thing and asked him to give up his tea for the month. He tried to argue me out of the idea, but I left him in dignified silence and went my own way.

"It was Molly Dale that sobered me up that time. It seems that the young chap was batching and that about the only thing he knew how to cook himself was tea. All unbeknownst to me he did as I had asked and left off the tea. This amounted pretty much to a fast in his case, and when Molly Dale found out that all the while I had been—er—under the weather, she was so mad that she came and sobered me up with a pailful of water, thrown in my face a cup at a time."

"Still," Samuel Graydon spoke with a faint trace of irony, "you could flatter yourself that

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you had done him good, even if he had failed with you."

"Nobody is infallible," the other answered. "I went out and shot a fine deer for the young preacher, so we have been on good terms ever since."

"But," queried Samuel Graydon, after a few moments' thought, "if you are interdicted, as you say, how do you obtain strong drink?"

A look of cunning crossed the face of the other and he was silent.

"At the hotels?"

"No."

"I hope you do not steal it."

"No; I'm no thief."

"Then where?"

"I get it. It's expensive, of course, but I do. And I cannot tell where, naturally. But I think, if someone helps me this time I will get by all right. You do without butter, now, and I'll do without booze. Is it a go?"

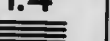
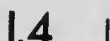
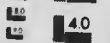
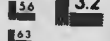
There were a lot of things that Samuel Graydon felt he ought to say, but as, in the warped brain of his listener, he and he alone was to be the present instrument of Divine help, he accepted the challenge. If by doing some such thing, however ridiculous, Kent, when he was home was able to keep the old man going right, then he would do everything in his power to take his place in that way.

The minister who had come all the way to this



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mountain field to help and instruct his nephew felt that he could not do less than the younger man would have done for this erring and misguided one.

"Yes," he said at the end of these reflections; "I will help you."

"Thank you, Samuel, from the bottom of my heart. I knew that you had it in you to be a good sport if given a chance. There will be baked potatoes and biscuit for dinner. They're not good without butter. Neither are string beans. I can see that you are going to help me uncommonly."

CHAPTER EIGHT

KENT'S YOUTHFUL RESOLVE REVIVED

"HELLO, Uncle! Not arrested yet?"

Samuel Graydon turned with a start from a solitary and butterless luncheon to see the tall form of his nephew in the doorway.

How welcome was the cheery voice and reassuring presence of the younger man. His two days' absence had endeared him to his uncle in a way that his presence could not possibly have done.

"Kent! I am glad to see you. I have found running your place to be rather a nervous business."

"Anybody turn up?"

"I have seen nothing of the constables, but I have had them on my mind. And this old man of yours——"

"Has Doc been bothering you? The old idiot! I should have warned him, I guess."

"Well, not bothering me exactly, but I fear he is contemplating a——"

"Bust, bender, tear, spree—any of them convey one's meaning here. He hasn't gone under?"

"It hangs by a very fine thread. Apparently all that stands between him and one of these—what-

ever you call them—is the fact that I am eating this dry and rather tasteless bread without any butter. Where did he get such a preposterous notion?"

"Heaven only knows. But it is wonderful how long he can keep it up if he thinks he is showing someone else how hard it is. Just get me a plate, Wong, and stir up some ham and eggs. I'll be washed in just a minute."

"It does look pretty bad." Kent indicated the butterless bread that the other was trying to eat, as he drew his chair to the table. "And I suppose it never occurred to you to beat the game by spreading jam over it."

"I do not care for jam on bread, or anything but butter. But it seemed to be all there was to do about it. How do you manage him?"

"In much the same way. Sometimes, if he is pretty far gone, I give him a few sips to tide him through the day, then a strong bromide so he can sleep it off. Sometimes strong coffee and hard work answers the purpose. But as to this cracked notion that someone else must be doing without something, too, nothing can cure him of that I am sure. If there was a cure I could soon get it by taking up a popular subscription."

"Where does he *get* it?"

"I don't know. He won't tell, of course. But if I ever find out the low brute that gets it for him, I'll put him out of the way of doing it, by heaven."

"Well, I hope you can watch the poor old man through this. When do you have to go back?"

"Cunningham says I may as well stay down for a few days now. I can do a lot of fixing round the place, as well as show you about a bit."

"And how about your success with your stream, Kent. I have been so full of my own thoughts that I forgot to ask."

"Well, if you had looked out this morning you'd have seen my animals lined up and drinking out of my brook in old-time manner."

"Ah! I am delighted. It was as you thought, then?"

"Exactly. The frost had heaved a rock so that the stream was all diverted southward. A stick or so of dynamite turned the trick. But I am afraid that it will shut Dale's off completely, unless some other spring helps feed his. But what is done is done. That rock is a Humpty Dumpty that certainly cannot be put back again."

"Well, my boy, I am glad that everything has turned out so well with you and glad to have you with me again. But I do not think you will mind my having my usual after-dinner nap now. I have allowed myself to become accustomed to it."

"Go to it, Uncle. I want to run over and see the Honourable for a while anyhow."

"Who is the Honourable? The old man mentioned him, too."

"He's an English chap on the next place up.

He came in four years ago. He is a brother of Lord Aldton of Holvein."

"Why is he called The Honourable?"

"You don't pronounce it properly, Uncle. It is Honnerable, with the accent all on the 'H.' But that really isn't his fault—not the fact that it is an official part of his name, nor the way we say it here. When he came he gave his name simply as Edward Aldton. He didn't put on any side, but he had money and a man Friday, so we rather suspected him of having been some pumpkins somewhere. And he had the quaintest ideas about running a ranch.

"However, we tried not to hold any of those things against him, and when the Miltons up on the hill were having a barn-raising they thought they would be neighbourly and ask him.

"The man who carried the invitation couldn't get by the combination of valet and butler who stood guard, so he stated his business to him. Friday, as we always called him, listened in stupefied amazement.

"'But,' he exclaimed in horror, 'e's a Honnerable.'

"The story started the rounds at that barn-raising and the name has stuck ever since. We found out afterwards that he was disgusted with Friday's reception of the invitation and would have been very glad indeed to have been there. But, for all of that, it has taken him quite a time to live it down.

"But I must run along and let you have your nap. Oh, by the way, Uncle, you remember my telling you of the walk Rolson and I took years ago, when we stole in on a lawn and saw——"

"Alleyne Milburne. Yes, I remember."

"Well now, listen to my tale, then tell me what you make of it. After I had finished blasting at the spring, I rode over the hills, by a short cut I know, to see Cunningham about staying down with you for a while. I have a cabin on a little stream off Sinclair Creek that I use for headquarters during the trapping season.

"Something guided me to go and look inside and *there she was in my cabin.*"

"Not Miss Milburne?"

"Alleyne Milburne. Now, Uncle, you are supposed to be an expert on signs and manifestations. Would you or would you not consider that to be prophetic?"

"But Miss Milburne in the Windermere! They usually summer at Gateport. Martha and I go up to your uncle Herbert's farm and we often see them there."

"How about answering my question?"

"Ah, yes. But prophetic of what, Kent?"

"I told you of the resolve I made years ago."

"But a mere boyish fancy. You cannot be of the same mind to-day. You've had a dozen similar notions since that time."

"Not a single one, Uncle. I have worked all these years with the single idea of putting myself

where I could go back to the city and meet her on a proper footing. Things have come my way so nicely in other ways that I can be excused for thinking that my luck is still running strong. And it hasn't discouraged me to find that fate has apparently not waited for my advent in the East, but has wafted the object of my ambitions to almost within my reach."

"But—but, Kent. Have you considered whether this would be—suitable?"

"I have considered that it would be to me."

"She has many acquaintances."

"Doubtless."

"And very many young men about. They see a lot of this Rolson, I believe. He is probably of the same mind that he was in your youth."

"I am sure that he is. It may also be in the nature of a prophecy that he was the next person I met after seeing Miss Milburne. We understood each other at a glance. It is to be a contest, there is no doubt of it. But something tells me that it will end all right for me. Get your sleep. I'm off."

CHAPTER NINE

THE MYSTERY OF A MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

THE main living-room of the small cottage that was the abode of the owner of Aldtonlea might more fittingly be described as a richly furnished den. It was as different as possible from the big, airy and masculine room that so well expressed the individuality of the owner of Equestria.

Withal it was a room designed for comfort—comfort of a rather self-indulgent and exotic sort. The books were the kind that most people said they had never read, hating to admit that they had never heard of them.

The tobaccos in the teakwood cabinet and the beverages in an almost priceless callarette of carved rosewood were the kind that men admitted they had never heard of but they were willing to try anything once. Discriminating people always pronounced these worth a second trial. To be sure, they were never offered to any but discriminating people.

On the walls were tacked large and small rugs of Oriental makes and colourings that not only gave the room a Turkish haremy look but that gave out strange spicy odours that suggested

streets of Bombay or the Taj Mahal in some other existence.

There was an open grate, of course, and a bear-skin whereon the owner's three dogs slept, and curtains of heavy Oriental silk to shut in the fire-light when the inmate so willed. But the chief feature of the room was the depth and comfort of the chairs. Their softness had the lotus-like effect of making one forget that there could be such a disagreeable and, on the whole, unnecessary thing as work.

As Kent Graydon crossed his meadow in the direction of Aldonlea, he pictured his friend taking his ease in one or another of these chairs—probably it would be the one that knew a lot of tricks like lowering the head, sliding out a rest for the feet and holding one's ash tray. He would have on the inevitable grey flannels and something very heavy and British looking in the way of oxfords.

So, indeed, he found him. Elward Aldton had decided that, on the whole, he might as well have a little siesta, and craned his neck without any too much pleasure, when the sound of footsteps came from the porch.

But his face lighted flatteringly on his ascertaining who was the intruder.

"Ah, Graydon, come in. Thank heaven it's you so I don't have to get up. Find anything you want, then sit over there where I can see you."

"I knew I'd find you here or hereabouts, you

lazy rascal," the other greeted, as he helped himself to a cigarette and took the seat indicated.

"What's the news?"

"Nothing much. It's too hot, I guess. Was over at the Invermere yesterday and had some golf. I hear you are up for wire-cutting again."

"Any good golf?"

"After looking the bunch over I took out a steel millionaire or something. He wasn't at all bad, as millionaires go. After showing him a little what I could do, I let him come up on me at the eighteenth. He won. He felt so good about it that, of course, there was a good dinner in it. Cocktails, cigars and all."

"Aldton," the other groaned, "what a pity you're such an awful sponge. I believe you lay awake at nights planning ways to be a dead beat. If you'd put half as much thought into hustling a little bit."

"Thoughts and hustling do not exactly——"

"Then try just hustling."

"My misguided friend, let me tell you this: The only thing that we shall take into any future existence is the structure of our thoughts. You may own enough fine horses to equip an army—got to leave them all behind. If Dale and I weren't blocking you you'd soon own the whole valley—and not a grain of it could you take with you.

"Some day in the next world I will leave the twentieth plane or wherever I am and come down

into the steerage, as it were, just to see how you look, divested of your handsome body and material possessions."

"Thanks, awfully. You're getting me round to the object of my visit. I've an uncle here from the east—the preacher one. He is a good old soul; believes in the God of the Bible and all that. I ask as a favour that you forget all this advanced knowledge when you talk to him. Let on you have preserved the religion your mother taught you, if you can."

"If I can. But you see, being away, I have sort of gotten behind the van. You see, the mater is president of the Condon School of Psychics."

"Oh——"

"Spiritists. The vice-president of this society, mark you, is a woman who ten years ago passed beyond the veil. She and my mother have great confabs about the general running of the society—through a medium, of course."

"Indeed. Well, for all of that, you get my meaning, I think. Just don't argue with him about his views. You may some day come down from the twentieth plane and find that he was not so far out, after all."

"Who knows? But I'll be mum as a mummy."

"Good! In other ways you will find him not bad company, I am sure. Come over soon. Doc's and Jimmy's allusions to you have piqued his curiosity—not to mention mine. He wants to meet you."

"I shall be delighted. And now, what is it that you really came to tell me?"

"You are a sort of psychic yourself. Well, here it is. I've seen Her."

"Ah. Spelled with a capital, I take it."

"All capitals."

"Hm-m-m. New?"

"Yes and no."

"She's not at the Invermere. Didn't see anything worth a second look yesterday."

"She is stopping there, but they were up in the pass yesterday. Her mother stayed behind. You may have seen her."

"The lady in purple?"

"How should I know?"

"Not seen her—the mother, I mean?"

"No. The name is Milburne."

"That's the one I mean. Well, my verdict would be that you are lucky if she favours your suit. If not, not."

"It was intimated to me that I would have the double job of winning the mother, too."

"You're serious, then?"

"Dead serious."

"Well, I wish you all luck. And may I venture to hope, now that life and freedom seem to promise so much of interest, that you will not be detained too long in the custody of the law—if such are McNulty's intentions?"

The other shrugged.

"McNulty seems to be simply brimming over

with intentions just now. I wanted to ask your advice about it."

"You wanted to ask my advice!"

"Among other things."

"Ah. The other things being the usual proceeding of giving me advice. But you interest me; go on."

"I met McNulty on my way from the pass, before lunch. He had just come from Dale's and was in such a black rage that he could hardly keep his hands off his gun. He accused me of every form of villainy and when he gave me a chance to suggest that he be specific, it boiled down to where he accused me of clandestinely marrying Molly."

"The silly ass! Where did he get it?"

"Molly told him, he said."

"What's she stringing him for?"

"I have no idea. He says he saw the certificate and that if there is anything crooked about it he will have me strung to a telephone pole."

"Oh, I say! You didn't take any of that from *him*. He's a blot on this fair landscape anyhow."

"I don't understand the thing at all. I guess that is why he is able to be about. If Molly did go to the trouble to have a certificate to show him—well, that is what I wanted to ask your advice about."

"Go to see Molly, of course. Don't work in the dark. If she has a certificate that says she

is married to you, I think you ought to know about it—if you do not already.”

“I passes over your levity, as Mrs. McCorkle says. But I rather thought that you would advise me to let you go and make the inquiries. Inquiring about one’s marriage to a young woman would, I should think, be quite a delicate matter.”

“Quite. It would indeed. I agree with you. And with my ingrained, habitual and indelicate British bluntness, I cannot persuade myself that I would be a suitable envoy. Were I a Frenchman, now, or an Italian—but no; finesse is *not* my forte.”

CHAPTER TEN

A BRIDE'S HONEYMOON—ALONE

MISS MOLLY DALE sat on the gate of what was still known to the valley as the Dale farm. But it was well known in the valley that the right to live in the house, to pasture a horse and cow on the meadow—and to swing on the gate, was about all of the rights and privileges of their former home left to the father and daughter.

The cattle that roamed the meadow and along the green-edged brook bore the bar-and-heart brand that stamped them as Pete McNulty's. Over in the meadow his teams were busy putting up hay.

The tenancy that McNulty now held was a suggestion of his that the Dales had not felt it possible to refuse, in view of the fact that their exchequer was empty, while several hundred dollars were owing as interest on the mortgage held by him.

This mortgage, being of an amount that far exceeded the value of the place, was not one for which it would be easy for them to find outside relief. The only man who would be apt to consider the place at anything like the value owing on it

was the one who was not, by special stipulation, to be allowed to buy it.

Wesley Dale's bent lay all in the direction of inventing, which for some reason is seldom allied with an ability for finance.

When, the year before, McNulty had stated that a tenancy for a term would satisfactorily square the accrued interest, he had also hinted that Molly had it in her power to cancel the entire mortgage very agreeably, and thus preserve their home for them.

"And, as your son-in-law," he had finished, "I could feel my way clear to backing you in some of your inventions. Two or three of them look like money-getters with a little cash behind them.

"It's all up to Molly," the mild little man had answered. "Whatever she says, goes."

"But would you let the whim of a girl, who doesn't know her own mind, do you out of your home?"

"Yes, I guess if Molly has that whim, and you are minded to put us out, that is what would happen."

McNulty had then let it go for the time being. But, on redoubling his efforts to attract the girl with no better success, he had come to be of the opinion that it was the presence of Molly's handsome neighbour that stood in the way of any advance he might have made.

Many were the curses wished by him on the "handsome mug" of the other. Kent's easy

camaraderie with Molly was regarded by him as a pose to keep his skirts clear, while still enjoying as much as possible of her company.

At last, with the additional argument of some recent money loaned to Wesley Dale, and his knowledge of their very straitened circumstances, he had attempted to have it out with Molly.

"You're driving your father to his grave, just for a foolish notion. His ideas are good. I can make him rich and famous."

But Molly, although her heart was wrung by the truth of his statements, had stood her ground. Had asked him to go away and try to forget it all.

Then McNulty, realising that only his trump card would save the game, had played it.

"Molly," he had said, "people know that someone has been furnishing this house with money for months. They are talking. I want to shield you from it all."

Molly's Irish fighting blood had leaped, but she had kept her question calm:

"Who are talking? And what are they saying?"

"I have an idea that some of the stories started—not a thousand miles from here. As to what they are——" A shrug finished his sentence for him.

"Then," Molly had said, going to her room and placing before him a bescrrolled certificate, "*This* can silence them."

"Graydon!" he had exclaimed. "The dirty, low-down cur!"

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"Get out!"

Something in the force of her words had started him toward the door. The mighty rage that possessed him had found no outlet until his meeting with Graydon.

So that Molly, while apparently sitting on a patent-applied-for gate and crocheting a camisole as she waited for Jimmy to bring the coast mail that had come from Golden by boat the day before, was really devoting most of her fiery young energy to hating Pete McNulty.

She had seen Graydon as he left the gate of Equestria, but crocheted on in true feminine indifference and looked up in surprise when the horse turned in at their gate.

"Hello, Ker^t," she greeted, ignoring the gravity of his expression. "I know what you are after. Father thought he would have it finished by noon."

"Never mind that. Molly, I want to talk to you."

"Yes?"

He saw that she did not intend to help him any.

"Seen McNulty lately?" he asked.

Molly counted stitches for a minute, then stated calmly:

"I had a final row with him this morning."

"And he met me half an hour later. I was rather puzzled at something he said."

"Yes?"

"Well?"

"Well?"

"What's the answer, Molly?"

Carefully Molly rolled up her work and tucked it away in a little bag. Then, balancing on the gate, she regarded the lake thoughtfully.

"Molly."

"Kent, listen. Will you wait a week for it?"

"A week, Molly! And what then?"

"Then I'll explain everything."

"And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime?"

"What am I to say? When I am congratulated or questioned, am I to deny it?"

"Please don't. Just for one short week, Kent."

"But Molly. *Think* a minute. If I don't deny the yarn, I admit it. You don't ask that?"

"Go back in the pass, Kent. The men there won't have heard a word until the end of the week. And then I will explain everything."

"I've just made arrangements to stay out of the canyon for a week."

"I don't believe McNulty will tell anyone but you of the certificate. He has a sort of pride and he has bragged that he has moved onto the place for good."

"But a certificate? Where did you get it?"

"*In one week.*"

"But a week, Molly. Did you ever see a yarn of that kind take a week to reach the farthest corner of this valley? It simply goes the faster for being a secret. And there is one quarter where

it would only take it a minute to queer everything for me. A week ago I'd not have minded; now I do."

"Kent!" Molly grasped the ear of his horse and prevented its following its evident intention of moving off. "Who is she? Why didn't you tell me?"

"There's little to tell; so *very* little that much less than the story McNulty has gone with would topple it at any moment."

"Then—here it is, Kent. And it's the second time to-day that I have broken a solemn and sacred promise. I was married to Walter Grayden last week in Golden."

"The young minister!"

"I guess he is by this time. He is away now being made a full-fledged parson. He isn't supposed to be married before that, but I got so nervous about McNulty that I induced him to be married before he left on the train. Then, as soon as he gets back, we intend having another ceremony down here and announcing it properly. Mr. Yorke satisfied his conscience in some technical way. The certificate is not dated yet, but McNulty did not notice that, nor that the initials and spelling were not like yours. I had counted on that. And I thought that if he did tell that it was you, people would soon find out the reverse. His yarns are not much credited, as you know. I never thought of doing you any harm."

"Poor kid. Well, likely it won't. But Grayden! I didn't know——"

"No one did. On account of McNulty I have been afraid to say anything. But what am I to do now?"

"Look here, Molly. I need some things for the house. A set of dishes and some silver, so I could give a bang-up dinner if I were so minded. I couldn't buy them myself if my life depended on it. So you go down with Jimmy this afternoon and get them for me. And buy you the most unministerial hat you can find for your trousseau as a commission. Then stay with your cousin there till you think Grayden will be back. The valley won't think that I would let a wife of mine, if I had one, take such a lonesome honeymoon as that. Here comes Jimmy over the hill now. Will you?"

"Kent, you are a saint. And great will be your reward in heaven."

"Aren't you airing your new position a little soon?"

"Never mind that. Just hold Jimmy till I get a few things together. Is it sterling silver you want?"

"How should I know?"

"Well—and how many?"

"It is all up to you. Scoot."

"Not in jail, eh!" was Jimmy's genial greeting as he stopped his car in response to Kent Graydon's signal.

"Not yet. I am beginning to hope that the offence will be outlawed before they get here."

"You can thank your Uncle Jimmy that they weren't here some time ago."

"How so?"

"Oh, I've been talking reason to certain parties. I told them they had better keep off your track; that you were getting pretty strong suspicions about the booze that Doc is getting."

"Go on! But you had better go slow. I don't want my hands tied with anyone that knows anything about that."

"Oh, it was only a chance shot, of course, but not so far wide of the mark at that. Well, we must get along."

"Just a minute. Molly's going down."

"Molly?"

"Yes. Going down to do some shopping for me. Trip expenses on your wagon will be mine."

"H-m. Be all right for me to look after her a bit down there?"

"She can tell you that."

"Oh. What McNulty tells me isn't true, then?"

"Can't say. But I should hardly think it likely. Here's Molly now. Don't worry about your father, Molly. I'll take him over for some of Wong's real cooking. Get him something you know he will like while you're there. 'Voir, everybody. Come along, Prince, old boy."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A LOST GOLF BALL

A COSTUMIER of note had once declared Claire Harwin to be the best dressed young woman in her native city, the said authority being a stickler for quiet tones, good lines and suitability.

But it is probable that few men could be found who would agree with the verdict. Most members of the opposite sex preferred the dash of coquetry that characterised the clothes worn by Claire's cousin, Alleyne.

The fundamental reason for this was that, while Claire dressed with the sole idea of pleasing herself, most of the other's toilettes were made with the idea of pleasing one or another of her men friends.

Just now Claire had donned a suit of heavy rajah that would be equally suitable, were the afternoon programme at the Invermere Country Club to be tennis, boating or golf. Then, having put the matter of her appearance out of her head for the rest of the day, she sat by the window where she could watch the lake and mountains, and so not waste the time that always elapsed between the finish of her toilette and that of her cousin's.

On this especial afternoon Alleyne seemed to be in no hurry to finish. Claire wondered whether she could not decide which costume suited her purpose best, or whether she was in doubt as to the purpose itself.

At any rate, Alleyne, after donning and getting to look just right a frock of green linen that, beside being a favorite of Ronald Rolson's, was suitable for anything in the realm of sport, had taken it off and had considered at length the merits of a ruffled blue organdy topped by a wide hat loaded with cornflowers and baby roses, as against a rather barbaric embroidered orange affair not many shades from the colour of her own hair.

The delft blue proved to be the final choice and it was a very dainty and youthful-looking Alleyne that emerged from the labour and ponderings of an hour. The ruffles plainly bespoke the fact that neither golf, boating nor tennis was the inspiration of the afternoon's toilette.

Then what was? Claire wondered.

"I haven't seen Ron since lunch," she ventured.

"I think he is golfing with that Englishman he had to lunch," Alleyne answered, trying the effect of a touch of rouge on her dainty ear-lobe. Cornflower blue required a little playing up to.

"Name's Aldton or some such thing."

"Rather distinguished, don't you think?"

"In looks do you mean?"

"In what other ways could he be to you?"

"As to looks, I don't agree with you. But he is frightfully distinguished in other ways; the only brother of Lord Holvein, who has the wonderful Aldton collection of paintings. But don't mention a word of this to mother. Since Fred's older brother died and Hester has become a ladyship, she thinks she is infallible. Likely she'd drop Ron like a hot iron in the hope that Lord Holvein's life is destined to be short."

"I think you do your mother an injustice."

"You know I speak the plain, unvarnished truth."

"Apparently, then," Claire thought, "he had nothing to do with the blue ruffles."

"They say," Alleyne presently ventured, "that everyone in the countryside comes to the club on Saturday afternoons. Do you suppose they do?"

"I don't know. A car came in from the pass when I was downstairs just now—Uncle and Pelham and Mr. Cunningham and some others."

"What others?"

"Some of the surveyors. Nice-looking men. I didn't know their names."

"Was there a Mr. Graydon?" Alleyne inquired casually.

"He's the handsome owner of the cabin you appropriated? No, I didn't see him. But I believe Junior is confidently expecting to see him somewhere. Probably there. Is your mother going over?"

"Alas, yes. And she's getting more trouble-

some about Ron every minute. He has told her of his plans for a yacht now, so that is another incentive. I'll get less peace than ever."

"Does she imagine," Claire asked, without looking at her cousin, "that you *could* settle matters if you would?"

"Well, I could, too. But what's the rush? There will still be Ron at the end of the summer. In the meantime, I think it will be rather fun here."

"Don't be too certain that there will still be Ron at the end of the summer. Something tells me that he will need congratulating or consoling very soon. If it is to be consoling—well, I've never tried it, but I fancy I might be good at it. I should like to live in Bellview—and a yacht! Muskoka and the lakes in July and August; down the river to Montreal for September golf. I'd like the life."

"There are a lot of lives you would like," Alleyne answered with tolerant amusement. "Only this morning you said that you would like nothing better than to own some of these hills and vales with a strip of the lake front, put on some decent clothes and live here till the day you die. Beside which, Claire dearest, a girl so disgustingly rich in her own right as you should be ashamed to have designs on anyone's house or yacht. Your duty is to fall in love with one of those rising or promising people you are always

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discovering and do some real good with your money."

"Not a bad idea," Claire assented, idly watching a decrepit old parrot profanely taking a bath on the lawn. "I remember that when that stunning-looking engineer of the cabin in the pass parted from you he said something about having had an object all his life. I thought it so worthy of him; and he may need the help you mention. Beside, he is so very——"

"You let him alone."

She spoke with such vehemence that her companion started. Then, with one of the quick changes of which her versatile temperament was capable, Alleyne crossed the room quickly and put her arms round her cousin's shoulders from behind.

"Dear old Harwin Warwin," she coaxed. "There's ten million men in this world, and I am only asking you to keep away from two. You'll do it, won't you?"

Then she was back again before the mirror, tilting the cornflower hat at an angle that was just the touch lacking in the other's toilette. Then, leaving her golf sticks, but taking a becoming parasol, she remarked:

"My sixth sense or something tells me that my mother is fuming down on the porch. I shall complain of the way you kept me waiting."

The two girls descended amiably and smilingly. Claire Harwin's smile was partly due to the fact

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that, without the unpleasant necessity of prying on her part, the situation had been put very plainly before her; and Alleyne's because, without any effort on her part, the conversation had come around to where she could get the situation before Claire's eyes just as she wanted it.

It was Pelham Milburne that awaited the girls at the ladies' entrance.

"Hello, you girls," he greeted them, with an enthusiasm that Claire thought so much nicer than the bored, blasé air he had affected in the early summer.

Then his eyes lit up as he went to the foot of the stairs to meet his mother, who descended with evident but unhurried pleasure.

"But, Pelham, dear! You've not changed yet. And we're all ready to go. You must hurry."

"I'm going over just as I am, mumsey."

"Nonsense, Pelham! I had your flannels pressed for you this morning. Go and get into them."

"They're too small since they have been washed."

"Did you try them?"

"No. But I know to look at them. Anyhow, I don't want to be the only dude there. The fellows from the pass will guy me all week."

Mrs. Milburne turned in despair to the girls.

"Let him go as he likes and get it out of his system," Alleyne counselled. "He doesn't really look too bad."

Alleyne was aware that she had surprised her brother, but she had an idea that he might become very useful to her during the summer.

"Good, sis," he approved. "Come on Claire, back me up. I look all right, isn't it?"

"Yes, you undoubtedly do, Pel. Still, I saw some young chaps going over in flannels a while ago. They carried racquets, but they did not look as though they would play the game you do. I am sure I shall wish you had not on those heavy boots."

"Oh, well, if it's that way, I'll just be a sec. Go over to the drug-store, girls, and get some decent balls. See they're marked 1913."

"You are such a comfort, Claire," Mrs. Milburne said, when the boy had hurried up three steps at a time. "I don't know what I would do without you. With your positive genius for directing the masculine mind, what a wife you will make!"

Kent Graydon with difficulty suppressed a whistle when, following the glances of the men who stood with him on the club verandah, he saw Mr. Cunningham bringing the Milburne party through the rustic gateway.

His sudden panic was not caused by the blue and gold loveliness that was Alleyne, but by the awe-inspiring, youth-chilling majesty that was Mrs. Horace Pelham Milburne.

To a lesser degree the same thing was felt by the young matrons of the club, so that for a

moment none went forward to greet the stranger as their natural kindness prompted them to do.

But, after a cursory glance over the pleasant assemblage, Mrs. Milburne's eyes rested on a little man in black, and she at once unbended to graciousness as she recalled having seen him at times in Gateport in other summers, the members of the club took courage. Mr. Cunningham was soon officiating at a most cordial reception.

But the relief of the women members on seeing that the stranger's rather frigid dignity could melt to friendliness was a mere bagatelle to the relief of the young man who, without seeming to do so, was keenly watching the group about his uncle.

"But keep your head, old man," he muttered to himself. "I can see that you have got to play your cards with some wisdom."

A pretty girl of seventeen gave Kent his tea, and as he drank it he formulated and rejected a dozen plans for the furtherance of what had become to him a single and absorbing objective.

For some reason his caution forbade his going straight to Alleyne, as all his inclinations urged him to do. Then he saw his neighbour, Aldton, come in from the links with Ronald Rolson. Grimly he noted that Aldton was soon the centre of the chattering group. And he could have gritted his teeth at the very evident pride with which Rolson introduced his new found friend to Alleyne Milburne.

"Oh, Mr. Graydon, I want you to come and meet the mater."

It was Pelham Milburne who had taken the procession of events into his own hands. The group fell apart as he propelled the other to where his mother held court.

"Mother, I want you to meet Mr. Graydon—my boss, you know."

"Ah, Mr. Graydon, how do you do. Pelham has spoken of you."

Then Kent Graydon established a record for himself among the young men who had been introduced to Mrs. Milburne in the last five years. He did not immediately turn in the direction of Alleyne as though in anticipation of an introduction.

This in Mrs. Milburne's mind balanced the fact that he was one of those inexcusably good-looking young men against which she had to guard Alleyne, and left him about where he was before.

Kent soon found himself standing a little to one side and discussing the problem of Horace Pelham, Junior, with Mr. Milburne. From here he noted that Alleyne was having a second cup of tea with Ronald Rolson, smiling into his eyes as she did so. He had no way of knowing that her intention was to pacify both that young man and her mother beforehand for her behaviour after she should seemingly have met Pelham's engineer.

Also, knowing very little of the feminine mind,

he had no suspicion that there might be a little of pique in her attitude that, in spite of her warning, he had made no advances in her direction.

Still, Alleyne was a young lady who knew how to get what she wanted. Soon she was standing with her father and he was trying to recall to her that she had met this man on the day they had been in the pass.

"Possibly," Alleyne said as her mother watchfully joined them. "There were such a lot of men about——"

Then, apparently uninterested, she dropped back to where Ronald Rolson stood.

"Let's have some golf," she suggested. "Get that man—what is his name?—for Claire, and we'll have a foursome."

"Golf!" he exclaimed, with a glance at her French heels.

"Yes, golf. Isn't it awful that I change my mind where I can't change my clothes? I'll get along. Go get them."

So Ronald went. He had already been round the links twice, but felt that he would go round till he was dizzy if only Alleyne paired his handsome opponent with Claire and elected to play with him.

It was somewhere near the seventh hole that Rolson's ball fell short on an intended long drive and rolled into the gravel-bottomed right of way of the new railway.

"Stupid," Alleyne exclaimed. "Go down and

get it. I'll wait here. I want to ask Mr. Graydon about this darling little lake hidden below here."

"Now be nice," Alleyne admonished Claire's partner when he caught up with her. "And be quick about it. I arranged this party and am out here in French heels just for the chance to talk to you. I saw you were going to be uppish at the club."

His eyes showed that her intention of raising him to the seventh heaven had been successful.

"There is a darling little launch down at the pier," Alleyne went on. "It is yours, is it not?"

"If you mean the right one."

"It has my name painted on it," she said severely.

He waited for his reprimand. Instead:

"I adore water and moonlight. I'd love to go for a little run some evening."

"Would you and your mother go out to-night?"

"I should say *not*."

"You think she wouldn't?"

"I know *I* wouldn't. I'd love to go, just you and I, though."

"I'd rather take your mother, too. Or your father, or Pelham."

"Oh, take them all then. I always thought there was freedom in the west; that one might do as one pleased here."

"I'm sorry."

"Wait. Don't go. Goodness, I don't know how to take you. All the boys I know come back

at me when I talk like that. And they'd jump at the chance I'm giving you, too."

"Perhaps they're not so serious as I. I want to go at this thing right."

"Well, you're not."

"I think I will ask your father and mother to go with me to-night. I have already asked your father to try my launch some time."

"What do you suppose mother will say to my name being on your boat?"

"She can scarcely know that I have known your name for years; or even that I know it now. If I get permission to take you on the lake some evening, you'll come?"

"I'll do better than that—I'll come anyhow. And I know you won't get permission. Poor Ron! I think he has lost his fourth ball. And there is Claire sitting on a sand-box. She is chewing grass and when she does that she is bored. You'd best hurry."

CHAPTER TWELVE

“THE MOST CAVE-MANLIKE SUITOR WINS?”

THE crisp, early hours of the next morning found Edward Aldton in his garden. The gardens of A. tonlea were one of the beauty spots of the valley, and were the only direction in which their owner had ever been known to expend energy. And even at that, a great deal of the work done—that is, the real work—was done by Mah Jim, Friday’s oriental successor.

This morning the owner was bringing inexpert knowledge and unaccustomed hands to the task of constructing a small rustic pergola that the wild lengths of some crimson ramblers seemed to demand.

A chuckle, caused by the merciless descent of the hammer on the user’s thumb, caused him to turn a haughty glare in the direction of the sound.

“Ah there, Graydon,” he said with relieved welcome, as he met the amused eyes of his neighbour, who leaned on the fence in a Greuze cherub attitude. “You are probably sent me by special providence. How does one nail up this bally thing so that it will not cave in on one?”

The other easily vaulted the intervening rails.

"Anyone without my extensive acquaintance of you might almost imagine you to be at work. What's up?"

"I am, for one thing. One might as well be, what with Dale's cowbells and those chanticlors of yours."

"By the way," Graydon interrupted. "There are two less roosters crowing than I counted just a week ago. Had any chicken dinners lately?"

"Yes, if I remember rightly, there have been two this last week—most excellent dinners, too."

"So I knew. I've just been round to investigate. You should tell your Chink to burn the feathers."

"What crude suggestions you make at times. When I hint to the excellent Mah Jim that a chicken dinner would please my palate, he asks no questions. When he sets before me what I have suggested, I ask none. An admirable arrangement. You're not asking me to disturb anything so perfect!"

"I am merely warning you that I may add that chicken bill up to where I take it out of someone's hide—if there seems to be no other way of getting it."

"Dear me! Do I understand that someone is threatened? And it was only this morning that I gave a breath of a hint to Jim that the noise of *so many* cocks was unendurable."

"Well, since that I have given him a breath of a hint that my men have instructions to use their

firearms if he so much as puts a foot on my place. I reserved diplomacy for you."

"About the cow-bells," Aldton went on imper- turbably. "I was going to speak to you. Dale's cow-bells used to be on Dale's place, and so quite out of my hearing. *Now*, for some obscure reason, they seem to spend their restless early morning hours on your place, right next to my line fence."

Kent Graydon chuckled as he whittled a gouge where a pole might be nailed.

"Yes," he said, "poor old Dale's creek is drying up, so I've taken some cow boarders. They don't need the bells, however, and I'll take them off on your word that you will acquire your chickens through the regular channels hereafter."

"Done. Send over the two noisiest for my Sunday dinner. But about the streams. Dale's is drying up, you say. And I notice that yours is coming again."

Then Graydon recounted the neat job that had turned the water of the twin streams northward again.

"McNulty's not on, at all?" Aldton asked.

"He suspects me somehow, but has nothing definite to go on. He has been back to the seeming source of Dale's brook and it doesn't look to have been tampered with. Perhaps he suspects me of having chloroformed it. Meantime, there is to be war, I guess. He is digging wells as hard as I was two weeks ago, and he told old Weir that

if he didn't get water he would sell his cattle and buy up sheep. Put them back on the hill runs with my horses. The coyotes have been troublesome down round Mud Creek. He says old Harbottle will sell all he has—five or six thousand."

"Phew," the other whistled. "That looks bad."

"Rather. It'll kill the run for horses. I'd give a thousand dollars to head him off the notion."

But the attention of Edward Aldonton had wandered. He looked at the sun, rubbed the back of his neck, then gathered up his tools.

"Come inside," he invited. "No white man could work in this heat. We'll have a pipe and call this a day. Then you can tell me your troubles."

"Troubles?"

"Sure. That's what you came for, you know."

"Got your own?" he asked, producing his tobacco pouch when they were in the cool of the den.

"I have, but I prefer yours."

"Fire ahead," Aldton invited, ensconcing himself comfortably.

"There isn't anything to tell. I wish there was."

"Course of true love not running smoothly?"

"Very—in the wrong direction."

"What seems to be the obstacle?"

"Principally another man that the mother has set her heart on."

"Ah! Enter the heavy villain."

"The heavy villain in this case is a darned decent chap, honestly in love and with a million or so of old Rolson's cash to argue in his favour. It's a cheerful outlook for me, all right."

"I take it from all this that you did not enjoy your ride last night."

"You've taken it. With the summer short and time flying, I intended to advance as far as possible in Mrs. Milburne's regard. I used all my arts to please her. The senator was very pleasant, but I don't fancy he would raise obstacles. But long before I got things mellowed to where she might regard me with tolerance, they were mellowed to where she was telling me all about her plans for her daughter. I felt as though I had stumbled onto a keep-off-the-grass sign."

"H-m. You've not asked my advice, of course, but it would be to confine your efforts to the young lady. After all, she's the one you want to marry—that is, if you've thought things out as far as that."

"I have. But I don't like tackling anything in an underhand fashion—much less this."

"Well, it's a moot question. According to writers of pre-history, our noble ancestor, the cave-man, selected his partner and hauled her home, establishing the first precedent. There is no record of his having cared a button whether her par-

ents approved of him or not. If he had spent his time in courting them first, it is more than likely that a rival cave-man, with a gold mine in the back of his cave—or whatever was the pre-equivalent of a swollen fortune of to-day—would have been busy dragging home his lady love.

"To conclude the advice you did not ask for, while I do not pose as a judge of character, it is my opinion that in this case the most cave-manlike suitor wins out."

Kent Graydon let his pipe go out as he watched a wasp in Aldton's window and pondered on the advice given.

"Then," he stated at last, "you, backed by generations of noblesse oblige and all that, advise me to win a young woman if I can, regardless of the fact that, as things now stand, it would sever her from the rest of her family."

"No. On second thoughts, I butt out. I sha'n't waste my breath advising a man in love. There's something about him——"

"How about you?" the other asked curiously.

"Were you never there?"

Edward Aldton shrugged.

"Unlike you," he said, "I've seen too much of the dear things. It's a good scheme to be out here in the mountains where one doesn't see the social variety, if a fellow wants to keep his ideals. Of course, a boat and a pretty girl in the moonlight is a nice diversion, but one is as good as another—or almost so. It's mostly the one one sees

the oftenest. I've often wondered why you didn't do the perfectly obvious thing and marry pretty Molly Dale. There would be none of this ticklish business of transplanting, beside which it is your short cut to getting the extra land you need and a way of getting McNulty out of the way."

"Well, as for that, why don't you?"

"I? After coming all this way to escape just that! My good mother—but I bore you with my private affairs. There is the luncheon gong. I think Mah Jim mentioned chicken salad for lunch to-day. I'd be glad for you to stay and have some."

"On a day like this?" was the Honnerable's shocked exclamation when, from the doorway, his visitor had conferred him to regions where, by comparison, even the end of July is supposed to seem cool."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE BOMB THAT FELL ON ALDTONLEA

ON Kent's return from Aldtonlea he found his uncle deep in the eastern mail that had been slipped into Equestria's gate box on Jimmy's upward trip.

"Ah, my boy," he exclaimed, "I have just finished. I was afraid you would be late."

"Aunt Martha should be satisfied with the appetite you've taken on here," Kent remarked as they seated themselves before steaming plates of soup. "I remember that she always called you a 'picky' eater.

"I've some news for you, too," he added. "You may have some butter. I saw old Doc in his shack as I came by. He's a pretty sick man, as he himself puts it."

"Really!"

It was not until he had greedily loaded his cracker and had put a generous amount into his soup that Samuel Graydon bethought himself to remark:

"But, dear me. He is drunk again, you say. That is very distressing."

"It's more than that. It's—well, I'll express

myself outside your hearing. I'd give a lot to know who's in this. It's never seemed just the thing to get the old man talking when he's edged, although I've an idea he'd never remember what he told a fellow now. But what's the news from home?"

"Ah, yes. I was coming round to that. I have a letter from the secretary to say that the young man who is filling my place is proving to be very satisfactory, and that my people think that it would be the wisest thing for me to remain until I have fully recuperated from my recent nervous breakdown. A letter from Martha says that she thinks the same; that she will go to her sister in Labrador if I will stay here. She has wanted to go for years. So, as the way seems to have been providentially made clear, I think I must accept."

"You're certainly looking fitter already. Do you suppose you could have been eating too much butter?" Kent inquired with gravity.

"Have all the fun you want," his uncle replied. "But never let it get back home. My people would never keep their faces straight long enough to let me preach a temperance sermon.

"As to feeling fitter," he went on, "I sleep like a child. I eat—well, you have seen that, and I can steadily feel my nerves becoming normal. The queer sounds and silences by night and that strange Chinaman by day no longer bother me in the least."

"But, Uncle! How about it after this week? I've really got to get back at work, and it's too far over for me to come back every night. You'd not like it here alone for long."

"Could I come with you part of the time?"

"You could when I am near the gap. We'll be on a bridge close in next week. We could back in my cabin there. I think you would like that." A sudden warmth filled his heart as he thought of a smiling face and red-gold hair in his mountain-side home.

"But after next week Cunningham has asked me to go in where they are re-surveying back up the Kootenay, where it joins the Vermillion. You could never make that I am sure. Would you go over to the hotel for a while?"

"I think I would not mind it here, Kent. I would miss your company, of course, but I certainly cannot stop you from your work."

His nephew sat in frowning perplexity for a time. He was thinking of with what pleasure he had looked forward to a month's work back on the Vermillion at the beginning of the hunting season—up to a few weeks ago. That was before the advent of Alleyne Milburne into his hills—and his heart. Now, the best he could think of his favourite hunting fields was that they were a long way off.

"I'll see what Cunningham says," he said at last. "The Vermillion job might do in October. I could sell some horses if I could get a while off

to break them. But if he thinks that I'd better do the job in Septemper, as we had it planned, I'll get the McCorkle over to look after you."

"The McCorkle?"

"That is what we call her. She is a widow, fat, good-natured—if never crossed—and forty. She 'goes out' to the various homes of the valley, going to the place that seems to need her most and never staying more than a month at a time. She accepts her 'fee' in advance, and accepts no back talk while on duty. But she's a capital cook and will fuss over you and keep your socks darned and your gout looked after——"

"I've never had gout, Kent."

"Nerves, then; or anything. Nothing will feaze McCorkle."

His uncle made no response. It was, of course, handy to have a button sewed on occasionally, but he had made the startling discovery, since coming west, that he could do even that for himself. He realised that he had been enjoying, for the first time in his life, freedom from the ministrations of what all the men in the locality called "skirts." The prevalence of masculinity about his nephew's place had been as a refreshing tonic to him.

Later, when they strolled to the porch, they found the master of Aldtonlea ensconced in the most comfortable chair. He was smoking a very good cigar but seemed to be deriving the minimum of comfort from it. His usually serene coun-

tenance was clouded with worry. He clambered to his feet in deference to the older man, and Samuel Graydon, scenting that the visitor wanted to talk to his nephew, pleaded that it was time for his afternoon siesta and left them.

Aldton sank again into his chair with an air of utmost dejection. His host sat on the broad steps of the porch, made a cigarette and waited.

"I got it in the mail," the Englishman said presently. "Did you ever get a bomb in that way?"

"Can't say I have. Let's see it."

Aldton felt in the pockets of his tweeds, drew forth an envelope and threw it into his friend's lap.

"Read it," he said.

Kent turned over a large square envelope of heavy paper, stamped with a crest, postmarked New York and addressed in a woman's fine handwriting.

"No, thanks," he said, passing it back. "Take your word for what's in it."

"It is a letter from my mother, stating that she is on her way to visit me—here." He said this with the air of exploding the bomb he had spoken of before their very eyes.

"Well?" his hearer said, imperturbably.

"It is anything *but* well. Even if that was the worst—which it isn't. She mentions having been obliged to come to New York on business—business, get that. But she finds the heat there unen-

urable so is coming on to me here in the mountains until the worst shall be over."

"Well, I——"

"Wait. After disposing of all the important details, she mentions, as a sort of after-thought, that she is taking the liberty of bringing along a little friend she met in New York. Apparently this friend has found the heat there unendurable, too. And a postscript mentions that the girl is very charming; a Southern girl with three million in her own right—Alabama cotton, I believe."

"Well," Graydon comforted, "even if she is an heiress, she ought to feel at home in this expensive scenery. She would go a long way to find anything better."

Aldton gave his friend a pitying glance.

"You dense dunce! Can't you see it? My worthy mother has set out on a match-making tour, and has cleverly decided to trap me in my own lair."

The tragedy in his voice stirred his friend to an unsympathetic howl. Then:

"You're probably imagining the whole thing," he comforted.

"The devil I am. I've seen the same thing done before. She managed affairs in the very same way for Jack. We're not a wealthy family, you know, as things go over there. A lot of expensive places but very little to run them with. Mother saw that there would have to be more money from somewhere so, when it came to the

time she thought Jack ought to settle down, she took a trip to America. She spent some time in looking over the field, with the result that a daughter of one of the American captains of finance visited us for the Christmas holidays. The satisfying result of it all was that Betty Stover and Jack were married the next January. There is no stopping the mater when she gets going—and apparently she is going now.”

“And was she so impossible—your brother’s wife, I mean.”

“Impossible, Lord no. She is a huge and unqualified success. She is a beauty, a charming hostess, and an altogether satisfactory wife and mother. She soon put things in order in the houses, too; added the proper new things and also left the proper old ones. A little puss near home who had once had a fancy for Jack said that it was no wonder Betty knew an antique piece when she saw it; that her father had made his fortune making them in his factories in New Jersey.”

“Maiew,” Kent said.

“Exactly. But, at any rate, there is some comfort in visiting at home now; furnaces, marble baths, electric light plants—even at the hunting-place.”

“Hm. No wonder your mother hated to stop when she got under way.”

“That was it. The first venture having been a success she turned to me. It began to look as

though a second son might be just as magnificent as the other. Of course there wasn't the title in my case. It would have been harder, I suppose, but it takes a lot to daunt some mothers. When I saw that she was pondering on the kind of wife I needed, I decided to do a little travelling. Finally I wound up here. Since then my life has been one of peace so far as rumours of wives are concerned. But when my allowance was shut off a year ago I suspected that some such thing was in the air. She knows how to put in the screws, does madame, this mother of mine."

"H-m ha." Kent commented. "Things shouldn't be too dull around here for a while to come. When do the guests arrive?"

"She said they would follow this letter in a week. But what am I to do? I can't wire 'em when I don't know where they are to be found."

"What would you wire if you did?"

"I'd wire something, have no fear. But I came to you to be advised what to do."

"Come into the fold like a good son, is all that I can think of. You say your sister-in-law was a success. Your mother knows you as well as she knows your brother."

"But Jack fell in love. He's built that way. I'm not."

"I should think that three million would be pretty good consolation."

"You don't agree with Kipling, then, that there are some things a fellow won't do."

"I wish people were running about to try to make my path easy for me, instead of which——"

"Forget it! We're discussing my woes now. You have no idea of how thankful you ought to be. But you haven't heard the worst at that."

"I had gathered that nothing could be worse to you."

"Just one thing. Mah Jim is leaving me this week."

"The deuce he is—and company coming!"

"I offered him higher wages too."

"Perhaps if you would pay him some of the lower ones."

"I gave him my mount in part payment—so now I must walk everywhere. But he complained that it was not suitable to send home to his aged father. I thought they killed off all the old Chinamen. They ought to."

An inspiration came to Kent Graydon.

"I know what you need; the McCorkle. It isn't likely that your mother would cotton to Jim's hash anyhow. I was thinking of getting her in to look after uncle while I have to be away, but I will let you have first try. Methinks, my friend, that thy necessity is greater than mine."

"I think I met the lady at Colonel Thaw's. *Met* her, mind you. She was at the table. I thought the Colonel could have trained a servant better than that. They had a dozen at home."

"She'll sit at your table too, if she comes. It's one of her rules. But she is a corking good cook."

"She may be that, but she will not sit at my table."

"Perhaps you had better get her right off, then, and have her halter broke before the folks come. She is over at Athelmere taking a little rest. You can get her by phoning the store. *But . . .* she demands cash in advance."

"I think I can manage that. I have been thinking of a scheme to make a little money; drubbing at it ever since I read this letter. My head is beginning to hurt. But I shall have the added pleasure of benefiting you while I earn the money."

"Benefiting me?"

"Oui, monseieur. You remember stating that you would give a thousand doliars if McNulty could be headed off in his plans to put sheep on the wild runs. A thousand dollars, you said."

"I meant five hundred."

"This isn't bargain day."

"Possibly I can think of a cheaper way myself. I'll have to think a bit over a thousand dollars."

"Five hundred it is, then, the day that you find out that through my efforts McNulty has decided not to buy sheep—less, of course, the fifty you are going to advance me for the purpose of installing Mrs. McCorkle."

Graydon produced a roll from which he counted fifty dollars.

"Take it and get out," he said. "I've a whole day's work to do yet and it's three o'clock."

"Just one thing more, Graydon. I'll have to have the loan of your motor boat. I want to go to Invermere to see Jimmy on business, then on to Athelmere to find a successor for my once faithful Mah Jim."

"I want the motor boat myself to-night. Go back and catch the little roan. You'll find a saddle in the barn. Keep both as long as you want them."

"Thanks, no end. I think it probable that I shall dine with your friend Rolson to-night. Any message for anyone?"

"Yes, if you don't mind, I'll send a note to Miss Milburne. Deliver it into her own hand, when no one sees if possible. You see how quickly I am taking your advice."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A GORGEOUS AUGUST NIGHT, AND—ALLEYNE

KENT GRAYDON paced the pier at the Invermere boat landing, his white flannels making him a conspicuous figure in the last of an August twilight.

The *Alleyne*, the trig little motor boat that rocked in the inky water, bumping gently against the pier, was its owner's pet extravagance. As he strolled beside it with his hands idly in his pockets he reflected that the boat, its gold lettered name and all its handsome appointments had been assembled with the dream-idea of its sometime carrying the person he hoped each moment to see coming down the little hill that led to the landing.

What if she did not come! One moment he called himself a fool for expecting his note to be answered in the person of Alleyne Milbourne; next moment he ardently expected it.

But even his most expectant moments were not entirely happy. In some ways Graydon could not be called finical—a little matter like cutting a neighbour's wire fencing—but of course uncle had fallen to that temptation too—found in him no qualms. But in matters where the opposite sex were concerned, an innate chivalry made him dis-

like anything either underhand or easily misunderstood.

He would greatly have preferred going to the hotel and giving Alleyne her invitation in the presence of her father or mother, and as he waited he resolved that in future it must be done in some such manner.

Then, close on the resolution came the realisation that a summer is a very short period of time, and that if he could not see Alleyne away from her parents, his suit must remain exactly where it was—which was almost nowhere.

All day the advice of Aldton that morning had been in his mind, and the more he thought of it the more sure he became that, as the other had said, cave-man methods were the ones to fit the case.

His two favourite pictures of Alleyne came into his mind alternately; sitting opposite him at their little meal in the cabin and smilingly telling him that she would slip away for a ride with him, as she had done that day on the golf course.

Dreaming of Alleyne had occupied so much of his leisure hours that it came as second nature to him. Before this summer these dreams had been intangible; merely the essence of things hoped for. Now they were the real part of his day. Eating and working seemed the unnecessary things. All at once he knew that if Alleyne could come to feel the way he did, no mere parents could hope to stand in their way.

Close on the forming of this resolve came low voices, nearing the top of the bank. An enquiring double whistle came down to him. Recognising this as Pelham's the waiting man answered joyfully, whereupon brother and sister raced to the foot of the hill, Alleyne stopping herself on the wharf by catching Graydon's hand and swinging round till she faced him.

"Such a lark!" she exclaimed. "I got your note. Mr. Aldton slipped it into a handkerchief that he picked up for me right under mother's nose. They're all playing bridge like demons so won't miss me for a few minutes. I mustn't be an instant over half an hour though. What a darling little launch!"

Kent helped her into a comfortable cushioned wicker chair, then turned to reach for her brother's hand.

"Can't come," that youth said, airily, "I never break promises to my sister."

Kent was suddenly possessed with a resolve to befriend this boy by every means in his power to the end of his days.

"Wait somewhere about, Pel," Alleyne said, when he had loosed the boat and started them off.

"Oh, somewhere. It's going to be exciting; not even a cigarette!"

"Oh, give the poor kid one, Mr. Graydon."

"Sorry, old chap," Kent said, "but I'll make this worth your while in some way."

The boat slid silently out on the black water, its

riffles catching a mother of pearl gleam from a mysterious afterglow that one felt rather than saw. The same afterglow was beamingly kind to Alleyne's fair skin and glory of hair. Kent leaned to prime his engine.

"Just a spin to show our speed," he announced as the engine roared and the boat shot forward into the night.

The day had been hot and oppressive but the night-cool was moist and grateful as it seemed to rush by. The peaks of the Selkirks were silhouetted against a faint lemon-coloured light in the west. A few stars came out, looked down on them, then hurried on their way.

For two miles they sped without speaking, then, when the man had shut off the engine, the boat glided in a silence only disturbed by the faint engine echoes that came from the hills circling the lake.

"Do you see that light?" he asked the girl, pointing to a tiny speck of gold that seemed to twinkle down a draw to welcome them.

"That is my place. I brought you down to say good evening to my light."

"Pel has talked of the place ever since you had him over there."

"It is even more important to me that you like it," he said.

"Oh, I guess I don't know much about ranching. Horses, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I adore horses; good horses; thousand dollar ones. Have you any like that?"

"I have one or two I wouldn't take that for. And some other nice ones. I have a white Arab that would suit you exactly. I—I would like it to be yours."

"That's dear of you. Pel spoke of the Arab," she hurried on. "He raved over it and your house and everything. He says you live the way a real man should. I think he wants to do the very same things; run a ranch, open up roadways, with trapping and any such other things you do as sidelines. He has been telling me all this lately as mother's ear is not entirely sympathetic."

Kent was silent for a few moments, reflecting on how topsy-turvy everything in one's world could be. Why mightn't it have been Alleyne instead of Pelham that had taken so whole-heartedly to the life of the valley.

And Alleyne, during his silence, was watching him covertly; was coming under the spell of the summer night and the dominant dark eyes of the man so close. This, because there was nothing to disturb her æsthetic sense of the fitness of things. For Alleyne professed a sensitive abhorrence toward crudity in any form. To-night there was none visible. The summer night and the surroundings were perfect; the boat was a thoroughbred of its class, and the man who sat near her was well-groomed, handsome and tremendously anxious to please her.

Alleyne could think of nothing more that the most exacting girl could demand. Except, perhaps— It might be just a little more to her taste if the man would unbend and flirt a bit—discreetly, of course, but with those eyes— She wondered, deliciously—

“Tell me about your home,” she said softly. “Equestria, isn’t it?”

“Equestria requires just one thing to make it perfect to me,” he said. “Shall I tell you what it is?”

But Alleyne had not counted on coming at quite such a pace. She looked at her watch suddenly.

“We must turn back this very instant,” she said.

Then when he had turned the boat and set the engine at a slower pace for the homeward run, Alleyne determined to keep the conversation where she wanted it for the remainder of the evening.

“Those are the lights of the hotel on that hill?” she asked.

“And there is my dear mother,” she rattled on, “frantically making eighty cents at bridge. Unless her luck has been wonderful she hasn’t once taken her mind off the game enough to wonder where her wayward child has taken herself. It is lucky for me that she doesn’t know that I am over a mile away, alone on the water with a woolly westerner—you are woolly, aren’t you?”

Kent ignored her levity.

"Alleyne—may I call you that?"

"You may—Kent."

"Thank you. But I was going to say that I don't like doing this either."

"Then why harass yourself? I didn't suggest it," she teased.

"You know what I mean; and that this is the realisation of my dreams of years. But I'd rather have you here with your mother's permission."

"What's the diff? I think it's a lark this way. Stolen fruits are sweeter."

"But it is more than a lark with me."

"Please don't be serious on a heavenly night like this. Come, I know you lied when you told Pel you had no cigarettes. I'm dying for one right now. *Please.*"

Kent handed her his case, then lighted a match for her. He smiled inwardly at his own out of date objection to smoking in the presence of a woman."

"You do it more prettily than most of the women I've seen at it in the valley," he said.

"Are there pretty girls living about here?"

"Some. Why?"

"I'm horribly jealous of them. Do they ride in this boat and come to see Equestria? By the way, I've been waiting all evening for you to invite Claire and me to get a boat and come down for tea some afternoon. Sometime when Pel is down; may we?"

"The very first Sunday he is down. I'll tell old

Adam Greir. He polishes the horses for a week if ladies are coming to see them."

Alleyne's white hand was laid for a minute on the rail close to Kent's. She was watching the little glow from her cigarette reflected in the water.

Quietly the man changed the rudder to his left hand and covered the small white hand with his right, tanned and strong. After a futile effort at release, Alleyne gave him a saucy, sidelong glance and turned the lighted end of her cigarette on his thumb.

Without the flicker of a muscle he left his hand where it was, till at last, with a cry, she flung the cigarette into the water, caught his thumb for a moment to her lips, then imperiously commanded him to get her with all speed to the Invermere pier.

The bridge players had retired when Alleyne and a stoic Pelham re-entered the hotel. Alleyne skipped upstairs to her mother's room where Claire was assisting her aunt with some refractory curlers.

"Alleyne! *Where* have you been?" her mother demanded, with all the stern dignity that she could muster with half her hair in curlers and the other half awaiting them.

Alleyne knew exactly the tack to take with her outraged parent; knew that she was seldom deeply suspected where she seemed to confess everything readily.

"Oh, mother, it's the most *gorgeous* night. Pel and I stole down to see if we could get a boat,"—this was strike one. Alleyne knew that it always gratified her mother when she and Pelham were on good enough terms to plan an escapade together—"We wanted to sneak one and have a little run. That's what you get for keeping Ron at bridge all night.

"Well, at the landing we came across that Graydon man that Pel adores so. He had his ducky motor boat there and took us for a very naughty spin, so of course you're cross."

"Alleyne, remember that this is to be the very last time. You will regret it if you encourage that man, I warn you."

"Goodness, mother. Last night he took you and Dad, to-night Pel and *me*. He told Pel to bring Claire some night soon. He is merely showing us the hospitality of the hills. You are simply ridiculous, the way you suspect everything and everybody. Come on, Claire, let's get to bed."

Inside their room Claire eyed her cousin levelly.

"You were fibbing a moment ago," she said.

"About the invitation? Well, only partly. There was something said about you and I going down to his place some afternoon. And I really think you will have to go the next evening. Your aunt's memory, you know——"

"Alleyne!" Claire suddenly exclaimed. "Why do you do it? He isn't the plaything sort. Let him alone. You're not even interested in his career."

“Why should I be. But I am interested in the fact that he is magnificently masterful, adorably handsome and rather dangerous to play with. Beside, you are far too interested in his career. If I leave him alone you will snap him up for the summer yourself.”

“No. I have made up my mind to snap up Ron.”

“See if you can scare me that way,” Alleyne laughed. “You and Ron couldn’t stop fighting for long enough. And fancy your falling out with your aunt after all these years of amity!”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MRS. MCCORKLE HAS HER WAY

THE Honourable Edward Aldton brought in a most excellent appetite from his brisk morning walk on the first morning of the régime of Mrs. McCorkle.

As he paused for his usual survey of his bright garden, the odours that usually greeted him there were outclassed this morning by the appetizing smell of crisping bacon and aromatic coffee.

A pleasant expectation filled the young man's mind. It was some time since he had taken the pleasure in his breakfast that he liked to. Mah Jim had not really gotten into form till much later in the day. He was doing his best at the dinner hour, and the veriest epicure could have found no fault with his roasts, but his morning bacon had been greasy and his morning coffee had been muddy, there was certainly no doubt of that.

He strolled through his French window under the rose vines very much at peace with all the world.

The table was set more daintily than Mah Jim's best—just the right amount of roses in just the right jar—but—here the young man brought his

cane to the floor with a click and stood stock still with surprise—it was set for two.

When Edward Aldton stood in the door of the kitchen his eyebrows were a trifle raised—always a vexing effort on the part of their owner.

“Ah, Mrs. McCorkle, good morning. Yes, it is a pleasant morning. Yes, I am ready for breakfast—but—I don’t understand. I am not expecting company.”

“No, Mr. Aldton, nor am I.”

“Then you might remove one of these plates?”

“Yours, sir?”

This was a slip on the part of Mrs. McCorkle. She had not in the least intended to say “sir.”

“No. Just remove the plate for the unknown guest.”

Mrs. McCorkle’s generous bulk stood in the doorway.

“Meaning which one?” she asked.

“Either. I’ll use the other.”

“But one of them is mine.”

“Ah. That’s the one. R m. . . .”

“Am I not to eat?”

“By all means. But not in here.”

“Why not?”

“Call it a whim of mine—anything you like.”

Turning abruptly she brought the excellent breakfast in to the table, set it before one of the plates, then passed out to the side porch where she sat in full view of the man as he sat down to eat. There was something so woebegone about the

broad back in its calico morning dress, that it disturbed the very excellent appetite that Edward Aldton had brought in from his morning's walk.

The perfectly prepared breakfast vanished so quickly that he longed to ask for more but he somehow shrank from summoning his breakfastless servitor.

Lunch time was a repetition of the breakfast programme. A dainty meal was set before him; an extra plate was opposite him. After waiting a moment for an invitation to use this—an invitation that was not forthcoming—she again seated herself on the porch, where the sight of her again detracted from his pleasure in the meal.

Aldton was certain that, so far in the day, the woman had not eaten a bite. He wondered if he were face to face with a hunger strike.

Again he longed to ask for a second helping. He wondered if she had purposely short suited him. But again he resisted the temptation to summon her and order more. Hang it all. Mah Jim had been summonable, even swear-at-able when one had wanted any more of one's meal.

The meal over, Aldton passed her on the porch on his way to the barn, making a pleasant remark about the meal as he did so. There was no response. The features of Mrs. McCorkle were buried in the depths of an immense white apron; her shoulders shook slightly.

But a lightning and unexpected glance, just as the man opened his side gate, revealed to him one

watchful eye regarding him from the depths of the apron.

"Aha! The lady stoops to conquer," was his comment to himself. "I wonder—however, it's her own affair, of course."

Aldton expected Jimmy's stage along, on its trip up at somewhere about four o'clock. The only task he had in mind for the day was a little business conference with Jimmy over a venture they were planning together. There remained the task of killing time until the arrival of the stage. Aldton decided on a run on the roan, after which he would go down by the lake where it was cool and where he could hear the approaching car for a considerable distance.

At something after three he turned the steps of his horse down toward the lake shore where, in a little group of poplars, he had had a seat built where he might read or think undisturbed on a summer afternoon.

This afternoon it was not so to be. He saw with a distinct shock of distaste that his shaded bower already had an occupant—the portly form of Mrs. McCorkle.

For a moment he hesitated as though to retrace his way. Then, after a moment's thought, he set his jaw, swung from his mount and went forward.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. McCorkle."

"My lands! You did startle me. I thought I had found a spot where no one would find me."

"I often come down for much the same reason. I had it built for that."

"Well, I'll go now. I have been looking at my little grave-yard."

Aldon looked about him inquiringly.

"Awa' over the lake," she told him, "I took the liberty of hanging down your telescope, and I can see the two white f'aces side by side quite plainly. It is to-day that Peter left me."

"Peter?"

"My little . . . His father went soon after. They are over there together."

"Why I'm—I'm no end sorry. Would you care to sit down and tell me about it?"

"I think I will. It is never out of my mind, of course, but to-day it is worse, being as it was on this very day. Peter was always a good little boy; never gave us any trouble, like most boys I've seen. He never seemed to mind that other boys had more playthings or better homes than he had; just was happy with the two of us and the simple things we made for him to play with.

"But he got a great fancy for a drum. Not an ordinary drum, but one something like the one he had seen in a moving picture house in Calgary. So he did whatever he could to help me earn and at last we had money enough saved to send and get him a kettle drum.

"The day we heard that it had come down to Athelmere on the boat he was almost out of his head with impatience to see it. I left him to mind

the house and walked the three miles over for it. He met me half way home and carried it the rest of the way. When we got in and he got the scissors to cut the string, I said:

“ ‘Wait a minute Peter; have you been a good boy this morning?’ I always asked him that. It was one of our jokes. This time his face fell. ‘Oh, mother,’ he said, ‘I didn’t want you to ask me that this time. Come and look.’

“And there on the floor of my little pantry was my last jar of strawberry jam—smashed to bits.

“Well, I guess I was tired. I’d walked three miles and back in the heat. And I hadn’t much jam. I called him a naughty boy and put the drum up on the shelf; told him he was not to open it till after he had had his supper.

“He didn’t say a word but his face got white under his freckles. He went out and wandered about for a while, finishing up the jobs I had given him through the week. Then he went down to our landing and got out the old boat we used, intending to row round to where his dad was cutting wood, to pass the time.

“We never knew what happened. They brought him up to me at six—I’d been feeling so bad about it all that I had an extra good supper ready—drowned. He never saw his drum.”

“I say, Mrs. McCorkle, I’d no idea of all this. Really it’s——”

“And he’d saved for almost a year. It was the only thing he had ever really wanted badly. I

kept it from him. If I hadn't, I would have him yet, and his father too, I think."

"Oh, but really. You must not blame yourself. From what I gather you had been better to him than many a mother is. And doubtless he is happy where he is. They say that there are harps and——"

"He wants his drum. It's over there with him now. And we put in the pond lilies that he had in the boat. I think he had been gathering them for me as a peace offering, when—he went."

"Mrs. McCorkle, you must not dwell on this any longer. You are hungry and unstrung. We will go up and get some tea. And please accept my sincere sympathy."

Before they left the grove she turned for a last look.

"If I could only get it to every mother," she said, "that broken jars don't matter a bit—as long as they have their children: that scratched furniture and torn clothes are not worth making a fuss about, as long as they are happy."

The day had grown intolerably hot. Up the bank ahead of them heat waves danced stiflingly. The last bit of the hill turned steeply upward before one gained the main road. Two or three times Mrs. McCorkle paused for breath. She made the final raise by gripping the offered arm of her companion, and thus gained the highway in time to meet the up-country stage and the as-

tonishment of Jimmy and two or three well known inhabitants of the valley.

The level eyes of the Englishman held the others so that while the stage paused and arrangements were made for an interview with the driver for that evening not a trace of amusement was visible on the face of any of the passengers.

Half an hour later, Kent Graydon entered Aldton's den unceremoniously, as was his wont.

"Oh, Aldton! Hm, why excuse me. Tea it is, eh? How are you, Mrs. McCorkle. Yes, thanks, I don't mind if I do. It's quite cosy here."

Feeling that his friend was inwardly shouting, remembering his most emphatic statements as to the decorum that was to be observed by his housekeeper, Edward Aldton made a resolve.

"If you'll excuse me while you have your tea, Graydon, I'll go for the roan and take her saddle off. I left her down by the landing. Mrs. McCorkle was just telling me about an event of which to-day is the anniversary. Get her to tell you about it."

Later Kent Graydon came out to where his friend was sponging off his dusty horse.

"Aldton," he said, "that's tough. I had heard that she had lost a little chap in the lake, but I'd not an idea that she blamed herself at all. I am ashamed that I ever thought of her with levity. One never knows."

"I've just been thinking," Aldton said, "of asking your uncle to come over to talk to her. I

should think he might be able to bring some comfort to her."

"That is something to hear—from an Atheist."

"I'm not an Atheist. Not at all. I belong to the Great Cult of the Open Minded. I should think that there are not more than a dozen of us, all told, in the whole world. Most people know there is a God of some especial sort—or else they know there isn't one. Just now Mrs. McCorkle's special Deity has become a Being of Justice, even of Vengeance. I should think that she would find your uncle's of very much more comfort to her."

"What a funny duck you are for queer ideas. Is it your idea that God is an individual Being, different to each vision—like a rainbow?"

"Look at it for yourself. Take Mrs. Willoby, on the hill. Her God is a smiling Being who keeps the children from catching measles and sends her sunny, breezy Mondays to make her clothes nice and white. Then there is Mrs. Bent on the next farm. She has a frowning Deity, who, she *knows* visited rheumatism on old Brixton because he disregarded the Sabbath and gave nothing whatever to the church. Can you reconcile the two?"

"Sure. Merely the difference in their own personal make-ups. But I agree that uncle could help a case like the one in here. I'll ask him to come over."

When the minister from the east went in that evening to have a quiet visit with Aldtonle's

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housekeeper, Edward Aldton, walking in his garden with his hands in his pockets and his head bent, did a lot of thinking that had very little to do with the twentieth plane.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

HOW COYOTES CAME TO THE VALLEY

SAMUEL GRAYDON watched anxiously for his nephew's return from his work in the pass on the Saturday afternoon that the young man had said he would be down.

The building of bridges was Kent's special department in the constructing of the highway, and, as Cunningham had wanted a temporary bridge thrown over a narrow chasm so that gravel teams might go ahead, it had been necessary for Kent to leave his uncle in charge of Equestria, and of old Adam Grier.

But he would be down again this afternoon, at least so Samuel Graydon fervently hoped. Not only did he long for the cheery company of the younger man by day; he felt that he needed his protection by night. In fact, he felt that another night full of noises such as he had endured for the last four nights would unnerve him completely.

In addition to this, old Adam Grier had been more than a weight on his mind. Although he felt certain that the old man had not been drinking during the past week, his behaviour had been even queerer than when he had been under the influence

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of his enemy. The thing that puzzled Samuel Graydon most was the old man's unseemly and uncalled-for mirth when he had attempted to find out the origin of the wild sounds he had heard at night,—a mirth so abandoned as to cause the questioner to harbour doubts as to the old man's sanity.

He was just reflecting that if it got any worse something should be done about it when he heard the welcome sounds of Kent's horse outside the house.

The very evident relief in his voice as he greeted the boy caught the other's notice.

"Nothing wrong, I hope, uncle?"

"Well, no. That is, I think not. But I have heard the wildest sounds each night; really ear piercing and terrifying. And they seem to come from everywhere and nowhere."

"Coyotes? Here too!"

"What?"

"Coyotes. At least I suppose that is what it is, although I have never heard them in this part of the valley before. But as I came by Willoby's he mentioned having heard them two or three times last week. And a man from across the lake said there seemed to have been some down on our lake front."

"But could a coyote, or any animal, make such sounds as I heard? And what is a coyote anyhow?"

"They are a very cowardly form of wolf, I

guess, and as for noise, they can make any and every sound that was ever devised. But the noise is the most terrifying part of them, for human beings at least. They are rather a pest to the farmyards in parts that are troubled with them. And Cunningham lost a good collie with them when he was working farther south. They are very cunning and a dog has to be pretty smart to cope with them. They wouldn't attack a dog single-handed but one of the band will sneak out and when seen by the dog will pretend to run. Unless the dog is too foxy to follow into the woods he will soon have anywhere to a dozen on him and hasn't much chance for his life.

"Hello," he went on. "Here's Jimmy and Aldton coming in. What's up?"

"Ah, yes. They mentioned wanting to see you. I told them I expected you soon after noon today."

There was something about Aldton's manner when he entered that caught Kent's attention, a businesslike air that was quite foreign to the Englishman.

"I saw you arrive, Graydon," he said, "so we came right over. You've your fountain pen, I see; we'll just trouble you for your signature to two or three things."

"Oh, sure. Just name the amount."

"In the first instance, you are to decide that. Although since you mention it, I should think that

about twenty-five would be right. It is for a wedding present for Molly."

"Oh?"

"Yes. She was married to your name-sake over in the little church yesterday. They are cruising on the lake in the house-boat for a honeymoon now, and we thought that we would buy up some furniture and fix things up for them before they come back. You're in on it?"

"I certainly am. I think it's a grand scheme. And this is really quite becoming to you. I hardly know you when you're animated."

"I am more animated than you think. To prove it, I'll just have you take a look at these. A signature is requested to each."

And he laid before the owner of Equestria two checks all made and awaiting only a signature.

"But what?—Four hundred dollars to Edward Aldton—One hundred to Jimmy Downey. Well, I'll bite. What's the answer?"

"It is merely the way I have decided to divide the five hundred you owe me as per our bargain of a fortnight ago."

"Bargain?"

"Precisely. About the sheep. If you remember you were to pay me five hundred on the day that I could prove that, by my efforts, McNulty had decided not to buy sheep."

"And can you prove that now?"

"Ask Jimmy."

"S'all right," was Jimmy's nonchalant reply,

"The sheep deal is off. But if I'd had the slightest hunch of how this little tale was to end, those checks would be made out different. It would have been fifty fifty on the five hundred or no coyotes."

"Coyotes!" Graydon exclaimed, his forehead a wrinkled map of perplexity. "Won't someone please unwind this for me?"

"I can," said Jimmy, "and with less words than the Honnerable would use too. You promised him five hundred if he could persuade McNulty that he didn't want to buy sheep. Not?"

"Right, so far."

"Well; someone's told him that the coyote is the sheep's best enemy, so he conceives the perfectly simple idea that if McNulty thinks the pests are getting bad round here he will stop to think before he drives thousands of sheep back among them.

"Then his bright little mind keeps on spinning and he remembers that he has heard me imitate coyotes just to amuse the boys down at Athelmere. So he comes to me a week ago and offers me twenty-five bucks a night for a four nights' performance. Twenty-five a night looks good to me, being only an amateur, as you might say, so I falls in and the deed is did. The results are all as he planned too. McNulty sure enough asked me to tell Harbottle that the sheep deal is off for the present. As to whether you are coming through or not—that remains to be seen."

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All through the narrative Kent Graydon had been sitting by the table, eyes fixed on the speaker, his pen tapping the table. Then he turned an expression of admiring wonder on the Englishman, now ensconced in his most comfortable chair. A little beyond him Samuel Graydon sat; and when it was observed by the younger men that tears of silent merriment were stealing down his furrowed cheeks, the die was cast. The rafters rang with the noise they made.

"It's the best I ever heard," Kent Graydon said at last, wiping his eyes. "Tell us how you managed it."

"The most extraordinary thing," Aldton began, "was the number of animals. Jimmy sounded like at least ten most of the time. He yipped, barked and wrangled all at once. Willoby tells that he saw a huge band, but that is impossible. The band was most discreet; I saw to that. But you tell it, Jimmy. I don't pretend to equal you as a raconteur."

"A ra—what? I'm going to look that up; and if it means what I think it does, you look out. But there's not much to tell. We serenaded the Willobys the first night; yelped around their henhouse for a while, then down in the grove of pine by the road. We were chased by their dog but as he and I are pretty good friends that didn't turn out to be serious. The strangest thing about that is that the Willobys insist that they lost three

fine hens that same night, which is reason one why this little scheme must not get out.

"Next night, we skirted Burke's hayfield. I think we did quite a bit better work that night. The Honnerable had opened up a bottle of Hollo-way's Dry before we started out and it seemed to go easier. But we found out later that Burke's kids were alone that night and scared almost out of their senses. Mrs. Burke has some little old temper, which is reason two why this must not get out.

"Next night we thought we'd go down by the lake shore. It is pleasant there, and the sound carries well on water. Besides there wasn't the same danger of getting shot down there. I'd seen Willoby and Burke lay in a stock of ammunition on that day, and a real coyote has nothing on me when it comes to a dislike of being shot.

"Well, we'd just get settled and drawn a cork in preparation when down to the landing comes old Doc and Mrs. McCorkle if you please. He hands her into the boat, your motor boat, mind you, and tries to start the engine. He can't make a go of it but he gets the oars and rows up and down close in where we can hear every word they say. He's telling her that he feels that he's likely to be soused soon if she doesn't come to the rescue and do without something to help him—oh, the old stuff, we all know it only too well. Well, she's quite impressed with the idea and promises to help him and asks how is she to. But when he

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tells her that she is to do without worrying over little Peter for a month, wow, doesn't she get mad? She laid him out for a fare-you-well. Told him to stand up like a man and fight his own battles without trying to get behind her skirts, and I can't tell you what all.

"Well, all this time, it's getting late. And I've to go down to Cranbrook yet that night to be ready to bring up some government gun the next day. So we decides to put on the performance.

"Shades of Christopher! You should have heard that woman yell. And she knows a coyote; was brought up among them. If I'd not known that I'd not have started. And she reached over and grabbed poor old Doc, and hangs on too. And he can't tell her that it's all right, he knows coyotes personally, so he just has to let her hang. It wasn't hard for us to make a lot of noise that night. It must help a real coyote a lot to have a sense of humour."

"Doc was in on this, you say?" Graydon asked when the mirth had subsided.

"Yes. You see, we had to have an accomplice, especially for the grand finale. And he seemed about the safest we could think of. We had him scout about to see what was being said, also to spread the news of coyotes in the vicinity, especially in McNulty's neighbourhood. Then we had him stationed with a flash on the last night, when we serenaded McNulty on Dale's place, so he could signal us if anyone with a gun was about."

"And a wise precaution," Aldton put in. "McNulty had bragged to Dale that if any came down his way, he would decorate the barn with their skins. Jimmy's and mine! I shudder to think of it."

"He had the gun all right," Jimmy went on. "Doc flashed us a warning from the lower corral so we slipped behind a pile of rocks and I made the sounds seem to come from the poplar grove; then, while he was in there we slipped to our barn and I sent the animals back into the hills. He used up all his ammunition and, all round, it was a merry evening."

"The only thing I am sorry about," Jimmy finished, "is that Mr. Graydon was frightened, although I am bound to say that he looks as though he is enjoying it right now."

"I have enjoyed your story," the older man said. "There is no doubt of that. I shall think of it every time I hear of a coyote."

"But to come down to business," Kent began. "What of the permanence of this arrangement? McNulty has decided not to buy sheep because of the sudden presence of coyotes in the neighbourhood. The sudden absence of them is more than likely to change his mind again."

"If I might be permitted to suggest," Aldton put in, mildly, "our bargain does not extend to cover that emergency. I merely agreed, for a certain sum, to alter the mind of McNulty. There was no guarantee, however of the permanence of

the change. It will be up to you to keep it altered. But you have my experience to go by. Nothing extra is charged for that. Jimmy, here, can very probably be induced to prevent the recurrence of the idea on McNulty's part by having the coyotes return occasionally throughout the summer—on the payment of a slight remuneration, of course."

"Slight remuneration is right," was Jimmy's disgusted rejoinder. "Twenty-five paltry dollars a night—for high grade professional services, while for his amateur efforts he is receiving the rather neat sum of a hundred per. With me doing all the work it would be more like it to divide the money the other way round."

"It's the idea, as usual, my dear James. The Big Idea. But for that bright thought of mine, you would be one hundred dollars poorer at this very moment. And I have not reminded you that you walked off with the bottle on three different nights.

"Also, you did not do all the work. I may not be anything of a ventriloquist, but when it came to straight noise, I most certainly held my end up. My throat is still sore from the barking and yelling I did."

"Rats!" Jimmy exclaimed, as he examined his check, pocketed it and reached for his hat.

"Last night, on Dale's place, I had to shut you off altogether. I was sober enough to know that

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even McNulty is not such a simon pure simp as to think that a self-respecting coyote in these Rocky Mountains is going about, baying to the moon, with a bally English accent."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ANOTHER BOAT RIDE—AND ANOTHER GIRL

ALLEYNE MILBURNE sat frowning at her reflection in the mirror through the smoke of her after-dinner cigarette.

“And why so pensive?” her cousin Claire inquired.

“I am just wondering how I can plan it to have my boat ride to-night.”

“Your boat ride, indeed, young woman! Well, I like that! I shall immediately produce a most reliable witness who will gladly testify that *I* was the one invited to ride in that launch on its next trip out.”

Alleyne was silent. She knew that her mother was certain to recall that she had said that Kent Graydon had asked for the pleasure of Claire's company when next he came. Far would it be from Mrs. Milburne to desire Alleyne to usurp her cousin's place for the outing. Alleyne thought of the look in his eyes, when his hand had rested on hers in the launch the other evening, and groaned.

“Well, go,” she said, “but don't stay a second over twenty minutes. Tell him that I got his note

and that my suspicious mother is the cause of my spoiling his evening."

"Spoiling his evening!" Claire exclaimed. "Oh, I don't know. I'll try not to."

"Claire Harwin! Don't you dare do any such thing. You will tell me every word you have both said, when you come in, or you won't ever go again."

"How you do terrify one! You know I've only to breathe a word of all this and you won't go again. Turn about is fair play. In fact, those are my terms."

"Harwy, you wouldn't be such a beast!"

"One never can tell. But I refuse to promise not to enjoy the evening. Time I went, isn't it? I believe this is my first clandestine appointment. I'm rather excited about it. If you're still awake when I come in I'll tell you—at least as much as you told me the other night."

"Get out, you devil!"

And Alleyne made a firm resolve never to let the situation get into such a muddle again.

"We're very sorry," Claire said, when a tall figure emerged from the gloom about the wharf and was silhouetted against the silver glow of moonlit water—"That is, Alleyne is very sorry that her mother had somehow gathered the impression that you wished to take me on this outing, instead of Alleyne."

"I understand. I assure you I shall be charmed.

BOAT RIDE—AND ANOTHER GIRL 169

The lake is lovely. I hope you will not regret your self-sacrifice."

"You're not being satirical?" Claire asked as she sank into the cushions of The Alleyne.

"Heaven forbid. I am immensely cheered to have you in on the conspiracy, although, somehow, I cannot help feeling that you do not approve of my course."

"Why?"

"Because I don't myself, I suppose."

After a pause, occupied with the engine, he resumed.

"I believe—there's something straightforward about you—that you could give a fellow an honest man-to-man opinion. Well, then—would you think—is it a forlorn hope I'm leading?"

Claire had been meditating, as she watched his face, bent over the engine, on the number of fine-fibred, splendid men she had known who had chosen rather heartless and shallow wives. As he spoke she came slowly out of her abstraction.

Misreading her hesitation, he said:

"I beg your pardon. That was a large order, on a first outing. A cigarette?"

"No, thanks. I'm horribly old fashioned. I don't smoke; I don't even flirt. I am afraid you are to have a dull half hour. But I'll talk of Alleyne, if you like. What was it you asked me?"

"No. We'll talk of you. You are a teacher, aren't you?"

"Why do you think that?"

"I don't know. Pel thinks you are very clever. And I feel that you have a wide range of sympathies. You'd be just the one anyone would want to have their children with. Pel said once that everyone in the house wanted you around if they happened to be sick. But I don't believe you are a nurse."

"No, I am not a nurse."

"Then I believe I was right the first time. Your being able to spend the summer here with the Milburnes gave me a tip."

"Yes, my aunt is very good to me."

Claire saw that, for once in her life, she was going to have a free and untrammelled evening. She could not remember having been anywhere with a young man who regarded her as any kind of a useful citizen. Most of the young men she had known had not thought to consider whether her sympathies were broad or not; or whether she would be a nice person to have about when one was sick, or to have one's children with.

Their attitude was much more apt to be clouded by the fact that she could write a check very high in six figures. Always before she had mentally felt the young men who put themselves out to be agreeable to her as imagining themselves assisting to spend her income, and it had stiffened her manner in the presence of all but married, or very young or very elderly men.

It was a very alert and interested Claire that leaned toward her companion in the boat. He re-

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flected that animation was all that was needed to make her beautiful.

"And now," she begged, "tell me about you. Of course I know that you're an engineer, and Pel has told me of Equestria. But there is lots more than that. You have caught the spirit of the valley and are bound up in its development. You belong—so much that you couldn't be transplanted."

"No, I couldn't."

"Well, why should you? Everything worth while is here,—everything worth while. And opportunities! Even I can see them everywhere. I wish I were a man."

"The opportunities for young women are not to be excelled," her companion rallied.

An unexpected dimple showed that she saw his meaning, then:

"Tell me of the others first," she said. "Tell me all about the valley from the very beginning."

Then Kent told her the story of the valley as he had gleaned it from old prospectors, some of whom could remember the day when the country was known only to sight-seers, hunters and seekers after the treasures of the hillside mines.

Then, gradually the story of the surpassing beauty of the valley, its fame as a grazing country and tales of the wonderful curative properties of the Sinclair and Fairmont hot-springs had spread in an ever widening circle.

The next cycle had been developments in the

way of irrigation projects in the hope that the million acres that the valley boasted might be used for mixed and fruit farming as well as grazing.

He told her of the day when he had realised his boyish ambition of owning a horse and of riding it over free, wild spaces; of his finding, in Equestria, a place exactly suited to his fancy where he had gone about the making of a home and the building up of a herd of horses that was spoken of in many of the western markets.

Claire admired his reticence in glossing over his early financial difficulties and his struggles to pay back the money "borrowed" for his education.

He told her of trips he had taken here and there in search of blooded stock, and she insisted on tales of his excursions up Toby Creek, through the Earl Grey Pass to Kootenay Lake, or in the Vermillion Range in search of elk and the wily mountain sheep.

But most of all she wanted details of his work on the mountain highway.

"Tell me all of that from the beginning too," she begged.

He went back again to the early prospectors and trappers who had found their way into the Vermillion Ranges, through to the great game runs of the headwaters of the Vermillion and Kootenay rivers and on down the Sinclair Pass

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to find the pastoral softness and rugged grandeur of the Windermere Lake and district.

He told how, out of all this, was born the idea of a scenic roadway which should connect Canada's premier mountain resort with Canada's premier lake district; of struggles to get the ear of the Provincial Government and Canada's Transcontinental Railway so that their dream might be realised.

Best of all she liked his modest account of their struggles with the gigantic task of constructing the road, especially where it ran in narrow chasms beside streams that, for a few days in June when the first heat brought down the mountain snows in torrents, became raging rivers bearing trees and even rocks that wore away the banks and changed the course of the stream in a few hours' time.

"I am simply spell-bound," she exclaimed when he had done. "I am coming back again next summer to write up the history of the whole thing. Do you suppose I could really do anything so useful?—"

Claire checked this strain quickly and hurried on lest he himself begin to question her usefulness:

"I'll buy your cabin in the pass and the Banff-Windermere tourists who make the mountain trip will go forth with the story of a spinster historian or historian spinster or——"

"By the time there are tourists on the highway,

you won't be a spinster," he told her. "Not by a jugful. There are enough men who know a good thing when they see it to make that an impossibility."

"Nonsense," Claire laughed. "Have you any idea of the time?"

"By Jove, it's late!" he exclaimed, bending the rudder so that the boat headed homeward and striking a match so that she might consult her watch.

"*Ten thirty!* And we're half an hour from home! I've been winding the shore so you could see it in the moonlight. We'll go straight up now. You've been such a wonderful listener that I've rattled on without noting the time. Are you cold?"

"Not a bit. It's been heavenly. Of course we shouldn't have stayed out so late but I've never before had a man give me a peep behind the curtains at his plans and hopes. I've enjoyed it too much to notice the time."

"Well," Alleyne inquired with acerbity, "did you do this just to plague me?"

"Dear me, Al, we never thought of you. That is—we talked of you, of course, but——"

"What did you say of me?"

"Umm. I gave him as little satisfaction as possible. It's the way to keep them keen, I believe. But it was much more than you deserve, at any rate. I should have told him the truth; that you

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are without a heart and that if he did not have nice teeth, arresting eyes and an almost Greek profile——”

“Don’t be too sure of all that,” Alleyne counselled. “What did he say when I did not come?”

“Oh, he was greatly disappointed, of course, but I will say he hid it nobly. In fact, he is a supreme actor. A girl less observant than I might easily have supposed him to be enjoying the evening as much as though his fondest hopes had been realised.”

And with this meagre and wholly tantalizing bit of information Alleyne had to be content for the other, with a dreamy smile that was anything but re-assuring, had said “good night” and had closed the door of her room.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A BACHELOR HERMITAGE INVADED

"THANKS, Graydon. It's certainly no end decent of you to leave your work every time I get into trouble. But I wanted some good sane advice, and someone to drink a cocktail with me. Fact is, I'm in a deuce of a hole."

"What's up now?"

Kent Graydon had just come in from glaring sunlight, so that it was a moment or two before the dim light of the room revealed the fact that his friend sat with one foot propped on a teak-wood stool and swathed in many bandages.

"And what is that?" he went on.

"That," the other answered wearily, "is my good Mrs. McCorkle's idea of what to do for a sprained ankle. But while either the ankle or the interminable bandaging would be sufficient in ordinary times, neither is the cause of my present predicament. Read that. Sit down, I'd forgotten."

Graydon opened a yellow telegraph sheet on which were the following words:

"Arrive Golden to-morrow. Meet us."

"That's to-day!" Graydon exclaimed.

"It is. They're on their way down now."

“On the boat?”

“I sent Abbott up with the big Winton from the garage.”

“Then they ought to be here in an hour or less.”

“They’re not coming here. I told him to take them to the hotel, then to come for me later so that I could join them at dinner. I’m afraid you’ll have to come along. I can’t half get about with this sprain and all. I don’t suppose you will hate dining at the Invermere, what? But you might do this for a chap—you can’t follow your real inclinations too openly in the face of *the* young woman’s mother’s watchfulness—then suppose, for the time being, that you be as pleasant as possible to the young lady at our table. I will endeavour to shine so dully, by contrast, that the thoughts of the newcomer will be diverted.”

“That’s rather a large order—and a little out of my line, I’m afraid.”

“Well, if you have a spark of gratitude for what I did about the sheep, come to dinner anyhow. Don’t put yourself out to be nice; just come and eat. I will leave the rest to the charms with which nature has endowed——”

A ring of the telephone cut short Graydon’s evident intention of ending the conversation. Aldton drew the instrument wearily across the table.”

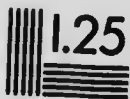
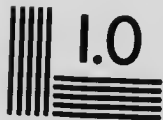
“’Lo.”

“Yes, Abbott——”



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"The deuce you say—No, certainly not—No, not here—Ask her to—Hello—Hello——"

Aldton finished up the conversation by seeming to pronounce the last word backwards.

"Here is a hole," he exclaimed. "I might have known it. The mater is alarmed about a foot that is so bad that I couldn't ride to meet her, so she refuses to stir from the car till they have brought her here where she can look after me. They'll be here in ten minutes. Oh, I say, Mrs. McCorkle."

"Yes, sir." Mrs. McCorkle used this form at all times now.

"I've just had a message from my mother. She refuses to stay at the hotel and will arrive here in a few minutes."

"And quite right and proper too, if I may say so, sir."

"Well, you may, I expect—for a few minutes at least. But what are we to do with them?"

"With your mothers, sir?"

"With my mother and—well, you see, she has along a—a young woman."

"Oh, I see. A maid."

"No. A—er friend, I guess. Where are we to put them? I have three small chambers. I occupy one; you another. That leaves one for the other two. It is inconceivable that my mother will want to share that tiny room with another, even if that other did not happen to be an heiress with ideas something the same as her own."

"An heiress, did you say?"

"A pampered American heiress. Her own rooms doubtless cover about an acre, wherever she lives."

"But, Mr. Aldton, an heiress! This really is too much. And it's only yesterday that I discover that your mother is a lady of title. That can be excused, seeing that she is your own mother—but to add an heiress onto that, unbeknownst to me! I really do not feel that I can cook for a titled person and an heiress that's always been used to French cooks—not for fifty dollars a month."

"Make it fifty-five, then. Anything. You can't desert me at ten seconds' notice. As for mother; anyone can cook for her. But the thing is, where to put them."

"Couldn't the young lady go back to the hotel?"

"That would be exactly my solution of the difficulty. But unfortunately my mother is a firm believer in young people being chaperoned, and in older people being chaperones. I suppose I *could* set a bed in the attic, among the guns and cobwebs."

"I've been in the attic, sir. The cobwebs are gone."

"That might help. But the heat is still intolerable there. It might be all right to put the other visitor—but no; one cannot always follow one's feelings. Mon Dieu! There is the car."

When Kent looked to where the car stood be-

side the road and noted that, although Abbott had reached back and opened the door, both women sat until he alighted and assisted them out, he trembled for the peace of a house containing those two and Mrs. McCorkle.

Mrs. McCorkle, herself, had noted the little by-play and was summoning her dignity with all possible speed to meet the emergency and the tall, well carried woman who was coming up the walk.

But the extra dignity was quite lost on the visitor. She was quite accustomed to any amount of it at the doors of homes where she was wont to visit. In a moment she had her son in her arms.

"Edward!" she exclaimed, "how thin you are. I am so glad that I came just at this time. Is the foot bad?"

"Just a twist, mother. Be right in a day or so. If you will find it possible to put up with the inconvenience of my small shack I'm no end glad to have you. Meet my friend Graydon. Often spoken of him."

"Yes, indeed. I am always glad to meet Edward's friends."

"And Mrs. McCorkle, mother. She will look after you and try to make you think you are stopping at a regular place."

Then Mrs. McCorkle had to abandon the stiff curtesy she had planned making, for the visitor had smiled charmingly and was grasping her hand.

"When we are settled," she said, in her rich

voice, "we must have long talks. I want to know all about Edward, and of course he will never tell me anything."

This unexpected turn of events made at once remote the possibility of Lady Aldton's being shown "what's what in this country," a resolve that had been formed that morning in the mind of Mrs. McCorkle.

And Kent, looking on, decided that the woman had "savvy"—something very necessary to bring with one, or speedily acquire in this western country.

"But where is Helen," the visitor asked. "Did she not come in?"

Through the open door the three looked to where a young girl, whose dark beauty was almost flowerlike, was bending above a bed of gladiolas. She smiled and came when the older woman called, touching a flower here and there as she passed.

She acknowledged the introduction to the two men pleasantly and naturally. Kent thought that, though she stood with the poise of a woman, she looked straight at one with the eyes of a child. The coldly accusing glare in the eyes of Edward Aldton she met with indifference; her eyes roamed past him as though she expected to meet someone else.

"And what do you think of this wild land?" Kent asked, in an effort to cover up his friend's discourteous welcome.

Instantly her face lighted. She had a most bewitching smile.

"I adore the mountains," she exclaimed, looking through the casement window to where the peaks of the Stansteads glittered in the sunlight. "I think I should like to live among them."

A grim look settled on the face of the owner of Aldtonlea. Graydon smiled as he noted it. In a moment he took himself off, leaving his friend to the ministrations of his mother and the machinations of the beautiful southerner.

When he looked back at his own gate he saw that the girl was again among the flowers, whence she had tactfully betaken herself so that mother and son might be together.

"You never can tell," Kent mused to himself. "She looks as sweet and guileless as a flower herself."

In the den of Edward Aldton, his mother was putting cushions behind his back and performing other comforting maternal ministrations.

"Thanks, mater dear," he said. "It is good to have you about."

"You will find Helen pleasant too. She is a sweet and agreeable girl. Does she not impress you as such?"

"Looks well enough. But what an occupation for a nice girl!"

"Occupation, Edward! What occupation?"

"Husband hunting, to put it bluntly."

"Husband hunting! What an absurd idea!

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You are not an instantaneous judge of character, I must say. Helen thinks now that she is never going to marry. That most rich young men are not the kind she wants to marry, and that, for all she could tell, the others would only want her money. I merely told you that I had picked up a pleasant travelling companion; she merely thinks that she has obliged me by bearing me company to a very pleasant mountain resort. She is wondering right now why Mrs. Edward Aldton has not been on hand to greet her."

"Mrs.——"

"Exactly. She hasn't an idea yet that you are a bachelor. So you see how you have misjudged her. She really wants much more to stay at the hotel than to impose on strangers. And if you are crowded——"

"No, we can manage somehow. I have that officer's bed that I had in Africa. I can set it up down by the lake or anywhere. I'm ashamed of my churlish greeting. I'm the same queer old stick, mother. No manners. Not like Jack."

"You are a dear boy, Ned, nevertheless. And I am sure Helen has not minded your manner. She would a great deal rather have you that way. If she consents to stay when she finds you are a bachelor, just keep out of her way all that is possible and no doubt we will manage splendidly. I'll go out now and tell her of my deception."

"Isn't it all lovely!" Helen Ware exclaimed, when the older woman joined her in the garden.

"Do you suppose they will let me work in this garden. I would love to get my hands all earth and feel that I am making things grow."

"I am sure my son would be delighted."

"Where is Mrs. Aldton?"

"That is a confession I have to make. We have strayed into the domain of a confirmed bachelor hermit. I had rather forgotten that you did not know this until I saw that you expected someone else to greet you."

"But what could he have thought of my coming in on him in this way? I shall go to a hotel, of course."

"If you wish, you shall do so, of course. But I shall miss you more than I can tell. Ned soon gets tired of feminine company and wanders off by himself. Then I will be alone, but for you. And also, there is the difficulty of obtaining a proper companion for you at the hotel. I can ask my son if there is a suitable woman near that we could procure."

"Oh, no, please. I have been hedged and pestered with companions and chaperones and keepers for the whole of my life. This trip with you has been the most like a family I have ever had. If your son will put up with me for a short while, I shall love to stay with you. I shall keep out of his way, as he dislikes girls, and be as good as ever I know how."

"Oh, I do not know that he really dislikes girls. He seems pleased that you are here. He merely

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likes to be by himself a great deal, but we shall know what to do about that. And I think, Helen dear, that we will not say anything to make him suspect that you are a young woman of fortune. He has the idea that he dislikes all girls that have been brought up in wealth, so, for our little while he need not know the difference."

Whereat the mother of sons who had gathered wisdom with her years went inside to attend to the unpacking of her bags, and the large red rose that she carried at her lips hid a smile of tender knowing.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A DINNER AT EQUESTRIA LODGE

Mrs. MILBURNE was holding a letter in her hand and tapping her foot impatiently as she awaited her husband. A moment ago she had dispatched Alleyne to find her father and to tell him that she wished to discuss something important with him immediately. Alleyne's further instructions had been to get Ronald and go out on the links.

The senator disliked being summoned to conferences with his wife. He preferred meetings where he was the summoner, and where he was the one who had the ammunition in readiness. However, he hid his temerity under a jocular manner. This was a bad start, for Mrs. Milburne disliked anyone's being jocular when the occasion called for seriousness.

"What's the trouble, my dear?" he asked. "Let's forget it and think what a glorious day it is for a motor ride. Alleyne was saying——"

"Never mind what Alleyne was saying. Read this."

She handed him a sheet of folded paper on

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which was written, and properly written, she had to admit, an invitation for the Milburne family and Miss Harwin to dinner on the following Sunday evening.

"I say," he remarked, "that's decent of him. He knows I want to see two or three of his best beasts, and have a look over his ranch."

"Is it possible," inquired Mrs. Milburne, with the sarcasm that is permitted to the wife of one's bosom, "that you imagine it to be *you* that inspires this rather sweeping invitation."

"Um-m, I dunno. It hadn't occurred to me that you had been gracious enough to prompt it."

"Well, I've certainly tried not to," she said firmly. "But possibly when I have declined this invitation, he will be able to take it as a hint——"

"What d'you mean, decline the invitation. We won't do any such thing."

"Would you drag me to this horse ranch against my will?"

"Oh, no. Not if you feel that way. We'll accept, then you can have a headache, if you like, and the rest of us can go."

Mrs. Milburne's impatience was merging into exasperation.

"There is one person who will *not* go," she said pointedly, "and that is Alleyne. Then you'll see if he doesn't regret his trouble."

"Alleyne! What's she got to do with it?"

"Everything. It is Alleyne he wants there; not you nor me nor the others."

Senator Milburne whistled and came to a standstill in his pacing of the floor.

"So that's the row! Where did you get it?"

"I use my eyes."

"It seems to me they've hardly seen each other. Have you anything definite to go on?"

"Very little. You know Alleyne. But it's there and has got to be stopped. Alleyne will listen to you if you put your foot down. You must do it at once."

"But put it down on what? Has she been encouraging the chap?"

"He doesn't need that. He needs discouraging. Alleyne is not nearly good enough at that when it is a case of a handsome young man. You will have to speak to her."

"I can't see how I can speak till there is something to speak about. I see no harm in her having a man friend, even if he is handsome. Especially when the man is as fine a chap as I know Graydon to be. And not only that, Louise, Graydon has taken hold of Pelham and bids fair to make a regular man out of him, too. All other considerations aside, that is the real reason why we are going to accept this invitation, with pleasure."

It was another of the rare times when the Senator had decided. Mrs. Milburne saw that if she did not play her cards with care, the dinner was apt to upset plans disastrously.

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"Did you know that Alleyne is practically engaged to Ronald?" she inquired.

"No. I didn't know it. When was this?"

"It is not all decided. She is taking a while to decide."

"And quite right, too. There is no rush. We have only one girl left."

"There is a psychological moment, though. I don't want her to let it pass. Knowing how easily diverted she is, I have decided that she must have a headache for this dinner. And he should not mind that I stay to nurse her. The three of you will go."

"Can't you see, Louise, that this is your worst course. Graydon will see through it; he's no fool. And certainly Alleyne will. It's just the way to make them keen for each other."

"Further than that," he went on, "if you want to put the notion of life on a ranch out of her head, take her over and let her see what one is like. Let her eat off an oilcloth, served by a Chinaman. She will see that she can't humour her fussiness there."

Mrs. Milburne pondered for some minutes. She knew that there was a measure of truth in what her husband had said; that it might be a good idea for Alleyne to see ranch life at first hand so as to contrast it with the luxury her very being required. But, knowing her daughter, she planned to find out sometime when Kent would be in the pass, when she would take Alleyne to the ranch

and let her see it without the disturbing influence of the young man's presence.

"Well, what about it?" her husband asked.

"There is something in what you say," she replied, "if it were not for Alleyne's utter and absurd fascination for any man who happens to be personally presentable—no, I will not risk it. Better to keep her where she can't see him—and to see that he keeps himself there."

"Claire," she said to her niece, who had just risen from a corner where she had been running ribbons into her aunt's lingerie, "write a note to say that we accept, there's a dear. Then you can carry Alleyne's and my regrets."

"Very well, Aunt. But I think it may be rather fun—dinner in a ranch house. They say that Mr. Graydon's cook is a wonder. And I shall not be the only skirt there. Lady Aldton and a Miss Ware from the South are to be there, too."

"Lady Aldton, did you say?"

"Yes. She is the mother of that rather indolent looking young man that Ron golfs with a lot."

"Mrs. Cunningham was telling me of her. She is a daughter of the Earl of Bowlming. It would certainly be nice to meet her. The Holvein place in Surrey is not far from Hester's. On second thoughts, we will accept. It is possible that she will be passing through the city on her return. I might have my first reception then, if she could be induced to stop over. Accept for us then, as I said, with pleasure."

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"That was quite a fib," Claire thought to herself as she opened her desk. "Although he *may* have asked them for all that I know. But I had better send Pelham over with a note if he comes in to-night. He will be glad enough of a chance to go to Equestria."

Then, her pen idle in her hand, she sighed:

"But I wonder why I did it for him, after all? With Alleyne away it might have been another very pleasant time for me—and much better for him in the long run."

Mrs. Milburne's feelings, on her arrival at Equestria's lodge on the day of the dinner, were most mixed.

It was with pleasure that she found that the daughter of the Earls of Bowlming could be most gracious and human. And with even greater pleasure she found that there was a possibility of Lady Aldton's spending a few days in their city on her return trip.

But it was with apprehension that she discovered that her host seemed to be unaccountably master of the situation; while all the laws of fitness would have decreed naturally that a young man in this out-of-the-way place, who had had the temerity to become the host, not only of the Horace Pelham Milburnes but of the ancient house of Aldton as well, should have been found in a state of blue funk when the fateful hour arrived.

Instead, his ease of manner conveyed to the

guests the impression that everything was to run with smoothness.

And the house was not crude, after all. It compelled an interest that she would gladly not have felt. There was nothing of luxury, of course, but there was very decided taste, of a masculine variety, and the big living-room was the best possible background for its owner.

He was neither too modest nor too boastful when the young women of the party demanded tales of his adventures in securing the heads and skins that decorated the room. When his authoritative voice sent his too effusive dogs each to his own corner of the room, she sensed something of the hero worship with which Pelham regarded the man; sensed and resented it.

All through the carving of the huge joint she marvelled that, while seeming to have done it quite offhand, her host had seated his guests in diplomatically and strategically correct order. It had seemed to happen so naturally that she did not guess that he and his neighbour had spent a laborious half hour over this very matter, and that even now beads of perspiration would gladly have stood out on his forehead as a result of it.

Her touch of feminine satisfaction that she sat in the seat of honour, while Lady Aldton was placed elsewhere, forestalled any resentment she might have felt at the personal significance of the arrangement.

Then it came to her that they were not eating

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from granite-ware and oilcloth. On the contrary, the linen, while having the gloss of newness, had the weight and lustre of quality. The silver was of good weight and pattern, the service of pleasing design.

In fact, all told, excellent dinner, genial company, lively conversation and pleasant surroundings—there wasn't a thing that could be counted on to terrify Alleyne. And Alleyne's eyes, fixed on her host, testified to the fact that she was not in the very least terrified.

And out of Mrs. Milburne's girlhood experience came the knowledge that any girl admires a man, who will sit at the head of a table and carve a roast properly, without apologies.

All in all, Mrs. Milburne wished that she had Alleyne safely back, in the company of Ronald Rolson, at The Invermere.

The finishing touch was coffee and cigarettes on the wide porch. Molly, who had excitedly helped to plan and arrange the entire meal, and had stripped the Dale rose bush for the centre-piece, watched this end of the meal from her own window by means of a good telescope.

"I guess it was correct to put them out there," she mused, "although I wasn't a bit sure about it. But the two haughty members seemed to drink theirs as though they had done it that way before. I do hope no one swipes my wedding present coffee spoons. Oh, my stars! There goes old Doc. And he can't walk straight! Oh——"

And sure enough, up onto the porch and into the collecting of coffee cups by the spotless Chinaman came the uncertain step of old Adam Grier. An unsteady hand drew off his hat and pathetic eyes searched each face for a sign of encouragement.

"What is it, Doc?" Edward Aldton asked kindly. "Kent went inside to the telephone. Anything I can do for you?"

"Kent's at the telephone, eh?" the man's high voice repeated. "Then I'll just talk to the ladies till he comes."

He crossed and sat rather heavily between Mrs. Milburne and Lady Aldton, peering into the face of first one, then the other.

"You're mothersh of daughters, I guesh," he said. "Mothersh of daughters. They're always around my Kent. Never let him alone. Never let him alone. Poor boy! Oh, there y'are, Kent."

There indeed, almost petrified, stood Kent. He had come to the door in time to hear the old man's words but not in time to forestall them. For a moment he was silent, his face a grim study. Then, at a little raising of the eyebrows on the part of Edward Aldton, he pulled himself together, helped the old man to his feet, and, excusing himself to the company, piloted his charge off the porch and out of sight.

Coming from the shack of old Adam Grier later, Kent was met by the owner of Aldtonlea.

"Bully for you, old chap," that young man

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exclaimed. "Accept my congratulations. It couldn't have been better. I am proud to have been your trainer."

"*Oh!* Wasn't it awful?" Graydon moaned.

"It didn't look awful, which is not only the main thing, but the only thing. You carried it off extraordinarily well; acted the host to the manner born."

"Acting is right. It was stage work right through. If it hadn't been for your directions and your statement that you would keep sending thought waves to buck me up, I'd never have finished it."

"You had to finish it. Of course, it was intended that Miss Milburne should contrast your shadows with someone else's high lights. And you fooled 'em one. As I said, I'm proud of the whole performance."

"But old Doc!" he went on. "Wasn't his innocence beautiful to behold. Mothersh of daughters! It didn't bother the mater, of course, but I sat where I could see the other's face!"

Kent Graydon added to the other's mirth merely by a small and rueful smile.

"I'll laugh some other day, when it looks funnier to me," he remarked. "Hello, Pel. What is it?"

"I say, Mr. Graydon. I'm taking Dad to show him the horse he has got to buy me. Lady Aldton and the girls are coming, too. Mother is back on

the porch. She asked me to tell you that she would like to talk to you for a few minutes."

"Certainly, Pel. I'll go now."

In no buoyant frame of mind he turned from the others to the house. The last thing he noticed in the group was a lifting of the brows on the part of Edward Aldton, a pre-arranged signal that was to convey to him the message, "Buck up. Bluff it out."

CHAPTER TWENTY

A DAY THAT ENDED WRONG

MANY times in Kent's own mind had he gone through an imaginary interview with the mother of Alleyne Milburne; an interview in which the two of them got down to brass tacks, as he put it.

He had already chosen the sentences in which he would give a convincing picture of his future, without seeming to boast; had searched vainly for words which could adequately convey to her the depth of his devotion to Alleyne.

As he made his way to the house at her request he wished fervently that he himself had invaded the enemy's territory and arranged the interview. This savoured too much of being "on the mat." Nothing in the way of a verbal inquisition would have surprised him.

But it did surprise him, almost to disarmament, that Mrs. Milburne bent on him a smile of beaming encouragement. Cordially indicating a chair quite nears hers, she began:

"I did such ample justice to that delicious dinner of yours that I thought I would not go into the fields with the others. And I thought that I would take advantage of the absence of the others to have a confidential talk with you. That is, if

you are quite sure you do not mind being detained."

"Not in the least." Then, taking the plunge, he added: "I have wanted to talk to you, too."

"Ah, yes. You have been so good all along, so very good. I feel that we have one thing in common—the interests of my son."

Her son!

Kent Graydon did not permit himself to move a muscle lest he betray his utter astonishment. Quite unaware of her listener's relief, she went on:

"He has taken his father now to try to persuade him to buy a horse he has taken a fancy to, and I can see that the country is getting such a hold on him that I must act quickly. So it occurred to me to send for you and enlist your help. You know, Mr. Graydon, Pelham has a regard for you that amounts to hero worship at his age."

"It is merely that I do the things that he finds congenial."

"Whatever the reason," Mrs. Milburne answered, "the fact remains. And I feel that, unless I have your assistance in persuading him what is best for him, I may have lost him entirely."

"Lost him?"

"Precisely. He has formed, and is persisting in, a wild idea that he wishes to stay here, instead of returning with us at the middle of September when his school re-opens."

"But even so, you will not necessarily have lost him. It seems to me that the boy has only found himself since coming here."

"I will not argue on that point," she said. "This may have done him no harm—even good, in some ways. But that is not the point. His education is not nearly completed. He must enter school at the beginning of the term."

"What do you plan to have him follow?" Kent inquired.

Mrs. Milburne stifled an inclination to intimate that this was an affair of the Milburnes and answered:

"His father has spoken of an engineering course at the university. But it is in no way all settled yet."

"That would be splendid," the other answered with enthusiasm. "I should think that there would be no difficulty in persuading him to consent to that. I will be in Toronto later in the autumn and would be more than glad to see him there."

Measuring glances of the two clashed and held. Mrs. Milburne felt that her antagonist was more cleverly armed than she had anticipated, and more adroit in the use of his weapons.

She realised, as clearly as though the young man had written it in black and white, that the price of his assistance in the matter of persuading Pelham to return to school with docility would

be his admittance to their Toronto home as a presumably welcome guest.

After some quick thought she decided that a truce was the only course open to her. During the interval till he would be in the city much might happen.

"I hope," she said, with a seeming cordiality that did her credit, "that while you are there we shall see something of you. Pelham will indeed be pleased, and it will help to reconcile him to returning. Possibly, if social duties permit, I might be able to arrange to have you at 'Rose-lawns' to spend a week-end with him."

Surely, she thought, this would leave no doubt in his mind as to his status as a guest.

"That would be splendid," he answered gratefully. "I shall look forward to that."

"Then that is settled," she said. "I shall not argue with Pelham. A mother needs to keep her son's affection. I shall leave him to you. And now I mustn't keep you from your guests. It was more than good of you to come to talk to me."

"Not a bit," Kent declared. "As I said, I had wanted to see you, too. I know that you have a car ordered to come for you later, but I wanted your permission to run Miss Milburne up to Invermere in my launch."

An imaginary message wafted from the Honourable Edward Aldton was all that buoyed Kent up through this amazingly daring request.

Mrs. Milburne had a sudden feeling that if she

talked to this young man much longer he might offer to trade Pelham for Alleyne bodily. Her one desire was to get rid of him before he realised his advantage and raised his terms.

"If Alleyne wishes it, - am willing," she admitted.

But she made a mental resolution to be somewhere near Alleyne when the request was made. Alleyne had been told with distinctness what to do with future invitations to go in that boat.

In the meantime Adam Grier had become restless in his shack. Through his open window he was watching the guests as they spread over the meadow among the grazing animals. Each had selected some special horse and there was a wager as to who would be the first to touch his, or her, choice.

Alleyne had chosen the pet of the ranch, a snow white Arabian with nose and hoofs of shell-like pink. Cautiously she approached the beautiful beast, expecting every minute to see it wheel and bound across the field. But the training of the old veterinary had been that all human beings are kind, and the Arab's experience of feminine humanity had been pretty much confined to Molly Dale, who invariably ended by producing a sugar lump.

So, far from turning from Alleyne, the white feet moved toward her; the white ears were forward and inquiring. She put out her hand and

touched his dainty forelock, then called softly to the others to announce her victory.

"So you're getting acquainted with Blanc Mange," a voice behind her said. "He has a sweet tooth, you see, and that's the way you look to him."

Alleyne turned as Adam Grier came beside her. The Arab stepped to meet him with a welcoming winnow.

"Blanc Mange!" Alleyne exclaimed. "What an odd name! And isn't he a dear!"

"They're a well-behaved herd. Look at them now! Talking to the company in their very best style. And it isn't every day they have rank and distinction to visit them, either. Eh, Blanc Mange?"

He held a sugar lump in the hollow of his partly closed hand and chuckled as the animal turned his head and sniffed and whimpered in his efforts to extract the sweet, pawing the ground with a dainty foot as a protest against being teased.

"Say, miss," Adam began, after he had finally put the sugar between the white teeth. "They thought I was drunk up there. All thought it, didn't they? Well, I wasn't. Not yet, that is.

"Wait a minute," he added hurriedly when the girl, with lips tight and nostrils wide, stepped back from him. "I wouldn't as much as hurt a fly—let alone a beautiful young lady. But now listen: You don't want to see an old man drunk, do you? Well, I know where there's a bottle or

so right this minute, and I've a longing to go get them and drink them at a gulp—a longing I've got to fight like the devil. But say, miss, it always helps me to fight it if I know that someone else is doing without something, too. Now wouldn't you like to help an old man out by doing without something you like—without your cigarettes, for instance?"

Alleyne Milburne's chin came up and her eyes flashed.

"No, miss, no. Kent didn't tell me a word. I just sort of know things when I am half—I'm not drunk, you understand, but there's no telling, unless someone helps me. You'd do that much for an old man. You don't do much for folks, you know. And I'll tell Kent. I'll tell him you're doing it for me. Come, is it a go? No booze for me—no cigarettes for you, for a whole month."

Alleyne gave an amused shrug of her shoulders.

"All right," she said, adding with vindictive mischief: "Go and enlist my cousin; take one on that fence there."

"You are a silly ass," she said to herself, when he had gone. "However, what he does not know cannot hurt him. If he wants to think you are not smoking, the way is clear."

Adam came to where Claire sat on the top rail of a corral, feeding wisps of timothy to the black that Kent usually rode.

He repeated his well-worn request adding that Miss Milburne had graciously consented to give

up her cigarettes for a month for their mutual benefit.

"Surely you want to help an old man, too," he finished.

"But as I don't use cigarettes——"

"Anything else will do as well. I could pick on something that would do me just as much good and you more. ♦ Will you promise?"

"Yes, I think so. What is it?"

"Just give up thinking about him—up at the house, I mean. That will do us both good."

And leaving an astonished and discomfited young woman on the fence of the corral, Adam ambled back to his shack, closely followed by the two pets, one snow white and one glossy black, and muttering over and over to himself:

"I do a lot of good in this world, in my own way. I do a lot of good."

When time came for leave-taking. Mrs. Milburne again felt a pang of fear at the sagacity of her host. In the hearing of all he said to Alleyne, when she came to bid him adieu:

"Your mother has been good enough to say that I may relieve the rather crowded car by running you up in my launch."

There was no request, therefore no opportunity, for Alleyne to make the directed refusal, even had she been so inclined.

"That will be lovely," she exclaimed, wondering the meanwhile how on earth he had extracted the permission that her mother's silence acqui-

esced in, considering the very final way she had been forbidden to get into that boat again, only the night before.

"Oh, bother!" Alleyne exclaimed when the launch had slid out of its shed and was headed up the sunset tinted lake. "Pelham is carrying my cigarette case. I forgot to get it."

"Mine aren't bad," Kent said, producing his case. "What Doc told me isn't true, then?"

"That old man that's half drunk? We only talked horse for a minute. What a wizard he is with your animals! And what a beauty your Arab is!"

"Yes he is. Doc tends him like a baby. Says he is keeping him fine and fit so that he will be a suitable wedding present for me to give my wife."

Alleyne veered from the tones in his voice and changed the subject.

"How on earth did you get mother to consent to your running me home?" she asked. "Did you use an anæsthetic?"

"Not at all. She apparently gave it willingly. Do you think I should derive any encouragement from it?"

"I don't dare hope so."

Then, at the light that leaped into his eyes Alleyne leaned back and bit her lip. She saw at once that a remark that she had meant to be mildly discouraging had been read by him to be tremendously encouraging. It had not enlight-

ened him as to her mother's position, but had seemed to lay bare her own feelings—a thing she had not at all intended doing, even had the impression been correct.

The journey up the lake was continued without spoken words. The man was apparently so contented to let matters rest with her last sentence that he did not pursue the conversation, except with his eyes—dark hazel eyes that came into their own in evening light on water.

As the silence grew and lengthened and deepened between them Alleyne became more and more annoyed with herself. As time wore on it became more and more impossible for her to take back the implied meaning of her words. And it seemed impossible to pick up the conversation and direct it into other, safer channels. The man's silence seemed not only to dominate her, but the lake and the valley and the hills as well. An impending sense of climax took possession of her as the boat finally slowed down and nosed its way into the purple shadows round the pier.

Then, when they stood under a cottonwood that shaded the wharf, he broke the long silence by saying her name once, and, gathering her quickly in arms strong as steel, kissed her on the lips.

With a cry all her annoyance with herself broke on him. She wrenched herself free of his arms.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, stamping a white-shod foot. "Mother was right. The men of the West are all alike. You——"

Her words were arrested by a flash of heat lightning from the south that lit up his face suddenly, revealing it stricken and grim.

"Alleyne, *don't*," his low voice begged. "God knows I'm sorry—if you feel that way. I thought—but come. I'll take you up to the hotel, of course, but—well, I won't annoy you again."

Turning, he helped her up the steep incline, but his hand on her arm was the touch of a stranger. In his silence now was a tenseness that she felt to the extent that it contracted her throat and made it ache. She found it impossible to utter a word but waited for something from him to break the spell. At the door of the hotel living-room he lifted his hat, turned and was swallowed in the night—and still not a word had been spoken.

Alleyne passed through the joking bridge players with which the big room was filled and went wearily up the stairs. She saw that the car with the others had not come in yet.

"It ought to suit mother, anyhow, to have me in before the rest," she told herself listlessly.

Then she went to her window to see whether the little headlight of *The Alleyne* was visible on its return trip.

The lake was a strip of blackness unrelieved.

"Oh, dear," she sighed in exasperation. "What is the matter with me? But any of the other boys I know would have apologised or argued or done *something*. Then I could have relented. I was

ashamed of being so snippy almost at once, but what could I do in that awful silence?"

"Oh, well," she said as she turned from the window, "I'm glad Ron will be in from his fishing trip to-morrow. I'll spend the whole day on the lake with him."

But as she removed her hat before the mirror she knew that it gave her no pleasure to think of Ronald Rolson's return, and that a whole day on the lake with him would bore her to extinction in her present mood.

Almost instantly her thoughts were back with her host of the day's dinner—which now seemed to have happened long ago.

"Botheration!" she exclaimed. "I wish he were more like other men."

But the fact that Kent Graydon was not like all the men she had known was probably the reason why her last waking thoughts were of strong arms about her and of firm young lips on hers.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

KENT'S INTERESTS ARE ENDANGERED

ON a mellow and delightful afternoon in early September Alleyne Milburne and her cousin Claire sunned themselves on the broad balcony of The Invermere.

The book upside down in Alleyne's lap and Claire's forgotten fancywork attested that they had given themselves up to the spell of the day; to the spell of crisp mountain air grown languorous. The faint breeze that found its drowsy way to their sheltered corner might have drifted straight from the River of Lethe, or have blown across the lotus of the ancient Lybian tribes.

"What a difference from this morning!" Claire exclaimed, stretching her arms above her head. "The air at seven o'clock was the crispest and most tingling that one could imagine breathing. It seems hard now to imagine that only eight hours ago I stood on that high bench land, looked over the valley and felt that I wanted to conquer the world."

"How far from here is that?" Alleyne inquired sleepily.

"It doesn't look it, but it is five miles. You

should have come, as your father suggested."

"Nonsense! Father is always relieved when I do not take his suggestions seriously. And you had to get up at six, or some such thing, didn't you?"

"We had breakfast soon after six and were well on our way at seven. We had climbed to the second bench row before we saw the sun. He streamed coloured rays at us through the Rockies and a flock of baby cloudlets. It was one of the most magnificent sights I have ever seen. And we were cold enough, at that hour, to welcome the warmth of the rays which dispelled in short order the chilly mists that hung over every little lake and stream.

"But by the time we got back to the mine that Uncle wanted to see, it was after ten and the sun was hot. It was quite a climb up to the entrance of the mine, but it was worth it. I was fascinated with all I learned about mining. I found that this district ranks third in British Columbia for mines of this sort. Next time I come out the foreman is going to assemble me a prospector's outfit and he and I are going to get some mules and a grub-stake and go and find a mine of our own."

"H-m. Chaperoned by whom?"

"He didn't mention that among the list of necessities. I remember that he said that if we got a good lead we would be all right, but I am sure that is not western for chaperone. I said I

preferred gold, but he thinks it will have to be galena, unless we go elsewhere. Pel was fascinated, too. He thinks he may branch yet—not having graduated quite—and be a mining engineer.”

“Did Pel walk up the steep part to the mine, with his ankle in splints?”

“He was assisted some, of course, but he did it—gamely, too.”

“Then that is the reason for the damnable temper he has this afternoon. Mother was sure Dad would let him over-exert.”

“Poor Pel!” Claire exclaimed with sympathy. “His sprain is such a disappointment to him. He has been like a caged animal for days because his gang in the pass was to have gone back on the Kootenay, surveying about some change in the bridge plans. As they are short a transit man or leveller or something, Pel was sure that Mr. Graydon would promote him from the ranks. So that was why he was so energetic on the hill this morning. He thought that if he could climb that, his father could not refuse to let him go back to work. Now he sees that it is no good and thinks he will not see the upper Kootenay at all. There is really very little chance that he will be able to do more than ride in to say farewell to the men before we leave.”

But Alleyne was not deeply concerned over the woes of her brother. She lit another cigarette

and gazed in moody silence at the row of peaks across the lake.

"I must tell you about the farm we saw," C'aire went on. "Up on those bench land there are hundreds, even thousands, of acres of land that they think will make splendid farms when their huge irrigation projects are completed. Mr. Graydon was telling me of it all the night we were on the water. He told me of the propaganda being carried on in Europe during the last two years and of the various settlers it has brought during the summer. Some of these, he said, have read the prospectuses to say that all they need to do is swing on the porch while a farm materialises by magic. Of course, this sort of settler is a detriment to any new place, for they are certain to be disappointed.

"But there are others who have come with the determination to overcome the necessary hardships, and these will do it—even as Mr. Graydon himself has done. We met a pair of this kind of settlers to-day. The driver had a parcel to deliver at a new farm, so, of course, we went along. The woman was a pretty English bride and seemed most pleased to see us; in fact, she made us stop for lunch. I found her most delightful; one of those well-bred, plucky sort, with the soft and perfect accent that is our despair. She had on the most beautiful rings I have ever seen—and she was making butter. And right there, in her rôle of a useful citizen, I envied her more than if she

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had been following her old pastimes of riding to hounds or wintering at Cannes."

"Fancy her husband's dragging her to this place if she has lived a life like that!" Alleyne exclaimed.

"He didn't drag her here—and he couldn't drag her away. Her enthusiasm is the most refreshing thing I have seen in years. I have felt an indolent and useless parasite ever since seeing her."

"But do you mean to say she doesn't find it dull and lonesome up on those benches?"

"Not having been up there, you can have no idea of the view. She says she is never lonesome, and *she* could never be dull anywhere. She shot a cougar yesterday, and has a nest of skunks under the barn. Something exciting happens every day, she says. To-day, it was our visit and the arrival of the parcel the driver brought. She and I opened this in her room while the men were talking horse. It was a most complete and beautiful baby layette which she expects to need about Christmas. You couldn't say a life like that was dull. I envied her from the bottom of my heart."

Later, out of the reverie that followed her story, Claire noted that her cousin was lighting her fourth cigarette in the last half hour. She let it pass without remonstrance, for Alleyne had been in a rather touchy and uncertain mood during the last few days. Neither did she mention the promise she knew her cousin to have made to old Adam Grier, mainly because she had not found it hu-

manly possible to keep the promise that she herself had made him.

Just here the attention of both was arrested by a rider who had reined his horse beside the gate of the garden below. With what seemed like a single movement, he swung from his mount and dropped the reins over the animal's head to the ground.

The girls had marvelled before that this simple procedure had seemed to say to a western horse, broncho or cayuse, "You are tied," and that the horse had seemed to believe it.

Then the rider had let his eyes rest on the two girls on the balcony for a moment, after which he took an envelope from his pocket, looked at it, then came across the lawn to the lower door.

Alleyne giggled.

"Wasn't that like the movies?" she said. Then suddenly sitting erect:

"That is a horse from Equestria. Don't you remember it following Pel about? That is a letter for me; I'm going down."

"No, wait," Claire counselled. "I think you are right about the horse, but if the note is for you he will bring it up."

At that moment a shy but nice-looking young man appeared diffidently at the door of the balcony.

"Is Miss Milburne here?" he asked, pulling off his broad-brimmed felt.

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"I am Miss Milburne," Alleyne said. "Is it a note from Mr. Graydon?"

"No, ma'am. Mr. Graydon's gone. The note is from old Doc—old Adam Grier, I mean. He has had something powerful on his mind for two or three days, and this afternoon he sent me over with a letter for you."

Alleyne laid the letter in her lap after a glance to make sure that the writing was not that of Kent Graydon.

"Mr. Graydon has gone?" she inquired.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Gone where?"

"He is up to the Vermillion by this time, I should think. They are doing some fresh staking on the highway up there."

"But what can this old man want of me?"

"You'll have to excuse me, ma'am, for not knowing what is in the note."

Alleyne turned it over, broke the seal and read a shakily written request that she go to see him immediately.

"What does he want me to go to see him for?" she asked sharply.

"He didn't tell me anything, except to bring an answer whether you will do what he asks or not."

"Well, you can say that I certainly shall not."

"Oh, Al," Claire interposed, "perhaps the poor old man is sick or in trouble."

"And if he is! I'm not a nurse, and his trou-

bles are nothing to me. I never heard of such amazing audacity."

"Is Mr. Graydon, Senior, not there?" Claire asked the young man.

"No. He went in with the boss."

"Do you know when they will be back?"

"Not for some time. They took a pack train, tents and a full camp. They're grubstaked for at least a month. Graydon said he would not be down before October, unless his uncle tired of it and wanted to quit."

"A month!" Alleyne exclaimed. "We'll be gone before then!"

And on the young man's remaining politely silent, she went on:

"But, of course, I can't go away over to that ranch full of men and horses. Mother'd never hear of it."

"I'm sorry, miss," the man said unrolling his hat preparatory to putting it on. "He seemed to think it would ease his mind to see you."

"I can't help——"

"You can tell him," Claire cut in firmly, "that either Miss Milburne or I will be over in about an hour."

"Thank you, miss. That ought to suit him."

Whereat the young man went below, swung to his saddle as his horse rose on its hind feet and twirled, and, gracefully leaping, rounded the corner in the direction of Equestria.

"Why not both go?" Claire asked. "We've

nothing to do with the rest of the afternoon. I'll go over to the garage to see if there is a car in."

"Nonsense, Claire! Mother will be annoyed if either of us think of such a thing."

"I have seen you less keen to mind your mother," Claire remarked. "But if you won't come I will have to get Ron to escort me."

"Ron can't. He's going golfing with me as soon as the sun gets a little lower."

"Oh, then I've done some good. Ronald has coaxed you to play every day this week without success. He will be glad to see you relent and stop brooding. But I shall go to Equestria anyhow. There may be something I can do for that poor, pathetic old man."

"Aren't you rather horning in, as Pel says?" Alleyne asked. "It was me that he asked for."

"Oh, I'll be a substitute. I'm getting to be quite used to that. And if Ron and Mr. Graydon can conceal their annoyance, probably this old man will manage also."

On her way to Equestria, Claire recalled a conversation she had had a few days earlier with Molly—still Molly Dale to all the valley, although her real name was now Mrs. W. K. Grayden.

At Molly's statement that she had never known her mother but had been brought up entirely by her father and other men, Claire had exclaimed: "Why, you poor child; and here in the West, too."

At which Molly had heatedly answered:

"The West, indeed! Well, didn't you know that a nice girl is never treated with anything but respect by the men of the mountains?"

Claire remembered her words and saw their meaning as two of Equestria's hands escorted her to the door of Adam Grier's shack.

"Now, Miss," the older one said, "we're mighty glad you have done us this favour. I think Doc is rational now, although he has raved for three days. But you just say what you want me to do; I'll either sit on the steps here, within earshot, or I'll go over by that corral outside hearing, unless you call; just whichever you say."

"I think you may wait by the corral." Claire smiled. "And thank you for being so thoughtful."

"Not a bit of it, Miss. It's you that is the thoughtful one. We've never seen the poor old cuss rave this way before. He kept it up after we thought he was sober, too. If you can fix him up in his mind we will be deeply obliged. Just go in. We've fixed up the place the best we could."

Claire had time to give only a cursory glance at the neatness of the room when the bright roving eyes of Adam Grier caught and held hers; eyes of such uncanny quality that she wondered for a moment as to the sanity of the man.

"Oh, you're not Miss Milburne!" he exclaimed when she came into the little room.

"Miss Milburne was unable to come," Claire

told him, "so I wondered if I might do in her stead. Did you want her especially?"

"I want someone who has Kent Graydon's interests at heart. Have you?"

"I will not do anything to hurt his interests, I can assure you— if you wish to confide in me."

"No, I don't believe you would," he answered, picking at the tufts of his quilt. "But you are going to despise me in a minute."

"No, I'm not. Why do you say so?"

"Because I've done something to hurt his interests. I'm the worst enemy the man ever had."

"How can you say such a thing? Mr. Graydon has told me that he could never leave his horses to follow his beloved work on the highway if you were not here to look after them."

"No, Miss. He has it wrong there. He'd be better off if he had never seen me. Almost any man could have looked after his horses, and they wouldn't have blabbed everything, either."

"Wouldn't have—what?"

"Told all his business, Miss. Oh, yes, I know. I'm careful enough with my tongue when I am sober, but just as something of importance comes along I get drunk and give it all away."

"And I'd never noticed before that it was always at some important time that he wanted to find out things that he got me a bottle or two to make me so I would tell it. Never saw it before."

"Listen, Mr. Grier," Claire said firmly. "Do try to be lucid. What have you told that you

shouldn't, to whom did you tell it, and how can I help set it right?"

The old man's eyes denoted that he was trying to make himself as coherent as possible.

"This time, Miss, it's about the sheep. I told on the coyotes; told McNulty the joke."

"Who is McNulty? The red-haired man next door?"

"Yes. He rents Dale's place."

"And why did you say he got you drunk?"

"I didn't say *he* got me drunk. Oh Lord, I didn't."

"No, of course; I jump at conclusions so. You said you told him the joke. What joke?"

"That Jimmy and the Honorable pretended to be coyotes to scare McNulty from buying sheep. Oh, I'm all mixed up. Can you understand me at all?"

"Splendidly, so far. Why didn't they want this man to buy sheep?"

"Because if he does, and puts them back on the hill runs it spoils the pasture for horses or cattle. Graydon would have to reduce his stock by more than one-half. He has not nearly enough pasture on his own place."

"Um hm." Claire, city born and bred, was thinking hard and rapidly in an effort to understand all the facts the none too coherent man was pouring out.

"But why," she asked, "did Jimmy or Mr.

Aldonton care whether or not sheep came on the runs? Neither have stock there."

"Well, just at that time the Honnerable was extra hard up, and he'd heard Kent say that he would give a lot of money if someone would induce McNulty to change his mind. So he cooked up a scheme for he and Jimmy to pretend they were coyotes."

"Why?"

"Because coyotes are the sheep's worst enemy."

"I see. I'm very stupid, but how did they pretend to be coyotes? Dress up and eat sheep?"

"No. Just howled like them. And barked around in the bush at night, the way the real animals do. McNulty heard them and sent word to the man who was to sell him the sheep that he would not take them, so everything was going fine—if it had been for me."

"Tell me when you came in," Claire encouraged.

"You see, Miss, they had let me in on the secret. They had to have someone to signal to them if anyone was about with a gun when they were making all this noise. I did all that well enough, but I had to go and spoil it all by laughing."

"Laughing?"

"Yes, laughing. It was funny, too, but one cannot always laugh when things get funny. This time I had casually strolled over to McNulty to

see if I could find out whether he intended going on with the sheep.

"Hear the racket last night?" I asks him. "Coyotes, eh? And I thought I heard your gun," I added.

"Yep," he said. "Coyotes. But they won't bother us much more. I shot the two biggest last night."

"And then, Miss, instead of saying 'you don't say!' and stringing him along—I laughed. It was funny, I know, but I was a trusted emissary, as you might say, and I should have kept grave.

"He caught right on that there was a nigger in the woodpile and as soon as Kent is out of the way—next thing I know I'm—what I mean is—about that time I found a bottle or so, and I guess I told everything. And the upshot of it all is that McNulty is going down on Jimmy's stage today to Harbottles place to make a dicker for the whole flock."

"Oh!" Claire exclaimed. Up to now the narrative had highly amused her, with its suggestion of adventure, but now she began to see that it was of a very serious nature.

"And Mr. Graydon is away, too!"

"Yes. When he is at home he keeps me sober. Then this couldn't have happened."

"But how does it happen that you are here instead of over in the village when—er——"

"No use going over there. It's against the law to sell it to me."

"Then who does sell it to you?"

"Well, I don't tell that, of course."

"Of course not," Claire agreed. "I couldn't ask you to do that. We will not discuss that point. But you say that you have had the misfortune to become—irresponsible, at the special times when there was something of importance in Mr. Graydon's affairs that he did not wish to become known. That is most unfortunate."

"The unfortunate part was that I never caught on that there was any special reason why anyone should want to get it for me. But as I look back I can see that there was something doing every time I got it. The worst time was when the fence had been straightened and the horses shut from the water. Another time I gave away his figures on a grading contract. Once I told about his going to buy a car of horses from England. Someone else wired and got them first. But none of the other times were as important as this. It would serve him right if someone caught him in the act of it!"

"Yes," Claire soothed. "Quite so. I agree with you about such a man—whoever he is. Now do you suppose I might go into Mr. Graydon's house and use his desk. I want to do some deep thinking and I may want to write something."

Scarcely noting the men who had awaited her coming out, Claire made her way to the house, for, almost with the saying of the last words she had formed a tremendous resolution.

The consequences of the resolution she had not taken the time to forecast; and as to the inspiration of it—she put that out of her mind as something that she could not face, even in the privacy of her own thoughts.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

CLAIRE HARWIN BUYS A RANCH

CLAIRE found Pete McNulty mending a piece of machinery in the little tool shed of the Dale place.

"Mr. McNulty?" she inquired, in her smoothest voice.

"That's me," the man assented.

"I've called on a slight matter of business," she began.

"I don't buy books," he answered, going on with his work as though she were not present.

"And I do not sell them, so we should get on splendidly so far as that is concerned. The matter of business is connected with your moving from the vicinity.

"I heard," she continued, "that you are buying the Harbottle sheep and run down on Mud Creek."

"The sheep—but not the run," he corrected her. "How did you hear?"

"Oh, I have little ways of hearing things," she told him. "If other means fail, I use a good old Scotch method of loosening a person up to make him talk."

"Yes?" he answered.

Outside a sudden metallic glitter that seemed to have come into his eyes, there was no sign to tell that he had understood her allusion. Claire admitted to herself that, whatever the man's faults, he knew how to keep his head.

"I am rather anxious to know your opinion of the efficacy and wisdom of such a method," she suggested.

"Is that why you are here?"

"By no means. But I may ask a little advice, may I not?"

"I guess you may," he admitted, "and here it is: If you ever do any such thing as you just mentioned, be careful not to go about telling of it. And here's a better tip still: Be very careful how you go about insinuating or accusing anyone else of doing it. Otherwise you are apt to get into serious trouble."

"But, of course," Claire began, her eyes big and innocent, "one wouldn't go about accusing anyone of such a thing unless one had absolute proof of it under lock and key somewhere—now do you think one would, Mr. McNulty?"

McNulty threw the piece of steel he held in his hand back to a pile of old metal, where it clinked musically.

"Get down to hard pan," he said roughly. "What do you want?"

"I am buying the Dale farm," she told him,

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"and I believe it is not to be sold without your consent. I came to get that consent."

"I also hold mortgages against it for nine thousand dollars," he said. "No one who knows their business would pay that for a place such as this. But if Dale tries any funny business like this to try to get rid of me, I'll foreclose and out he goes, neck and crop."

"Oh, no he won't," she said, "because, if you try any such thing, you will find yourself in a safe spot, secure from doing harm for quite a time. For some offences there is not the option of a fine, you know."

"I guess Graydon's wire-cutting case would come up first, if there are to be moves in that direction."

"Possibly, but I know nothing about that. Neither does he know anything about what you have done, or what I have done, or what old Adam Grier has done since two weeks ago."

"If Dale wanted to sell at all, why wouldn't he sell to me?" he asked doggedly.

"I do not know that. Possibly he likes his neighbors. But he has sold to me. I have made out a check for the nine thousand of the mortgage, plus the six hundred fifteen interest Mr. Dale tells me he still owes you. To that I have added five hundred as a special compensation for terminating your term of rental before the end of the year."

"I don't have to terminate the rental, unless I wish."

"I have counted on your wishing it."

"When?"

"By the end of September, say."

"I've two hundred head of stock here. What about them?"

"Anything you like. Why not use this money to buy Harbottle's place, and run them down there?"

"It's a pretty well cooked up scheme," he admitted, "and you thought you could scare me into it!"

Claire felt a momentary panic that her scheme was to fail after all. Her heart was pounding so hard that she wondered at her ability to keep her voice in control at all.

"I have not tried to scare you," she said. "But I have been told that you are a shrewd business man and I had counted on your seeing the matter in a sensible light. Possibly you will when you have permitted your mind to dwell on the alternative."

"You've not stated it."

"I have hinted at it, and I shall not hesitate to state it at the proper time and place, if necessary. But I had much rather not do it in that way. It would be much more agreeable to me to part from you such good friends that I could invite you to visit me some time, if I should ever come to live on my place."

McNulty shook his head.

"No girl pulls the wool over my eyes again," he averred.

"I'm not trying to do that," Claire laughed. "I am trying to keep to the game like a sensible player. And surely you can see that I hold the cards. The one I have mentioned is ace in trump suit. Here is another high one; if this release is signed at once I will not tell Mr. Graydon what I know of this business. I believe he has threatened the guilty one with complete extermination."

McNulty took time to light his pipe before answering.

"Without admitting that Graydon has any reason for a grudge against me, I don't mind telling you that a scrap with him would be very much to my liking, any time you or he care to bring it along."

"Another good one," Claire went on. "If these things are signed in five minutes I will give the extra bonus of a promise not to divulge the personalia of the coyotes, or the fact that you told that you had shot the two largest animals."

With lucky prescience she had hit on the vulnerable spot in the armour of her adversary—his dislike of ridicule. She made her pen ready for him and glanced at her wrist watch.

"But—how do I know that someone else won't tell it?" he asked.

"You mean Mr. Grier?"

"Y-yes."

"I'll give you my word of honour that it shall never be told by either of us; that is—as far as one can promise for him. In his lucid moments he will be safe."

The dull red that mounted to his forehead told that her shot had gone home. He picked up the pen and signed at the spots indicated. Then he folded her check with scarcely a look at it.

"If the end of the month is not convenient," Claire said, elated beyond bounds with her success, "a few days will make little difference. It will take me some time to acquire stock myself, or for Mr. Dale to acquire it for me. The neighborhood is simply to think that he has redeemed his place; they will not know that I have had a hand in the matter at all. You would prefer Mr. Graydon to think that, I know."

"As you wish," he answered. "The neighbour's opinions will count for very little for me now. I am rather glad to be rid of it all, since things have turned out in the way they have."

"Then surely we part friends," Claire suggested. "I am sure I wish you every success in your new venture, and—mightn't we shake hands?"

The September sun was dropping among the Selkirks as the car rolled homeward with Claire. Some low hanging clouds of the day before had left a blanket of fresh, clean white on all the peaks. On the Rockies this white was rose-tinted

with sunset rays, but the chill blues of evening were stealthily creeping up on these.

The car came to the crest of the ledge they had been following. From here the road led down and down in hairpin curves to where a swing bridge crossed the Columbia at the head of Lake Windermere, after which it was still a run of a mile or so to the hotel.

Away across the valley, on the opposite bench, columns of smoke spiralled heavenward, one of them probably rising from the cosy evening fire of the English bride. Claire pictured the supper scene of the happy couple, after which the tiny flannels and snowy clothes would probably be spread before the wondering gaze of the young husband.

Above them and back among the hills was the mine they had visited—was it only that morning? She pictured the foreman and others there as bringing their husky appetites to the board in the log-built cookhouse, presided over by the small but smart Chinaman.

And back, many miles in the Rockies behind her, there was a camp where probably at this very minute bronzed and khaki-clad men were washing up in tin basins on a bench under the trees, preparatory to investigating the source of the good smells coming from the chuck tent.

Claire had a momentary, perhaps telepathic, mental picture of Kent Graydon, brushing back

his thatch of brown hair and smiling at the capers of some of the younger men in his charge.

Then Claire fell to wondering what would be Kent Graydon's opinion of her sudden impulsive act of the afternoon. What would be any young man's opinion of an act committed by a young woman all for his benefit.

She almost seemed to hear his astonished exclamation of: "Why ever did you do that?"

And if she could not face herself with the answer, how would she tell it to him—or to Alleyne?

But by this time the car was at the door of the hotel and her thoughts on the matter were ended.

Alleyne was at this very moment dragging weary feet in from eighteen holes of golf. She and Ronald reached the porch just as the car swung to the steps and halted.

"What did you find out?" Alleyne asked of Claire, quite oblivious of the fact that both her companion and the chauffeur were within easy hearing.

"I have made a most startling discovery," Claire answered as she descended from the car, "something that I had not in the very least suspected; that I have in me the makings of a rattling good business woman."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

KENT'S MOUNTAIN SURVEY CAMP

SAMUEL GRAYDON had spent a week in the environs of a mountain survey camp, and, while a week, by the calendar, consists of no more than seven days, it was easy for him to persuade himself that a large part of his life had been lived among the little known splendors of the inner Rockies.

The little group of tents, cook house and sleeping quarters nestled near the upper Kootenay, not far from where it is joined by the Vermillion, and midway between the Brisco and Mitchell divisions of the great Rockies.

As Samuel Graydon told his nephew, he had learned more during the two days' trip in and the week's occupation of the camp than in any other nine days of his existence.

He had learned how to procure wood that would burn for the evening camp-fire, and how to build the fire; one that would be still glowing in the morning, even though a chill September frost had lain like a blanket on the valley during the night.

He had learned to tell a spruce from a tamarac; a poplar from a Balm of Gilead; Nanickanick from

Oregon Grape, the track of a white-tailed deer from the hoof marks of the pack mules, and the choir of a wood-pecker from the call of a loon.

He had learned not to mind the hootings of owls or the pattering, scratching scamperings of small animals over his tent at night, or the strident call of the brilliant jay—that intrepid follower of all mountain camps—in the very early morning.

He had learned that thin cotton walls make for perfect safety for man, should the queer, muffled thumping of footfalls in the dark, felt almost as much as heard, be a wandering lynx, a thirsty deer following their well beaten path to the river's edge for his nocturnal night-cap, or merely one of the mules wandering because he himself had improperly tied a slip-knot.

He had learned that, while a rabbit scurried to cover and a grouse whirred to the safety of a thicket at his approach, a porcupine or skunk would go its own way, quite regardless of his presence, hogging the trail ahead of him for just as long as it pleased them to do so. Nature had endowed each so richly with methods of self-defence that the fear of man or beast was entirely foreign to them. But he did not know that the fact that he invariably went about without a gun had a lot to do with the number of wild-folk with which he became acquainted.

He had his tent opening thrown wide in the mornings so that he might not miss the beauties

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of the sunrise, streaming down through the mists of the morning, and when six o'clock came it was hard to decide whether to miss his supper or go inside and miss the glories of the sun's resplendent setting in the gorge of the Little Vermillion Pass.

He mourned almost as much for the tragedies continually going on in the realms of nature as he had done for the various sadnesses he had encountered in the human race. His afternoon was clouded when, on an excursion that led back into the hills beside a moss bordered stream, he found the locked antlers of two splendid deer. These, lying amid a scattering of white bones, attested the tragic end of either a friendly sparring match or of a savage combat.

The squeal of a hapless field mouse when an owl swooped low at night, or a writhing fish in the claws of a hawk that had just dipped into the Kootenay, found echoes of mournful sympathy in his breast.

His first glimpse of an elk marked a red letter day among all his adventures. On a Sunday afternoon he and Kent had climbed to a little ridge for a view of a valley that often rewarded one with a glimpse of some form of big game.

Just before they reached the crest of the ridge, there fell on their ears one of the strangest sounds that Samuel Graydon had ever heard—a sound that would have been a screech if it had not been

more of a bawl, and one calculated to strike terror to the heart of man or beast.

"It's an elk!" was Kent's quick exclamation, as he motioned L's dogs to heel, and carefully avoided the twigs in the pathway that might, by breaking, warn an animal of their approach. "I hope he is out where he may be seen. From the sound I should think he would be a beauty."

"There he is!"

Away below, by a clump of jack-pine, stood a most regal specimen of full grown elk. For a moment his head was lifted inquiringly, as though he sensed intrusion in his mountain fastnesses. Then, satisfying himself that the danger was not pressing, a fact that strangely had something to do with the intruder's lack of firearms, he resumed his occupation of polishing the last straggling remnants of velvet from his newly hardened antlers by the process of rubbing them on the trunks of the pines.

Which done, he would be prepared to stalk forth and find him a mate, and woe betide any presumptuous male of his own kind that dared attempt to thwart his purpose.

"What a noble sight!" Samuel Graydon exclaimed. "I have always thought the deer to be the most beautiful and gentle of all God's wild creatures."

"Well," Kent qualified, "you are at least half right. There are times when they are beautiful and times when they are gentle, but they are very

seldom both at one time. Three or four months ago, when that creature was using his strength to renew his antlers, he was gentle and spiritless enough to please anyone. But he was anything but beautiful. He was thin and droopy, his coat was shaggy and dirty, and his splendid antlers were short and clubby.

"Now, I will grant you he is a noble sight. He has worn off his last year's coat by running through the underbrush. One would think he had been gone over by a groom. And he will soon have his horns polished to the queen's taste. But he isn't gentle. He is as murderous a brute as one would wish to meet, and if there hadn't been climbable trees on this ridge I'd not have ventured up without a gun. There' he's going to bugle again. If another answers, we are like as not to see a fight."

"Then," his uncle implored, "let us go home now."

Kent put his hands to his mouth and attempted an imitation of the strident call, but, after a first start of attention, the animal ignored the attempt and directed his efforts to the perfecting of his toilette.

As their camping experiences progressed the elderly man found his admiration for the clever woods-craft of his nephew becoming boundless. The fact that anyone could, by placing spruce of tamarac boughs in the ground at a certain angle, make a bed of the softness and springiness

of an Ostermoor amazed him. Also it was his first experience of angling in swiftly running water. He never tired of watching the boy as he waded up stream and filled his creel with beauties that made supper a thing to look forward to.

And he was tremendously interested in the work of his nephew's party. The expedition was due to the fact that, at the point where their camp was pitched, the Kootenay was showing a strong disposition to change its course—not at all a new diversion for the venerable stream—in which case the roadway, as now surveyed, would presently be undermined and washed away.

Kent's job was to decide between the advisability of running the road farther up the hillside than the present trail, or bridging the Kootenay and running on the other bank for a mile or so.

Samuel Graydon delighted to be on the ground early enough to see the transit set up, the chain and rod men making ready and the axemen whetting their axes as they waited for line. As he accompanied the workmen he noted the fact that his nephew had a profound influence—all for straightness and decency—over the men in his charge.

And he admired the sportsmanship that forbade the men from firing on the grouse that hovered temptingly near at times, until the date when the season should be open.

“Wait till the fifteenth,” Kent said, “and we'll get you a fried grouse dinner, the like of

which you have never tasted, even on your annual dinner with Mrs. Boss-of-the-Church. And we'll follow it up with a meal of roast duck that will take your mind right back to Aunt Martha, I assure you."

"How far away it all seems, Kent," the older man said. "I suppose someone has to live in the cities, but one could easily imagine here that the rush and artificiality of it all is a part of another existence. If I cannot take back some sort of inspiration from my sojourn in these hills, I am indeed a weak vessel. I fear my powers of description will not convince even Martha. How I wish she might just see it once."

"Perhaps," his nephew suggested, "she might not discover that she is an aboriginee under the skin, as you have. Possibly she is happier with what she is doing."

"Possibly," the older man agreed. "Martha thrives on household cares. She seldom enjoyed the days we spent in the park or in the country. Today, bless her heart, she is probably worrying for fear she has got too much turmeric in her mustard pickle, or wondering if the neighbours can be feeding her cat on the sly."

But it was from the coming of Jerhue, an old trapper and guide, that he derived the greatest information and pleasure. On the third day of their stay he rode into the camp, leading a well-loaded pack mule. One saw at once that both the horse and the mule had been selected with

endurance and general utility in mind. Both they and their master were logical denizens of the little known valleys and hills.

"Aha, Jerhue." Kent called a hearty welcome to the little cavalcade. "I was looking for you. I knew you'd smell the campfire if you were within fifty miles. Where you been all summer?"

"Away up the Kootenay and over to the Beaverfoot."

"Doing any prospecting?"

"Nope. Just sizing up the game situation. I've two big parties booked for the fall, one in October and one November. But gosh a'mighty, you ought to see the trails! Washouts, trees down, grown over everywhere; it's the national crime. We need a new government; a few Lauriers in this——"

"Come on, Jerhue, don't talk politics. What's the game like this year?"

"Saw a few moose, but they're scarce. They ought to close the season again. I wrote and advised it. Elk are pretty good this year. More young ones than usual. They're down on the plains already."

"We saw one Sunday. Any sheep?"

"Only one, but he was sure a beauty. I got a photograph on a crag right up next the skyline. I nearly broke my neck getting it, but I think the plate ought to be good for at least a hundred. I have a buyer picked for it already—a funny cove that was in the crowd that I take out next

month. I met the bunch at Banff and made arrangements there. This one kept running about with a camera, peering at the landscape through thick glasses. He told me he had the finest collection of wild life photographs in America. That is why he follows hunting parties about; he'd never be able to shoot anything. Do you think a hundred is enough to ask him?"

"A hundred is about as crooked as——"

"*Crooked!* I'll leave it to your uncle here. I took the picture O.K., and I'll tell him so. My part's on the level. It's none of mine whether he tells he took it or not. If you want to preach, go after Dehan. He sold a plate of a grizzly for a hundred and fifty."

"Dehan? Where'd *he* get a picture of a grizzly?"

"It was the pet belonging to the people down at the springs. Took it up the hillside, where the camp didn't show—out among its native rocks, as it looked. And he managed it so that the collar and chain were out of sight—a pretty slick piece of work, if you ask me. And all he said was that he had a picture of a grizzly. He had. He is known as a man that can keep quiet in four languages, so the men knew there was no use in trying to find out about his grips with the grizzly. There's tricks in this trade that I don't know."

"Sold any pictures lately?" Kent asked.

"The one of the cougar fight. A big gun on the C. P. R. bought it and gave me an order for any

more good ones I can get. It's getting to be quite a source of revenue, along with the guide work."

"Not to mention trapping. You have about the best lines in the hills."

"I don't do bad. And, as I know how to keep out of mining, I've a tidy sum laid by for a rainy day."

"Not laying traps yet?" Kent inquired.

"I got the dead-falls for bear and cougar set. Just been up there now. Nothing much doing yet, but I thought I might get something before I go out after deer. I'll not bother with the small stuff till the season closes.

"I laid the line too early last year. The firm in Montreal that handles my skins had sent me a new and infallible bait, so, as I knew the marten were furring early and I'd nothing else to do, I gave the stuff a tryout."

"Did you get anything?" inquired Samuel Graydon, whose deep interest in the conversation of the old trapper had been evident.

"He would," Kent grinned.

"I did." The sun-tanned face wrinkled into a smile. "Mice and mountain rats, squirrels and some birds, with the rest of the traps sprung by Lord knows what. But not a marten or a beaver, not even a skunk or a weasel. A fellow can't trap till the small pests go to bed.

"I sent a collection of the skins I'd got to the firm—had to skin some of the things under a mag-

nifying glass. But I thought they'd like them as a testimonial."

"But," Samuel Graydon inquired, "do you not find it most unpleasant and—er, distressing—finding these poor creatures entrapped so cruelly?"

"Well," the old trapper weighed his words judiciously, "that depends. Sometimes I do; sometimes I don't. Take a marten, now. He's a gentleman—never kills but when he has to have a meal. I trap for marten most of all, but I'm always sorry when I catch one. But a mink or weasel—that's another story. They're plain murderers—kill everything they find for the mere love of killing, even if they can't begin to eat it. When I find them in a trap, I always say, 'Aha, my boy. You've got what's coming to you.'"

"How about grub, and a shakedown?" Kent asked a little later. I should think I've nearly enough boughs left from our beds to do you up."

"Bough me no boughs," the old man misquoted. "I'm out of the bough class. I've got me one of these new fangled pneumatic beds. All the big guns have them now."

"Listen to him!" suggested Kent.

"Swat. And they don't want to wait around while their guide wastes time making up a fussy bough bed. Besides, we are often above the timber line where boughs are out of the question.

"So I thought, as I've no one to leave my money to, I'll just be comfortable. Fifteen pounds it set

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me back straight from London. But say, Kent, will you mind blowing it up for me? It's hard on an old man's lungs, even if it is easy on his bones."

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

DO THE AIRY-FAIRY CREATURES MEAN WHAT THEY SAY?

THE life of the fragrant woodlands, with its melody of sounds, its health-giving exercise and its peace and inspiration, would have been one of unalloyed pleasure to Samuel Graydon could he have felt that the days were bringing the same happiness to his nephew.

Having been buoyed up by the young man's apparently boundless vitality and optimism ever since coming to Equestria, he felt rather a sense of void now that the supply had slumped below par. He alternated between a longing to see the boy back in his old buoyant spirits, and a relieved feeling that, however much the wound might hurt at first, it all tended toward ultimate benefit.

In the daytime Kent's work was pushed with a relentless energy—an energy directed toward procuring coveted forgetfulness; an energy that kept the rest of the camp hustling to keep pace with. But he did what many a man in a like situation fails to do, kept his temper under all circumstances while at work. He was hearty with Jerhuc and his dog and considerate and companionable where his work was concerned, at all times,

but when night fell and they sat by the fire in the shadows he was often very poor company.

For an hour at a time he would sit, staring into the fire, his dog, his uncle and this trapper guest forgotten, after which, usually in response to remonstrances from his faithful four-footed chum, he would give a quick sigh, smile again and relate some of the tales of experiences in the timbers that his uncle never tired of hearing.

But even on the occasions when the boy's manner approached its old cheerfulness, the kindly watchful uncle felt that the under-current of pain was always there, refusing to grow less.

"Open confession," the minister mused, on one of the evenings when a blue and purple darkness had enveloped them earlier than usual, "is good for more than the soul. It is also good for the body and the mind and the digestion.

"Kent, boy," he said aloud, "in all these years I have learned to be understanding, sometimes even helpful. Couldn't you tell me about it?"

Kent put his pipe in his pocket and toyed with the ears of his dog, a wire-haired terrier that sat on his haunches facing the fire, his head between his master's knees.

"There's nothing to tell, uncle," he said at last. "Everything is ended. That is why I am acting like an idiot and spoiling a holiday that you want to enjoy."

"You're not spoiling my holiday, Kent. Personal gloom clouds cannot overcast the beauties

of nature. That is one of the wise ways of Providence. But I would greatly like to see you happy soon."

"Well, uncle, I'll try to buck up. I'm ashamed——"

"No, don't talk nonsense. But now that we are on the subject, I don't mind telling you what my thoughts are. There have been many men, you know, who have felt great grief over circumstances that have turned out later to have been for the best. There, I have said it. I see the hand of Providence in it all."

"The hand of Providence," Kent scorned. "What kind of a Providence is it that sets the object of the hopes of ten years miraculously before one's eyes, that seems to make the object almost attainable, then snatches it suddenly and cruelly, leaving everything blank and ended? If the hand of Providence is in the thing at all, that is what it has done."

"It was as final as that, then?" Samuel Graydon had good voice control. He kept every vestige of relief from his tone.

"It was final enough for me," Kent said grimly. "I had merely misunderstood before."

Later, both uncle and nephew kept turning the matter over in their minds, even in the face of the sedative and sleep inducing properties of spruce boughs inside the tent and a spruce log fire outside. It was this that kept them awake till, between the hours of eleven and twelve, distant

hoof-beats were heard on the soft trail, mixed with the sharp sounds of horseshoes striking stones.

Kent rose sharply to his elbow and listened. Then, making sure that a rider was approaching, he dressed hastily in the dark, slipped from under the rear of the tent where the firelight did not reveal him and waited.

Sudden thoughts of McNulty filled Samuel Graydon's mind. The hoof beats came nearer, turned from the trail and stumblingly made toward the fire. Then he heard an astounded exclamation from his nephew.

"*Pel!* In the name of heaven what are you doing here?"

"Oh, is that you, Graydon?" There was utter and weary relief in the boy's tone. "Gosh, but I'm all in. Help me down, will you? I'm almost too sore to move. And look at the horse."

"I see it," Kent said sternly. "How far have you come to-day?"

"Right from Invermere. Ouch!"

"Not forty-five miles with you and that pack on that small beast!"

"Well, Mr. Graydon, I meant to be two days on the way. I meant to stay at Camp Three till to-morrow, but they told me I'd be twelve miles further by dark and could get here all the earlier in the morning. They gave me blankets and grub and right in broad daylight, when they suggested it, I thought it would be fine to roll up in a blanket

anywhere and go to sleep. But when it got dark—well I was too scared.”

“They knew you would be.”

“Yes, I guess they did. I heard them laughing after I’d left, but of course I never let on.”

“And they knew that you shouldn’t do it either—without even a gun. I’ll fix some one for this.”

“No, let them alone. I gotta learn, I guess. But they might have thought of the horse. I led him a good bit of the way, although my ankle was hurting right up to my ears. But after it got dark and my flash played out I had to get on and let him take his head. He might have gone to the North Pole for all of me. Sometimes I thought he was running me right down to the river, but the trail always dipped up again.”

“What horse have you?” Kent asked.

“A roan affair that I managed to hire. The worst of the poor brute is the way he shies. And every time he jumped the bushes were full of bears eyes. I’ve decided that I am an out-and-out coward.”

“Rot!” Kent said. “I know all about that. When did you eat last?”

“At noon.”

“Nothing since?”

“I didn’t dare take time. I’ve been peering ahead for your tents since six. But say! There’s black spots everywhere. Got any Scotch? I’ve an idea I need some—lots of it.”

“Yes, we’ve got some—lots of it, but it isn’t

what you need. Come over to the cookhouse and I'll get you some ham and eggs, then you can tell me why you have made this ridiculous trip with a bad ankle."

Pelham Milburne was dividing his attention equally between a plate of beans, one of ham and eggs and a cup of steaming coffee when finally his host, after sliding an apricot pie and a loaf of raisin cake down the table, took a seat opposite him.

"This is about the best we can do for you tonight," he said. "Now out with it."

"Well, *wait*. Just le'me get the edge off."

The finishing of the plate of beans, the ham and eggs and three cups of coffee did this to the extent that the lad was able to desist for long enough to ask a question—a veritable thunderbolt to his hearer.

"Graydon," he said, "man to man, tell me this: do you want to marry my sister?"

"Well, Pel," the other answered after a judicious pause, "I have been busy for over a week trying to persuade myself that I do not. My uncle has been helping me to the best of his ability."

"Power to his elbow," Pel mumbled through apricot pie.

"What!"

"He's right." More pie. "Most unsuitable thing in the world.

"Your mother and sister have shown me that

quite plainly. You needn't rub it in, if that is what you came for."

"Oh, damn! I mean unsuitable the other way round."

"Then I shall have to lecture you on family loyalty."

"Don't trouble. Your lecture on truth, number four, series six, covers the case entirely. Of course, if you were married to Alleyne, I would do my best to make it up to you in other ways _____"

"You are very good, but your services are not apt to be required. Apparently you have not discussed the matter with your sister."

"I've not gone to the lengths I'd like in the matter, I'll give you that. But I'm off quarreling, and one can't reason with a girl. I really could tell you a lot of things about girls. Not having a sister, you think that, beside being airy-fairy heavenly creatures, they are reasonable human beings and know their own minds and mean what they say like a regular fellow.

"Maybe some are and do, but if you ever come across such a one, never let her out of your sight again, for they're scarcer than you have any idea of. But say," Pel was searching in his inner pockets, "here is the reason for my sudden appearance. Of course it wasn't a hard job for any one to get me to come back to you; as a matter of fact I am going to run behind you and stay there. They want me to go back with them next week."

For the first time since the day of the dinner Kent's bargain with Mrs. Milburne came back to him. The dénouement of his perfect day had put the matter entirely from his mind.

"Here it is," Pel finished. "It's a letter from Al. And say, where can I put my horse, and can I have a corner for a shake-down before I petrify?"

"I'll unsaddle and look after your horse. You will crawl into my bed beside my uncle in the tent by the fire. I'll fix up something fine for myself. Scoot, now!"

Sitting by the fire later, Kent read his letter; began it aloofly and non-committally and perused it in that frame of mind until he came to the post-script. After which he began it again and re-read it in a softer mood, and after gazing into the glowing coals till faint streaks of dawn outlined the blue hills, he felt a fear at his heart that he was bound and fettered more securely than ever before—but he made a resolution to be very certain that it was not to the wheels of her chariot.

Alleyne began by telling him of their early departure, necessitated by her mother's anxiety to be in Banff during the visit of the Governor General and his suite; said that she wanted to see him to thank him for the pleasant times he had given them and, perhaps, to be invited back; that her father and mother would be at dinner at Colonel Hurd's on Saturday night and that she would be in the summer house at the end of the

dahlia path at ten o'clock in a penitent mood and a ravishing frock.

And Alleyne, reading this over and fearing that there was nothing in it to bring her man of the hills back to her feet, had added:

“And I cannot bear to leave, thinking you angry with me, or without telling you that what happened on the wharf that night has been sweetly in my thoughts ever since.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

“AM I FOLLOWING A WILL O’ THE WISP?”

THE beat of hoofs as a rider neared The Invermere, soon after ten on the next Saturday evening, brought alternating tremors of hope and anxiety to Alleyne Milburne. She had wondered greatly during the last few days as to whether or not her note would be answered in the way she desired. Just what turn events were to take, providing he did come, she had not gone into. Something in her being had clamored insistently to see him again, and as Alleyne had never accustomed herself to self-denial, she had called him back to her. Further than that—well, she did not believe in crossing bridges before one came to them.

The sound of hoofs came closer and a white horse, like a ghost of the night, drew up at the rustic fence beside the summer-house.

“You there?” a low voice inquired.

“Yes, Kent.”

Whereat he swung from his saddle, vaulted the low rail that separated him from the vine covered arbour, and stood before her in the doorway. Alleyne frowned that his shadow darkened the moonlight and hid the picture that was to have

been his first glimpse of her, a picture of youth in a pink sweater suit, with a huge white fox throw to enhance its charms.

"Come inside, Kent," she said, "and sit here by me. Then I can see whether you are cross or pleased with me."

She gave him her two hands as he came inside, but he took only one, and sat beside her on the low wicker settee inside the arbour.

"Why should I be cross with you?" he asked.

"Let's not go back to that at all—that is, after I have said I am ashamed."

"Then—why should I be pleased?" he pursued.

"Because—well, weren't you pleased to get my note and to know that I wanted you back?"

"That depends."

"On?"

"On what you are going to do with me now that you have me here."

"Do with you?"

"Exactly. Don't hedge."

"Well, goodness, Kent. I'm not going to do anything. You're not a bit like you were before."

"I can be, Alleyne. I think I will be if I stay here many minutes, but—it's up to you."

"Kent, you exasperate me. Nothing is up to me. I'm not a feminist or modern votes for women sort. It's up to you."

Again Alleyne paused, feeling that she had implied too much.

"What I mean," she finished, "is that I just

want you to be nice to me before I go away. You're hard as nails to-night."

"Alleyne, wait. Just answer me two or three questions, then we may see about that."

"Don't ask any questions. Just tell me if you like my hair in this way. I did it so to please you."

"You're adorable, Alleyne, from tip to toe. You know what I think about that. Question one: You did not bring me fifty miles from my work to play with me?"

"I should love to play with you," she said, perversely misreading his meaning. "That is, with mother away. Do you never do anything but work?"

"I am asking the questions. What I mean is that, as you know I am not the plaything or tame cat variety——"

"And who is?"

"I don't know. I'm not. You knew it when you wrote that note asking me to come to you. Also you knew that if I came again I would ask you to be my wife. That is what brought me, Alleyne; the knowledge that you knew, when you were asking me to come, what I would do. After you've told me the real truth, we'll see who's hard as nails."

"And supposing I can't tell you."

"You can."

"Supposing I won't. Oh, Kent, don't let us quarrel again!"

"We won't quarrel, dear. Only can't you see that I've got to know whether or not I'm following a will o' the wisp. If I have been, I will be on my way back to my work in a few hours' time."

Alleyne had a feeling of struggling against something closing in on her; something very delicious, but something she might be very sorry for when she came to her senses in broad daylight.

"I am waiting for my answer," he said. "See, I'm not even touching your hand. I want it to be a level-headed answer that you will not regret when the moon is gone."

She started at the way he had read her mind, then flushed with annoyance.

"I don't admit your right to insist that I decide on anything," she said.

"Is it Rolson that stands in my way," he asked, going on with his questionnaire.

"Nor have you any right to ask that."

"Is there anyone else?"

"Heaps of them," she said.

"Any important ones?"

"N-no."

"Then it rests between him and me."

Silence gave her assent.

"Has he asked you?"

"Yes."

"Has he had his answer? But of course not. You wrote me that note. You are trying to decide: is that it?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Then let us think it out together. Rolson's a fine, decent chap. I think he would say something the same of me. He has the greater means, of course, but that should count for so little in this matter that we will leave it out altogether.

"Then, Alleyne, doesn't it all boil down to this: You know what marriage means. You must have thought ahead to that. You cannot possibly want to give yourself to more than one man. Leaving mothers and money and everything else out, which one is it?"

Alleyne turned and buried her face in his shoulder. Then, when his arms stole round her and she should have had a feeling of security therein, a sudden perverseness came over her. The picture in her mind faded and was replaced with one that sprang unbidden from her most frivolous past; a picture of a resplendent window that she had once seen in a fashionable street of Paris—a window where a single gown of opal and silver was displayed amidst draperies of misty grey.

And the only thing she could force into her mind, in what she felt should have been her moment of moments, was the fact that Ronald Rolson would go with her to Paris, would buy her gowns such as that and would take her to places where they were worn. And somewhere in the misty background was her mother's face, firmly approving her decision.

She did not know how long the trance-like

dream had lasted when she was aroused by the loosening of the arms that were about her.

"I see," he said, getting to his feet, "I have lost out. Well, Rolson will make you happy if it is in his power. Only, tell him, Alleyne. Don't keep him waiting. You can't know what hell that is. I'm going now, dear. Good-bye. I will be a part of the mountain scenery in your mind in a very short time."

As he stood there, handsome in the moonlight, something in his six feet of upright, decent masculinity reached a chord in Alleyne past any artificiality that earth could devise. She threw herself suddenly into his arms.

"Kent, don't go. It's you I need, I know. But oh! I'll never get it by with mother."

A frown deepened in Kent Graydon's eyes even as he held her close. In the very moment of giving herself, doubts had crossed her mind. And there was no eliminating her mother.

Suddenly lifting his head, Kent confided a resolution to the young moon that watched them.

"Alleyne," he said, "will you meet me down at the pier to-morrow at five? The house-boat you noticed once on the lake will be there. We will go out on that. Then I will tell you what we will do with this tangle."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A CAVE MAN CAPTURE

THE next morning, as Edward Aldton was breakfasting at an early hour—an early hour for Edward Aldton—a shadow filled his doorway and caused him to turn his head to investigate.

“Graydon!” he exclaimed. “Come in. It seems ages since I’ve seen you. I thought you’d gone in for the month.”

“I thought so too. Breakfasting in our dressing gown, eh?”

“As you see. Had yours hours ago, I suppose—in an afternoon suit.”

“Not so bad as that. As a matter of fact, I’ve not had any. Where are the ladies?”

“Still asleep. We dined, wined and bridged at the colonel’s last night.”

“They’re still in love with the country?”

“They say so.”

“Um-m.”

“Yes. I see that you are longing to ask further questions but think they would be in bad taste. Well, you’re quite right, as usual. Now tell me what it is that perturbs you to the extent of upsetting your usual husky appetite.”

"Brace you feet."

"Righto."

"I'm going to be married to-day."

A piece of bacon that was on its way to the mouth of Edward Aldton paused, then returned to the plate from whence it came.

"Eloping?"

"You would probably describe it as a cave man capture."

"I would describe such an action in much stronger terms than that. You can't mean that you took that rot I talked so seriously as that. There must be some way, a little less raw, to bring the mother round. In fact, she was singing your praises only last night."

"If she sang praises it was because she thought I was behind two rows of mountains. But I've forgotten the mother. I am using this means because it is the only way to settle it."

"You're quite certain that it is what the young lady wants?"

"Deep in her heart, it is. I found that out last night. But as the ties that hold her seem too strong for her to break, I shall simply do it for us."

"She won't regret it afterward?"

"I'll not let her."

"What are your plans?"

"A cruise up the Columbia in the house-boat."

"Married by?"

"Uncle."

"Hm. You've been eloquent, then. He once confided to me his hopes that you would not succeed—er——"

"Of course he knows that I am not worthy to tie her shoes, but he has a fancy that I might not be able to make her happy here. I have not broken the matter to him yet, but, well I am expecting that when he finds that we are headed up the Columbia for a week's cruise, and that only himself and the marriage ceremony stands between us and—er—censure, he will not attempt to argue the case. But this is what I came here for. I have to act at once of course: we'll leave Invermere at five, come down to the wharf for you and uncle——"

"For me?"

"Yes. I'll need another witness beside uncle. Then I'll drop the two of you at Athelmere on our way up the river."

"But I don't approve of the thing a particle."

"Nevertheless one cannot refuse to be best man for a friend. It isn't done."

"Oh, well. What about a license?"

"Got it."

"And a ring? I could be best man with my eyes shut."

"Molly has lent me hers. She is going to send for another."

"With the Reverend W. K.'s consent?"

"She says he is too absent minded ever to notice. It was her own suggestion. She wants to do

it, as I smoothed her way for her a while ago, and she says that what the others don't know won't hurt them."

"I see. But I'm quite prepared to hear that the young lady has altered her mind in the meantime."

"She hasn't made it up yet. She has been asked to go out in the houseboat with me, and I will unfold my plan as we go down for you and uncle. If she concurs, we will stop at Invermere for her things. I've everything ready but provisions for the boat. Molly is making a list now as I am not collected enough to do it. Then Doc is going over to stock the boat. And now I must off."

"Quite so. I hear my mother stirring so must go and dress. Just what does a best man wear at an affair of this—er, informality?"

"Wear any old thing you like."

"Thanks. This is certainly different from any of my past experiences as groomsman; no fussing over gloves and spats; no manicures, or florists or turkish baths——"

"Turkish baths?"

"Recent festivities, don't you know. But as you said—— If you go by the kitchen, open the door carefully. I don't want Mrs. McCorkle hurt."

But his solicitude for his housekeeper was belated by about five minutes. In that five minutes she had hustled to her room, taken off her apron

and pinned on her hat and was even now on her way to Equestria as fast as her feet could carry her.

The last sentence she had heard in the conversation of the two men had been the one where Adam Grier was mentioned as the emissary to furnish the house-boat.

She climbed the slope to Equestria's lodge just as Molly, having left a list of provisions that she thought likely to appeal to the taste of the bride to be, ran toward the stile on the Dale's line fence. Mrs. McCorkle was too breathless to more than nod an answer to Molly's friendly wave.

"Goodness me!" was the girl's exclamation. "What ever is the matter with her. Her hat is crooked, and she looks so funny and wild!"

Adam Grier rose from Kent Graydon's desk at the unceremonious entrance of Mrs. McCorkle.

"My dear Madame,"—the presence of this woman had of late moved him to his floweriest eloquence.

"Don't 'Dear Madame' me, Adam Grier. I'm all out of puff, coming up that hill in a hurry."

"But why do it? There is plenty of time——"

"That is just what there is not—if we're to do anything to save him."

"Save whom? No one's being drowned?"

Then, realising that the remark was inadvertent, he amended:

"Tell me what is the matter. I'll do anything I can."

"Now, you're talking. Well, we've *got* to stop this wedding."

"But, my dear madame——"

"Don't *do* it."

"All right. But one can't stop weddings."

"Can too. You've no idea how often it's done. And this time you've got to do it."

"*Me!*"

"Yes, you."

"But—anything but that. You don't know, of course, the harm I have done Kent Graydon, in one way and another. And now that he is trusting me again, like the generous man he is, I have simply got to make good."

"Well, I don't know what you've done to harm him, but, whatever it was, here is your chance to make it up to him by doing him one supremely good turn."

"But he'd be apt not to see it that way. They're in love, you know."

"He thinks he is. I'm not so sure about her. And Adam Grier. You know yourself that she both smokes and drinks. Nice doings to bring to the lodge."

Then, realising that, in turn, her remark had been inadvertent, she suddenly changed her tactics.

"Adam," she said, "you know that since you promised me to give up drink and I promised you to stop worrying about little Peter, we've both been happier and better."

"We have, indeed. I owe a lot to you." He did not add that she had been assisted by McNulty—or lack of McNulty.

"And, Adam, remember the night when you told me about your nice place in Ontario, with that sister-in-law on it?"

Mrs. McCorkle's voice had sunk to a soft murmur. Adam Grier's susceptible mood had followed her.

"Yes, I remember."

"And you hinted that if you could just go back there with a wife with strength of mind, some one like me, for instance, who had never made any promises to make a home for her, that she might be made uncomfortable enough to induce her to move out—remember?"

"Yes. Yes, indeed."

"Well, I pretended not to see the hint at the time, but I saw it. And I've done some thinking over it since. So Adam, here is your chance: If you want that huzzy put off that place by those there means, you go over to Invermere now and stop that wedding by hook or crook—or any other means you can think of."

"But my dear—Mrs. McCorkle. You have only put it in a worse light. I don't like the thoughts of winning you by letting down my boss."

"Very noble sentiments, Adam, and I admire you for them. But you are taking a wrong view of the matter. If ever you had a chance to do

Kent Graydon a great act of kindness, it is at this very minute."

"But what can I do? Go to the girl's mother?"

"Just like a man. Anyone can see with half an eye that that girl never minds her mother. You'd drive her right into his arms."

"Well then who? Her father?"

"No, not him either. He looks like a man with sense enough not to mind if his daughter does marry a real man. The only person I can think of is another suitor that every one thinks she will take. And I don't see why she doesn't do it, for he looks to me to be just the man she ought to fancy. I have been wondering a lot why Kent didn't have the sense to choose that one they call Claire. *I* could tell him that she would be the one woman in ten thousand for him.

"But you go over to Invermere and find this other man. His name is Rolson or something. Get into conversation with him and tell him casually that if he strolls down to the wharf at five he will see a wedding party go off. Then you might suggest that Miss Milburne is a pretty fine girl but that you think she is lucky to get a man like Kent Graydon.

"Then I think you can leave the rest to him and go on about the business of furnishing the houseboat. It won't be safe for Mr. Graydon to find out that you have not done that. And some day you will be able to tell him about it all and he will thank you on his bended knees."

“No. I will never tell him that I have added this outrage to my already long list.”

“Very well, Adam. Now hurry. If all goes as we hope we will discuss further plans on the lake this evening.”

Adam Grier found the object of his quest on the porch of the Invermere Golf Club. Ronald Rolson manifested no especial interest in the attempts of the other at conversation, even when it was mentioned that a romantic elopement was to take place that afternoon, till the old man got down to cases and mentioned names.

As soon as Adam saw that the desired interest was aroused he rose to take his leave, saying that it was his pleasant duty to provision the houseboat so he must get about it; that he supposed he should not have been telling someone else's secrets, but that he was sure the young man would not tell where he had picked up the tip about the wedding.

And all the time that this conversation had been in progress, a youth in a big plaid cap, who had been winding tape on golf clubs inside the club house had stood rooted to the spot.

Then quietly, before he could be observed, he laid the sticks away, tip-toed out through the back and through a little grove of trees that shaded the house and, when safely out of hearing, whistled a long low whistle of amazement.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

A COMPACT OF RIVALS

“So! That’s the ticket!”

Horace Pelham Milburne, Junior, took off his cap, ran his fingers through his hair—hair that he hoped to have trained into a creditable college cut by Christmas—then put the cap in his pocket. He always found it difficult to think with a hat on, and clearly some thinking had to be done now, and that very quickly.

“That,” he mused to himself, “is why sis was trying to persuade the mater to go to tea at Mrs. Cunningham’s. I wonder when they cooked it up. I’ll bet my hat it was last night. Sis was simply off the map for over an hour.

“*That* is why Graydon hustled poor old Samuel and me down from the camp so fast that both his old age and my youth are stiff as a board. That, also, is what I get for being so keen to take a note back to him, and after it all he reads me the riot act about going back to school!

“But how to stop it all—for I certainly have got to stop it. Not only does Graydon not know what is good for him, but, while a fellow’s family may not be all he’d ask of it, he can’t see it bust

to pieces. Surely Al knows the mater isn't built to withstand such shocks. I wish Dad hadn't gone up the river. He has such a sane old head in a erisis. He'd tell me what to do.

"But how does a fellow stop a wedding?—get out an injunction? I believe there is some place in the ceremony where a fellow could step up and say 'I object' but that wasn't meant for cases with a groom like Graydon. I wonder how long I'd last.

"I'd go to Claire, only, if she happens to be in on it, the joke would be on me. No—I'll play a lone hand.

"How about throwing a monkey wrench into the machinery of the houseboat? But I think I heard Graydon's launch come up the lake just now. He would send me on an errand to the springs or somewhere in short order.

"Well, what can I do; steal his license? No good. It is probably buttoned over his heart. Steal his preacher—that's it. *That's it!* They surely can't make it a go without him. Doc said they intend going down the lake for him at five. That gives me an hour. I'll ride over and tell him the plans are changed; that he and I are to wait at the wharf at the foot of the lake—down at Potter's. If he questions my presence I'll tell him I'm a witness or an end man or anything they've got to have.

"Then when the boat gets down to Graydon's landing and there is no preacher in sight, Alleyne

will have one of her red-headed fits. She always does when anything goes wrong; and she'll demand to go back. Or perhaps when he sees her at it he will demand that she go. It ought to work, by jove it ought."

The house-boat "Windermere" had been loaned to Kent by its owner for a period of two weeks—longer if necessary. Swaying gently at the Invermere landing, its whiteness glittering in the sunlight, its awninged deck gay with hanging baskets and boxes still in full bloom, the "Windermere" was as desirable a vehicle for a honeymoon as any dreamer could desire.

And Kent Graydon, in cream flannels, pacing the deck impatiently behind the flowered railing, completed a picture that would have been attractive to almost any girl in possession of her sober senses.

This was the first thought that struck the mind of the young man who descended to the Invermere landing a few minutes before the hour of five. The usual debonair manner of Ronald Rolson had deserted him for he realised that, if the cards played against him in the next half hour, he had very little interest in what happened to the rest of his life.

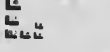
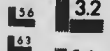
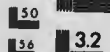
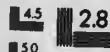
"Quite a pretty picture," he commented, in answer to Graydon's pointedly unenthusiastic greeting.

Then Ronald Rolson thought hard as he lighted a cigarette. He was anxious to respect Adam



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Grier's evident anxiety that it should not be known that he had mentioned any of his employer's plans, but in the face of that he found it hard to open the conversation.

"Have you time for a little talk?" he asked finally.

"If it is short. I have asked Miss Milburne to go on the lake at five."

"I thought as much. I heard her trying to persuade her mother to go out to tea."

Kent answered nothing to this.

"Also," Rolson seemed to be weighing his words, "I noticed your man, Adam Grier, ordering a number of provisions sent down to this boat—a lot more than seemed necessary for afternoon tea for two people. When one is vitally interested one finds it easy to put two and two together. Perhaps you will tell me if four is correct."

For a moment Kent sat on the railing and looked at his one time friend in silence. He admitted to himself that this was the first time in his life that he had had to make the slightest effort to keep his gaze level. And yet, he mused, he was not in the least ashamed of the course he was pursuing; that was—until that very moment it had seemed the honourable course, in that it was the only one.

"Admitting, for the sake of argument," he said at last, "that two and two makes four—what then?"

"To put it a little more clearly; I have come to the conclusion that it is your intention that one and one be made one. Am I right?"

"Suppose you are. What then?"

"Nothing—for me, I guess."

"You can't ask me to consider that."

"No. I shouldn't in your case, of course. But there are some other things you haven't considered."

"Be explicit."

"Well, of course Graydon I know that you are not fool enough to have made all these preparations and planned this coup without very definite encouragement or permission from Miss Milburne. But I wonder if you have considered that she is under the spell of a fascinating and romantic country; that—pardon me—your good appearance, your sportsmanship—all the good qualities of which you are so damnably full, have blinded her to the fact that she will be undertaking a life utterly foreign to her tastes and upbringing.

"I would like to show you a picture of five months from now. The summer spell will be buried under snow; summer romance hidden. What Alleyne will want will be theatres, dinner dances, clothes, girl friends to admire them and, possibly—me."

"I don't think that she will."

"But neither do you *know* that she will not."

"And the background of that dismal picture,"

Rolson went on, "will be a blur of unhappiness. If this comes off, you may be sure that Pel will not be allowed out of Toronto again. Mr. and Mrs. Milburne will not be contented if their daughter is not happy, not to mention the mess it would make of both your case and mine. There! That is the way I prophesy the future. What do you think of it?"

"It is exactly what I would expect of anyone steeped in artificiality and the other things that money breeds. There is just one thing strong enough to withstand the whole sickening combination. Rolson, do you honestly think that, if I didn't know Alleyne loved me, I'd dare attempt this thing?"

"No. I said something of the sort a while ago. But there is this: if she only thinks that she does, you are taking a step that cannot be undone, however much it is desired; if she really does, there is nothing to be lost by waiting to be sure."

"In whose interests do you speak?"

"In hers, Graydon, and hers alone. And I think that fact gives me a right to make a suggestion."

"Well?"

"It is this: Let her have till, say the end of November to make her decision. I will be in Ottawa most of that time and will not make any efforts to influence her. You mention coming to Toronto in November. Well, I'll give you right of way for a week. If, at the end of November, Alleyne feels

that she wants to leave the life she is accustomed to and come here with you, then, Graydon, I'll act as best man at your wedding. What have you to say to that?"

"This, Rolson: If, at the end of November, after viewing the situation from her own environment, Alleyne decides that it is you that will make her happy, then I will take the second rôle that you suggested just now."

"Thanks, Graydon. Your sportsmanship is certainly all Pell says it is. And perhaps I had better mention that it is possible that Miss Milburne will not keep the tryst. On someone's mentioning your presence here, Mrs. Milburne had almost decided to take her daughter calling with her. Perhaps we might go up and drink to our compact."

No, thanks. I will get back down the lake. But I must mention that Miss Milburne did not know what my plans for the afternoon were. They were to have been unfolded to her after we had left to meet my uncle. She might not have concurred. If I lose out in this you might like to know that in after years."

"If you lose out, Graydon! Somehow I cannot seem to think that you will."

The nose of the "Alleyne" was turned homeward again. Away at the foot of the lake, at Potter's Landing, two men, one young and one old, who from that distance could not make out the launch or its owner, waited on with what patience

they could muster for a houseboat that was a speck in the distance to begin to move.

And on Graydon's landing an Englishman, who had just smoked his dozenth cigarette, recognised the sound of the boat's engine, swore softly with relief and turned to the pleasant duty of asking Miss Helen Ware to go for a walk in the soft September afternoon.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

ALDTON BEGINS AN INDUSTRIAL CAREER

EDWARD ALDTON found his mother seated at his desk. After several ineffectual attempts to get an idea of the shape into which he had allowed his affairs to drift, she had asked for and received permission to go through his papers and accounts herself.

The bills she had made into a neat pile; receipts—what few she could find, in another. And, having brought what order she could out of the general chaos, she was not pleased with the result.

She felt that some very plain facts should be brought to the notice of her son at the first opportunity that presented itself.

Close up on this resolution, both the opportunity and the young man materialized.

“Mother, where is Miss Ware?” he asked.

“Helen is outside somewhere; and as she is, Ned, I would like to speak about these——”

“She is not in the garden or down by the lake. Nor on the road as far as one can see. Did she mention where she was going?”

“She is somewhere about. Where will I find an account of what you make out of the place here?”

"I imagine you will find all there is of it in the receipts, bills for repairs and all that sort of thing. I sell an animal occasionally but the money is usually required before it is acquired. But I cannot see why you spirit Miss Ware somewhere every afternoon. I've worked like a stevedore each morning because each of you seemed to expect it, but I would like to see something of my visitors afternoons and evenings."

"As to what you say about working mornings the place looks a great deal better since you have put more of your time on it. Helen was remarking it only this morning."

"Oh, was she? She seems to have taken every opportunity of getting off it, I have noticed."

A comfortable inner satisfaction was felt by Lady Aldton at the significance of the chance remark. It was the first time her usually taciturn younger son had given any clue as to the trend of his thoughts in the matter.

"I am sorry if you have not seen enough of Helen," she said. "We both thought she was pleasing you best by keeping out of your way. If what you say is true, it is too bad that she has to leave us tomorrow."

"*Leave us to-morrow!* But you said she would be here till the end of October."

"I shall. But she insists she must go at once."

"But—why did you not tell me?"

"She only told me this morning. And you seem to have been occupied since."

"You remonstrated with her?"

"No. This is your house, you must remember. I was not sure but that the arrangement would suit you best. And as she has friends going through who will meet her at Golden, I had really no grounds for objecting. But I am sorry. She is a charming girl and I shall miss her bright company sorely. It is too bad that you only now realise that she is such a pleasant companion. You might have made so much better use of the summer."

"But where is she now? I am wasting, in one silly way or another, all of her last afternoon."

"Now that I think of it, Ned, she mentioned going back to the poplar grove to gather golden-rod, and to try to commit it all to memory. I should have gone with her had it not been for these papers of yours, but we can discuss them again. Go and bring Helen in for her tea."

He found her in the poplar grove among the golden-rod.

She had been sitting on a little knoll, letting her eyes feast on the autumn fringed blue of the lake, and, while she had seen him leave the house and had watched his tweed-clad figure swinging up the meadow, cutting at the clover heads with a rough hewn stick and whistling a care-free melody, he had almost stepped on her before he saw her.

Wearing a yellow sweater and tam o' shanter that blended with the golden-rod and yellowing

poplars—all of which seemed to gather heightened color from the mellow autumn haze that hovered over the valley—she seemed a very spirit of the dying summer.

His unusually inscrutable face lit up at sight of her. She was so real and live a part of the woods that it was impossible to think that to-morrow they would be empty of her presence.

“If only I were an artist,” he exclaimed, throwing his cap at his feet and selecting a bumpless spot on which to stretch his length, “I’d dash back to the house for a palette and make you hold that pose whilst I painted an Epitome of Autumn.”

Helen Ware smiled amusedly, and, as always without a trace of coquetry.

“Fancy *your* dashing anywhere!” she said.

“As a matter of fact, I’ve just dashed up here. Came twice my normal gait since the mater told me that you intend leaving us soon.”

“Tomorrow.”

“No!”

“I must.”

“But why must you?”

“Because I must. But you may see me again. I am coming back every year to spend September in some part of the Rockies. I even regret the autumns I have spent elsewhere. I have felt such contentment in the shadows of these peaks.”

“Then your contentment had everything to do with the scenery and nothing——”

"Nonsense! You and your mother have given me a glimpse of charming, simple *real* family life. I have liked it more than I can ever tell you."

"Then why go now, when I'm only getting to know you?"

"Then let us spend our last afternoon in getting better acquainted. I wish you would talk about your early life and your family. I feel that I have been in it without knowing much of it. And I haven't one of my own, you know."

Aldton was more than a little surprised at her naïve statement. He reflected that he had always heard of the fascination the old families seemed to hold for Americans—families centuries old, as they appertained in Britain. But to come right out with it that one hadn't one! Perhaps she meant—

"How do you mean, no family?" he asked.

"No *family*," she repeated. "No father, or mother, no sisters or brothers; nothing but an elderly and very deaf aunt, and two prim New England cousins."

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed. "That is a shame. What—where—?"

"In school," she answered. "Almost all of my life. Dad died while I was there. I did not get word in time to get to him at the last. And I cannot remember my mother. Our real home in the south has been closed for years."

"Where did you meet my mother?"

"At Mrs. Van Deans'. The deaf aunt visited

the school once and after that the girls felt sorry for me that I was invited to one place or another for all of the holidays, also ever since leaving school. So you see why I am so interested in families. Talk about yours. You've heard every bit of my story."

"Well, I don't know. There is Jack. Mother talks enough about him. He is the best hunter man in the county, and he married an—an excellent wife. They've two boys. Line secure, you see."

"Your father?"

"Was an army man. Uncles the same. Grandfather was one of the old school Imperialists who began opening up Africa in earnest. He died down there somewhere. Great-grandfather was Ambassador to Russia time and again. There is a Russian portrait or so of him that is very wonderful, if one understands Art. The one before him was the art fiend. He built up the Aldton collections that are rather famous now."

"Yes, I have heard of them. We studied about some of them in school. And just think of coming of a long line of wonderful men like that. Think of having a name that was honoured by brave men back in the ages of romance. I cannot tell you how I envy you!"

Edward Aldton gave a tiny frown at the sentiments just expressed.

The discovery of her early departure and the alluring picture she made, smiling at him from

among the flowers, were influencing him in the step he intended taking, but perhaps there was something in him handed down from early British forebears that made him dislike having the way made too easy for him.

But, looking again at the girl beside him, he suddenly knew that there was a charm about her that made her altogether desirable. The end of the internal debate that had been going on within him for over two weeks came in an overwhelming affirmative.

"Helen," he said, coming to his feet and standing before her, "you spoke just now of honouring the name. I want to know if you will—by sharing it with me."

Slowly and uncomprehendingly her eyes left the lake and came to his.

"You mean——?"

"I mean—that I am glad for what the name stands for, when I lay it, with myself, at your feet."

"But— Oh, I am sorry."

"Sorry for what?"

"That you have said this."

"But Helen! You spoke rather well of the name just now."

"I know."

"Then it is to me that you object."

"No. You are nice. And not very bright or you would guess why I am leaving to-morrow."

"Is it that I haven't said how much I care? do, Helen, tremendously."

"No, it isn't that. I inferred you did from what you offered."

"Then—please tell me," he begged.

"Well," she said, after a pause, "here it is. Could you—what would we live on?"

"I know," she went on, "I am not supposed to need it, but I could never marry a man that could not, by his own efforts, support us both."

It has been said that a gentleman never shows surprise. At any rate, Edward Aldton's face was a mask that hid what amounted to utter astonishment.

"What would you have me do?" he asked.

"Dig in a ditch?"

"It might help. Digging all day, you might get thinking and think a way out of it. Many a man has done that. How much does Mr. Graydon make from his place?"

"Oh, no end. I don't know how much."

"Who bought it for him?"

"No one."

"I see. And no one sent him regular remittances for years, I suppose."

"No, I dare say not."

"Mrs. McCorkle tells me that he has bought his land and built up his herd by doing anything there was to do in the valley, from road-making up and down. He has had a lot to do with the highway in the Pass and all other improvements.

He is an Empire Builder just as your forefathers were. His children's children will be proud of him."

"Then—I've had my answer."

"No, Ned. We will not call it that. I will leave it for one year before answering. What you do in that year will decide the answer. As I said, I will be back again in the mountains in September. Perhaps your mother will want to come again then."

"She will when I tell her."

"What will you tell her?"

"That you are going to be my wife."

"But we don't know yet. And she is sure not to want two American daughters."

A quick glance at her serious but guileless face gave him a sudden glad feeling. And he mentally hoped that there would be some things that his mother would never tell his wife.

"Mother can soon be persuaded," he told her.

"And the industrial activity upon which I will shortly embark will be a real delight to her. But it is real encouragement from you that I need most of all. Haven't you even a *little bit*?"

"All right," she said, "but just one. Then I'll race you to the house. I know the tea is long over-boiled, and you ought to begin your industrial career by doing something undignified."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AT MRS. RONALD ROLSON'S RECEPTION

NOVEMBER had lain its chilly hand on the Windermere Valley. The brilliant yellows of early autumn had been blackened; the lake had laid away its turquoise blues for another season, but the hills had deepened their blues and purples and added caps of dazzling white to preserve the colourful average. At sunset times they glowed like gigantic coals of living fire.

On any day that clouds came to obscure the glory of the hill-tops, the lake turned grey and sulked.

Equestria had become so accustomed to managing itself during the frequent absences of Kent Graydon that it ran on much the same as ever, even though its master had gone far afield on a mission of tremendous import.

In fact Mrs. Adam Grier, née McCorkle, would have said, in a most decided manner, that the place was running better than usual, for was not that "sloppy heathen"—the neatest Chinaman on earth got no better from her—ousted, and she herself doing the cooking and looking after the welfare of the men and the place.

What would happen to Equestria when, on Kent's return, she and Adam betook their way to Ontario, leaving the place to the mercies of a new mistress and another heathen, she refused even to try to imagine.

The bars between the pastures of Equestria and Aldtonlea were down and the Graydon herd roamed at will over both places, cropping what little herbage the lateness of the season afforded.

But this was all the signs of life that might be found on the ranch of the Honourable Edward Aldton. The snug and hospitable little cottage had been closed for the winter, as its owner was avidly studying the rudiments of scientific farming, stock and poultry raising, as well as bee-keeping at an Experimental Farm near where he had engaged himself to work for the winter.

Unbeknownst to her son, Lady Aldton had had a confidential talk with the superintendent of the institution, in which he was asked to note and report on the young man's progress and enthusiasm. And, in case such a thing seemed warranted, he was commissioned to buy up some good strains of the stock best suited to the valley, so that, when the spring arrived, the young man would be equipped to begin a paying ranch in earnest.

Further than that, she had dreams of his taking an interest in the restoration of their country home in Kent, with, possibly, ambitions toward taking a directing hand in the management of a daily paper that had fallen into the hands of the

family a generation or so back. Lady Aldton did not intend to suggest this to her son, but she had formed the sagacious plan of putting the idea into the head of the ambitious Helen.

In every way her delight in the impending match between her son and the charming southerner was boundless. And there was really very little that was mercenary in this satisfaction, although the Aldton estates were in the position where re-inforcements were a necessity, and she would now be relieved of everything but her clubs and charities and the care of her rare collections in her London apartments; but her greatest pleasure was in the fact that at last some one had come who could stir her son from his constitutional and habitual laziness, and induce him to begin to use the brains and abilities with which he was endowed. The sensible mother felt nothing of jealousy that the younger woman had succeeded where she had failed in this.

And now, in the evening of one of the last days of November, we find Kent Graydon in a city of the East, following along the same street that, many years before, he had traversed on an exploratory tour with his new found friend, Ronald Rolson.

And this night he was on his way to do what on that distant evening he had watched other people do—attend a big reception at Roselawns, the city home of Senator Horace Pelham Milburne.

Kent swung along the pavement, clicking his cane on the hard walk and breathing deeply of the frosty night air. He had scorned his adoring Aunt Martha's suggestion that he approach an affair of such grandeur in a taxi; had said that he needed the walk to cool his excitement and work off his nervousness. For that he was nervous as he approached his ideal of twelve long years—on the spot where he had first caught sight of her—he certainly could not deny.

The fact that Mrs. Milburne, when in much trepidation he had called her on the phone earlier in the day, had been all friendliness and amiability, had added to rather than dispelled his uneasiness.

Somehow her statement that not only Pelham, but she and Alleyne as well, would be delighted to see him did not raise him to the seventh heaven as it should have done. How cordial she had been as she had invited him to the reception to which he was now bound! She had apologised that they could not meet him on the first night just "en family" but had hoped that the reception would amuse him.

Kent had wondered grimly if she thought *he* would amuse the reception.

"See here, aunt, what do they do at receptions in Toronto now?" he asked. "They danced the last time I was at such a thing at Milburnes. Twelve years ago, that was."

"The last time—"

Incredulously his aunt set down a dish that she was lifting from the oven.

"Where did you get the money to cut any such capers twelve years ago?"

"I was there," he said, "although none of them knew it at the time. Will they dance to-night?"

"Like as not. They're dancing all the time now, morning, afternoon and night."

On his way to the house Kent was wondering if the lessons he had had during a stay in Chicago on his way east would stand him in good stead. He felt no qualms as to his evening clothes, or any of his other clothes, for that matter. He had given a tailor of the big city a pretty busy time of it.

Added to good and conservative taste of his own in matters of dress had been the counsel of Charlie King, a rising young engineer with whom Kent was visiting; a young man up to the minute in everything, from collars to cotillions.

He it was that had persuaded Kent to take a few lessons in the new dances that were sweeping even the staidest onto their feet. Between whiles, Charlie piloted his friend to any and every social affair that he could manage. He was proud as possible of the glances of interest that followed him and his tall, striking looking visitor.

"By George," Charlie exclaimed. "If it isn't urgent that you see Toronto, you stay right here. I'll have you the rage in no time!"

But Kent had few thoughts but of his success

MRS. RONALD ROLSON'S RECEPTION 29.

when he should reach his destination. To that end he kept his eye on the men whose appearance stamped them as men of affairs, wherever they went. He noted how they carried their canes, wore their cravats, handled their soup spoons or tipped a taxi-driver; did it all with the watchful eye of Mrs. Milburne somewhere in the background of his thoughts.

He left Chicago with a list, compiled by his friend, of what should be worn to any affair that might occur throughout the day; and he would have defended this list with his last breath rather than have had it fall into the hands of Jimmy Downey or any of his companions in the Pass.

And now he was almost within two blocks of Roselawns, would soon be in the presence of Alleyne and holding her hand. Strangely enough, during the last few weeks he had been utterly unable to recall a distinct mental picture of her. His efforts to visualise her as he had first seen her in the cabin, or a white figure in the gloom as they had ridden on the lake, or even as she had looked at him on the night in the harbour—all had been unsuccessful. A satisfying memory entered him as diligently as would the foot of a rail now.

He turned a corner and came abreast of Roselawns. The house was not nearly so big as he had remembered it. Compared with some he had admired on the Chicago boulevards, it was a modest dwelling. Still, it looked imposing now,

with lights in every window and cars parked at the curbstone.

Charlie had warned him to be fashionably late at everything, the sole exceptions to be cards or his own wedding.

As he neared the walk a big and glossy limousine emptied itself of two female birds of paradise, attended and assisted by two men, silk-hatted, suave.

The knowledge that his own clothes were quite as correct as those of the two men—he could have told one of them that braid was not being worn on trouser legs this year—did not bring him a full measure of assurance as he followed the others up the tiled walk.

Then suddenly something in the way the moon was riding grandly among flying and fleecy clouds, even as it rode among the peaks of the Rockies in the winds of November, brought clearly to his mind's eye the lean, aristocratic face of Edward Aldton. The eyebrows of this telepathic vision of his far-off friend were raised, as though to convey to him their one-time message, "Buck up. Bluff it out."

Kent took a fresh grip on himself and rang the bell.

In the past two months none of the Toronto papers Kent had seen had contained any news of the Milburnes. For one thing he had seen few; he and his uncle had spent another month back on the Vermillion, and, after his uncle's depar-

ture, much of Kent's time had been spent in Calgary and Chicago. The doings of society in general and of the Milburnes in particular had not reached him.

So that he was probably the only one who entered the Milburne home that evening to whom the nature of the festival was not known.

Being divested of his hat and top-coat, Kent stood in the hall in a throng that moved gently and chatteringly toward the entrance of the drawing-room. Somewhere out of sight a stringed orchestra played softly with a pulsing rhythm that seemed to key his excitement to a higher pitch.

Kent was immediately behind two women who conversed behind the shelter of huge fans of ostrich feathers. Presently he could not help hearing their words.

"Were you surprised?" he heard one ask of the other.

"Surprised; well *rawther!* And away out *West!* Why would they have it there?"

"Oh, Banff isn't too bad. It's civilised. And the Duchess was there, which was *something.*"

"Oh, *rawther!* *Everything,* I should say. Then I hear that they climbed mountains for the honeymoon! *Fawncy!* An unnecessary test of tempers, I should say, especially when one knows Alleyne's."

The words "honeymoon" and "Alleyne" were just beginning to take a dizzying hold on Kent's

mind, when he rounded the portière of heavy tapestry beside a marble column, and there, down the length of the room, was a group that threw any necessary light on the conversation he had just heard.

A radiant Alleyne in filmy lace, carrying at least fifty dollars' worth of orchids, stood—beside Ronald Rolson. And his embarrassed and continuous bowing to remarks addressed to him proclaimed him a groom as surely as did Alleyne's ensemble proclaim her a bride.

And if further proof were needed of the status of the pair, there beside them stood Mrs. Milburne, in mauve satin and ninon—the traditional uniform, since time was, of the Mother of the Bride.

A whirling sea of emotions possessed Kent for a moment. Then in the next moment came a numbness in which he could feel no emotion of any kind. He wondered much at the latter sensation; wondered that, instead of rushing through the throng and dragging Ronald Rolson outside to where he could settle his perfidy fittingly, he was moving conventionally, in a conventional gathering, as though everything were as it should be. "Great," he mused, "are the bonds of civilisation."

Then the two women were at it again.

"Will you look at Wally Williams!" one exclaimed. "No one is to know that he has a broken heart."

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"He hasn't," was the cynical reply of the other. "He's delighted to have another place to go to dinner."

Kent looked to where a dazzling young man was engrossing the attention of the bride, and wondered if it were possible that he could be hiding anything like a broken heart.

"If *he* can be game, I can," Kent thought.

But questions; why? when? and where? buzzed in his head like machinery. Gripping his watch fob, he turned to a friendly-looking man who stood near.

"When did this happen?" he asked. "I've not been in town."

"September, I believe," the man answered. "Out West somewhere."

Another orchestra broke out somewhere near, an affair of drums and noises, doing the latest Castle Walk. One of the women near Kent remarked:

"Two of them! They've taken Ron right into the family, that is certain."

The crowd was thinning as it moved toward the ballroom and the Castle Walk. Then Kent heard his name spoken in a familiar voice and found his hand grasped in a clasp that brought his assurance back to him.

"Lady Aldton!" he exclaimed. "How good to see you here!"

"And so good to see you. Come and speak to your hosts, then we will find a corner somewhere.

I would like to speak of some of my plans for Ned."

Novice as Kent was, he could see that the pleased recognition of the distinguished English woman had given him a certain cachet in the eyes of the assemblage. Many heads were turned in his direction.

Then the crowd thinned as they neared Alley and she saw him. And straightway she knew that this tall man, with his colour deep from the sun and winds of the valleys, and who had seemed such a fitting part of a romantic summer there, was quite the most presentable person that had stood before her during the evening.

She turned her back on her husband, adored him openly with her eyes and exclaimed:

"Kent! I *am* glad you have come. Come to the ballroom. I want every girl to see you this minute. They'll all be *green*."

And Kent, looking into her shallow desire, exhibited him as a capture that she might make others envious, and knowing that outward appearances had everything to do with this desire and inner qualities nothing, suddenly and clearly saw her as she was. Twelve years of idolatry flew away from him and he had to take a grip on himself to keep from despising her.

He murmured something about having to have a talk with Lady Aldton, but on looking about for her, found her deep in conversation with a girl who showed no signs of relinquishing her.

"Graydon."

It was an abashed and embarrassed voice at his elbow.

"Will you come to the library with me," Ronald Rolson invited. "I want to talk to you."

"I wouldn't mind." Kent was at that moment, in the bewilderment of the revelation that had come to him, keen for anything that would rescue him from being introduced to a lot of girls.

"But aren't you part of the main show here?" he asked.

"Oh, I can get away. I've spoken to everyone in Ontario five times each to-night."

Once inside the library Rolson closed the door after them, after which he went to a door concealed in the panelled wall and manipulated a dumbwaiter that connected with the cellar.

"Some Scotch?" he asked.

"Not to-night, thanks."

"Then I'll drink yours, too. Sit down."

"I'll stand, thank you."

"Well, go ahead. What have you to say to me?"

"You invited the interview."

"I know, but——" Here Ronald Rolson put his hands in his pockets and regarded the floor. "I don't know whether what I've got to tell——"

"Tell me this first," Kent said. "Had you this festivity in mind—as a reception for me when I got to Toronto—when we made our bargain?"

"God, Graydon! Can you think that?"

“I merely wondered if I could be so mistaken in a man. You seemed at the time to mean what you said.”

“I did, Graydon. I am glad that you can believe that. I meant to leave them at Banff for two months, as I have said. In fact, I told Mrs. Milburne so—that I meant to leave the next day.

“She became very agitated and feared that I was leaving because Alleyne was not treating me fairly. I assured her that that was not the case, but she would not believe me, and asked me not to decide finally till we had talked it over—in the sun-room after a concert that was to be held that evening.

“And when, as I waited for her in the sun-room, Alleyne came to me, gave me her hands and said that she was willing to marry me the next morning at ten o'clock, it seemed that the matter had gotten out of my hands. What could I do—but what I did?”

“Nothing, I dare say.”

“I did mention you— suggested—weakly, if you like—that she wait until she was sure that you did not count for more than she realised. But I could not suggest that we had made a bargain about her. Her answer was ‘To-morrow at ten—or never.’ And I chose. What would you have done?”

“Well, Rolson, once on a house-boat on Lake Windermere I felt that you had me at a disadvantage. Now I feel perfectly scored. Shall we let it go at that?”

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"Oh, you two!"

It was the voice of Claire Harwin, who had unceremoniously opened the door of the library, expecting—she knew not what.

"Alleyne said she saw you come here and she says that Ron is to go and host immediately and that Mr. Graydon is to come to the ballroom, where the girls are lined up awaiting him."

"Do you want to dance?" she asked Kent, when Rolson had left them together.

"I suppose I must."

"Not unless you wish. If you had rather, we will go somewhere where it is quiet. The conservatory is nice, but there is standing room only there. But there is a little sun-parlor off Aunt's room upstairs. There will be no one there. Shall we go up to give you time to get your balance?"

"I *would* like it," Kent said gratefully, whereat they slipped up a side stair and along a dimly lit corridor to a glass-walled, palm-trimmed room that just now was flooded with moonlight. The music and dancing feet below seemed very far away.

Claire turned in the moonlight and gave him her hand.

"I'm sorry," she said simply.

Kent found the firm, cool touch of her hand very comforting.

"Awfully game, the way you took it," she went on. "I was watching from a corner. I was secretly afraid of what an elemental mountain man

would do when suddenly faced by such a situation.

"And I had not had the slightest chance to give you a warning. I don't know whether Aunt thought you could have heard or not. If only I could have gotten to the telephone—— I cannot tell you how worked up I was over the whole thing. Aunt was disgusted that I would not take the slightest interest in my dressing."

"For a disinterested toilette, it seems to me to be a huge success," he told her. Which was not bad for a man without a sister, and with very little experience of feminine companionship.

Then, drawing up a low wicker chair for her, he added:

"Would you mind telling me about it? Rolson wasn't any too coherent."

"He tried to justify himself?"

"Why should he?"

"He told me of your compact."

"Oh! No, he wasn't trying to justify himself. But I think he did it. And he had no reason for supposing that I had the slightest chance. The dice was loaded against me, I suppose. And they tell me that Banff is a more than usually romantic spot."

"It was not the romance so much as a sudden disposition on Ronald's part to leave us that brought matters to a head. Aunt made her mind up, and, of course, Alleyne saw the force of her arguments. And there was the chance of a lifetime to have Royal guests. Back in officialdom

again they would have been inaccessible. As it was, both the Duke and Duchess were charming, and everything passed off as smoothly as Aunt could desire.

"And I hope," Claire went on, "that you will not let it spoil too much of your life. It has spoiled this trip, of course, but you still have left your splendid work, your valley, your ranch and your friends."

"Yes, Claire, I still have them. And I see now that a man should stay where he belongs. The higher he flies, the harder he falls. But I will be back at my work in another week; back on my horse again and out in the trails as long as they are open. It will be lonely there without my dreams and the summer's absurd hopes—but I will work it out somehow."

"Yes, I am sure you will. And—I think I hear Alleyne calling. Perhaps we had better go down."

CHAPTER THIRTY

“I WILL GO TO-MORROW”

KENT GRAYDON sat in the smoker of the Imperial Limited, which was bearing him Westward with a speed that even the most impatient traveller could not berate.

And Kent, believing himself to be impatient to reach his mountain home, found it hard to account for a restless, uncertain and unsatisfied feeling that had been with him ever since his departure for the West—a feeling that somehow his affairs had gotten on the wrong track and, with him, were headed in the wrong direction.

Underneath him the wheels sang an unaccountable refrain—“You’d better go back. You’d better go back.”

The train slowed up at a station not far from the Queen City of the West. Kent put on his hat and top-coat and went to the platform, with the thought that the biting wind that raced by might clear his head of absurd notions.

But the one inclination of a wind that had gathered speed over leagues of wheat lands seemed to be to turn him in his tracks and hurry him Eastward in the direction from which he had come.

Again in the smoker, Kent settled himself determinedly to solve the riddle of his mood. And before he sought his berth that night some guardian angel that watches over the affairs of obtuse men had whispered to him the answer.

Two days later he stood at the portals of the Milburne home and was told that Mrs. Milburne was out but that, if he wished, he might see Miss Harwin.

Claire came down in a simple frock of white wool with touches of Chinese jade. Her eyes widened incredulously when she saw who was her visitor.

"Kent!" she exclaimed. "But I thought you had gone days ago!"

"I came back," he stated simply, then asked:

"Where can I talk to you alone?"

"We are alone here. Aunt and Alleyne are off for the afternoon in quest of period furniture. They will not be back till dinner. I hope you will stay to see them. Speaking of angels, it is not half an hour since I was thinking of you as wending your Westward way alone."

"That is what I have come about, Claire. I turned back at Winnipeg, on an impulse that I somehow felt to be an inspiration, to ask—now that I am here I hardly know how— But, Claire, you like the country and the life. Will you come, Claire?"

Up to now they had been standing, but Claire motioned him to a seat as she sank to the nearest

one herself. He seated himself as though ready to rise at an instant's notice.

"Will you, Claire?" he repeated.

Meeting his eyes unflinchingly she shook her head.

"Why not, Claire?"

"Oh, for several reasons. The only one necessary to mention being that young women do not marry—you were suggesting matrimony, were you not?"

"*Claire!* Certainly."

"Exactly. One does not marry a young man and go with him to a strange country, even though one must admit one loves the life and would go into it."

"I see, Claire. I have gone into this in the stupidest way possible. You think, of course, that I am a disappointed bounder, anxious to be caught on the rebound by anyone—anyone at all who will consent to soothe my ruffled feelings. Isn't that what you are thinking?"

"I am so surprised, Kent, that I do not know what I do think. But I cannot listen to you any longer. As a matter of fact, it was *I* who suggested a wedding with a Duchess present. I assure that that statement will terminate our conversation."

"Nothing will terminate it but an absolute refusal on your part to listen to me. If you will do that I think I can convince——"

"It would be difficult to convince me that a man

can stop loving a girl—provided he really has stopped—and begin with another girl before the week is out."

"I know that it seems abrupt and absurd to you. But what you say is not fair. It hasn't happened in a week. It goes back—underneath everything, of course, like Dale's stream—to where I first met you.

"As far as Alleyne goes—that is over forever. That does not seem inexplicable when one considers that it was an ideal that I was worshipping all the time; a girl that did not exist outside my own imagination. In this imagination I had been building an ideal year by year, aided by pictures and eulogies of Alleyne that I saw occasionally in the papers. In twelve years I had achieved the image of a young woman who was honourable and generous, sportsmanlike and fair, sympathetic and womanly.

"And when I saw Alleyne this summer I believed, because I wanted to believe, that all these qualities had developed in her, even as my eyes told me that her beauty had developed.

"Then, on the night of the wedding reception, just as a sort of desolation was settling over me, it came to me in a flash that it had been a dream of my own that I had loved. I had merely thought that Alleyne embodied it. She doesn't. And, Claire, *you do*.

"Supposing, Claire—it turns me cold to think of it—that I had married Alleyne this summer, and

were sitting beside her instead of you as I get this straightened out! Supposing that I were finding out—as I certainly should have—that it is you that embodies my ideal of all that is good in woman, *too late!*”

“But, Kent——”

“Forget my absurd suggestion of just now, Claire. I know that girls like you are not simply picked up and walked off with. To think that I was not spending my summer in trying to win you! I was the only one who did not see it clearly. Uncle did, and Aldton—even Doc and Mrs. McCorkle. But if there is no one else I would like a year to try to win you. All I will ask on your part is a letter once or twice a month—and no objection to how many I write you.”

Claire roused herself from the astonishment in which the turn of events had thrown her to realise that her heart was beating gladly; to realise that it would be wonderfully precious to her to have his letters coming, all her own, and many of them, for a whole year. After that—

“There is this, too, Claire, that I want you to know before I go. It came to me as I sat up one night in the train and thrashed it all out; came to me how much you have really been in the back of my mind for the last few months; how, often, when I was out on the highway or on the lake you came to my mind and I longed to have you there to show you something that I knew would interest you. Even when I was back on the river

grieving over Alleyne's rebuff, you came into my thoughts more than I realised. Of course I spent long hours by the fire brooding over my blighted life—thought it was my rôle, I suppose. But in my sane, daylight hours, I longed to have you see the wonders of the mountains with me.

"I remember one day climbing the peaks till I was away above the clouds. These settled in and rained hard on the camp while I was still up in the sunshine. I thought of how you would have liked it, and I longed to have you there with me—not at all as a consolation, but as a companion.

"Another day I got a young cougar near its mother, which had gotten into one of Jerhue's deadfalls. The young one, without the mother to restrain it, had become inquisitive in the neighbourhood of a porcupine, and had gotten its mouth full of quills. I wanted you there to help me with the poor little devil, although I had to shoot it finally.

"There were other times, too—hunting trips, gorgeous sunsets—but I fear that I am not very convincing."

"Yes, Kent. Somehow I do feel that we—that you were attracted without knowing it. If I could only feel *certain*."

"That I have a chance, you mean?"

"No. About you."

Later she acknowledged to herself that the man could, when he tried, be very assuring and convincing; so convincing that there was not a vestige

of doubt left in her mind but that the man she had almost unwittingly admired since her first meeting with him was, and always would be, hers and hers alone.

"Then," Claire said conclusively, "that being the case, why need we wait a year?"

"Do you mean that you would go with me before then?"

"I will go to-morrow."

"Claire! But you cannot be ready."

"I can. I have heaps of clothes, and so have you. We could go to your uncle's in the morning, then come back here later and announce it."

"But——"

"Don't *but*. You have Ronald's experience to teach you that a man had better take his wife when he can get her."

"My objection was this: I cannot get a suitable wedding present in one day. Or shall we go on to London for it?"

"Kent, be honest. Haven't you had almost enough of cities?"

"I am sick to death of them. But with you——"

"Then I am, too. And the only wedding present I want is out there waiting for me now. I mean the white Arab. And mine is out there waiting for you. I am going to give you the Dale farm."

"The Dale farm?"

"The Dale farm. I bought it before I left there and it is my wedding gift to you."

"But, Claire! That cost thousands. I'll have to see your uncle."

After a moment of puzzlement it came to Claire that this man who had come back out of the West to seek her still thought of her as a dependent relation of the Milburnes. She wondered if her diplomacy would be equal to the test.

"Don't bother Uncle with our business affairs," she begged. "Anyhow *I* bought it. Now listen, Kent. You will have to hear this, so hear it now. I am not a poor relation here. I have more than they have. Kent, be *sensible!*"

For Kent had dropped her hands and was staring at her in utter bewilderment.

In the excitement of the moment neither had noticed that Mrs. Milburne had entered the hall and was regarding them with amazement from between the portières.

"Kent," Claire went on, "if you are going to let the money make any difference between us I will throw it all in the lake. I had no idea that it could matter."

"It cannot matter, of course," the older woman said, coming forward. "And Claire, don't do anything so foolish as to throw away anything that is valuable for a mere romantic fancy. Wait till you try to purchase period furniture!"

Then she turned to Kent and extended her hand. There was a new kindness in her face and cordiality in her voice.

"Please accept my hearty congratulations," she

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said. "I have come to be able to read such scenes between the lines. I shall be most happy to welcome you into the family, and"—here Kent saw a sudden twinkle in her eyes—"I have no doubt but that I shall always have a place in your thoughts among the best of your benefactors."

THE END

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