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# THE GIRL AT BULLET LAKE

By H. A. CODY

*Author of "The Frontiersman," "The Long Patrol," "The King's Arrow," "Glen of the High North," "The River Fury," "The Red Ranger," etc.*

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# CHAPTER I

## ORDERED AWAY

"You must get away at once. You need a rest."

"Is it as bad as that, doctor?"

"It is. I shall give you a tonic to brace you up. But the best remedy is fresh air, in the woods, or somewhere else."

As Doctor Bradbury turned to his desk, Robert Rutledge sat staring straight before him. He did not feel sick, only played out, worn and fagged. He had lost his appetite. He had little or no ambition, and his work was becoming a burden. He had to drag himself to the office every morning, and always left it at the end of the day weary in mind and body. He had never experienced anything like it before, as his health had been of the best. His old friend Doctor Bradbury, in whom he had much confidence, would give him something to build him up, and in a short time he would be as well as ever. But this order to get away to the woods was something he had not expected. It seemed too simple. Perhaps the doctor did not understand him. He was not sick, just a little run down, and his nerves somewhat unsteady. A tonic would make him all right again. It was sheer nonsense about fresh air and the woods.

Presently his eyes rested upon some bottles neatly arranged along a shelf in an adjoining room. What did they contain? he wondered. Different kinds of medicine, no doubt. The doctor must know the use of each. He also noticed several surgical instruments. And those strange things which looked like tanks. What were they for? The doctor must know a lot about them. Clever fellow. What a vast amount of knowledge he must have stored away in his head. And did he know a great deal about the human body? Most likely.

"Take this three times a day, before meals." The doctor had risen from his desk and was standing before him. "Stay away for two months, at least, and then report to me when you come back."

"But where am I to go, doctor?"

"To the woods, the fresh fields, or anywhere else, so long as you live out of doors all day."

"Do you know any good place?"

"I do. Bullet Lake will suit you fine. And there is a snug house on the shore, known as 'Bullet House'. It is not a very poetical name, I admit, but that will make no difference. Si Acres will charge you something, but it will be more than worth it. There is excellent fishing there, too."

"Where is this wonderful paradise, doctor?"

"It's not far away, only a few miles back from the river at Glengrow. You surely must know the place."

"I know Glengrow, for my sister lives there. But I never heard her mention Bullet Lake."

"That's not surprising. Women, as a rule, do not take much interest in the woods and fishing. But go there. Old Acres is a queer fellow, and it will be worth something to see him. He's a wealthy old miser who would sell his soul for a dollar. He's a cranky cuss, too, and his neighbors are greatly afraid of him."

Robert Rutledge smiled.

"So you wish me to become the tenant of such a man? What rest shall I have with that man prowling around?"

"Oh, he'll not trouble you, providing you pay in advance. Money will keep him quiet."

"But the name of the place has an ominous sound, doctor. Bullet Lake and Bullet House! Why are they called that?"

"I do not know for sure. There is a story about a shooting racket there many years ago, so I guess the name must have come from that. I am not interested in such things. But you are, so you may find something of value."

"So you give me permission to carry on my writing, doctor?"

"Yes, in moderation. You have been doing double work here, so that is why I want you to get away. You grind in the office all day, and write at night. That's caused the trouble. No man can stand such a strain for any length of time. But, there, I must attend to my other patients. Do as I say, and good luck. If you are not a new man when you come back, I will not charge you a cent for my services."

Robert Rutledge walked slowly away from the office in deep thought. He knew that the doctor was right, so decided to follow his advice. The idea of living in a little house in the woods by the side of a beautiful lake was alluring. In his mind he pictured the scene, the birds, and the shimmering water. Perhaps there was a verandah to the house. If so, how pleasant it would be to lie in a hammock, read, write, and dream to his heart's content. There would be nothing to disturb him, no dull office grind, and no clamor of the busy insistent world. He would attend to a few matters of importance and then get away as soon as possible. In fact, he felt better already, and hungry. He suddenly remembered that he had eaten nothing since morning, and now it was almost two hours past noon. The White Lily Cafe was near, a familiar resort of his. It would be quiet there at this time of the day, and there he could think over his plans for the future.

Reaching the cafe, he sat down at a small table near a window overlooking a large square, beautiful now with flowers. He had often sat here watching the people strolling to and fro or sitting upon the benches along the walks. Now, however, his mind was upon other things, and he did not even glance out of the window. All he could see was a little house nestling by the side of a woodland lake. And Nell and the children would be only a few miles away, so he could visit them whenever he became too lonely. And they might come to see him. How pleasant it would be to watch John and Betty playing among the trees and along the shore. He would make little boats for them, and ramble with them and Nell through the woods.

So lost did he become in this bright fancy-scene that he hardly noticed when the waitress arrived with the frugal order he had given her. A new vision had come to his mind. It was another Nell, and other children he saw. They were only a dream wife and dream children, but the thought of them quickened his heart and brought a slight tinge to his overpale face.

Presently he became aware of someone sitting in front of him, just three tables away. Had she been there when he came in? he wondered. Why had he not noticed her before? Forgotten was the woodland cabin and the little lake as he watched her. Her left arm rested upon the table, and her slender, well-shaped fingers pressed lightly her cheek as she gazed dreamily out of the window on her right. Swiftly and with admiring eyes he noted her strong beautiful face, the graceful poise of her head crowned with a wealth of jet-black hair, and the quiet neatness of her dress. Involuntarily he gave a sigh of relief. In outward appearance she measured up to his ideal standard of perfect womanhood. That she was not more than nineteen or twenty years of age he felt certain. He longed to see her full face, but she did not look once in his direction until the waitress arrived to serve her. She then lowered her hand and looked straight at him for one fleeting second. If she knew that he had been observing her she showed no sign as she began eating. Robert knew that it was rude and ungentlemanly to stare at her. But he could not help it, so fascinated was he by her charming beauty. Every movement she made was full of grace and dignity. Who was she, anyway? Was she engaged? He looked at her hands, but saw no ring. Her fingers were devoid of any adornment save that which had been bestowed upon her by nature in her happiest mood. She was free! The thought brought a glad throb to his heart. He must learn something about her, her name, and where she lived. But how? He could not very well follow her. Perhaps the waitress might be able to tell him.

He was aroused by the sound of voices on his right. Two women had come in, and were seated at a table a short distance away. Their presence and their words irritated him. They were like discordant notes in a beautiful symphony. He recognized them at once. One was Mrs. Sylvester Casham, wife of a local promoter, a man well-known for his connection with a number of shady business transactions. He had made considerable money, and his wife was very prominent in the leading social set of Pretensia. She rode high on her husband's money, and professed a great interest in art and literature, although she knew little about either, and could not speak a dozen words of the English language correctly. She was exceedingly plain, haughty and overbearing to those she considered her inferiors. She talked much about her illustrious ancestors, although it was an open secret that the only noted member of her family had been her grandfather, who had ruined many people when he cleared out of the country, taking with him money that had been entrusted to him for investment. But that was years ago, in another city, so Mrs. Casham was unaware that the affair was known in Pretensia.

Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge was a different type of a woman. She was of commanding appearance, and agreeable to those who did her bidding. She was strong-minded and could not tolerate any inferior position. She had to be the leader in any

club to which she belonged, as well as the social circle of the city. Her husband was editor and chief owner of the *Daily Echo*, the one newspaper in Pretensia. It was well known that he was ruled by his wife, and many even suggested that she wrote some of the editorials and directed the policy of the paper. She was kind and condescending to her friends, but merciless to her enemies, as a number had learned to their bitter cost. Mrs. Sylvester Casham was her bosom friend, for in her she found a woman she could dominate and bend easily to her imperious will.

It was quite easy for Robert Rutledge to hear nearly every word these two women uttered. They did not lower their voices, and paid no heed to those around them. He knew that something out of the ordinary was disturbing Mrs. Rockbridge, and he was not long in finding out. It was the question of the new rector for St. Alban's, of which church she was a prominent member. Robert was well aware what a burning issue it was to the entire congregation. The rectors of St. Alban's in the past had all been men of marked ability, fluent speakers, and of high social standing. This standard had to be maintained, so a thorough search had been made far and wide for a suitable man. A number of men had come and preached their best sermons, but the one who had made the most favorable impression was a young man from a country parish, the Reverend Andrew Nairn. By his noble appearance, his well-trained voice, and excellent sermons he had won the hearts of all except Mrs. Rockbridge. The reason for her dislike was quite apparent. She had a nephew in the ministry, so she desired that he should be chosen. His chance had been good until the appearance of Mr. Nairn. Mrs. Rockbridge at once realised that her hope of having her nephew chosen was doomed. This was hard for her to endure, as it was her great ambition to see a member of her family rector of such an important church as St. Alban's.

"I cannot understand all this excitement over Mr. Nairn," she indignantly declared. "To my mind his sermons were quite ordinary, and his voice was not at all pleasant."

"I agree with you," Mrs. Casham replied. "Your nephew is a far better speaker, and a true gentleman, besides. We know nothing about Mr. Nairn. His parents may be very commonplace, lacking in culture, and uncouth in speech and manner. Suppose such people should visit their son if he became our rector, how could we call upon them? We should be greatly embarrassed and mortified."

"But Mr. Nairn is almost like the Angel Gabriel to the people of St. Alban's, remember. They were so much impressed with him that I am afraid they will not change their opinion."

"But what about his wife, my dear? We know nothing about her. And we should know a great deal before Mr. Nairn becomes our rector."

"Has this Angel Gabriel a wife?" This was a new idea to Mrs. Rockbridge, and she seized upon it greedily.

"I believe he has. But she may be of little account, and what a calamity that would be to our church."

"It would be terrible, my dear. We must certainly find out something about her. If we are to have an Angel Gabriel as rector, we want his wife to be an angel, too."

"But how can we find out? Who knows anything about her here?"

Mrs. Rockbridge sat for a while in deep silence, and her food remained untouched before her.

"I am going to find out myself," she at length declared.

"You!"

"Yes. I am going to Glengrow. I have been planning to spend a few weeks at the new summer hotel there, anyway. Augustus wanted me to go with him on a trip abroad, but I prefer a quiet place near home. I shall take my new car which I am learning to drive."

"Won't you be nervous about driving alone? You should take your chauffeur with you, for a while, at least."

"I am never nervous. I have discharged my chauffeur, and intend to do my own driving after this. Women are just as capable as men, and in many ways more so."

Robert Rutledge had heard enough. As he thought of Nell and what she was like, his heart became hot with anger. The idea of such a heartless woman as Mrs. Rockbridge spying upon his sister was hard to endure. He glanced at the girl before him, and he was certain that he saw a faint semblance of amusement upon her face. How beautiful she was. And

what a difference there was between her and those two schemers nearby! She reminded him somewhat of Nell. "Angel Gabriel's Wife!" The words kept ringing through his mind. Then his anger subsided, and he felt like laughing outright. How his sister would enjoy the joke. But should he tell her? Would it not be better for him to wait and see what would happen? If Nell knew, she would be on her guard, and that would spoil the fun he saw ahead. Yes, Nell must be just her own natural self for Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge's spying eyes.

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## CHAPTER II

### MORE THAN HE EXPECTED

With his stout blackthorn stick beating the ground Silas Acres strode along the road. It was a bright warm morning with only a faint breath of wind astir. Birds darted here and there, and butterflies zig-zagged in front of him. The air was richly laden with the scent from fields of clover and nearby gardens. There was much to charm the senses along this country road which skirted the shore of the noble river in the Parish of Glengrow. But Silas Acres seemed oblivious to such attractions as he pressed steadily forward. He was a large towering man, unbent by the fourscore years that had passed over his head. His clothes were rough, his boots coarse and heavy, and his slouch hat worn and faded. His face was bearded, and beneath his craggy brow challenging eyes looked out over the crest of a strong prominent nose. He resembled a patriarch who had suddenly stepped out of the past, and was not at all pleased with his surroundings. He walked with a haughty dignity with his eyes straight before him, unheeding the curious glances that were cast upon him from houses and fields along the way. He knew that he was being watched, and that his appearance upon the road this morning would be discussed by his neighbors for several days. This thought gave him considerable satisfaction, and caused him to thump the ground harder than ever. He liked to arouse people's curiosity. He had been doing it for years, and he wished to do so as long as he lived.

Peter Pendle saw him, and stayed his hand in the act of raising the brush to the window-frame he was painting. An expression of concern came into his faded gray eyes as he laid down his brush and stepped to the kitchen door.

"Come quick, Sarah," he called. "Si Acres is on the road this mornin'. What d'ye s'pose he's after?"

"Trouble, no doubt," his wife replied, as she left her washing and came to the door. "He never leaves home for anything else."

"I guess yer right, Sarah. But who's to be the victim this time, I wonder. We were the last ones when our cows broke into his meadow. Hello! he's turnin' into the rectory. Now, what in time is he after there!"

"Religion, maybe. He was at church last night, remember. Perhaps he has repented and is going to the parson for advice."

"H'm, when Si Acres repents then there'll be hope for the devil. It's trouble the old cuss is after an' not religion. I've a good mind to go over an' help the Nairns in case Si becomes too fractious. An', besides, I'm curious to know what he's after."

The bang that Mr. Acres gave with his stick upon the front door of the rectory did not sound like that of a humble and repentant man. It was the blow of one impatient to be admitted, and who would brook no delay. He had not long to wait, for the door was soon opened by Hettie Rushton, the maid, who shrank back when she beheld the towering form standing before her.

"Is your master in?" the visitor demanded.

"Yes, sir, but he's at breakfast and can't be disturbed."

"Breakfast! Breakfast! You mean dinner, girl."

"Indeed I don't," Hettie retorted, stamping her foot. Her fear had vanished and she was ready for fight. "We have meals here at genteel hours, let me tell you that."

Mr. Acres glared at the girl, and was about to speak again when the dining room door opened and Mrs. Nairn appeared. If surprised at Hettie's flushed and angry face, and the presence of the visitor, she showed no outward sign as she stepped forward and held out her hand.

"Come right in, Mr. Acres," she invited. "We are at breakfast, so you are just in time for a cup of coffee with us."

Astonished and somewhat subdued by this gracious greeting, Mr. Acres followed Mrs. Nairn into the room. Hettie, still bristling with fight, made a face at him, and then returned to the kitchen. She was very curious, however, to know what he wanted, so she kept her ears keenly alert as she hovered near the partly-opened door leading into the dining room.



The sight that met Mr. Acres' eyes caused him to hesitate a little, while a peculiar sensation came into his rebellious heart. He paused just inside the door and stared around the room. To him it was an unusual scene of peace and cosiness, a striking contrast to the stern and bare dining room of his own house. Through the open window on his right the fresh flower-scented air was drifting softly into the room. Above, a canary was enjoying its morning bath, and rejoicing in the sun which fell full upon its cage. The visitor noted all this at a glance. Then his eyes rested upon the breakfast table with its snowy linen, and thought of his own table with its cheap red covering. He saw especially the two little ones seated there looking at him with big wondering eyes. A feeling of resentment came into his heart. This was a new world to him, and he felt like an intruder into a holy place. He was out of harmony with his surroundings. Why should these people have such peace and comfort while he himself was restless and unhappy? And they could have breakfast long after their neighbors had begun their day's work. What a life of ease they must lead.

This feeling of resentment was not lessened when Mr. Nairn rose from the table, came forward and held out his hand.

"This is the second unusual pleasure you have given me in a short time, Mr. Acres," he accosted. "The other was last night when you were at church."

Had Andrew Nairn known his visitor better he would have said nothing about his attendance at church. He realised his mistake, however, as soon as he had uttered the words. Mr. Acres straightened quickly up, his right hand gripped hard upon his stick, and into his narrowed eyes came a fighting gleam. He was very calm, and when he spoke his voice was cold and cynical.

"Yes, I was at church last night, Mr. Nairn, fool that I was. And that is why I am here. You spoke about the heathen, and the importance of sending missionaries to save their souls. But what about the heathen at home? And they are right here in this parish, too. People call me a heathen, and perhaps they are right. But no one would give money to convert me. I am scorned by all, and looked upon as a heathen because I seldom go to church. I went last night for the first time in years, and people stared at me, grinned and nudged one another. Oh, I saw what they did. And I put a fifty-cent piece upon the plate when it was passed around. I made a mistake in giving that money, so want it back. A heathen should not give, but receive."

Mr. and Mrs. Nairn could hardly believe that they had heard aright. The former's face flushed with anger, and he was about to make an impetuous reply when a warning glance from his wife checked him. With an effort he controlled himself and looked his visitor full in the eyes.

"Do you mean what you say, sir? Or are you only joking?"

"Joking! Do I look like a man who makes jokes? Oh, no. I am in dead earnest and want my money back. I am a heathen to your way of thinking, and wish to remain so."

"Very well, then, here is your money," the clergyman replied, handing him a fifty-cent piece he had brought from his pocket. "It is not the same one you gave last night, but I suppose that does not matter."

"Not at all, not at all," Mr. Acres growled as he took the coin. "One piece is as good as another."

A feeling of deep disgust for this man swept upon Andrew Nairn. Should he allow him to leave the house unrebuked? Was it not his duty as a minister to call him sharply to account?

As he thus reasoned with himself, little Betty stepped forward and stood before the visitor. There was a shyness in her manner, and the eyes which looked up at the face of the man towering above her contained an expression of wonder and awe.

"Are you a heathen?" she simply asked. "I never saw one before."

Mr. Acres looked quickly down at the child, and his brow knitted in perplexity. He did not know what to reply to this dainty maid. He could talk and argue with a man, but what could he say to this child? He had not talked to children for years, as they had always fled from him in fear. But he had to say something now, for Betty was expectantly waiting for him to speak.

"Do you think I am a heathen?" he at length asked.

"I hope you are, for I always wanted to see one, oh, so much."

A queer gurgle sounded in Mr. Acres' throat as he struggled with a peculiar sensation that had come upon him.

"Yes, I suppose I am a heathen," he confessed with a somewhat unsteady voice. "Are you satisfied now, my child?"

"Oh, I am so glad," Betty eagerly cried, "for I can give you this," and she held up a bright twenty-five cent piece. "This is for the heathen. I was going to put it in my Mission box, but I want you to take it now."

"I can't take it, child. Put it in your box. I must go."

"No, no, you must take it," Betty urged. "Please do."

A deep silence now ensued. As Mr. and Mrs. Nairn anxiously watched, they saw their visitor undergoing a hard struggle. They were wise enough not to interfere in this little drama. Which would win they could not tell. It was a battle of gentle, trustful simplicity against an overbearing, cantankerous nature. Presently, however, Mr. Acres moved his right hand, his fingers opened as if compelled by some unseen power, and taking the coin he dropped it into a pocket of his coat. The tension was relieved, and Mr. and Mrs. Nairn breathed more freely. Betty had won, and she clapped her hands with delight.

"My money will make you a good man," she cried. "I will give you some more when you come again."

For a few seconds Mr. Acres stared at the child, and then stepped back. He was about to leave the room when Mrs. Nairn stopped him.

"Let me make you a cup of coffee," she urged.

"I don't want any," was the curt reply. Mr. Acres was recovering himself, and the old defiant expression had returned to his eyes. "I must get home."

He tried to meet the clear friendly eyes of the woman standing before him. She was very attractive in face and form, and her manner was so charming that he felt uncomfortable. If she had been cold and haughty, or had spoken disdainful words it would have been a great relief. But her friendliness unnerved him and made him feel contemptible. He determined to leave the room and never enter the place again. His visit was altogether different from what he had anticipated. He had expected an excited scene when he demanded the money. That would have given him much satisfaction, and he would have gloated over it for days. But this——.

He lifted his head and looked around the room. Why, he did not know, except that he wished to evade those eyes which were gazing so steadily upon him. As he did so, he gave a sudden start, and an expression of surprise overspread his face. Swiftly he strode across the room until he stood before a picture upon the wall of a full-rigged clipper ship. Eagerly he drank in the details, entranced by her marvellous beauty.

"Ah, Dana alone could describe her," he muttered. "'Sharp upon the wind, cutting through the head seas like a knife, with her raking masts and her sharp bows running up like the head of a greyhound.' Yes, yes, Dana knew, all right."

He turned impetuously to the curious and interested watchers near the table.

"Where did that picture come from?"

"It was my grandfather's," Mrs. Nairn explained. "It was his ship."

"What! Captain John Rutledge? Was he your grandfather?"

"He was, and that ship, the *Ida Rutledge*, was named after my grandmother."

Mr. Acres swung around, stepped forward, and with piercing eyes, studied keenly the fair face upturned to his. His lips moved as if he wished to speak, to ask a question. But no word came. Instead, he cast another glance at the picture, strode across the room, passed out into the hallway, and left the house, closing the front door after him with a bang.

Hurrying to the window, Mr. and Mrs. Nairn watched him as he walked rapidly to the main road. Along this he moved for a short distance when he suddenly stopped. He fumbled in his pocket, and bringing forth something, he threw it upon

the ground and stamped it furiously into the dust at his feet.

"Oh, it must be Betty's money he has thrown away!" Mrs. Nairn exclaimed. "He seems to be very angry. What a strange man."

"He is a savage heathen, all right," the clergyman replied. "He acts like one, anyway."

"Did he throw my money away?" Betty anxiously asked as she came close to the window and looked out.

"He did, dear," her mother replied. "But, never mind, we shall get it when he has gone."

"No, we shall leave it there," Mr. Nairn firmly declared. "He has tainted it with his touch. I wouldn't lay hand upon it, for it is an unholy thing now."

Mrs. Nairn looked quizzically at her husband.

"You should refuse much of the money that is given to the church, then, Andrew. It, too, is tainted."

"Nell! I am surprised to hear you say that."

"But it is true, nevertheless, and you ought to know it. Didn't Sam Crofter boast how he patched up a spavined horse and sold it as thoroughly sound? And didn't Ben Skipson tell how he always put big apples on the top of the barrel and poor little ones at the bottom? I have heard, too, about the tricks of others, and they are all givers to the church."

The distressed look that came into Andrew Nairn's eyes caused his wife to smile. She caught him affectionately by the arm.

"There, there, dear, don't worry about what I have said. We can't help what people do. I only wanted to remind you that Mr. Acres is not the only heathen in this parish. And to tell you the truth, I like him."

"Like him! Like that man! You surely are not in earnest."

"Yes, I am very much in earnest. I like him because he is real. He did not want to give that money and he had the courage to come and say so. Most of the people who give money to the church would like to get it back. But they are too cowardly."

"Nell! Nell! I am astonished at you. What has come over you?"

"I suppose you are astonished, and annoyed, too, Andrew," and Mrs. Nairn gave a deep sigh. "But what I have said is true. Most of the people here are hypocrites. They don't want to give, and only do it for appearance. They are afraid of what their neighbors might say. But Mr. Acres has the courage of his convictions, and that is what I like about him. I wonder, though, why he took such an interest in that picture. Did you notice how he looked at me when I told him that the ship was named after my grandmother?"

Andrew Nairn laughed, and placed his arm lovingly about his wife.

"He considered you a curiosity, no doubt, my dear. It is something, remember, to be the granddaughter of such a man as John Rutledge, the once famous captain and shipbuilder. Not likely he ever saw such a notable person as you before."

"You may be right, Andrew, although I have the feeling that there is some other reason for his strange behaviour."

"Perhaps he saw something of the rebel in you, Nell. You know what I mean."

"I do, and I am not ashamed of my rebel spirit, if you persist in calling it that. I do get impatient at times with the smug, conventional, and self-satisfied way of living, and long to break away and be natural. I am tired of the swaddling-bands of society. I was never cut out for a clergyman's wife, anyway."

"You will find it harder, Nell, should I become Rector of St. Alban's."

"I know it. But I shall do the best I can for your sake. We are not there yet, remember. In the meantime I want to learn more about Mr. Acres, and why he was so greatly interested in my grandfather's ship."



# CHAPTER III

## AT GLENGROW

Reclining in a comfortable chair upon the rectory verandah, Robert Rutledge was enjoying an after-supper smoke. It was a pleasant change for him to be away from the city in such a quiet place as this. His bitterness towards life somewhat subsided as he looked at his sister Nell close by, and Andrew seated upon the steps watching the children. Betty was perched upon the lowest step, clasping the beautiful doll Uncle Bob had brought her. John was playing with his gift, a wonderful toy tractor that when wound up would climb over almost everything. His excited shouts caused much amusement to the interested watchers.

"I feel well already," Robert declared. "The fresh air, and the joy of these children are better than any tonic. This is a glorious place, and I am so glad I came. How happy you two must be here."

"I am," Mrs. Nairn replied. "It is certainly wonderful, and with that noble river almost at our door, I am not surprised that the new hotel is attracting many people. The rooms are all taken, so I understand."

"One room would be vacant, though, but for me," Robert quietly replied. "Ah, I see you wonder what I mean, Nell. But as I was coming from the city this afternoon I saved a woman from a serious accident, death, no doubt."

"In what way, Bob?"

"Oh, it was another case of an inexperienced woman driver. I was following her up a steep hill, and when near the top she tried to change gears. She evidently became confused, for the car began to back towards the steep bank on the right. I was close behind, and seeing the danger, managed to catch the left wheel of her car with my fender. It was quite a bump, but my car held, and as soon as I could get out I blocked both of my back wheels with stones. By that time the woman was standing upon the road, and she at once began to denounce me for hitting her car. I was never so surprised in my life. I tried to explain what I had done, and showed her the steep bank. But nothing would appease her. She declared that she would have been all right, and if I had not interfered she would have backed to the foot of the hill without any trouble. That made me mad.

"Madam," I said, "if I had not stopped your car when I did it would be down over that bank, and you would now be sprouting wings in the celestial realm and tuning your sweet voice for the angelic choir!"

Mr. and Mrs. Nairn smiled at these words.

"You couldn't help being poetical, could you, Bob?" his sister queried.

"Well, there wasn't anything to inspire the muse in that woman. My, she was furious, and called me a fool. She told me it was not safe for a woman to drive alone on the roads, and I agreed with her. She even demanded that I should pay her damage. Think of that! Perhaps I should have let her go over the bank. With Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge among the angels I could breathe more freely."

"What, not Mrs. Rockbridge, wife of the editor of the *Daily Echo*!" Mr. Nairn exclaimed.

"The very woman, Andy. And I suppose there will be a big write-up in the paper about that affair, and the dangers women run from careless drivers."

"Did Mrs. Rockbridge know you?" his sister asked.

"Oh, yes. She called me 'Fool,' so you see she knew me, all right."

Mrs. Nairn, who had been watching the children, looked quickly around, for she detected the note of bitterness in her brother's voice.

"Don't say that, Bob. You are not a fool, but a very clever man. Just think of the wonderful things you write."

"Wonderful! Thank you, Nell, for your compliment. You are the only one who ever encourages me."

"Not at all, Bob. Others think the same as I do. I am sure the editor of the *Daily Echo* is always glad to have your poems and stories. He wrote a lovely editorial about them last month."

"Oh, talk is cheap, but when it comes to payment, that is a different thing altogether. I never received a cent from him for anything I wrote, and when I wanted a few copies of the papers containing my stuff I had to pay for them at the usual rate."

"And they didn't send you any complimentary copies?" Mr. Nairn asked in surprise.

"Not one. They never seemed to think about it."

"But you should have protested, Bob," Mrs. Nairn declared. "You should have demanded payment."

"I have been too easy, I guess. But I got after Mr. Rockbridge yesterday, and we had a heart-to-heart talk. I told him I was leaving for the woods, and suggested that I should write several articles for his paper, and demanded so much for each. He thought I had taken leave of my senses, and told me so in words that I would not like to repeat here. He said there is nothing thrilling enough in this province to make good copy, and advised me to go abroad. I at once bet him the price I had asked for my articles that I could find an abundance of material close at home thrilling enough to satisfy him. He was so sure of his ground that he accepted at once. So here I am ready to begin, and I want you two to help me."

"Where are you going to get your thrilling material?" Mr. Nairn asked.

"Right here in this parish, of course. I see you are amused, but you will be greatly surprised later."

"There's nothing of special interest here, Bob, for your purpose. You should go somewhere else, to the north or the west, for instance."

"That is where so many people make a mistake, Andy. Home things are so commonplace that there seems to be little really worth while. Now, what have you in Glengrow that is known and yet unknown?"

"What do you mean?"

"Isn't there some place, house or incident that people have talked about for years, and yet know very little about it? Think of the old cellar holes. What stories they might tell if they could only speak, of homes once there, tragedy and happiness. Then, there must be old buildings standing in desolate places. What tales they might reveal. I did hear of one in this parish, called 'Bullet House.' There must be some reason for such a strange name. Do you know anything about it?"

He looked first at the clergyman and then at his sister, as if expecting them to give him some valuable information. But they knew nothing.

"That is generally the way," he declared. "And yet that old building is standing there by the lake of a similar name. Who built it? And why is it called 'Bullet House?' I hope to find out. I have been told that it is owned by an old man, Si Acres. He may be able to tell me something. Do you know him?"

"We know him and don't know him," Mrs. Nairn replied. "Isn't that so, Andrew?"

"We know him as a brute of a man. He put a fifty-cent piece into the offertory plate last night, and came this morning to get it back. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"But why did he do that, Andy? What lies back of such an action?"

"Meanness, and a hatred to the Church."

"Are you sure? I should like to know more about that man. The history of his life may prove of considerable value. What do the neighbors think of him?"

"They are afraid of him, and leave him alone so far as they can."

"Do you know anything about his past life?"

"I cannot say for sure. Peter Pendle told me once that Mr. Acres built ships, or went to sea. I have forgotten which."

"You never told me that, Andrew," his wife remarked. "That may explain his strange interest in the picture of grandfather's vessel."

"Ah, this is getting quite interesting," Robert replied. "We have now connected him with ship-building days, so that is something. What did he say about grandfather's ship, Nell?"

"Not much. When he first saw it, he was surprised, walked across the room and stood staring at it. He then asked me about it, and when I told him, he turned quickly around and looked at me with such a queer expression in his eyes. It seemed as if he wanted to say something, for his lips moved. But he hurried away without a word."

"You have overlooked what he said about Dana," Mr. Nairn reminded.

"What was that?" Robert quickly asked.

"I do not remember his exact words, but as he stood looking at the vessel he said that Dana alone could describe her, and seemed to be quoting something about the ship cutting through the water like a knife, and her sharp bows running up like the head of a greyhound. I do not know what he meant by Dana."

"Why, he must be the man who wrote *Two Years Before the Mast*, the best book in the English language about the sea and the life of sailors. So you don't know it?"

"No, I never heard of it."

"I suppose not. You like something with an ecclesiastical tone. But what you have told me is another incident which must not be overlooked. I wonder——."

He ceased abruptly and looked out over the fields. He listened as his sister told about the money Betty had given to Mr. Acres, and how he had stamped it into the dust. He remained silent for a while when she had finished. He then re-filled his pipe, lighted it, and gave a deep sigh of contentment.

"This is all very interesting, Nell. But where does Bullet House come in? Why did he get that place back there in the woods?"

"For lumbering purposes, I have been told," Mr. Nairn explained. "It was well wooded when he bought it, and it is said that he made a fortune out of the logs, although he has done nothing there during the last few years."

"Who owned the place before he bought it?"

"I never heard."

"Was it ever called by any other name?"

"I do not know."

"My, my! And you have been living here for a year and were never curious about that man!"

"I have had more important things to think about, Bob."

"No doubt you have, Andy. With Nell and these fine youngsters, as well as your parish duties you have had your mind and hands full. But I am free for several weeks, and with no family care, so I am going to see what I can find out about Bullet Lake and your strange neighbor, Si Acres."

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# CHAPTER IV

## THE VISITOR

About the middle of the forenoon Silas Acres was enjoying a cup of tea, and a slice of bread with a little cheese. This had been his custom for years. He was in a most thoughtful mood, and his forehead often knitted in perplexity.

When he had drained his cup and gathered up the last crumbs of bread and cheese, he placed his hand upon his filled pipe lying upon the table. Slowly he lifted it to his mouth and struck a match. As the smoke encircled his head he glanced towards the kitchen door.

"Rachel," he called. "Come here."

At once a woman of middle age and of medium height entered the room.

"Did you call, sir?" she asked.

"I did. Where are the boys?"

"Working at the line fence."

"H'm! Working! They're asleep, most likely, under a tree. Lazy rascals! Rachel."

"Yes, sir."

"Any news?"

"Nothing of special importance except that you were out unusually late last night. You should be more careful. The night air is not good for you."

"Ah, so you heard I was out late! Who told you?"

"No one, sir. But I heard you come in. And, besides, I found the lantern on the floor this morning, and your coat covered with dust. And look at your knees. You must have been kneeling upon the road. What in the world were you doing?"

"Ah, Rachel, you are very observing. Yes, I was out late, hunting for something I dropped upon the road yesterday."

"Did you find it?"

"No."

"Was it money, sir?"

"It was. And something else I can never find."

He sighed and looked across the room at the model of a fine full-rigged clipper ship upon the wall over the mantel. There was a wistfulness in his eyes, and he allowed his pipe to go out.

"Rachel."

"Yes, sir."

"How is Mrs. Nairn getting along?"

"Why do you ask me? I very seldom see her."

"But you hear what the neighbors say about her."

"Sometimes."

"I thought so. They gossip a great deal about what goes on at the rectory."

"Yes, sir."



"Especially about Mrs. Nairn."

"I suppose they do."

"They say she is giddy and independent."

"They do, sir."

"Yes, yes, I knew it. Do you think they are right?"

"It is not for me to say. I try to attend to my own business."

"And I wish to God others would do the same. How can they understand a woman like Mrs. Nairn? She has the blood of a great seafaring race in her veins, and that makes the difference. You may go now, Rachel."

The housekeeper was about to return to the kitchen, when glancing out of the window she saw a man walking towards the house.

"A stranger is coming from the road, sir," she announced.

"A stranger, eh, Rachel? What does he look like?"

"He is a young man, and walking fast."

"An agent, no doubt, who wants to sell me some farm machinery. But I have all I need. There he is at the front door. What impudence! He should have gone to the back door. Don't let him in. Send him away."

Rachel left the room, and returned a few minutes later.

"He is not an agent, sir. He wants to rent Bullet House."

"Ah, that's good. Bring him in at once. I am always ready for business like that."

He re-filled and lighted his pipe while awaiting his visitor. He was naturally pleased, as so far this season no applications had been received for the use of the lake and house. He had begun to fear that his increase of the rent might keep people away. But here was a man who wanted the place, so that was encouraging.

As Robert Rutledge entered the room, Mr. Acres rose to meet him, and held out his hand.

"I am pleased to see you, sir. Sit down. You don't mind, I hope, if I continue my smoking?"

"Not at all. I am glad you enjoy a pipe. I shall light up, too."

"That's right. Try some of my tobacco. I think you will find it extra good. It's none of your common stuff, but the best English brand."

"Thanks. Judging by the delicious aroma it certainly must be excellent. Someone said that 'The smoke of glory is not worth the smoke of a pipe.'"

"Ho, ho, very good, very good. And you will need the best tobacco to cheer your loneliness out in the woods. If you like my brand I can supply you with all you need at a reasonable price. I always keep some on hand for my friends."

"Do you sell much, sir?"

Mr. Acres glanced quickly at the young man. His eyes narrowed a little, and his face became grave. He then smiled.

"No, I sell very little. I have no friends here."

"Why do you make an exception of me, then?"

"Because you wish to rent my house at Bullet Lake. Is that so?"

"It is, sir, and I hope we can agree upon the terms."

"Oh, they are quite moderate. Only five dollars a week for the use of the lake, where there is good fishing, the boat, and the house with everything in it. And there is the wonderful scenery included. Do you not call five dollars cheap?"

"It is quite satisfactory to me, and I shall take the place for a month. You wish payment to be made in advance, I suppose?"

"Yes, I generally request that. But if you prefer to wait for a while it will be all right."

"I shall pay you now, Mr. Acres, and have it off my mind. I may not have any money left when holiday is over."

"Do you intend to live alone, young man? You will find it rather lonely out there, especially at night."

"Oh, I shall stay at the lake during the day, but my sister insists that I shall sleep at the rectory."

"At the rectory, you say?"

"Yes. Mrs. Nairn is my sister."

Slowly Mr. Acres removed the pipe from his mouth, and looked keenly at his visitor.

"So you are a Rutledge, then?"

"I am. Robert Rutledge is my name. I should have told you before."

"And Captain John Rutledge was your grandfather?"

"Yes."

"And are you interested in ships, too?"

"I am. I dream of ships, and write about them. The spirit of the sea is in my blood, and yet I have to spend my days in an office."

"So you are an author, eh? What do you write?"

"Not much; just a little prose and verse."

"About the sea?"

"Mostly. I like to write about the sea, especially in verse. I can best express myself that way."

"Quite true, quite true, Mr. Rutledge. There is nothing like the sea to stir the imagination. Can you remember any of your verses? I know Kipling, Masefield, and Newbolt. They are grand, and I have their books on the shelf over there. You know Masefield's *Ship Fever*, of course,

I must down to the sea again,  
To the lonely sea and sky.

"Yes, I know it well. It is great. But I cannot come anywhere near such a masterpiece as that. The great sea poets are in a class by themselves, so I only admire at a distance."

"Don't worry about that. What have you written? Give me a sample, I am hungry for something new about the sea. Anything about captains? They were great men, even though they were hard-driving devils at times."

Mr. Acres leaned eagerly forward, and Robert was touched by the longing expression in his eyes. He could not understand why the neighbors were afraid of such an agreeable man. People must surely misunderstand him. How surprised Nell and Andrew would be when he told them of this pleasant conversation.

"I have a poem, sir, named *Bluenose Captains*, which you might like, although I am somewhat diffident about reciting it to one who has fed so long upon the masters."

"Don't let that trouble you, young man. Let me hear what you can do, and then I shall judge."

"Very well," Robert smilingly replied. "If you can endure the agony, here it is:

Captains were they in olden days,  
And Captains they are still,  
Though some lie deep where the great waves sweep,  
And some lie under the hill;  
But under the wave or under the sod,  
Their deeds and fame abide,  
For they made a name in the great sea game  
When the clippers rode the tide.

They all went down to the sea in ships  
With a rollicking devil-may-care,  
And they quested long and they quested far  
In seasons stormy and fair;  
But fair or foul was the same to them,  
And dangers they never did shirk,  
For the gales might blow and the mainsails go,  
It was all in the full day's work.

Captains were they in olden days,  
Masters of ships and men,  
Whelps of a hardy Bluenose breed,  
Parker and Forbes and Wren.  
Honor to them, bold Captains all!  
Their deeds are their country's pride,  
For they won high fame as they played the game  
When the clippers rode the tide.

Mr. Acres sat for a while lost in thought, with his pipe clutched hard in his right hand. Robert longed to know what he was thinking about. He was soon to learn. Slowly Mr. Acres rose from his chair, walked across the room, and taking down a book from the shelf, came back to the table.

"Young man," he began, "when I come across sea verses which satisfy me, I always read Dana again. Any poem that can send me to such a masterpiece as *Two Years Before the Mast* is worth while. Your verses have done so, and that is the best compliment I can pay you. Dana is wonderful. What descriptions you find there, of gales, with ships scudding under bare poles. Who has ever described the rounding of the Horn like Dana? He knew what he was writing about, for he had the actual experience. And so did I. What would I not give for one more trip in a grand clipper ship! And the captains were great men, even though they were hard drivers. But they had to be so. Yes, they had to be so, for they had to deal with hard men. And your grandfather was one of the best skippers I ever knew."

"What! did you know my grandfather?" Robert asked. "Did you sail with him?"

A strange startled look came into Mr. Acres' eyes, and he glanced nervously around. He laid the book upon the table and straightened himself up to his full height of six feet. For the first time Robert realised how large he was. In an instant his whole appearance had changed, and he was now the man his neighbors knew, fierce and defiant. Robert was astonished at this sudden transformation. And it had come about through the simple question he had asked. It seemed as if Mr. Acres had been caught off guard, that he had said too much, and was angry with himself.

Rising to his feet, Robert picked up his hat.

"I must go now, sir. My sister is waiting for me. Is your house at the lake locked?"

"It is. Here are the keys to the front and back doors. Keep them locked when you leave the house. One can never tell who may be prowling around the place."

"I shall be careful, sir. But I hope there will be no ghosts to trouble me. One cannot lock them out, you know. Bullet

House is rather a gruesome and suggestive name. Do you know why it is called that?"

"Why do you want to know?" Mr. Acres fiercely asked. "Have you any special reason?"

"I have. It is such a peculiar name that I am curious to know if there is any thrilling story back of it."

"That you might write about it, eh?"

"Perhaps so, if I can get any worth-while material."

"You cannot, Mr. Rutledge, and I advise you not to try. Confine your writing to the sea and leave that old house alone. If you are wise you will heed what I say. Come, I shall show you to the door."

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# CHAPTER V

## BULLET HOUSE

A short distance from the main highway Peter Pendle's house stood upon a gentle elevation surrounded by birch, maple, and elm trees. It was a well-kept place, the house and barn showing watchful care. A garden of old-fashioned flowers greeted all who passed, and tourists often stopped to admire the beautiful sight.

The morning after the conversation at the rectory a van stood near the front door of the Pendle house. To a stranger it seemed a peculiar affair, but to the people of Glengrow, and far beyond, it was a most familiar object. Upon each side it told in big letters the business of its owner:

PETER PENDLE'S PANACEA,  
A SURE CURE FOR ACHES, SPRAINS, AND BRUISES  
OF MAN AND BEAST.  
TRY A BOTTLE—ONLY 50 CENTS.

This Panacea was a liniment, with a salve as a side-line. It was known for its remarkable curing qualities, and was held in high esteem by farmers and others throughout the country. Peter had received many testimonials which he carefully preserved in an old scrap-book. Several were from veterinary surgeons, and these he prized most of all.

The secret of this Panacea remained with the Pendles.

"It was given to my grandmother by an old Indian squaw," Peter often explained. "She made some use of it, an' so did my parents. But they didn't fully realise its possibilities. It's queer how some folks will let fine opportunities slip through their fingers. But Sarah an' me have turned it to good account, an' we've done well."

This morning, however, Peter was not thinking about his Panacea as he stood in front of his house with Mrs. Nairn by his side. He was watching a man walking rapidly up the road.

"It's yer brother, at last," he drawled. "Why, he's been half the mornin' there. I was beginnin' to fear that Si had eaten him up."

"I was getting somewhat anxious, too," Mrs. Nairn smilingly replied. "I am afraid that we have been delaying you, Peter. We should have been at the lake before this."

"Oh, I'm in no hurry. It doesn't matter so long as I'm back in time to meet the boat. Our visitor is comin' to-night."

"Is everything ready for her? You have made such a nice place out of your old shed."

"Haven't I, now!" and Peter looked with admiration upon his handiwork. "She wants to live by herself in a bright, airy place. Sarah's got it all clean an' the furniture set to rights. The walls are bare, but we got orders to leave them that way. Miss Rowland will bring her own pictures with her, so she said, an' she will paint others while here. I never expected to live so near to a real artist, but one never knows what will happen next."

"Do you know anything about Miss Rowland, Peter?"

"Nothin', except what my old city friend, Jim Hardy, wrote. He knows her, an' considers her a very fine girl. But here's yer brother, lookin' rather serious. We kin get off at once."

Robert was unusually quiet as they drove along the road leading to Bullet Lake. Their progress was slow, owing to the rough places and the corduroy bridges where Peter had to be very careful. The van swayed and bumped a great deal, but it was a strong car and accustomed to bad roads.

"You are a good driver, Peter," Mrs. Nairn complimented. "It is wonderful how you manage on this road."

"It's the car, Madam. Why, it's almost human an' knows just what to do. The other day a tourist read the letters on the sides an' asked me if I was Peter Pan. I wonder what the feller meant. Who is Peter Pan, anyway?"

"He's a fairy," Mrs. Nairn explained. "He's a queer little chap, and does magical things. There is a book about him which tells how he caused three children to fly away to a strange place. The words 'Peter' and 'Panacea' on your van must have suggested Peter to the tourist."

"Most likely they did, Madam. An' it's a good name, too, fer this car has been a real fairy to me, an' has carried me to many queer places which I could not visit with my old horse an' waggon. I must read that book about Peter Pan some day."

Mrs. Nairn enjoyed the scenery along this back-land road. Most of the way was through a thick growth of sturdy birch and maple trees, with here and there a few pines and firs. She wondered about her brother's silence, as he was usually so full of fun and animation.

"What is the matter, Bob?" she at length asked. "You haven't said a word since we started. Did Mr. Acres bewitch you?"

Robert aroused himself and laughed good-naturedly.

"Not at all, Nell. I found him very interesting, and we had quite a chat."

"Ye did!" Peter exclaimed. "What on earth did ye talk about? Money?"

"Ships. Mr. Acres has a fine model of a clipper ship. I was surprised at the number of books he has about the sea, and he knows them by heart. But——."

Robert paused and gazed thoughtfully before him.

"But what?" his sister questioned.

"The man is a mystery to me. He was most affable when we were talking about ships, and I thought the neighbors had misjudged him. But when I had paid him for four weeks' use of his house at Bullet Lake, I asked him if he knew how it had received its name. At once his manner changed and he glared at me most furiously. I realised that I had made a mistake, so was glad to come away. I am certain that the story of his life would reveal something worth while, and I must find out what it is."

"I guess ye'll have some job ahead of ye, Mister," Peter drawled. "If ye kin learn the real history of that man, ye'll be a wonder."

"Has anyone ever tried?"

"Well, we've all done a lot of wonderin', but it ended at that, fer that was as far as we could go."

"But I intend to go deeper than wondering and talking."

"Good luck to ye, then, Mister. But here we are right at the lake."

Bullet House was a snug abode, situated in a small clearing among the trees. Both Mrs. Nairn and Robert were delighted with the place. From the verandah which faced the water, there was an excellent view of the lake and the wooded hills beyond.

"Isn't this glorious!" Robert exclaimed.

"It is, and I wish I could stay here a while with you," his sister replied. "I would then be away from the gossiping tongues which wag about everything I do and say."

"They'd wag all the more, Madam," Peter declared. "What a choice bit of news it would be if you should live here. It would certainly be great fun to hear what folks would say."

"But why should they, Peter? It would be none of their business."

"Maybe not. But they'd make it their business, a'right. An' besides, you are the parson's wife, so you must expect to be talked about."

"Why should you mind what people say, Nell?" Robert queried. "Let them talk if they want to. I know it annoys you. But

that is the penalty of having such an independent spirit. Anyway, I am not going to let wagging tongues interfere with me in this snug retreat. Peter Pan has brought us here, and I am going to enjoy myself."

"But Peter Pan led those children into great dangers, remember. There were pirates, Indians, and that terrible crocodile which swallowed a clock. I hope there will not be such enemies here."

"All I can think about now, Nell, is something to eat. This is the first time in weeks that I have been really hungry. What have you in that basket?"

"Something you like, Bob. An old-fashioned strawberry shortcake. I made two, but left one home for Andrew and the children. I hope they are making out all right. Suppose we have our luncheon right here on the verandah. There must be a small table in the house. While you men are looking for one, I shall unpack the basket."

"What about the tea?" Robert asked. "We'll need a fire to boil some water."

"I have brought a big thermos bottle full of tea, Bob, so there will be plenty for the three of us."

"Good fer you, Madam," Peter shouted. "It takes a woman to think of everything."

A quarter of an hour later they were cosily seated around the table that had been found, and enjoying the good things Mrs. Nairn had prepared.

"This is life," Robert declared, as he helped himself to a sandwich. "I know I shall be well in a few days in a place like this, with nothing to disturb me. Isn't that so, Peter Pan?"

"Don't be too sure, young man. Si Acres might be prowlin' around keepin' an eye upon ye."

"Oh, I'll soon send him about his business. This place is mine for a month, so I won't stand any nonsense from him."

"H'm, ye may think so now, Mister, but ye don't know Si as well as I do. It's not so easy to send him about his business when he gets on the rampage. An' if Si isn't prowlin' around, maybe ye'll have ghosts visitin' ye."

"Ghosts!" Mrs. Nairn exclaimed. "Ghosts here?"

"That's what folks say. They've seen old Tom Rayton an' his wife walkin' around among the trees an' peerin' in through the windows at night. I guess it was only imagination, though. It's wonderful how some people get scared an' see strange sights out in the woods."

"Who was Tom Rayton?" Robert inquired, now keenly interested.

"Oh, he was the man who built this house an' cleared the land. He had quite a farm here at one time, but it's all grown up in trees now. I didn't know him, but the old people have told me that he was a quiet, hard-working man an' minded his own affairs. An' so was his wife. They had one child, an' I have often wondered what became of her. How anyone could shoot a man such as Tom Rayton must have been is beyond me."

Robert leaned eagerly forward, his eyes glowing with animation.

"What! did someone try to shoot him?" he demanded.

"He tried an' did, so I've been told. It was a wild night in the fall, an' the Raytons were settin' right in there before an open fire. Mrs. Rayton had the baby on her lap, an' Tom was seated by her side. Suddenly there was a bang of a gun outside, a bullet tore through the window sash an' struck Tom in the shoulder."

"Go on," Robert ordered, as Peter paused. "What happened next?"

"Well, all I know is that Mrs. Rayton had to go all the way to the shore fer the doctor who lived there."

"Alone!" Mrs. Nairn exclaimed.

"Sure, Madam. Who else was there to go with her? Yes, she went through the darkness an' the rain. It must have been a terrible trip, especially for a woman. Anyway, she got the doctor, an' he did what he could fer Tom. But the poor feller never fully recovered. His arm was always weak, so he couldn't work as well as before."

"But who shot him?" Robert questioned.

Peter shook his head and gazed thoughtfully out over the lake. He then filled and lighted his pipe.

"The one who did the shootin' was never found," he at length explained. "The Raytons didn't have an enemy, so far as anyone could tell, so the whole affair remains a mystery to this day."

"Perhaps the shooting was accidental," Mrs. Nairn suggested. "Someone may have been hunting and fired at a moose."

"Perhaps so, an' that was what many thought. But it was a queer night fer anyone to be huntin'. I could never believe that idea."

"And what happened to the Raytons?"

"What happened? I almost hate to tell ye. That shootin' was just the beginnin' of their troubles. Tom had a friend, a city man, who visited him from time to time to fish in the lake an' to hunt. Well, it seems that the friend got Tom to back his note fer a considerable amount. He then failed in business, so Tom was called upon to make good. He didn't have the money, so his place was sold. That broke Tom down completely, an' he didn't last long after that. He died in less than a year, an' left his wife an' baby alone in this house."

"Who bought the place?" Robert inquired.

"Si Acres, of course. He was the only one in Glengrow who had enough money. An' he made a fortune, too, out of the logs he had cut. Just think of that! An' what good has the money done the old skinflint?"

"What became of Mrs. Rayton and the baby?"

"Si turned them out, an' they went away to the States. What happened to them I never heard."

"And who was Rayton's false friend?"

"Now, let me see. I have heard his name, and I think it was Tray, but am not sure. He went away, too, an' I did hear that he set up in business again, an' did well. But I never saw him. I'm not positive though about his name. 'Tray' doesn't sound just like it. Maybe it was Gray, although I think it began with a T."

"Tray will do very well, Peter, for it suggests the word 'traitor,' and he must have been one, all right. I am going now to have a look at that window. Is the mark of the bullet there yet?"

"It is, an' that is the way this place got its name."

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# CHAPTER VI

## CAUGHT OFF GUARD

About the middle of the afternoon Andrew Nairn was seated at his study desk. It was unusual for him to be in the house at this time of the day, as he was generally visiting throughout his parish. But this morning Hettie had been attacked with a severe headache, so she said, and had to go home. It seemed to Mr. Nairn that her headaches were becoming very common of late. Anyway, it was most annoying to-day when Nell was away, and he would have to stay home to look after the children.

After he had awkwardly prepared dinner for himself, Betty, and John, and washed the dishes, he was quite hot. The study was cool, so instead of putting on his coat and collar he laid them on a chair by his side for immediate use in case a visitor should arrive. He kept his mind upon the children as they raced through the house or played upon the verandah. He could hear their chatter and rippling laughter, so knew they were enjoying themselves. Once he heard them thumping upon the piano and listened as they tried to sing a simple hymn they had learned at Sunday school. The sound was sweet to his ears, and he longed for Nell to be present to hear them.

Gradually he became absorbed in the work before him. This consisted of examining a number of sermons he had prepared and delivered in his parish. He had spent much care and time upon them, and was quite proud of his productions. He knew that they were far beyond the heads of his people, but he was determined not to preach down to them, but to lift them up to his level. Often, however, he longed for a congregation that would appreciate his ability and scholarly sermons. If he were only in a city church what a pleasure it would be. The first opportunity had come when he had preached at St. Alban's. It had been a red-letter day to him, and he believed that he had made a favorable impression, so he had a strong hope of being elected. This afternoon he began to examine his best sermons and to arrange them in the order he would deliver them should he be chosen for St. Alban's. He dwelt fondly upon several, such as *Religion and Science*, *The Quest for Truth*, and *Reality and the World's Needs*. He was firmly convinced that they would make a greater appeal to intellectual minds than light and homely sermons.

Time sped swiftly by as he sat there. He had not forgotten the children, and occasionally he lifted his head to listen to their voices, and then satisfied that they were all right, he turned his attention again to the task before him.

He had almost finished revising the last sermon when the study door was flung suddenly open, and Betty danced into the room, her face beaming with animation.

"Daddy! Daddy!" she cried. "Here's a visitor to see you. I'm bringing her in."

Mr. Nairn rose quickly to his feet and reached for his coat and collar. This was a most embarrassing situation, as he had never expected anyone to catch him off guard in his study. But here was a woman right at the door. Without looking to see who she was, he struggled to put on his collar. But his fingers fumbled, a collar button fell to the floor and rolled around the desk. Dropping upon his hands and knees, he began a frantic search, and after he had found the button, he regained his feet, struggled into his coat, became confused and thrust his right arm into the left sleeve.

And while the Reverend Andrew Nairn was thus performing these desperate antics, Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge stood in the doorway, with John close behind. An expression of triumph lighted up her face as she watched the scene before her. So this was the Rector of Glengrow! How she longed for the members of St. Alban's to behold their Angel Gabriel in his study. But they should know about him just as soon as she could get a letter to her dear friend, Mrs. Casham. Imagine such a man as rector of a fashionable city church, collarless and coatless when a visitor called! Why, the church would be scandalized and the laughing-stock of the town. It would never do to have such a careless man as rector. She was pleased beyond measure, and as she stood triumphantly there she seemed like a cat watching a mouse which she had hypnotized.

When his struggles with the coat and collar were at last ended, Mr. Nairn straightened himself up and looked towards the door. His embarrassment at once increased when he beheld Mrs. Rockbridge standing before him. He recognized her, and knew her as one of the most influential members of St. Alban's. It was certainly most humiliating to be found in such an awkward predicament. It was the first time in his ministry that he had been so caught when a visitor arrived. He was greatly annoyed, and his face flushed.

All this was very gratifying to Mrs. Rockbridge. She could not have arrived at a more opportune time for her purpose. She could afford to smile in a most engaging manner as she advanced and held out her hand.

"I hope you will forgive me, Mr. Nairn, for my abrupt entrance. But I could not resist the invitation of this sweet maiden. What charming children you have, and how proud you must be of them."

Besides being angry at Betty and John for ushering the visitor into the study, the clergyman was ashamed of their grimy faces and dirty clothes. They looked more like waifs of the gutter than the clean, neat tots they had been that morning. And to think that Mrs. Rockbridge, of all women, should behold them in such a condition!

"I am sorry you have caught me off guard," he at length found voice to say. "The fact is, Mrs. Nairn is away from home to-day, and our maid had to go home on account of a headache, so I have been forced to keep house. I hope you will excuse me. Please sit down. But, no, not here in this disorderly place. The sitting-room will be better."

"You need not apologize," Mrs. Rockbridge gurgled. "A parson's study is his workshop, and what does it matter so long as he produces sermons such as you gave at St. Alban's when you were there. They were wonderful, and everyone has been speaking about them."

Quite pleased at this flattery, the clergyman felt greatly relieved as he led the way into the adjoining room. He longed to hear her speak more about his sermons. She had evidently forgotten the awkward predicament in which she had caught him. People of high social standing could easily overlook such an incident as that, he imagined.

But as he entered the sitting-room he received another shock, for the place was in great disorder. Books and sheets of music were scattered about the floor, chairs were upturned, and crusts of bread were lying upon the centre-table.

"The children!" he gasped. "They were playing in here this afternoon, but I had no idea they were up to such mischief. I thought they were playing Sunday school."

"And so we were, Daddy," Betty explained. "I was the teacher and John was the children. We had great fun."

"You evidently did, my dear," her father replied in a gentle voice. He was regaining his composure now and remembered the sweet voices to which he had listened so attentively. "I hope you will excuse this," he added turning to the visitor. "It was all my fault. I should have paid more attention to the children."

"It is only natural for the little darlings to enjoy themselves," Mrs. Rockbridge smilingly replied. "I love children, and their quaint ways are so charming. We cannot expect them to be quiet and orderly like grown-up people."

"I am glad you understand children, Mrs. Rockbridge. Some women do. But it shows how helpless a man is when his wife is away. Now, if Mrs. Nairn had been at home this would not have happened. Will you please sit down and rest, that is, if you can find an upright chair."

Mrs. Rockbridge beamed good-naturedly. She could afford to be pleasant after such interesting incidents which would go a long way towards furthering her designs.

"I must not stay long," she declared as she seated herself in the only available chair in the room, while the clergyman sat down upon the piano stool. "I came merely to find out the hour of service in your church next Sunday. I could learn nothing at the hotel. I am afraid the people there are not church-goers."

Mr. Nairn's eyebrows lifted a little as he looked keenly at the woman.

"That is strange," he replied, "for I have several service notices tacked up in prominent places in the hotel."

"I didn't see them," Mrs. Rockbridge lied. She was feeling somewhat embarrassed now, an unusual thing for her.

"And some of my people are working at the hotel," the clergyman continued. "You might have inquired from them."

"I am not in the habit, sir, of asking servants questions."

"Oh, I see." A slight smile lurked about the corners of Mr. Nairn's mouth. "But the young man in charge of the office is one of my most faithful church members. He could have told you."

As Mrs. Rockbridge now became visibly confused, Mr. Nairn knew that she had been lying, and he became suspicious of her visit. Suddenly an idea flashed into his mind which caused him to understand the meaning of her abrupt entrance into his study. She had come under the pretext of learning about the hour of service that she might spy upon him and his household affairs. As a prominent member of St. Alban's she had either been sent by the church or she had come upon her own responsibility. He then remembered that she had a nephew who was a candidate for the rectorship of the church. Yes, it was as clear to him as day, and he was thankful that his eyes had been opened to the real object of her visit. She had caught him off guard, but henceforth he would be on his watch against her. He noticed that she averted her eyes from his, and that looked suspicious. He not only suspected her of hypocrisy, but he was beginning to dislike her, as well. The idea of a woman entering his house as a spy was repugnant to his nature.

Rising to his feet, he went into the study. When he returned a minute later, he had a paper in his hand.

"This is the list of my services," he explained. "You might like to have it."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Nairn. But do you hold services in six places?" Mrs. Rockbridge asked as she looked at the paper. "How do you manage to do so much?"

"I have three services every Sunday, besides Sunday school in two places."

"My! my! how busy you must be. And does your wife go with you on all your rounds?"

"As often as she can, especially when I go to places where there are no organists."

"But doesn't she get very tired?"

"Sometimes. But she enjoys playing at the services, and she generally has short practices afterwards. In this way we are building up several creditable country choirs."

"How grand!" Mrs. Rockbridge exclaimed, although inwardly she was disappointed. Mrs. Nairn must be a remarkable woman, and the idea was not altogether to her liking. "But does not your wife become tired of country people and rural ways. Does she not long for more congenial life?"

"Not at all. Mrs. Nairn was brought up in the country, and is very fond of it."

"That makes a great difference, then."

Mrs. Rockbridge's face brightened, for this was agreeable news to her. A woman brought up in the country would never suit as the wife of the Rector of St. Alban's. She would know little or nothing about high social life, and would, therefore, not understand how to conduct herself properly among fashionable people.

Mr. Nairn truly surmised her thoughts. He was perfectly at ease now, and all his embarrassment had disappeared. He waited a little before giving what he believed would completely confound this impudent woman. His was the pleasure of anticipation.

"Yes, my wife lived in the country until she went to college," he at length quietly explained. "After her graduation she travelled and studied for two years in Europe. She saw much of fashionable life in some of the large cities, and found it so shallow and artificial that she longed for the quietness of the country. It was a great relief to her when we came to this parish."

While thus speaking the clergyman had been closely watching his visitor. What he saw satisfied him. Her narrowed eyes told plainly her disappointment. She had evidently not expected to find such a woman in the wife of the Rector of Glengrow. But Mrs. Rockbridge was well versed in the art of dissimulation. She smiled sweetly as she rose to her feet and held out her soft plump hand.

"I am looking forward to meeting your wife, Mr. Nairn. I hope to see her often during my short stay here."

"We expect to call upon you," the clergyman replied. "We always call upon guests at the hotel who belong to our Church."

Whether this was intended as a rebuke Mrs. Rockbridge was not certain. Anyway, she was a very angry woman as she

left the house and walked down the gravel path to the main road. She had been guilty of a serious breach of etiquette in calling first at the rectory. She knew that such a thing would not be tolerated among her set in the city. Such action would have placed the stamp of inferiority upon any newcomer at once. But she had imagined that such a custom was unknown in the country, so she could do as she pleased, and none would know the difference. But she realised now that this was not so. Mr. and Mrs. Nairn evidently knew what was proper, so that was one of the things which troubled her.

Mrs. Rockbridge was in no pleasant frame of mind as she made her way back to the hotel. She found some relief to her feelings, however, in the letter she wrote that night to her dear friend, Mrs. Sylvester Casham. She said nothing about her own indiscretions, but enlarged upon the rector's appearance in the study, the dirty children, and the disorderly condition of the house.

"A woman, no matter how well educated she may be, who will neglect her house and race over the country is not a fit person to be the wife of the Rector of St. Alban's, even though he is the Angel Gabriel, which Mr. Nairn is certainly not. But I shall remain here for a while and find out all I can."

Such were the closing words of the letter to her dear friend. Anyone acquainted with Mrs. Rockbridge knew that she would go to almost any length in order to further whatever design she had in her mind.

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# CHAPTER VII

## STARTLING NEWS

The two old henchmen of Silas Acres' household were as opposite as two human beings could possibly be. Billy Stubbles was talkative, small, and quick of foot. He was interested in everything, and a great news-gatherer. He liked the company of men, and a hot argument brought the glow of satisfaction to his wrinkled, clean-shaven face. He was liked by everyone in the parish, and whenever the young people met together for a dance it was Billy who supplied the music upon his old violin. He had a mouth-organ, as well, and this he always carried with him, and played it even in the field while resting at times under the shade of a tree. "Music is the language of heaven," he often told his fellow workman, Nathan Brown. "But sad to say, Nathan, some have no ears to hear it, an' that is the trouble with you." This was certainly true, and it annoyed Nathan to hear Billy talk about music as the language of heaven. To him the violin was the devil's instrument, and the mouth-organ was almost as bad. He was a tall, large, sober-faced man. He seldom smiled, and he looked with sad, reproachful eyes upon the gay and wicked world. To him the Bible contained the only language of heaven. He read and studied it regularly. He was a staunch Baptist in belief, while Billy was an ardent member of the Church of England. Fierce were the arguments they often held while working in the fields, and sometimes during the evenings, especially in winter. As Nathan knew his Bible almost by heart, he could quote book, chapter, and verse to support his claim. Billy, on the other hand, always fell back upon the Prayer Book, and what the Church taught. They were both mighty champions in defense of what they believed, and often their work suffered while they engaged in some heated discussion.

And in politics they were also opposed to each other. Nathan was a Liberal, and Billy a Conservative. Each read the paper which favored his own side, and denounced the other as a "lying sheet" not fit to enter any decent house. But for all this, they were fond of each other, and their fierce arguments amounted to nothing more than words. In such battles they found considerable pleasure, and if parted for a day they were anxious to be together once more to begin their wrangling all over again.

In one thing, however, they were united, and that was in their unswerving loyalty to Silas Acres. So long had they been with him that they formed an integral part of the place. They also knew that not a word must be said in the parish about what went on in the Acres' household. This was a law which had never been broken. News came into the house, and all were eager to hear the latest about the affairs in Glengrow, and what the neighbors were saying and doing. But not a word leaked out beyond the borders of Silas Acres' farm. This annoyed the people of the parish. They had long since given up questioning Billy and Nathan when they met them at the store, the post-office, or at church.

Silas Acres reigned supreme in his little kingdom. Here with his two workmen and his faithful housekeeper, Rachel, he laid aside the stern mask of scorn and contrariness which he presented to the outside world and became an agreeable companion most of the time. But his word was law, and his servants knew it. Although he talked freely with them when he felt so inclined, they were really never familiar with him. There was something about him which they could not understand. This was chiefly his silent moods when sometimes for days he would have little to say, and seemed completely lost to what was going on around him. He ate and moved like a man in a dream, and on such occasions there was always a peculiar expression in his eyes.

Such was his manner after supper one evening as he sat at the table with Nathan on his right and Billy on his left. There was an abundance of well-prepared food, for Rachel was an excellent cook. Whatever Mr. Acres might be to others he was never mean in his own house. "Good food, and plenty of it," was his motto. He himself was generally a hearty eater, and he liked his men to be well fed. But this evening he ate very little, and seemed to pay no attention to the discussion in which Billy and Nathan were engaged. They were not as fierce as usual, and several times they glanced at the grim, silent man at the head of the table. That something out of the ordinary was disturbing him they were well aware, but what it was they had no idea.

When Billy and Nathan were at last through with their supper, they pushed back their chairs and were about to leave the table, when Mr. Acres stirred to life and motioned them to remain.

"Light your pipe, Billy, and I shall do the same. Nathan can stand the smoke for a while, I guess."

When their pipes were drawing to their satisfaction, Mr. Acres looked keenly at Billy.

"You were at the store to-day. Any news?"

A smile overspread the little man's wrinkled face, and his eyes brightened. He had been eagerly awaiting this question, for he did have special news to impart.

"Yes, Si, I heard something important this afternoon. The whole parish is up in arms against Mrs. Nairn."

He glanced at his master and felt quite satisfied at the effect of this announcement.

"Against Mrs. Nairn!" Mr. Acres exclaimed. "Why is that?"

"Because of what she said about the people in this parish, and about you."

"About me! Explain what you mean."

"Well, Si, it started the mornin' you visited the rectory. After you had left, Mrs. Nairn told the parson that she liked you because you are not a hypocrite like most people in Glengrow."

Mr. Acres' eyes opened wide in amazement, and even Nathan was impressed.

"Why does she like me, Billy?"

"Because you are honest about not givin' to Missions. Others feel the same as you do, but they only give because they are afraid of what people might say. You have the courage of your convictions, while others have not. That's what Mrs. Nairn said."

"Well, well! But how did the people hear about it?"

"Oh, Hettie heard her. She was listenin' at the door, an' she told her mother. The news soon got around."

"I see, I see," Mr. Acres mused. "So Hettie started it, eh? The hussy! She should be whipped. Did she tell anything more?"

"Sure she did. She told about the money you demanded back. It's been a sweet morsel to all the gossips."

"I suppose so. What would folks do if they didn't have someone to talk about? They've had me for a long time, and now Mrs. Nairn is their new victim."

"Oh, they've been gossiping about her ever since she came to the parish," Nathan growled. "She's a good woman, and that's the trouble. She's kind and pleasant to everyone, and doesn't put on any airs. She's an exceptional woman, even though she does belong to the wrong Church."

Billy suddenly bristled for fight, but Mr. Acres motioned him with his hand to be quiet.

"She must be quite exceptional if she likes me," he quietly remarked. "So she called the people of Glengrow hypocrites, did she? Good for her! I like her pluck. Any more news?"

"Nothin' of much importance except that Peter's visitor has arrived."

"Who is she?"

"I didn't hear her name. She only came last night. Peter has fixed up his old store-room for her. She is an artist, an' wants to live by herself."

Mr. Acres raised his right hand, as was his custom when dismissing his men.

"That will do, boys. You may go back to your work now, and get the chores done. See that the bars are put up so the cows can't get out."

When the men had departed, Mr. Acres remained at the table lost in thought, and drawing steadily at his pipe. Rachel cleared away the dishes and began to wash them. Several times she glanced into the dining-room at the silent man and wondered what he was thinking about. Rachel Stockford was a woman well past middle age, whose back was bowed

from long years of toil. Her hair was white, and her face bore marks of mental suffering. Her eyes contained an almost hopeless expression, and she worked more like a machine than a human being. She had been housekeeper here for many years, and had faithfully and patiently performed her various duties. No woman ever came to see her, and she seldom left the farm except for a rare visit to the store or the post-office. But she had been over to the Pendle's that afternoon, and this Mr. Acres knew.

"Rachel," he called, looking towards the kitchen. "Come here."

"What is it, sir?" she asked coming towards him with the dishcloth in her hand.

"How is your rheumatism, Rachel?"

"Very bad, sir. My right shoulder troubles me all the time."

"And so you've decided to try Peter Pendle's Panacea?"

Rachel gave a slight start, and a flush overspread her face.

"Who told you that, sir?"

Mr. Acres smiled as he tapped the table with the fingers of his right hand.

"Never mind who told me, Rachel. But I know, all right. Have you any faith in Peter's Panacea?"

"I hardly know, sir. But I have read those big letters on Peter's van so often that I cannot get them out of my mind. 'Peter Pendle's Panacea' has been running through my head day and night until at last I decided to try it. Anything else has failed to give me any relief."

"And so will this fail, Rachel. Peter is a hum-bug, and so is his Panacea. But he is a good fellow, for all that, and the only real man in Glengrow. And his wife is a worthy woman, and minds her own business, which is more than most of the women here do. They have a visitor, I hear, and she is living in the store-room Peter has fixed up. Did you meet her?"

"I did. She invited me in, and was very agreeable. She is one of the most charming girls I have ever met."

"So she is young? How old do you think?"

"I cannot say for sure, though I should judge she is about nineteen or twenty."

"And what does she intend to do here?"

"Paint pictures, so she said. And she asked me to bring a message to you."

"To me! Who told her about me?"

"Peter and his wife, I suppose. She wants your permission to use Bullet Lake and House. She is very much interested in them, and hopes to get some very fine pictures there. She is quite willing to rent the place for a few weeks."

Mr. Acres laid his pipe upon the table and looked keenly at his housekeeper.

"What does she know about that place?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Why didn't she come to see me herself?"

"She didn't say. But I wish she would come, for I am sure you would like her. No one could help it, for she is so beautiful and bubbling over with life."

"Is that so? Well, if she does much bubbling in this parish she'll have the gossiping tongues wagging in no time."

"I don't think she would mind one bit, sir. She seems mighty independent and well able to take care of herself."

"She'll have use for all the spirit she's got, then. But she'll have to find something else to paint as I have already rented

Bullet House and Lake."

"She knows that, for Peter told her. But she only wants permission to go to the lake and paint things. She doesn't want to live in the house."

"That makes no difference. I have rented the place to Mr. Rutledge, so she will have to see him. And, by the way, Rachel, what is this charming damsel's name?"

"Miss Joan Rowland, sir."

Rachel was staring at some crumbs lying upon the table which she had overlooked, so did not see the startled expression that came into Mr. Acres' eyes. Neither did she notice how erect he was sitting. Presently his whole body began to tremble, and he clutched the edge of the table to control his shaking hands.

"Some wine, Rachel. Quick," he gasped.

Glancing at her master, and alarmed by his appearance, the woman hurried out of the room. In another minute she was back with a glass of wine which Mr. Acres seized with a trembling hand and drained it to the last drop.

"Thanks, Rachel. I feel better now. You may go. I wish to be alone for a while."

"Suppose you lie down on the sofa, sir," the woman suggested.

"No, no. I'm all right now. It was only a weak spell. And, Rachel."

"Yes, sir."

"Did Peter say anything about Mr. Rutledge?"

"Not much. He took him and Mrs. Nairn to Bullet Lake yesterday afternoon."

"Did he say what Mr. Rutledge intends to do out there?"

"He hopes to do some writing."

"What about?"

"I don't know for sure, but from what Peter said he is anxious to find out something about Bullet House, and how it got its name. He thinks there must be a thrilling story connected with it. He was greatly interested in a bullet hole in the window sash. That is all Peter told me."

"That is quite enough, Rachel. You may go now."

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# CHAPTER VIII

## ANXIETY

For some time Mr. Acres sat at the table staring straight before him. Rachel moved quietly about the kitchen, keeping all the while a watchful eye upon her master. His fainting spell worried her, as this was the first time she had ever known one to come upon him. He should see the doctor, she believed, although she knew he would be angry if she even suggested such a thing. He meant a great deal to her, for should he die, she would be homeless. The Poor House would be her only refuge, and she trembled as she thought of it.

When Mr. Acres at length rose from the table and went upstairs, Rachel felt seriously alarmed. This was a most unusual thing for him to do, as he always spent the evening strolling about the farm, examining everything, to find out if Billy and Nathan had done their work thoroughly. Even in winter he never went to his room until bedtime, but spent the evening before a large open fire smoking, and reading one of his books about the sea, ships, and captains. It was but natural, therefore, that when he departed from his ordinary custom she should be greatly disturbed.

Waiting until Mr. Acres had entered his room and closed the door, she went out into the milk-room at the back of the house. The men were already there with their pails of milk for the separator. They were too much engaged in a heated discussion to notice that Rachel was late, as she was generally there ahead of them, and had everything ready.

"You can't prove from the Bible that dancin' is wrong," Billy was saying as the housekeeper arrived. "But it does tell us to praise the Lord in the dance."

"In what book is that?" Nathan demanded. "Name the chapter and verse."

"Well, I can't off-hand," Billy confessed, scratching his head in perplexity. "But I have heard it read in church, so it must be all right."

"So that is what you hear in church, eh?" Nathan sneered. "I wouldn't go to a church which teaches that dancing is praising the Lord. Now, what I hear when I go is that the wicked shall be turned into hell."

"But what has that to do with dancin'? Ye can't prove that the ones who dance are more wicked than them who don't."

"But they are."

"How d'ye know that?"

"By their fruits ye shall know them. That's what the Bible says."

Before Billy could make any further reply, Rachel appeared. His face brightened.

"You're just in time, Rachel. You can settle this question between Nathan an' me. Is it wrong to dance? Nathan says it is, an' I say it isn't. Can you tell me the place in the Bible where it says we are to praise the Lord in the dance?"

Rachel, with arms akimbo, looked scornfully at the two men. Their eyes dropped before her steady gaze, and they shuffled somewhat uneasily.

"You big babies!" she reproved. "Why, you should be thoroughly ashamed of yourselves. You are always quarrelling over something. For pity's sake, don't be so silly. Men as old as you are should know better, as I have often told you before."

"But we get great fun out of it," Billy declared with twinkling eyes. "I do it fer Nathan's good. He would never read the Bible except to find some text to floor me in an argument."

"You're wrong," Nathan growled. "I read the Bible for the good of my soul. I'm sorry you don't do the same, for you need the medicine of Holy Scripture if any man ever did. I—"

"There, stop that," Rachel sternly ordered. "I want to speak to you about master. I am afraid he's ill."

These words produced a disturbing effect upon the two men, and at once they lost all interest in their argument about

dancing.

"When did he take sick?" Billy asked. "He was all right when we left him, wasn't he, Nathan?"

Nathan merely nodded his assent.

"No he wasn't," Rachel declared. "He ate very little, and seemed worried over something."

"So he did," Billy agreed, fumbling in his pocket for his pipe and tobacco. "He was interested, though, in the news I gave him."

"And he was curious, too, about Peter's boarder, and asked me several questions about her. It was just after I told him her name that he took his weak spell."

"Well, that's queer. I wonder—"

He suddenly stopped, and instead of lighting his pipe, he thrust it back into his pocket, and brought forth his mouth-organ upon which he began to play an old familiar air.

"I can always think better when I'm makin' music," he had often said.

"Then, it's more than anyone else can do," Nathan had always retorted. "I don't see how you can call the noise you make music."

But Billy never cared what anyone said, so lost was he to all outward things when he was giving expression to his feelings upon one of his beloved instruments. And so as he played now he paid no attention to what his companions were saying. Neither did the roar of the separator which started a few minutes later under Nathan's powerful arms, disturb him in the least.

In the meantime, Mr. Acres was seated before his desk near the bedroom window which faced the main highway. From here a clear view could be obtained of the hotel in the distance, the rectory, and a large stretch of river to the right. And near the shore was his little yacht, riding calmly at anchor. He was not looking at them now, however, but at Peter Pendle's house, especially at the freshly-painted part aglow with the light of the declining sun. It fascinated him as he sat there with his right arm resting upon his old oak desk. There was no fierceness in his eyes now such as he presented to the world. Instead, there was a gentle expression, almost of longing. It was quite evident that he was deeply moved, for his hands were clenched hard together, and his body was erect and rigid. The rich scent of clover drifted in through the open window, and he heard the faint strains of Billy's mouth-organ. He recognized the old tune, *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, and it affected him keenly as he listened with strained attention. He had not heard it for long years, and he wondered why Billy was playing it now. This was followed by *Auld Lang Syne*, and as the last notes faded on the calm air, Mr. Acres lowered his arm from the table and pushed back his chair. Rising to his feet, he crossed the room and locked the door. Returning to the window, he drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, and selecting one, he opened the middle drawer of his desk. With a hand that slightly trembled, he lifted out a package of papers, neatly arranged, and securely fastened with elastic bands. There were similar packages in the drawer upon which he looked but did not touch. He evidently had use for only one now, and he gazed upon it for some time. This was merely a number of faded cancelled bank cheques. The top one alone was visible, made payable to the order of Lucy Rayton, and signed by the Golden Trust Company. A wan smile overspread Mr. Acres' face, and he sighed. Again he looked out of the window off towards the house from which the glow of evening had faded.

"So fade life's joys," he whispered. "Fleeting as the sinking sun, and leaving behind nothing but darkness, loneliness, and despair."

He ceased and remained lost in thought. Again his lips moved.

"I may be mistaken. The name may be only a coincident. If I could see her face, I think I should know the truth. I might take the message to her myself. But, no, Billy had better go. I do not feel equal for such a thing. I shall write a note instead."

Picking up a pen he wrote a few lines upon a sheet of paper. This he carefully folded, placed it in an envelope and addressed it to Miss Joan Rowland. He gazed at it for a while, and then rose to his feet. He moved towards the door, but

stopped half way as if undecided what to do.

"Yes, Billy could take this," he muttered. "But what good would that do? I want to see the girl. I must go myself. I want to find out for certain, and to-night."

He left the room and began to descend the stairs. When part way down he changed his mind, stopped and then slowly retraced his steps. Silas Acres was undergoing a severe mental struggle. If anyone had been watching his actions he would have been surprised, if not amused. But to this old man there was nothing amusing in what he was doing. It was one of the most important events in his life, a crisis, so he believed, which might mean a great deal to him. Perhaps it would be the end of a strange undertaking, or only another of the many links in a chain, the first of which had been formed years before. If the latter, he would then be satisfied. Hitherto he had been content to wait and hope. But now he felt that he could endure no longer. He could not let another night pass without learning the truth. The suspense would be too hard to endure.

Resolutely now he again descended the stairs, picked up his hat and stout walking-stick, and left the house by the front door. He glanced somewhat nervously around lest Rachel or the men might be watching. Seeing and hearing nothing of them, he walked towards the gate, which he cautiously opened to prevent its creaking upon its rusty hinges. Then up the road he moved, striking the ground heavily with his stick as he advanced. He was now the Silas Acres his neighbors knew. The mask was once more upon his face with which he confronted the world, not to be removed until he had returned to the shelter of his own abode.

The sun had gone down, and the long twilight was steadily deepening as he drew near Peter Pendle's house. To his surprise he saw no one about the place, although the doors were open, telling plainly that Peter and his wife were not far away. But it was upon the newly-painted part that he looked, expecting to find Miss Rowland there. He reached the door and rapped with his stick upon the right hand casing. Receiving no response, he looked inside and noticed the neatness and cosiness of the room. Pictures without frames adorned the walls, one of which was that of a noble clipper ship under full sail, which brought a glow of pleasure to his eyes. The room was scantily furnished with a few chairs, and a centre-table upon which was a vase filled with fresh wild flowers. All these he observed at a glance. He then stepped back and looked around. Seeing a rustic chair beneath a big maple tree a short distance away, he decided to rest there a while and wait. Surely some one would come shortly.

And it was there that Joan Rowland found him, as she was returning from the rectory where she had taken Betty and John after a glorious romp in the grass. She stopped and stared at the man seated under the tree, and leaning forward with both hands resting heavily upon his stick which was firmly planted upon the ground. Perhaps he was a tramp! He looked like one, anyway, with his ragged beard, old felt hat, and worn clothes.

She was about to advance to ask him what he wanted, when Mr. Acres lifted his head and saw her. And truly Joan Rowland was worth looking at. Young, buoyant, and cheeks flushed by her exercise with the children she seemed to the staring man the very embodiment of grace and beauty. But as he rose to meet her his eyes searched for more than youthful charm. He was looking for the reflection, no matter how faint, of one whose image was enshrined in the secret and holy place of his heart.

Startled by the strange piercing expression in the man's eyes, Joan hesitated and drew back a little. Seeing this, Mr. Acres smiled grimly.

"Excuse me," he began. "Are you Miss Joan Rowland?"

"I am, sir. What can I do for you?"

"Take this," and he held out the letter. "You want the use of Bullet Lake and House. This letter will explain everything."

"Oh, you are Mr. Acres," Joan replied. "Won't you come in? Mr. and Mrs. Pendle will be home soon."

For a few seconds the man stood gazing at the animated face before him. He then slowly shook his head.

"Not now, Miss. Not now. Some other time, maybe."

Without another word he turned and walked slowly away, leaving the girl staring wonderingly after him. Then an expression of anger flashed into her eyes.

"So that is Silas Acres! And I was civil to him!"

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# CHAPTER IX

## AN ACCIDENT

Mrs. Rockbridge was not satisfied with her visit to Glengrow. The fact that Mrs. Nairn was a graduate of a University of high standing, that she had travelled extensively in Europe, and had attended a number of large social functions in some of the great cities made Mrs. Rockbridge's undertaking all the more difficult. So far she had only the condition of the rectory as an off-set. She was well aware, however, that such a state of affairs might happen in any family where children were left alone for a while. No, people would need far more than that to change their minds and turn them against the Rector of Glengrow and his wife.

Puzzled, as well as annoyed, she was wondering what to do next when she was summoned back to the city. As president of the Go-Ahead Club she was needed at a luncheon to be given to Miss Ramona Blemfield, the noted authoress and lecturer who was visiting Pretensia. It was necessary that the president should attend to welcome the famous guest. That her presence was needed was very gratifying to Mrs. Rockbridge. It showed that no one else was capable of performing the duties of such an important occasion. She had little time to prepare an address of welcome. But this did not worry her in the least. She believed that she was able to speak in an entertaining and intelligent manner at a moment's notice.

The luncheon was a brilliant affair, with the leading women of Pretensia present. Mrs. Rockbridge glowed with pride, and her eyes beamed goodwill as she talked affably to the guest of honor on her right.

"This is your first visit to this country, Miss Blemfield, I believe."

"It is, and I am delighted with everything I have seen, and the hospitality I have received. But I was well prepared for this, as several years ago I travelled in Europe with one of your charming girls. She told me so much about this wonderful country, that ever since I have been eager to visit it, but never had the opportunity until this year. I long to meet my friend again, but have no idea where she is. We corresponded for some time, but owing to my wandering life I lost track of her. In her last letter to me she said that she was about to be married to a clergyman, but I have forgotten his name. I am so sorry that our correspondence ceased, but it was my fault. I should dearly love to see Nell Rutledge again, for I always think of her by that name. I suppose you have never met her? But that is hardly likely, as this is such a vast country."

"No, I never met her," was the only reply that Mrs. Rockbridge made. She showed no concern, but tactfully changed the subject to Miss Blemfield's writings. But her heart was full of bitterness and anger. She was well aware that Nell Rutledge was Mrs. Nairn, wife of the Rector of Glengrow, and this thought was hard for her to endure. When she at length rose to speak she was ill at ease, and her words were halting. Her fluency of expression had vanished, and all in the room wondered what was the matter with their president. She made a desperate effort to rally her forces, but all in vain. She said a few ineffective words, and groped wildly in her mind for something of importance to say. She was compelled to end abruptly, and merely introduced the guest as "Our distinguished visitor of whom we have heard so much."

When the luncheon was over, Mrs. Rockbridge hastened to the office of the *Daily Echo*, and gave her husband a very bad half hour. She told him what Miss Blemfield had said about her acquaintance with Nell Rutledge in Europe and of her regret at losing track of her.

"I am certain that she is Mrs. Nairn, wife of the Rector of Glengrow, and don't you dare to say anything about her in the paper."

"It will be a pity to leave such an important item out, my dear. It would bring credit upon our—"

"I won't have it," and Mrs. Rockbridge stamped her foot in rage. "You know what that would mean to the people of St. Alban's. Why, it would make them all the more eager to elect Mr. Nairn. If you put anything about what I have told you into the paper you will regret it."

Mr. Rockbridge knew only too well, so meekly submitted. He breathed a sigh of relief when his wife had departed and he was left in peace. But he remained lost in thought, and his eyes bore a worried expression.

"Have I come to this!" he murmured. "That woman rules me soul and body. She is becoming more overbearing every day, and there is only one way I could curb her. If she knew what I know, it might have some effect, but I have not the courage to tell her."

He sighed as he turned to his desk and continued his work.

In the meantime Mrs. Rockbridge was speeding recklessly on her way to Glengrow. She was an erratic driver, and several times she had barely escaped serious accidents with other cars. But she was such a headstrong woman that she did not blame herself in the least. She seemed to think that the road belonged to her, and that all drivers should give her the right of way. And they generally did, glad to escape without harm from such a whirlwind of a woman. In fact, several letters of complaint had reached the office of the *Daily Echo*, but they had never been published. The Editor saw to that.

Mrs. Rockbridge was also reckless at sharp turns in the road, and took them at times with such speed that those who happened to be watching gasped with horror. This evening, however, she did it once too often at a place in Glengrow where the road was narrow. Coming to a sharp turn, she did not slow up until quite near. Realising her danger, she applied the brakes with all her strength. She was too late, for the car left the road, plunged into a thicket of hazel bushes and turned over on its side.

At this moment Jim Broadbent was eating his supper in his house nearby. Hearing the crash, he rushed out to see what had happened, followed by his wife and children. He had just extricated Mrs. Rockbridge from the car and was placing her upon the grass when Peter Pendle drove up.

"Hello, what's the matter?" he inquired.

"A fool of a woman," Jim growled. "I expected something like this. Give me a hand."

Peter climbed out of his car, crossed the road, and looked down at the unconscious woman.

"H'm! Mrs. Gusty Rockbridge, eh? She passed me like a whirlwind a few minutes ago. Is she dead?"

"I don't think so. Just a faint."

"Is that it? Well, I'll soon bring her out of that."

Going to his van, Peter returned a minute later with a bottle in his hand.

"This'll bring her to, if anything will," he declared as he drew out the cork and applied some of the liquid to the woman's forehead. He then held the bottle to her nose. Mrs. Rockbridge stirred, gasped, groaned, opened her eyes and sat suddenly up.

"Where am I? What has happened?"

"Yer right here on the ground, an' yer car is restin' comfortably over there," Peter replied.

"But what are you doing with that bottle? Are you robbers, trying to poison me?"

"Do we look like robbers, Madam? Maybe ye've mistaken us fer devils. But they didn't get ye this time. We are honest men, tryin' to help a woman in trouble. This is merely Peter Pendle's Panacea which will cure anything from a spavined hoss to a faintin' female."

Mrs. Rockbridge stared at her car, and then struggled to her feet.

"Why don't you get my car out of that?" she demanded. "And why do you permit such a bad turn as that in this road. It's a regular death-trap."

"It is, Madam, an' it's a wonder yer not now in the celestial city—or somewhere else," he added after a short pause.

"What do you mean? That I might have been killed?"

"Well, it looks that way. You can't expect to travel like a whirlwind on this road an' get off with it, let me tell ye that."

"But I wasn't travelling fast. How dare you say that I was?"

"There's the evidence, Madam," and Peter pointed to the car. "That thing couldn't stand the pace, 'specially round this curve, so it took to the bushes. Now, it might have hit that tree there, just a few feet away. But it had some sense, even though its driver didn't."

"Do you dare to insult me?" Mrs. Rockbridge demanded. "Do you know who I am?"

"Oh, yes, I know, a'right. But it doesn't make any difference to me whether yer Mrs. Gusty Rockbridge or the King of England. I'm only speakin' fer yer good. But, there, you'd better go into the house while we get the car out that mess. Come, Jim, let's get busy."

Mrs. Broadbent now came forward.

"Yes, come with me," she invited. "You need a rest."

Reluctantly Mrs. Rockbridge allowed herself to be led away from the road. She walked unsteadily and was very glad to lie down upon the sofa in the sitting-room when she reached the house. Mrs. Broadbent brought her a cup of hot tea, and urged her to drink.

"You'll be all right in a few minutes," she comforted. "I am so thankful you were not killed or seriously injured. That is a bad turn and several accidents have happened there."

"It is a terrible place," Mrs. Rockbridge replied. "The government should not allow it. I shall get my husband to write a strong article about it, an editorial, perhaps."

"The road is to be repaired, I believe," Mrs. Broadbent explained. "The surveyors have been over it, and work will begin this summer. Now, won't you have something to eat? I have some nice fresh rolls. Let me bring you one, and a little jelly which I made myself."

"No, thanks. I am not hungry. How could I eat after that terrible experience! Are these your children?" she languidly asked, noticing for the first time a boy and a girl standing in the doorway.

"They are," Mrs. Broadbent proudly acknowledged.

"They go to school, I suppose?"

"They go regularly during school term, but they are having their holidays now."

"And they go to Sunday school?"

"They always have, but it is hardly likely they will go any more."

"Why? Is the Sunday school closed too?"

"Oh, no. It's because of Mrs. Nairn, the parson's wife."

These words aroused the reclining woman, and a new interest appeared in her eyes.

"What about Mrs. Nairn? Has she offended them in any way?"

"No, I can't say that. But she has offended us, and that is just the same."

"What has she done?"

"It isn't what she has done, but what she has said. Haven't you heard?"

"Not a word. What was it?"

Mrs. Broadbent sat down in a nearby chair, pleased to have such an interested listener.

"Well, she said that the church people in this parish are hypocrites."

"She did!" Mrs. Rockbridge forgot her weakness, and quickly rose to a sitting position. "Did she really say that?"

"That's what Hettie Rushton, her maid, told her mother. She heard what Mrs. Nairn said the day Si Acres was at the rectory. After he went away, the parson and his wife had a set-to about something. It was then that Mrs. Nairn said some awful things about Sam Crofter and Sam Skipson, and called all the people in the place hypocrites. We only give our money, she said, for appearance because we are afraid of what our neighbors might say."

Mrs. Rockbridge listened eagerly to every word. This was a choice bit of gossip for her.

"Isn't it strange that your rector's wife should say such things about the church members?" she queried.

"Strange! Why, it's terrible. But that wasn't all she said."

"No? I should consider that quite enough."

"One would think so. But Mrs. Nairn even said she likes Si Acres because he has the courage of his convictions."

"Who is Si Acres?"

"An old devil who lives down the road from the hotel. He hates everybody, and everybody hates him. He's an awful man."

"So Mrs. Nairn likes him?"

"That's what Hettie said. Now, any woman who can see anything to like in such a brute as Si Acres must have a nasty streak in her."

"Didn't Mrs. Nairn show it by what she said about the church members?"

"She certainly did."

"Were you surprised when you heard what she said?"

"Not altogether. She's been showing signs of what she's like ever since she came here."

"Has she? In what way?" Mrs. Rockbridge felt sure now that she was on the verge of some important revelation.

"Oh, I can hardly explain. It's not that she has done anything really bad. That's not what I mean. But she's too common for a clergyman's wife."

"Indeed! How common?"

"Well, for one thing, she's too free and easy. Why, she's friendly with the riff-raff, such as the Stoneys and Buckeyes, people we consider the lowest of the low, and who never put foot inside the church until she came."

"So they go now?"

"They do, and send their children to Sunday school to mix with ours. They should keep by themselves."

"But the Church is for all, remember, the poor as well as the rich, for the outcasts as well as for the saints." Mrs. Rockbridge remembered an address she had once given in connection with relief work in the city, although she neither believed nor practised what she preached.

"I suppose it is," Mrs. Broadbent doubtfully agreed. "But it didn't use to be so here. The parson and his wife always kept themselves respectable. They had dignity, and called only upon the ones who subscribed to the church and attended the services. How well I remember dear old Mrs. Beckwith, who brought up a large family, and stayed at home to look after them. She only visited with the parson on special occasions when invited out to tea. And she was so proper that no one would think for a moment of being free and easy with her. My, we had to be on our best behaviour when Mr. and Mrs. Beckwith were at our house. But dear me, now the parson's wife is racing all over the parish with her husband, and romping with the children just like a school girl."

"That must please the children," Mrs. Rockbridge remarked as Mrs. Broadbent paused for breath.

"It does, and they are always delighted to see her. But they don't stand in awe of her as they should. When old Parson



Beckwith and his wife called we were always put through our Catechism, 'and other things a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health,' as the Prayer Book says. But now it's nothing but fun, singing, and story-telling when Mrs. Nairn comes. However, we won't see much of her now, I suppose, as that brother of hers has arrived. She'll have her hands full looking after him, from what I hear."

Mrs. Rockbridge was fully alert once more. Her interest had subsided while Mrs. Broadbent had been talking, and she was becoming impatient. She was anxious to hear something of real importance against Mrs. Nairn instead of in her favor. That she was free and easy, and fond of children did not suit her. She had risen to her feet to go back to her car when Mrs. Broadbent's words caused her to resume her seat.

"What about Mrs. Nairn's brother?" she asked.

"I only know what Peter Pendle told me this morning on his way by. It seems that Mrs. Nairn's brother has rented Bullet House from Si Acres for several weeks."

"Well, there's nothing wrong about that, is there?" Mrs. Rockbridge somewhat sternly inquired.

"Maybe not. But it makes a great difference when a girl has rented the same place."

"It certainly does. And who is the girl?"

"A Miss Rowland, I think her name is. Peter fixed up that shed of his for her. She's a painter, you see, and says she wants to paint Bullet House and Lake. But that looks to me as only an excuse for getting out there with that young man."

"Are you sure that Mr. Acres rented it to both of them?"

"Peter says so, and he thinks it's a great joke. But to me it is scandalous."

"It is. And what does Mrs. Nairn think about it?"

"She doesn't seem to mind, for she went with her brother to the lake this very week. Peter took them out."

"Where is Bullet House?"

"About two miles back from the river."

"Is there a good road?"

"Not very. But cars go over it, all right."

Mrs. Rockbridge had risen to her feet. She had forgotten all about her accident in the face of this important piece of news.

"I want to go to Bullet Lake," she announced. "Do you think your husband will go with me to show me the way? I shall pay him well."

"I think he will go. But you can ask him yourself. There he is now coming to the house. Your car is on the road and seems to be all right."

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# CHAPTER X

## SUSPICION

The *Daily Echo* reached the rectory about the middle of the forenoon. As Andrew Nairn sat upon the verandah reading a letter he had received, his wife picked up the paper lying on a chair by his side. She had not much time to spare, as she was needed in the kitchen. Hettie knew very little about cooking, and was slow to learn. She was also forgetful and had to be reminded over and over again about the simplest matter. But she was the only girl the Nairns could obtain, for all the others were working at the hotel except those who were needed at home. Hettie was too incompetent to find employment there, and she had been dismissed the previous summer. Mrs. Nairn, however, found her of considerable use, such as washing the dishes, and other household duties. She was also agreeable and fond of the children which meant a great deal.

Mr. Nairn was interrupted in his reading by an exclamation from his wife. Looking up, he noticed the flush of excitement upon her face.

"What is it, Nell? Something important?"

"Oh, Andrew! It's wonderful! Just think, Mona is in town!"

"Mona who?"

"Mona Blemfield, of course, the girl I met in Europe. Her picture is here in the paper with an account of her lecture yesterday before the Go-Ahead Club at which Mrs. Rockbridge presided. It must have been a great affair, and I wish I had been there. I might have gone if I had known."

"But you are not a member of the Club, Nell."

"That would have made no difference. I would have called upon Mona at the hotel and she would have taken me with her. Oh, Andrew, I have a good mind to call her on the 'phone and ask her to come to visit us."

"That's a grand idea. I am anxious to see the wonderful Ramona of whom you have talked so much. But dare we presume to entertain such a notable person here?"

"Mona will be delighted with everything, I am sure. And if she can come, we must take her to Bullet Lake. She will like it there."

"Out in that lonely place!"

Mrs. Nairn laughed at the expression upon her husband's face.

"Just wait until you see her and then you will understand. Read what this paper says about her while I go and look after my cake. I forgot all about it, and hope it is not burnt."

When she returned a few minutes later, Mr. Nairn was still reading.

"Well, what do you think of Mona now?" she asked.

"I can't judge very well from this account, Nell. It is mostly about Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge, what she said, and the names of others who were present. It says that Miss Blemfield was charming, and that she gave a graphic description of her travels in Europe. But for one line about what she said there are five given to the remarks of the president. Listen to this: 'Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge presided, and in her usual pleasing manner introduced the noted lecturer. She explained the purpose of the Club and the many famous speakers who had been entertained. She believed that the Club was doing a most valuable work along true educational and constructive lines. Her words were received with hearty approval.' Now, what do you think of that?"

"I am not one bit surprised, Andrew. I have noticed that when Mrs. Rockbridge presides at any affair a great deal is reported about what she says and very little about the chief speaker. It is too bad, for I am sure that Mona must have given a wonderful address. She is clever enough, anyway."

"I am getting nervous, Nell, about meeting her. I shall be as dumb as an oyster in her presence."

"No, you won't. You will make out, all right. But we are not sure yet that she can come. You look after things here while I go over to the store and 'phone. It may take me some time to get her."

"What about the cake, Nell?"

"It is done, and Hettie is preparing the vegetables for dinner. Keep an eye on the children. They are playing at the back of the house."

When Mrs. Nairn returned from the store, her sparkling eyes told of her success.

"Mona can come," she announced, as she entered the study where her husband was seated at his desk. "I got her in a few minutes. And, my, wasn't she surprised to hear my voice! She has been thinking so much about me. And you are to meet her at the Blue Rock Hotel at 5 o'clock."

"Why so late, Nell?"

"She has an engagement, an address, I think, to give during the afternoon."

"Why can't you go with me, Nell? It makes me shiver to think of meeting the great Ramona Blemfield and driving home with her."

"I can't go very well, Andrew. I must do some extra cooking and get the house set to rights. You will make out, all right, and fall in love with Mona as soon as you see her."

"Are you not afraid to let me go alone?"

"Not at all. You may fall in love with her all you like and I won't mind. But I don't think Mona will fall in love with a staid parson like you. She said she was surprised that I ever did. And, in fact, I am of the same mind myself."

Mr. Nairn smiled as he turned his attention once more to the sermon he was preparing for Sunday. He was pleased that his wife was so happy, and he really looked forward to meeting the famous lecturer. Should the members of St. Alban's hear of her visit to Glengrow rectory it might mean much in his favor.

Mrs. Nairn had another reason for staying at home besides cooking and looking after the house. She had already planned to visit Mrs. Rockbridge that very afternoon that she might hear what she had to say about Ramona Blemfield. She said nothing to her husband, however, for she was quite sure that he would insist upon her waiting until he could go with her. But Mrs. Nairn preferred to make her visit alone, for with her quick womanly intuition she believed that Mrs. Rockbridge had more than one reason for coming to Glengrow. She had been suspicious of this society leader of Pretensia ever since that afternoon she had called at the rectory. There was something more in that visit, she surmised, than appeared on the surface. She had come as a spy, so it seemed to her, and the thought was most annoying. Then there was the casual remark Robert had made when he had jokingly warned her to be on her best behaviour because Mrs. Rockbridge was at the hotel. She had asked him what he meant, but he had only laughed in reply. She had thought over these things a great deal, and wondered if they signified anything. But that morning a chance remark made by Miss Blemfield over the 'phone convinced her that she was right in her suspicion.

"I have been inquiring for you everywhere," Mona had said. "I even asked Mrs. Rockbridge, but she said she knew nothing about you."

But perhaps Mrs. Rockbridge had spoken the truth. Why should she know who Mrs. Nairn was before her marriage? This idea came to her as she busied herself about the house. She might be wrong, after all. Why should such a woman as Mrs. Rockbridge spy upon her? That it was in connection with St. Alban's had entered her mind, but she had banished it as ridiculous. Anyway, if there was any reason she hoped to learn something definite during the afternoon.

Mrs. Rockbridge received her visitor in a cordial and unconventional manner at the hotel. She was out upon the verandah, reclining in a large comfortable hammock with a copy of the *Daily Echo* by her side. She did not rise, but extended a hand of welcome to her visitor, and motioned her to a chair.

"You will pardon my not rising," she began, "but I met with an accident yesterday, so feel quite used up to-day. These

roads are very dangerous, especially at the turns. You drive a great deal with your husband, I suppose, so know what they are like."

"The shore road is good compared with the ones back from the river," Mrs. Nairn replied. "Some of them are terrible. We have had the springs of our car broken several times, besides other damages."

"And do you go to such places with your husband?"

"Oh, yes, as often as I can, especially where there are no organists."

"My, what a busy life you must lead. Mr. Nairn must find the work in a country parish most trying and difficult."

"He thinks it very pleasant except in winter when the roads are bad. Sometimes they are almost impassable."

"But don't you both find life somewhat uncongenial here? Do you not miss the social and intellectual stimulus of the city?"

"In a way we do," Mrs. Nairn smilingly replied. "But we have great times reading together during the long winter evenings when my husband is at home. You would be surprised should I tell you of the many books we have read since we have been here."

"Mostly novels, I suppose?"

"We read a novel occasionally, although we prefer something more solid, such as history, biography, essays, plays, and poetry. Last winter we read and studied several of Shakespeare's and Ibsen's Plays, and had a glorious feast upon Browning, Shelley, and Masfield, the new Poet Laureate. You have read them all, of course, and can readily understand our enjoyment."

A mischievous twinkle appeared in Mrs. Nairn's eyes as she noticed the surprised expression upon Mrs. Rockbridge's face. Although a society leader, this woman knew very little about the great writers and only made a pretence of being well versed in literary matters. But she was always quite equal to any occasion. Ignorance never daunted her, and the less she knew about a subject the more voluble she became.

"You must indeed get great pleasure from such reading," she replied. "My husband and I are very fond of the Masters, and have such beautiful sets of their works. But for all that, we like to mingle with intellectual people, to exchange views and to keep abreast of the times. Lectures by prominent people are also stimulating, and we attend as many as possible."

"I see by to-day's paper that you had a noted woman to lecture before your Club yesterday afternoon. Judging from the account, she must have been very delightful."

Mrs. Rockbridge cast a swift glance at her visitor. But Mrs. Nairn was gazing out upon the river with a far-away look in her eyes.

"It was a rare treat, I assure you, Mrs. Nairn. Miss Blemfield was wonderful. And she charmed everybody by her gracious manner."

"She has travelled extensively, so the paper says."

"She has, and her word pictures were so graphic that you could almost see the places she described."

"It must be wonderful to hear about distant countries. That is what we miss here."

Mrs. Nairn gave such a deep sigh that Mrs. Rockbridge was surprised. If this woman had travelled in Europe, and had visited some of the great cities why did she not say so? Mr. Nairn had told her that his wife had studied abroad, and had seen much of high social life. Such silence, then, on the part of this woman was puzzling. And why did not Mrs. Nairn mention her acquaintance with Miss Blemfield? But, perhaps, she did not know her. It might be some other Miss Rutledge the noted lecturer had met. She hoped so, anyway, but hesitated about asking any questions.

When Mrs. Nairn at length rose to go, Mrs. Rockbridge urged to her to stay a while longer.

"It is very good of you to come to see me," she purred. "I had the pleasure of meeting your husband and lovely children

when I called at the rectory."

"I am so sorry I was not at home. John and Betty had everything topsy-turvy, and my husband was almost in despair when I returned. A man is quite helpless as a housekeeper. Mine is, anyway."

"Your brother must be quite an exception, then, from what I hear."

This was just the opening Mrs. Nairn needed, and she was determined to make the most of it.

"My brother!"

"Why, Mr. Rutledge, of course, who has rented Bullet House. He is your brother, is he not?"

"Oh, you mean Bob. You see, he gets nothing else from us. Yes, he will make out fairly well with what I cook for him. We are so pleased to have him with us, and I do hope his health will soon be improved. You have never met him, I suppose?"

"No, but I have heard my husband speak of him as a most promising author. He has written some very fine articles for the *Echo*, and his poetry is wonderful. You must be very proud of him."

Mrs. Nairn had now learned all she needed. As she left the hotel and walked slowly back to the rectory, she wondered more than ever about Mrs. Rockbridge's strange behaviour.

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# CHAPTER XI

## A WOODLAND MUSICIAN

The morning sun glinted gently down upon the little brook at the back of Bullet House. It was a small brook, its banks lined with birch trees and alders. The water was low, as was generally the case during the summer months. But there were deep clear pools under the roots of old trees and near big rough boulders which lifted their heads out of the bed of the stream. These formed excellent retreats for trout, and near one of these Robert Rutledge sat upon the bank with several speckled beauties upon a twig by his side. He had been fishing for over an hour, and was quite satisfied with his catch. He would take the fish to the rectory and get his sister to cook them for breakfast.

"We shall have a feast," he mused, "and I must give a couple to Peter and his wife. But, perhaps, they should have three. Their lodger might like one. She is an artist, so Peter said. I wonder who she is."

Leaning back against a large tree, whose cooling shade was most refreshing, he dreamed of the girl he had seen for such a short time at the White Lily Cafe. The image of her beautiful face was as fresh as when he had then seen her. But he did not know her name. He had asked the waitress, but she could not enlighten him. It was the first time she had observed her at the White Lily, she had told him. Should he ever see her again? he asked himself. It was hardly likely. He had not the slightest clue to guide him, and now that he was marooned here in the wilderness he would have no opportunity of searching for her. In another month it would be too late. She was merely a visitor in Pretensia, no doubt, and even now she might be miles away with no thought of him in her mind.

But Robert Rutledge could not forget her. And although he believed he should never see her again, he gave himself up to bright visions. This sylvan retreat was a beautiful place, yet it needed the presence of the girl he had seen at the White Lily to make it a real heaven on earth. He pictured her seated by his side on the mossy brook bank, walking with him through the woodland ways, or sitting before the open fire on chilly evenings. That such a girl was endowed with a keen mind and a charming manner he never for an instant doubted. She would understand and sympathize with his literary aspirations, and how much work of an outstanding nature they would accomplish together. Such was his day-dream which gave him so much pleasure.

He was aroused by the sound of music in the direction of the lake. Listening attentively, he recognized what seemed to be the strains of a mouth-organ. It was strange to hear such music in this lonely place. Who could it be? He did not know the tune, but it was a lively one, and played with considerable zest. He decided to find out who the musician might be, and what he was doing here.

Picking up his rod and fish, he rose to his feet and walked cautiously down the brook. He did not have to go far, however, for through an opening among the trees he saw a little man seated at the foot of a big birch with a mouth-organ to his lips playing as if his life depended upon his exertions. He seemed to Robert like some spirit of the woods clothed in human form that might vanish in an instant. He had not expected to find such a being here, and a slight sense of awe stole into his heart. As he stepped forward for a closer inspection, the music suddenly ceased, and the little man looked around and saw him. He did not appear surprised at the presence of the stranger, and his face wrinkled into a smile.

"Do you like music?" he asked.

"I do," Robert replied, moving to his side and looking down upon him. "Are you enjoying an outing, too?"

"Sure. I am Billy Stubbles an' like to get alone at times."

"It must be pleasant playing here with the harmony of the birds and the rippling brook to accompany you. You have chosen a most ideal spot."

"Haven't I, now!" The musician's eyes glowed with animation. "I am glad you understand. Not many do. Nathan makes fun of me when I talk about music bein' one of Nature's greatest gifts. Why, there is music everywhere if we have the souls to hear it. I can't help playin', no matter where I am, but I am always at my best in a place like this. Nathan says my mouth-organ an' fiddle are the devil's instruments to lead souls to destruction. You don't believe that, do you, sir? You are an educated man an' should know."

"They certainly are not. They are very beautiful instruments when properly used."

"I'm mighty glad to hear ye say that. I shall tell Nathan."

"Who is Nathan?"

"Oh, he's an old sour-kroot who works with me at Si Acres. He's a great reader of the Bible, an' hunts up all the verses he can find about the wicked goin' to hell. He's always yangin' an' complainin' about the badness of the world."

"That is a great mistake, my friend. Can he not see the beauty around him?"

"No, he never thinks about such things, an' he hates music like poison. I like to play to tease him. We're opposites, ye see. Nathan is a Grit an' I'm a Tory. We also differ about religion, an' we have great arguments."

"So you enjoy it?"

"I should say so. Why, it's meat an' drink to us."

"And you keep good friends?"

"The very best. We understand each other, so that makes all the difference, ye see."

"I suppose so. But you must spend a great deal of your time arguing. How does Mr. Acres like that? And what are you doing out here at this time of the day?"

"Lookin' fer a cow that strayed away last night. She must have a calf somewhere."

"And do you expect to find her by sitting under a tree playing your mouth-organ?"

"Sure I do. The cows know my music an' come when I play a lively jig. I've got 'em trained that way. It saves me much trampin' after 'em at milkin'-time. But Bess can't be anywhere near or she'd have answered before this. Guess I'll have to go somewhere else an' play. It's too bad, fer it's tarnation hot this mornin'."

"Is this a part of Mr. Acres' pasture?" Robert asked, beginning to doubt the truth of this little man's words. He had a suspicion that he had come for some other purpose. What he said about cows coming at the sound of music seemed to him like a fairy-tale.

"Oh, no, this is not a part of Si's pasture, sir. But Bess broke through the fence last night. Ye can't keep that cow in when she has a calf on her mind."

"But would she stray this far?"

"Sure. Distance means nothin' to her. She came here last year, an' I found her an' the calf amongst some bushes just back of that old house up yonder. It's queer how animals like to get off by themselves when they're in trouble."

"Isn't that the way with people, too?" Robert queried.

"I guess yer right, sir, when I come to think of it. Old Rayton, who built that house, was like that. Why, after his trouble he didn't leave this place until he was carried away a dead man."

"What trouble?"

"His broken shoulder, of course, an' the note he backed fer that false friend of his."

"What happened to his shoulder?"

"He was shot one night while settin' before the fire with his wife an' little baby by his side."

"Who shot him?"

"It never was learned. Whoever fired that shot got scott free."

"And who was the false friend? What became of him?"

"He cleared out, set up business elsewhere, an' did well, so I've heard. But I never met him, an' can't remember his name, though I knew it once."

"Did you know the Raytons?"

"Knew 'em well. They were quiet, hard-workin' people, who minded their own business. An' Mrs. Rayton was as pretty a lass as ever walked God's earth. How she could be happy in this lonely place was always a mystery to me."

"Was she happy?"

"She seemed so. I was a young man when she came here, an' I used to visit the Raytons at times, an' she always gave me a hearty welcome. She was fond of music, beautiful pictures, an' liked to talk about the wonderful things of Nature. She had a soul that understood, an' eyes to see what others couldn't."

"Who was she before she married Rayton?"

"I don't remember her name. But she was from the city, an' her father worked in the ship-yards. It's queer why such a lovely girl married a poor man like Tom Rayton when she might have had the pick of any of the rich fellers in the city. They were crazy about her, so I heard. But I guess she followed where her heart led. It's wonderful what a woman will do fer the man she loves."

During this conversation Robert had been standing near Billy. He now sat down by his side and drew a cigar from his pocket.

"You smoke, I suppose?"

"I sure do, but mostly me old pipe. Nathan says smokin' is a great sin an' a filthy habit. But Si likes his pipe, an' so do I. It's been a great comfort to me."

"Have you lived all your life in this parish?"

"Most of it. I've worked fer Si ever since I was a young man, an' guess I'll work fer him now to the end of me days."

"How long has Mr. Acres lived here?"

"He came shortly after the Raytons. He was a sea captain before that."

"Why did he come here?"

Instead of replying, Billy laid his right hand upon his companion's arm, and looked off to the left. He then placed his mouth-organ to his lips and played a lively dancing air. When he at length ceased, he rose to his feet.

"Bess is over there," he announced. "I heard her. Listen."

Robert did so, but heard nothing like the sound of a cow's call.

"Your ears must be better than mine, my friend."

"Maybe yours are not trained to hear the voice of a cow, sir. You've lived in the city most of yer life, I suppose?"

"I have."

"That makes the difference, then. You are used to the sounds of the streets, steam-whistles, an' such things. You don't have to depend upon yer hearin' there. But here in the country we learn to listen an' understand different sounds, even that of a cow's voice. I must go now an' take Bess home."

He had taken a couple of steps when he stopped, turned and looked at Robert.

"How d'ye like Bullet House?" he asked with a grin.

"Very much. It's a comfortable place."

"An' you are really Mrs. Nairn's brother?"



"I am. Do you know her?"

"Should say I do. She plays in church, an' I sing in the choir. She says she couldn't get along without me. If you're as good a man as she is a woman you're all right. An' ..."

He paused abruptly while a serious expression came into his eyes. Robert waited for him to continue.

"An' if the folks in this parish have the least bit of sense left in their heads they'll let her alone."

"What do you mean?"

"Ye'll have to find that out fer yourself. Good mornin', sir."

With that Billy glided swiftly away and disappeared among the trees, leaving Robert in a most thoughtful mood.

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## CHAPTER XII

### WHAT THE STORM BROUGHT

Stretched full-length upon the rustic sofa at the north-east end of the verandah Robert gazed out dreamily at the tops of the many trees in front of Bullet House. It was pleasant to lie there amid such peaceful surroundings with nothing to do. And this would be his life for a whole month, and longer, perhaps. The city with all its noise and confusion was far away. He did not wish to think about it. But he could not help pitying the unfortunate mortals who were cooped up in stores and offices on such a sweltering day. He knew what it was like, and now he was free from it all. Why did people have to toil and struggle so hard to make a living? he mused. Why could not life be just like this he was now enjoying, with few needs and nothing to worry about? He had no ambition to work since coming here. He had not written a line of poetry or prose, and he had not even removed the cover from his typewriter. When he felt stronger and the urge was upon him he would produce something of importance, so he believed. But now he wished only to rest and dream, or not dream, just as he desired.

He looked at his watch and was surprised to find that it was about the middle of the afternoon. It seemed but a short time since he had eaten his lunch. He must have been asleep. He laughed, and the sound of his voice appeared strange and startling.

"I am getting to be a hermit already, for I am losing count of time. And what shall I be like in a few weeks? But what does time signify in a place like this? Time is only for people who toil. I am thankful that it means nothing to me now. I suppose Rayton and his wife slaved here to build this house and clear the land which is now all grown up in trees. That's what time does. In a few years it blots out our work, leaving little or nothing behind to tell of our efforts. But this house remains, and it is in good repair, thanks to Mr. Acres' care. And he turned Mrs. Rayton and her baby off this place and made a fortune out of the lumber! What a merciless creature he must be. Yet he has kept this house in good condition. I wonder why. Who is that strange man anyway? He was once a sea captain and made money. Why did he give it up and settle in Glengrow? I should like to introduce him into a story and allow my imagination free play. He is a bachelor, and I could weave a thrilling love-story about him and explain why he never married. I would have him in love with a girl when he was young, and he lost her when she married another. Why, I believe in time I could work out quite a yarn with Si Acres and some beautiful damsel as the principal characters. But that would be only fiction, and I want facts about this old house. If Si Acres comes into the story, all the better. But how in the world am I to find out?"

He was aroused by the distant rumble of thunder. So absorbed had he been in thought that he had not noticed the disappearance of the sun and the approaching storm. The sky in the west was heavy with big angry clouds, which were rolling steadily towards him. Ere long he could hear the wind whipping the tops of the trees on the hills, and he knew that the storm would not be long delayed. The thunder increased in intensity, and the lightning flashes grew brighter and more frequent. To Robert this was an interesting experience. A thunder storm in the city seemed different from one in the country. There it affected him but little. Now, however, a sense of awe stole into his heart. The steady and irresistible approach of the storm appeared like a monster about to spring upon him with fury and destruction. The increasing wind sounded to his ears like a hissing breath, and the massive clouds assumed the form of a huge black body of the onrushing demon. He longed for human companionship. If Billy Stubbles would only appear, what a relief it would be. But the cheeping birds which had taken shelter among the branches of the trees, and a scolding squirrel nearby were the only living creatures around him. Except for them, the silence was ominous. Not a leaf stirred, and the lake was like a mirror. Nature seemed to be holding its breath for the attack of the charging battalions of the heavens rolling down from the hills.

A slight sound in the direction of the lake attracted his attention. As he looked, he started and sat quickly up. Speeding over the water was a small row-boat driven by a girl who was swaying to the oars with a beautifully rhythmical motion. He could see her quite distinctly, and noticed that she was hatless and that her arms were bare to the elbows. Who could she be? he wondered. And where had she come from? What in the world could a girl be doing alone in such a place! That she was heading for the shore near the house was evident. But would she make it before the storm burst? Once he saw her turn and look at the rain on the hills, and then glance towards the shore as if to see how far it was away.

Robert became intensely interested now, almost excited, as he watched the race between the girl and the approaching tempest. Which would win? And as he looked, the lake became ruffled as the wind swept its surface with eddying flurries. Then came the rain, a few vagrant drops at first, which soon increased in intensity. The storm had now struck,

and the sound of the rain upon the leaves mingled with the crashing of the thunder. The girl had now reached the shore, and in another minute she was hurrying up the narrow path. Robert rose to his feet, and walked along the verandah to receive her. It took the girl but a few seconds to reach the steps, and as she lifted her face to his Robert recognized her. She was the girl he had seen at the White Lily Cafe! So great was his surprise that he stared as if stricken dumb. She looked more beautiful than when he had first seen her. No longer was she the calm, sedate person of the city cafe, but a girl with flushed cheeks, and the very embodiment of youthful health and animation. As she stepped upon the verandah, she brushed back a few wisps of hair from her cheeks and forehead. Her eyes sparkled with a mischievous light as she turned them upon the face of the staring young man.

"What a storm!" she exclaimed, as she shook the rain from her dress.

These words brought Robert out of his trance.

"Are you w—wet?" he stammered.

"Oh, not at all. I am very dry, as you can plainly see. I'm almost scorched with the sun."

Robert laughed outright, and his embarrassment vanished.

"I am glad you think so. I was going to offer you a comb and a towel, but you won't need them."

"I do not need them, thank you. My handkerchief will serve as a towel, and my fingers as a comb."

"It is good to be so independent. Anyway, I bid you welcome to my humble abode, although it's not as up-to-date as the White Lily Cafe."

"I think it is great, Mr. Rutledge."

"So you know me, then?"

"Only your name, and that you have rented this house for several weeks. Mr. and Mrs. Pendle told me. I am their lodger."

"So you are Miss Rowland. My sister, Mrs. Nairn, told me that there was some one at the Pendles, but I didn't know it was you. Why do you want this house, then?"

"I don't want it. I only desire the privilege of coming here to do some sketching. Mr. Acres told me that I would have to ask your permission."

"Why didn't you?"

"I came this afternoon for that very purpose, but found you asleep, so I did not wish to disturb your peaceful slumber."

"That was too bad. I am sorry I missed such a pleasure."

"Didn't you miss the boat? I took it without your permission."

During this conversation Joan had been wiping her face with her handkerchief and brushing her hair with her fingers.

"There, I guess that will do. I am quite dry now. My dress didn't get very wet."

"Suppose we sit down," Robert suggested. "That sofa over there is quite comfortable."

"It seemed so to you a while ago," the girl smilingly replied as she followed him across the verandah. "My, what a storm! It is the worst I ever experienced. I hope nothing will happen. Mr. Acres warned me against coming here."

"He did! Why?"

"He didn't explain. But in his brief letter he advised me to stay away from Bullet House. He said it might not be safe for me to be here."

"H'm, did the old fellow think I would harm you? Why, I am as innocent as a lamb."

Joan smiled as she looked out over the lake.

"I don't think he meant that, Mr. Rutledge. He must have had something else in his mind."

"Have you any idea what it was?"

"I am not sure. But he may be superstitious about this place, and so gave his warning."

"He didn't warn me. But, yes he did. He told me to confine my writing to the sea and leave this old house alone. And he also said that if I were wise I would heed his words. Surely that was a warning, and I forgot all about it."

"He must have some reason, Mr. Rutledge. And so you are an author? What do you write about?"

"Oh, various things, especially short stories about the sea. I am now trying to work up an article for the *Daily Echo*. The editor believes there is nothing of importance in this province to make a thrilling story, so I hope to prove that he is wrong."

"And do you expect to get any material in such a lonely place as this?"

"I do. Why, I am already on the track of something very unusual. It is a mystery connected with this old house."

The girl gave a slight start, but Robert considered this due to a vivid flash of lightning, followed instantly by a terrific crash of thunder.

"That's pretty close," he declared. "A tree was struck, no doubt. One gets all kinds of excitement here from a thunder storm to the mystery of an attempted murder."

"A murder! Here?"

"Oh, it happened years ago when the Raytons owned this place, so there is nothing to worry about. There is no danger now."

"I am glad," and the girl gave a sigh of relief. "But what about their spirits?"

"Spirits! What do you mean?"

"Ghosts, then," and Joan laughed. "Are you not afraid that their ghosts will appear?"

"Not at all. I do not believe in such nonsense. Do you?"

"Not in the way some people do. But I like to think that the spirit of the brave and the true dwells in old places, even in this very house. Every writer or artist should try to capture that spirit in his book or picture. Isn't that what you are trying to do?"

"I suppose so," Robert somewhat doubtfully replied. "But I am trying first of all to unravel the mystery connected with this house. When I accomplish that, perhaps the spirits of old Rayton and his wife will help me. In fact, I have already been inspired by what I have heard."

With hands clasped upon her lap Joan gazed at the dripping and swaying trees. Robert thought her face the most beautiful he had ever beheld. And her manner was so charming and unaffected. There was an easy grace in her every movement, and her voice was rich and musical. What a wonderful girl! And to think that the storm had brought her to him!

"Isn't it strange that both of us came here almost at the same time," he remarked. "I knew nothing about this place until a few days ago."

"Who told you?"

"Dr. Bradbury. He sent me here for my health. That was the day I saw you at the White Lily Cafe. You didn't notice me, though."

"Don't be too sure, sir. How could I help it? You stared hard enough at me."

"I couldn't do otherwise, Miss Rowland. I had to do something to counteract that odious Mrs. Rockbridge. As you were the only person in sight, you had to be the victim of my observation."

"I see," and a faint smile overspread the girl's face. "So you heard what that woman said?"

"I certainly did. And to think that she had the impudence to talk in public about my sister. Some day I hope ..."

Robert did not finish his sentence, for at that instant he saw a woman hurrying through the rain towards the house. Rising to his feet he hastened forward. And then he recognized her. It was Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge!

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## CHAPTER XIII

### REFUGE

Dripping with rain and hair in disorder, Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge presented a woe-begone appearance as she stumbled up the verandah steps. Her face was white as death, and her eyes were filled with terror. No longer was she the calm and dignified president of the Go-Ahead Club, but a badly-frightened woman.

She seemed on the verge of collapse when Robert placed his arms around her trembling form and helped her to the sofa. There he was assisted by Joan who induced the distressed visitor to lie down. Thus stretched full length upon the sofa, with a pillow under her head, she resembled a woman in the last stage of complete exhaustion. Robert was much disturbed.

"Is she dying?" he whispered. "What can we do for her?"

"Bring me a towel and a comb," Joan ordered. "We shall need a fire, too, for her clothes are wet. There is a stove in the house, I suppose."

"There is. But I shall light a fire in the fireplace. That will be better. There is plenty of dry wood handy."

As Robert busied himself in the house he could not help wondering what would happen next. When he had been expecting a peaceful and lonely life in the forest, surprises and disturbances had come upon him in rapid succession. And now Mrs. Rockbridge had arrived! What in the world was she doing here? What was there for her to spy upon at Bullet Lake? He paused as he was about to strike a match and held it suspended in his right hand. Had her visit anything to do with Nell? He smiled at such a foolish idea, struck the match and applied it to a piece of birch bark. But he could not get the thought out of his mind. Mrs. Rockbridge had come to Glengrow chiefly to spy upon Nell. Why she had come to Bullet Lake he did not know. But there must be some purpose other than pleasure, he felt sure. Perhaps she would explain when she had recovered from her fright. Anyway, he decided to be on his guard, and, if possible, find out something.

Through a small window he could see Joan bending over Mrs. Rockbridge. From where he stood he had a good view of her face. How beautiful it seemed to him, and her eyes were expressive of deep concern for the troubled woman. He almost envied the latter, and wished himself in her place. If something had only happened to him what a joy it would be to have the girl bending over him in an effort to do what she could for his welfare.

And as he thus watched, Joan lifted her head and looked towards the door. Feeling certain that he was needed, he went at once to her side. Mrs. Rockbridge was lying with closed eyes, apparently asleep.

"We must get her to the fire," the girl whispered. "Her clothes must be dried."

Arousing the prostrate woman, they assisted her into the house. The fire was burning brightly, and before this they placed her in the only armchair the room contained.

"There, you will be more comfortable now," Joan declared. "This nice fire will soon dry your dress. You must have had a terrible experience."

"It was awful!" the woman moaned. "The lightning struck a tree close to my car, and I saw the blaze among the branches."

"Where is your car?" Robert inquired.

"Out there just in sight of the house. I got that far when gas gave out. Mr. Broadbent was with me, so he started to walk back to the store for a supply. I was waiting for him to return when the storm came on. Oh, dear! I shall never recover from this shock. And my heart is weak, too. My doctor advised me to be careful and to let nothing disturb or excite me."

Robert smiled a little as he stooped and placed another stick upon the fire.

"You took a bad road to-day for your outing, Mrs. Rockbridge. This is the second time lately that I have been able to assist you."

"When was the first, sir? I don't remember having met you before," she lied.

"Perhaps not. But you will recall, no doubt, an incident on a steep hill a few days ago when another car bumped into yours, and you called the driver a fool."

"I do now very well. So that was you? I did not recognize you. I fear I was very hasty that day and lost my temper."

"And you nearly lost your life, Madam. You did not realize your danger, but if I had not checked your car when I did it would have gone down over that steep bank, and ..."

"I don't want to think of that, sir. I understood later what a narrow escape I had, and wish to apologize now for my rudeness to you. I was very much excited. You saved me then, and now to-day you are doing me a good service. Do you live here? And is this your wife?"

"Unfortunately, no. This is Miss Rowland, who like yourself was driven in here by the rain. I am very grateful to the storm for sending me such pleasant visitors."

"And what are you doing out here?" Mrs. Rockbridge impudently asked turning her head and looking sternly at Joan.

"I was merely looking for a man," was the quiet and unexpected reply.

"Looking for a man!" Mrs. Rockbridge gasped.

"Certainly. Isn't that the chief aim of women? And I was fortunate in finding mine sooner than some. There he is. What do you think of him?"

Robert stared at Joan in amazement. What did she mean by such words? Then the light of understanding dawned upon his mind, and he longed to laugh outright. This girl knew what she was about, and there was a definite purpose in her banter.

Mrs. Rockbridge suddenly revived. Her weakness and fright vanished, and she was her imperious self again. Joan's words satisfied her, for such a statement could only come from a girl devoid of all modesty. And the young man of whom she so flippantly spoke was Mrs. Nairn's brother! And he, no doubt, was the girl's lover, and they were planning to live together here. Surely Mrs. Nairn must know all about it. Anyway, the people of St. Alban's would know just as soon as she could get a letter to her dear Mrs. Casham. She showed no sign of elation, however, but assumed a languid and indifferent attitude as she looked towards the door.

"I hope Mr. Broadbent will soon be here with the gas. I must get back in time for dinner."

"Why not stay and have a bite with us," Robert invited. "I have enough for the three of us."

"No, no, I couldn't think of staying. I want to get away from this place as soon as possible. After my terrible experience I never want to come here again."

"Your experience is only in keeping with the record of this house, Madam. Miss Rowland and I were both advised not to come here."

"Why was that?"

"There seems to be an evil spell upon this house. It is supposed to be haunted, and ghosts have been seen here."

"Ghosts!" Mrs. Rockbridge started and looked anxiously around. "Are you not afraid, then, to remain here?"

"I do have a creepy feeling at times. But I would not mind seeing the ghosts if they would only tell me what I want to know."

"What is that?"

"The mystery about old Thomas Rayton who built this house. He was shot one wild night while sitting just where you are now."

"Was he killed?" Mrs. Rockbridge gasped.

"No, but he might as well have been, for he didn't live long after that."

"Who tried to kill him?"

"No one seems to know, and that is what I want to learn. You may see the bullet hole in that window sash over there."

"But didn't the police do anything?"

"I suppose they tried, but that affair happened so many years ago that hardly anybody remembers it. And to think that his wife left her baby here with her injured husband and walked all the way through the darkness and the storm for a doctor. That was true heroism, all right."

"Mr. Rayton recovered, I suppose?"

"Not altogether, for he never regained the use of his wounded arm. And in addition, he had another trouble, for he lost this place through a false friend."

"Dear me! That was too bad. Who was the false friend, and what did he do?"

"I do not know his name, but I hope to find out. He induced Rayton to back a note for a considerable amount, and then failed. He became wealthy later, so I have heard, though where he is I have no idea."

"And he didn't do anything to help Mr. Rayton? He didn't pay him?"

"Evidently not, for this place was sold, and poor Rayton died of a broken heart."

"What a sad story! And what became of his family?"

"His wife and baby were turned out by Mr. Acres, who bought this place."

"Did he really turn them out!"

"He did, and made a fortune out of the lumber he had cut here."

"The brute!"

"But that false friend was the greater brute, Madam."

"You are quite right, sir. And you say he became wealthy later?"

"So I have been told."

"Dear me! Too often fortunes have been made that way. They have been built upon the ruins of unfortunate people. That old villain's family are strutting around, no doubt, upon his ill-gotten gains, and looked up to as leaders in society. I should certainly like to expose such people."

"Why not do it, Madam? You are gifted with the pen, for I have read several of your articles in the *Daily Echo*."

"Yes, I am fond of writing," Mrs. Rockbridge replied, flattered by these words. "But I have never taken up writing seriously, only as a pastime when the mood was upon me."

"Why not do something more, then, when this new mood is upon you? Here is a great opportunity. The story of this old house might make a thrilling article. If you cannot unravel all the mystery about the shooting-affair, you might show up old Acres' infamous deed in turning a helpless mother and babe out of house and home."

"But that would be a risky thing to do, Mr. Rutledge. Mr. Acres would naturally resent such action, and might sue for defamation of character. One has to be careful when writing about family histories."

Robert smiled and glanced at Joan.

"And it would be the same with others, Mrs. Rockbridge. If you begin hunting up family records you are in danger of disturbing musty skeletons, and getting yourself into no end of trouble, especially when the descendants are living and prominent in the social and business world. And even the most unlikely persons would object, for as a poet said,



'There's a deal o' solid kicking in the meanest-looking mule.' No, it is better to leave such things alone and write about other matters."

"I believe you are quite right, sir. But there should be no risk in writing about Mr. Rayton, how he was shot, and the heroism of his wife. That would make a thrilling article, and would offend no one."

"It would if properly handled. But you could not very well leave out that false friend. The story would be incomplete without him."

"But I do not know his name."

"All the better, Madam, for then you would run no risk."

During this conversation Joan had been sitting silently nearby. There was a peculiar expression, almost of indignation in her eyes, which the others did not notice. With hands clasped before her, she listened intently to every word, and once a slight tremor shook her body. It was hard for her to hear such talk about the Raytons. What to her companions was merely material for an interesting article, to her was of vital importance, and touched the very quick of her being. How could she explain what that old house meant to her? She could not admit strangers into the deep recesses of her heart. She had heard enough, more, in fact than she desired, so longed to get away by herself to be alone with her thoughts.

Just when she felt that she could endure no more of the conversation, the honk of a car horn sounded outside. Mrs. Rockbridge rose quickly to her feet.

"It must be Mr. Broadbent," she declared. "I am so glad he has come."

Without a word of thanks, she hurried out of the house. She stopped suddenly, however, upon reaching the verandah at the sight which met her eyes a short distance away.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### MORE VISITORS

It was then that Mrs. Rockbridge received one of the surprises of her life. It was also sufficient evidence that her doctor had been mistaken about the condition of her heart, otherwise the shock would certainly have proven fatal. Instead of seeing Mr. Broadbent with a supply of gasoline, she stared in amazement upon Peter Pendle's van, the big letters upon the side gleaming bright beneath the sun's rays which were once more streaming forth after the rain. And standing by the car were two women and two children. The former she recognized at once, and her face grew ashy pale. They were Mrs. Nairn and Miss Ramona Blemfield! At first she thought she must be dreaming. But, no, it was only too true. Inwardly she groaned at the awkward predicament in which she had been caught. Those two women before her were the last persons she wished to meet together. Only too well she remembered her conversation with Miss Blemfield at the Go-Ahead Club lecture. What could she say? How explain? For a few seconds a sickening feeling came upon her, and she was sure that she was about to faint. It would have been a relief, at any rate. Her heart, however, did not give out, but stood up nobly to its duty during this trying ordeal.

It was Peter who relieved the situation. Alighting from his car, he came towards the house.

"I've brought ye some gas, Madam," he announced. "Jim asked me to fetch it, an' I'll fix ye up in a jiffy."

These words aroused Mrs. Rockbridge. Her heart was hot with anger, and she needed a victim.

"Why didn't Mr. Broadbent come himself?" she demanded. "I paid him well for his service, and now he has deserted me."

"I don't know why he didn't come, Madam. But I can fix ye up just as well as Jim, so ye'd better come along."

Mrs. Rockbridge was now regaining her courage and self-possession. This was not by any means the first ordeal she had been through. Although caught off her guard and placed in very embarrassing situations at times, she had generally been able to extricate herself with considerable cleverness. As the leader of Pretensia's social circle this was absolutely essential, otherwise it would have been difficult for her to have maintained her position. So now as she stepped from the verandah and followed Peter, her manner underwent a sudden and remarkable transformation. Once again she was the affable and beaming president of the Go-Ahead Club. She expressed her surprise and delight at meeting Miss Blemfield in such a romantic place. As she held out her hand she said how pleased she was to find her in the company of her dear friend, Mrs. Nairn.

"I have had such a wonderful visit here that it has made up much for my nerve-wracking experience in the storm," she told them. "I must go now, as I have an important engagement at the hotel. But I hope to see both of you again soon."

With that she was away, leaving the two women staring after her in amazement.

Mrs. Nairn was the first to recover. A smile overspread her face, and her eyes twinkled with amusement.

"What a woman! We didn't catch her, after all. How neatly she escaped."

"It is just as well, Nell," Miss Blemfield replied. "Let us forget her. I don't want anything to disturb my visit to such a charming spot as this. I have come across too many people of her kind during my travels, so wish to be free of them for a while."

"But poor Peter Pan isn't free. Just look at him struggling along with that can of gasoline. He will have something interesting to tell us when he comes back."

"I like him, Nell, and his van is such a curiosity, with those big letters 'Peter Pendle's Panacea' upon the sides. I am going to take a snap of it and have a lantern-slide made to use in one of my illustrated lectures."

"And you must get a picture, too, of that old house, Mona. It has an interesting history. Bob will tell you all about it. There he is now coming with the children. They soon found him out, for he is a great favorite of theirs."

It took Peter some time to get Mrs. Rockbridge started on her way. When he at length came to the house, he found supper

almost ready upon the verandah. A table, covered with a white cloth, was adorned with appetizing food Mrs. Nairn had brought with her. When Peter appeared, all turned expectantly towards him. His hands were dirty, and a doleful expression was depicted upon his face.

"I am glad you escaped without any serious injuries," Robert accosted. "I was just thinking about going to your assistance."

"It was just as well ye didn't, young man. I got off, a'right, but you might not have been so fortunate."

"Was she angry?" Mrs. Nairn asked as she placed a well-frosted cake upon the table.

"Oh, no. She was very sweet, called me a darlin', an' other pretty names. My! I'm thankful I'm not her husband. What a life he must lead."

"Perhaps he thinks she's the finest woman on earth, Peter."

"He's welcome to his thinks, then, fer all I care. But I want nothin' more to do with her. She's too bossy, an' if she doesn't watch out she'll kill herself in that car some day. It was terrible the way she started. I advised her to be careful on the slippery road, an' you should have seen the look she gave me. That big thunder cloud wasn't a patch to it. But, there, I must get me hands washed, fer I see supper is about ready."

It was a happy group that a little later gathered around the table. The children were delighted with this unusual picnic. And to add to their enjoyment Betty was allowed to sit on Uncle Bob's right and John on his left. The sun was now shining brightly, and the birds were again chirping among the branches of the trees. It was a scene of peace and contentment, a striking contrast to the storm which was raging but a short time before.

"Well, well!" Robert exclaimed. "Little did I imagine this morning what the day held in store for me. When I expected to be left entirely alone with my thoughts, the world has sought me out. The first visitor was Billy Stubbles with his mouth-organ, and now you are here."

"What did Billy want?" Peter quickly asked.

"He was looking for a cow. He said that he always brought in the cows with his music."

"He did! The liar! Billy wasn't lookin' fer a cow. He was after something else. Now, what in time could it have been!"

"That is what I should like to know, too. I was suspicious of him from the first."

"I believe Si Acres sent him to spy upon ye."

"Why?"

"Dear knows. One can never tell what Si has in his mind."

In the general conversation that followed Joan took very little part. All were so friendly and agreeable that whatever feeling that she was intruding soon passed away. Miss Blemfield was delightful, and Mrs. Nairn bright and animated. This little world was most refreshing after the confusion of the city. It was one of nature's simple cures for the restless heart and mind. She tried to listen and to appear interested in the conversation, but her thoughts would wander to other things. There was so much to attract the attention of her artistic soul. The lake was calm now, resting like a tired child after its brief turbulence. The dripping trees gleamed golden beneath the lowering sun, their slender network of branches forming a beautiful tracery against the shimmering water beyond. Some of the trees were large, especially one great pine which stood close to the narrow path leading to the lake. It must have been a fair-sized tree when the Raytons built their house, she thought. How often they must have looked upon it. Under it, perhaps, the man lurked that dark wild night when he had tried to kill Mr. Rayton. Why did he want to do that? It must have been revenge. But why? Her face became very serious, and Robert watching her from the opposite side of the table longed to know what she was thinking about. Joan, however, was not looking at him. She had drifted off to the past, and in imagination she beheld the Raytons, husband and wife, living here, rejoicing in their little baby girl, and looking forward to years of peace and happiness until ...

Something brought her out of her reverie. What it was she did not know. Miss Blemfield was speaking, and her words arrested Joan's attention.

"I have noticed that many in this country think too little of their writers," she was saying. "They often acclaim foreign authors and disparage their own. That should not be so. It is not good to have the inferiority complex. People who consider themselves and their productions, no matter what they might be, inferior to others are not likely to make the progress that they should."

"I am pleased to hear you say that," Mrs. Nairn replied. "Why, some people consider our manner of pronunciation entirely wrong, and think that the English alone speak correctly. Once I heard a noted English lecturer talk of 'dinnah,' 'lectchah,' and 'cultchah.' He didn't say 'Oh, no,' but 'Oo-noo.' When he was through a woman said to me, 'What a delightful speakah. And wasn't his pronunciation cha'ming?' I didn't agree with her, so she gave me a look which plainly said, 'What an ignorant woman!'"

"You are quite right, Nell," Robert agreed. "Although we sometimes overwork the letter 'r', we show, at any rate, that it is in the alphabet. Why should we be considered inferior or lacking in proper pronunciation because we sound that letter? If the English prefer their way of speaking, that is their business. We have our own, so why should we be ashamed of it?"

"In my lectures which I am giving in this country," Miss Blemfield remarked, "I try to emphasize the value of your own possessions, especially your writers. For some time I have been much interested in several of your poets, and consider that they have produced some very fine work. But I have been surprised to learn how little they are known here. Of course, there are a few who are almost household names, but the majority are almost unknown. Poets of other lands, however, are held in high regard, and generally appreciated. While lecturing this week before the Go-Ahead Club I quoted two short poems. One was by an English author, and it was received with marked approval. The other, and superior in my opinion, as I explained, by one of their own poets, was received in almost dead silence. And the name of that poem is *Sea Born* by Robert Rutledge."

The startled expression, almost of consternation, which came into Robert's eyes caused Miss Blemfield to smile.

"W—where did you get it?" he gasped.

"From the magazine in which it was published, of course. It appealed to me when I first read it. I was also attracted by the author's name, for I had met a charming girl by the name of Nell Rutledge several years ago."

"But how did you know that I wrote *Sea Born*?"

"I didn't until your sister told me last night. I was very much surprised that the *Daily Echo* didn't mention what I said about that poem. But I understand now."

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# CHAPTER XV

## AN OLD SCRAP-BOOK

Twilight was steadily deepening over the land as Silas Acres sat in his vine-covered porch at the front door of his home. This was his favorite place of meditation during the long summer evenings, and here he was seldom disturbed. From this retreat he could look out over his broad fields which stretched from the main road down to the river on the right. It was a pleasant sight, for the well-cultivated land was robed with various shades of oats, buckwheat, corn, and rich meadow grass. He always enjoyed sitting here gazing upon his valuable possessions. They were his own, and no one could take them from him. This was his kingdom which he had built up through long years of care and labor. Here he could live as he pleased and bid defiance to the envious eyes cast upon him, and the gossiping tongues which wagged about his affairs. He knew what his neighbors said about him. "Odd Acres" they called him, and this gave him a grim satisfaction.

This evening, however, he was in a different mood. He was not thinking so much about his fields as formerly. His eyes were fixed more upon the main highway than upon the sloping expanse of meadow and grain. He was watching for some one who was long in coming. Mr. Acres twisted uneasily in his splint-bottom armchair. He was becoming impatient. He could faintly hear the sound of the separator in the milk-house where Rachel and Nathan were busy. This was Billy's evening off, so Nathan had to do the milking alone, which was not at all to his liking. This always made him grimmer than usual, and Mr. Acres chuckled a little at the thought of Rachel's ordeal with the Bible-reading man.

"I can see where Billy will get consigned to the hot place to-night," he mused. "And he really deserves it for not coming home sooner. The choir practice must have been over before this. I wonder what can be keeping him."

Mr. Acres' patience had reached the breaking-point, however, before Billy arrived. It was quite dark as he opened the gate and sauntered towards the house. He knew that his master would be waiting for him in the porch, so braced himself for the lecture that was sure to be forthcoming. Mr. Acres saw his dim form and straightened himself up in his chair.

"That you, Billy?"

"Yes, it's me, Si. Been waitin' long?"

"Waiting! I've been sitting here for over two hours. What in the world kept you so late? Didn't I tell you to come home early?"

"It's not late," Billy replied as he sat down upon the porch step. "An' this is my night off."

"I know it is, Billy. But I want to hear the news. What's the latest about the rectory folks?"

"The whole parish is up in arms against them."

"I know that. It's because of what Mrs. Nairn said about me. How does she take it?"

"I can't say, Si. Mrs. Nairn never mentioned it."

"Perhaps she doesn't know what people are saying."

"Oh, I guess she does. I didn't see the parson, as he was away somewhere. But there were only two at the practice to-night, an' Mrs. Nairn said nothin' about the trouble."

"Didn't she seem surprised?"

"She didn't show it."

"And who was the other one besides you?"

"Miss Rowland."

"Ah, so she was there? Can she sing?"

"Like a bird, Si. She's got a sweet voice, though it's not very strong. I didn't sing much, as I liked to listen to her."

"When the nightingale sings, it is as well for the crow to be silent."

"What's that you say, Si? I don't understand your words."

"It is just as well, Billy. The practice didn't last long, I suppose?"

"No, just a short time. When we were through we went over to the rectory and had a grand time. Mrs. Nairn played some good old tunes and I accompanied her on me mouth-organ."

"That must have been very pleasant. What did Miss Rowland do?"

"She sat an' listened, though once she did sing two verses of one of the songs. She said she liked my playin'. When I told her I did better on the fiddle, she asked me to bring it over to her place some evenin' an' play fer her. She has a nice cosy house."

"Were you there?"

"I was. After Mrs. Nairn had served tea an' cake, I walked home with Miss Rowland. She invited me in an' showed me some of her pictures. I wish you could see them, Si. She has a lot on the walls, an' some that are not finished. There is one of Bullet House, an' another of the lake. They look great."

"Was she out there to-day?"

"I think she was."

"Did she say anything about Mr. Rutledge?"

"Not that I remember."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, Si, I can't swear to it, but as far as I can recollect she didn't mention him. She talked mostly about the lake, how beautiful it is, the trees, flowers, an' such things."

"And you like her, Billy?"

"Like her! Say, Si, if I had a daughter like her I'd be the happiest man on earth. Just think what it would mean to have such a girl to care for you in yer old age, an' to love ye. Why, it would be heaven on earth."

"Be careful, Billy, and don't get too sentimental. You must not let your heart run away with your head, remember."

"There's no danger of that, Si. I'm old enough to have a little horse-sense, an' know what's what. But if I was young an' good-lookin' as that Rutledge feller, I know what I'd do. An' if he doesn't get a hustle on an' make up to that girl in good right style he's a darn fool. I'd use a stronger word if I wasn't a member of the choir."

Owing to the darkness Billy did not see the smile that overspread his master's face.

"It is unusual for you to be so taken with a woman, Billy," Mr. Acres remarked. "She must be somewhat out of the ordinary run of females. You make me quite curious about her."

"She is out of the ordinary, Si. She's the only woman in this place, except Mrs. Nairn, of course, that I've taken a real shine to. She doesn't poke fun at me an' ask silly questions like some of the other girls. She talks to me straight an' makes me feel I'm a man. But, hang it all, why can't people leave her alone? They've started a scandal about her already."

"A scandal!" Mr. Acres leaned suddenly forward. "What kind of a scandal? And who started it?"

"All I know is what Peter told me. I met him on the way home. He'd been to the city, an' my, wasn't he mad. He was ragin' hot. I've been boilin' over ever since I heard it, an'—ouch!"

This exclamation was caused by a sharp grip of fingers upon his shoulder.

"Stop your chatter, man, an' come to the point at once," Mr. Acres growled. "What about that scandal?"

"All I know is what Peter told me," Billy replied, rubbing his smarting shoulder. "He said it's all around the city that they're livin' together at Bullet House."

"Who?"

"Miss Rowland an' Mr. Rutledge, of course. It's a rare morsel fer the evil-minded, so Peter said. He heard men chucklin' about it in shops an' on street corners."

"Is there any truth in it, Billy?"

"None, Si. I'd stake me life on it. You know how I've watched that house an' lake ever since Mr. Rutledge went there. He believed my yarn about the cow an' the music, ho! ho! But he's a nice young feller, an' I'm sorry that such a nasty report has got afloat."

"But did you ever see him and Miss Rowland at the house together, Billy?"

"Only that day she was driven in by the storm, as I told ye. Her an' Mr. Rutledge sat upon the verandah until Mrs. Rockbridge arrived. She—"

"Yes, yes, you told me about her," Mr. Acres impatiently interrupted. "I have wondered, though, what she was doing out there that day."

"So have I, Si, until Peter told me that she was the one who set that scandal goin' in the city."

"What! Mrs. Rockbridge!"

"So Peter said."

"How did he find out?"

"I don't know, but Peter generally knows what he's talkin' about."

To these words Mr. Acres made no reply. A silence of such an unusual length ensued that Billy wondered what had come over his master. He twisted, shuffled his feet, and even coughed a little, but all in vain. No movement came from the form nearby. Perhaps he was asleep. But, no, that was hardly likely. Ere long Billy became alarmed, and laid a hand upon his master's knee.

"Are ye asleep, Si?"

"Why, no," was the quiet response. "What made you think I was?"

"Well, if ye wasn't asleep, ye must have been darned near it, fer ye haven't said a word fer the last fifteen minutes or more. The bed's the place fer you, I guess."

"I'm not sleepy. But it's getting damp out here, so I'd better go in. Take a good look around the barn, Billy, and see that everything is all right. In the morning you and Nathan attend to the potatoes. The bugs are getting bad again. Give them a good dose this time. Is there enough poison?"

"Plenty, I guess."

"That's good. It's a pity we can't sometimes get clear of human pests as easily as we can potato bugs. Are you sure it was Mrs. Rockbridge who started that scandal?"

"So Peter said, an' he's a man we—"

"That will do. Good night."

Billy made his way through the darkness to the barn in a most thoughtful mood.

"I can't understand Si nohow," he mused. "Something's troublin' him, that's certain. Why he keeps me spyin' upon that feller at Bullet House is more'n I can understand. An' he's mighty curious, too, about that girl. He's changed a lot since she came to this place. I never saw him so gentle as he is to-night. I wonder why he was so still after I told him about

Mrs. Rockbridge. An' he said 'Good night' to me. I never knew him to do such a thing before. Hope t'goodness he's not really sick. If anything happens to Si, it'll be hard on the rest of us here."

Going at once to his room, Mr. Acres took down a scrap-book from a shelf over his desk. This he opened and as he turned the pages, ships of various designs, as well as newspaper clippings of prose and verse were exposed to view. Not until he came to a page almost at the middle of the book did he stay his hand. He then sat down, and drawing the lamp he had lighted up close, he fixed his eyes upon a clipping he had pasted there years before. It was the description of a fashionable wedding in a distant city. The bride was Josephine Agatha, only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Trayturn, and the groom was Augustus Rockbridge, a prominent journalist of Pretensia. The wedding took place in the church, and the reception was held at the beautiful residence of the bride's parents. Among the guests were most of the leading citizens, and the presents were numerous and costly. The gift of the bride's father was a very substantial cheque.

All this and much more Mr. Acres read, as he had read it many times before. Again his fingers turned over the pages to more recent dates. Several times he paused where large headlines told of Mrs. Rockbridge's doings in Pretensia as leader of society. There was a clipping about the welcome she had received upon first coming to the city. Another of her election as president of the Go-Ahead Club, and many more. They were all pasted in the book with considerable neatness, the dates being marked with ink. It was quite evident that Mr. Acres had followed with more than a passing interest the actions of Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge since her marriage.

At length he came to a page well towards the end of the book, and there he stopped. It was not necessary for him to turn further, as he had found what he had been seeking. There were several clippings here which filled three pages, telling of the lamented death of Thomas Trayturn. His picture was there, as well, and upon this Mr. Acres gazed for some time. It was not a pleasing face, for the great jaws, low forehead, small fiery eyes, and short upturned nose presented a bull-dog appearance. Yet this was the foremost business man of Flintville over whose sudden death such an ado had been made. As Mr. Acres read the fulsome account of the man, a stern expression overspread his face, and an angry light glowed in his eyes. He had read it often before, but it had never affected him so keenly as now.

"In the sudden passing of Thomas Trayturn, Flintville loses one of its most highly-respected and prominent citizens," so ran the article. "Ever since he came to our city he has taken an active interest in its welfare. As a business man of marked success he always set a shining example of integrity and fair dealing. His benevolent generosity is well known, and his liberal contributions to our charitable institutions were always made in a most unassuming manner. He never let his left hand know what his right hand did. As a church member—"

A slight ironical groan came from Mr. Acres' lips, and he read no more. He knew the rest of that account almost by heart. "He never let his left hand know what his right hand did," he repeated. "That's quite true. And it was well for him that he didn't. And his daughter is Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge! And to think that she is the woman who spread that vile scandal in the city about those young people! And Trayturn escaped what was coming to him! But by heavens, his daughter won't! And she has only herself to blame. If she had minded her own business it would have been different. But she'll pay for it. Yes, she'll pay, all right, for her own deviltry and her father's, too."

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# CHAPTER XVI

## SCHEMERS

For some time it had been a mystery to the people of Glengrow why Mr. Acres would not sell Bullet Lake. It abounded with such excellent fish, that it was greatly desired by sportsmen. Several very tempting offers had been made, but all in vain. Then the proprietors of the new summer hotel had exerted every effort to induce Mr. Acres either to sell the lake or lease it to them for a number of years. It was just what they needed in connection with their hotel project, and would prove a valuable attraction for tourists. To their repeated requests, however, Mr. Acres was adamant. When at last they became too insistent, he turned angrily upon them, ordered them off his place, and threatened to take legal action against them if they did not leave him alone. After that he was not troubled. He was willing and even anxious to rent the house and lake to individuals for a limited length of time, but he would have nothing to do with the owners of the hotel nor wealthy sportsmen.

When Mrs. Rockbridge returned to the hotel from her visit to Bullet Lake she was in no enviable frame of mind. Outwardly she was calm, as befitted a woman of her social position, but inwardly she was consumed with burning anger and bitter hatred. Mrs. Nairn had outwitted her, and what was more, she had humiliated her before Miss Ramona Blemfield. And in addition, there was a feeling of fear for the very woman upon whom she had come to spy. How cleverly Mrs. Nairn had arranged matters. But why? Did she suspect anything? She recalled her visit to the hotel, and when Miss Blemfield's name was mentioned, why did not Mrs. Nairn speak of her acquaintance with the noted lecturer? This was not only annoying, but puzzling. And suppose this story should reach Pretensia! How much would be made of it? Mrs. Rockbridge was well aware that she had enemies, and bitter ones, at that. What if they should hear of her humiliating defeat! The story would soon spread, and she would be the laughing-stock of all. That would never do. She must act first, and the most effective way would be to start the news about Mrs. Nairn's brother living with a girl in a lone house back in the woods. She might write to her dear friend Mrs. Casham. But that would mean committing herself to the written word which she did not care to do. Something might happen, and should her letter be produced as evidence it might prove very embarrassing. No, that was too risky. The spoken word was safer, and she was certain that Mrs. Casham and others of her kind would do the rest. Thus the story would receive rapid circulation, and it would be difficult for anyone to trace it to its source.

Mrs. Rockbridge was quite pleased with her scheme, and decided to go to the city the very next day. She longed to start off at once, but was too tired after her experience that afternoon. She would rest and feel fresher in the morning for her important undertaking. She would need to be in good form lest she should make some serious blunder.

She was about to leave the hotel the next morning when she received a telephone call from her husband. He wanted her to come to the city at once as he had something of importance to tell her which he could not mention by phone. Mrs. Rockbridge's curiosity was much aroused, and she made a record trip to Pretensia where she found her husband in his office. She decided to say nothing to him at present about her discovery at Bullet Lake, but wait until she had seen Mrs. Casham. It would be better, so she considered, for her husband not to know that she had started the story. He could then, if necessary, truthfully say that his wife had not said a word to him about it. Deeper and deeper now was she becoming entangled in her scheme. On the surface it seemed quite a harmless thing to learn what she could about the wife of the Rector of Glengrow. It was absolutely necessary for the welfare of St. Alban's that the woman in the rectory should measure up to the social and other standards of the church. And, besides, her nephew desired the position, and she was very anxious for him to have it. There was no harm in that, as it was quite reasonable. If Mrs. Rockbridge had stopped in time no harm would have been done. But to find that Mrs. Nairn was superior to many women in culture, social attainments, and personal charm was most annoying. And in addition, Mrs. Nairn had outwitted her. Such an insult she could not endure. It was revenge she now desired, and with such a passion burning in her heart she was ready for almost any undertaking to injure a noble woman. And the only way she believed she could accomplish her design was to strike at her through her brother and Joan Rowland. Such conscience as she had left, condemned her. And she well knew that her husband would do the same if he knew of her scheme.

The editor of the *Daily Echo* was so much interested in the plan he had in his own mind that he paid no attention to his wife's excited manner. If he had thought of it at all he would have attributed it, no doubt, to the mysterious phone call she had received from him. He at once explained why he had sent for her.

"It is in connection with Bullet Lake. I want to get possession of it, and you must help me."

"Why do you want the place?" Mrs. Rockbridge sharply asked. "You surely don't want it as a summer resort. I wouldn't live there for any consideration. The house is haunted, and has a bad reputation."

"That doesn't make any difference, my dear. I want it merely as a business proposition. I have had a letter from a wealthy New York man who wishes to buy such a lake, which is near the river, and where there is good fishing. Bullet Lake should be just what he needs. Money is no object, so he says."

"Do you know the man, Augustus?"

"Quite well. I met him last fall when he was here on a hunting trip. Now, if I can get that lake, we should be able to make a considerable sum out of the transaction."

"But how are we to get it?"

"That's just the point. It belongs to old Si Acres, an odd man, and much feared by his neighbors. Have you met him?"

"I have not, but I am anxious to have a talk with him about Bullet House. It has an interesting history, and I am quite anxious to write an article for our paper. Mr. Acres should be able to supply me with valuable information, as he is the oldest man in Glengrow."

"Well, then, he is the one I want you to see, and, if possible, induce him to sell Bullet Lake. You may find it a difficult undertaking, as he has refused time and time again to sell to the Glengrow Hotel Company. They are very anxious to get the place, and are willing to pay a big price for it. It is valuable property, and if we can get possession of it, we can sell it to the highest bidder, although I think the Hotel Company would have no chance against the New York millionaire."

"Why do you think that I can succeed when others have failed?" Mrs. Rockbridge asked.

"Because you are such a clever woman. You have the ability and determination to carry through anything you undertake."

Mrs. Rockbridge made no reply to these words of praise, as she was thinking of her recent defeat by Mrs. Nairn.

"When are you going back to Glengrow?" her husband inquired.

"This afternoon, maybe. I want to see Mrs. Casham. Has anything been done about St. Alban's?"

"Nothing, so far as I have heard."

"Who took the services last Sunday?"

"Oh, a young fellow from Greatburn. He was not much from all accounts. The favorite seems to be the Rector of Glengrow. Have you met him?"

"I have."

"Judging by the tone of your voice you do not think much of him."

"I don't. A clergyman who receives a visitor in his shirt-sleeves is no man for St. Alban's."

"Was that the way he received you?"

"It was, and he did not seem one bit embarrassed."

"And what about his wife?"

"Absolutely impossible. Her house was in a most disorderly condition when I called, and her two little brats of children were running wild. They were dirty, too, and looked much neglected."

"Was she at home?"

"No. She was off somewhere gallivanting with her brother. I met him later, and he said he knows you."

"He did! What's his name?"

"Rutledge. He has written for our paper, so he said."

"Oh, yes, I know the fellow quite well. He is a clever writer, and we have used several of his articles. They have been most favorably received and copied by other papers. But confound him, he had the impudence to ask me to pay him for his stuff."

"He did! Isn't that unusual?"

"Quite. To have his articles published in the *Echo* should be pay enough. It gives a young writer a publicity he could not otherwise obtain. I told him so, and he was quite indignant. He contended that if his stuff was worthy of publication it should be paid for. He seemed to think that we are running our paper for charity. Is his sister anything like him?"

"I told you, Augustus, that she is impossible. I might use a stronger word, but that will have to do."

"So you wouldn't care to have her as your rector's wife?"

"Decidedly not. The sooner the people of St. Alban's get their eyes open, the better it will be."

"So you intend to do what you can to open their eyes?"

"I feel it is my duty to do so."

Mrs. Rockbridge glanced at her wrist-watch and rose to her feet.

"I must go now, Augustus. Meet me at the White Lily. We shall dine there."

"Very well, dear. And, by the way, what is that man Rutledge doing in Glengrow?"

"Nothing, so far as I know. He is living in Bullet House."

"In Bullet House! Why did he go there?"

"For his health, so it is reported. But there seemed nothing the matter with him when I saw him."

With considerable difficulty Mrs. Rockbridge refrained from telling her husband what she knew about Robert Rutledge. Lest she should be further tempted to do so, she hurried away to her very dear friend, Mrs. Sylvester Casham.

The editor of the *Daily Echo* remained for some time in deep thought after his wife's departure. His mind was upon Bullet Lake and how much it would mean to him if Mr. Acres could be induced to sell. His sole hope lay in his wife, and in her he had unbounded confidence.

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# CHAPTER XVII

## THE BARGAIN

The morning was fine and Silas Acres had spent some time walking about his place. This was his usual custom, and nothing ever escaped his keen eyes. He always knew exactly what Billy and Nathan were doing, how the vegetables were growing, if the peas were properly bushed, the beans staked, and the potatoes hoed. When he found any omission he seemed to take pleasure in speaking about it, although seldom a word of praise passed his lips for work well done. In this respect he was like many people, and was, therefore, quite human.

This morning, however, Mr. Acres was very absent-minded, and to all appearance made his rounds merely from force of habit. This his men noticed, and discussed it as they weeded and thinned the long rows of turnips back of the barn.

"Si's got something on his mind," Billy declared as he paused and looked over at his master who was moving slowly towards the house. "He's changed much these last two weeks. I wonder if he's goin' to die."

"He's old enough," Nathan replied as he stooped and jerked out an extra-thick bunch of turnips. "I hope he'll get religion, though, before the end comes. It would be terrible for him to die in his sin."

"What sin?" Billy was all for fight now.

"The sin of unconversion. He needs a change of heart."

"God help you, then, Nathan, if he does. He wouldn't keep a whinin' hypocrite like you a day if he had a change of heart. I often wonder why he's put up with you so long."

"You're just as bad as he is, Billy. You need a change of heart, too. Religion means little to you. It's all a matter of going to church, while all the time your heart is cold and bare."

"H'm, an' what has your religion done fer you, Nathan?"

"It gives me a joy past all understanding. It lifts me like Paul the Apostle up into the third heaven to see and hear things which it is not lawful to utter."

"Well, don't try to utter 'em, Nathan. If they are anything like the groans an' yelps I've heard from you at times, I don't want to hear any more of them. Maybe that's the way you express yer joy."

"Billy, you are too ungodly to understand such things. When you get religion, you'll groan and wail over your past sins the same as I do. And you'll have great joy, too, in the thought that your sins are all forgiven and blotted out."

"And do you think your sins are blotted out, Nathan?"

"I am sure they are, Billy."

"Well, all I can say, then, is that I'm not much struck on the job. You're too poor a sample to suit me. An', besides, yer too dang proud of what ye call conversion. But, hello, who's that drivin' in at the gate?"

Mr. Acres was standing half way between the house and the road looking out upon the river. He was leaning heavily upon his stick, like a man wearied with a long journey. He was seeing more this morning than his broad, well-cultivated acres and thriving crop. His eyes had a far-away expression, and an insatiable desire was burning in his soul. The present was obliterated. Only the past was with him in all its fulness and clearness.

And standing there, he unheeded the cars that sped along the road. He paid no attention to the curious eyes that were cast in his direction. The world of to-day was as nothing to this lonely man whose hopes had long since been buried, and for whom there seemed no light to cheer the darkness of his soul.

Presently he was aware of a car drawing up close to his side, and a woman speaking to him. He turned swiftly, angrily, at this intrusion, and looked into the smiling face of Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge. He recognized her at once, although he had never seen her so close. But he knew just how this woman looked from what he had heard. That she was beautiful

there was no mistake, and for an instant his heart quickened with an almost youthful admiration. This vanished in an instant, however, for behind those smiling lips, glowing cheeks, and animated eyes appeared the heavy swinish face of Thomas Trayturn. This banished everything else and stirred his soul with anger. And here was Trayturn's daughter with her expensive car, smiling upon him! And she was the woman who had circulated that report about Joan Rowland and Robert Rutledge, and had come here to spy upon Mrs. Nairn! He was tempted to turn his back upon her in disgust, when her voice stayed him.

"You are Mr. Acres, I believe," she began as she held out her hand. "I have been so anxious to meet you."

Leaning forward upon his cane, Mr. Acres ignored the out-stretched hand and looked keenly into her face.

"Yes, that's my name. 'Odd' Acres, so people say, and maybe they're right."

"I am sure they are not," Mrs. Rockbridge gushingly replied. "Men who do great things are often called odd by others. Perhaps they are jealous of your wonderful farm. I have often admired it as I passed up and down the road. I wish to introduce myself. I am Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge. My husband is the editor of the *Daily Echo*. Perhaps you have heard of him."

"Yes, I know him through his paper. I take it."

"And you like it?"

"It is very readable, and the editorials are well written."

"I am so glad to hear you say that, sir. Augustus works very hard upon that paper. He is wearing himself out, and I have been trying to persuade him to take a rest, and to come to this beautiful place for a few weeks. But he doesn't like hotel life, so that is why I have come to see you this morning. Augustus is fond of the woods, and I have found such a lovely place which I know would suit him to perfection. It is Bullet Lake, and I have been told that you own it."

At these words Mr. Acres' body stiffened, a fierce gleam appeared in his eyes, and his hands gripped hard upon his stick.

"Yes, I own Bullet Lake, but it is rented at present."

"Oh, I don't want to rent it. I wish to buy the place and make it our summer home. The house on the shore is most attractive, and there Augustus would have the rest and quietness he needs."

"But it is not for sale, Madam."

"You would sell, though, if you were made a large enough offer? We are willing to pay well."

"Do you want it for your own private use?"

Mrs. Rockbridge hesitated, and shot a swift glance at Mr. Acres. She wondered why he had asked that question.

"Yes, for our own use," she confessed. She left the word "private" out, and this Mr. Acres noted. He believed now that she was lying, and he was anxious to learn more. He became suspicious of this scheming woman.

"So you want the place for your husband's benefit, Madam?"

"It would do him much good, and a few weeks there during the summer should make a new man of him."

"But he might not find the rest he desires. Bullet Lake and House have an evil reputation, as, no doubt, you have heard. It is a haunted place, to be exact, and that might be rather unpleasant."

"Yes, I have heard that, Mr. Acres. But surely you do not believe in ghosts! Only weak, silly people have such notions."

"Perhaps so, Madam. Anyway, you would have to run the risk."

"Oh, we would be quite willing to do that. We are not afraid of ghosts. And should we get the place, I would like to know the story of Bullet House. It has an interesting history, I have been told, and that makes it very romantic. It would be interesting to tell our friends about it when they visited us. Do you know anything about it? I should like to write an

article for our paper. It would make excellent reading."

"Yes, it certainly would, especially for the *Daily Echo*."

"And you will tell me about it, sir?"

Mr. Acres did not at once reply, for an idea had flashed into his mind which gave him a savage delight. Again he saw the face of Thomas Trayturn, heavy and swinish. He recalled the laudatory things that had been said about him after his death, and then thought of the misery he had brought upon a hard-working man and his wife. It was of the suffering of the latter he chiefly thought. And here was Trayturn's daughter, haughty, self-satisfied, and carrying on her father's business of injuring innocent people.

As Mrs. Rockbridge watched him she became impatient at his silence. She could not endure delays, but was all for action. She liked people to decide swiftly, and come to the point at once. She believed that Mr. Acres was really anxious to sell. She remained outwardly calm, however, and began to draw on her driving-gloves.

"I don't want to urge you, sir, unless you wish to sell the place. We are quite willing to buy, but if you do not desire to sell we shall have to seek for some other place. I would like, though, to know the story of Bullet House."

Just then Rachel sounded the dinner horn, and Mrs. Rockbridge glanced at her wrist-watch.

"Dear me! I did not know it was so late. I must not detain you any longer, as your dinner is waiting."

"Let it wait," Mr. Acres growled. "And don't go just yet. I have been thinking. Yes, it would be quite a surprise to have an article in the *Daily Echo* about Bullet House, and I can give you the information you want."

"Oh, how delightful!" Mrs. Rockbridge was all smiles now. She was accomplishing something, anyway.

"And I am willing to let you have the place," Mr. Acres slowly continued.

"Ah, that is better still. My husband will be so pleased. But I would like to know your price."

"I am afraid it will be very large." A peculiar expression came into Mr. Acres' eyes which the woman did not notice.

"Yes, it will be very large. I have had tempting offers already, but always refused to sell. Now, however, it is different."

"Well, how much?" Mrs. Rockbridge was again becoming impatient.

"I will not sell for money, Madam. My price is of another kind altogether."

"Not sell for money! What do you mean, sir?"

"I see you are surprised, and not without reason. Although money cannot buy that place, there is something that can. Just a minute, please," he ordered as Mrs. Rockbridge started to interrupt him. "Yes, there is something, and that is the written and published story of Bullet House. If you write the account just as I tell it to you, and have it printed in full in the *Daily Echo*, the place is yours."

At this strange statement, a fear came into Mrs. Rockbridge's mind that this man was mentally unbalanced. She had heard of his peculiar actions, and this seemed to be a definite proof that something was wrong with him. Who else but a crazy man would make such an offer?

"Are you in earnest, Mr. Acres?" she asked. "Are you really willing to sell your place for such a trifle?"

"I am. Bullet Lake is of little use to me now. I am an old man and would like to see the story in print before I die. It is a duty I owe to the world."

With considerable difficulty Mrs. Rockbridge concealed her triumph. It was a tribute to the fascination she had exerted over this peculiar man. How pleased and surprised her husband would be.

"Your offer is very attractive, Mr. Acres, and I shall write the story to the best of my ability. I have written several articles for our paper, so am not altogether a novice. When can we begin?"

"There is no special hurry. I shall need a week or two to get my thoughts into shape."

"And will you tell me about that wretched man who ruined the Raytons?"

"What man?"

"The one, of course, who proved a false friend, and who induced Mr. Rayton to sign his note. I have often thought about his treachery, and longed to expose him. Most likely his descendants are now living upon his ill-gotten gains."

"Yes, I shall tell you everything. You shall know all about him."

"That will be good. But I can hardly wait, as I am so anxious to get the article written. But I must not keep you any longer from your dinner."

With a graceful movement she started the car, and confident and self-possessed, she smiled upon the old man as she sped through the gateway to the road beyond.

Mr. Acres stood and watched until the car was lost to view around a bend in the distance. A gleam of triumph shone in his faded eyes as he turned and walked slowly towards the house.

"That woman's a speeder, all right," he mused. "But she's speeding into something that will give her the jolt of her life. Yes, Mrs. Rockbridge, you are headed straight for something that will cut down your speed and take the cussed impudence out of your make-up. And it's been coming to you for a long time. It's a pity, though, that your skunk of a father isn't alive to share some of it. But 'the sins of the fathers,' yes, yes, the children must bear them. That's Scripture, and it's true in this case, all right."



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A CHILD THE VICTIM

At dinner Billy and Nathan were discussing the eternal problem of the inequality of life. They had started it out of doors, and continued it as they sat down at the table. Mr. Acres listened to them with more interest than usual, and even smiled a little from time to time. He could afford to be good-natured now, for things were coming his way in a most unexpected manner. Yes, he was being borne on a top wave to triumph, and the thought thrilled his soul.

"It isn't fair fer some people to have so much while others have nuthin'," Billy declared, as he helped himself to a liberal slice of roast beef. "Some have more'n is good fer 'em, an' some can't make a livin', no matter how hard they scratch."

"But what does all their money amount to, anyway?" Nathan asked. "It doesn't make them contented. They're running from one thing to another to find happiness, while all the time true happiness is within. When a man has peace in his heart, nothing else matters. It's a pity they can't see it."

"That may be all right, Nathan, as far as it goes. But why can't a man have peace in his heart, an' enough to live upon, as well, an' be decently buried when he dies?"

"Oh, the Lord is giving the rich their good time now, like the rich man in the Bible. The poor will get their reward some day when they are carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."

"I don't like such reasonin', Nathan, even though it is in the Bible. Look at Mrs. Rockbridge, fer instance. Why should such a stuck-up snookin' woman have so much now, with nothin' to do but live on the fat of the land, drive a big car, an' make trouble fer good people? She may never get into old Abraham's bosom, an' I'm mighty sure he wouldn't want her, but why she has such an easy time here is more'n I can fathom."

"You are too ungodly," Nathan reproved. "The ways of the Lord are wonderful and beyond our understanding. Don't you remember how it says in the Bible about the rebellious Children of Israel, that the Lord gave them their hearts' desire, and sent leanness withal into their souls? That's what He is doing to-day. Those rich people hanker after the flesh pots, and the Lord gives them their desire, but they have leanness of soul. And I am afraid you are much the same, Billy. You hanker after dancing, smoking, and card-playing, but your soul is very lean in spiritual things."

"An' do you think your soul is fat, Nathan?" Billy retorted.

"I hope so. It is full of grace, for the Lord has given me the more abundant life."

"Well, it may be so, but no one would ever suspect it, Nathan. When the brindle cow kicked over your pail of milk the other night, where was yer grace of heart then? Ye didn't show much of it, let me tell ye that."

"I was caught off guard, Billy. The devil gripped me for a few seconds. But I have repented, and have received forgiveness."

"Ye have! An' what about last night when ye jammed yer finger in the barn door? Judgin' by what ye said an' the way ye acted, the grace in yer heart wasn't very fat."

Nathan had no ready reply to this charge. He nearly choked in his anger. His face grew very red, and he tried to say something which ended in a fit of coughing. And to add to his discomfort, Billy was smiling in a most tantalizing manner. Even Mr. Acres was amused. He had listened to this conversation with Mrs. Rockbridge in his mind. When his henchmen were at last through with their supper, he dismissed them with a warning to keep busy at the turnips, as haying would soon be on.

After the men had gone, he filled and lighted his pipe while Rachel cleared away the dishes. He settled himself comfortably in his big armchair, as was his wont, and gave himself up to meditation, which on this day was very enjoyable. In the wreathes of smoke circling up from his pipe he could see the whirling form of Mrs. Rockbridge as she vainly tried to extricate herself from the net into which she had become enmeshed. In the wisps of smoke he saw her hair flying in wild disorder, as with out-stretched hands she pleaded for mercy in her downward rush to disgrace. This was all very pleasant to him as he sat there and dreamed.



When he was through with his smoke, he went upstairs to his room, opened the old scrap-book, and studied it for some time. He did not need to have his memory refreshed, but merely wished to gloat over the laudatory articles about Thomas Trayturn, and the effusive descriptions of Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge's wedding, as well as other accounts of her doings in Pretensia.

He was aroused by the sound of hurried footsteps upon the stairs, and then Billy stood at the open door. His eyes were bulging, he was panting hard, and his whole manner expressed intense excitement.

"Si, Si," he cried, "the parson's little girl's been hurt, killed, maybe!"

With a bound Mr. Acres left his chair and advanced towards Billy.

"Hurt! Killed!" he gasped. "How? When?"

"Mrs. Rockbridge ran her down when she was drivin' from here."

Fiercely Mr. Acres stared at his informant, and the expression in his eyes frightened Billy. He backed up a few steps, afraid lest his master was going to strike him for bringing such news. But he had no need for fear. Mr. Acres hardly noticed him, for his mind was elsewhere. So that woman had run down the little Nairn girl, the child who had given him that twenty-five cent piece! She rose before him now in her sweet simplicity as he had seen her that morning at the rectory. And it was Mrs. Rockbridge who had crushed such a delicate flower! His hands clenched hard, and his heart grew hot within him. He then looked at Billy.

"How did it happen?" he asked in a more quiet voice. "Tell me, quick."

"I only know what Jed Davis told me as he drove by a few minutes ago. There was a cow on one side of the road, an' the parson's two little ones on the other. Mrs. Rockbridge was drivin' fast, an' tryin' to go between the cow an' the children, she got confused an' the front fender of her car hit the little girl."

"Is she dead, Billy?"

"Not when they carried her into the house, so Jed told me. But he wouldn't be surprised if she's dead now. He heard the news at the store. They sent fer the doctor at once. It's just what I've been expectin', Si. I knew that woman would kill or hurt somebody sooner or later by the wild way she drives."

"That will do, Billy," Mr. Acres ordered. "You may go back to your work now. I am going over to the rectory."

Slowly, like a man in a dream, Mr. Acres closed his scrap-book and returned it to its place on the shelf. He then went downstairs, and picking up his hat and stick, left the house. Once upon the road, his pace quickened, and like the giant Antaeus of Grecian fable, he seemed to grow stronger at every step. His speed denoted his anxiety, and for all his fourscore years he would have tested the endurance of a much younger man.

Reaching the rectory door he did not rap with his stick as on his former visit. He gave a gentle tap, opened the door and entered. Hettie met him. Her face was pale, and her eyes red. Mr. Acres glared at her.

"Where is your mistress, girl?"

"Hush, don't speak so loud," Hettie whispered, holding up a warning finger. "Mrs. Nairn is upstairs with Betty. The house must be kept very quiet."

An eager expression came into the visitor's eyes.

"The child is living, then? She wasn't killed?"

"Oh, no, but she was hurt bad. The doctor was here, and he'll be back again soon."

Before Mr. Acres could say anything more, Mrs. Nairn came down the stairs. Her face showed the strain and anxiety she was undergoing. But she was calm as she held out a hand of welcome.

"I came to find out about your little girl, Madam," Mr. Acres began. "I am sorry, very sorry."

"Thank you, Mr. Acres. You are very kind. Come into the sitting-room and rest. You must be tired."

Surprised at her thoughtfulness for him, Mr. Acres sat down in a big chair and leaned forward upon his stick. He looked at Mrs. Nairn as she seated herself nearby. Her courage and self-control appealed to him. If she had cried, wrung her hands, and uttered words of reproach against Mrs. Rockbridge he would not have been surprised. But to see her sitting there, even smiling a little, was out of the ordinary. It's the Rutledge blood, he mentally decided. Her grandfather was like that. Great stock!

Briefly Mrs. Nairn related what had happened so far as she knew. The children had been out of the house but a short time, and had gone out upon the road to see a stray cow when Mrs. Rockbridge arrived. She slowed down and tried to pass between the cow and the children. But just then the cow decided to cross the road, and to keep from hitting it, Mrs. Rockbridge had swerved her car to the left, and the fender had struck Betty, knocking her into the ditch and breaking her right arm. How serious were her other injuries the doctor could not tell at present. Anyway, the child was resting as comfortably as could be expected, and was conscious.

Mrs. Nairn's eyes were moist when she finished. Mr. Acres was watching her closely, and had not missed a word she said.

"Where is Mrs. Rockbridge now?" he sternly asked.

"At the hotel, I suppose. She carried Betty into the house, and felt greatly concerned about the accident."

"And well she might be," Mr. Acres growled. "What right has she to drive like Jehu along these roads, endangering people's lives? She blamed the cow, no doubt?"

"She did, and blamed me, too, for allowing the children out on the road."

"She did!" Mr. Acres rose suddenly to his feet. He was in a fighting mood, and looked fierce.

"I must not keep you any longer now, Madam," he said. "But if I can be of any use to you, let me know. You are a Rutledge, and that's enough for me."

He picked up his hat which he had placed upon the floor, and then paused.

"Could I have one look at the child, Madam?" he asked. "I won't make the least noise, and I won't stay more than a second. Just one peek will do."

Mrs. Nairn was surprised. She glanced quickly at the old man and noticed the eager look in his eyes. How could she refuse such a request?

"The doctor has ordered—"

"I know, I know what he said, Madam," Mr. Acres interrupted. "The child must be kept very quiet, and no visitors allowed to see her. But I won't disturb her. She'll never know I'm in the room."

Only for an instant did Mrs. Nairn hesitate. Then she took matters into her own hands.

"Come," she said in a low voice. "You shall see Betty."

Upstairs Mr. Nairn and Joan Rowland were on guard by the injured child. The former was sitting by the cot watching with strained attention the face of his little daughter. Joan was seated on the opposite side, waiting and ready for anything she might do. As Mr. Acres entered, he paused just inside the door and glanced for an instant around the dainty room. Then his eyes fell upon the curly head upon the pillow. Without a sound he moved to the cot and looked down. Slowly he reached out a trembling hand and touched the child's head. That was all. Not a word was spoken, and he seemed unconscious of anyone else in the room. In another second he was gone, leaving Mr. Nairn and Joan staring in wide-eyed wonder at the open door through which he had passed.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### UNREST

For several days Betty's life hung in the balance. The shock to her delicate system had been so great that for a while the doctor feared the worst. She took no notice of anything, and all efforts to arouse her proved in vain. It was an anxious time for the ceaseless watchers by her side, and as she lay there so white and ethereal in appearance they had the feeling that she was gradually slipping away from them.

On the fourth day after the accident, a change took place. It was towards evening and Mrs. Nairn was alone with the child. Betty, who had been lying as if asleep, suddenly opened her eyes and looked around. Seeing her mother, she gave a faint smile.

"Where is he, Mummy?" she asked in a feeble voice.

"Who, dear?" Mrs. Nairn questioned, bending over the cot.

"That heathen man. He was right here talking to me. Has he gone?"

"You have been dreaming, darling."

"Have I? But I want to see him, and give him some more money. It's in my box downstairs."

"All right, dear, you shall give it to him when he comes again."

"Has he been here, Mummy?"

"Yes, he came to see you. He was right in this room."

"Oh, I am so glad. I was hoping he'd come to see me."

The child gave a deep sigh, closed her eyes, and dropped off into a peaceful sleep. That was the beginning of the change for the better, and a great thankfulness filled the hearts of all.

During this anxious time the people in the parish expressed their sympathy for Mr. and Mrs. Nairn. They seemed to have forgotten their grievance, and did what they could. Some brought butter and eggs to the rectory, and even Mrs. Broadbent came all the way to bring a cake she had made.

"I wanted to do something," she explained to Mrs. Nairn. "I have children of my own, so can feel for you in your trouble."

Mrs. Nairn was deeply moved by these words, and tears came into her eyes as she tried to express her thanks.

"Everybody is so kind and thoughtful," she said. "I did not realise until this trouble came how many good neighbors we really have. I am afraid I have misjudged them, and hope they will forgive me for any hasty and uncharitable words I have said."

"Indeed they will," the visitor declared. "And they have forgiven you already. We're not people to hold a grudge. Just let us know if there is anything we can do, for we are anxious to help."

When Mrs. Nairn told her husband that evening about Mrs. Broadbent's visit and what she had said, he remained silent for a few seconds. Then he looked at his wife.

"Good may come out of this, Nell. The people here were up in arms against us, and I really believed we should be forced to leave. That would have greatly interfered with my future career. Our failure here would soon be known far and wide. Oh, I know how it would be, for I have heard about others and what people have said. Yes, it would pass from place to place, 'Mr. Nairn? Oh, he's the clergyman who made a mess of things in Glengrow.' Perhaps the Lord is overruling all for good."

"But at what a terrible price, Andrew. Why should our darling child suffer that good might come? I may be rebellious,

but it does not seem right that Betty should be sacrificed to bring peace in this parish, especially among people who are supposed to be Christians."

"It does not seem just, Nell. But remember a Greater than Betty suffered for the sins of the world and to bring peace. But, there, we shall not discuss that any more now. And besides, it is too deep a problem for us to try to solve."

Twice a day Mr. Acres came to the rectory to inquire after the injured child. It was always in the morning, just before noon, and early in the evening. He never varied his time of calling, and stayed only a few minutes. These visits touched both Mr. and Mrs. Nairn, for it showed his keen interest in the child. He never again asked to go upstairs, but in a gruff voice requested to know how the little one was getting along. Then he was gone, thumping his stick hard upon the ground.

The evening of Betty's change for the better, Mrs. Nairn met him at the door, and his face brightened at the news.

"Come in," she invited. "I have something to tell you."

As Mr. Acres seated himself, with his hands firmly placed upon his upright stick, Mrs. Nairn sat down facing him. She wished to look into his eyes that she might see again the fleeting expression she had caught the day he had asked to see Betty. She had wondered at it then, and so had Joan. It seemed to express a great desire of the soul, hidden behind a rough and forbidding exterior.

"Yes, Betty's condition is improved," she told him. "The doctor was here a few minutes ago, and he is much pleased. And I want to tell you that the first question she asked was about you."

"Ah! About me?" Mr. Acres leaned eagerly forward. "And what did she call me?"

A slight flush came into Mrs. Nairn's cheeks, as she hesitated.

"You needn't mind telling me, Madam, for I know. She called me the 'heathen man.'"

"She did, and I hope you don't mind. She had just awakened from a dream, so was not herself."

"Mind! Do I mind? I should say not."

For the first time Mrs. Nairn saw Mr. Acres smile. It was a wonderful smile, like a beam of sunshine through dark heavy clouds. But it satisfied her. She knew now that she had not been mistaken in the man.

"I think Betty would like to see you, Mr. Acres," she said. "You might come up to her room just for a minute."

"Not to-night, thank you kindly, Madam. I shall come again, as I have something of importance to attend to this evening and to-morrow."

The one who was deeply concerned about Betty, although in an altogether different way, was Mrs. Rockbridge. The accident had upset her "terribly" she confessed, and she was afraid that her heart would not stand the shock. Anyway, she was able to drive her car to the city the afternoon of the accident to consult her husband. That the Nairns would sue for damages was uppermost in her mind. They would demand a large sum, and if the case should go to Court she knew how many would be brought to witness against her as a most reckless driver.

"This must be settled out of Court," she declared after she had told her husband what had happened. "I could not stand the strain, as my heart is in such a bad condition. We must offer the Nairns a price to settle."

"Let us not be in too great a hurry, Josephine," Mr. Rockbridge advised. "The Nairns may not take action, and, besides, you were not altogether to blame for the accident. That cow should not have been on the road. And what were those children doing there alone?"

"But I was on the wrong side of the road, Augustus. The children were really in the ditch. I became confused when that cow started to cross the road. You see, I had been talking to old Mr. Acres, and was so excited over my success that I was driving faster than I should. I fear I was to blame."

"So you saw Odd Acres, did you?" Mr. Rockbridge asked. "And you succeeded?"

"I did, beyond my fondest expectation. He will let us have the place for almost nothing."

Mr. Rockbridge rose to his feet, his eyes aglow with eagerness. The accident to the little child was forgotten in the prospect of an important business deal.

"How much?"

"Nothing in money. Mr. Acres merely wants me to write the story of Bullet House. He has agreed to give me the full account, and if we publish it in our paper just as he tells it to me, the place is ours. It seems strange, but that is what he said. I wonder if that old man is in his right mind. His neighbors think there is something mentally wrong with him."

At these words Mr. Rockbridge stared at his wife for a few seconds, and then resumed his seat. In fact, he slumped down in his chair like a tired man. This his wife noticed.

"What is the matter, Augustus? You look sick."

"I am all right. But you must not write that story, Josephine."

"And why not?"

"Because it will bring trouble upon you. Bullet House has a bad reputation. It is haunted, and whoever tries to meddle with its unsavory history will meet with disaster. I don't want you to get mixed up with it, so you must leave it alone."

"Must! No one, not even you, should mention such a word to me. I have a mind superior to all superstitious ideas. I am surprised at you, Augustus, for I considered you above such foolish notions. Have I not gone to great trouble to get that place for you? And when I have succeeded so far, you order me to have nothing more to do with it merely because the place is haunted. When I begin a thing I always carry it through, and I shall do the same now, ghosts or no ghosts."

"Very well, then, Josephine. I have warned you, remember, so if you take matters into your own hands you will have to pay the penalty."

"I am quite capable of doing that, as you should know by this time. We are going to have that place, and just as soon as I can get this unfortunate Nairn trouble settled, I shall visit Mr. Acres again and get the full story of Bullet House. I am so anxious to begin."

"All right, have your own way, as you always do. When are you going back to Glengrow?"

"This afternoon. I shall see the Nairns, and get that matter off my mind. I cannot write when anything is troubling me."

Mr. and Mrs. Nairn were with Betty that evening when Hettie came to the door and whispered that Mrs. Rockbridge was downstairs. At once Mr. Nairn rose to his feet, but his wife motioned him to sit down.

"Let me go, Andrew. You watch here."

"But I must see that woman, Nell. There is something I want to say to her, and the sooner the better. She needs to be told a few straight things."

"No, no, not now, Andrew. You are too excited. Wait for a day or two. It is better for me to go."

"But, Nell—"

"Hush, Andrew. Remember Betty. Please let me have my way this time, and I am sure you will never regret it."

"Very well, then, Nell," was the reluctant assent. "You always get your own way. And, perhaps, you are right. Maybe I am too much worked up to meet that woman now. Go and see what she wants."

Mrs. Rockbridge was seated in the sitting-room whither Hettie had conducted her. She was weary and irritable, for the day had been a most trying one. She wished to get through with this interview and return to the hotel. With a sigh she leaned back in the comfortable chair. It was restful here, and a feeling of peace pervaded the room. She glanced around and noted its neatness, a striking contrast to the first time she had visited it. It soothed her tired nerves. She closed her eyes and meditated upon the events of the day. Nothing but worry, excitement, and rushing from place to place. And she

had been doing that all her life. And what had she gained? No peace of mind or body had come to her, but a restlessness which nothing could satisfy. She had been chasing after happiness, but it had always eluded her. Now she was disgusted with it all.

Opening her eyes, they rested upon a picture over the mantel. It fascinated her, and held her spellbound by something she could not explain. It was a beautiful picture by a famous artist of the Master of Galilee standing with arms out-stretched to a crowd of people surrounding Him. The old and the young, the sick, the lame, the blind, and the halt, all were there, their faces eagerly upturned to Him who was standing before them.

The watching woman rose quickly to her feet and went close to the picture to read the title. "Peace I leave with you." Yes, that was its name, and she knew the meaning. Those people gathered there had found the source of true peace. She could tell it by their faces. But it was at the Master Himself that she looked, and His eyes seemed to enter her very soul. A strange feeling came over her such as she had never before experienced.

In another minute Mrs. Nairn entered the room and stood by her side. Turning, Mrs. Rockbridge saw her, and immediately she was her former self again.

"I have been admiring this picture," she explained. "It is very beautiful. And how is the child now?"

"About the same, so far as we can tell," Mrs. Nairn quietly replied. "The doctor is still hopeful."

"I am glad of that. It was an unfortunate affair, and I have come to see about a settlement. I was talking to my husband this afternoon, and as we do not wish the matter to go to Court, we are willing to pay what is reasonable. Perhaps you will tell me what you will take to settle."

Mrs. Nairn could hardly believe that she heard aright. She looked at her visitor in amazement.

"I do not understand what you mean, Mrs. Rockbridge."

"You don't! You see, we are willing to pay you something for what I did to your child. It is always customary for people to take legal action in such cases. But we do not wish that, so prefer to settle out of Court."

"Oh, I understand now. But we never thought of doing such a thing. And do you think that money could compensate us for the loss of our darling child?"

"Of course not. But we thought—"

"We want nothing," Mrs. Nairn interrupted. "The very idea of taking anything is terrible. Please do not mention it again."

Mrs. Rockbridge looked keenly at Mrs. Nairn, and a peculiar feeling stole into her heart, such as she had felt when looking at the picture on the wall. For once she was at a loss what to say. Her self-confidence had vanished, leaving her almost helpless in the presence of this calm woman. She wanted to be away by herself—to think.

"Very well, then, Mrs. Nairn, I shall accede to your wish. But if there is anything I can do, please let me know."

Impulsively Mrs. Nairn seized Mrs. Rockbridge's hand in hers.

"Yes, there is something you can do. You can remember Betty in your prayers."

Mrs. Rockbridge walked slowly back to the hotel. She was much disturbed, and her thoughts were of a deep, searching nature. Her former life of social activity and striving after position seemed shallow and distasteful. She had caught a brief glimpse of another life, and desired to know more of it. She could not get Mrs. Nairn out of her mind, try as she might. And that night as she lay awake she was ever before her. "Remember Betty in your prayers," kept ringing in her ears. And in addition, there was that picture on the wall, with the Master's calm, loving eyes, and out-stretched arms, giving forth His blessed message of peace to troubled souls. All this was quite new to Mrs. Rockbridge. For a time she tried to combat the strange feeling that was gradually stealing over her. At length, however, she gave up the struggle, and allowed herself to be borne by some mysterious power into another world so wonderfully new and real.

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# CHAPTER XX

## THE PICTURE

Since the accident Joan Rowland had spent most of her time at the rectory helping Mrs. Nairn. But when Betty's condition began to improve, she sought the refuge of her snug abode to sketch a picture that was uppermost in her mind. And that was the face of Mr. Acres as she had seen it the morning that strange man had visited the room where the injured child was lying. She could not forget the expression in his eyes. It haunted her, so remarkable did it seem. She tried to imagine the cause of it. What was lying behind that fleeting look. From memory she sketched that stern, rugged, defiant face, and then endeavored to capture the expression she had seen. But she was baffled. Try as she might, it eluded her.

She was seated with her back to the door where the glow of departing day fell upon the sketch on her easel. She was quite satisfied with the face she had drawn, the rough beard, shaggy eyebrows. Roman-like nose, and deep wrinkles. But the eyes! They were not right. Her hand ceased as she studied her work. It seemed strange to her that she should be so much interested in the face of the man she so strongly despised, the man who had been so heartless to her mother and grandmother in turning them out of their home into the cold and cruel world. He might have let them remain in that little house by the lake. What difference would it have made to him? He had acquired a fortune from the lumber he had taken off the place, and surely that should have satisfied him. And what a wonderful farm he had, worth considerable money. It was strange that such a heartless man should have prospered. And yet why had he been so anxious to see Betty that morning? And what was the meaning of that strange expression in his eyes? It was more than she could understand, and she gave a slight sigh. She could not finish the picture. She would wait until she saw Mr. Acres again. She might then see the look and capture it for her sketch.

Not wishing that any one should see it, she drew a cloth over the easel, and was about to leave the house to go over to the rectory, when a step outside arrested her attention. Looking quickly around, she was surprised to see Mr. Acres but a few feet away. She was startled. So here was the man whose face she had been sketching, the very one she was longing to meet that she might tell him what she thought of him. And now he was right before her! She nerved herself for the ordeal which she dreaded, although she felt that it had to be performed. He should know who she was, at any rate. It was not right that such a creature should escape. Anyway, it would relieve her feelings to give expression to what had been so long in her mind.

Mr. Acres had stopped just outside the door, and was leaning heavily upon his stick as he peered keenly at the girl from under the rim of his old faded hat.

"Good evening, Miss. Where is Peter?"

"He and Mrs. Pendle left in the van about an hour ago," Joan explained. "They said they would not be long."

"H'm, they're always gallivanting around somewhere. I've come all the way to see Peter on important business, and he's not at home."

"Come in and rest until they return," Joan invited. "You must be tired."

"Thank you, Miss, I guess I will. That walk has puffed me a great deal. I can't stand much these days, and that hill seems to be getting steeper every year."

He seated himself in a chair, took off his hat, and placed his hands upon his upright stick. He then looked critically around the room, and his eyes brightened as they rested upon the pictures of several ships upon the walls.

"You have a cosy place here, Miss. And what fine pictures. And what great clipper ships you have there. Where did you get them?"

"I painted them, and I am glad you like them."

"You painted them! That is your work!"

Mr. Acres' eyes turned in admiration from the ships to the face of the girl standing before him.

"Certainly I painted them. I am very fond of ships, especially the old sailing vessels."

"You are right, Miss; you surely are. Ah, those were great days when the clipper ships sailed the seas. They have nothing now but iron tubs. No life. No romance."

Joan noticed the animation that kindled the old man's eyes. He was young again, living in the past. She smiled a little sadly.

"Yes, I like old things," she quietly remarked. "They appeal to me, especially if they have a personal interest. That is why I am so greatly interested in Bullet House. Perhaps you would like to see some of my sketches of it."

She glanced at her visitor as she moved across the room, but his face revealed nothing. He evidently didn't know who she was.

"Here is one I made a few days ago," she remarked, holding up a sketch of the house by the lake. "I like it."

"Ah, it is very good, Miss, and quite natural. So you have a personal interest in that old house? In what way?"

The critical moment had now arrived, and Joan's heart beat fast. She laid aside the sketch and stood before the old man.

"Yes, I have a personal interest because my mother was born in that house."

She waited for some word of surprise, but none came. Mr. Acres was not looking at her, but staring straight before him.

"Yes," the girl continued, "my mother was born there, so that is why the house is of such special interest to me."

"So you are old Jim Rayton's granddaughter, then?" Mr. Acres questioned, as if unaware of the fact.

"I am, and from that house my grandmother was turned out when my mother was a mere baby."

"Is that so? And who turned them out?"

Joan looked at the man in astonishment. What did he mean by asking her that? He should surely know.

"The man who bought the place, of course."

"And who was he?"

Joan's only reply was to reach out, draw the cloth from the sketch upon the easel, and turn it towards Mr. Acres. He looked at it, indifferently, for a few seconds.

"So that's the man, eh? But where are his horns?"

"Horns!"

"Yes, the devil is always pictured with horns and hoofs. But as you show only his face, I can't tell what his feet are like."

Joan was forced to smile in spite of herself. This man was a puzzle to her.

"I didn't think it necessary to add the horns," she explained. "His face is evidence enough."

"Quite right, Miss. Yes, quite right. That face shows what a devil he is."

"But do you know him?" Joan asked in astonishment.

"Certainly I know. It's supposed to be me—yes, it's me, all right, except the eyes. You haven't got them right. But why on earth have you taken the trouble to sketch me, Miss? Couldn't you find a better subject?"

"I suppose so, but I want to have your face before me lest I waver in my purpose."

"And what is that?"

"To tell you what I think of you for turning my mother and grandmother out of that house."



"Ah, so you have been bottling up your wrath, have you? But tell me why you are afraid of wavering in your purpose."

"Because of the look I saw in your eyes the day you went to the rectory to see Betty."

At these words Mr. Acres gave a slight start, while an expression of anger overspread his face.

"And what did you see there?" he sternly demanded.

"I don't know. But it was something I should like to capture for that picture. I can't finish it unless I do."

Mr. Acres stared at the girl, and a slight tremor shook his body. He then slumped down into his chair.

"You must have sharp eyes, Miss," he growled. "Your imagination is too vivid. You didn't see anything unusual. You merely thought so."

"Oh, no I didn't. I saw it very plainly, and it was caused by the accident to that little child. Am I not right?"

"Why should that child give me such a look, Miss?"

"You know better than I do, sir. You must be greatly interested in her, or you would not go twice a day to inquire about her."

"Well, why shouldn't I be interested? It isn't often we have an accident in this place."

"Is that the only reason, Mr. Acres? Isn't there something about that child which appeals to you? Perhaps it is her prayers, for she has prayed for you every night since the morning she gave you some money."

"Is that so? But I'm not at all surprised. She thinks I'm a heathen, and the Church teaches the duty of praying for the heathen."

Mr. Acres chuckled as he glanced at Joan. He evidently did not mind what he was called.

"But you are not a heathen," the girl declared.

"Perhaps not, Miss. A heathen might be quite a good fellow. But I am not according to you. I'm a villain, almost a deep-dyed criminal because I turned your mother and grandmother out of Bullet House. And what wrong was there in that, let me ask? I bought the place with my hard-earned money, and surely I had a right to my own property. Isn't that reasonable?"

Joan stared hard at her visitor, and became somewhat confused. She had never thought of this before. Mr. Acres, seeing her embarrassment, smiled.

"But you might have let them remain there for a while," Joan at length found voice to say. "What harm could they have done? But, no, you turned them out to shift for themselves. Was that right?"

"Perhaps not. But they didn't find the world so cold and cruel, after all, did they? They got along all right, I suppose?"

"They did, but no thanks to you. If my grandmother had not fallen heir to considerable money, she and her little babe would have starved."

"So your grandmother got some money left to her, eh? From a relative?"

"I do not know. My mother, who was a baby at the time, never knew where it came from, as my grandmother never told her."

"Do you get it now, Miss?"

"I do. Ever since my mother died the money has come to me every month."

"Who sends it to you?"

"It comes through the Golden Trust Company."

"And you have never made inquiry as to the legacy, Miss?"

"No, because I knew it was no use. My mother tried, but to no purpose. Anyway, the money comes regularly, so why should I worry?"

"Quite true, Miss, quite true. But doesn't it seem strange that you know nothing about the legacy, not even how much it is?"

"Perhaps so. But, you see, it has been coming so regularly for such a long time that I have taken it as a matter of course."

Mr. Acres rose slowly to his feet, stepped over to the easel, and looked down upon the sketch.

"Is that the best you can do, Miss?" he asked.

"Oh, no. That is just a rough sketch, a mere outline of what I hope to do."

"So you intend to finish it?"

"I was planning to do so, if you don't mind. Perhaps you would come and sit for me. I might then be able to get your eyes right."

Mr. Acres stood silently, lost in thought. He then looked curiously at the girl.

"I will do so, providing you will make another sketch. I have a picture of the man who was the false friend to your grandfather. He was responsible for much of the trouble. Yes, he was the one who really broke Jim Rayton's heart, ruined him, and undoubtedly caused his death."

Into Joan's eyes came an expression of intense eagerness.

"What is his name? I long to know."

"What! didn't your mother tell you?"

"Perhaps she did, but I have forgotten."

"It is not necessary for you to know just now. Make the picture first, study his face, and let me know what you see in it. Anyway, I shall bring the one I have as soon as I can. I expect to be busy to-morrow. But there is no immediate hurry."

Joan was about to question him further, for she was anxious to learn more, when Peter's van drew up in the yard. Mr. Acres at once bade her good evening, cast a swift glance at the sketch, and left the house.



# CHAPTER XXI

## A STREET SCENE

An unheard of thing happened in Glengrow. It was nothing less than Silas Acres riding with Peter Pendle in the big van. It was about the middle of the forenoon when he started from Peter's house, so it was reported, and the news soon spread. Where in the world were they going? everybody asked, although no one could give a satisfactory answer. The Broadbents had seen them pass their place, and Peter had waved his hand to Jim. Tim Cardin had met them on his way down the road.

"It was just at the covered bridge," he explained to several who were gathered at the store. "Si was starin' straight before him and never seemed to notice me. But Peter grinned and gave me a funny wink. I believe they're headed for town."

"Why didn't Si go by boat, then?" Jerry Perkins asked. "He has always gone that way. He has no use for cars, and I never knew him to ride in one before."

"And he never had any use for Peter," Tim laughingly declared. "And now he's made up with both him and the car. There's something out of the ordinary in the wind, mark my word. We'll find out, though, when they come back."

"Don't be too sure about that," Tom Adams, the storekeeper, reminded. "Peter can be as close as a clam at times. Look how he holds on to the secret of his Panacea. He won't give that away."

"Because there's money in it, that's why," Jerry replied. "And most likely Si has paid him well to take him in his van to the city, so he'll keep mighty mum about it."

And while the neighbors talked and wondered, the big van lurched on its way. It was one of the surprises of Peter's life when the evening before Mr. Acres had asked him to take him to town the next morning.

"I shall pay you well, Peter, for your work. I have always gone by boat, but I have a reason now for going by car, and your van will suit my purpose well. But, remember, Peter, you are not to say a word to anyone about this trip. I want to keep people guessing. Their tongues will wag, and they will have a grand time surmising why I have gone with you. We shall have some fun out of it, anyway."

And fun Peter certainly did have that morning as he drove through the parish. Not only did he enjoy the staring looks of all they met, but he knew also that this was his passenger's first trip in an auto. He had heard him denounce cars in the most vigorous terms, calling them the invention of the devil for the ruin of mankind. He had vowed, too, that he would never ride in such a contraption, but that the waggon and boat were good enough for him. So Peter smiled to himself this morning and put on extra speed. As a rule he was not a fast driver, and was always most careful. Now, however, he could not resist the temptation of doing some exceptional stunts. Where the road was straight, he stepped on the gas, and experienced a special thrill when he heard Mr. Acres gasp as he clutched the side of the car. It was the same when rounding turns. Although he slowed up, yet the speed was enough to cause his companion considerable concern.

"Say, Peter, is this thing running away?" he gasped.

"Runnin' away! Why, no, she's just joggin' along. D'ye want me to let her out to show you what she can really do when she gets worked up?"

"Heavens, no, man! She's worked up too much now to suit me, so be careful. My, how this thing sways! Do you suppose it will upset?"

"She never has yet, but, then, one can never tell what she might do. This car is almost human, Si. She knows this road like a book, every hill an' turn. An' she's always so glad fer a run that she cuts up a few capers now an' then like a frisky colt."

"Well, don't let her do too much frisking now, Peter. I'm human, remember, and my frisking days are over."

"Afraid of gettin' sea-sick, Si?"

"Sea-sick! I was never sea-sick in my life. But road-sickness is a different thing, and that's what I have now. I'd rather

walk than be shaken up this way."

"Worse than a storm at sea, eh?"

"Far worse, Peter. At sea one has a chance for his life when anything goes wrong. But this thing is a death-trap."

Peter had all the fun he needed, so when he saw that his passenger was badly frightened, he slowed down to a steady and reasonable speed.

"That's better, Peter," Mr. Acres remarked with a sigh of relief. "Just keep her at that."

"I'll do the best I can, Si. But if this car takes another frisky spell I can't help it. She's got sense, though, fer she knows how frightened you are when she starts out fer a little fun."

It took them about an hour and a half to reach the city.

"Drive me to the Zilph Department Store," Mr. Acres ordered. "And I want you to call for me there this afternoon at 5 o'clock sharp. I shall not need you until then."

They were driving slowly along a street which ran through a poor section of the city. Cars were coming and going, and Mr. Acres was very nervous as Peter threaded his way through the traffic with much care. And on the sidewalks children were playing, unheeding the speeding autos but a few feet away. Sometimes several could be seen watching an opening to dart to the other side. They ran great risks, but experience had made them skilful at this dodging game. To Mr. Acres, however, it was nerve-wracking.

"This is terrible, Peter," he exclaimed. "It's a wonder to me how those youngsters escape."

"Oh, they're used to it, Si. They're just like rabbits."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when a frantic shout of warning was heard, then a harsh squealing of brakes, followed instantly by a child's wild shriek of pain. Peter brought his car to a standstill, and looked around. Just across the street a crowd was gathering around some object lying upon the pavement.

"A child's been run over!" He gasped. "I expected it."

Mr. Acres made no reply. He stepped out of the van as fast as his age would permit, and walked cautiously among the cars. He reached the spot, and towering head and shoulders above most of the people he was able to see quite clearly what had happened. And what he saw filled his soul with horror, for lying where the wheel had crushed her was the limp body of a little girl. A policeman was bending over her, with a couple of men by his side. Presently several other policemen arrived, who forced the crowd back to give more room around the injured child. Then the clang of the ambulance bell was heard, the crowd parted as by magic, the little girl was carefully lifted from the ground, placed on board, and the car moved swiftly away towards the hospital. It was all done in a short space of time. Then the people soon dispersed, and the traffic went on as usual. Various comments were made. It was a wonder that more children were not killed or injured, and parents were to blame for not looking after their little ones, so some said. Others declared that the city was at fault for not providing proper play grounds. But it all ended in talk, and soon they forgot all about the accident.

With Mr. Acres, however, it was different. He had caught a fleeting glimpse of the injured child's face, and what he saw there stirred his soul to its very depth. And her wild cry of pain rang in his ears. He stood there like a statue watching the ambulance until it was out of sight. He then looked around upon the children who were now scurrying away like rats. The excitement was over, and they were anxious to go back to their games. They were all dirty, and most of them barefooted. One little fellow limped bravely after the others, and dodged skilfully between the moving cars.

"Heavens, what a swarm!"

The words came involuntarily from Mr. Acres' lips as he watched the scurrying youngsters.

"You are right, sir," came a voice at his side. He looked quickly around and saw a policeman standing nearby. "This is my beat, and those kids give me no end of trouble. This is the third accident that has happened on this street this month."

"But why is it allowed?" Mr. Acres demanded. "Can't the children be kept off the streets?"

The policeman shrugged his shoulder and looked keenly at the old man.

"Where are they to be kept, sir? There is no place for them but here. Now, if they could be out in the country on a hot day like this instead of playing on this sweltering street, what a great thing it would be. But who wants them?"

"Isn't anything being done for such children?" Mr. Acres asked.

"Oh, yes, the Family Welfare and the Children's Aid are doing what they can. Then the Gyro, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides have camps. But it is impossible to provide for all, so hundreds have to play on the streets just as these youngsters are doing."

The policeman left, and as Mr. Acres stood there he realized for the first time how hot it was. The heat was almost unbearable, and he longed for the coolness of his own home in the country, with the shade of the great trees. And yet these children had to undergo this day after day. And what must their homes be like!

Then all at once he had a vision. It came to him so suddenly that it was startling. It was a picture of the coolness and the beauty of Bullet Lake, the brook at the back of the house, and the shade of the large sheltering trees. And in this picture he saw a swarm of happy healthy children, playing among the trees, wading in the cool water, and enjoying themselves in various ways.

And he saw, too, the sandy shore of his own fine farm, the great spreading trees there, and almost felt the refreshing breeze drifting in from the sea. What a place for children! What a world of good it would do them to spend a few weeks in such a place. What a blessing to lift them out of this noisy, dirty, sweltering hell and give them a taste of God's grand fresh open. It would be like heaven on earth to poor little beings.

He was aroused from his dream by the approach of Peter.

"Guess it's time fer us to be movin', Si. The traffic law won't allow me to keep the car here any longer."

"Quite true, Peter, quite true. I had forgotten. You go on, but be at the Department store at 5 o'clock. I want to stay here a while. I'm interested in something."

"All right, Si, I'll do as ye say. But don't stop here too long or ye'll have a sunstroke. I'm nearly cooked."

When Peter had gone, Mr. Acres walked slowly along the street towards the business section of the city. He paid no attention to the curious looks cast at him, for his mind was intent upon his surroundings. He studied the houses, noting their decayed condition, and glanced into windows that he might obtain a view of their interiors. But the children were his chief attraction, and he watched them keenly until he had reached the upper end of the street.

Coming at length to a restaurant, he entered and ordered a light dinner. He was not very hungry, but he wished to rest and think. He was strangely stirred, and the vision of that little crushed child stood out vividly in his mind.

He was part way through with his meal when two men entered and sat down at a small table next to him. It was quite easy for him to hear what they said.

"Another child run over on Surrey Street," one of them casually remarked.

"So I hear," the other replied. "Bad street, that, for children. Something should be done."

"That's just it, Ves. Something should be done, but who should do it?"

"The city, of course. Kids should not be allowed to play in such dangerous places."

"Where are they to play, then? They can't be kept penned up in houses all day. And, after all, the streets are not much better on a sweltering day like this. I wish they could go to some cool place in the country. What lovely spots there are along the river where children could be so happy. The church I attend has a camp at Long Point, and about thirty children are under canvas there. They go for ten days, and then other children take their place. It is doing so much good to those little tots, and the leading women in our church are greatly interested. They have forgotten all about their social engagements and jealousies in this good work."

"That's great, Tom. I wish the women of St. Alban's would do the same. I go there, and what a blessing it would be if my wife and her bosom friend, Mrs. Rockbridge would undertake such a work. It would take their minds from that new Rector affair. I am sick and tired of the strife that is now going on."

"But what are the men doing, Ves? Now, in our church the men are backing up the women, supplying the money, and helping in every way they can. I haven't the time to do much, but my wife is up to her ears in the work, and she enjoys it, too. It's made a new woman of her."

"I wish to goodness all of our society-crazed women would do the same, Tom. I shall speak to my wife, and she may be able to induce Mrs. Rockbridge to do something. They make a strong team when they get started. 'Rockbridge & Casham, Limited' they have been called, and not without good reason."

Mr. Acres smiled to himself at the thought of Mrs. Rockbridge taking an interest in poor children. She was too much concerned with other matters, such as making trouble for worthy people, and scheming to get possession of Bullet Lake. But she would have something else to think about before long, and the thought of the article she was planning to write for the *Daily Echo* gave him considerable satisfaction. As the men nearby had now turned their attention to business affairs, Mr. Acres rose from the table, paid for his dinner and left the building.

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## CHAPTER XXII

### THE MYSTERIOUS BOX

It was evening as Peter's van lurched homeward through Glengrow. Mr. Acres was in a thoughtful mood, and not inclined to talk. But Peter was of a different mind, and did what he could to keep up a conversation, although, as he afterwards said, it was a mighty hard job.

"Did ye hear anything about the girl who was run over, Si?"

"No."

"It's too bad them kids have no other place to play on a swelterin' day like this."

"It is."

"It would be nice to have 'em out in the country under the shade of some of our big trees, or wadin' in the water along the shore. It would do 'em a world of good."

"Better than your Panacea, eh?"

Peter chuckled a little at his companion's sly thrust.

"Well, I wasn't thinkin' about that, Si. But since ye've mentioned it, a notion's come to me mind. Now, s'pose we had a bunch of them kids in Glengrow on your shore, fer instance, they'd need a lot of attention, wouldn't they?"

Mr. Acres gave a slight start, for he had been thinking of the same thing.

"Yes, Peter, they would."

"An' they'd git so sunburnt wadin' an' swimmin' in the water, that the skin would peel from their bodies. An' that's where my ointment would come in mighty handy. An' they'd climb trees, bruise their shins, an' hurt themselves in no end of ways. Then there'd be a great rush fer Peter Pendle's Panacea to mend the little critters. Yes, it would be a great thing fer me if they'd come."

"There would be no money in it, Peter."

"An' why not?"

"You would have to do it for charity's sake."

"H'm! Would I? I don't know about that."

"I shall have to leave you out, then, Peter. I was hoping that we might be partners in the undertaking."

These words uttered so quietly, and yet with the assurance of a man who has firmly made up his mind, caused Peter to stop the car, so great was his amazement. He turned and stared at his companion.

"What's the matter, Peter?"

"You, Si. I don't understand ye."

"Perhaps not. But drive on. I hope my words have not injured the car."

This was the nearest Peter had ever known Mr. Acres to approach the making of a joke.

"Oh, the car's a'right, Si, though I'm not sure about you. D'ye mean to tell me that you are plannin' to bring a bunch of city kids to yer place?"

"I am more than planning. I am going to do it, and I want you to help. I have had my eyes opened to-day, and I see some things in a new light. We must do something to help those poor children. Are you with me or not?"

"Sure I'm with ye, Si. I'll do all I can, even to givin' out gallons of me precious Panacea."

"That's good, Peter. But be careful how you drive. You nearly went into the ditch."

"Did I? Well, I'm a bit rattled over what ye've jist told me. An' so is this car. She's terribly frisky when she gits excited, an' there's no knowin' what she'll do next."

Mr. Acres smiled somewhat grimly and lapsed into silence. Peter tried to continue the conversation, but all in vain, and except for an occasional growl of "yes" or "no" he said nothing. He was in Glengrow now, and the atmosphere of the parish seemed to be affecting him, making him the surly Odd Acres his neighbors knew.

Billy and Nathan had just finished their supper as the van drew up at the back door. They were arguing as usual, but ceased and stared in amazement as Peter lifted a big wooden box from the back of the car.

"Carry it up to my room, boys," Mr. Acres ordered, "and be careful how you handle it." When they had disappeared into the house, he turned to Peter. "I'll be up to settle with you. But don't mention to anyone what I said to you on the way from the city. I hope I can trust you."

"Trust me, Si! Why, ye could trust me to all yer worth an' I wouldn't tell a soul. An' what's more, I'm with ye on that scheme fer helpin' the kids. We're pardners, an' we'll stick together, by jiminey, we will."

After Billy and Nathan had carried the box upstairs, they hung around hoping to hear something of importance. Their curiosity amused Mr. Acres, and as he ate his supper he occasionally smiled. He was in a happier mood than he had been for years. He had some aim in life now, something to think about instead of brooding always upon the past. Rachel noticed the change that had come over her master, and wondered. When he was through with his supper, he looked towards the kitchen.

"Rachel."

"Yes, sir," she responded, coming into the room.

"Here is something I have brought for you." It was a dress he had taken from a parcel by his side.

"For me!" Rachel's eyes opened wide in surprise, as she took the dress in her trembling hands. Such a present from her master was an unheard of thing.

"Certainly it's for you, Rachel. Did you think I bought it for Billy or Nathan? Oh, no, I have something else for each of those lazy rascals. Here, give them these."

For Billy there was a new pipe, with a can of choice tobacco, and for Nathan a Bible with large print. Nathan had been complaining for some time that his eyes were getting so poor that he could hardly read the words in his old Bible.

Rachel tried to express her thanks, but words failed, and tears came into her eyes. Mr. Acres did not like scenes; they annoyed him.

"There, there, that will do. I want no blubbering here. Get along with you and take those things to the boys. Pipe, tobacco, and Bible, a strange combination."

Billy and Nathan stared at the presents which Rachel handed to them. They were sitting under the big tree at the back of the house.

"Did Si really buy these fer me?" Billy asked.

"He did. Have you any doubt about it?"

"No, not if you say so, Rachel. But what's come over him? He never did anything like this before. He always gave us a scoldin' when he came from the city. An' he bought Nathan a Bible! Well, well! wonders'll never cease."

"I wish he'd bought one for you," Nathan retorted. "It would do you more good than that vile tobacco."

"I want to see it improve you first, ye old grouch. If it cheers you up an' makes ye more agreeable I may borrow it an' do



some readin' myself. But I've got me Prayer Book, an' that's enough fer me."

"Prayer Book!" Nathan growled. "I wouldn't be caught reading prayers out of a book. I want to pray as the spirit moves me."

"It must be a darn queer spirit, then, which moves ye to make the awful groans an' yelps I've heard when yer prayin'."

"Stop this nonsense," Rachel sternly ordered. "I am sick and tired of your everlasting wrangling. You ought to be thankful that you have such a good master, and who thought of us all when he was in town. I am, anyway, for just see the nice dress he brought me."

She held it up for their inspection, and they felt the material and pronounced it excellent.

"When will you wear it, Rachel?" Nathan asked.

"At your funeral, me boy," Billy replied. "I think you're goin' to die soon, so Si wants to get ready fer the great occasion."

"You'll die before me, and in your sins, at that, Billy. You better hurry up and get religion before it is too late."

Billy made no reply, but gazed thoughtfully at his pipe and tobacco.

"Now, I wonder what's come over Si to give me these. I hope he's not goin' to die soon. D'ye s'pose he's feelin' his end is near, an' his heart is gettin' tender. I've heard of rich men givin' a lot of money before dyin' to ease their conscience. Dyin' men, so I've heard, often have an admonition of their end."

"Premonition," Rachel corrected. "No, I don't think master has any notion of dying. He's as smart as he ever was. He never complains of an ache nor a pain."

"But I wonder what's in the box he brought from the city, Rachel."

"Was it heavy?"

"Not very, an' that's what makes me curious. Now, a box of that size should be heavy."

"Why should it?" Nathan growled. "I've seen big boxes that were quite light."

"Your head, fer instance, Nathan. It's big an' light, an' wooden, too."

"Don't judge me by yourself, Billy. If I had a head like you, I'd ..."

"There you two are at it again," Rachel interrupted. "No matter what we talk about, you always start wrangling."

"But Billy started it," Nathan declared.

"I didn't. You spoke about big an' light things, so I couldn't think of anything else but your head."

Rachel looked scornfully at the two belligerent men.

"We were talking about master's box, so never mind about your heads. The less said about them, perhaps, the better. Did anything rattle in the box?"

Billy scratched his head in an effort to remember.

"No, Rachel, I didn't hear anything rattle except Nathan's joints. They always rattle when he's carryin' anything upstairs."

"They don't rattle half as much as your tongue, Billy," Rachel reproved. "I wish you would keep to that box. What kind was it?"

"Wooden, of course."

"Yes, yes, but did it look as if it contained groceries or clothing?"

"Not groceries, Rachel, fer Nathan would have smelled them in a jiffy. He's got a great nose fer such things."

"How could I smell groceries or anything else with you near?" Nathan retorted.

Billy suddenly gave a yelp and slapped his sides.

"I've got it!" he shouted. "I know what's in that box."

"Ye do? What?" Nathan asked, now quite excited.

"It's, it's—no, I won't tell ye. It's a secret, an' will keep."

Billy grinned with delight at the expression of eager curiosity upon Nathan's face. He pulled his mouth-organ from his pocket, and wiped his lips with the sleeve of his coat.

"You can read yer Bible, Nathan, fer yer soul's good. This is your night to turn the separator, so ye'll need much spiritual help to keep ye from fallin' from grace."

With that parting thrust, he began to play, *Annie Laurie*, and continued on to *Old Black Joe*, ending up finally with *We won't go Home 'Till Morning*.

"Billy's the most hopeless and ungodly man I ever met," Nathan confided to Rachel as he started for the pails to do the milking.

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### GIFTS FOR A CHILD

After he had finished his smoke, Mr. Acres went up to his room, carrying a hammer in his hand. He locked the door, walked over to the box and stood gazing down upon it for several minutes. In his eyes was an expression of satisfaction, almost of joy. It was not of the box he was thinking, but of an injured girl at the rectory. He had a vision of her delight when he visited her that evening. Although old in years, he was young again in heart, for it was the unconscious influence of a little child that had worked the subtle transformation in this bitter-minded man. The wheel of time had turned back to that point in his life when he had loved children, and his greatest pleasure had been in having them around him and doing something to make them happy. It was then that his dreams had been bright of little ones of his own, looking to him for everything, and clinging to him with simple faith and love. Then the great change had come into his life, and he had banished, or believed that he had done so, all the affections of the heart, and had turned against the world as it had turned against him. And since that time he had worn a mask, and seldom had he lifted it from his face. But as waters checked by a barrier become all the stronger, and at last burst their bonds with irresistible force, so had the long-pent-up affections of this lonely man. He had found again something he had lost, and in finding that, he had found a wonderful relief. A new feeling possessed his soul, and he was like a man suddenly freed from the gripping shackles of bondage. The past seemed like a terrible nightmare from which he had suddenly awakened.

And with this came another vision, so startling that it appeared intensely real. He raised his eyes from the box and glanced around the room. He had the feeling that some one was with him, and whose presence was affecting him in a most remarkable manner. He had never experienced anything like it before, and a sense of awe came into his soul. He raised his right hand to his forehead, wondering if there was anything the matter with him. He even felt his face, and looked at his hands. No, there was nothing wrong with him. He was the same man outwardly. But that mysterious presence! What did it mean? And who was it?

All at once a great illumination swept upon him, and he knew. His body trembled at the idea. With a swift step he crossed the room to a shelf upon the wall. Reaching up, he brought down a small iron box and placed it on his desk. Bringing forth a bunch of keys from his pocket, he chose one, and unlocked the box. Within were papers of various kinds, and a package of letters tied with a string. These he lifted out, and underneath a young and beautiful face was exposed to view. It was that of a girl, about eighteen years of age, with smiling eyes which seemed to look straight into those of the old man standing there. For many years he had not beheld that picture, so now memories of the long ago came upon him like a flood.

"Lucy! My God, you're the same! You haven't changed. And are you with me now in this room? Is it your presence I feel?"

Again he glanced around as if expecting to see some one. He then lifted the picture from the box, and gazed longingly upon it.

"Yes, Lucy, you chose Tom instead of me. You followed where your heart led, and I suppose you were right. But it was hard for me, and I guess you never knew what it really meant. But you'll never be dead, Lucy, while your grandchild lives. She has your eyes, mouth, and forehead. And she does not know what you meant to me, Lucy, and I suppose she never will. But it's just as well. The young are not interested in love affairs of the past. They have their own to take their attention. Yet she might be my granddaughter but for ..."

He suddenly checked his meditation, dropped the picture back into the box, replaced the papers, shut down the cover, and turned the key. He did this almost savagely.

"Fool! I'm a fool," he muttered, "and getting sentimental. I must stop this nonsense. What has love to do with a man of my age and experience?"

He picked up the hammer, and in another minute he had the box open. And there lying securely packed were several things to delight the heart of a little girl. Lifting out one, carefully wrapped, he removed the paper and exposed a big doll, fully dressed. This he placed upon the floor, and then brought forth a cradle, a set of dishes, kitchen utensils, a bedroom suite, a broom and dust-pan, and a funny jumping-jack. These he strewed around him, and kneeling in their

midst he seemed like a veritable Santa Claus getting ready to start forth upon his mission of goodwill. If the neighbors could have seen Mr. Acres as he knelt there, what a delicious morsel of gossip it would have been for their wagging tongues. "Odd Acres is crazy," they would have declared. "We are certain of it now." And in a way they would have been right, for this old man was almost beside himself with rapturous joy over the purchases he had made.

After he had viewed his possessions to his heart's content, he placed all back in the box except the doll and the cradle. These he wrapped up with much care so that it was impossible for anyone to tell what they really were. He then nailed down the cover on the box and laid the hammer upon the shelf. As he did so, his hand touched the scrap-book lying there. It was only a little incident, that touch, and yet it stirred up memories he could not easily forget. He hesitated for a few seconds. Why not let Thomas Trayturn and his deeds rest? But for the thought of Mrs. Rockbridge he might have done so. And that decided him. So long as she was in the flesh, haughty and overbearing, and making trouble for innocent people he could not do so. She wanted the story of Bullet House, and she could only have that by including the tale of her father's despicable deed. It would be necessary to resurrect him to teach his daughter a lesson.

Lifting down the book, it took him but a minute to turn over the leaves until he came to the swinish face of Thomas Trayturn. It was the picture accompanying the eulogistic article which appeared after his death. With his knife Mr. Acres cut this out, folded it up and placed it in an inside pocket of his coat. He wanted Miss Rowland to sketch that face. It might be well for her to know what the man looked like who did so much to ruin her grandparents. If that face would not convince her as to his nature, then nothing else would.

With the parcel under his arm, he left the room, locked the door and went downstairs. No one was to be seen, although he heard Billy's mouth-organ near the milk house. He surmised how curious the men and Rachel, too, would be over the box, and he smiled. But the smile faded as he strode up the road, and the mask of years once more shrouded his face. He met two of his neighbors, and they saw only the stern, fierce man they had known for years. To their words of greeting, he returned a mere grunt and a jerk of the head.

"What's Odd Acres got under his arm?" one of the men asked. "It's quite a parcel, whatever it is."

"It's hard to tell," the other replied. "Si's been to town to-day. Maybe Peter's forgot something, and Si's taking it to him. I'd like to know what Peter brought back in his van."

The men stood and watched Mr. Acres until they saw him turn in at the rectory.

"He's taking something to the parson," the first speaker declared. "Books, most likely. The parson's a great reader."

"Guess yer right, Sam. Si's been at the rectory a lot since that little girl was hurt. He's taken quite a fancy to her, so I've heard. And he thinks a lot of Mrs. Nairn, too. It's queer for Odd Acres to like anybody."

Mrs. Nairn and Joan were with Betty when Mr. Acres arrived. John was in bed, and Mr. Nairn was in his study working at his Sunday's sermon. Robert had not yet come in from Bullet Lake. Betty had not been so well during the afternoon, and when the doctor called he was puzzled about her condition.

"She doesn't take an interest in anything," Mrs. Nairn had explained. "She did ask, though, why the heathen man didn't come to see her, as she had some more money to give him."

"Has she slept any?" the doctor inquired.

"A little this morning, just after you were here. But it is hard to arouse her. She lies there with her eyes fixed upon nothing."

"Now, I wonder what we can do to arouse her. If she could get the blood stirred up in her body I believe it would do a world of good. But I guess that will take time. Anyway, let me know at once if there is any change. I shall drop in again in the morning."

When the doctor had left the room, Betty looked at her mother.

"I'm glad he's gone, Mummy," she said.

"Why, darling? He is a good man, and came to make you better."

"Did he? But why doesn't that heathen man come? I have my money right here to give him."

She turned her head and looked at a twenty-five cent piece lying on the little table near the bed. Tears came into Mrs. Nairn's eyes, as she took the child's free hand in hers. Joan went to the window to hide her emotion. As she looked out, she saw a man coming to the rectory.

"Here is Mr. Acres now," she announced.

"The heathen man?" Betty asked.

"Yes, dear. And I am sure he wants to see you."

"Oh, I am so glad," and the child gave a sigh of relief. "I can give him my money, and that will make him good."

In a few minutes voices were heard downstairs, and soon Mr. Nairn ushered the visitor into the room. Betty's eyes brightened, and she reached out her uninjured hand. Mr. Acres saw the expression, and his heart quickened as he went to her side.

"Betty has been asking for you," Mrs. Nairn told him. "She wants to give you something."

"Eh? Give me something? And what is it?"

"Some more money," the child explained. "I've saved it for you. It is there on the table, so you can take it."

Mr. Acres looked at the coin, and then at the child. The anxious watchers wondered what he would do and say. For a few seconds he himself seemed to be uncertain. Then his right hand moved slowly to the table. He picked up the money and placed it in his pocket. This satisfied the girl, and a slight color appeared in her cheeks.

"You're not a heathen man any more, are you?" she asked. "My money will make you good."

Mr. Acres made no reply. He hesitated just for an instant, and then began to unwrap his parcel. Betty watched him, and when at last she saw the doll, she gave a cry of delight.

"It's for you, Miss," Mr. Acres explained, as he placed it by her side. "I am glad you like it."

A deep silence reigned in the room, and the eyes of all watched Betty as she examined her treasure, its hair, eyes, clothes, and then hugged it tight.

"Lovely doll. Pretty doll," she murmured.

When, however, Mr. Acres unwrapped the cradle and laid it upon the bed, she remained transfixed with wonder and joy.

"Is that for me, too?" she asked.

"It's for the doll. I guess it's big enough. Here, let me see."

With clumsy hands Mr. Acres took the doll and laid it carefully in the cradle. It was then that Betty laughed for the first time since her accident, and her parents' hearts thrilled with a great joy. The doll and the cradle had worked the marvellous transformation.

"You funny man," Betty exclaimed. "Let me fix the doll. You don't know how."

Mr. Acres straightened up, stepped back and watched her as with one hand she deftly did what he had vainly tried to do. The mask was now removed from his face, and he was almost like a child in his eagerness and delight. Joan had been watching him closely, and many strange thoughts passed through her mind. The man she had learned to hate, the man she had always considered a harsh, unfeeling brute was now before her, doing what he could to please a little child! She studied his face, especially his eyes. More than ever she now wished to sketch him, and catch that expression which had eluded her the first time she had tried to capture it. This man was a mystery to her. Did he possess two natures, one harsh and cruel; the other kind and tender to little children? It seemed so. And yet she could not forget what he had done years before.

Leaving Betty with her treasures, Mr. Acres cast one lingering look upon the child, and moved towards the door. Mr. and

Mrs. Nairn followed him downstairs, leaving Joan on guard. Their hearts were full of gratitude to their strange neighbor.

"How can we ever repay you for your kindness?" Mrs. Nairn impulsively asked.

"Don't try to, Madam. I have been more than paid already. You don't know what ..."

He ceased abruptly and stared hard at the woman.

"I want to have a talk with you and Mr. Nairn. I have something very important to say."

"Come into this room, then. It is quiet there."

"Not now, no, not to-night. To-morrow, maybe. But before I go, I wish to see Miss Rowland for a minute. But, no, that will not be necessary. Give her this," and he drew the paper containing Thomas Trayturn's picture from his pocket. "She will know what to do with it. Good evening to you both."

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE DISCOVERY

Mr. Acres had been gone but a short time when Robert arrived from Bullet Lake. He was later than usual, and as he entered the house it was at once evident that something out of the ordinary had taken place. He was generally whistling or humming a tune in a careless, light-hearted manner. Now, however, he was quite excited. Although he made an effort to be calm, the glow in his eyes and the flush upon his face betrayed him. Mr. and Mrs. Nairn were in the study talking about Mr. Acres and his interest in Betty as Robert entered. His sister rose to meet him.

"You are late, Bob. We were getting anxious about you. Have you had your supper?"

"I think I have, Nell, although I am not sure. Yes, I believe I did eat something a while ago. Where's Joan?"

"With Betty."

"May I go up? I want to see her."

"Certainly. And Betty will be glad to see you."

Taking two steps at a time, Robert bounded up the stairs like a great overgrown boy. Mr. and Mrs. Nairn looked at each other and smiled.

"Bob has improved very much since he came here," Mr. Nairn remarked. "The life in the woods agrees with him. I never saw him look better."

"But he is excited now about something, Andy. I wonder what has happened."

"It is hard to tell. One never knows what to expect next. Since Bob came here we have had no end of excitement. And the strangest of all is the way Mr. Acres is acting. He is a changed man. I am curious to know what he wants to say to us. When do you suppose he will come again?"

"To-morrow, most likely. His heart seems to be set upon Betty. I believe it is her unconscious influence that is affecting him. Did you notice his face, especially his eyes, when he was near her?"

"I did, and that is what puzzles me. He seems like a man who has been wearing a horrible mask, and as he stood by Betty it was suddenly removed and his real face was revealed. He is worth studying, for there is more in him than I imagined."

"Perhaps I have not been altogether wrong in my opinion of him," Mrs. Nairn reminded. "You remember what I said that morning he came here to demand the money he had given?"

"Indeed I do, and your words got you into a great deal of trouble. I did not agree with you then, Nell, but I do now. The more I see of Mr. Acres, the more I like him. He is the most peculiar character I have ever met."

"Peculiar, yes. And grand, too. I like his ruggedness. He reminds me of those great sea captains of the famous clipper-ship days of which my grandfather used to tell me when I was a child. The spirit of the sea was in their blood."

"And it's in yours, too, Nell," Mr. Nairn smilingly replied. "I believe that is the reason why that strange man appeals so strongly to you."

"Most likely, Andy. And Mr. Acres was a sea captain himself, remember, and he knew my grandfather. You know how excited he became when he saw the picture of the *Ida Rutledge* in the dining-room, and learned that I am a Rutledge."

"I did, and I have never forgotten his quotation from Dana, 'Sharp upon the wind, cutting through the water like a knife, with her raking masts and her sharp bows running up like the head of a greyhound.' That's what he said."

"Your memory is remarkably good, Andy."

"Oh, I have been reading Dana's great book, which I bought, and learned that quotation by heart. It has been an inspiration to me. 'Sharp upon the wind, cutting through the water like a knife.' What vigor in those words, and what a

reminder of how one should face life. And 'running up like a greyhound.' Why, that is enough to thrill one's very soul with courage. It has mine, anyway."

At that minute Joan and Robert entered the room.

"Betty is asleep," the girl explained, "so she is all right for a while. She has her doll in her arms."

Mrs. Nairn rose to her feet, and offered her chair to Joan.

"I think some one should be with her, for she might wake at any minute. We have never left her alone since the accident."

"I would like for you to stay, Nell," Robert replied. "There is something I have to say, so I wish all to be present. We can hear Betty if she makes the least sound. I am sure she'll be all right."

Mrs. Nairn hesitated, but seeing the eager look in her brother's eyes, she resumed her seat. Joan and Robert sat down near the table where the lighted lamp cast its soft glow upon the girl's face, and glinted upon her dark hair. She looked very beautiful to Robert, and Mr. and Mrs. Nairn were of the same opinion. They hoped that the friendship between her and Robert would continue and develop into a more enduring bond. Nothing would please them better, for they had become fond of this girl who had come so recently into their lives.

"Yes, I have something to tell you," Robert began, "which I think you all should know. It may not amount to much, but I hope it will. It is of a discovery I made at Bullet House, and which kept me late in coming home."

He paused, drew a small packet of letters from his pocket, and laid it upon the table. He smiled at the interest and curiosity he had aroused in his listeners.

"I had been having a wonderful time during the afternoon, first on the lake and then upon the verandah, lying on the sofa reading a ghost story. It is not very often I read such a yarn, but it was in one of those magazines I took along with me. Well, just at the most thrilling place, and when the cold chills were scuttling up and down my spine, and my hair seemed to be lifting from my head, I heard a peculiar noise in the house. At first I thought it was only imagination, but soon knew that it was real. It was a muffled sound, something beating and flapping in a box. At once I remembered the stories I had heard about that old house, and although not superstitious, I began to wonder if the ghosts of old Rayton and his wife had returned. I wish you had been there, Andy."

"Misery likes company, eh, Bob?"

"I longed for company then, and no mistake. I would have even welcomed Billy or Si Acres. Anyway, I had to brace myself for the ordeal and try to find out what it was. My knees were shaking when I went into the house, but not a blessed thing could I see. The noise still continued, and it came from the chimney above the fireplace. The ghost was in there, I was certain, and at once I realized what it was. It was a bird, beating itself against the boards in an effort to get out. You can imagine my feeling of relief. It was no ghost, after all, but a living creature in need of help.

"Then I noticed something that had hitherto escaped my attention. On one side of the chimney from which the noise came I saw what looked like a small door, although there was no knob or latch of any kind to be seen. Standing upon a chair, I forced open the door, and at once a bird darted out, circled around the room and then flew out the door. Examining the place from which the bird had come, I found it empty. Feeling sure that there must be an opening in the chimney by which the bird had entered, I felt as far up as I could reach, but found nothing. I then ripped off one of the boards, determined to find the hole. If a brick had fallen out, a spark might escape and set the building on fire, so I wished to guard against any trouble during my stay there.

"When the board had been removed, I found a hole just below the floor. A brick had crumbled away, and there was an opening as large as my hand. Through this the bird had evidently come. In fact, I found many feathers and tiny bones lying around, showing that other birds had been entrapped and died there. The sounds that they made in their death struggles, perhaps, account for the idea of ghosts in that house. The only thing left was for me to fill up the hole, so I went in search of some clay near the shore. I am not a mason, but common sense told me what to do in such an emergency.

"Finding some clay I plugged up the hole with broken pieces of brick I found at the back of the house, and plastered the clay over it, making a mighty good job. Then when about to replace the board I had torn off, I noticed something lying on the narrow piece of scantling just above the little door. Thinking it was merely a piece of plaster that had dropped there,



I paid no attention to it, but replaced the board, pounding the nails in with an axe. I must have hit unusually hard, for I heard something drop inside the small cupboard. Then to my surprise I saw that packet of letters lying there where it had fallen. The pounding had knocked it off the narrow scantling. In my excitement I forgot everything else, for I was certain that I had come upon something of considerable value. Neither was I mistaken, for in those letters I have found a clue which I believe will lead to the unravelling of the mystery connected with that old house."

Joan had listened with rapt attention to every word that Robert had said. Anything connected with that house by the lake was of great importance to her. Often her eyes wandered to the letters lying upon the table. She could hardly wait, so anxious was she to know what they contained. Then when Robert spoke of finding them in that little cupboard, she leaned eagerly forward. Was the mystery at last to be solved? she asked herself. Why had Robert been so deliberate in telling his story? What to him was merely material for an article he hoped to write was to her of vital interest. She longed to clutch the letters, tear them open, and find out their meaning. With an effort, however, she controlled herself and waited.

"I am going to read you two of these letters," Robert continued. "They are, I believe, the first and the last that were written, although there is no date to any of them."

Slowly he untied the string, altogether too slowly, so Joan thought. Why didn't he cut it with a knife?

"Now, this one," Robert went on, separating a faded paper from the others, "was written on board the ship, the *Ocean Queen*, lying at Bombay. It was evidently written in a hurry, but every word shows the deep heart-feeling of the writer. I have thought over his words, and tried to picture him sitting in his cabin writing to his sweet-heart so far away. It's a good subject for a poem."

"Suppose you leave the imagination and the poem for some other time, Bob, and get on with the letter," Mr. Nairn suggested.

"Oh, yes, please do," Joan urged.

Robert noticed the excited tone of her voice, and as he glanced at her he saw that her face was unusually flushed. He made no comment, however, but turned at once to the letter, and began to read.

Bombay

Dearest Lucy,

I have just arrived here, and find that the *Ida Rutledge* is to sail for home in a few minutes. Her captain, John Rutledge, is one of my best friends, and he has promised to deliver this letter to you. It is the first time in two months that I have had any opportunity of sending any word direct to you. But you have never been out of my mind. My heart calls out for you, as I believe yours does for me. It is hard that we must be parted for such a length of time. But we must be patient a while longer. I have been making money fast, and soon I shall be able to give up the sea, and we can then settle in some nice country place where we shall be always together. I know a farm along our beautiful home river, and there free from care, we shall be so happy.

I can write no more now, except to say that by next summer I hope to be home. From here I shall sail for South Africa, and from there I may have a chance to write to you again.

Good bye now, my darling Lucy. I have your picture always with me. But I do not really need it, for you are enshrined in my heart, and I feel your presence ever with me.

Ever your loving and faithful,

Si.

There was deep silence as Robert finished. Joan was breathing hard, and her hands were clenched firmly together upon her lap.

"Well, what do you think of that?" Robert asked, looking around at his listeners.

"Very interesting," Mr. Nairn replied. "But who is 'Si'?"

"I don't know for sure, Andy, although I imagine he is none other than our quaint neighbor, Si Acres. He was a sea captain, and his ship was the *Ocean Queen*. He also speaks of my grandfather, Captain John Rutledge, as one of his best friends. I don't think there is any doubt at all."

"Do the other letters tell anything more?" Mrs. Nairn asked.

"Only one, Nell. The rest were written from various places, and are much like the one I have just read. And they are all signed in the same way, and with no date. But this one," and he held it up, "must have been the last one written, and a sad letter it is. I almost hate to read it, for it tells of a heart-broken man who lost the girl he loved. No place is given, and it begins very abruptly. Listen.

Lucy,

I can't believe it's true. I have just arrived in port and learn that you are married to Tom Rayton, and have gone to the woods to live. And yet you said you loved me and would wait for me until I came home. I understand now why I didn't get any letters from you for the last six months. I never for an instant imagined that you were untrue to me, but thought your letters had gone astray. Now I know. Tom had taken my place in your heart. I am nearly crazy. To come home and find you married to another is terrible! Why, oh why didn't you tell me, and not keep me buoyed up with such hope? I have worked for you alone, and have made money that you might have plenty. And yet you have gone to the woods to live a life of poverty and hardships! I can't understand it. This is my last letter to you. I don't know what to do, for my world is turned upside down all of a sudden. I can't believe it is all your doing, Lucy. It's Tom who has betrayed me, and, by God—But what's the use of writing any more? You've done the deed, and made your own nest, so you'll have to put up with the consequences. I shall see that you get this letter without Tom's knowledge.

Good bye forever,

Si.

When Robert had finished, he folded the letter, thrust it back into its stained envelope and looked around. He glanced at his sister and noticed tears in her eyes.

"Pathetic, eh, Nell?"

"Very. And to think that after so many years those old letters should come so strangely to light! And what a place to hide them!"

"A very safe place, I should say. Mrs. Rayton must have put them there so her husband wouldn't see them, and then forgot all about them."

"I understand now why Mr. Acres is so odd," Mr. Nairn quietly remarked. "What a tragedy that was to him. It is strange, though, that he should have settled so near the girl he loved and lost. I wonder if they ever met again."

Joan had heard all that she could endure. Her brain was in a whirl, and she wished to be by herself that she might think over all she had heard. But she was very calm outwardly as she rose to her feet and turned to Mrs. Nairn.

"I must go now," she said. "I hope Betty will have a good night."

"We shall see you in the morning, I suppose? Betty will be sure to ask for you."

"Perhaps so. I have some work to do which may keep me later than usual. But I shall come as soon as I can."

She then looked at the letters lying upon the table.

"May I have them just for to-night?" she asked. "They have interested me very much, and I should like to read them slowly by myself."

"You are welcome to them," Robert replied, although he was somewhat surprised at her request. "Let me carry them for you."

"Not to-night, thank you. I wish to be alone—to think."

"Oh, that reminds me of something I have for you, Joan," Mrs. Nairn exclaimed. "It's a paper Mr. Acres gave me. Now, what did I do with it? Oh, here it is on the floor. I must have dropped it in my excitement over those letters."

As she handed it to Joan she noticed that something was troubling the girl. She could see it in her eyes and the strained look upon her face. The men noted it, too, especially Robert, and he longed to know the meaning. Why had those old letters affected her so strangely? Was she related in any way to those Raytons? Was that the reason why she was so greatly interested in Bullet House? It seemed so.

Robert was unusually quiet the rest of the evening. He sat and smoked alone out upon the verandah until quite late. Mr. and Mrs. Nairn believed his quietness was due to Joan's refusal to allow him to accompany her home. But Robert was not worrying about that. He was seeing other things, and what he saw gave him considerable satisfaction. The mystery of that old house by the lake was being revealed, so he believed, and he was very eager to find the entire solution. He had come across a remarkable clue which he hoped would lead to most important results. How surprised the editor of the *Daily Echo* would be at the discovery he had made.

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# CHAPTER XXV

## MENTAL GHOSTS

Strange thoughts kept pounding through Joan's brain as she walked from the rectory back to her own house. She followed the little path which led across a small tree-embowered brook and through a field of tall grass. It was a beautiful evening and the moon was riding high above the far-off eastern hills. The river, lying like a great mirror, caught its glow in a long straight silver gleam from shore to shore. On any other night Joan would have stood entranced by the alluring scenes around her. Now, however, she could think of nothing but those old letters she clutched in her hot hand.

Reaching the house, she found Mrs. Pendle seated by her front door, looking out over the meadow to the river beyond. The sight of this quiet woman somewhat soothed the girl's agitated heart and mind. During the short time she had known Mrs. Pendle she had found her a pleasant woman, hard-working, and who minded her own affairs. She had never heard her speak a harsh or unkind word about anyone.

"All alone to-night?" she asked, as she stood before her.

"Oh, no, I am never alone, especially on such a night as this. I have excellent company, for the moon and the river are smiling at me. And, besides, night has so many lovely voices which I hear and try to interpret. Listen to that little bird, for instance. What a sleepy cheep it has. When I was a child my mother used to talk to me about the many beautiful things we can hear in nature if we have the ears to listen aright."

A longing came into Joan's heart to confide her trouble to this woman. It would be a relief to speak to some one. She resisted this desire, however, for she was anxious to go over those old letters. She wished to do some more serious thinking before taking anyone into her confidence.

"Where is your husband to-night, Mrs. Pendle?" she inquired, as she was about to turn away towards her own abode.

"He's over at Mr. Acres', and he's been there for some time. I never knew him to go there at night before. But Mr. Acres sent for him, so he said. It must be something important, for Peter won't tell me what it is. Perhaps Mr. Acres wants to make his will. Peter is quite a hand at that, and has done it often for others. Yes, it must be a will he is writing, but it must be a long one to keep Peter such a length of time."

When in her own room, Joan lighted the lamp, drew down the blinds, and seated herself at the little table. Eagerly she opened the letters and read every word. In fact, she did more than read, for she saw behind the words, and pictured the one who had written them. And that man was Mr. Acres, living such a short distance away! And it was her grandmother who had acted so shamefully! It was little wonder that her face burned as she thought of this. There was good reason why he had turned her mother and grandmother out of that house by the Lake. And could anyone blame him? Yet she had always considered him a mean man, a scoundrel, for what he had done. Did her mother know how he had been treated? It was hardly likely, as her mother would have kept the secret hidden within her own heart. Perhaps she was ashamed of the way she had acted. And did she ever regret marrying Thomas Rayton?

All this, and much more, passed through Joan's mind as she sat there staring upon those letters. Twice she read the one written from Bombay, and the last which told of the writer's astonishment and grief. What a shock it must have been when Mr. Acres arrived home to learn that the girl he loved so dearly was married to another. It was no wonder that he was so odd. Anyone would be who had suffered such a heart blow. And he had given up the sea and settled in Glengrow. Why did he do that? Was it to be near the girl he loved? And did he continue to love her, notwithstanding the way she had treated him? That was hardly likely when he had turned her and the baby out of the house. It was all very puzzling to Joan. She longed to know more, and how could she find out? Mr. Acres could tell her, but she shrank from the thought of asking him. Anyway, he did not seem such a monster to her now. Instead, a sense of pity stole into her heart. He had never married, but lived his lonely life, with only his hired help as companions. She longed to do something for him. If the girl he loved had treated him so badly, perhaps her granddaughter might do something to atone for the past.

As she gathered up the letters, placing them carefully and almost reverently in their envelopes, she noticed the piece of paper Mrs. Nairn had given her. She had forgotten all about it. Quickly unfolding it, her eyes rested upon the face of Thomas Trayturn. Then she recalled her conversation with Mr. Acres and his promise to her. So this was the face of the man who had done her grandfather such a great injury. Why did Mr. Acres wish her to make a sketch of him? There was

nothing that she could see in such a face that was worth while the effort.

She read the fulsome account, how charitable he was, and how he had never let his left hand know what his right hand did. And this was the man who had ruined her grandfather! He had become wealthy, and yet he had made no effort to repay what he had stolen. And what had become of his family? His sons and daughters, if he had any, were living, no doubt, upon the money he had made, and were leaders in society. And who were they? Ah, the paper told. She had hardly noticed their names before, but now she read with deep interest. Mrs. Rockbridge was a daughter. Why, she must be the same woman who was staying at the hotel, and who had taken refuge in Bullet House during the thunder storm. But there might be some mistake. No, that could not be, for the paper said she was the wife of the editor of the *Daily Echo* of Pretensia.

"Yes, she must be that haughty, overbearing woman who has come here to spy upon Mrs. Nairn," Joan mused. "And to think that she is the very one who has circulated that scandalous report about Robert and me! And she is the daughter, too, of the man who ruined my grandfather! I can tell by his face that he was capable of almost any deed of infamy. What a discovery this is. I shall surely sketch his face, for I may need it. I wonder if Mrs. Rockbridge knows what her father did. If not, she should know. Perhaps it might check her, and teach her to leave other people alone."

Next morning after Joan had prepared and eaten her breakfast, she went over to the rectory. She wished to find out how Betty had passed the night, and also to return the letters.

"Betty slept well," Mrs. Nairn informed her. "She is very bright this morning, and is now playing with her doll and cradle. I am so thankful. You must go up to see her."

When Joan at length came downstairs, she found Robert waiting for her. After she had given him the letters, he walked back home with her. She looked very beautiful to him this morning, and his heart thrilled at being so close to her. He had not seen much of her of late, as she had spent most of her time with Betty. But he had dreamed of her during the long peaceful hours at Bullet Lake.

"Did you sleep well last night?" he asked after they had gone a short distance.

"Great. I always do."

"You didn't see any ghosts, I suppose?"

Joan laughed as she stepped across the little brook.

"No. Why should I?"

"Oh, I thought perhaps those old letters might have affected you. Such things sometimes do."

"Did they trouble you?"

"They did. I was late going to bed, and then I couldn't sleep. I saw ghosts, all right."

"What kind? Good or bad?"

"I can hardly tell. Everything seemed so confused. I couldn't get Mr. Acres and Lucy out of my mind. I have a vivid imagination, anyway, and those letters started it working at top speed last night. I thought of all sorts of things, especially about that lover who had been so shamefully treated. It was enough to break any man's heart. Mr. Acres must have been about crazy and ready to do almost any desperate deed. Now, what would such a person really do? He would brood and brood for days, weeks, months. His heart would become hard, bitter and revengeful. He would think of the girl he loved, and of the man who had taken her from him. At last, full of jealousy and hatred, he would visit the house where they were living. He would watch them through the window, and seeing how happy they were, he would go away more bitter than ever. Then the devil would take possession of him and drive him to kill the man he hated. A wild night and darkness would cover the deed. With gun in hand, he would creep up to the building, he would see the man and his wife with their little babe before the fire. That scene would add more fuel to his passion, and he would shoot."

"Stop!" Joan cried, clutching Robert by the arm. "I can't stand any more. It is terrible what you say. Your imagination has carried you too far."

"Do you think so? But who fired that shot? Who else had any reason for killing Mr. Rayton but the man from whom he had taken the girl he loved? And what about that threat in the letter? I remember every word, 'It's Tom who betrayed me, and by God—' Now, if that isn't a threat of vengeance, I don't know what it is."

"And do you really believe that Mr. Acres did the shooting?" Joan asked in a voice that trembled with emotion. "The very idea is terrible."

"I know it is. But suppose it is true? That is one of the ghosts I saw last night. And the other was that of Lucy, living her lonely life in the woods, and thinking, perhaps, of the lover she had cast off."

"Perhaps she never thought any more about him," Joan quietly remarked. "She may have been perfectly happy with the man she had chosen."

"That may be so. But I can't help thinking about those old letters. She hid them in a remarkable place where her husband would not find them. I wonder if she ever took them down and read them when alone."

"Most likely she forgot all about them, for she left them there when she was turned out of the house."

"Quite true. But that may have been due to her excitement and worry. But I believe she remembered them when it was too late to get them."

"What are you going to do with them, Robert?"

"Keep them, of course, until I learn more. I am anxious to find out what happened to Mrs. Rayton. It is hardly likely that she is alive after so many years. But her daughter must be living somewhere, so if I could only find her I might learn something of much importance."

"Perhaps Mr. Acres knows. Why not ask him?"

"No, no, I would not dare to do that. And there is no telling what he might do if he knew I have those letters. I must think of some other way."

"And when you do, you will write the story for the *Daily Echo*?"

"Certainly. And what a story it will be! It should make a great hit."

They had already reached the house and were standing just outside the door. Joan did not ask Robert to enter, as she had work to do, so wished to be alone. There was much she might tell him, but she did not care to enlighten him just now. But he should be warned, lest carried away by his enthusiasm he might do something which would cause great trouble.

"It might be as well to say little about those letters for the present," she advised. "Suppose Mr. Acres should hear of your discovery?"

"What difference would that make?"

"It might not, and again, it might. Although it is quite evident that Mr. Acres wrote them, yet it is only surmise on your part that he did the shooting. I do not see how you can write that article and connect him with that terrible deed. You have no definite proof, and you might get yourself into serious trouble."

Robert stared at the girl as the truth of her words dawned upon his mind. Joan smiled at his crest-fallen appearance, although she felt sorry for him.

"I never thought of that," he confessed, "so taken up have I been with the unravelling of the mystery and writing about it."

"And allowing your imagination to run wild."

"Not altogether, for I am sure that I am not far astray. But I see how necessary it is to be careful what I write with Mr. Acres still alive."

"And there may be others," Joan reminded. "You will have to find out about that false friend, mention his name, and tell what he did. If he has relatives living, they, too, might make trouble."

"More snags, eh? But the truth should be told, no matter how it might offend. Perhaps that man's descendants are living to-day upon the money he gained in such a dishonest manner. They may be strutting around, haughty, overbearing, and looking down upon everybody else. Oh, I have seen such people, and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to bring down their high feathers and make them bow their heads in shame. So it may be with the relatives of that man who ruined the Raytons."

"How are you to find out?" Joan asked.

"I don't know now. But I shall keep on searching, and something will turn up to help me. But, there, I am going, as you wish to be alone."

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# CHAPTER XXVI

## A GUEST FOR DINNER

For some time Joan sat at her easel, and under her skilful fingers the face of Thomas Trayturn took definite shape. It was not a pleasing subject, for she could find no inspiration in that low forehead, swinish eyes, and pug-like nose. Several times she stayed her hand, feeling that she could not finish the drawing. But the desire to possess a likeness of the features of the man who had ruined her grandparents urged her to continue.

And as she worked, Mrs. Rockbridge was much in her mind. There was no resemblance at all between the father and the daughter, so far as she could see. The latter must have inherited her good looks from her mother. What would that haughty woman think if she knew what her father had done? Would it affect her in any way, or was she indifferent to such a thing? She might say it was all a malicious lie, concocted to injure her. But how would she ever know? Who would tell her?

When Joan had the work about done, and was giving it a few finishing touches, a loud rap upon the screen door startled her. Looking quickly around, she saw Mr. Acres standing there, his stick in his hand.

"Good morning, Miss," he accosted. "Hope I haven't frightened you. Sorry to disturb you at such a pleasant task."

Joan smiled as she rose to her feet.

"Come in, Mr. Acres. I was so absorbed in my subject that I didn't hear you until you knocked."

"Absorbed, eh?" Mr. Acres queried as he entered and glared at the face upon the easel. "And well you might be. That face would absorb anything. It did poor old Tom Rayton of money, anyway. But you've done it well, Miss, except the eyes. You haven't got them quite right."

"I know it," Joan agreed. "But please sit down and tell me something more about the man. I may then be able to get his eyes right."

"You couldn't," Mr. Acres declared as he seated himself heavily in a chair nearby. "There was something about Trayturn's eyes which no artist could catch. They were too cunning and shifty. Yes, I guess you've done all anyone could do. Now, the eyes in that picture from which you copied, are not correct. The photographer must have touched them up a great deal. But he couldn't do much with the nose and forehead. They tell their own tale, so just leave it as it is, Miss."

"Does Mrs. Rockbridge know what her father did?" Joan asked.

"How do you know that she is his daughter?" Mr. Acres demanded in surprise.

"Why, it's in the newspaper clipping you gave me."

"So it is. So it is. I forgot about that. Yes, Mrs. Rockbridge is Tom Trayturn's daughter. But I don't think she knows what a skunk of a man her father was when he was young. If she did, she would not carry so much sail."

"But will she ever know?"

"Oh, yes, she'll know," Mr. Acres chuckled. "She'll find out, all right, never fear. She's headed straight for the breakers now, and it's her own doings."

"You knew my grandmother, I suppose?" Joan inquired as casually as possible.

Mr. Acres gave a slight start, and looked keenly at the girl.

"I thought I did, Miss. But when she married Tom Rayton, she puzzled me. Why such a girl was willing to spend her life in a lonely cabin in the woods was more than I could understand. No, I never really knew Lucy Benton."

"But a cabin may become a palace when love is there, so I have heard," Joan quietly reminded, as she carefully studied the old man's averted face. "She was quite contented there, was she not?"



"She seemed to be, so far as I know."

"Until her husband was shot. How could anyone do such a thing? And she walked all the way to the shore for the doctor through the darkness and the wild storm. She must have been very brave."

"Did you know your grandmother, Miss?" Mr. Acres questioned.

"Oh, no. She died before I was born. But my mother often told me what a wonderful woman she was."

"She never wanted for anything, I suppose?"

"No. She had enough."

"And you and your mother never wanted? You always had sufficient?"

"Yes. The money always came regularly."

Mr. Acres rose abruptly to his feet, and looked keenly at the girl.

"I didn't come here this morning, Miss, to talk about such things. I came to get you to help me. I want your advice. I am going to bring some poor children from the city and give them an outing on my shore. It will do them a world of good, and I need your assistance."

A sudden glow came into Joan's eyes. This Mr. Acres noticed, and it pleased him.

"I shall do anything I can to help you, sir. I think it is splendid of you to do this for the children. I have often wished I could do something like that myself."

"You have! So you have seen children playing on the dirty, stifling streets and longed to help them?"

"Indeed I have. My heart has often ached as I watched them. And I have been thinking of them while living in this beautiful place, with the trees, flowers, grass, and cooling air all about me."

"And the water, Miss. Think of those little ones wading in the water and playing along the shore. How much good it should do them. Suppose we go over to my place, for I want to explain what I hope to do, and where the tents will be pitched."

"I shall gladly go," Joan replied. "I wish Mr. and Mrs. Nairn could go, too, for I am sure they would be greatly interested in your undertaking."

"They know about it, Miss, for I told them this morning. They will go over this afternoon if you will stay with Betty."

The people of Glengrow had another topic of conversation this day. Word soon spread that Odd Acres and Miss Rowland had been seen walking together along the road. In fact, it was almost a sensation, and tongues wagged in the most excited manner. What did it mean? was the question many asked. Had the old man taken a fancy to the girl? Some even suggested that she had cast a spell over him, and that, perhaps, she was willing to marry him for the sake of his money.

Mr. Acres was quite aware how his neighbors would talk, and he smiled grimly as he strode along by Joan's side. He knew how curious all would be. But this would be nothing compared to their astonishment when trucks arrived, the tents were erected, and the cookhouse built. He did not mention this, however, and Joan was totally unaware of the excitement this walk would make throughout the parish.

When they reached the house, Mr. Acres asked the girl to wait a minute, as he wished to speak to Rachel. When he returned there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"I told Rachel that you would have dinner with us, Miss, and she nearly fainted. I should have been more careful, for she is not used to such a shock."

"She is evidently not accustomed to visitors, then, Mr. Acres."

"She is not. We have never had any person to dine with us, so that is what is disturbing Rachel. But I told her if she made

any change for dinner I would discharge her."

"You surely wouldn't do that."

"Oh, no. I did it merely to keep her from getting flustered and making herself too much extra work. I also ordered her to warn Billy and Nathan."

"Why, what about them?"

Mr. Acres smiled, and thumped his stick harder upon the grass over which they were walking.

"Those lazy rascals are forever arguing about something. They never agree, and even at their meals they keep up their everlasting wrangle. I left word for them to stop their nonsense to-day."

"I am sorry, Mr. Acres, for I should like to hear them. I have never met Nathan."

"You haven't missed much, then. Anyway, you'll see him at dinner, so you can judge for yourself."

Mr. Acres explained to Joan his plan for entertaining the children, pointing out where the tents would be pitched, and the sandy shore where the water was shallow and safe for wading and bathing.

"We shall begin work to-morrow, Miss Rowland. Trucks will bring tents, bedding, provisions, and all other necessary things from the city. I shall get workmen here to build the cookhouse, and erect tables and swings."

"But who will look after the children?" Joan inquired. "It will be quite an undertaking."

"Oh, the Family Welfare Bureau is looking after that. Enough trained workers will be sent out to handle the bunch."

"It will cost a great deal, will it not?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter, so long as the children are benefited."

"And you intend to pay for everything?"

"I do, although I don't want the people in this parish to know that. You must keep it a secret, Miss. I am just letting the Family Welfare have my share, remember."

Joan smiled. She was surprised at this old man's enthusiasm. He was like a child with a new toy. This plan of his had transformed him from the surly man of a few days ago to a most genial companion. When at last the dinner horn sounded, she had a clear idea of what he intended to do, and that he wanted her advice and help.

The dinner that day was a new and an interesting experience to Joan. It was quite thrilling to think that she was the first guest who had ever sat at that table. Rachel had not obeyed her master's orders, for the table was spread with a snow-white linen cloth instead of the old red covering which had done noble service for years. There were also neatly-folded napkins, as well as silverware which had never been used before. And Billy and Nathan were dressed in their best suits, and their hair had been brushed with extra care. Rachel had seen that they were as presentable as possible.

Mr. Acres presided at the head of the table like a lord. Although he made no comment, he was pleased at what Rachel had done, and the neatness of his two henchmen. He placed Joan at his right, with Nathan next to her. Billy was on the opposite side of the table, and at first a feeling of jealousy came into his heart. This soon vanished, however, and he presently grinned with delight when he noticed Nathan's embarrassment at being so near the fair guest, and how he wriggled uncomfortably whenever Joan spoke to him. And his opponent's grinning face added to his discomfort. But when the girl called him "Mr. Brown" it was more than Billy could stand, and he gave a sudden yelp. Mr. Acres glared at him in surprise.

"What's the matter, Billy?"

"Nothin' much, Si. It's gone now, whatever it was. Guess it was me heart. It takes a queer kink at times."

"It must if it makes you yelp like that."

Joan was watching Billy, and surmised the cause of his agitation. It was great fun to see the little man trying to suppress

his merriment. She glanced at Nathan and caught a glimpse of his grave face. She had not yet heard him utter a word, and wondered how she could start a conversation. A sudden idea came into her mind. Again she looked over at Billy.

"What hymns are we to have next Sunday, Mr. Stubbles?" she unexpectedly asked.

At these words Nathan became galvanized into life. He straightened up, and in turn grinned at Billy. The latter, however, was equal to the occasion.

"I have not consulted with Mister Brown yet," he replied.

"You never consult me," Nathan growled, feeling once more very uncomfortable.

"There, there, boys, that will do," Mr. Acres ordered, knowing full well that this was merely a prelude to another wrangle. "Our guest is not interested in your discussion, remember."

"I do not mind," Joan smilingly replied. "It has been a long time since I have heard a real live argument. I am enjoying it here with you men very much. And I like your pictures, Mr. Acres, especially that one of the great ship over there. Did you sail it?"

"Yes, the *Ocean Queen* was a fine vessel, and I was master and owner. She could outstrip any ship on the Seven Seas except one, and that was the *Ida Rutledge*, owned and sailed by my best friend, John Rutledge. I did not mind being beaten by him, for he and his ship well deserved the honor."

"What great days they must have been, Mr. Acres. How often have I longed to go to sea, but never had the opportunity."

"You paint pictures of ships, though, Miss, and that means a great deal. You have the spirit of the sea."

"Perhaps so, and it may be that which makes me love ships. How you must miss the ocean, Mr. Acres."

"Miss it! It is never out of my mind. I dream of it day and night, especially when there is a gale abroad. Then I long to be on the *Ocean Queen*, and feel her leaping and quivering under my feet. Just look at her. What a beauty! My, it was great the way she could stand up to the fiercest wind that blew, and as Dana wrote, 'cutting through the head seas like a knife, with her raking masts and sharp bows running up like a greyhound'. Yes, Dana certainly knew what he was writing about. You never read him, I suppose?"

"No, I never had the pleasure, although I intend to do so just as soon as I can get a copy of his great book."

"I shall let you have mine, Miss," Mr. Acres declared as he rose to his feet and crossed the room to his bookshelf. "Here it is, *Two Years Before the Mast*, the greatest sea story ever written. Take it home with you. I am sorry it is so worn, but that won't make any difference. I know it almost by heart."

Joan was deeply moved by her host's excitement. She noticed how his hand trembled as he gave her the volume, and his eyes glowed with enthusiasm. Billy and Nathan stared at their master in amazement, and even Rachel paused to listen. She, too, was impressed, and this was unusual for her.

"It must have been hard for you to give up the sea," Joan remarked as she took the book. "Did you miss it much?"

"Not at first. I was tired of the rough life and wished to forget all about it. I wouldn't let anyone call me 'Captain', for I wanted to get rid of everything that would remind me of the past. In time, though, the longing for the sea returned, and it is stronger now than ever. But it is too late, and I am too old ever to go to sea again."

He suddenly ceased, and his manner changed. He seemed like a man roused from a dream. He glared hard at Billy and Nathan.

"I have been talking like a fool," he sternly declared. "Get away to your work, boys, and never repeat a word of what I have just said. Yes, get away with you, and keep busy." He then turned to Joan. "I bid you good day, Miss. You are expected at the rectory, so I shall not detain you any longer."

Billy and Nathan hurried out of the room, glad to be away from their strange master. Joan also rose from the table and looked straight into the eyes of the towering man before her.

"Mr. Acres, I wish to thank you for the pleasure you have given me to-day. I have always had a great admiration for the old Bluenose captains, but my admiration has been greatly increased since I have met you. Captain Acres, I bid you good day."

Mr. Acres followed the girl with his eyes as she left the room. He then went to the window and watched her as she walked from the house to the main highway. A gentler expression dwelt now in his eyes, and his right hand which rested upon the window sill trembled a little. He sighed, as he turned and went slowly upstairs to his room. The man who was once master and owner of the famous *Ocean Queen* was living again in the past. It was not of his ship, however, that he was now thinking, but of a girl, young and beautiful, and who very much resembled the one who had just left his house.

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# CHAPTER XXVII

## A SURE CURE

The morning after her visit to the rectory Mrs. Rockbridge awoke late. She had not slept well, for many things disturbed her mind. She had thought much about Mrs. Nairn, and the picture she had seen upon the wall. A sense of her own unworthiness had come to her, and with it a longing to live a different life. She had chased after happiness and had not found it. She had striven to be first, and when she had obtained her desire she had not found the satisfaction she had expected. Always there was something to mar her enjoyment. Yes, she would make a change, so she decided as she tossed restlessly through the slow hours of the night.

Now, however, she was in a different mood. Her head was aching, and she was suffering from an annoying pain in her left shoulder. This frightened her, for she had never experienced anything like it before. Perhaps it was her heart. She had heard of people with heart trouble suffering from pain in their left arms. It was all due to her excitement the previous evening and her restless night, so she believed. Anyway, she was a very ill-tempered woman when she at length entered the dining-room. She was once again the haughty and overbearing Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge, and the order she gave to the waitress was curt and imperative. But she ate a hearty breakfast, and then went to the hotel desk for her mail, which consisted of several letters, and the *Daily Echo*. She inquired of the young man there about a doctor.

"The nearest is Dr. Westburn, at Crestville, ten miles away. Shall I 'phone for him?"

"Oh, no, I would not think of bringing a doctor all that distance. It's only a pain in my shoulder. Perhaps it will soon pass away."

"Why not try Peter Pendle, Madam? He might be able to help you. His Panacea will cure almost anything, judging by the sign on his van."

"You mean the Mr. Pendle who lives near the rectory?"

"Yes, Madam. I can send over for a bottle of his Panacea, if you wish."

"That will not be necessary. I employ only regular medical men, and not quacks."

The deskman smiled as Mrs. Rockbridge moved haughtily away. That was a good one on Peter, and he decided to tell him when he saw him again.

With her mail in her hand, Mrs. Rockbridge went out upon the wide verandah and settled herself in a large comfortable chair. She was all alone here, as the other guests were either down by the shore, or playing tennis or golf. One letter was from her husband, inquiring about her health, and how the Nairn child was getting along. Another was from the secretary of the Go-Ahead Club, and was merely a matter of business. The third was from Mrs. Sylvester Casham, giving her the latest news about St. Alban's.

The Reverend Henry Nesbitt took the services last Sunday, she wrote. He is a young man, and of fairly good personal appearance. But his sermons were most commonplace, not at all intellectual, and he has a slight hesitation in his speech which is quite annoying at times. He would not do for St. Alban's. He has several children, and his wife is a very ordinary woman, of no culture. I have been doing what I can on behalf of your nephew, but so far Mr. Nairn seems to be the favorite. When you come home and make your report about the Rector of Glengrow and his wife, it will, no doubt, make a great difference. The election will take place soon. In the meantime we are getting along very well. As we have no rector, and do not have to pay the special clergymen who are taking the services during the summer, we are saving money.

When Mrs. Rockbridge had finished the letter, she leaned back in her chair and gave herself up to serious thought. Strange to say, she had suddenly lost interest in the choice of a rector for St. Alban's. She did not try to account for this feeling. But it did seem as if the scales had been removed from her eyes and she saw things in a new light. And this was largely due to her own restlessness and unhappy state of mind. What had all her striving for prominence amounted to? she asked herself. The thought of the bickerings and jealousies of her social set appeared so silly, futile, and even wicked. She recalled the faces of the women she knew so well. How worried they were, and their eyes expressed such

dissatisfaction. And she herself was the same. Life seemed very unreal to her this morning, and she felt unusually old and ineffective.

All at once Mrs. Nairn came into her mind as she had seen her the previous evening. What a humble life she led, and yet what peace and repose she possessed. She had noticed this even when Betty was in such a critical condition. No outcry, no wild flurry, but a serenity which she could not understand. To be in Mrs. Nairn's presence was soothing and inspiring. What was the cause of it?

With a start Mrs. Rockbridge sat up very erect in her chair. Vividly there appeared before her that picture she had seen upon the wall, of the Master of life stretching out his arms to all. Why should she think of Him now? she wondered. Was it a message for her? In fact, she had never thought much about Him before. Although very active in Church work, she had left the Master out. What she had done had been merely for her own satisfaction, and her desire to lead and shine. And what had it all amounted to, anyway? Wearily she leaned back in her chair, and as she did so, she felt a sharp twinge of pain in her shoulder. Could it be that her heart was affected by her excitement? She should really see her doctor. But he was in the city, and she did not feel like sending for the one at Crestville. His charge would be large, and, besides, it might be only a touch of rheumatism. Peter Pendle's Panacea might help her. Perhaps it was worth trying.

And thinking of Peter, Joan Rowland came into her mind. Who was she, anyway? The remembrance that she had started the slanderous story about this girl and Robert Rutledge was not at all pleasant to Mrs. Rockbridge now. For the first time the meanness of her act swept upon her. Perhaps she should not have been so hasty. Again that face of the Man of Galilee rose before her. It haunted her, and gave her no peace. Was it rebuking her for what she had done? It seemed so, and this was hard to endure. Her old spirit revived, and once more she was the haughty and overbearing woman that she had been for years. The thoughts and habits of a lifetime are difficult to change, and this was true of Mrs. Rockbridge. She was not well, she told herself, and that was the cause of her strange mood. She would go for a walk, and shake herself free of her depression. She must not allow herself to be carried away by a sentimental whim.

She rose to her feet, and the movement brought back the pain in her shoulder. But the old time determination was upon her. She would fight it, as she had fought other enemies and conquered. Her will would overcome the trouble. It had always done so in the past, and she believed it would now.

Her walk led her to the Pendle house, and there she found Peter at home, arranging some bottles in his van.

"You are very busy, I see," she accosted. "I hope I have not disturbed you."

"Not at all, Madam. I am used to bein' disturbed. In fact, I like it."

"You do!" Mrs. Rockbridge's eyes opened wide in surprise.

"Sure, fer when folks disturb me I know they want my help. People only come to me when they are troubled with aches, sprains or something else."

Mrs. Rockbridge smiled in spite of herself. This man amused her.

"Well, that is why I have come to you, Mr. Pendle. I am suffering from a severe pain in my shoulder. I hope it is not my heart. It may be a warning."

"Your heart, Madam! Why, you've got a heart as strong as an ox. I can tell that by lookin' at you. Your heart's all right, what there is of it."

"But my doctor said it is weak, so I must be careful."

"Fiddlesticks! He only told ye that to get you to run to him every once in a while so he could send in a big bill. Now, I have something that will cure your pain in a jiffy. Two applications of Peter Pendle's Panacea will give you immediate relief. One may do it, but for a stubborn case it sometimes takes two."

Peter reached into the van and brought forth a small bottle.

"This is it, Madam. It's very strong, so ye must not apply it too liberally. Rub it on gently an' let it soak in. It may hurt a little, but that will be all the better. I know a man who had a pain in his left shoulder. An' would ye believe me, when he reached home the pain was all gone, an' it never came back again. That Panacea was so effective that it cured his pain

right through his coat, shirt an' skin without touchin' his flesh. Ye see, he had put the bottle in his pocket next to his troubled shoulder. Yes, this is certainly great stuff."

"I shall take a bottle of it, then, Mr. Pendle. How much is it?"

"Only fifty cents, an' dirt cheap, at that. But I don't care to charge any more, as I like to do what I can fer humanity's sake."

After Mrs. Rockbridge had paid the money and received the bottle, she was in no hurry to leave. She glanced towards the house.

"Does Miss Rowland live in a part of your house?" she asked in a casual manner, as if the thought had just entered her mind.

"Yes, she lives in that place adjoinin' mine."

"Is she at home?"

"No, she's over at the rectory lookin' after Betty. The Nairns are over at Si Acres."

"So they are friends of his, then?"

"They seem to be this mornin'. Anyway, that's where they are."

"Miss Rowland is quite an artist, is she not?"

"Indeed she is. You should see the pictures she's painted. My! her ships are wonderful. I never get tired of lookin' at 'em."

"I should like to see them, Mr. Pendle, as I am very fond of good pictures. Do you suppose Miss Rowland would mind my looking at them?"

"Not at all, Madam. She's very friendly, an' she would appreciate anyone lookin' at her work. She told me so herself. I only wish she was here now so she could show 'em to ye herself. But the door is open, so yer're welcome to go in an' make yerself at home."

This was very agreeable to Mrs. Rockbridge, so leaving Peter, she opened the screen door and entered. It was a cosy place, where everything was arranged with simple artistic taste. The pictures on the walls at once attracted her attention, especially those of the great clipper ships. There were also sketches of Bullet House, and scenes of the lake. She looked at these rather languidly and indifferently, for her interest in art was only superficial, and she could not tell the difference between a mere daub and a masterpiece.

Turning at length from the pictures on the walls, she began to examine the room. And as she did so, her eyes rested upon the sketch on the easel. Amazed beyond measure, she stepped swiftly forward and stared down upon the face she knew so well. It was startling, so bestial did it appear to her. It seemed as if the artist had taken a delight in giving full expression to the small swinish eyes, low forehead, pug nose, and protruding lips. And that man was her father! A feeling of disgust swept upon her as she stood there. This was only for an instant, however, as it was succeeded by intense anger. Why had Miss Rowland done that? What right had she to do such a thing? And where had she obtained a copy? Ah, there it was lying right by the easel, the clipping from a paper she had seen before. But why? That was the question which caused Mrs. Rockbridge's heart to beat fast and her hands to clench hard together. Miss Rowland must have some sinister purpose in view. If not, why should she wish to sketch such a face? It was not a subject an artist would naturally choose. Almost anyone would turn from it in disgust.

Suddenly an idea flashed into her mind. Perhaps Miss Rowland had heard the tale she had told about her and Robert Rutledge, and in this way she was seeking revenge. But how had she obtained that clipping?

As Mrs. Rockbridge thus stared at the picture, her anger increased, and she longed to tear it to pieces. In fact, she did reach out a hand, and her fingers curved tensely. They almost touched the sketch, and were only checked by fear. With an effort she restrained herself, turned away, and walked out of the room. Peter was still at the van, and she hoped to get away without speaking to him. She was in no mood for conversation just now. But Peter saw her.

"Hello! How's the pain now?"

"Much better," was the curt reply.

"Ah, that's good. Wonderful stuff, that. It'll cure whether ye use it or not."

But Mrs. Rockbridge did not seem to hear. She was moving swiftly and haughtily along the path leading to the rectory.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Peter muttered, as he gazed after her. "Something's upset her ladyship, an' I wonder what it is. Why she's as mad as a hornet, an' a human hornet, 'specially a female, is a mighty nasty insect to meet. It'll take more'n my Panacea to cure her sting, by jingo it will."

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# CHAPTER XXVIII

## A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

When Robert Rutledge went to Bullet Lake he believed that he could live there in perfect contentment. Away from the busy world he imagined he could invite his soul, spend the long quiet hours in meditation, and desire nothing more than to be alone in the wilderness. But from the first day of his arrival he learned that this was impossible. He found that he could not get clear of the things of the world. They pressed in upon him, and instead of being a separate unit he was mysteriously bound in the bundle of life with others. And in truth he was glad that this was so, for it brought him a new and inspiring interest in those around him, especially in one who was constantly in his mind.

So on this beautiful morning he thought much about Joan Rowland as he had seen her the evening before at the door of her house. Every expression of her face was vividly clear to him as he lay stretched out upon the rustic sofa, lost in a golden realm of fancy and romance. Never had he known such a girl, so he believed, and different from all he had ever met. Not only was it her beauty that appealed to him, but an indefinable charm of voice and manner. No one could be more pleasant, and yet there was a strange reserve about her which he could not understand. And she was very sensitive, too, for since the circulation of that slander by Mrs. Rockbridge she had not been to Bullet Lake. And he missed her so much. The charm had somewhat vanished from the place since she came no more. He knew that she was busy at the rectory helping to take care of Betty. Perhaps she would come again when the child was fully recovered. He hoped so, anyway, and in the meantime he would continue the work he had laid aside. The desire for activity had now returned. There were several poems he wished to finish, and two or three short stories were taking shape in his brain. But that mystery about Bullet House was still uppermost in his mind. Not until he had unravelled that would he feel satisfied. He had come unexpectedly upon one clue through those old letters, but how could he give what he had discovered to the world? He recalled Joan's words of warning, and knew their truth. To reveal their contents would undoubtedly involve him in no end of trouble. He must learn more about Si Acres, and how was that to be accomplished? It was certainly a puzzling question.

Then the desire came upon him to copy those letters. They would be easier to read, and it would be a beginning, at least, of the article he hoped to write. As soon as he had finished his dinner, he brought his typewriter and table out upon the verandah and set at once to work. It was pleasant to feel again his fingers upon the keys, and his old creative spirit stirred within him. In a place such as this, so quiet and refreshing, he believed that he could accomplish something of real value. His rest had done him good, and his mind was keen and active.

When he had finished, he gathered up the old letters and placed them in a pocket of his coat lying near. Stretching himself out upon the sofa, and with pipe in his mouth, he read over what he had written. He then gave himself up to thought. How little did the writer realize that his words would so strangely come to light and prove of such interest. Suppose Mr. Acres should learn about them, what would he do? And Robert wanted him to know. But who would tell him?

Laying the sheets of paper by his side, his eyes wandered off to the hills, and also to the lake which could be discerned through the trees. Everything told of peace. There was nothing to disturb the harmony of the place. And for the present he was in full possession of it all.

Ere long a new and pleasant fancy came to his mind upon which he let his imagination wander at will. This humble cabin was a castle and he was the ruler of a vast domain. The time was long ago when robber bands roamed the forest. But here in this stronghold he was safe. And now his men were off on various raids, and they would soon return laden with spoils. And in the castle there was one who ruled with him, more beautiful than any queen who had ever walked the earth. And this fair one had the form and features of Joan Rowland. What a story he might work out of this fancy. He would have the queen stolen from him by a stern and cruel enemy, and he would lead forth his band of men to her rescue. He pictured them riding through the forest, along deep valleys, and over high hills until at last the enemy was overtaken and his loved one saved. Then with what joy and triumph they would return with the enemy put to rout.

From this pleasant dream he was suddenly awakened by a heavy splash in the water on his right. Lifting himself to a sitting position, he caught a glimpse of a great moose that had entered the lake and was striking out strongly for the other side. This was the first time he had ever seen a moose so near, and a thrill of excitement swept upon him. Leaping to his feet, and unheeding the sheets of paper, several of which had fallen to the floor, he rushed down to the landing where the boat was tied. In another minute he was in full pursuit of the noble animal. He wished to watch it swimming, to examine

its wide-spreading antlers, and to view it when it lifted itself out of the water on the opposite shore. He kept at a safe distance, however, and studied to his heart's content the great form as it surged on its way. He had no desire to kill such a magnificent animal. He merely wished to study its every movement and to enjoy the unusual scene. This experience might serve him in good stead for some adventure story.

Steadily the moose kept on its way, and when its feet at length touched ground it rose slowly from the lake, scrambled up the steep bank, and with water dripping from its heaving sides, turned and looked at the strange object that had been following him. He did not seem at all afraid nor in any hurry to bury himself among the trees. He stood there, a monarch of the wild, with his great antlers uplifted, viewing the intruder into his rightful domain, and yet offering no harm.

Thoughtfully Robert rowed back to the landing. He had seen something of special interest. What a sketch Joan might have made of the noble creature. He pictured her eyes alight with interest, and her face aglow with animation as she sketched. Too bad she had missed such an opportunity. He would tell her about it, though, and that would be some satisfaction.

Reaching the house, he stepped upon the verandah. After his adventure he was in no mood for writing. A sudden desire came upon him to go back to the rectory. He was anxious to see Joan, as he had something to tell her. He could make the moose the excuse for leaving the lake so early. He smiled to himself at this idea, and wondered if the girl would understand. She was quick and keen, and if she had the least idea of what she meant to him, she might suspect his ruse.

Taking the typewriter and table into the house, Robert returned for the letters. He knew where he had left them, but to his surprise they were not there. He looked around, thinking they might have been blown away. There was no wind, so that idea was ridiculous. He searched carefully, but not a sheet could he find. All had mysteriously vanished.

"Well, this is queer," he exclaimed. "I am sure I left them here when I went after that moose. What could have happened to them! They were not able to walk away themselves, that's certain. Somebody must have taken them!"

As this idea came into his mind, he turned swiftly and examined the pocket of his coat where he had placed the letters. They were still there, and he gave a sigh of relief.

"I was afraid they had walked off, too," he muttered. "Perhaps the ghosts took the others. I may not be so much alone as I imagined."

Seating himself upon the sofa, he filled and lighted his pipe. He was more excited than he had been while chasing the moose. He felt now that he was being watched, and most likely this had been going on ever since he came to this place. But who in the world would want to keep an eye upon a lone man in the wilderness? What object could any one have for doing such a thing?

The next instant he removed his pipe from his mouth, and held it so long in his hand that the fire died out in the bowl. Who but Si Acres would be interested in what he was trying to do? He recalled Billy's visit under the pretext of searching for a stray cow. He had suspected the truth of his statement then, but had almost forgotten about it. Now, however, he was certain that his suspicion had been correct. Si Acres had sent him, and most likely he had been lurking around every day since. This thought annoyed him at first. Why could he not be left alone? But soon a feeling of satisfaction stole into his mind. Mr. Acres must be uneasy. Was he afraid that his tenant at Bullet Lake might unearth something of vital importance to him, and that his connection with Thomas Rayton might be revealed? This was only a surmise on Robert's part, but how else could he explain the loss of those sheets of paper? Had Billy been hiding among the trees, waiting to learn what he could? And the presence of the moose had given him the opportunity to steal those papers.

"I may be wrong," Robert mused, "but it is interesting, anyway. That queer old fellow warned me to confine myself to stories about the sea, and not to bother with this old house. And if he is now in possession of the copies of those letters he will wonder where the originals are. He will be puzzled. But what will he do? He may prove a very dangerous man when deeply aroused. He will naturally wonder how I obtained those letters, and how much more I know. If after so many years his attempt to shoot Thomas Rayton should come to light it will be most serious for him. And what might he not do to avert such a thing? If he tried to commit a terrible deed long ago, he might do the same now when he seems more of a devil than ever."

This was not a pleasant thought, and Robert glanced somewhat apprehensively around. He then laughed.

"I am getting afraid of a shadow. Nevertheless, it makes me nervous to think of a revengeful man lurking among the trees with a rifle in hand watching me. But would he be silly enough to shoot? It is hard to tell, though, what that man might do. He is different from all men I have ever met. Now, I wonder how I am going to find out the full story of his life. And those papers. Let me see. Joan might be able to help me. Perhaps she will have some suggestion. Yes, I shall go to see her at once."

It did not take Robert long to reach the rectory. Alighting from his car, he entered the house. In the hallway he heard the sound of voices upstairs, mingled with children's laughter. He then recognized Joan's voice. So up the stairs he went, taking two steps at a bound, stopped at the bedroom door and looked in. There was Betty propped up in bed with the toys Mr. Acres had given her strewn before her. On one side was John with wide eager eyes watching Joan opposite as she manipulated a funny little monkey dancing up and down a long string fastened to a stick. Robert had eyes only for the girl. How wonderful she looked, as with eyes aglow and cheeks flushed with interest she amused the children. To the ardent young man her thoughts seemed to be entirely upon what she was doing. As the monkey made a complete somersault, Betty shrieked with delight and raised her eyes. As she did so, she caught sight of the man standing in the doorway. The expression of joy upon her face increased, and her eyes sparkled more than ever.

"Uncle Bob!" she cried. "Come and see the funny monkey."

At once Robert stepped forward. John rushed to meet him and dragged him to the side of the bed.

"See, see, Uncle Bob, what the monkey can do. Make him jump again, Joan."

The girl was about to rise from her knees, but Robert motioned her to remain where she was.

"I am sorry to disturb your play," he apologized. "But I could not help stealing in upon you to see what all the fun was about."

"We have been having a grand time," Joan smilingly replied. "But we are glad that you have come, for you can tell us a story. The monkey is tired and needs a rest."

"And let another monkey do the talking, eh? Well, I don't mind, so long as I please Betty and John."

He seated himself upon the side of the bed, and to the delight of the little ones told the story of the moose. It held them spellbound, and their eyes were big with wonder.

"And did it have great horns?" Betty inquired when he was through.

"Yes, as big as that," and Robert stretched out his arms full length.

"Oh! And did it swim all the way across the lake?"

"All the way, Betty, and I followed it in the boat. I wish you had been there, Joan, for it would have made a splendid sketch."

"I am sure it would," was the quiet reply. "I have missed something I always wanted to see."

Just then Hettie appeared at the door, and announced that Mrs. Rockbridge was downstairs and wished to see Miss Rowland.

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## CHAPTER XXIX

### MORE THAN SHE EXPECTED

The quietness of the sitting room was a striking contrast to Mrs. Rockbridge's agitated state of mind. It was so restful here, a little world shut off from the disturbing elements of life. The flower-scented air drifted softly in through the open window on her left and gently swayed the muslin curtains. The murmur of bees in the garden mingled with the sweet chirping of a bird in a nearby tree. The woman leaning back in the large comfortable chair was soothed by such surroundings. She was hot, tired, restless, and unhappy. Here she was experiencing a peace such as she had seldom known. It was the same that had come to her the evening before when she had talked with Mrs. Nairn. The very atmosphere of the room seemed to possess a magical influence. Why was that? She lifted her eyes and looked at the picture upon the wall. She had not forgotten it, for it had appeared to her over and over again through the long tedious hours of the night. The beauty of the face of the Man standing there, the expression of love in His eyes, the strength which emanated from his very appearance, and the appeal of those out-stretched arms were almost more than she could endure. They reminded her of her own unworthiness, and brought to her heart the bitter sting of remorse. They told her of how much she had missed in life of all that was best.

Suddenly there flashed into her mind that picture she had seen upon the easel in Joan's room. What a contrast! The woman's hands clenched hard and her body trembled. Never had her father's face appeared so repulsive. She closed her eyes as if to shut out the image. All the beast nature in that face stood out clear and distinct. She had always known that he was a selfish man, that money was his god, and that whatever good he had done was merely to win the praise and approval of others. She recalled the life in her old home before her marriage, the talk about money, success, social ambition, and other worldly things. But never any word about the Great Master who had come to give the more abundant life. It was true they had always gone to church, but only as a matter of duty and for appearance sake. That was all. Religion meant nothing more. It was not a sustaining power, a sweet influence to give peace and comfort. It was like a garment to be used only on Sunday and then laid aside for the rest of the week.

The bitterness of it all came upon her now. How much she had missed! How she had been misled! And now after years of church work and social activity she was an unhappy and disappointed woman. What had all her efforts amounted to, anyway? she asked herself. Oh, to retrace her steps and begin life all over again.

She was in the midst of this serious meditation as Joan entered the room. Mrs. Rockbridge rose to meet her, and as she took the girl's hand in hers she noticed the beauty of her face, her bright smile, and the charm of her manner.

"Excuse me for keeping you waiting," Joan apologized. "But I was playing with the children, so had to make myself presentable before coming downstairs. I am nurse-maid this afternoon."

"And how is Betty getting along?" Mrs. Rockbridge inquired as she resumed her seat.

"Very nicely now, and is taking an interest in everything. We were playing this afternoon with the toys Mr. Acres gave her, and she is delighted with them."

"Mr. Acres!" Mrs. Rockbridge's eyes opened wide in surprise. "Did he give her toys?"

"He did, and went to the city for them, and brought them here himself."

"You astonish me, Miss Rowland. Mr. Acres, of all men, to do such a thing!"

"I am afraid people have misjudged him, Mrs. Rockbridge. It may have been partly his own fault, for he has a very stern manner. But just think what he is going to do for poor city children."

"What is that?"

"He is going to bring a number out to his place and give them a glorious time. They will live in tents down by the shore, and there will be attendants supplied by the Family Welfare Bureau to look after them. But he wants us here to help, and I hope you will join us, for we must all assist."

"Why, what could I do?" the visitor demanded. "I might give money."

"Give yourself, Mrs. Rockbridge," Joan quietly replied. "You can help to keep them busy. Games must be arranged, as well as little picnics up the brook. Oh, there are so many things I have in mind."

"It will take a great deal of your time, will it not, Miss Rowland?"

"I hope it will take every minute while the children are here. I can hardly wait until they come. It will be something worth while."

"And what about your painting, Miss Rowland? Will not this new work interfere with that?"

"I know it will, but to do something for poor children is more important than that."

"So that picture on your easel will have to wait, then?"

Joan gave a slight start, and looked keenly at her visitor.

"Ah, you know what I mean," Mrs. Rockbridge continued. "Yes, I saw the sketch you are making, and I hope you will forgive me for entering your cosy studio. But I went over to get some of Mr. Pendle's Panacea for my rheumatism, and he was kind enough to show me your wonderful pictures. He said you would not mind."

"Oh, not at all. But it was stupid of me to leave that sketch upon the easel."

"Why?"

"It is some private work I am doing for Mr. Acres, and perhaps he would not care for others to see it."

"For Mr. Acres! He asked you to make that sketch for him?"

"He did."

"And why does he want it?"

"You will have to ask him."

"But do you know who the man is you are sketching?"

"I have read the newspaper account, of course, and it says that you are his daughter."

"I am, but why should Mr. Acres wish to have his picture?"

"He may be able to explain."

"Most likely, and I shall ask him as soon as I see him again. But what right has he to do such a thing without my permission?"

"He may consider he has a right, Mrs. Rockbridge. He knew your father, so he told me, and may merely wish to have a picture of him. Surely there can be no harm in that."

"No, I suppose not," was the somewhat doubtful assent. "But there must be some other reason. Mr. Acres is a very strange man, and I cannot believe it is done for friendship sake."

"I believe you are right," Joan replied. She was thinking very keenly now, and decided that this haughty woman should know the truth, no matter how hard it might be. "Mr. Acres wishes to have a sketch of your father for a special reason."

"And what is that?"

"To show the face of the false friend who ruined Thomas Rayton many years ago."

At these words Mrs. Rockbridge's face turned deathly pale, her body slumped down into the chair, and she looked at the girl before her with wide-staring eyes. Joan was moved to pity at her misery, and she almost regretted what she had said.

"I knew it would shock you, Mrs. Rockbridge, but it is better, perhaps, that you should learn it from me than from others, especially Mr. Acres. And I have a right to tell you."

"What right?" the unhappy woman demanded, arousing herself. She was ready for fight now with this calm and self-possessed young woman.

"It is the right of self defence, and also for the sake of those who mean a great deal to me. I have their interest at heart, and desire only to save them as well as myself from the harm you have done."

"Indeed! Your words are very strange, Miss Rowland. Please explain your meaning."

"I am surprised that you do not understand. You surely have not forgotten the main purpose of your coming to Glengrow. Was it not to spy upon my friend, Mrs. Nairn, and to carry back an unfavorable report of her to the members of St. Alban's?"

Astonished beyond measure, Mrs. Rockbridge rose to her feet and confronted her accuser. Joan faced her, not the least abashed.

"How dare you make such an accusation?" the angry woman demanded. "Do you realize the seriousness of your words? I shall take legal action against you at once for making such a charge."

"You are quite welcome to do so, Mrs. Rockbridge. And why should you deny it? I overheard your conversation with Mrs. Casham at the White Lily Cafe several weeks ago. How could I help hearing, for your voice carried all over the room. And Mr. Rutledge heard you, too, and he will confirm what I have said. It is no use for you to deny it."

Mrs. Rockbridge stood as if turned to stone. For years she had skilfully extricated herself from many embarrassing situations in which she had become involved. But she found it impossible to do so now. The evidence was too strong against her. She tried to stare Joan out of countenance, but she soon found her own eyes shifting uneasily before the steady look of her accuser. She knew that she was beaten, and by a mere slip of a girl, at that. This was hard for such a haughty woman to endure. But she would not willingly succumb without another effort.

"So Mr. and Mrs. Nairn have put you up to tell me this," she sneered. "They were afraid, I suppose, to do it themselves."

"So far as I know they are totally unaware of the main object of your visit here, Mrs. Rockbridge. They have never mentioned it to me, anyway."

"So you have taken it entirely upon yourself to defend them, then? Your hero who is living at Bullet Lake evidently did not have the courage to face me himself, but left it to his—to a girl."

This partly veiled innuendo caused Joan's cheeks to crimson, but otherwise, she showed no sign of embarrassment.

"The 'hero' you mention is not lacking in courage, and he would have exposed you as soon as you came to Glengrow but for one thing."

"And what was that, pray?"

"His keen sense of humor. Mr. Rutledge, and I suppose he is the 'hero' you mean, considered your spying upon Mrs. Nairn such a joke that he said nothing to her about it, for he wished to see how far you would go. He wanted his sister to be unaware of your design that she might be her own natural self. If you had stopped there no harm, perhaps, would have been done. But when you could find nothing against Mrs. Nairn personally you tried to strike at her through her brother."

"Miss Rowland! How dare you say such a thing? This is terrible, and I shall not permit you to talk like this."

"Oh, yes you will. You shall hear me through. I dare to speak as I have because your slander about Mr. Rutledge includes me. You spread the report that we were living together at Bullet House. You cannot deny it, for you know it is true, and I have definite proof."

"Produce it, then," Mrs. Rockbridge challenged, greatly enraged.

"That will be quite easy. Come with me to Mr. Pendle's, and let him tell what he heard in the city. He will be glad to do so."

Again Mrs. Rockbridge was entangled in a net from which she knew she could not escape. A great fear now possessed her, and the helplessness of her position overwhelmed her. What did Peter know? What had he heard in the city? She

believed that she had so covered her tracks that no one could possibly connect her with that tale of scandal. And yet Peter Pendle knew all about it!

"Are you ready?" Joan asked. "Peter is home this afternoon."

But Mrs. Rockbridge did not reply. She stared hard at the girl, and then, defeated and humiliated, tears came into her eyes. She sank down into the chair, buried her face in her hands, and sobbed as if her heart would break. The proud haughty woman had been at last subdued. She had visited the rectory expecting to bring Joan Rowland to account, but she herself had been confounded. And she could see no way out of her difficulty, no matter how hard she thought. But her tears were not really tears of repentance. It was mostly the sense of defeat which moved her so deeply.

At length her sobbing ceased, and as she wiped her eyes with her tiny silk handkerchief, she looked at Joan who was standing waiting for her to speak.

"I hope you are happy now, Miss Rowland. Are you pleased that you have seen an old woman in tears through what you have said?"

"Happy? No. You have no idea what it has cost me to tell you this. Satisfied? Yes, if it will teach you to mind your own business, and leave innocent people alone. You have done much harm already. That cannot be undone. You know now what your father did to a poor hard-working man who was kind to him, and you have been following his footsteps."

"Stop! Stop! I can't bear to hear any more. And I cannot believe my father would do such a treacherous thing. It may be a lie. What proof have you?"

"Mr. Acres has the proof, so he told me. You can ask him."

"So you have been talking to that old man about my father, have you? And you two planned to crush and humiliate me? Why should a girl such as you get yourself involved in that deed of the past? Why do you take such an interest in bringing it now to light after so many years?"

"I would never have done so, Mrs. Rockbridge, if you had not come here to make trouble. But you might as well know now as at any time that Thomas Rayton, the man your father ruined, was my grandfather."

"Your grandfather!"

"Yes."

"And my father ruined him!"

"He did, and he built his fortune upon the wreck of my poor grandparents."

Mrs. Rockbridge made no immediate reply. She gazed unseeingly through the window, out upon the fields beyond. But something was awaking within her soul, something that had been suddenly aroused, a nobleness that seemed entirely foreign to this imperious woman. The great crisis in her life had now been reached, and the opposing force that had swept upon her, instead of driving her downward, had lifted her to a higher level. Swiftly she turned and caught Joan by the hand.

"I am sorry, terribly sorry, Miss Rowland. I did not know. I did not understand. But now—There, I can say no more. I must leave you. I have much to think about. Good-bye."

Greatly bewildered, Joan remained standing where Mrs. Rockbridge had left her. Then her body trembled and she sank down into a chair. The strain which she had undergone relaxed, and a sudden weakness swept upon her. She buried her face in her hands and tried to think of all that had taken place.

And there Robert Rutledge found her as he came into the room. Her huddled form and bowed head startled him. He came quickly to her side.

"Joan, Joan, what is the matter?" he asked. "What has that woman done to you?"

Then for the first time a sob escaped the girl's lips as she raised her face to his. Impulsively Robert bent and placed his arms tenderly around her. To his supreme joy Joan nestled her head close to his, and with a sigh of relief, gave herself

up to his sustaining strength and comfort.





# CHAPTER XXX

## HONOR

It had been a great day for Mr. Acres, and as he sat at supper with Billy and Nathan, his heart was filled with an unusual peace and happiness. In the morning he had explained to Joan his plans for the children, and then she had honored him with her presence at dinner. And during the afternoon the Nairns had been with him, and they had entered so enthusiastically into his undertaking and promised to help him all they could. And to-morrow the actual work would begin. Teams would haul lumber from Kittson's mill, and carpenters would be on hand to erect the building, part of which would be used for kitchen, and the rest as the place where the meals would be served. Trucks would also come from the city bringing tents, bedding, food, cooking utensils, and other things necessary for camping purposes. Mr. Acres had left the management of these things with the Family Welfare Bureau, which understood such matters. And then the children would come, and he pictured their joy at being in the country. Girls would come first, about twenty in all, and then boys would have their turn.

For once Billy and Nathan were eating in silence. They had failed to begin an argument as soon as they sat down at the table. Mr. Acres surmised the reason, and he was much amused. They were expecting him to tell them something about his plans, so before the momentous things that were pending any argument seemed out of place.

"Is the boat all ready, boys?" he inquired when supper was about over. "I have not done much sailing this summer, so have paid little or no attention to the condition of the craft."

"She was in good shape when I was on board of her a couple of weeks ago," Billy replied. "Everything was in apple-pie order then."

"Doesn't leak any?"

"Very little. But the tender needs to be looked after. It's leakin'."

"I'm not surprised. It's been high and dry for months, so you boys get to work and cork it in the morning. You'll find oakum in the wood-house over the door, and tar in a pail on the wall. You better touch up the hull, too. I want to have everything in good order when the children come. And, by the way, boys, I want you to help all you can, so be handy when needed. That will do now, so get along with the chores."

Mr. Acres filled and lighted his pipe, and leaned back to enjoy his smoke. Nathan at once left the room, but Billy lingered at the table. He was fumbling in his pocket, and at length brought forth several sheets of crumpled paper.

"I've got something fer ye, Si," he whispered, glancing cautiously towards the kitchen lest Rachel might hear. "I was out to the lake this afternoon an' found something at last."

"Eh? What's that you say?" Mr. Acres demanded. His mind had been dwelling upon other things.

"I found these," and Billy held up the papers. "That young feller was busy at his typewriter out on the verandah, an' when he was through he stretched himself out upon the sofa. Pretty soon he saw a moose swimmin' across the lake, an' he went after it pell-mell. That gave me a chance to investigate, as you ordered, so I got hold of these, an' here they are."

"Some poetry, no doubt," Mr. Acres remarked as he held out his hand. "I shall look over them at my leisure. But did the young man miss these, Billy, when he returned to the house?"

"He did, Si, an' looked around as if wonderin' what had become of them. He then got in his car an' went away."

"Have you learned anything about the meaning of that hammering in the house? Did you see what he had been doing?"

"I did. A board by the fireplace had been torn off an' put back again."

"Ah, where was that?"

"Just above the little cupboard door. Now, what in time d'ye s'pose he did that for?"

"I have no idea. But you may go now, Billy. You have done very well, and have been most careful. Mr. Rutledge never suspected that you were watching him, did he?"

"I guess not. He only saw me once when I told him I was huntin' fer a cow. Ho, ho, that was funny. He thought I could call the cow with music. Maybe he'll write some poetry about it."

When Billy had gone, Mr. Acres sat for a while lost in deep thought. He was not at all satisfied with his tenant at Bullet Lake.

"I should not have rented the place to such a man," he mused. "There is no telling what he might unearth. He believes that if a man holds an idea in his mind for any length of time he will receive an answer sooner or later which will solve any problem. I don't believe such nonsense, and yet ..."

He rose abruptly from the table and went into the kitchen. Rachel was busy making pies.

"I did not get time to make these this morning," she explained. "The boys are fond of pies. The last ones I made lasted only two days."

"H'm, you feed them well, Rachel, in fact, almost too well."

"Perhaps so, but they show their keep, and are always grateful."

"Grateful! I wish they'd show a little to me, then, for all I've done for the lazy rascals. But, Rachel."

"Yes, sir."

"How do you like Miss Rowland?"

"I have always liked her from the first moment I saw her. She is a very sweet girl, and so good and kind."

"Ah, I'm glad to hear you say that, Rachel. You gave us a great dinner to-day."

"That's what Miss Rowland told me."

"Did she?"

"Yes. And she offered to help me with the dishes, but I wouldn't let her."

"We shall see more of her, Rachel, for she has offered to assist with the children when they come. I shall invite her here to dinner again some day. I hope you won't mind."

"I wish she would come every day, sir. It would be something for me to look forward to. Why, this kitchen seems a brighter place because she was here for only a few minutes."

Mr. Acres was pleased at these words of praise, and his heart was unusually light as he ascended the stairs to his room. He was finding a greater interest in life than he had for many a year. The cloud of gloom and defiance under which he had been living was lifting and the sunshine was breaking through. Only a few weeks before life had seemed to him like a dreary and barren waste with no light ahead. Now he had much to live for. The children were coming, and he would see Miss Rowland every day. And the Nairns would come, too, and they had promised to bring Betty as soon as she was able to leave the house.

Reaching his room, he sat down in a comfortable chair by the window which was aglow with the light of the westering sun. He liked to sit here and look out upon the river, especially when a gale was abroad. Then the longing always came upon him to be out at sea with the wind in his face, guiding the *Ocean Queen* as she stormed on her way. But to-night he was not thinking of this. Other things occupied his mind. He was wondering why Robert Rutledge had torn off that board out in Bullet House. What reason could he have for doing such a thing? He then remembered the sheets of paper Billy had given him. Drawing them swiftly from his pocket, he unfolded and spread them out before him on his lap. Then as his eyes rested upon the words written there, a puzzled expression overspread his face. He began to read, and at the first line his face turned deathly pale, and his hands trembled so violently that the words danced before his eyes. But it was not necessary for him to read, as he knew what those letters contained, although long years had passed since they had been penned. "Bombay," and "Dearest Lucy." How he stared at those words. Then when his hands had become steadier

he read it through. "Your loving and faithful, Si." Yes, that was the way it ended, and it all seemed like a dream to him now. It was hard to realize that he had written those words.

He read the other letters, as well, and when he had finished, he was greatly agitated. Where had Robert Rutledge obtained those letters? Who had given them to him? And they were only copies. Ah, he believed he knew. There was only one person who would have the originals, and that was Joan Rowland. This thought made him angry. What right had the girl to do such a thing? Was she in league with Rutledge in his effort to unravel the mystery of Bullet House? And what could he do about it? How could he check any further investigations? He might demand the letters, but that would be sheer folly. And, besides, he had no right to them. They belonged to the girl, and most likely they had been handed down to her from her grandmother.

Mr. Acres slumped down in his chair, his face drawn and haggard. The appearance of those letters after so many years almost stunned him. He had never expected such a revelation. What was the meaning of it all? At once there flashed into his mind words he had often thought about, "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid that shall not be known." They startled him. Why did they come to him just now? Was there Something, after all, in religion? And was that same mysterious Power now working his ruin? It was strange, too, that Joan Rowland and Robert Rutledge should have come to Glengrow at the same time, and that both were so greatly interested in Bullet House, one the granddaughter of the Raytons, and the other anxious to unearth the history of the place. It seemed more than a mere coincidence. And then those old letters had come to light! So Lucy had kept them! That was strange. He imagined that she had destroyed them so her husband would not see them. Perhaps she had shown them to him. But, no, that was hardly likely. There were things in them she would not want Tom to see, so he believed she had kept them hidden.

Hidden! That word brought a new idea to his mind. Had she hidden them, and then forgot all about them? And had Robert Rutledge discovered those letters in that little cupboard by the chimney? He straightened up at the idea, and a sense of relief came into his heart. Perhaps, after all, Miss Rowland had not given him those letters, but he had found them by chance. And that might be the meaning of the pounding Billy had heard, and the cause of the removal of that board. Yes, it did seem reasonable. And Miss Rowland had not deceived him. He was glad of that. But how much more did Rutledge know? What else had he found?

Mr. Acres felt very old and lonely as he again slumped down in his chair. The inspiring joy that had been his through the day had now vanished. It seemed strange to him that when he was about to launch his welfare work on behalf of poor children that this trouble should come upon him. For it was a trouble of a very grave nature. Those old letters which had so unexpectedly come to light, might involve him in serious difficulty, especially the last one with its incriminating threat. Of course, no one could prove anything against him from the letter, but considering what had happened that wild night at Bullet House, it would look bad. And, besides, he did not know how much more Robert Rutledge might have unearthed. If in some unaccountable way he had found those letters, he might even now be in possession of other material, and already writing the story for publication. When the mind is ruled by fear, it is easy for the imagination to become distorted to an alarming degree. And this was the case with Silas Acres as he sat in his lone room while the shades of night closed slowly around him.

He was at length aroused by a gentle knock upon the door which startled him. It was most unusual for anyone to disturb him when he had sought the quietness of his own room. But it was only Rachel's voice he heard, which informed him that a gentleman was downstairs who wished to see him. Mr. Acres was in no mood for receiving a visitor, but thinking that he might have come in connection with to-morrow's work, he told Rachel that he would be down in a few minutes.

When he at last entered the sitting room, great was his surprise to see Robert Rutledge seated there. He stopped suddenly and glared fiercely at the visitor. Robert did not seem at all concerned by such an attitude, but rose to his feet and held out his hand.

"Pardon me for disturbing you, Mr. Acres," he apologized, "but I have called to see if I can be of any assistance to you in your work with the children you are to bring from the city. It is splendid of you to undertake this, and I want to do what I can to help."

"Ah, so that is why you have come," Mr. Acres replied, as his face cleared. He was relieved, for he was afraid that Rutledge had come to him in connection with the papers Billy had stolen. "Yes, we shall need help, so it will be easy to find something for you to do. It will be a change, I suppose? You must find it quite lonesome at Bullet Lake."

"Not at all, sir. There is no end of excitement. Why, to-day a moose took to the lake and swam to the opposite side. It was a grand sight to see him when he came out of the water. I followed him in the boat, and when I returned to the house I found that a ghost had been there and carried off several typewritten sheets of paper I had left on the sofa. A moose and a ghost in one afternoon! Wasn't that thrilling enough for any man?"

"I suppose so, especially the ghost. I warned you, remember, that there might be ghosts prowling around."

"I know you did, but I thought there was a whole bunch of ghosts in that house the day a little bird came through a hole in the chimney and made such a racket in that small cupboard. I had to tear off a board to find the hole which I plugged up as well as I could. But I was well repaid for my efforts, as I found several old letters there which interested me very much."

Robert was keenly watching Mr. Acres' face as he made this announcement. But no outward sign of concern could he detect in the old man's immovable features, except a slight expression of sadness in his faded eyes.

"So you found some letters, eh?" Mr. Acres queried. "And you think that I wrote them, I suppose?"

Robert started, his face flushed, and he became visibly embarrassed. Mr. Acres smiled.

"I knew such a question would startle you, Mr. Rutledge. But I see it is no use for us to beat around the bush any longer. Yes, I wrote those letters many years ago, and now that you have found them you intend to have them published. They will make great reading for the curious. How people will gloat over the love letters of Old Odd Acres. What a choice tit-bit it will be for them."

Robert was too much confounded to make any reply. He stared at the man standing so erect before him. He had never imagined that Mr. Acres would take the discovery of those letters so calmly. If he had raved and stormed he might have known what to do. But to hear him talk like this was most disconcerting.

"Come with me, young man," he said, "I want to show you something."

Leading him across the room, he paused before a framed picture upon the wall.

"See that, Mr. Rutledge, *The Northwest Passage*, by Millais. It is a great picture. Look at that old sea captain sitting there in his little cottage by the sea. Watch his face as that young woman, his daughter, no doubt, reads to him from his old log-books the records of his attempt to find the northwest passage. He failed, but his clenched hands and the expression upon his face tell of the longing in his heart to try again. But he is too old. He has only memory now, and the words he wrote years before. Those log-books are sacred things, for they tell of high ambition, courage, and failure."

Mr. Acres ceased abruptly and gazed hard at the picture.

"Young man," he continued, "life, too, has its log-books, and they are sacred things. And how much more so are love letters written when the heart was afire, or when great disappointment blotted out all hope. You are a grandson of one of the finest men who ever sailed the seas. John Rutledge was my best friend. I never knew him to do anything that would injure another, and I cannot believe that anyone who bears his name would be guilty ..."

He paused, for his voice was becoming unsteady, and his body was trembling. Robert Rutledge was deeply moved. He understood the meaning of those words. A sense of sincere sympathy came into his heart for this lonely man. Impulsively he thrust his hand into an inside pocket of his coat, brought forth the letters he had concealed there, and offered them to Mr. Acres.

"Take these, sir. I can keep them no longer. Do what you like with them. May I never do anything unworthy of the name I bear. I have learned a valuable lesson to-night."

Eagerly Mr. Acres reached out his hand. His face brightened, and his eyes glowed with a new light.

"Thank you, young man. I know what a sacrifice you have made. But you will never regret it. You have not found anything more about Bullet House, I suppose?"

"Nothing of any importance for a story, and I do not intend to seek any further. There is too much involved. Good evening, sir."



# CHAPTER XXXI

## THE STORM

Seated upon a rustic chair in front of the house, Nathan was looking down towards the shore at the happy group of children romping there. It was evening and his day's work was done. But he was not happy. He had been much alone during the week, as Billy had been in great demand at the camp. This did not please Nathan, and he wondered why he had not been asked to help. And, besides, he had no one to argue with, not even at the table, for Billy had taken all his meals with the children. As he now listened to the joyous shouts and laughter his heart was heavy. What was the world coming to, anyway? he asked himself. And Si Acres must be crazy to bring such a bunch of youngsters from the city streets to romp over his place, and to eat up his vegetables.

As he thus mused, Billy suddenly appeared around the corner of the house. He was panting hard, and seemed in a hurry.

"Oh, here ye are!" he cried, as he caught sight of Nathan. "I've been lookin' fer ye all over the place."

"Well, what de ye want?"

"That big rope we use fer bindin' hay. I can't find it anywhere."

"What do ye want it for?"

"To make another swing."

"H'm! So ye want to wear out a good rope, eh?"

"Sure. We couldn't put it to better use. Anyway, it's none of my business, so ye needn't growl about it. Si told me to get it. Do ye know where it is?"

"I do. It's in the cow stable, coiled up under that pile of potato boxes. I put it there meself. But, my! my! never did I imagine it would be used for such nonsense as is going on down by the shore."

"Nonsense! What do ye mean? Isn't this the finest work that's ever been done in this parish? An' I'm proud of Si. It's wonderful what he's been doin' all the week, even playin' with the girls an' takin' 'em out fer sails upon the river. It's makin' a new man of him."

"Yer wrong, Billy," Nathan replied, shaking his head in a mournful manner. "He'll never be a new man until he has a change of heart, and only the grace of God will give him that. And the same with you, Billy. I'm surprised that you are teaching those little girls to dance. You surely know what the Bible says about people who offend the little ones."

"What does it say?"

"That it is better for a man if a millstone is hanged about his neck, and he is drowned in the depth of the sea. I should think that such words would strike terror into your soul."

"An' do ye think I'm offendin' them little girls by playin' a lively tune while they hop around upon the grass?"

"But think what it might lead to, Billy. It might teach them to dance."

"Well, s'pose it does, what harm is there in that? Mrs. Nairn an' Miss Rowland must think it's all right, fer they join in an' think it great fun."

"They do! Mrs. Nairn dancin', an' her the parson's wife!"

"Sure. An' the parson himself can step as lively as any of 'em. An' so can Mrs. Rockbridge. Why she an' him did a regl'ar breakdown last night right on the grass. I tell ye it was great."

Billy pulled his knife and plug of tobacco from his pocket and began to whittle off several slices. He watched Nathan out of the corner of his eye, much amused at the shocked expression upon his face. He chuckled as he struck a match and touched it to his pipe.

"It's nothing to laugh at, remember," Nathan chided. "Sin is a very serious thing, and when a clergyman takes part in dancing it makes me tremble."

"Keep on tremblin', then, me boy. It's a wonder to me that yer body hasn't fallen to pieces, fer ye've been tremblin' ever since I knew ye."

"It's grace that has kept me strong, Billy. But you're too ungodly to understand spiritual things. And you a church member, too! But what can one expect when your own parson and his wife are the same."

This aroused Billy. He did not mind what Nathan said about him, but when he criticized his special friends it was altogether different. He took his pipe from his mouth and stepped forward.

"You say another word against Mr. an' Mrs. Nairn, if ye dare. I'm just ichin' to twist that sanctimonious mug of yours. An' I'll do it if I hear another peep out of ye."

Nathan drew back in fright, for he had never seen Billy so aroused.

"Keep cool, keep cool. It's no use getting so excited. I was only speaking for your good. If you and the Nairns go to the devil, it won't be because I haven't warned you. Teaching little girls to dance! I suppose ye'll be showing them how to play cards, too."

"Oh, we haven't had time for that yet, Nathan. We've been too busy with other things. This afternoon we had a picnic up the brook, an' what a great time we had. We all went, an' Si was the life of the party. Ye should have been along, me boy. It would have done ye a world of good."

"I was never asked," Nathan growled. "I wonder why."

"Oh, that's easy to explain. Si didn't want you around with yer groans an' gloomy mug. He wanted the children to have a good time, but one sight of you would have spoiled the whole show. Them Welfare people are fine an' know how to handle children. An' really they are a great bunch of youngsters, ready fer anything, an' they certainly are enjoyin' themselves. I'd like to have some of them little girls as me own. It must be wonderful, Nathan, to have a family around ye. We've missed a lot in life. I heard Si talkin' to Miss Rowland an' he said the same thing."

"I'm very glad you haven't any children, Billy. They'd be sure to follow your example, and grow up bad weeds."

"An' it's mighty lucky you haven't any, either, me boy, fer you'd have made them so sick of religion that they'd have gone to the devil in no time. But, there, I must get that rope. I've stayed here too long. Ye better come an' show me where it is."

Nathan rose slowly to his feet and followed Billy to the barn. When he had dragged the rope from under the pile of boxes, he threw it down upon the floor.

"There it is," he growled. "But be careful of it, for it's quite new."

"Oh, don't ye worry," Billy grinned, as he shouldered the rope and started off. "But, say, why not come along with me an' see the fun? It'd do ye a world of good. Think what a change has come over Mrs. Rockbridge. She's a new woman. The same might happen to you."

"She needed it, Billy. But with me it's different. I'm saved, so I don't need any change."

"Is that so? Well, ye don't look it. But that's yer own business, so if yer satisfied, I am."

Mr. Acres was greatly pleased at the success of his undertaking. But the excitement and the special exertions he was making tired him. He missed the quietness of his house, and his after-dinner nap. And so on the fourth evening he was exceptionally weary. He knew that he should not have gone up the brook that afternoon. It had been too much for him. But the children had dragged him along, and he did not wish to disappoint them. When he returned he was very weak, and glad to sit under the shade of a tree to rest. From there he could watch all that was going on, the preparations for supper, the children on the swings, and tumbling about on the grass. He longed to be young again, to be full of abounding strength. He also watched the earnest helpers, especially Joan and Robert, and a feeling of satisfaction came into his heart as he noticed how much they were together, and seemed so happy. The Nairns, too, had done what they could to help, and Betty and John had been over several times.

But what puzzled Mr. Acres was the remarkable change that had come over Mrs. Rockbridge. She was an altogether different woman from what she was a week or so before. Her former haughty and overbearing manner had vanished, and now she was a capable and an agreeable helper. She played with the little ones, and thought of new games to amuse them. And she was so pleasant to Mrs. Nairn, and he had seen the two working harmoniously together on several occasions.

The interest and curiosity of the people of Glengrow amused and gratified Mr. Acres. Most of them came to see the strange things that were going on, and he knew that they would have a choice topic of conversation for a long time. They would decide that Odd Acres had gone absolutely crazy in bringing a lot of riff-raff children from the city and entertaining them on his place. Oh, he knew what they would say, but that did not worry him in the least. He was happy in his efforts to help the children, so that was all he desired. And there would be others to come when these went away. Boys might not be as easy to manage as girls, but he had perfect confidence in his workers.

As he sat there, he noticed that a change was taking place in the atmosphere. The wind had veered, and was winging in from the south. For several days the weather had been ideal for camping, but now a storm was threatening. If the wind should develop into a gale, it would be very uncomfortable for the campers. He believed that the tents would stand, as they were pitched in a place sheltered by big trees and a high sand bank. But if the gale became too severe there might be trouble. At this season of the year, however, he did not expect anything of a very serious nature.

After supper Mr. Acres took the girls for a sail in his boat. Out upon the river his weariness left him, and he was young again in spirit. Robert and Joan had come along, too. A sail such as this thrilled the children, and they shouted and laughed in high glee, especially when a light spray of water swept upon them. Mr. Acres' face expressed his pleasure as he guided the *Ocean Queen* on her way. It brought back memories of other days, and of a great ship, another *Ocean Queen*, storming through turbulent seas. This was mere child's play, and yet it brought him considerable satisfaction. He lingered longer than usual upon the water this evening, for a strange feeling was upon him. It was a sense of parting forever with his old familiar friend. He could not tell what it meant, but when he at length rounded up the boat to its mooring place, he gave a slight sigh. Even when the children had gone ashore, he remained for a while, a lonely figure, lost to the world around him. When at last he landed, and made the tender fast to a stake, his tired feeling returned. He would go to the house, so he decided, go at once to bed, and get a good night's sleep.

During the night Mr. Acres woke with a start. The wind was driving the rain in fierce gusts against the window. Instantly he thought of the children. He must go and see how they were making out. Lighting his lamp, he found that it was a little past midnight. Dressing as quickly as possible, he went downstairs and lighted the lantern. Then out into the night he hurried, bending his head to the storm which beat upon him. He saw lights down by the shore, and knew that the campers were in trouble. Neither was he mistaken, for when he reached the place he found that two tents had been blown down, and the children were gathered in the kitchen where a fire was burning in the stove. Outside, the workers were endeavoring to rescue the blankets and clothes from under the canvas. Mr. Acres assisted them, and ere long beds were made upon the floor where the children were quite comfortable.

Joan noticed Mr. Acres' dripping clothes and woe-begone appearance, and felt anxious. Once she saw him shiver.

"You should not stay here," she told him. "You are wet and cold. We can get along very well now."

"But the other tents may blow down, Miss, and you might need me."

"Oh, we can manage, all right. This place will hold all the girls, if necessary. Please go at once, for you are shivering."

"I think I will, for I do feel cold. This is one of the worst summer storms I have seen for years. Yes, I guess I'll go."

Joan watched him as he picked up his lantern and disappeared into the night. He looked so grey and feeble that she felt uneasy. And he had come out into the storm for the sake of the children! And he was the man who had held such bitter feelings in his heart for long years! How could she ever forgive herself for her own evil thoughts about him? What could she do to atone for her mistake?

Such were some of Joan's musings as she busied herself making the girls as comfortable as possible, and soothing their fears when an extra fierce gust shook the building.

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# CHAPTER XXXII

## THE LAST LONG VOYAGE

Seated upon the rectory verandah Mr. and Mrs. Nairn and Robert Rutledge were engaged in earnest conversation. Breakfast was just over, and here they gathered for a short time as was their usual custom. The storm of the night had passed, although heavy clouds were still sweeping across the sky, through which the sun occasionally glinted. The men were discussing their visit to the children's camp during the night.

"We got there just after Mr. Acres had left," Mr. Nairn explained to his wife. "The girls were all right and quite comfortable, especially the ones in the cookhouse. They were greatly excited over the collapse of their tents, and some were badly frightened. We wanted to stay, but Joan wouldn't let us. She is certainly a great girl. You agree with me, don't you, Bob?"

"I do, Andy. I have always thought her wonderful from the first time I saw her at the White Lily Cafe. But I am puzzled as to why she came to this place, and why she is so much interested in Bullet House. You remember how those old letters affected her so keenly that evening I read them. Something was troubling her that night. Do you suppose she is in any way related to those Raytons?"

"Why, Bob, I never thought of such a thing," Mrs. Nairn exclaimed in surprise. "Perhaps it is only your imagination that makes you think she is."

"It may be so, Nell," and Robert gave a deep sigh. "I have let my imagination have free rein of late, and have come upon valuable information which I cannot use. I told you of my conversation with Mr. Acres, and how he confessed that he had written those old letters I gave him. I wonder if he knows anything about Joan. I have a good mind to ask him when I see him again."

"It is strange that Joan hasn't told us who she really is," Mr. Nairn remarked. "I have noticed a certain reserve about her which I have never been able to understand. She has never told us anything about her past life."

"You are quite right, Andrew," Mrs. Nairn replied. "Several times when we were talking she seemed on the point of telling something of importance she had on her mind, but always paused and became unusually silent. I never asked her, hoping that some day she would confide in me."

This conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Peter Pendle. He appeared suddenly, and in great haste, around the corner of the verandah, and it was at once apparent that he was unusually excited.

"Si Acres is very sick," he announced. "Billy has gone to phone fer the doctor. Si didn't come down fer breakfast, an' when Rachel went to his room she found him in a bad shape."

"What is the matter with him?" Mr. Nairn asked, rising to his feet and stepping forward.

"Billy wasn't certain, but thought he got cold last night when he went down to the camp. The night air always affected him, anyway. I'm goin' over now to see if there is anything I can do. Joan is there, but she may need a man to help. Billy said he left Nathan out in the barn prayin', an' he was shoutin' to the Lord at the top of his voice."

"Let me go, Peter," Robert replied. "You have work to do, while I am free. I can send for you later, if necessary."

"You are right, Bob," Mr. Nairn agreed. "I shall go over with you. We may be able to do something until the doctor arrives."

Mr. Acres had taken a bad turn towards morning. His exposure during the night had brought on a fever, and he had tossed restlessly on his bed until Rachel arrived. He was so hoarse that he could hardly speak. And this increased during the day. When the doctor arrived and examined the patient he looked grave.

"He must be kept very quiet," he told Joan when he had left the room. "I am afraid it's pneumonia, but I shall be back again this afternoon and I may be able to tell then for sure. In the meantime, give him two of these tablets every three hours."

All through the day and night Mr. Acres seemed to take little notice of what was going on around him. He was in a stupor, and had to be aroused to take the tablets. Robert remained with Joan, and through the long hours the two kept watch. When the doctor returned, his worst fears were confirmed, and he pronounced it a serious case of pneumonia.

"He should be in the hospital," he whispered, "but he could not be moved now. Perhaps we should send to the city for a nurse."

At these words, low though they were, Mr. Acres lifted his head, and glared fiercely at the doctor.

"I won't have a nurse from the city," he croaked. "I won't, I tell you. Lucy will do, and she's right there."

"Very well, then," Joan replied, as she placed her hand upon his hot forehead. "I shall stay with you, so don't worry."

Like a tired child Mr. Acres dropped his head back upon the pillow.

"I knew you'd come, Lucy. I've been waiting a long time for you."

Joan glanced at Robert. Both understood the meaning of those words, for they recalled those old letters. The patient had gone back to other days, and as they listened they caught broken sentences which they tried to piece together. At times it was about the sea. He was on board the *Ocean Queen*, driving her through a storm, and giving stern orders to his men. He then wandered off into a strange jargon in which only the word "Lucy" could be distinguished.

Thus for two days and nights Mr. Acres tossed, moaned, and raved. Joan was on guard most of the day, while Robert and Mr. Nairn kept watch through the night, the latter taking duty until midnight, and the former until morning. Rachel helped all she could, but as she had her household duties to perform, Joan called upon her as little as possible. Billy and Nathan were greatly depressed by their master's illness. The former was needed at the camp to amuse the children. It was considered advisable to continue the work for the little ones as Mr. Acres had planned. Joan longed to be down at the camp, but knew that her right place now was in the sick room. For a couple of hours one afternoon Mrs. Nairn took her place, and she was able to go down to the shore. But apart from that, she remained faithfully on duty.

Early the third morning Joan and Robert were together by the bedside. They liked this time when the watch was changed, and Robert was never in any hurry to leave. To be with the girl he loved so dearly meant more to him than anything else in the world. Her very presence inspired him, and he was never tired of watching her as she waited upon the invalid or sat silently by his side. This morning, just as Robert was about to leave the room, Mr. Acres opened his eyes and looked around. Then as he saw Joan near him, a slight smile flitted across his face.

"Ah, I had a wonderful dream," he began. "But what has happened to me?"

"You have been very ill," the girl explained. "You caught cold the night of the storm."

"So I did. Now I remember."

He lay very still for a minute or two, as if lost in thought. He then looked at the girl.

"Yes, I am sick, and there is something I wish to tell you while I have a little strength left. Go and bring me that picture of Bullet House you painted, the one with the big pine tree in the foreground. Don't be long."

These words tired him. He coughed, and it caused him much distress. Joan realised that there was no time to lose, so she at once left the room. Mr. Acres did not speak again, but remained very still. Robert watched him anxiously. He looked so frail and weak that he was afraid he might not live until Joan returned. That he had something important to say he was quite sure. Perhaps he wished to explain the mystery connected with his life. It seemed to Robert that Joan would never return. But, in fact, it was not long before she was back with the picture. At sight of her, the invalid's face brightened.

"You've got it? That's good. Now get my keys from the pocket of my trousers there. Bring them here."

When Joan had complied with this request, Mr. Acres motioned to one of the keys.

"That's it. Unlock the middle drawer of my desk and bring me some packages you will find there."

His eyes eagerly followed the girl, and when she again came to his side with the packages in her hands, he was satisfied.

"Put them on the bed, in front of me. That's right. Now, sit down and listen."

He paused, and his breathing was hard. Several times he tried to speak, but his coughing interrupted him.

"Suppose you wait," Joan suggested. "You are very tired now."

"No, no, I must not wait. I must speak. Show me that picture. Yes, it's Bullet House, all right. And there is that window through which I fired the bullet that night of the storm. I want to tell you the truth, and it is right that you should know it. I tried to kill Tom Rayton, your grandfather. May God forgive me! But he stole Lucy from me. He took the only girl I ever loved, and I tried to kill him. I was mad, I guess. But, there, enough of that. You didn't know about it, and no one did. But you hated me for turning your grandmother and mother off the place. See that great pine. The place was covered with such trees, and I had them cut. People said I made a fortune, and perhaps I did. But why did I turn them out? Why? Hand me those packages, the old ones first there at the bottom. They are cancelled cheques. Look at that name on the top one. Read it."

Excited beyond measure, and trembling, Joan did as she was ordered.

"Ah, you know the name, 'Lucy Rayton', your grandmother. And she received the amount of that cheque every month while she lived. Now look at that other package, the one near the top. See the name there, 'Priscilla Rowland.' She was your mother, was she not?"

"She was." Joan merely whispered the words, for she could hardly trust herself to speak. Light was now dawning upon her mind, leaving her bewildered.

"And she received the same amount after her mother's death. Look now at those new ones on top. Ah, I see you are astonished. Yes, the money went to Joan Rowland, and it all came from those trees on that place at Bullet Lake. That was what I did with it."

With a cry Joan slipped from her chair and knelt by the bed. Impulsively she reached out and placed her arms around the dying man. Tears coursed down her cheeks.

"Forgive me, oh, please forgive me," she sobbed. "I did not know. I did not understand."

Feebly Mr. Acres raised his right hand and placed it gently upon the girl's head. There was a wonderful expression in his eyes, such as Robert, who was watching almost breathlessly, had never seen before.

"There is nothing for you to forgive," the invalid murmured. "I am the one to ask forgiveness, and not you. But you know it all now, and it is well."

"Did my mother understand?" Joan anxiously asked, lifting her eyes to his. "Did she know it was you who sent that money so regularly?"

"I believe not. Your grandmother did, though, but I made her promise that she would never tell anyone, not even your mother. Yes, I guess Lucy was true to her word. At first she was unwilling to accept the money, but when she knew I did it to atone for my sin, and the love I had for her, she—"

He ceased abruptly, and tears came into his eyes. Then another coughing spell swept upon him. When it was over, Joan urged him to say no more, as the effort to talk was telling so severely upon him. The doctor would be angry.

"No, no, I must speak. What do I care for the doctor? He can do nothing for me. I am beyond his power, or the power of any man. The law cannot touch me now."

For a few seconds he was once more the defiant man, with the challenging expression he had always presented to his neighbors. This soon passed, however, and a softer look came into his eyes.

"For long years I lived in hell," he at length confessed. "My sin made me an outcast, and I faced the world with hatred in my heart. The brand of Cain was upon me. At last I met a little child, and it was she who broke me down. My eyes were opened, and I found—I found God and peace. I fought long and hard, but it was no use. That little girl was ever before me. And I want to see her again before I go—yes, before I go—before I—"

He suddenly paused. His eyes opened very wide, and he was once more lost to the world around him. He was upon the *Ocean Queen*, giving stern orders to his crew. He tried to rise, but fell back upon his pillow, exhausted. The anxious watchers could do nothing, only await the outcome, which they felt could not be long delayed. Once he called for his old friend, John Rutledge. But it was Lucy he last mentioned. As he uttered her name, he looked up, and his face brightened into a radiant smile.

"I see you, Lucy. I'm coming."

His right hand began to grope over the quilt, as if seeking for something. At once Joan seized it in her own, and held it firm.

"Ah, I have found you, Lucy—you and God."

Down by the shore the children shouted and played, unconscious that the man who had given them such pleasure had launched forth upon his long, last voyage from which there would be no return.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII

### AND SO IT CAME TO PASS

It was the evening after the funeral, calm and warm. Billy and Nathan were in the kitchen, the former pulling steadily at his pipe. Rachel was washing the supper dishes. At the table they had discussed the funeral, the large attendance, and what the parson had said. They could not bear to be separated for any length of time. The house seemed so lonely now that their master had gone. The men, especially, were quite bewildered. No longer did they receive the usual after-supper orders to do the chores. Already they were turning to Rachel as the one who could best direct them.

"Well, Si was good to us," Billy remarked after a deep silence which was becoming painful. "He gave us a home, anyway. I was afraid when he went we'd be set adrift."

"I wasn't," Rachel emphatically declared. "I knew that master would make provision for us, and he did. We are to have the use of this place as long as we live."

"But a stranger will rule over us," Nathan growled, "and a girl, at that. What possessed Si to leave everything he owns to Miss Rowland is more'n I can understand."

"Oh, she'll be all right," Billy replied. "An', besides, she can't turn us out, even if she wants to. An' I'm sure she won't try. I heard the parson read Si's will this afternoon, an' it's as clear as day. It says we're to have the use of this place as long as we live, an' the three of us are to share alike in what we raise. An' when we get too old to work, or are sick, we are to be provided for from a trust fund which Si set apart, an' is handled by the Golden Trust Company. An' we are to be decently buried, too, when we die. Now, if that wasn't generous of Si, I don't know what ye'd call it. We'll be better off than we ever were in our lives, an' have comfort in our old age. Ye can't deny that, Nathan."

"Quite true, Billy. Si has certainly provided for us, but I wonder if he made provision for himself in the next life. He laid up treasure on earth, but it will be no use unless he had treasure laid up in heaven."

"If he doesn't get to heaven, then you'll have a mighty poor show," Billy retorted. "Si wasn't always blattin' about his religion as you are, but he was mighty good to us. An' see what he did fer them poor city children. If that isn't religion, I'd like to know what it is. I'd be willin' to stake high on Si's chances against some pious psalm-tooters I know."

"Do you mean me, Billy?"

"Yes, if the shoe fits. I'm goin' to stand up fer Si. He didn't go to church much, I admit, but he did read his Bible, fer I've often seen him with the Good Book open before him, specially on Sunday nights. Isn't that so, Rachel?"

Thus addressed, Rachel turned towards the men. She did not speak, but both noticed that there were tears in her eyes. She tried to say something, but words would not come. Instead, she sank down upon a chair and covered her face with her apron. The men were not only surprised, but alarmed. Never before had they seen this calm, self-possessed woman give way to any emotion.

"Are ye sick, Rachel?" Billy asked, going to her side and laying a hand upon her shoulder.

"I'm all right now, thank you," she replied, lifting her head and wiping away her tears. "I can't help feeling this way. No one knew master better than I did. In some ways he was like a baby, even though he seemed stern and fierce. He had a big heart which I am sure was almost broken by some great trouble when he was young. I do not know what that was, but it made me sorry for him, and he knew it. I shall miss him so much, and the house will be very lonely now."

"You're quite right, Rachel," Billy agreed. "We shall miss him, too, fer there'll be no one to boss us around. We'll be something like a chicken without a head, an' that won't be well."

"You've always been like that, anyway," Nathan declared, "so it won't make any difference to you. Now, I suggest that we elect Rachel head of this place, and that we take our orders from her. It's only for your sake, remember, Billy, that I propose this, and not for my own."

Billy glared at Nathan, and the old spirit of battle welled up within his soul. With an effort he crushed back this feeling,

and agreed that it was a good idea, although he did hate to let off his opponent without a parting thrust. Thus for once Billy and Nathan were of one mind.

That same evening Mrs. Nairn was lying in the hammock upon the rectory verandah, with her husband seated by her side. Their visitor, Mrs. Augustus Rockbridge, had just left in her car for the hotel. She had been with them for over an hour, and now that she had gone, they remained silent for a while, lost in thought. Their hearts were deeply stirred by all that had taken place during the last two weeks, especially since the death of Silas Acres. They had heard from Robert and Joan about the death-bed scene, the confession, and the passing of the strange man. And in addition to all this, had come Mrs. Rockbridge's apology. She had spoken quietly and with emotion, a striking contrast to her former haughty manner. Mr. and Mrs. Nairn were not only surprised, but much affected, as well. That so great a change should come over such a woman as Mrs. Rockbridge was remarkable. And of this they were thinking now.

"I can hardly believe it is true," Mrs. Nairn at length began. "Why, Mrs. Rockbridge's story is almost like a fairy-tale. She came here to spy upon me, and to find out my faults as Angel Gabriel's wife. In a way, it is really amusing. I suspected something from the first visit she made here when she found you in your shirt sleeves, and the house in such disorder. But I never fully understood the purpose of her coming. It is all clear to me now."

"There is something almost too deep for words about this, Nell," Mr. Nairn replied. "There has been Another at work, and He has overruled everything for good. I cannot help recalling those wonderful words of the Magnificat. 'He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek.' They might not apply in every way to this case, but the main idea is the same. That woman came here, hard, haughty, and determined to injure us. Then from a most unexpected source she received a blow to her pride and self-confidence which brought her low in humility and shame."

"Yes, it is wonderful, Andrew," Mrs. Nairn agreed. "And there is another thing we must not forget. For quite a while something had been stirring in Mrs. Rockbridge's soul, so she told us. It was the spirit of unrest, and dissatisfaction with her life. And that picture she saw in the sitting room was another factor in her transformation."

"And you, too, Nell," Mr. Nairn reminded. "It was your sweet self that had a great influence upon her."

Mrs. Nairn reached out and placed a hand upon her husband's. There were tears in her eyes, but they were tears of happiness.

"My part was very small, I fear, although I am thankful for whatever effect I had upon her. God can use our little for the working out of His plans.

"And He always does so, Nell. Just think how much Betty meant to Mr. Acres. Her unconscious influence softened and changed his heart. When I recall his visit to us that morning he demanded his money back, and then think of the same man doing so much for those poor city children, it seems almost like a miracle, so great has been the transformation. And he was only at the beginning of his good work when he was taken away. That is something I cannot understand."

This conversation was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Peter Pendle.

"Ah, enjoyin' the evenin', eh?" he asked as he stepped upon the verandah.

"It is fine enough to enjoy," Mr. Nairn replied, offering him a seat by his side. "Sit down and enjoy it with us."

"No, I can't set down, thank ye, all the same. I must hurry home. But as I was comin' by the store, I was asked to give ye this," and he handed forth a small folded paper. "It's a 'phone message from the city, I guess."

Mr. Nairn took the paper, and by the dim twilight read the contents.

"Nell! Nell!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet in excitement. "I've been elected Rector of St. Alban's! And it's unanimous!"

"What's that?" Peter demanded before Mrs. Nairn could reply. "Elected Rector of St. Alban's? So we'll lose ye! My, my! I'm sorry."

"And so am I," Mrs. Nairn replied. "I shall be sorry to leave Glengrow, but—" She paused and gazed out somewhat sadly into the deepening darkness. "But the people here have never forgiven me for what I said about them. Although they were kind and thoughtful when Betty was injured, yet I know I shall never regain their confidence. They look upon me with suspicion, so, perhaps, it is as well for us to go away."

"I know, I know," Peter replied. "An' even now folks are talkin' about the parson's sermon this afternoon. They say he should have held Si Acres up as a bad man, instead of sayin' that we must leave him to God to judge. They wanted to have Si painted accordin' to their own views. But I gave 'em something to think about, an' told 'em plainly that the parson was right. That settled their quackin', though, no doubt, they began again jist as soon as I left."

"Thank you, Peter," and Mr. Nairn held out his hand as he spoke. "You have always been a good friend to us, and defended us against bitter slander. It is good that we have such friends as you and your wife. I must go now and send a message of my acceptance of the Rectorship of St. Alban's."

Robert Rutledge and Joan Rowland were seated at tea in the White Lily Cafe. They had just come to the city from Glengrow, and had several things to attend to before returning. They were facing each other at a small table near the window overlooking the large square. Only a few people were in the room, and no one was close to their table, so it was easy for them to talk in subdued voices without being overheard.

"It was here that I first saw you," Robert remarked, looking longingly at the fair face before him. "That is why I chose this table. What a discovery that was for me!"

"And how you stared at me," Joan smilingly replied.

"I know I did, and how could I help it? But I had no idea that you took any notice of me. You kept gazing out of the window until the waitress brought your dinner."

"Oh, I saw you, all right, and I considered you a very rude, bold man."

"And I frightened you, I suppose? But you frightened me at first, for I thought some other man had a claim upon you."

"At first? you say. What caused you to change your mind?"

"I saw no engagement ring upon your finger."

"Wasn't that poor evidence? There is no ring now, and yet—"

"I know, Joan, what you mean," Robert hastily interrupted. "But you shall have a ring just as soon as we can get to a jeweller's store. You see, I haven't been to the city since that evening you made me the happiest man on earth. Just think what a change has taken place in a few weeks. When I first saw you here I had very little to live for, and my doctor ordered me away for my health. Now I have so much to live for, and I am well and strong. Then I had little hope of literary success, while now—"

He ceased, and drew a letter from his pocket. His eyes were alight with enthusiasm, and Joan felt that the letter contained something of unusual importance.

"I received this to-day," Robert continued, "and have kept it as a surprise until now. In this place I saw you first, and that was the beginning of my happiness. It, therefore, seems fitting that I should tell you of my success in this room of such pleasant memory. This is a letter from the editor of the *Proclara Magazine*, accepting my story I sent to him several weeks ago, before I went to Glengrow. And here is a cheque for five hundred dollars. And he wants other stories from me about the sea. I tell you, it means much to get into the *Proclara*, as my stories there will bring other magazines after me. I can hardly believe it is true."

Joan's eyes were glowing with pleasure, and her face beaming with animation.

"You are splendid, Robert! I always knew it from the first time I saw you. And just think, you can do your writing, and I can continue my painting. What a happy time we shall have. And isn't it wonderful that Mr. Acres left everything to me. I wonder how much he was worth."

"We shall attend to that in a few days, Joan. But after we get the ring, suppose we go over to Doctor Bradbury's. I want to show him how strong and well I am, and to thank him for sending me to the woods. Won't he be surprised and delighted when he sees what a prize I have captured."

"Don't be too sure," Joan happily replied. "Doctor Bradbury may think differently."

"I have no fear of that. But let us go now. I am very eager to get back to Glengrow to tell the good news to Nell and Andy. I should see the editor of the *Daily Echo* while I am in town, but he will have to wait. I had a letter from him yesterday. He wants me to write several articles for his paper about sea captains and old ship-building days, and he is willing now to pay me a reasonable price for them."

"What about the story of Bullet House?" Joan queried. "That should be thrilling enough for Mr. Rockbridge."

"He begged me not to write it."

"So he knows the story, does he?"

"He has known part of it for years, although he never had the courage to tell his wife. It took a heroine to do that."

Joan's face grew suddenly grave, and she gave a deep sigh.

"I didn't feel much like a heroine. It was a terrible ordeal."

"It served its purpose, though. But let us forget all about that. I want to think only of pleasant things, such as Bullet Lake, and the glorious picnic we shall have there to celebrate our happiness."

[The end of *The Girl at Bullet Lake* by H. A. Cody]