

Lure of the Ranges

N. de Bertrand Lugrin

Illustrated by

Roy Fisher

fadedpage.com

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: The Lure of the Ranges

Date of first publication: 1926

Author: N. de Bertrand Lugrin (1876-1962)

Illustrator: Roy Fisher (1890-1953)

Date first posted: December 15, 2023

Date last updated: December 15, 2023

Faded Page eBook #20231227

This eBook was produced by: John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

THE LURE OF THE RANGES

By N. DE BERTRAND LUGRIN

ILLUSTRATED BY ROY FISHER

The theory that the way to reach a man's heart is through his stomach is given delightful support in this little romance of Mrs. Edgerton and her boarders.

Mrs. Edgerton stood looking in at the window in which something new in electric ranges was being demonstrated. It was January, and cold. Too cold for her tight little suit of navy blue serge and her black cotton stockings. Unreasonable for her shabby blue hat with a red wing, for her patched button shoes. She gripped a black leather handbag in her gloved hands, holding it in front of her, with one finger down on the clasp in case anybody should try to open it, a purely instinctive precaution. Now and then as the wind blew shrilly up the street, she shivered and drew a musty-looking fur neck-piece closer about her throat.

There was a crowd in front of the window, a laughing, garrulous crowd, freely commenting on what was taking place before their eyes.

A buxom young woman in a maid's uniform was making cakes in the window for all the world to see. When she had mixed them and put them in their tins, she placed them in the oven of the large nickel-trimmed electric range. While one thing cooked she started to work on another. There were "ohs" and "ahs" when she took the things from the oven, placed them on a table and began at once to decorate them. She decorated them with icing and meringues until they were completely camouflaged, then ostentatiously displayed them where they could best be seen and admired.

But not all the persons in the crowd admired them. There were sniffs from some of the women, grunts from some of the men.

"I'd like to see a batch o' cookies or biscuits."

"Let her show us some home-made bread or a deep apple pie."

"How about a bit of shortbread or some crullers?"

“Can she no bake naethin’ but them wee bit sweeties?”

Mrs. Edgerton’s lip curled a trifle disdainfully. The window, with its modern devices, made no appeal to her; the young woman least of all. Her dress was very short. She wore silk stockings with a ladder running up from one heel. There was rouge on her cheeks and her hair was marvellously marcelled. Now and then she glanced coquettishly at her audience.

Mrs. Edgerton went home. She set about the preparation of her own dinner for her boarders. She had only three now, and with prices so high, it was hard contriving to make appetizing dishes. But she was a fine cook. She prided herself upon it. It was her one accomplishment. And she had been cooking all of her life.

She was in the midst of making a beefsteak and kidney pie when a shrill summons came down the stairs.

“You’ve forgotten to fill my jug, Auntie.”

Mrs. Edgerton’s already flushed face turned a deeper pink. She dusted the flour off her hands, and, going to the tap, filled a pail with hot water. Her lips were primly set as she left the kitchen. A hennaed head was leaning over the banister. There was a glimpse of a plump figure swathed in a kimona. “Jes’ put it down on the stairs. Sorry to bother, old thing.”

“As if she couldn’t go to the bathroom and get her own hot water,” Mrs. Edgerton said to herself. “And her ‘Auntie’ and ‘old thing.’ I wish she’d up and leave me. Lord knows I need the money, but she’s breaking my heart, that’s what she’s doing.”

It was all she could do to keep the tears from dropping into the meat pie.

And then at dinner:—

“I wish’d you’d make some of them fancy cakes like what I saw in the window down on Sherwood Street to-day.” The hennaed lady, whose name was Mrs. Emma Flewin, looked up from a plate of delicious tomato soup to smile first at the landlady, and then at Old-timer the boarder opposite her. Old-timer merely made a noise gulping his soup by way of reply. He never heard anything he didn’t want to hear. He was a very old man. He had come to Mrs. Edgerton ten years before, when he was already old, because, he said, they told him he was dying and only good food would prolong his life. It had helped to prolong it. If Mrs. Edgerton ever found herself entertaining the slightly impious thought that it was unnecessarily prolonged, and that

she would be glad to come into the little legacy he had promised her, she immediately reproached herself and spent extra time and labor on some special dish for him.

“Mr. Leighton is late to-night,” observed Mrs. Emma Flewin. “I wonder, now, if he’s goin’ to be silly enough to take what I said serious.” She sipped her water thoughtfully and half-smilingly.

“What was that?” asked Mrs. Edgerton. And then she could have bitten her tongue to think she had shown such quick interest.

“Why, we had a sort of tiff last night,” confessed Mrs. Emma, with a pout. “I said he hadn’t ought to break his bread in his soup, and he didn’t like it, and he said he’d wait till I was finished before he had his dinner after this.”

Mrs. Edgerton got up to change the plates. The idea of that woman daring to criticize Frank Leighton like that! And the idea of his caring enough to be offended! Besides, if he was late it meant more work for her. But then he never had thought of that!



“I’m expecting to marry, myself, next month,” announced Mrs. Emma, with some bitterness, “an awful elegant fella, Mr. T. J. C. Prothero, of Calgary.”

“For five years I’ve tried to please him, and never once,” she said to herself passionately, as she dished up the vegetables in their cream sauce and wrapped a serviette around the pie-dish, “never once has he praised my cooking or expressed the least gratitude for all I do for him. He just takes it for granted. And here, one word from her ladyship sets him on his ear, and he keeps his good dinner waiting and me fretting—”

When she went back Frank Leighton was taking his seat. He was rather stout, slightly bald, with a good humored mouth, and kindly eyes. He held his shoulders very erect, and had a habit of looking down at ladies with a slow, understanding smile, which some of them, Mrs. Emma Flewin in particular, found irresistible. He tucked his napkin in his waistcoat and said he would do without soup.

“It’s rather better than usual,” said Mrs. Edgerton wistfully.

But he waved his hand. “No thanks, I had a bite to eat in town. I’m not really hungry.”

A bite to eat in town! Something that had never happened before. Her boarders always came home with splendid appetites, scorning to take the edge off them by anything less than her own good fare. What was her world coming to? The tears actually filled her eyes. But nobody noticed.

“Oh, I know why you’re late.” Mrs. Emma looked at him archly. “You’re mad at me.”

Mr. Leighton ate in silence.

“I promise never to do it again.” She laced her fingers together and beseeched him over the top of them. She was rather pretty, even if she was hennaed. Old-timer grinned, and Leighton smiled.

“I’m not worrying about what you said. I’ll get even with you.”

“How?”

“You’ll see, after dinner.”

“A little more of the pie?” suggested Mrs. Edgerton quaveringly. But he did not hear her. She knew it was about the best steak and kidney pie she ever had made. But nobody said anything. Mrs. Emma and Leighton kept up a silly chatter all through the meal. Old-timer ate in silence. And Mrs. Edgerton was left to her own thoughts.

She cried over the dishes that night. Frank Leighton and Mrs. Emma had gone out together, and she had heard a scuffle in the hall and had known he was trying to kiss her. She didn't believe Mrs. Emma was a bit younger than she was, either. And Frank Leighton was several years older. But nobody ever thought of her as young or having any of youth's longings. She dressed her full forty years, and looked five years older than that. But Mrs. Emma could easily pass as thirty. She rolled her stockings and wore bells on her garters.

There had been a time before Mrs. Emma came that she had hoped Frank Leighton was beginning to think of her as something more than the landlady. He used to look at her occasionally, and smile his slow smile when he saw the colour mounting up in her face. And once he had come out in the pantry to tell her something, and she, startled at his sudden entrance, had given a little scream. He had put his arm around her and almost kissed her. She had wished a hundred times since that she had let him. That was the very night before Mrs. Emma arrived. Two whole years ago.

She finished her dishes and because she was feeling lonely and depressed she decided to go to see a funny picture. But she was sorry afterward that she did. She happened to strike the very place where Mrs. Emma and Frank were. And they sat in front of her, ate sweets and snuggled. It was almost more than she could bear.

Going home she passed the window behind which she had seen the cooking demonstration earlier in the day. There was no buxom lady there, but her wares were still on display, shelves full of them. And a legend read: "Come in and get a free sample and let us demonstrate to you the superiority of the—Range."

It was while she paused, staring a little contemptuously at the bedecked cakes, that a thought came to her. She glanced around. Across the street, almost directly opposite, was a large shop where McL— ranges were sold, and a little farther down, a blazing sign advertised somebody's coal. Like a flash of light came her big idea.

It was well that her boarders had only their breakfast and dinner with her, because for the next fortnight she was tremendously busy away from home, from eleven until somewhere around four-thirty. She did not allow her cooking to fall off for all of that. But then she was such a genius in the culinary line that she could stir up a cake and have it in the oven while most cooks would be hunting the recipe. If her heart sank at the growing intimacy

between Frank Leighton and Mrs. Emma she tried not to show her feelings. Although it was hard. Especially one night when Mrs. Emma came into her room just as Mrs. Edgerton was undressing, and ensconced herself at the foot of the bed, wrapping herself in the eiderdown.

Said Mrs. Emma: "Don't you be surprised at anything you may hear." She had a veil tied tightly over her marcel, cold cream on her face and a strap under her chin to keep away wrinkles. "Frank is just too slow and canny for words, but I think I've got him where I want him. He's awful silly over me now and then." She hugged the eiderdown about her and laughed.

Mrs. Edgerton brushed her long hair in silence.

"Why don't you get it bobbed?" asked Mrs. Emma, "It would look beautiful, curling naturally and that. Say, dearie, you could make yourself awful cute if you half tried. With your little figure and your nice teeth."

"I'm too busy to bother," said Mrs. Edgerton scornfully.

"What I wanted to ask you about is sort of private. But I thought maybe you could put me wise. Frank said to-day he gets two hundred bucks a month. But it's not what I hoped. He looks to me like a man that's saved a lot. What do you think?"

"I don't know anything about it. I s'pose he has."

"You ain't any idea then?"

"No."

"And I couldn't get him to say so. There's a fella with better prospects than him in Calgary that I could have for the taking. He's crazy about me. But he's in the barber business. Somehow I jes' couldn't really love a barber. It's a prejudice, I suppose. I couldn't love a butcher neither. And I'd hate awful to marry a second-hand clothes dealer. Aint it queer how us wimmen are?"

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Edgerton with readiness.

"Well, anyways, I shouldn't wonder if he ast me, Frank, I mean, any day now. He's sort of staving me off, trying to kid me and make little Eager-heart of me. Well, you know, girlie, I'm not so old. But then I'm not so young, either—" Mrs. Emma gave a peal of laughter. "And I been married once. But, say, I hope it won't break your heart, dearie, if when we are married Frank and I go into a tonier part of the town—"

Mrs. Edgerton dropped her brush suddenly. For a moment her heart seemed to stop beating. It couldn't be true. It couldn't. Frank would not seriously consider marrying this silly, empty-headed woman. He wouldn't leave her. Surely he wouldn't. The very thought made her faint.

Three days after this confidence Mr. Leighton was late for dinner again. Mrs. Edgerton had brought in the rice chocolate pudding, a beautiful pudding. Old-timer's eyes glistened. His mouth watered. Here was a pudding inviting to the eye, delicious to the palate, welcome to the stomach, nourishing to the whole system. It was topped with whipped cream and candied cherries.

"Dearie," cried Mrs. Emma, "don't you dare cut that till Frank comes. Its just too beautiful. It ought to be on exhibition. You're a lalalooza cook, I'll tell the world."

"Speaking of cooks," said a hearty masculine voice in the doorway, and Mr. Leighton entered, "I've seen a peacherino to-day, down on Sherwood Street."

"Oh, applesauce!" Mrs. Emma shrieked with laughter. "That skirt who covers up her fallen cakes with colored icing?"

"Not on your sweet life." Mr. Leighton gave her round shoulder a squeeze in passing. "This is a dear, little grandmother of a woman. I've fallen head over in love with her. She's in the window opposite the electric shop, an ad for McL— ranges and for Morry's coal. The crowd was so thick I had to wait a half hour to get close enough for a good look and I was late for the office. I told the boss and he went down. As I came away just now he was phoning to try and get her address. The St. Denis Hotel want her for their summer camp."

"What's the big idea, a grandmother person?" Mrs. Emma's interest was only lukewarm.

"She bakes and broils and steams a whole dinner on a big range. Eats! I'll tell the world! Stuffed chicken and mashed potatoes and mince pie and hot rolls. Gee, I felt sorry for some of the real hungry ones standing out there in the cold. It came on to snow a bit, too."

"I'll have a look to-morrow on my way home," yawned Mrs. Emma. "She's sure got your goat, Frank. But I'll bet she couldn't beat Auntie's pudding to-night."

"It's some pudding all right." Frank Leighton smiled at Mrs. Edgerton and the unwonted praise made her small mouth tremble so that she had to

bite her lip hard.

The next day at dinner Mrs. Emma voiced her feelings in regard to the new window display.

“It’s the swellest thing you ever saw, Auntie. A dandy kitchen, all shining pots and pans, and a great big range, with the red coals showing in the draught. They’s a dining room too, jes’ swell, with a white cloth and blue willow dishes and all. You’d ought to see it. I’m jes’ like you, Frank, I’ve fell in love with that little woman. She’s about as big as you, Auntie. White hair under a white cap with violet ribbons. An apron with a bib and wide strings, you know, old-fashioned. And buckled shoes on the teensiest feet. Her specs is so big you can’t hardly see her face, but what you do see is awful cute, little prim mouth and red cheeks—”

“She’s shy, too,” broke in Frank, passing his plate for more pudding. “I don’t know but I like that best about her. Keeps her face turned away like a bashful kid. I’d like to hug her.” As he was looking directly at Mrs Edgerton when he said this, that little lady blushed and made a pretext to go out and get some fresh water, though nobody wanted any.

“Solly Black, the agent for McL—’s tells me he’s selling stoves to beat the band,” Frank laughed, “and Morry’s coralling all the coal business in town. People want to get in the shop for a back view and to nosy around—”

“Ain’t folks the beatinest?” queried Mrs. Emma of nobody in particular.

“It’s the slickest bit of advertising competition I ever saw,” said Leighton. “There’s a big sign across the street, ‘What is Home without a Mother. What is Mother’s home without a—Range?’ ”

“Yes, and a gramophone with a loud speaker,” interrupted Mrs. Emma, “playing all those homey sobby things, like Swanee River, Home Sweet Home, Silver Threads Among the Gold—Gee, it jes’ gets your goat. You look in and there’s that little white-haired woman baking her pies so happy like, and the fire glowing, and the poinsettias on the dining room table, and a grandfather’s clock ticking away and a cat asleep on a mat.—Say, it jes’ makes you want to cry and you feel sorry for every mean thing you ever done.” Mrs. Emma looked at Frank Leighton, her eyes full of candid tears.

He reached across the table and patted her hand. “Baby” he smiled.

“Does she make dumplin’s?” Old-timer asked a rare question, licking his lips.

“And who do you suppose buys that dinner just as it stands?” asked Mr. Leighton, “Why, Colonel McLaglin, and he has it served at his swell club. I heard to-day he’s dickering to take that little woman out to his country place and pay her a tremendous salary.”

It was on Sunday night some days later that Mrs. Emma sought out Mrs. Edgerton in her room. “Auntie” was lying down.

“For cat’s sake,” screamed Mrs. Emma, “wherever did you get that swell negligee?”

“I bought it,” smiled “Auntie” smoothing the soft pale blue satin of it.

“And heck! Look at the mules and the silk stockings. Why Auntie, how come?” Mrs. Emma picked up the articles in question and examined them. “You can’t get these things for nothing, believe me. Since when have you set up bein’ Camille?” Mrs. Emma meant nothing insulting, and as Mrs. Edgerton did not know who Camille was, it was all right.

“Why, I bought them, of course. I’ve needed some things for a long time. But I was kind of shy to buy outside things till I got used to pretty things inside. I’m buying a fur coat, but I don’t know if I dare to wear it, it’s so grand.”

“You are the curiosest little thing.” Mrs. Emma kicked off her bedroom slipper and essayed to squeeze her foot into the satin mule. Unable to do so, she sighed, flung herself down in a chair, and turned her large blue eyes on Mrs. Edgerton. “And Frank nearly made me cry the other night, talking about how brave and hard-working you was. Said he wisht he could buy you a pretty dress and bonnet. My eye, a bonnet! Ain’t that jes’ like a man?” Mrs. Emma swung her foot in its loose slipper for some time in silence, not noticing Mrs. Edgerton’s sudden perturbation. She was too much engrossed with her own thoughts.

“Say, Dearie,” she observed, after a few moments. “I’m getting sick an’ tired waiting for him, Frank Leighton, I mean. I praktikly ast him last night, too.”

“You did?” Mrs. Edgerton sat up straightly. What Mrs. Emma had told her both touched her and hurt her. The “bonnet” seemed to set her quite outside the pale, too old for anything except pity.

“It beats me how these bachelor fellas can call your bluff,” pouted Mrs. Emma. “I’ve about made up my mind to marry that barber after all. One thing he could keep my hair awful swell, and it does cost a nawful lot now.

Say, Dearie, you look elegant to-night. I wonder you never took a second. You must get fed up with this boarding house business.”

“I am rather.” Mrs. Edgerton drew one long, brown plait over her shoulder and began to wind the ends of it around her fingers. “But I don’t know about getting married again.”

“It’s safer,” sighed Mrs. Emma, “takin’ everything into consideration. You know, Auntie, with your clo’s off, you don’t look near as old as I took you to be.” She turned frank eyes full on Mrs. Edgerton. “You got quite a nice neck, and hardly any grey hair.”

Mrs. Edgerton blushed. “I’m forty-one.”

“Smoking Tut! I’m forty-three! I thought you was years older. Say, why don’t you leave your door open, so’s Frank Leighton could see you as he passes. I’d like to take a start out of him. He’s about the conceitedest man I know.”

“I thought you liked him?”

“So I did for a while. I thought he was awful swell. He is swell, too, for a fella that ain’t his own boss. But, oh my gosh, Auntie, he’s that slow—”

“I’ve had a very good offer to go and keep house,” broke in Mrs. Edgerton. “It’s out in the country, a lovely place. They’d pay me a hundred a month, all found, and two months’ holiday in the year with full salary.”

“My gawd!” Mrs. Emma went limp in her rocking chair. “What’s the good of a husband?”

“I’ve been making enquiries about that little woman down town in the window,” said Frank Leighton the next day, when they were once more gathered about the table. “She’s a widow, somewhere around forty—”

“Forty!” screamed Mrs. Emma, “with that white hair? Come off.”

“It’s a wig,” he explained. “Anybody could see that. I tried to find out her name. But they wouldn’t tell me. I offered five dollars—”

“My, we’re getting generous!” Mrs. Emma darted a sarcastic glance at Mrs. Edgerton.

“I shan’t let the matter of expense stand in the way of what I mean to do,” went on Mr. Leighton, grinning. He was well aware that he was in Mrs. Emma’s bad books, and was far from repentant over anything.

“I’ve watched that little woman for two weeks and I want to watch her permanently.”

“Tee-hee-hee,” snickered Old-timer startling them all. No one there had ever heard him laugh before.

“She won’t appear in the window any more,” continued Mr. Leighton. “The electric people have bought her off for five hundred dollars from appearing anywhere in town.”

“Suffering snakes,” ejaculated Mrs. Emma. “Some folks have all the luck.”

“I’d give fifty dollars to find out who she is,” Mr. Leighton’s voice was fervent. “And I’m not the only one. Solly Black has a list of names two feet long of people wanting her address, making all sorts of propositions—even proposals of marriage.”

“I can’t bear it.” Mrs. Emma tossed her head. “I didn’t think such things was made anymore.”

“All you know,” retorted Mr. Leighton.

“If you should get your window ad,” Mrs. Emma told him tartly, “you would not have any better cooking than what you get right here, and it would cost you a darn sight more, unless you married her. It might come cheaper then.”

“I might even do that, if she’d have me,” laughed Mr. Leighton.

“I’m expecting to marry myself next month,” announced Mrs. Emma with some bitterness, “an awful elegant fella, Mr. T. J. C. Prothero, of Calgary.”

“Sounds like a dago,” observed Mr. Leighton.

“All you know.” Mrs. Emma eyed him in cold contempt. “He’s Irish.”

About seven o’clock that night when Mrs. Edgerton concluded all of her family was asleep, she tiptoed up the back stairs. She had set bread to rise in the kitchen, banked up the fire, turned out the lights. She was very tired, but too excited to be sleepy. She took off her dress, donned the blue satin kimona, and let down her long hair. For a little while she twisted and turned in front of the mirror. Then she went to the cupboard and with reverent hands took a handsome fur coat out of a box, shook it, held it up,

looked at it lovingly and slowly and luxuriously slipped into it. She sat down before the mirror, smiling a little wistfully.

She had had a marvelous adventure. And they had shown her pictures of the country mansion. It would be a lovely, luxurious home for her as long as she wanted it. But she was still young, and she had worked very hard, and very long. Denied herself nearly everything mentally and physically, except bare necessities.

She sighed.

There came a knock at the door.

She said, "Come in," languidly, expecting Mrs. Emma.

But it was Frank Leighton, very red and very apologetic, wearing a velveteen smoking jacket and the embroidered slippers she had given him at Christmas.

At the sight of her, he almost staggered.

"I—I was trying on some new things," Mrs. Edgerton blushed very much redder than he did.

"I just came to say—" he began, and her own confusion giving him courage, "that they told me to-day you intended to leave for the country next week. I simply couldn't wait overnight, Milly—"

"Milly!" She didn't know he even knew her first name!

"Who told you?" She paled a little, but her heart leaped in a sudden transport of delight.

"Why Solly Black he—"

"He promised not to give me away—to anyone."

"He didn't tell me it was you, Milly. Just that the little woman, the darling little woman—was going away. You must not. I can't let you go, Milly."

He was bending over her now, daring to gather some of her soft hair in his hands. Mrs. Edgerton thrilled to the tips of her tired toes.

"How long have you known?" she asked breathlessly.

"From the very first. You see there is a little mole here, just under your chin—"

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *The Lure of the Ranges* by Ann de Bertrand Lugrin]