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LOVE STORY
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MAGAZINE

EVERY
WEEK

MAR. 17, 1923

15 CENTS

Ruby M. Ayres
Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith
L.M. Montgomery
Author of
"Anne of
Green
Gables"



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Title: Hill O' the Winds

Date of first publication: 1923

Author: L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery (1874-1942)

Date first posted: Feb. 22, 2018

Date last updated: Feb. 22, 2018

Faded Page eBook #20180232

This ebook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

LOVE STORY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

Vol. X

March 17, 1923

No. 2



Hill O' the Winds
by L. M. Montgomery
Author of "ANNE OF GREEN GABLES"
ILLUSTRATIONS BY P. J. MONAHAN

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Edward Wallace puffed up the Hill o' the Winds. Having called her Mrs. Edward Wallace once by way of conventional introduction, I shall hereafter call her Cousin Clorinda because everybody who knew her called her that, even those who were of no relation at all. And few ever left off the "cousin" in spite of the indefinable awkwardness of it; nobody could call her Mrs. Wallace, and yet there was something about her that forbade plain Clorinda to all but her husband and a few old, intimate contemporaries. She was so sweet and lovable—and dignified. You see, she had been born a Cooper.

She was a fat, sonsy lady who at sixty still retained the asking eyes of a girl and yet had something about her capacious maternal bosom that made you want to lay your head on it if you were tired or troubled. You could tell without half looking that she was a perfect cook, and that her children rose up and called her blessed.

She was addicted to wearing light-tinted dresses which she admitted calmly were far too young for her. She wore one now, a pink-flowered muslin, and a shade hat trimmed with clouds of pink tulle and daisies. She looked like a big, full-blown cabbage rose in it, and as she had all the outdoors of the sun-steeped summer afternoon around her for a background, she was not unpleasing to the æsthetic sense.

This is quite enough to say of a woman who is not the heroine of this story.

Cousin Clorinda did not come up to Hill o' the Winds very often. Elizabeth Cooper, who reigned there, was only a second cousin who kept up all the Cooper traditions and disapproved strongly of Cousin Clorinda's flower-hued dresses and daisied hats. Cousin Clorinda drove up on a duty visit once a year and was painfully polite to Elizabeth, who was painlessly polite to her.

But Cousin Clorinda, weighing one hundred and eighty, would not have walked up to Hill o' the Winds on a hot, dusty afternoon to see Cousin Elizabeth if she never saw her. She was going up now to see Romney Cooper, walking because she could not get a horse that day and to have waited another day without seeing Romney would have killed her. She had loved him as her own son in his boyhood days when he had spent his vacations nominally at Hill o' the Winds and actually down on her seashore farm. But she had not seen him for ten years and she was hungry for a sight of him. He *had* been such a darling.

He was, in the strict way in which the Coopers tabulated relationship, her "first cousin once removed." Elizabeth was his aunt. Elizabeth didn't deserve

such luck, thought Clorinda. Romney had gone into journalism in a distant city when he was through college and had ceased to come to Hill o' the Winds for his vacations. But he had had pneumonia in the winter, followed by some complications, and had been ordered to rest wholly for the summer. So much Cousin Clorinda knew because Elizabeth had so told Doctor John Cooper, who told Clorinda. But there were a million other things she wanted to know if she had breath enough left to ask them after she had reached the top of that terrible hill.

She stopped at the gate when she did get up and leaned against it thankfully. Really Hill o' the Winds was a lovely spot. It was the old Cooper homestead so Clorinda had a prescriptive right to be proud of it, although she herself had never lived there. The old house was a fine, stately, white building hooded in trees that had taken three generations to come to that wide-spreading, leafy luxuriance; there was an old, formal garden, with clipped cedars, thick, high hedges and broad paths beautifully kept; and the view of the big, green, sunshiny valley all around it below, with gauzy hills on one side and the long, silvery sand shore of the hazy blue sea on the other, was something strangers always raved over. The Coopers themselves never said much about it; they were too proud of it to talk of it.

"It's an awful place to get to," sighed Clorinda, "but when you do get here you've something for your pains. I wonder who Elizabeth will leave all this to when she dies. I know it won't be me or any of mine, so I can wonder about it with a clear conscience. John Cooper is rich enough already and has no sons. But she hates almost everybody else. She ought to leave it to Romney, but she disapproves of him. She likes him well enough but she disapproves of him. So *he* has no chance. Now I must go in and talk to her a few minutes first, I suppose. Good Lord, send me something to say!"

Few of Cousin Clorinda's associates would have supposed she could ever be in want of something to say. But she always found it very hard to talk to Elizabeth, that high-bred, stately, old-maiden Lady of the Hill, who could, so Doctor John was wont to aver, be silent in all the languages of the world. At least Cousin Elizabeth never talked the language of gossip, and gossip was Cousin Clorinda's mother tongue.

Perhaps the good Lord whom Cousin Clorinda invoked thought it would be easier to prevent an interview with Cousin Elizabeth at all than to furnish conversation for it. Elizabeth met Clorinda at the door of the dim, cool old hall and said distantly:

"I suppose you have come to see Romney. Go right upstairs to the tower room. I've given him that for a sitting room for the summer."

Cousin Clorinda swam up the stairs. Cousin Elizabeth looked up at her from the hall.

"An old ewe dressed like a lamb," she thought contemptuously.

She herself wore dark purple velvet with a real lace collar. It was old fashioned but very handsome. She returned to her embroidery with the comfortable feeling born of a justified contempt for somebody we have never—really—liked.

But then Cousin Clorinda didn't care.

"What luck!" she thought as she made her way to the tower room.

"Cous-in-Clor-in-da!" said Romney, between hugs.



He sent a tender, persuasive "Co-oo-ee" down into the Edgelow garden. The girl looked up. Then she coolly turned her back and walked into the house.

"So you really know me?" said Cousin Clorinda complacently.

"Know you! You haven't changed a particle! Know you! Could I ever forget you?"

"I'm much fatter," said Cousin Clorinda with a sigh.

Then she held him off and looked at him. Yes, he was just as handsome as ever; his dark, reddish hair was just as thick and wavy, his gray eyes just as kind and luminous and twinkly, his figure just as fine and well bred. Cousin Clorinda was strong on breeding. But he was far, far too thin.

"Kiss me again," she said. "And then we'll sit down and talk. I've come up to pump you. I'm going to ask you about everything. You've got to tell me about everything."

"Of course," said Romney. He found her hatpins for her, pulled them out and took her hat off. He looked admiringly at her thick, brown-gold hair lying in sleek waves in which was not a thread of silver.

"You darling thing, you're as young as ever," he said. "I was a little afraid you might have grown old. I was coming down to see you to-night—did you know it?—you and your jam closet. *Have* you a jam closet still?"

"I couldn't wait for to-night; I want what I want when I want it. And of course I have a jam closet. While I live and move and have my being I'll have a jam closet."

"And a dairy full of cream? Do you remember how I used to steal cream out of your dairy?"

"The dairy is there all right. But we separate the cream now."

"Oh, cousin, I'm sorry! No more delightful big, brown panfuls to skim! But you'll give me plenty to drink, won't you. I *must* have plenty of cream, Cousin Clorinda; the doctors insist that I must have oceans of cream. And raspberry vinegar—they didn't tell me I must have raspberry vinegar because they didn't know anything about it. They would have, if they had known. Mind the time I stole a bottle of it to christen a boat? And you smacked my ear for it? I've been lopsided ever since."

"You haven't changed much," said Cousin Clorinda in a satisfied tone.

"Of course not. Sit here, dear thing, right by the window. I've been sitting here for an hour, musing on the Edgelow garden. When all's said and done it's finer than the Cooper garden."

Cousin Clorinda gave a scornful glance at the Edgelow garden as she filled the big chair with her pink billows, arranged them to her liking and leaned back as ineffably contented as a cat with its tail folded about its paws. She had not climbed Hill o' the Winds to discuss the comparative merits of Cooper and Edgelow gardens.

"How do you feel, Romney?" she asked anxiously.

"Lazy and contented. I've always been lazy but never before have I felt contented. As for the rest, I'm as poor and orphaned as I ever was. Lordy, but it's good to see you again! I'm going to stretch out on this sofa and feast my eyes on you. I love you in that pink. Why do ladies of sixty—excuse me, of course I'm not implying that *you* are sixty, ageless being!—generally go about so soberly and dourly clad? Sixty is the very time they should bloom out into gorgeousness, like autumnal trees."

"I always liked bright colors," said Cousin Clorinda complacently. "I shall wear 'em till I die. They can bury me in black if they like, but as long as breath is in me, I'll have pink ribbons in my nightdress. Dear Elizabeth is likely throwing a fit down in the parlor now because of this pink dress. How have you been getting along in journalism, Romney?"

Cousin Clorinda spoke rather doubtfully. No other Cooper had ever “gone in” for journalism. It seemed a foolish, inconsequential occupation for a Cooper. The Coopers had been solid folk.

“I haven’t made any money. I’m poor as a rat,” admitted Romney. “But I’ve had a darned interesting time. Have *you* had *that*, Cousin Clorinda?”

“No,” said Clorinda, one of whose charms was honesty.

“Nor any of the other Coopers hereabouts?”

“I suppose not,” reflected Clorinda. “No, I think they’ve all been as dull as I. But if you can’t make any money at your profession, Romney, how are you ever going to keep a wife and family?”

“But Cousin Clorinda, darling, I haven’t a wife and family to keep.”

“Don’t you ever expect to have?” Cousin Clorinda was slightly severe. The Coopers had always thought it a highly respectable thing to be married. “You are thirty, Romney. It is time you were married.”

“Oh, cousin, did you come all the way up here to lecture me on getting married—to twit me with my single cussedness?”

“No, I didn’t——”

“And at sixty—you have annoyed *me*, cousin, by casting my years up to me, so I won’t pretend you aren’t sixty—you shouldn’t be interested in marrying and giving in marriage!”

“I thank my stars that I didn’t lose interest in youthful things when I lost my youth,” retorted Clorinda. “I’ve lots of sentiment in me still and I’m not afraid to show it.”

“That’s what makes you so adorable.” Romney stretched out his hand, possessed himself of hers and kissed it. “If there were a young Cousin Clorinda about I’d snap her up. But as there isn’t I’m afraid I’m doomed to die a bachelor. They tell me it’s an easy death.”

“Why won’t you be serious?” reproached Clorinda. “When you were in your teens you used to tell me all about your love affairs. Do you remember your desperate flirtations with those Merrowby girls down harbor?”

“Of course I do. Say, those girls were delicious! What became of them? But I’ve no love affairs now, darling, or I’d certainly tell you all about them. I am not, never have been and never will be actually in love.”

“Why?” said Cousin Clorinda.

“Because I have an ideal.”

“Shucks, we all have. *I* had an ideal forty years ago. He was tall, like you, and gray-eyed like you—curly-haired, musical. And I married Ned Wallace, who was short and had hair so straight it wouldn’t even brush and who couldn’t tell ‘God Save the King’ from ‘Money Musk.’ As for his eyes—I’ve lived with him thirty-five years and I don’t know even now what color they are exactly. I *think* they’re green. But I’ve been happy with him.”

"I can't fall in love with anybody but my ideal," said Romney obstinately.

"What is she like?"

"Her name is Sylvia."

"Sylvia. You *have* met her then?"

"I have not. But her name is Sylvia. She is tall and has very black hair, which she always wears brushed straight back from her forehead as only a really pretty woman can dare to brush it. Of course she is fortunate enough to have a widow's peak. Then she wears it in a heavy, glossy braid around her head. She has intensely blue eyes, with very black lashes and straight black brows. She has a pale creamy face with a skin like a white narcissus petal, but a red, red, mouth—and lovely hands, Cousin Clorinda. A beautiful hand is one of the chief charms of a beautiful woman. Sylvia's hands are—oh, I wish you could see Sylvia's hands! I wish *I* could see them! But I never shall. It's a depressing thought, cousin. But haven't you a nice girl or two round to amuse me? You always used to have, shoals of them."

"That was when my girls were home. They don't come any more. Girls are scarce, it seems to me. Soon as they grow up now they're off and away. I've the school-teacher boarding with me. She might do—she's cute and pretty. And it would be quite safe for both of you," concluded Cousin Clorinda solemnly, "because you would never really fall in love with *her* and she has a young man of her own."

"Maybe the young man would object."

"Oh, he's away out West. She writes to him every day. You'll find her good company."

Romney hid a smile behind his hand. Cousin Clorinda was so deeply in earnest in regard to providing amusement for his summer, the darling, thoughtful old thing!



"You darling thing, you're as young as ever," cried Romney. "I was afraid you might have grown old."

"I've been chumming with Samuel Rice since I came," he said. "Our acquaintance is only twenty-four hours old but we are sworn friends. Know him?"

"No. He's Elizabeth's man's son, isn't he?"

"Nephew—orphan nephew. Aged ten. The most amazing compound of mischief and precocity I've ever come across. Aunt Elizabeth detests him and frowns on our league of offense and defense. But you'd love him. He's taken on all our traditions because his uncle works for us, even the old family feud. He parades the Whispering Lane, whistling impudently, and last night I caught him firing stones over the hedge into the Edgelow garden. He was quite indignant because I stopped him."

"Why did you stop him?"

"Why—did I—why? Cousin Clorinda, do you think I should have let him

go on firing stones over there?"

"Of course. It would serve old Jim Edgelow perfectly right, and give him the exercise he needs throwing them back again, the lazy old sinner!"

"You don't mean to say that *you* keep up the old feud still? Of course Aunt Elizabeth does, but *you*—a moldy old scrap like that. Do you even know who and what began it?"

"I do not, and it's no difference. A feud's a respectable thing and should be kept up like all the other family customs."

Romney examined Cousin Clorinda's face and eyes to see if she was being sarcastic or facetious. He concluded that she was neither, but wholly in earnest, and the wonder of the thing almost staggered him.

"It's the only honest-to-goodness passion in our existence," continued Clorinda. "It lends spice to everything. I'd get tired to death of going to church if it wasn't for the fun of sweeping past Mary Edgelow from Clifton, and staring her brazenly in the face without a hint of recognition every Sunday. But I admit that the feud isn't what it was once. There are fewer Coopers, and no Edgelows at all except Mary and old Jim. When they die the feud will die with them. But he's only sixty and most of the Edgelow men lived well into the eighties."

"The men, but not the women."

"Well, the men killed them, of course—in different ways, all quite legal. I never knew a happy Edgelow woman. Look at that old cream-brick house there—nice, chubby old place all grown over with vines. Yet it's been full of tragedies. Old Jim tortured his wife to death for thirty years, by denying her everything she wanted and showering on her everything she didn't want. She was smothered and starved. Of course in the first place he really courted her to cut out Ronald Cooper. Then, when he got her, he lost his enthusiasm. Now they say he's lonely. I'm glad of it, though I'm afraid it's too good to be true."

"He doesn't look any more amiable than of yore," said Romney. "I saw him glowering at me from his front doorway last night precisely as he glowered at me twenty years ago. Wouldn't you think anybody'd get tired of glowering in twenty years? I smiled at him and shouted 'Good evening.' He went in and banged the door."

"You shouldn't have demeaned yourself." Cousin Clorinda was as severe as she could be with Romney.

"Cousin Clorinda, where is the sense of keeping it up?" he pleaded.

"There isn't any. But hate's a good lasting passion. You get over love but never over hate. And as for the sense of it—there's no sense in heaps of things we do. There's no sense in your forswearing marriage and the comforts of home because you've got an impossible ideal. Still—you do it."

"Still—I do it," echoed Romney in a melancholy tone. "You're right,

perfectly right, divine one. Man cannot live by bread alone; he must have either feuds or ideals. My ideal means everything to me, everything, even though I shall never find her.”

“Oh, maybe you will yet,” said Cousin Clorinda with cheerful optimism. Cousin Clorinda couldn’t believe that tall, wax-skinned girls with black hair and blue eyes were as scarce as Romney seemed to think.

“Never,” said Romney in a tone of profound conviction. “She is chatelaine only of my castle in Spain. I shall never find her in the flesh.”

He sighed and went to the window, looking down into the Edgelow garden. He stood there for a few seconds. Then he said calmly:

“There she is now, down in the Edgelow garden.”

Cousin Clorinda gasped, got up and went over to the window. There was a girl in the Edgelow garden, walking about bare-headed, pulling a flower here and there. She was a slender thing with heavy, glossy black hair. She was too far away for her eyes to be read, but her skin was as creamy as a lily and her mouth was crimson. She wore a dress of pale green and one great pink rose was stuck in the braid of her hair over her ear.

“You’ve been making fun of me,” said Clorinda severely. “You knew all about that girl. You’ve been describing her to me. You——”

“Cousin Clorinda,” interrupted Romney solemnly, never taking his eyes from the girl, “your suspicion is natural but unjust. I give you my word of honor that I never saw her before, save in my dreams. I didn’t even know there was a girl over there. Who is she?”

“It must be Dorcas Edgelow,” said Clorinda, compelled to believe him.

“Dorcas. Nonsense! Her name is Sylvia, *must* be Sylvia.”

“I never heard of a Sylvia Edgelow. But I did hear last spring that old Jim was expecting his niece Dorcas for a visit this summer. She’s Martin Edgelow’s daughter from Montreal, you know.”

“Well, whoever she is, she’s mine. It’s a staggering thing, Cousin Clorinda, to look out of a casual window thus, and see the very girl you’ve been dreaming about all your life.”

“But Romney, you can’t marry *her*! She’s an Edgelow!”

“I don’t care. I told you I had cast off the Edgelow feud with the shackles of the past. That girl there is mine——”

“She’s old Jim Edgelow’s heiress, too. He’s worth nobody knows how much. She’ll be very rich; she won’t—won’t——”

“She will. I don’t care whose heiress she is nor how rich—at least I don’t *now*. At three o’clock to-night I’ll probably care horribly. But now I’m drunk, Cousin Clorinda, I’m drunk just with looking at her! I’ve seen all my fancies, ideals, hopes, dreams in a human shape. She looks like love incarnate. I *know* her eyes are blue and her name is Sylvia.”

“Dorcas—Dorcas.”

“Sylvia! Look at her hands. Did you ever see anything so perfect?”

“The Edgelow hands,” admitted Cousin Clorinda. “They were always noted for fine hands. Oh, she’s a lovely thing, Romney, and it’s not likely you’re the first man that’s noticed it. She’s likely engaged already.”

“Not a bit of it. She was predestined for me. Look, she’s smiling to herself, cousin! I do like to see a woman smiling to herself. Her thoughts must be so pleasant and innocent. I wish she’d look up? Can’t I rap on the glass?”

“She’d think you were crazy, Romney. This was just how you carried on over the second Merrowby girl when you were eighteen.”

“Slanderer! I did not, nor with the first nor third Merrowby girl—rollicking, soulless young nonentities! Of course I’m crazy. She’s driven me crazy, so she might as well know it.”

Before Cousin Clorinda could prevent him Romney had thrown up the window and leaned out. He put his hands to his mouth and sent a long, tender, persuasive “Co-oo-e-e” down into the Edgelow garden.

The girl looked up startled. Romney waved his hand at her and smiled. For a moment both he and Cousin Clorinda thought she was going to smile back. Then she coolly turned her back on them and walked into the big cream-brick house and shut the door.

Romney pulled his head in and sat down.

“Have I made an awful ass of myself?” he said doubtfully.

“You have,” said Cousin Clorinda comfortingly. “But,” she added as an afterthought, “either she liked it, or she is a born flirt.”



From a vine-hid upstairs window Miss Edgelow watched Romney as he walked away, the rose in his pocket.

“Her rose fell out of her hair as she went in,” said Romney. “It’s lying there on the porch. I wonder if old Jim Edgelow would shoot me if I went over and got it. I think I’ll risk it.”

“Romney!” gasped Cousin Clorinda. But Romney had gone. She looked out of the window in helpless fascination, saw him appear below, saw him cross the Cooper garden, open the gate, go along the road to the Edgelow gate, disappear, reappear again round the corner of the house, and pick up the rose in triumph.

The door opened and old Jim Edgelow came out.

“What are you doing here, you impertinent pup?” he growled.

“Why be so unoriginal?” asked Romney cheerfully. “Anybody could call me a pup. Why not think of something worthy of the Edgelows? Besides, I’m not a pup really. I’m quite a middle-aged dog. I just came after your niece’s rose. I’m going to marry her, you know.”

“Will you get out of this before I kick you out?” asked old Jim with dangerous calmness.

“Oh, I didn’t mean to stay. I’d have been gone before this if you hadn’t

detained me, uncle-that-is-to-be.”

Romney took out his pocketbook, carefully placed his rose therein, shut it, restored it to its place, bowed low to his ancient enemy and returned to the tower room with the air of a conqueror.

From a vine-hid upstairs window of the cream-brick house Miss Edgelow watched him as long as he was in sight.

CHAPTER II.

It was morning and Romney was on his way to the sand shore for a swim, with his bathing suit rolled up under his arm, a gayly striped bath towel hung over his shoulder, and his coppery head bared to the sun. He was in excellent spirits although his three o'clock musings had been of an unsatisfactory character.

At three o'clock it had seemed preposterous to dream of marrying an Edgelow heiress and senile to fall in love with her. He had laughed at himself and now he felt very wise and prudent. She was his ideal, but between them her wealth and his poverty stood like grim, unconquerable ogres. The feud counted for nothing in his eyes, but one couldn't marry on an income that served only, in its most flexible moments, to keep life in one. There was nothing like looking facts squarely in the face and accepting their logic. He couldn't afford to fall in love with Dorcas Edgelow—but her name *must* be Sylvia!—and therefore he would not do it. She must remain for him only an exquisite might-have-been.

She could be only his dream girl.

Meanwhile life was good. It was worth while having been ill to realize the tang and savor of returning health again on a morning like this when a sea wind was blowing up over the long green fields.

"There's nothing on earth like a sea wind," said Romney, filling his lungs with it, snuffing rapturously at it. "What a tang, what a zip, what a message from vast, interminable spaces of freedom! What a magic of adventure! I feel as if I'd exchanged my shopworn soul for a fresh one, fire-new from the workshop of the gods. 'Who is Sylvia—what is she,' compared to this incomparable morning, wind and sea? 'I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul!' Sylvia shan't rock my canoe!"

He whistled gayly and strode on. Everything was good. He felt like a boy again. The rice lilies were as thick as ever in the shore fields and the margin of the pond as pink with water witches. Beyond, in the dunes, was a wild, sweet loveliness of salt-withered grasses and piping breezes. Far out, the sea was dotted with sails that were silver in the magic of morning sunlight.

He would have a glorious dip, a glorious wallow on sun-warm golden sands; then, after a glamorous walk home, one of Aunt Elizabeth's delightful dinners; then an afternoon of hammock dreams in the garden. He would not even look across the hedge. For him Edgelow estates and heiresses had ceased to exist. He would not look at, speak to, nor think of Sylvia again.

With this—he looked at her. He had reached the brink of the deep little

“run” by which the pond waters ran out through a gap in the dunes to the sea. On the other side of it, barely five yards away, Sylvia was standing, her arms full of water witches, looking in dire perplexity at the water. Then she looked at him.

For a moment or two, or an æon or two, according to whatever measurement of time you prefer, they stood so and looked at each other. Romney, who had just sworn never to look at Sylvia again, fairly devoured her with his eyes. She wore green again and she looked like a long, slender, green flag lily with the exquisite blossom of her face a-top of it. Had there ever been such a pretty woman in the world before? Had any woman ever had such an exquisite line of neck and chin? What were all the renowned, unhappy Edgelow beauties compared to her? They were dead and gone, broken-hearted, but she was here in her exquisite flesh and blood, looking as if no sorrow ever had, or ever could have, touched her.

“Good morning,” said Romney, who wanted to say, “Hail, goddess!”

Miss Edgelow looked at him and smiled. Her smile was very faint and mysterious, like a half-opened rosebud. You felt that the full flower could not be quite so wonderful.

“The plank is gone,” she said plaintively. “It was here when I crossed an hour ago.”

Romney pointed to some men who were making marsh hay up along the pond.

“Likely they have taken it.”

“And how am I to get across?” she asked. “It’s so deep—and cold. I can’t wade it.”

“No reason why you should,” said Romney. “I was sent here by the Powers That Govern for this moment. It was predestinated in the councils of eternity that I should be here at this precise moment to carry you across.”

“Then I hope it is likewise predestinated that you won’t drop me! The water looks fearfully cold and black, and I’m sure there are horrible slimy things at the bottom.”

Romney coolly stepped into the run, though he felt slightly dubious as to what bottom he might find. Sand and mud are a treacherous combination, and to wade in icy-cold water to your knees is an experiment for a man not too long over pneumonia. But what cared Romney? Luckily the bottom of the run, though oozy and squidgy, was no worse, and he got across without trouble. He was very near to her now. Seen close, she was not quite so beautiful but infinitely more charming. Her creamy skin was powdered with delicious little golden freckles. They made her less a goddess and more a woman.

“You must let me carry you over,” said Romney. “I won’t drop you; I won’t wet you; but,” he added internally, “I won’t swear that I shan’t kiss you

before I set you down.”

“I’m afraid it will be too much for you,” she said. “You’ve been ill, haven’t you? And you’re dripping wet with that cold water.”

She must have been asking about him to know that he had been ill. James Edgelow would never have volunteered the information. Romney glowed from head to foot.

“I’m all right. As for being wet, I came down to get wet.”

“But not in your clothes. That,” she said practically, “is what makes it dangerous. Why didn’t you take off your shoes and socks and roll up your trousers?”

“That would have kept you waiting.”

“You are a very imprudent young man,” she said; then added, as if by way of afterthought, “I wouldn’t have minded being kept waiting.”

What did she mean? Romney imagined several things she might mean. He stood, staring at her. What a delicious mouth she had! Her hair was like midnight under her wide green hat. But her nose was slightly irregular—well, let us say crooked. How nice! And her voice was a sweet, throaty, summery drawl. What a voice for love making! Romney stood there and imagined her making love in it.

“Did I frighten you last night by my crazy hoot?” he asked.

“Oh, no. I have been told that the Coopers are eccentric.”

“You’ve been brought up on the feud, I suppose,” said Romney sulkily. “Well—are you going to let a vile, contemptible Cooper carry you over the run?”

“Yes, but I won’t speak to him while he’s doing it,” said Miss Edgelow. She smiled again; it made Romney want to seize her in his arms and press kisses on the smile until he had found the heart of its mystery. This Edgelow girl had the smile of Mona Lisa, the everlasting lure and provocation that drives men mad and writes scarlet pages in dim historical records.

He picked her up and waded through the run with her. He did not hurry. Every time he took a step he felt carefully about to make sure of his foothold. He did not go straight across, but anglewise, with no explanation offered. Finally, however, he had to make land. Then he set her down reluctantly—without kissing her.

“Thank you,” she said. “I hope you won’t take cold for this.”

“There are no such things as colds in the seventh heaven,” said Romney. He felt that it was an incredibly stupid thing to say. Why couldn’t he think of something clever? He could think of clever things easily when there was nobody to say them to. His magazine stories were noted for their sparkling dialogue. Yet now he could only be clumsy. His fiction heroes talked superbly to heroines of all sorts. *They* never made asses of themselves.

Miss Edgelow ignored his feeble attempt properly.

"You must go and take your salt-water dip directly," she commanded. "And dry your clothes in the sun before you put them on. Be very particular about that."

"I am going to stand here," said Romney, folding his arms, "and watch you out of sight. And to-night—what about to-night? Can I come over into the Edgelow garden and talk to you?"

Miss Edgelow smiled.

"The dead Edgelows would turn over in their graves."

"Excellent exercise for 'em," commented Romney. "Be honest. I don't believe you care a hoot for the dead Edgelows and their feuds any more than I do."

"No, I don't," she said candidly. "But one living Edgelow is worse than all the dead ones. Last night my uncle commanded me never to speak to you, look at you, nor in any way become cognizant of your existence. He was—emphatic."

"Which means that he didn't scruple to enforce his decree with some fine old Edgelow oaths. Do you intend to obey him?"

"A man," said Miss Edgelow reflectively, "is master in his own demesne. At least I cannot invite you into his garden. Neither, of course, can I go to yours."

"The Whispering Lane is debatable ground," said Romney.



He held her for thirty blissful seconds while he waded through the run with her.

“So I have heard,” said Miss Edgelow. Before she turned away she looked at him once from under her broad hat. Something in the look made Romney suddenly recall Cousin Clorinda’s pronouncement: “Either she liked it, or she is a born flirt.”

Was she a flirt? That look—was it invitation, lure, provocation? It held more than mere friendliness, Romney knew. There was even a hint of defiance in it, though more, it seemed, of feuds and prohibitions than of him. He had a feeling that Sylvia—hang it, her name *couldn’t* be Dorcas—might come to walk in the Whispering Lane as much to “show old James Edgelow” as for any other reason.

“I will be prudent,” said Romney to himself as she went away. “I shall remember the fatal hour of three o’clock. I shall not make myself miserable howling for the moon nor humiliate myself to furnish a summer holiday for a bored beauty. Only—prudence is such a shoddy sort of virtue by times. One always feels ashamed of it. If I had been prudent I would not have waded through this icy run water and so would never have held that delicious armful for thirty seconds. I would never have had that exquisite white hand resting on, clinging to, my shoulder. There was no engagement ring on it, by the way. Nevertheless, there are certain things I must remember henceforth.”

Romney held up his left hand and checked them off on his fingers.

“First, she is an Edgelow, therefore born to hate me; second, she is an heiress, therefore taboo; third, I am poor as a rat and likely to remain so, therefore out of the running; fourth, I think she is a bit of a coquette, therefore to be shunned; and fifth——” Romney paused for a moment. “And fifth, she is the sweetest, most adorable, most desirable thing that ever looked allurement at a man out of a pair of—of—of—heavens, I’ve forgotten after all to find out what color her eyes were. Therefore, I am a besotted fool!”

He caught up his impedimenta and hurried over the dunes to the beach. He would certainly be prudent henceforth. He would devote himself to Cousin Clorinda’s school-teacher by way of double prudence. He plunged into the surf thinking:

“Her lashes are so long it’s no wonder I couldn’t rightly see her eyes. And her eyebrows are straight and dark. I’m sure of *that*, anyhow.”

The lady referred to was not the school-teacher.

At dinner that day, sitting in the cool, dim dining room of the Hill, looking out on the golden valley, Romney was not above trying to pump Aunt Elizabeth about her new neighbor, but he got nothing for his pains. Aunt Elizabeth knew nothing about her, and plainly did not want to know.

She contrived to give Romney the impression that Edgelows did not really

exist. They might imagine they did, but they were mere emanations of the Evil One, to be resolutely disbelieved in by any one of good principles and proper breeding. You did not speak of the devil in good society; neither did you speak of the Edgelows. This imagined girl might be an imagined Dorcas Edgelow or she might not. Aunt Elizabeth relegated the whole Edgelow clan, connection and cash to limbo with one wave of her thin, unbeautiful Cooperian hand. Edgelows, indeed!

Thus checkmated. Romney swore inwardly that he would never ask any one about Miss Edgelow again; and a quarter of an hour later was asking Samuel about her. He simply couldn't keep from talking to somebody about her.

Samuel lived in a little house in a hollow on the side of Hill o' the Winds. He was never called Sam. It simply could not be done. He was a handsome urchin of ten with an elfin beauty of face which Aunt Elizabeth considered clearly diabolic. Jet-black eyes, limpid with mischief, laughter, lawless roguery; brown curls, bare to the sunlight; cheeks rose-red beneath golden tan; a shirt, half a pair of suspenders, what was left of a pair of pants originally fashioned for a much older boy—that was Samuel. He generally had a snake, dead or living, concealed about him, and he had never heard of the Ten Commandments. By nature he was honest, but he never spoiled a good story by sticking too closely to the truth, and he was as thorough a young pagan as ever ran wild on the heath.

Romney loved him.

"Do you," said Romney shamelessly, "happen to know who the enchanted princess is who walks occasionally in yonder fair pleasance beyond the cedarn hedge?"

"Meaning old Jim's garden?" asked Samuel, transferring a vicious-looking little brown snake from his pants pocket to his shirt pocket. "'Zat what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Don't know nothin' of her. Watched her through the hedge last night. She'd be good looking if 'tweren't for her freckles. Gee, but they're thick!"

Romney glared. Samuel winked at him impudently and, on second thought, restored the snake to the pants pocket.

"How can you touch those horrible things?" said Romney, shuddering. He hated snakes.

"This snake's dead," said Samuel contemptuously.

"Then you have no information to give me concerning our mysterious stranger?"

"Nope. I kin find out all about her though if you're so set on it. What," asked Samuel seriously, "what makes you like her so well?"

Romney was flabbergasted. He thought he had been very cool and impersonal and detached in his questions, and here was this imp——

“Samuel, my boy, you have a very vile habit of jumping at conclusions. Simply because I betray an entirely natural curiosity regarding a lady who is my next-door neighbor, why do you absurdly suppose that I have a deep personal interest in her?”

“’Cause you don’t talk English when you ask questions about her,” rejoined Samuel, fishing up another snake, a very live one this time. “All them big words mean you’re bashful talking about her.”

“Has she been here long?” asked Romney, reverting to English.

“Never saw her ’round ’fore yesterday.” Samuel explored a third pocket with a disappointed expression. “There, he must ’a’ slipped through that hole! Just my durned luck! He was the finest snake of the bunch. Say, don’t worry. I’ll know all there’s to be known about her ’fore to-morrow night. But you oughtn’t to be hankering after her—one of that gang over there.”

The Cooperest of all Coopers could not have expressed more contempt for “that gang” than Samuel, who had never heard of them a month previously. Samuel had an instinctive recognition of a foe to all boys in old Jim, and had adopted the feud as a convenient excuse for hostility.

As for Romney, he was by now far from the three o’clock mood and he wanted so badly to talk of his dream lady that he must needs talk of her to Samuel, no fitter confidant offering.

“I want you to find out that her name *isn’t* Dorcas.”

“But it *is*,” said Samuel. “I heard old Jim shouting after her this morning, when she went to the shore: ‘Dorcas, you remember my dinner hour is twelve.’ ”

“Well,” thought Romney, turning away in disgust, “I can think of her as Sylvia anyhow. And that is all that matters, since she is an Edgelow and an heiress and a coquette. Dorcas is not for me, but Sylvia has always been mine. Samuel,” he added aloud, “do you wish you were rich?”

“Yep.”

“What is the first thing you would do if you were rich?”

“Buy Joe Perkins’ trotter,” said Samuel unhesitatingly.

“And *I*, Samuel, if I were rich, would marry the young lady we’ve been speaking of.”

“Would she hev you?” asked Samuel.

CHAPTER III.

Miss Edgelow was walking at sunset in the Whispering Lane. This lane ran through the beech wood at the back of the Cooper and Edgelow estates. It had been a bone of contention for generations. Both families claimed it and both used it determinedly to prove their claim. For the past twenty years no particular fuss had been made over it. Miss Elizabeth walked through it on principle twice a year when she knew James Edgelow would see her; and James Edgelow always went to church that way, when he did go, though it was the longest way around.

Samuel joined Miss Edgelow as she loitered along under the great, gray-boughed beeches. Perhaps Miss Edgelow had been expecting some one else; perhaps not. She did not betray any disappointment and she smiled at Samuel in a chummy fashion and proceeded to get acquainted with him.

Miss Edgelow had, so it seemed, a "way" with boys. Samuel liked her but kept his head. After all he was the retainer of a clan that was at feud with hers. When he found out that she was not afraid of snakes he respected her also, but for all that he had made up his mind that he was not going to have any "courting" between her and Romney.

Samuel wanted Romney wholly for himself; he loved him and he wanted him for chum and playfellow. This would, Samuel knew with a deadly, instinctive certainty, be all spoiled if he began running after a "skirt." Men were no good when they began running after skirts. Besides this particular skirt was an Edgelow, and you couldn't trust an Edgelow. She would likely as not make a fool of Romney. Sarah Dean, down at Clifton, had made a fool of Homer Gibson and Homer had hanged himself. Samuel was not going to have any hangings at Hill o' the Winds. This Edgelow girl must have her claws clipped in time.

Samuel had been thinking over the matter all day and knew just what he was going to do. Meanwhile he sat on the log and appeared so simple and charming and naïve that Miss Edgelow thought him a delightful child.

"What is your name?" asked Samuel.

"Dorcas Edgelow."

"I told him that. He wouldn't hardly believe it."

"Told who?"

"Oh, Romney. He was quizzing me about you."

"Oh, indeed! And why wouldn't he believe my name was Dorcas?"

"Dunno. He's full of queer notions. He says," went on Samuel shamelessly, "that if he was rich he'd marry you."

Miss Edgelow crimsoned. She looked very angry for a moment, but Samuel, intent on shifting a snake to more comfortable quarters, did not notice this.

"But he's poor—always was and always will be, so he says. He's a writer man, you know. He likes to spoon about with girls and then put them in his stories."

"Oh, so that is what he does," said Miss Edgelow, still looking a little dangerous. "Did he tell you so?"

"Yep. He wants to get acquainted with you so that he can put *you* in a book. Honest. That's his idea. Would you like to be put in a book?"

Miss Edgelow bit her lip.

"Did he tell you this, too?"

"Yes," assented Samuel unblushingly. "Thought I ought to warn you. And he told me he always tells a girl just what he thinks she'd like to hear. Don't let him fool you."

"Oh, I won't." Miss Edgelow looked as if there was not the slightest danger of it.

"He thinks you ain't bad looking, o' course," supplemented Samuel, "only he doesn't like your freckles. Say, do you know what will cure mange in a bulldog—a *half* bulldog?"

Just at this moment Romney came along the lane on his way to have supper with Cousin Clorinda. He was dressed in white flannels and was bareheaded. His eyes were luminous and his thin, delicately cut face was dreamy and remote. He did not see Miss Edgelow until he was quite opposite to her, did not see her because he was thinking of her. Then he halted in confusion and bowed rather stiffly.

Miss Edgelow stood up. He saw at once that she wore a dark red hat, very wonderful and droopy and becoming, and the palest of pale pink dresses. She turned away, but as she turned she flung him a brief, mysterious smile, a surprisingly nice smile considering the expression that it had replaced. Romney wanted to follow her but dared not. He went on feeling exceedingly and foolishly happy. He was quite as well aware of the foolishness of it as of the exceedingness.

Miss Edgelow walked away also, forgetting Samuel, who, however, was satisfied, feeling that he had done a good bit of work. Miss Edgelow communed with herself as she went back home.

"So that is what he does—studies girls for 'types' and puts them in his stories! Mr. Cooper, you need a lesson. I believe Uncle Jim was right when he said all Cooper men believed that every girl who looked at them fell in love with them. So you would marry me if you were rich. Condescending, insufferable young man! Wait till I'm through with you! And you don't like

my freckles.” Suddenly Miss Edgelow stopped and laughed. “Why should I blame you for that? I don’t like them myself.”

“What do you find in this forsaken hole that is so amusing?” asked old Jim Edgelow, coming around a corner of the cedar walk.

“Uncle Jim,” said Miss Edgelow, “if you were a young man trying to make love to a charming young woman—I *am* charming, am I not—would you object to her freckles?”

“Who’s been making love to you?” demanded old Jim fiercely.

“Nobody. That’s the trouble. Nobody has made any love to me. I flung myself quite boldly in Romney Cooper’s way to-night and he passed me by. He objects, so I understand, to my freckles. Uncle, do you suppose I could make him fall madly in love with me in spite of my freckles, and then spurn him in true, dramatic Edgelow fashion? Do you suppose it would make any difference if he knew I don’t have freckles in winter?”



Samuel had an elfin beauty that was clearly diabolic. He generally had a snake about him, and he had never heard of the Ten Commandments.

“I think you’re quite mad,” said old Jim. “No, don’t smile at me like that. Let me tell you, miss, that you trade too much on that smile. It may work with silly young asses but it won’t work with *me*. I won’t have you associating with this Cooper imbecile, do you hear me? Am I to be defied at my age by a chit of a girl?”

“He says he won’t marry me,” said Miss Edgelow plaintively.

“Good Lord, girl, have you asked him to marry you?”

“Not yet,” said Miss Edgelow. “I’m afraid it wouldn’t be any use. He doesn’t like my freckles, as I’ve said.”

Old Jim snorted and stamped off, too angry to speak. Besides, he suspected that this girl was making fun of him.

“If there’s one thing that I like more than another,” Miss Edgelow remarked to the weeping beech, “it is tormenting the men.”

Romney went down the lane and across the windy fields and along the shore. The sea was ruffled into a living crimson under the sunset. The fishing boats were coming in. One incredibly white little star was just visible where the pale pink of the upper sky shaded off into paler green. Down low in the southwest there was a new moon. He saw it over his right shoulder, and wondered if Sylvia saw it too. She was not out of his thoughts for a minute during his whole walk, but he thought this was because he allowed it—never that it was because he could not help it.

Cousin Clorinda’s house was so near the sea that the sound of waves always filled its rooms—a gray old house fronting the sunset, with leagues of satiny-rippled sea before it, purple headlands and distant, fairylike, misty coasts.

“What a view old Mark Wallace picked out when he built his homestead!” said Romney admiringly. “What a thing to have the sea at your very doorstep like this! How delightful it would be to live in this old remote place with Sylvia and walk along that shore with her in the moonlight. Heigh-ho, if it were only possible!”

“If what were only possible?” queried Cousin Clorinda, billowing down the walk in blue muslin and a cherry-hued scarf.

Romney told her.

“And why isn’t it possible?”

He stared at her. This incredible woman scarcely twenty-four hours ago had warned him against having anything to do with Miss Edgelow, and had quoted feuds to him. And now she didn’t seem able to believe that the idea was absurd.

“Adorable and adored cousin, why this right-about-face? You amaze me.”

“Haven’t you faced about yourself?” retorted Clorinda. “Yesterday afternoon you were going to marry her out-of-hand. Now you are groaning that it isn’t possible!”

“I told you three o’clock would bring wisdom. Three o’clock in the morning is the wisest and most accursed hour of the clock. At three o’clock I saw clearly how impossible it all was.”

“At three o’clock *I* saw that it was quite possible,” averred Clorinda. “Why not?”

"She is, or will be, disgustingly rich."

"All the better. You can't live on love."

"Nor on my wife's money, either."

"Can't you make enough to live on?"

"I've always made enough to live on myself. But I couldn't ask Sylvia to live in a garret with me."

"Any other reasons?"

"She is a flirt, I think—no, I'll say a coquette. That sounds better, infinitely more alluring and gracious."

"A girl like her always flirts—till the right man comes."

"I don't suppose she'd look at me."

"She's half in love with you already."

"And finally, her name isn't Sylvia."

"I won't discuss the matter if you're not going to be serious," said Cousin Clorinda, really annoyed. She had lain awake most of the night constructing a gorgeous castle in air for Romney, and it was aggravating to find that he refused to inhabit it, and refused so frivolously.

"Dear young thing, I *am* serious. Isn't it serious that that exquisite dream maiden should be named Dorcas? Serious! Why, it's a tragedy!"

"I have known several excellent women," said Cousin Clorinda severely, "who were named Dorcas."

"I grant it. Excellent women, beyond a doubt! But had those excellent women beauty, charm, distinction? Did they walk and speak like queens? Could they afford to comb their hair straight back from their faces?"

"No," admitted Cousin Clorinda after a few moments of honest reflection, "no, I don't suppose they were—did—could."

"You see," said Romney triumphantly, "of course she shouldn't be named Dorcas! But don't let's talk of her, cousin. I had an attack of temporary insanity at four by the clock yesterday. I am sane now. I am not in love with Miss Edgelow; I am not going to be in love with her. I think I will put her into my next magazine serial as a heroine. That is her proper environment. She is not meant for human nature's daily food. I couldn't ask her to darn my socks or fry my bacon. Lead me to your jam closet, lady fair! Comfort me with raspberry vinegar, for I am sick of Aunt Elizabeth's sweetish ginger cordial. And stay me with an armchair. Your armchairs always fitted my kinks."

"I've got supper ready for you in the dining room. I want you to eat it and tell me I'm a good cook. I'm dying for a compliment. I never get any now that I'm old."

"Where is your school-teacher?"

"In her room, correcting exercises. No, I am not going to call her down. If Dorcas Edgelow doesn't interest you then——"

"But she *does*. Haven't I told you that I'm going to write a story about her? Interest me! Why, I held her in my arms to-day for thirty blissful seconds! I won't say but what I held her a shade more tightly than was absolutely necessary. But then I had to be careful not to drop her, hadn't I? Fancy if I had dropped her in the run!"

"Rom-ney—Coop-er!"

"They didn't put the hyphens in when they christened me. Strawberry shortcake! Cousin of my heart, you're——"

"You shan't have one crumb of my strawberry shortcake until you've told me what you've been doing. Romney, you're overacting. You are dying to talk to me of Dorcas Edgelow, and yet you pretend you aren't."

"I came down here to talk about Samuel Rice," protested Romney with warmth. "I'm really interested in Samuel. He is a gifted, engaging orphan. I want to do something for him, uplift him. For instance, couldn't we persuade him to go to Sunday school? *You* can help me, Cousin Clorinda. A good woman's influence——"

"I don't care a hoot about gifted orphans, just now, anyhow. I'm dying to hear all about Dorcas Edgelow and you. I've never known a romantic love affair, not even my own."

"Would you sacrifice my happiness, ruin my life, break my heart, to gratify your lust for romance?" demanded Romney. "Cousin Clorinda, I *won't* talk of her. She is charming—you've no idea how charming she is! Her freckles are enchanting; an atmosphere of perfume seems to surround her and yet I swear she doesn't use perfume; she has a nice little way of cuddling in your arms when you are carrying her about. And her smile, Cousin Clorinda——"

"I am a patient woman, Romney, but if you don't tell me without any further preamble what you mean by carrying her about I'll smack your ears."

Romney told her. Also he told her of the meeting in the Whispering Lane.

"She was in the Whispering Lane?"

"Yes, by chance or God's grace and she wore——"

"She went to the Whispering Lane after you had suggested it as a sort of neutral ground? And you didn't stop and talk to her? You didn't——"

"I had an engagement with you, divinity."

"You are a hopeless goose! You have thrown away a golden opportunity. And you have insulted *her*."

"Cousin Clorinda, you don't really mean that you think she went there to meet me!"

"Of course she did," said Cousin Clorinda. "When she smiled at you as you say she did you should have followed her, even if you broke forty engagements with me; followed her to the very den of old Jim himself, if necessary."

“What about the feud?”

“A feud,” said Cousin Clorinda solemnly, “is an unchristian thing. Besides, it would be a treat to see Mary Edgelow’s face if Dorcas married you.”

“I give up trying to understand you,” said Romney. “Anyhow, I’ve told you all there is to tell, so now may I have my shortcake?”

It was starlight when Romney went home. A white filmy mist was hanging over the river valley. He crossed the sea fields and climbed Hill o’ the Winds. The dew was cold and the night was full of mystery and wonder and sheer magic. The two houses on the hill and their old gardens were veiled in it. It was an expectant night, a night when things intended to happen.

Romney halted on the porch for a moment. There was a blot of white in the Edgelow garden, just across the hedge. As he looked at it something was thrown over the hedge and struck him in the face, a soft, odorous something. He stooped and picked it up. It was a wide-blown rose, damp and exquisite with dew, a rose white enough to lie in her bosom or to star the soft, dark cloud of her hair.

When Romney straightened up and looked across to the Edgelow garden the blot of white was gone.

He kissed the rose.

“It’s too dear a night to go to sleep,” he said. “I will lay me down in the hammock and dream sweet, wonderful, foolish dreams that will be all the more wonderful and foolish and sweet because they can never be anything but dreams. I will dream of a world where there is no three o’clock in the morning.”

In her room Miss Edgelow was looking scrutinizingly in the glass.

“They really don’t show so much by lamplight,” she said.

CHAPTER IV.

There is, unfortunately, a three o'clock every night, and the fire of Romney's enthusiasm was in white ashes again by morning. He got up and repeated several times aloud to himself: "She is an Edgelow. Her father is rich. Her uncle will make her richer. Her name is Dorcas," by way of fortifying his determination to think no more of her and see no more of her.

He was full of prudent resolution. He would not so much as look toward the Edgelow garden; he would never go near the Whispering Lane; if he ever met Dorcas Edgelow by accident he would bow with easy courtesy and pass on. It did not matter a particle whether her eyes were gray or blue.

Then it occurred to him that it was odd that it should require such a tremendous amount of resolution to avoid a girl whom he had not even seen forty-eight hours ago. It would not be forty-eight hours until four o'clock that afternoon.

Romney whistled uproariously all the time he was dressing. One window of his room looked out on the Edgelow garden, but he never glanced that way. He talked to Aunt Elizabeth all through breakfast of his work and his ambitions and his idea for his new serial, but he did not tell her he meant to use Dorcas Edgelow for a heroine. He did not mention Edgelows at all. The curious thing is that he thought himself quite heroic because he did not.



Samuel appeared so simple and charming that Miss Edgelow thought him a delightful child.

After breakfast he rushed off to the shore for a surf dip, never glancing at the Edgelow garden at all. Not that he would have seen anything if he did look. Dorcas Edgelow, being no doubt a lazy, luxurious, pampered little thing, was still asleep in bed.

Halfway to the shore Romney suddenly remembered that he had left the rose she had tossed him in a glass of water in his room. What if Aunt Elizabeth flung it out! She would be sure to, never dreaming that a faded flower was of any value. He turned and rushed madly home again, getting there just in the nick of time. He met Aunt Elizabeth carrying the rose downstairs.

"Oh, aunty, give me that. It's very much mine."

"It's faded," said Aunt Elizabeth in astonishment.

"I kissed it to death," said Romney.

"It is not," said Aunt Elizabeth coldly, "the sort of flower you should have in your possession at all."

So she knew it for one of the Edgelow roses.

"It's a rose of Eden," said Romney. "Do you know the legend of the Rose of Eden, Aunt Elizabeth?"

No, Aunt Elizabeth did not know it. She knew only that she wanted to get downstairs and that Romney was blocking up the way.

"Don't you know your Kipling, Aunt Elizabeth?"

"What is a Kipling?" asked Aunt Elizabeth patiently.

"Why—er—ah—Kipling is a poet." Romney was very flat.

"Was he any relation to Longfellow?"

"No, I think I may safely say they were not connected. But he wrote a poem about the Rose of Eden. When Eve left Eden she contrived to carry off with her one of its roses, and wherever one of its blood-red petals fell sprang up a Rose-of-Eden tree. You find 'em here and there all over the world. And every daughter of Eve—and every son of Adam, though Kipling doesn't mention that—shall once at least 'ere the tale of his years be done' smell the scent of an Eden rose, have his one glorious moment when he sees his dream, even though he may never grasp it. And that one moment, Aunt Elizabeth, makes life worth while, even though all the rest of it be roseless."

Aunt Elizabeth looked down at him. She was not a stupid woman even if she did not know her Kipling, and she understood his meaning. An old, old memory stirred in her heart; a whiff of ghostly fragrance, painfully sweet, blew through the deserted chambers of her soul. Without a word she handed Romney his rose and went on down the stairs. But at the foot she turned and looked up, already repenting her weakness.

"She is of the race of our enemies," she said warningly and disapprovingly.

It was too late now to go to the shore. The sun would be too hot for the return walk. Romney went down to the hollow and hunted up Samuel. Again he never looked at the Edgelow garden. Yet although he did not look, he saw her there quite plainly, strolling up and down the acacia walk, bareheaded. When he had disappeared without looking, Dorcas Edgelow went back to the house and remarked to her uncle, who was reading in his library:

"I hate that young man next door."

"It would please me much better, miss, if you thought nothing at all about him," said her uncle.

"And therefore," continued Miss Edgelow, "I am going to break his heart; or if that is impossible by reason of his having none to break, I shall hurt his pride so dreadfully that he will suffer still more. I should like, uncle, to humiliate that young man to the very dust."

"So he has snubbed you, has he? Serves you right for throwing yourself at his head."

"I only threw a rose," said Miss Edgelow plaintively.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," said her uncle comfortingly. "I haven't any authority over you, of course. I invited you here for the summer because your father told me plainly that he wanted to feel you were in some safe place while he had to be in Mexico. I did not know then that Elizabeth Cooper was going to have a young jackanapes next door. Likely she brought him there on purpose. I don't believe a word of his being ill. He looks fit as a fiddle. But remember this, miss: If you throw yourself away on that penniless fortune hunter not a cent of my money will you ever see."

"Throw myself away on him! Uncle, do you realize that I've just told you I hate the creature?"

"See that you keep on hating him then, miss. There's a proverb, if I remember aright, to the effect that hate is only love that has missed its way."

Old James looked very fierce and relentless. Miss Edgelow sighed and went away. It was frightfully dull at Hill o' the Winds. It was a detestable old place. It was out of the world. No decent people abode there. She would rather be in Mexico.

Oh, why had she been so silly as to throw him that rose? Why did night and faint starlight and scented winds make people do such absurd things? She had been warned, hadn't she? Samuel had warned her. Well, then, why had she done it?

"I suppose," she thought resentfully, "that he doesn't even find me interesting enough to study for material. Detestable creature! I am not going to think about him again."

Romney, meanwhile, was talking to Samuel. He was resolved that he would not mention Miss Edgelow to Samuel. It will never be known whether

he would have kept this resolution or not, because Samuel mentioned her at once.

"Her name is Dorcas," he announced triumphantly. "She told me herself."

"Dorcas it is," said Romney airily. "Not that it matters. Dorcas or Titania or Melisande—all is one. Her last name is Edgelow."

"Her father had to go to Mexico for the summer—he's a civil engineer—so she came to stay with her uncle, and she's twenty-three years old," said Samuel.

"Did she tell you her age, too?"

"Nope. I found *that* out down at Clifton last night. 'Pink' Raymer told me. Pink is old Mary Edgelow's chore boy. He heard her telling old Mrs. Franklin all about her. She's an awful flirt, old Mary says, and her father sent her to Hill o' the Winds 'cause he had to go to Mexico and dasn't trust her home alone. She can't help making eyes at any man who happens to be round, old Mary says. She's even been engaged a lot o' times, old Mary says, but always broke it off. She means to marry rich when she does marry, old Mary says. She's so extravagant, nobody but a rich man could keep her, old Mary says—her dress bill every year is awful!"

"Samuel, do you realize what an abominable thing gossip is?" demanded Romney sternly. "I'm sorry to find you so addicted to it."

"You told me to find out all I could about her," protested the aggrieved Samuel.

"Did you then find out whether her eyes are blue or gray?"

Samuel stared a second.

"No," scornfully.

"You see the only important thing, the only thing I really wanted to know about her, you have failed to find out. And yet you were sitting beside her on a log in the Whispering Lane for some time last night. Unobservant Samuel! But never mind. Her name is Dorcas and there is no reasonable doubt in my mind that her eyes are fishy blue. Let's go a-fishing."

"Let's," said Samuel, brightening up. "Say, I've called my pig after old Jim Edgelow."

So Dorcas Edgelow was a heartless coquette, who broke hearts and ruined lives for her amusement, a cold-blooded schemer who meant to ensnare a rich husband! Romney did not know that Samuel had made up all these accusations out of whole cloth, that he had never been at or near Clifton the preceding evening, that Pink Raymer was only the name of the hero in a lurid dime novel Samuel was secretly devouring. Nobody could have suspected such a thing of Samuel, the frank-eyed, open-faced, red-lipped child.

He seemed too frank and honest.

Doubtless old Miss Mary Edgelow exaggerated somewhat, thought

Romney; ancient maiden ladies of seventy-odd seldom erred on the side of charity in their judgment of their young relatives. But the fact remained. Dorcas Edgelow was a calculating coquette. Dorcas Edgelow was mercenary. Dorcas Edgelow must be avoided.

Therefore Romney went fishing.



"Your women shall never be happy," she said. "One and all they shall die in sorrow as I die!"

CHAPTER V.

He fished all day and wrote in the tower room all the evening. He would not let himself look down into the Edgelow garden. Dorcas Edgelow was sitting there reading a book; at least she had a book on her lap. At intervals she religiously turned a page. She sat facing the tower room and the hedge, but she never looked at them—noticeably.

She was bareheaded and she had thought a great deal about her dress before she put on her primrose silk. She wore a starlike cluster of pink and white daisies in her hair. She knew she looked very well. But what difference did that make when there was nobody to look at her?

She read until eight o'clock and then got up and went indoors in a huff. I am afraid she banged the door. She would die in this stupid place—yes, die! Then perhaps people might be sorry for their behavior—her father for instance, her cruel father who had doomed her to this solitude and exposed her to unparalleled impudence from the cub editors that infested it. There was no doubt that Miss Edgelow was very much annoyed.

Five minutes after she had gone in Romney went to the window and looked down into the Edgelow garden. Nobody was there. What an intolerable, prim, antiquated, formal, unattractive place it was! How could anybody endure year after year those endless stiff walks and clipped hedges and old-fashioned roses? How could anybody live at Hill o' the Winds anyhow? How thankful he would be when his doctor would let him get away from it!

Romney stared at the Edgelow garden for ten minutes longer; then he tried to write again, failed, threw down his pen, looked at the Edgelow garden, still deserted, and betook himself to the hollow to seek Samuel.

Samuel he could not find. Samuel was at that moment talking to Miss Edgelow in the Whispering Lane, imparting to her a few facts and considerable fiction. So he went for a walk to the shore instead. It was dark when he got back and there was still no one in the Edgelow garden. Romney was sure of that because he went to the hedge and looked it over thoroughly.

He did not sleep a great deal that night. Neither did Miss Edgelow. It was a warm night and the mosquitoes were troublesome. Samuel slept dreamlessly. He had told Miss Edgelow that Romney thought she was quite struck on him, and he had told Romney that Pink Raymer had heard old Mary say that there was a certain millionaire in Montreal to whom Miss Edgelow would be engaged in the fall. It was an understood thing, according to the mythical Pink.

Therefore for two days Romney fished and wrote and ignored Miss Edgelow and thought continually about her. And for two days Miss Edgelow

read novels and avoided the garden and sang so loudly and cheerfully that old Jim told her to shut up. He had no particular ear for music. So Miss Edgelow went to the Whispering Lane. She knew there was no danger of meeting that detestable young man there because she had seen him striding down the hill half an hour before.

Of course Romney was there; he had only been down as far as the hollow and when he came back he saw a white figure, which was really that of old Jim's housekeeper, disappearing in the distance along the valley road to the shore. He was sure it was Sylvia—pshaw, Dorcas!—so the lane would be safe.

They met face to face. They smiled at each other as if they had expected to meet. Romney said it was a lovely evening and Miss Edgelow said it looked like rain—it didn't—and then they walked on together because there was nothing else to do.

Each of them thoroughly distrusted the other but neither wanted to be anywhere else. Miss Edgelow told herself again that it would be a pleasant and righteous thing to teach this young man a lesson. Romney told himself that if Miss Edgelow wanted to flirt, well and good; he would play the game with zest and get as much amusement out of it as she did. So they were both ready to be surprisingly agreeable to each other and both of them felt suddenly that Hill o' the Winds was a dear, old, quaint, romantic spot, full of poetry and steeped in romance. Romney as he walked beside her felt perfectly happy and satisfied.

"Now why?" one part of him asked the other. "I've often walked in lanes before. It can't be the lane. Dorcas Edgelow, is a beauty, but I've walked with women just as beautiful. Why?"

There was no answer so he gave up asking the question and enjoyed his satisfaction. The Whispering Lane was a delightful spot. The warm air was full of elusive wood fragrances that mingled distractingly with the faint perfume that exhaled from Sylvia's—no, confound it, Dorcas'—dress. Shafts of sunlight fell through it; now and then one struck athwart Sylvia's hair and intensified its blue-black sheen.

Robins whistled here and there. Little ferns brushed Sylvia's silken ankles. There were openings in the trees like green, arched windows, and one saw enchanting little landscapes through them.

There was a gate at the end of the lane and when they came to it they leaned against it and looked down into the valley. The gate was narrow and crowded with dogwood bushes, so that they had to stand close together. Occasionally Romney's shoulder touched Sylvia's or a frill of her lacy sleeve brushed his hand.

They watched the valley in a long, delicious silence. It was luminous in hazes of purple and pearl. Great clouds piled themselves up in dazzling masses over the iridescent sea, thunderclouds with white crests and gorges of purple

shadow.

Miss Edgelow did not try to talk much. She knew exactly the value of significant silences when you were teaching a certain kind of lesson. She knew that foolish women chattered too much, that wise ones let nature talk for them.

When she did talk she talked of Samuel, his engaging deviltry, his amusing precocity. She said she was very fond of Samuel; Romney said he was, too, and felt that it was a link between them. He told her how he had loved Hill o' the Winds in childhood and how glad he was to find it unchanged, a place unspoiled by the haste and rush of modernity, a place where one might dream dreams and cherish feuds and other impossible things.

Then they were silent again in as many languages as Aunt Elizabeth herself could have been. In fact, when Romney lay awake half the night to think over that half hour in the Whispering Lane he was surprised to find how little they had talked and yet how much more he seemed to know of her. At first he struggled against thinking of her; then philosophically decided that the more he struggled the more fictitious importance the thought of her would assume. Better think her out and have done with it.

So he gave himself over to his memories of her and gloated over them, the delicate, half-mocking, half-alluring undertones in her voice, the delicious golden spots on her face, the charming gestures of her wonderful hands. Oh, she was quite perfect, just as he had always known she would be.

There was no danger of his falling in love with her. There were a score of indisputable reasons for safeguard. So there was no danger in dwelling on her perfection, no danger in recalling her ways and words and glances—but he had forgotten after all to find out the real color of her eyes!—no danger in dreaming of what might have been when one knew it couldn't possibly be. In short, there was no danger in a skillful flirtation when both parties knew exactly what they were about.

"I have been walking in the Whispering Lane with Romney Cooper," said Miss Edgelow to her uncle.

"Humph!"

"He is a very nice young man."

"Humph!"

"He is, I think, the nicest young man I ever met."

"Humph! I thought you said you hated him."

"So I did. So I do. I hate him all the more for being so nice. What business has he to be so nice when he is poor and designing and a Cooper and utterly out of the question?"

"Out of the question for what?" grunted old Jim.

"I'm glad you didn't say 'humph' that time," said Dorcas reflectively. "It was getting monotonous."

It was a week later that Romney went to see Cousin Clorinda again, through a weird, uncanny twilight following a rainy day. The sea was like gray satin before Cousin Clorinda's old house. The sky was curdled all over with pale gray clouds. Cousin Clorinda wore flowered organdie and kissed him.

"Cousin Clorinda, she is divine."

"Who?" said Cousin Clorinda indifferently.

"Why, Sylvia—Dorcas, if you must have it."

"Oh yes, the niece of old Jim's," said Cousin Clorinda as if she just now heard of her for the first time. "Try some of my shortcake, Romney. You used to be very fond of it."

"She's the most charming thing in the world, Cousin Clorinda. I am not in love with her. Please don't imagine I'm in love with her."

"Oh, I wouldn't imagine it," Cousin Clorinda seemed a trifle absent.

"But I could be in love with her overwhelmingly if she weren't as rich as wedding cake, and a man-eater. I could adore her. She is adorable. The only thing I'm really sorry for is that I didn't kiss her that day I carried her over the run. The gods will never send me such a chance again."

"My white hen stole her nest and brought out ten of the dearest yellow chicks to-day."

"Chickens! Cousin Clorinda, I'm talking of Sylvia—Sylvia. It's such a luxury to call her Sylvia when I speak to you instead of Miss Edgelow or that abominable Dorcas! This morning when I woke up she was helping Mrs. Gould weed the kitchen garden and singing like a seraph. I love to hear a woman singing at her work. Everybody should sing at his work."

"Nonsense," said Cousin Clorinda. "Fancy a butcher singing at his work! Or an undertaker!"

Romney ignored the interruption.

"You can't believe how deliciously her hair kinks at the nape of her neck on a rainy day. You can't believe how golden her freckles are on her creamy skin. She isn't like any other woman in the world."

"Nobody is," said Cousin Clorinda. "Is Elizabeth troubled with rheumatism this wet day?"

"Cousin Clorinda, I didn't expect to find you so unsympathetic," reproached Romney.

"Is it unsympathetic to ask about Elizabeth's rheumatism? I would have thought it quite the reverse."

"Darling, I came over here to-night to talk about Sylvia to you. I wanted to tell you that, lovely as she looks in flower-hued robes, she is still lovelier in a gray mackintosh and a rubber cap; that, exquisite as she is when she's talking, she's ten times more exquisite when she's silent; that I'll go mad if I can't solve the mystery of her smile—and you're not a bit interested!"

"No, I don't think I am. In fact, you bore me when you rave about Dorcas Edgelow. Don't be so emotional."

Romney stared incredulously, reproachfully.

"And the last time I was down here you were urging me to marry her!"

"I was not," said Cousin Clorinda brazenly. "I was only teasing you. I regarded the whole matter as a joke. The idea of your marrying Dorcas Edgelow is quite absurd. She wouldn't look at you."

"Why wouldn't she? I am kind and amiable when I feel like it. I never lose my temper, though I may mislay it occasionally. I go to bed early at least once a week. I bear other people's misfortunes with equanimity. And I *never* tell any one that he has a cold. I'd really make an admirable husband."

"And your salary wouldn't keep her in boots for a month."

"Cousin Clorinda, you've been lying awake at three o'clock too often and too long. That is what is the matter with you."

"Anyhow, I'm not going to talk or be talked to about that Edgelow puss," said Cousin Clorinda decidedly. "The world is full of other subjects."

"Don't you believe it," said Romney.

But Cousin Clorinda was pink and white and blue draped adamant. She fed him royally, but not a word would she hear of or say of Sylvia. He went away disgruntled.

"You'll be sorry when I'm dead," he warned her.

But Cousin Clorinda sat back in her rocking-chair and laughed.

"The less we talk of her the more he'll think of her," she reflected. "If I had let him pour out all he wanted to tell me he'd have gone home empty, resolving to be sensible and eschew her and all her beguilements. Now he's gone home determined to show me he can't be shooed away. Besides," added Cousin Clorinda, "he took a whole week before he came down to tell me about her. I am not going to put up with being ignored in that fashion by a young snip I pampered with cream while he was a baby!"

CHAPTER VI.

There were some transactions between Miss Edgelow and Samuel whereby the former became possessed of two adored orange-hued kittens, fluffy morsels of fur and mischief that gamboled about her feet as she walked in the Edgelow garden and frisked after her in the Whispering Lane.

She did distracting things with them—at least Romney found them distracting. She cuddled them under her lovely chin and kissed the sun-warm tops of their round, velvety heads. Romney knew she was doing it deliberately, on purpose, out of malice aforethought to drive him crazy, and she very nearly succeeded in spite of his knowledge of her arts. Sometimes he gloomily wished he could wring the necks of those little beasts. Only a conviction that Samuel would get her more prevented him from putting them out of the way in some underhanded fashion.

Yet often the pretty picture Sylvia and her little cats made in the prim, stately, haunted old garden charmed him. He wished that he were an artist and could paint her. Failing that, he wrote her into his new serial so vividly that she took possession of it and played hob with his plot. It would never do for the magazine he meant it for, or any other, and his summer's work would go for nothing and he would be minus several hundred dollars and be on short commons for the winter. But still he wrote on at it, and would have nothing to do with any other tale.

Occasionally he talked to Samuel about it and Samuel told of it what seemed good unto him to Miss Edgelow. Samuel was not satisfied with what he had done. He had meant to keep those two apart and had not succeeded. He had meant to keep Romney to himself, and Romney spent all the time he was not in the tower room at work, mooning about in the Whispering Lane with Miss Edgelow. Samuel was disgruntled, and took his revenge as he might.

Both Romney and Miss Edgelow made a great pet of him, but that did not worry the vacuum where his conscience wasn't in the least. He was an artistic liar and never told either of them anything that sounded out of keeping. So they kept on believing him and mistrusting each other and hankering for each other and meeting each other. Aunt Elizabeth and old Jim were not supposed to know anything about it and perhaps they didn't.

Miss Edgelow was very curious about the story Romney was writing of which she was the heroine. But he never mentioned it to her and she would not betray Samuel by mentioning it to him. She vowed, though, that he should have a final scene for it which he would never forget, and, with this in view, she was as sweet to him as if she had really been the coquette he believed her

—and perhaps she was.

At least she was secretly much dissatisfied with her progress. Romney said delicious things to her and looked things still more delicious and played the part of devoted admirer to perfection. But Miss Edgelow wanted more than admiration. To spurn admiration would inflict no real wound, teach no lasting lesson. She wanted him to love her, so that he might feel it to the core of his soul when she finally laughed at him and dismissed him.

And so far, in spite of three weeks' delectable companionship and pretty speeches and prettier silences and moons and stars and kittens, she could give herself no assurance that he really cared a penny's worth for her. Her failure annoyed her and caused her to say sarcastic things to old Jim.

Romney considered that he was still a wise and prudent young man. He congratulated himself on his ability to refrain from loving not wisely but too well when there was such temptation to it. Not many men, he reflected, would have kept their heads in the face of such provocation, even though they knew her for a professed flirt and themselves for paupers. They would have been fools and fallen fathoms deep in love without being able to help themselves. Now he, Romney, was not a fool.

True, sometimes at three o'clock at night wisdom and prudence seemed rather ugly and sordid virtues, and Romney thought it might have been just as well to let himself go, to put his neck under her scornful little foot and let her play with his heart and throw it away, and spend all his wealth and power of loving in one splendid, unreasonable, unreasoning burst of folly. But around the rest of the clock he was complacent and kept telling himself he had done well to keep fast hold of his heart.

This was his state of mind when Clifford Hughes came to see him. Hughes was the owner of the string of magazines for one of which Romney had once intended his serial. Hughes wanted to know about the serial and was disgruntled because Romney told him it would never do.

But that was not really what Hughes had come to talk about. He had fallen hopelessly in love and got himself engaged and he was so blindly, besottedly happy that he had to tell somebody all about the affair; and Romney was the only fellow he could tell about it. Romney had always been a dreamy, romantic chap. Romney would sympathize with him. So he sat in the tower room and raved for hours.

Romney listened and sympathized, and grew more dismayed every minute. This fellow Hughes was saying about his lady just what he, Romney, wanted to say about Sylvia. This fellow Hughes was disgustingly happy in the very way he, Romney, wanted to be happy—in the very way he *could* be happy if Sylvia loved him as Hughes' lady loved him. Romney was shocked and alarmed and upset, and didn't know what he was saying to Hughes half the

time. He only realized that a truly dreadful state of affairs had come about all at once.

He loved Sylvia, loved her just as wholly and madly as ever man loved woman. How could he have been so blind and besotted as not to have known it before? Why, he had loved her from the moment he had first seen her in the Edgelow garden! And she didn't care a snap for him, and he couldn't ask her to marry him if she did, and how was he ever to get himself past three o'clock *that* night? *Then* he would realize his position to the full. And even now it was quite unbearable.

"Hello," said Hughes, looking out of the window. "Who's the pretty girl over there, Cooper?"

"Pretty girl!" Hopeless idiot! Blind bat! Couldn't he see that Sylvia was the most beautiful woman in the world?

"Syl—Dorcas Edgelow," said Romney indifferently.

"Know her?"

"I've a nodding acquaintance with her," said Romney indifferently. "You know there's an old feud between the families. It has petered out pretty well in our generation, but it doesn't make for cordiality."

"I see. Pity. She's really quite nice looking." Then Hughes dropped the subject. To prevent any possible return to it Romney took him fishing. He forgot to ask Samuel and Samuel was so furious that he went straight to Miss Edgelow and told her that he *had* been fishing with them and heard them talking about her, and Romney had told the city man that she was a nice small thing and that he could have her for the asking, but didn't mean to ask because he was too poor and a wife was a nuisance anyway.

Samuel, being angry, was less artistic than usual and for the first time Miss Edgelow wondered if he was not painting the lily. He looked so guileless and cherubic that it was hard to believe it of him; but really Romney Cooper didn't seem like a man who would say such things to a friend about any girl. Nevertheless, Samuel couldn't be making it *all* up out of whole cloth; *something* must have been said.

She was very disdainful and saucy when Romney came that night to the Whispering Lane. But all her disdain and sauciness didn't keep her away from the lane nor from making a very careful toilet before she went there nor from looking radiantly entrancing when she got there.

"So your friend has gone?" she said.

"Yes, thank Heaven," said Romney. "If he had stayed any longer I should have gone crazy."

"Do your friends always have that effect on you?"

"No, not always. But he is engaged to be married. He was so insultingly happy that I couldn't tolerate him. And he kept talking about *his* lady fair when

I wanted to be talking about mine.”

“Oh, so you have one?” Miss Edgelow tucked a kitten under her chin and spoke only with languid interest.

“Yes. I’ve never told you about her, have I?”

“Not that I remember.”

“May I? I suppose I’ve caught the infection from Hughes. I want to talk about her to-night. You don’t mind?”

“Oh, no,” quite graciously.

“Her name,” began Romney gravely, “is Sylvia. It couldn’t be anything else. Sylvia is the only name in any language that absolutely suits and expresses her.”

“We had an old black cook once named Sylvia,” murmured Miss Edgelow reminiscently. “Go on.”

“Her name is Sylvia. She is about five feet six. She has jet-black hair that grows off her face in a widow’s peak. She has a creamy skin and lips as red as the rose of love. She has wonderful hands. She has straight black brows. She has eyes that are—why, I swear they are dark, dark blue! It has only come home to me this minute what color they really are. She has such a trick of veiling them with her lashes, you know.”

“She has no imperfections, of course,” said Miss Edgelow, a trifle contemptuously.

“Oh, yes. She isn’t Tennyson’s *Maud* at all—not ‘faultily faultless,’ not she. She has a number of little golden freckles and her nose is—is——”

“Crooked?” suggested Miss Edgelow.

She smiled a bit.

“No—no—not crooked. I swear it’s not crooked. Just a trifle more than aquiline.”

Miss Edgelow was quite angry. She knew—let it be accounted unto her for vanity or not—that Romney was describing her to her face. He was trying out a scene for his story in all probability.

“It will be very witchlike when she grows old, no doubt.”

“Sylvia will never grow old,” said Romney. “She is the incarnation of eternal youth.”

“Does this paragon return your affection?” dared Miss Edgelow.

“Alas, no. She laughs at me. She mocks me. She doesn’t care for me at all. It’s just as well, of course. I can’t marry her, you see.”

“Why not?” Miss Edgelow’s lashes hid her eyes very securely.

“She is rich and going to be richer. I am poor and will probably be poorer. Besides, as aforesaid, she doesn’t and couldn’t care for me.”

“This,” thought Miss Edgelow, “is the point in the story where I should say, ‘Have you asked her?’ with the soft pedal on. I shall not say anything of

the sort. Instead I shall say:

“You are very likely correct in your opinion.”

“I know I am,” said Romney, folding his arms and scowling ferociously at space. “I know I am. But oh, you have no idea how madly I love her! How madly I shall always love her!”

“How many girls have you loved—always—before her?” asked Miss Edgelow impertinently.

“Not one. I never even fancied I loved before.”

“How uninteresting. Now I”—Miss Edgelow paused, and went through the motions of a blush—“I have been in love, or imagined myself in love, several times. Three, to be exact. Yet I am soundly heart-whole at the present moment. So you see there is hope of your ultimate recovery.”

“I shall never recover. I don’t want to recover. Why didn’t you marry those men?”

“It is not permitted to marry three men,” said Miss Edgelow plaintively. “And there were other reasons. One of them was a young lawyer. He was the handsomest man I have ever known.”

“He had piggy eyes. I swear he had piggy eyes,” said Romney viciously.

“He had *not*. And he made love so artistically. It was quite a pleasure to listen to him.”

“He must have had heaps of practice”—still more viciously.

“The same idea occurred to me,” said Miss Edgelow composedly. “I think that was why I didn’t marry him. A man with a talent like that *couldn’t* bury it in a napkin. He’d have to keep on using it. The second object of my affections was a professor of McGill. He was the cleverest man I ever met.”

“Moon-face, pursy-mouth, tortoise-shell glasses! I can see him,” said Romney.

“He was very intellectual looking,” murmured Miss Edgelow. “And yet he asked me my opinion about things. That was his way of making love. It was agreeable. But I had a presentiment that after we were married he would stop asking my opinions. That would *not* be agreeable.”

“There was a third, I think,” said Romney, seeing that Miss Edgelow had lapsed into apparent reverie.

“Oh yes, there *was* a third. Note the tense. He is—was—moderately good looking and moderately clever. I think I liked him better than any of the others.”

“Why didn’t you marry him?”

“He didn’t ask me to. He—he told me he loved another lady. He even described her to me, talked to me about her. I couldn’t with any self-respect care for him one moment after that, could I?”

Miss Edgelow shot an upward glance at Romney before her concluding

words. Romney remembered what Samuel had said old Mary Edgelow had said, “She can’t help making eyes at any man who happens to be around.”

“She is luring me on,” he thought miserably. “I won’t *be* lured. She can laugh at me in her sleeve but she shall not have the satisfaction of laughing at me openly!”

He strode on in silence. They turned at the gate and walked back. At the entrance to the lane they paused. The old Edgelow house and garden, drowned in lilac sunset light, incredibly delicate and elusive, lay below them in a dip of the long Hill. They stood and looked down on it. After a long silence Miss Edgelow said dreamily:

“It is a house of memories. I am haunted by them. So many Edgelow women, and all unhappy! There has never been a happy Edgelow woman; or if they were happy they were never happy long. Some of them deserved their unhappiness; some of them didn’t. I wonder”—Miss Edgelow looked reflective—“in which class I shall belong.”



"What will they do to me for telling lies?" asked Samuel. "You won't let her snuff him out, will you?"

"She has taken a new tack. She is trying to play on my sympathy now," thought Romney. "She is not content with my veiled avowal. She must have my scalp to dangle openly at her belt. She can't claim it yet because her name is not Sylvia."

"Some of the Edgelow men were to blame for their women's unhappiness, weren't they?" he said.

"Yes, some. I think Uncle Jim must have been a horrid sort of husband. I was here one summer when I was a little girl. I have never forgotten Aunt Fanny's eyes. She died by inches through the years. Most of the other tragedies were sudden and speedy."

"Tell me about them—if you don't mind talking about them."

"Oh, I don't. I'm rather proud of my family ghosts and demons. I shall be one of them some day, and I shall come and haunt this old place. Our house in Montreal isn't really ghostable. I shall wander about this old garden and my ghost chum will be Thyra Edgelow, Great-uncle Fairfax's bride. Just a few weeks after her marriage she went gayly out to those woods away over there to gather nuts—and never returned."

"What happened to her?"

"That question has been asked a thousand times—and never answered. She simply vanished from among the living that autumn afternoon. No trace of her was ever discovered. Some thought she must have been drowned in the river and her body swept out to sea. Some thought—but there were all sorts of surmises. She hadn't wanted to marry Fairfax Edgelow, it seems. She was a gay, merry creature.

"Then there were Tom and Dorothy Edgelow. They were married children; he was nineteen and she was seventeen. They had one glorious summer in that old house at least. He was Grandfather Edgelow's brother. They both died in the same week of typhoid. Great-aunt Edith was a wonderful musician and very ambitious. One of her hands was so mangled by a door slamming on it that she could never play again. She went insane brooding over it. Uncle Jim's sister, Aunt Lilian, was killed by lightning in the room I sleep in, struck while trying on her wedding dress. The Edgelow fate seems to have a special hatred of our brides. None of us have been happy in our love affairs. It's the old Edgelow curse, you know. We have a family curse as well as a family feud, you see."

"I never heard of the curse. What of it?"

"My great-great-great-grandfather, Thomas Edgelow, was a harsh creditor. He sold out at a chattel mortgage sale the household possessions of a poor old woman. She cursed him and his descendants. 'Your woman shall never be happy,' she said. 'One and all they shall die in sorrow, as I die.' She hanged herself that night. Do you believe in curses? I don't. But it is the truth that there has never since that day been a happy Edgelow woman, whether she was Edgelow by birth or Edgelow by marriage.

"Uncle Jim's father was blinded by an explosion of his gun three months after he was married to Cora Graham, the great beauty. And after that he made her life wretched through his jealousy for fifty years. For they lived together that long and he never seemed to realize that she had grown old. He was as madly jealous of her when she was seventy as when she was twenty.

"Katherine Edgelow was jilted by her lover. She never went out of that house afterward except once. When her false lover was married in Clifton Church she dressed herself in widow's weeds and went to the wedding. She stood a little behind the bridal party during the ceremony; nobody dared

interfere with her. The bride fainted when she turned and saw her. Katherine was living when I was here that summer long ago. She was incredibly old and I was terribly frightened.

“But the bitterest of our ghosts must be Great-great-grandmother Edgelow. She was jealous. She thought her husband loved Adella Cooper. That was the beginning of the Edgelow-Cooper feud, you know.”

“No, I didn’t know. I never knew what began it—thought it was something trivial. What did your great-great-grandmother do?”

“She met her husband one night when he was returning, so she thought, from Adella, and threw vitriol in his face. He was blinded for life.”

Romney shuddered. The sun had dropped into a bank of western cloud and a chill and a shadow swept over Hill o’ the Winds and rolled down its sides to the valley.

“At least she was in earnest. She didn’t play at loving,” he said, as they turned away.

“No; but wouldn’t it have been better if she had?” retorted Miss Edgelow.

“Undoubtedly. Yet I think I rather like ladies who love in earnest.”

“Would your Sylvia love in earnest?”

“If she loved me at all. But you see she doesn’t.”

“Are you quite sure she doesn’t?”

“Quite.”

“And you are quite sure you couldn’t marry her if she did?”

“Quite.”

“So it is a blessing she doesn’t?”

“Exactly.”

Miss Edgelow turned to the gate that opened from the Whispering Lane into the Edgelow garden.

“I think,” she said, “that I am going to be very busy for the rest of my stay here.”

“I shall be—busy—too,” said Romney gloomily.

“Oh, yes, you have your serial to finish.”

Romney wondered how she knew he was writing a serial. He had never said anything to her about it.

“Yes,” he said very briskly. “I must really hurry up with it. My time is nearly up—only three weeks more.”

“And since we are both going to be so—busy—we may as well say a polite good-by now,” said Miss Edgelow. She held out her hand. Romney took it, gave it the requisite friendly pressure, dropped it.

“Good-by, Miss Edgelow,” he said. He lifted his hat and went away whistling. Miss Edgelow, holding her head very high, went back to the Edgelow house.

Old Jim was, as usual, reading in his library.

"Romney Cooper has just told me that he can't marry me."

"Did you ask him to, pray?"

"I think I did."

"And he refused you."

"Practically."

"Then he has more sense than any Cooper ever had before," said old Jim, returning to his book.

"Nobody takes me seriously," mourned Miss Edgelow. "I suppose I must be fundamentally light. Well, isn't that better than destroying my husband's sight with vitriol, Uncle Jim? Wouldn't *you* rather have a wife who laughed at you than one who threw vitriol at you?"

"My wife did neither," said old Jim significantly.

"But she died young," thought Miss Edgelow. She did not say it aloud; there were some things it would not do to say to old Jim. She went up to her room and peeped out. There was a light in the tower room.

"He is busy at his story," said Miss Edgelow. "I don't think he got much material for it from me this evening—of the kind he wanted, anyhow. I wonder what a subeditor's salary is."

Then, oddly enough, Miss Edgelow lay down on her bed, buried her face in a pillow and—cried.

Romney was not writing. He was bunched moodily up in a chair. Aunt Elizabeth was knitting lace. Samuel was building a pen in the back yard for a couple of pet snakes. Samuel was very happy.

CHAPTER VII.

Samuel was happier still for the next two weeks. Romney was his own again. He kept no more trysts in the Whispering Lane, but devoted himself to Samuel. They fished and swam and lounged together. The tower room was forsaken and Romney's pen rusted on his inkstand.

Sometimes he saw Miss Edgelow and her golden balls of fluff in the Edgelow garden, but she never looked his way. Quite often he heard her singing gayly. Soon after that he always whistled gayly. Peace and contentment apparently, brooded over Hill o' the Winds.

Only Aunt Elizabeth was slightly worried. Romney's appetite was poor. Her choicest delicacies did not tempt him; neither did Cousin Clorinda's. Romney had been down to see Cousin Clorinda quite often through the summer, but he had never talked to her of Sylvia, and Cousin Clorinda could not ask him to. Now he went down on another cool, rainy evening when the fogs were coming in on the east wind and the valley was gray and hidden.

"Beloved, how long can two weeks be?" he asked her.

"That depends," she said.

"On what?"

"In your case I think it would depend on Sylvia," said Cousin Clorinda boldly, and anxiously. She did not like Romney's lack of appetite and hollowness of eye any better than Aunt Elizabeth.

"There is no such lady as Sylvia," said Romney. "She is such stuff as dreams are made of."

"What about Miss Edgelow then?"

"An amusing young person. I haven't been talking to her lately."

"For two weeks, to be exact," said Cousin Clorinda. She rocked slowly in her chair and looked at him very maternally. Romney had a queer fleeting feeling that he would like to lay his head on her breast and cry as he used to do long ago when he got hurt, and have her stroke his head and say, "Never mind, be brave; you'll soon feel better."

"Make a clean breast of it to me," said Cousin Clorinda.

"You weren't very sympathetic the last time I tried to talk to you about her."

"I don't suppose I'll be sympathetic now either. But it'll do you good to talk it out. What did you quarrel over?"

"We didn't quarrel. She just dismissed me. I suppose she had got all the amusement out of me that she expected—or wanted."

"Tell me every word both of you said," ordered Cousin Clorinda. Romney

did. He had no difficulty in remembering them; they were all too deeply impressed. Cousin Clorinda listened and rocked gently. After he had finished she continued to rock so long that Romney wondered if she meant to say anything at all. Finally she said:

“Poor girl!”

“Poor—*what?*”

“Poor girl,” repeated Cousin Clorinda.

“Why do you pity *her*?” cried Romney, aggrieved.

“Because it must be very hard to be as deeply in love as she is with a young man so utterly insensate and blind and pig-headed as you,” said Cousin Clorinda calmly.

“Why—thank you.” Romney was very sarcastic. “Thank you. I haven’t received so many compliments for a long time. Insensate?”

“Yes, insensate. A girl like Dorcas Edgelow practically offers herself to you and you practically flout her.”

“Cousin—Clorinda!”

“Blind because you can’t see that she’s dying for you. Pig-headed because you would rather destroy her happiness and your own than ask Jim Edgelow’s heiress to marry you.”

“Dearest, you are simply darkening counsel by words without knowledge. Miss Edgelow doesn’t care a snap of her lovely, slender fingers for me. I came to you for the bread of comfort, Cousin Clorinda, and you give me the stone of ridicule.”

“Go back to Hill o’ the Winds; go to Dorcas Edgelow; say to her, ‘I love you. Will you marry me?’ Then if she says ‘no’ come back to me and I’ll give you all the comfort and sympathy you can desire.”

“I can’t do that,” said Romney stubbornly. “Besides, I have done it—practically, as you say. I’ve told her I loved Sylvia. She knows well enough who Sylvia is.”

“Yes, and immediately after telling her you informed her that you were too poor to marry her. Romney, are you really so very poor?”

“I am. Worse, I’m in debt to my doctor. I’ve been depending on paying him off with the cash I’d get for my serial this fall. And now I can’t get it written, not in a salable way anyhow. Job’s turkey was a capitalist compared to me.”

“And have you no chance of promotion?”

“Not at present. Not for years, if ever. I suppose the truth is I’m lacking in enterprise, Cousin Clorinda. I’m not a pusher. And I’ve dilly-dallied a bit, I know—drifted. You see, it didn’t seem to matter. As long as I could pay my own way and enjoy life after my own fashion I was contented. I didn’t believe I’d ever really meet Sylvia. So I’ve rather been sidetracked.”

"Get back to the main line and hustle," said Cousin Clorinda.

"Too late. I can't ask her to wait for years for me. Besides, she wouldn't."

"Then forget her."

"I can't."

"Then for goodness' sake," said Cousin Clorinda in exasperation, "try some of my ginger snaps."

So, after all, Romney didn't get much sympathy from Cousin Clorinda. He went back to Hill o' the Winds feeling that she thought him a rather poor sort of critter. Well, so he was. He was a failure, an utter, arrant failure. He had failed in everything in which a man ought to succeed. No wonder Sylvia laughed at him! No wonder Sylvia mocked him! He even wondered that she thought him worth while flirting with. How deep her eyes were, how perfect the curve of her throat, how kissable the sweet red curve of her mouth! Romney groaned.

"Matter?" queried Samuel, appearing suddenly halfway up the Hill, his wet, laughing face dimly visible in the rainy twilight. "Sick?"

"No. But you will be here in this cold east rain with nothing on your back but a torn shirt. Hustle home and dry yourself! You have a cold now."

"Oh, I'm a fish," said Samuel. "Rain never hurts me, no more'n a frog. But *you* had new ammonia. You gotter be careful."

"I'm not going to be careful," said Romney recklessly. "It would have been better for me if the pneumonia had made an end of me. Samuel, were you ever so unhappy that every beat of your heart hurt you?"

"Nope," said Samuel laconically. "You feeling that way?" he added uneasily.

"Samuel," said Romney, "if I could just be snuffed out to-night—like a candle—I'd like it."

"All on account o' that Edgelow skirt, I s'pose," said Samuel, less disdainfully than usual, however. A close observer might have thought that he felt a trifle less satisfied with himself than before.

"Samuel," said Romney, "never fall in love."

Samuel thought this warning totally unnecessary. But he was worried. He knew Romney well enough by this time to know that the more airily he talked of anything the more deeply he felt. When Romney was indifferent he talked quite earnestly. Samuel, when he went to bed that night, wished that after all he had not told Miss Edgelow certain things. He wished it hard for quite a while and then he gave up wishing anything except that he might get warm and stop shivering. Next day his uncle sent for the doctor.

Samuel was sick for a week before Miss Edgelow heard of his illness through her uncle's housekeeper. She went right down to the hollow. Romney was there, waiting on him. Samuel would have no one else, though they had

brought a nurse up from Clifton. He was delirious but he always knew Romney.

“Pneumonia?” asked Miss Edgelow.

Romney nodded. He looked worn and ill himself, for he had not slept much during the week and he was worried over Samuel. He didn’t know how fond of Samuel he was until the doctor looked grave over the child.

“Yes, double pneumonia. We’re doing all we can for him. But he’s worried over something. It’s against him.”

“What is it?”

“We don’t know. He keeps saying, ‘I wish I hadn’t told her,’ and begging me to put things straight. I promise to do so, but I haven’t an idea what he means and I don’t think he has any confidence that I’m doing what I promise.”

“Can I see him?”

“Oh, yes. But it isn’t likely he’ll recognize you.”

Samuel was lying on his bed, staring at the ceiling with dull, fevered eyes. It was not clear whether he recognized Miss Edgelow or not. But he appealed to her.

“They was all lies, you know. You’ll tell her, won’t you?”

“Yes, yes, dear.”

She was very gentle and motherly as she took Samuel’s thin, strangely white and clean little paw. Romney saw a look on her face, an expression of her spirit that he had never seen before.

“He never said one of those things. I made ’em up. Tell her that. *You’ll* get it straighter than *he* would. *He’d* mix it all up. *He* talks all round things. *He* never goes to the point. *You* tell her.”

“I’ll tell her. I’ll make her understand,” promised Miss Edgelow.

“What’ll they do to me for telling lies?” queried Samuel.

“Who, dear?”

“The fellers up there.” Samuel pointed to the ceiling. “God—and the rest.”

“Oh! Oh, they’ll forgive you, dear, if you’re sorry.”

“I am sorry. I wisht I hadn’t. It’s made him want to be snuffed out. I don’t want him to be snuffed out. *You* won’t”—Samuel gripped her hand—“*you* won’t let her snuff him out, will you?”

“She shall not snuff him out,” promised Miss Edgelow solemnly.

“I made Pink Raymer up, too,” said Samuel. “There ain’t no Pink Raymer, only in a book. I took him out of the book. You’ll put him back in the book, won’t you?”

“Yes, dear.”

“And shut the cover tight?”

“Yes.”

“Now, mind, you mustn’t let her snuff him out,” said Samuel.

The nurse came in then and Miss Edgelow went out. She did not look at Romney. She paid very little attention to Romney for the next week, though she saw him every day when she came to see Samuel. Samuel was delirious at times yet, but he had evidently given up worrying. Only when he saw Miss Edgelow he always said, "You won't let her snuff him out, will you?" and Miss Edgelow always replied, "No, I won't let her snuff him out." But she never looked at Romney.

On the evening of the day when Samuel "took the turn" for the better Romney went to the Whispering Lane. It was three weeks since he had walked there. Miss Edgelow was standing in the shadow of the beeches. Their gloom threw still darker shadows on her glossy hair and deepened the luster of her long blue eyes. She had a kitten on her shoulder and her dress was a young-leaf green with a scarlet girdle. Beyond her were tossing young maples whitening in the wind, with glimpses of the purple valley beyond them.

Romney came up close to her and looked down at her. He was tired and pale but there was an air of triumph about him.

"Your name isn't Sylvia——" he began.

"But it is," said Miss Edgelow. "Sylvia Dorcas Edgelow. I am always called Sylvia at home. Uncle Jim hates the name. He has always called me Dorcas."

Romney tried again.

"You are your uncle's heiress—and I——"

"I am not. Uncle Jim hasn't ever had any intention of leaving me a cent. His will was made years ago; he has left everything to found a library in Clifton. He thinks I don't know that but I do. Old Cousin Mary told me."

"You have been brought up in luxury and——"

"I was brought up in comfort and father gave me a year at school in Paris. After I came back I graduated in domestic science at Macdonald. I can make bread; I can make my own clothes, the number of useful things I can do is quite appalling."

"I am poor but——"

"Honest."

"Sylvia, you *must* stop interrupting me! I cannot allow my wife to interrupt me."

"You are too poor to keep a wife."

"I'm *not*. I have a letter here in my pocket—hear it crackling—from Clifford Hughes, offering me the head-editorship of the four magazines he owns. The salary will keep us very comfortably. Besides, 'to him that hath shall be given.' Aunt Elizabeth told me this morning that she had made her will when she took that trip down to Clifton last week and had left everything she owned to me, except the Chippendale sideboard, which is to go to Doctor

John, and the colored egg dish, which is to go to Cousin Clorinda. As it happens, the sideboard and the colored egg dish are the only things of Aunt Elizabeth's I've ever coveted. But it means something to me to know that some day my—my—let us say my grandchildren will inherit this old place. So now will you be good?"

"Have you finished your serial?" asked Miss Edgelow inconsequently.

"No. I'm working it up to the grand climax now, though. It's coming out better than I expected. How did you know about it?"

"Samuel told me. He also told me you experimented with girls and put their reactions into your stories. At least, he did not use those words, but that is what he implied."

"Little beast! But I *did* put you in that serial, Sylvia. Only you were so unmanageable after I had got you in, you persisted in snuffing the hero out."

"Well, you know"—Sylvia looked straight into his eyes—"I promised Samuel I wouldn't do that any more."

It might have been an hour or a hundred years afterward that Romney said:

"I want to kiss each of your freckles one by one. It will take some time."

"Aren't you afraid to marry me?" asked Sylvia. "There is the curse, you know."

"*You* will be a happy woman. A curse is worked out in four generations. You are the fifth. It has spent its force, as all evil things must do. The Edgelow tradition of unhappiness will vanish with the old feud. *You* will not disappear nor go insane nor throw vitriol at your husband."

"And you," said Sylvia, "will not open my letters nor give me a silk dress I don't want and refuse me a new hat I do—nor jilt me?"

"It's a bargain," said Romney.

Old Jim Edgelow was reading in his library.

"Uncle Jim," said Sylvia, "I am going to marry Romney Cooper in six weeks' time."

She was really afraid. Nobody ever knew just how old Jim would react to anything. But old Jim Edgelow had been governed by contraries all his life. He loved to disappoint people. He would rather disappoint them agreeably than not at all. He shut his book, took off his glasses and said:

"Marry him then and be hanged to you! It will infuriate old Elizabeth Cooper, anyhow."

"She didn't seem very angry," said Sylvia.

"What! Does she know of it already?"

"Oh, yes. We went right to her as soon as we became engaged. She said, 'God bless you.' It was old-fashioned, of course," said Sylvia meditatively,

“but I think I liked it.”

Uncle Jim replaced his glasses and opened his book.

“Those whom Elizabeth Cooper has joined together let not James Edgelow put asunder,” he said.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Hill O' the Winds* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]