

BARR ROBERT

ONE DAY'S COURTSHIP,
AND THE HERALDS OF
FAME

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and The Heralds of Fame**

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Chapter I

John Trenton, artist, put the finishing touches to the letter he was writing, and then read it over to himself. It ran as follows:—

“My Dear Ed.,

“I sail for England on the 27th. But before I leave I want to have another look at the Shawenegan Falls. Their roar has been in my ears ever since I left there. That tremendous hillside of foam is before my eyes night and day. The sketches I took are not at all satisfactory, so this time I will bring my camera with me, and try to get some snapshots at the falls.

“Now, what I ask is this. I want you to hold that canoe for me against all comers for Tuesday. Also, those two expert half-breeds. Tell them I am coming, and that there is money in it if they take me up and back as safely as they did before. I don't suppose there will be much demand for the canoe on that day; in fact, it astonishes me that Americans, who appreciate the good things of our country better than we do ourselves, practically know nothing of this superb cataract right at their own doors. I suppose your new canoe is not finished yet, and as the others are up in the woods I write so that you will keep this particular craft for me. I do not wish to take any risks, as I leave so soon. Please drop me a note to this hotel at Quebec, and I will meet you in Le Gres on Tuesday morning at daybreak.

“Your friend,

“John Trenton.”

Mason was a millionaire and a lumber king, but every one called him Ed. He owned baronial estates in the pine woods, and saw-mills without number. Trenton had brought a letter of introduction to him from a mutual friend in Quebec, who had urged the artist to visit the Shawenegan Falls. He heard the Englishman inquire about the cataract, and told him that he knew the man who would give him every facility for reaching the falls. Trenton's acquaintance with Mason was about a fortnight old, but already they were the firmest of friends. Any one who appreciated the Shawenegan Falls found a ready path to the heart of the big lumberman. It was almost impossible to reach the falls without the assistance of Mr. Mason. However, he was no monopolist. Any person wishing to visit the cataract got a canoe from the lumber king free of all cost, except a tip to the two boatmen who acted as guides and watermen. The artist had not long to wait for his answer. It was—

“My Dear John,

“The canoe is yours; the boatmen are yours: and the Shawenegan is yours for Tuesday. Also,

“I am yours,

“E. Mason.”

On Monday evening John Trenton stepped off the C. P. R. train at Three Rivers. With a roughing-it suit on, and his camera slung over his shoulders, no one would have taken him for the successful landscape artist who on Piccadilly was somewhat particular about his attire.

John Trenton was not yet R. A., nor even A. R. A., but all his friends would tell you that, if the Royal Academy was not governed by a clique, he would have been admitted long ago, and that anyhow it was only a question of time. In fact, John admitted this to himself, but to no one else.

He entered the ramshackle 'bus, and was driven a long distance through very sandy streets to the hotel on the St. Lawrence, and, securing a room, made arrangements to be called before daybreak. He engaged the same driver who had taken him out to "The Greys," as it was locally called, on the occasion of his former visit.

The morning was cold and dark. Trenton found the buckboard at the door, and he put his camera under the one seat—a kind of a box for the holding of bits of harness and other odds and ends. As he buttoned up his overcoat he noticed that a great white steamer had come in the night, and was tied up in front of the hotel.

"The Montreal boat," explained the driver.

As they drove along the silent streets of Three Rivers, Trenton called to mind how, on the former occasion, he thought the Lower Canada buckboard by all odds, the most uncomfortable vehicle he had ever ridden in, and he felt that his present experience was going to corroborate this first impression. The seat was set in the centre, between the front and back wheels, on springy boards, and every time the conveyance jolted over a log—a not unfrequent occurrence—the seat went down and the back bent forward, as if to throw him over on the heels of the patient horse.

The road at first was long and straight and sandy, but during the latter part of the ride there were plenty of hills, up many of which a plank roadway ran; so that loads which it would be impossible to take through the deep sand, might be hauled up the steep incline.

At first the houses they passed had a dark and deserted look; then a light twinkled here and there. The early habitant was making his fire. As daylight began gradually to bring out the landscape, the sharp sound of the distant axe was heard. The early habitant was laying in his day's supply of firewood.

"Do you notice how the dawn slowly materialises the landscape?" said the artist to the boy beside him.

The boy saw nothing wonderful about that. Daylight always did it.

"Then it is not unusual in these parts? You see, I am very seldom up at this hour."

The boy wished that was his case.

"Does it not remind you of a photographer in a dark room carefully developing a landscape plate? Not one of those rapid plates, you know, but a slow, deliberate plate."

No, it didn't remind him of anything of the kind. He had never seen either a slow or a rapid plate developed.

"Then you have no prejudices as to which is the best developer, pyrogallic acid or ferrous oxalate, not to mention such recent decoctions as eikonogen, quinol, and others?"

No, the boy had none.

"Well, that's what I like. I like a young man whose mind is open to conviction."

The boy was not a conversational success. He evidently did not enter into the spirit of the artist's remarks. He said most people got off at that point and walked to warm up, and asked Trenton if he would not like to follow their example.

"No, my boy," said the Englishman, "I don't think I shall. You see, I have paid for this ride, and I want to get all I can out of it. I shall shiver here and try to get the worth of my money. But with you it is different. If you want to get down, do so. I will drive."

The boy willingly handed over the reins, and sprang out on the road. Trenton, who was a boy himself that morning, at once whipped up the horse and dashed down the hill to get away from the

driver. When a good half-mile had been worried out of the astonished animal, Trenton looked back to see the driver come panting after. The young man was calmly sitting on the back part of the buckboard, and when the horse began to walk again, the boy slid off, and, without a smile on his face, trotted along at the side.

“That fellow has evidently a quiet sense of humour, although he is so careful not to show it,” said Trenton to himself.

On reaching the hilltop, they caught a glimpse of the rim of the sun rising gloriously over the treetops on the other side of the St. Maurice River. Trenton stopped the horse, and the boy looked up to see what was wrong. He could not imagine any one stopping merely to look at the sun.

“Isn’t that splendid?” cried Trenton, with a deep breath, as he watched the great globe slowly ascend into the sky. The distant branches of the trees were delicately etched against its glowing surface, and seemed to cling to it like tendrils, slipping further and further down as the sun leisurely disentangled itself, and at last stood in its incomparable grandeur full above the forest.

The woods all around had on their marvellous autumn tints, and now the sun added a living lustre to them that made the landscape more brilliant than anything the artist had ever seen before.

“Ye gods!” he cried enthusiastically, “that scene is worth coming from England to have one glimpse of.”

“See here,” said the driver, “if you want to catch Ed. Mason before he’s gone to the woods you’ll have to hurry up. It’s getting late.”

“True, O driver. You have brought me from the sun to the earth. Have you ever heard of the person who fell from the sun to the earth?”

No, he hadn’t.

“Well, that was before your time. You will never take such a tumble. I—I suppose they don’t worship the sun in these parts?”

No, they didn’t.

“When you come to think of it, that is very strange. Have you ever reflected that it is always in warm countries they worship the sun? Now, I should think it ought to be just the other way about. Do you know that when I got on with you this morning I was eighty years old, every day of it. What do you think my age is now?”

“Eighty years, sir.”

“Not a bit of it. I’m eighteen. The sun did it. And yet they claim there is no fountain of youth. What fools people are, my boy!”

The young man looked at his fare slyly, and cordially agreed with him.

“You certainly *have* a concealed sense of humour,” said the artist.

They wound down a deep cut in the hill, and got a view of the lumber village—their destination. The roar of the waters tumbling over the granite rocks—the rocks from which the village takes its name—came up the ravine. The broad river swept in a great semicircle to their right, and its dark waters were flecked with the foam of the small falls near the village, and the great cataract miles up the river. It promised to be a perfect autumn day. The sky, which had seemed to Trenton overcast when they started, was now one deep dome of blue without even the suggestion of a cloud.

The buckboard drew up at the gate of the house in which Mr. Mason lived when he was in the lumber village, although his home was at Three Rivers. The old Frenchwoman, Mason’s housekeeper, opened the door for Trenton, and he remembered as he went in how the exquisite cleanliness of everything had impressed him during his former visit. She smiled as she recognised the genial Englishman. She had not forgotten his compliments in her own language on her housekeeping some months before, and perhaps she also remembered his liberality. Mr. Mason, she said, had gone to the river to see after the canoe, leaving word that he would return in a few minutes. Trenton, who knew the house, opened the door at his right, to enter the sitting-room and leave there his morning wraps, which the increasing warmth rendered no longer necessary. As he burst into the room in his

impetuous way, he was taken aback to see standing at the window, looking out towards the river, a tall young woman. Without changing her position, she looked slowly around at the intruder. Trenton's first thought was a hasty wish that he were better dressed. His roughing-it costume, which up to that time had seemed so comfortable, now appeared uncouth and out of place. He felt as if he had suddenly found himself in a London drawing-room with a shooting-jacket on. But this sensation was quickly effaced by the look which the beauty gave him over her shoulder. Trenton, in all his experience, had never encountered such a glance of indignant scorn. It was a look of resentment and contempt, with just a dash of feminine reproach in it.

"What have I done?" thought the unhappy man; then he stammered aloud, "I—I—really—I beg your pardon. I thought the—ah—room was empty."

The imperious young woman made no reply. She turned to the window again, and Trenton backed out of the room as best he could.

"Well!" he said to himself, as he breathed with relief the outside air again, "that was the rudest thing I ever knew a lady to do. She *is* a lady, there is no doubt of that. There is nothing of the backwoods about her. But she might at least have answered me. What have I done, I wonder? It must be something terrible and utterly unforgivable, whatever it is. Great heavens!" he murmured, aghast at the thought, "I hope that girl isn't going up to the Shawenegan Falls."

Trenton was no ladies' man. The presence of women always disconcerted him, and made him feel awkward and boorish. He had been too much of a student in higher art to acquire the smaller art of the drawing-room. He felt ill at ease in society, and seemed to have a fatal predilection for saying the wrong thing, and suffered the torture afterwards of remembering what the right thing would have been.

Trenton stood at the gate for a moment, hoping Mason would come. Suddenly he remembered with confusion that he was directly in range of those disdainful eyes in the parlour, and he beat a hasty retreat toward the old mill that stood by the falls. The roar of the turbulent water over the granite rocks had a soothing effect on the soul of the man who knew he was a criminal, yet could not for the life of him tell what his crime had been. Then he wandered up the river-bank toward where he saw the two half-breeds placing the canoe in the still water at the further end of the village. Half-way there he was relieved to meet the genial Ed. Mason, who greeted him, as Trenton thought, with a somewhat overwrought effusion. There evidently was something on the genial Ed.'s mind.

"Hello, old man," he cried, shaking Trenton warmly by the hand. "Been here long? Well, I declare, I'm glad to see you. Going to have a splendid day for it, aren't you? Yes, sir, I *am* glad to see you."

"When a man says that twice in one breath, a fellow begins to doubt him. Now, you good-natured humbug, what's the matter? What have I done? How did you find me out? Who turned Queen's evidence? Look here, Edward Mason, why are you *not* glad to see me?"

"Nonsense; you know I am. No one could be more welcome. By the way, my wife's here. You never met her, I think?"

"I saw a young lady remarkably—"

"No, no; that is Miss —. By the way, Trenton, I want you to do me a favour, now that I think of it. Of course the canoe is yours for to-day, but that young woman wants to go up to the Shawenegan. You wouldn't mind her going up with you, would you? You see, I have no other canoe to-day, and she can't stay till to-morrow."

"I shall be delighted, I'm sure," answered Trenton. But he didn't look it.

Chapter II

Eva Sommerton, of Boston, knew that she lived in the right portion of that justly celebrated city, and this knowledge was evident in the poise of her queenly head, and in every movement of her graceful form. Blundering foreigners—foreigners as far as Boston is concerned, although they may be citizens of the United States—considered Boston to be a large city, with commerce and railroads and busy streets and enterprising newspapers, but the true Bostonian knows that this view is very incorrect. The real Boston is penetrated by no railroads. Even the jingle of the street-car bell does not disturb the silence of the streets of this select city. It is to the ordinary Boston what the empty, out-of-season London is to the rest of the busy metropolis. The stranger, jostled by the throng, may not notice that London is empty, but his lordship, if he happens during the deserted period to pass through, knows there is not a soul in town.

Miss Sommerton had many delusions, but fortunately for her peace of mind she had never yet met a candid friend with courage enough to tell her so. It would have required more bravery than the ordinary society person possesses to tell Miss Sommerton about any of her faults. The young gentlemen of her acquaintance claimed that she had no faults, and if her lady friends thought otherwise, they reserved the expression of such opinions for social gatherings not graced by the presence of Miss Sommerton.

Eva Sommerton thought she was not proud, or if there was any tinge of pride in her character, it was pride of the necessary and proper sort.

She also possessed the vain belief that true merit was the one essential, but if true merit had had the misfortune to be presented to Miss Sommerton without an introduction of a strictly unimpeachable nature, there is every reason to fear true merit would not have had the exquisite privilege of basking in the smiles of that young Bostonian. But perhaps her chief delusion was the belief that she was an artist. She had learned all that Boston could teach of drawing, and this thin veneer had received a beautiful foreign polish abroad. Her friends pronounced her sketches really wonderful. Perhaps if Miss Sommerton's entire capital had been something less than her half-yearly income, she might have made a name for herself; but the rich man gets a foretaste of the scriptural difficulty awaiting him at the gates of heaven, when he endeavours to achieve an earthly success, the price of which is hard labour, and not hard cash.

We are told that pride must have a fall, and there came an episode in Miss Sommerton's career as an artist which was a rude shock to her self-complacency. Having purchased a landscape by a celebrated artist whose work she had long admired, she at last ventured to write to him and enclose some of her own sketches, with a request for a candid judgment of them—that is, she *said* she wanted a candid judgment of them.

The reply seemed to her so ungentlemanly, and so harsh, that, in her vexation and anger, she tore the letter to shreds and stamped her pretty foot with a vehemence which would have shocked those who knew her only as the dignified and self-possessed Miss Eva Sommerton.

Then she looked at her libelled sketches, and somehow they did not appear to be quite so faultless as she had supposed them to be.

This inspection was followed by a thoughtful and tearful period of meditation; and finally, with contriteness, the young woman picked up from her studio floor the shreds of the letter and pasted them carefully together on a white sheet of paper, in which form she still preserved the first honest opinion she had ever received.

In the seclusion of her aesthetic studio Miss Sommerton made a heroic resolve to work hard. Her life was to be consecrated to art. She would win reluctant recognition from the masters. Under all this wave of heroic resolution was an under-current of determination to get even with the artist who had treated her work so contemptuously.

Few of us quite live up to our best intentions, and Miss Sommerton was no exception to the rule. She did not work as devotedly as she had hoped to do, nor did she become a recluse from society. A year after she sent to the artist some sketches which she had taken in Quebec—some unknown waterfalls, some wild river scenery—and received from him a warmer letter of commendation than she had hoped for. He remembered her former sketches, and now saw a great improvement. If the waterfall sketches were not exaggerations, he would like to see the originals. Where were they? The lady was proud of her discoveries in the almost unknown land of Northern Quebec, and she wrote a long letter telling all about them, and a polite note of thanks for the information ended the correspondence.

Miss Sommerton's favourite discovery was that tremendous downward plunge of the St. Maurice, the Falls of Shawenegan. She had sketched it from a dozen different standpoints, and raved about it to her friends, if such a dignified young person as Miss Sommerton could be said to rave over anything. Some Boston people, on her recommendation, had visited the falls, but their account of the journey made so much of the difficulties and discomforts, and so little of the magnificence of the cataract, that our amateur artist resolved to keep the falls, as it were, to herself. She made yearly pilgrimages to the St. Maurice, and came to have a kind of idea of possession which always amused Mr. Mason. She seemed to resent the fact that others went to look at the falls, and, worse than all, took picnic baskets there, actually lunching on its sacred shores, leaving empty champagne bottles and boxes of sardines that had evidently broken some one's favourite knife in the opening. This particular summer she had driven out to "The Greys," but finding that a party was going up in canoes every day that week, she promptly ordered her driver to take her back to Three Rivers, saying to Mr. Mason she would return when she could have the falls to herself.

"You remind me of Miss Porter," said the lumber king.

"Miss Porter! Who is she?"

"When Miss Porter visited England and saw Mr. Gladstone, he asked her if she had ever seen the Niagara Falls. 'Seen them?' she answered. 'Why, I *own* them!'"

"What did she mean by that? I confess I don't see the point, or perhaps it isn't a joke."

"Oh yes, it is. You mustn't slight my good stories in that way. She meant just what she said. I believe the Porter family own, or did own, Goat Island, and, I suppose, the other bank, and, therefore, the American Fall. The joke—I do dislike to have to explain jokes, especially to you cool, unsympathising Bostonians—is the ridiculousness of any mere human person claiming to own such a thing as the Niagara Falls. I believe, though, that you are quite equal to it—I do indeed."

"Thank you, Mr. Mason."

"I knew you would be grateful when I made myself clearly understood. Now, what I was going to propose is this. You should apply to the Canadian Government for possession of the Shawenegan. I think they would let it go at a reasonable figure. They look on it merely as an annoying impediment to the navigation of the river, and an obstruction which has caused them to spend some thousands of dollars in building a slide by the side of it, so that the logs may come down safely."

"If I owned it, the slide is the first thing I would destroy."

"What? And ruin the lumber industry of the Upper St. Maurice? Oh, you wouldn't do such a thing! If that is your idea, I give you fair warning that I will oppose your claims with all the arts of the lobbyist. If you want to become the private owner of the falls, you should tell the Government that you have some thoughts of encouraging the industries of the province by building a mill—"

"A mill?"

"Yes; why not? Indeed, I have half a notion to put a saw-mill there myself. It always grieves me to see so much magnificent power going to waste."

"Oh, seriously, Mr. Mason, you would never think of committing such an act of sacrilege?"

“Sacrilege, indeed! I like that. Why, the man who makes one saw-mill hum where no mill ever hummed before is a benefactor to his species. Don't they teach political economy at Boston? I thought you liked saw-mills. You drew a very pretty picture of the one down the stream.”

“I admire a *ruined* saw-mill, as that one was; but not one in a state of activity, or of eruption, as a person might say.”

“Well, won't you go up to the falls to-day, Miss Sommerton? I assure you we have a most unexceptionable party. Why, one of them is a Government official. Think of that!”

“I refuse to think of it; or, if I do think of it, I refuse to be dazzled by his magnificence. I want to see the Shawenegan, not a picnic party drinking.

“You wrong them, really you do, Miss Sommerton, believe me. You have got your dates mixed. It is the champagne party that goes to-day. The beer crowd is not due until to-morrow.”

“The principle is the same.”

“The price of the refreshment is not. I speak as a man of bitter experience. Let's see. If recollection holds her throne, I think there was a young lady from New England—I forget the name of the town at the moment—who took a lunch with her the last time she went to the Shawenegan. I merely give this as my impression, you know. I am open to contradiction.”

“Certainly, I took a lunch. I always do. I would to-day if I were going up there, and Mrs. Mason would give me some sandwiches. You would give me a lunch, wouldn't you, dear?”

“I'll tell them to get it ready now, if you will only stay,” replied that lady, on being appealed to.

“No, it isn't the lunch I object to. I object to people going there merely *for* the lunch. I go for the scenery; the lunch is incidental.”

“When you get the deed of the falls, I'll tell you what we'll do,” put in Mason. “We will have a band of trained Indians stationed at the landing, and they will allow no one to disembark who does not express himself in sufficiently ecstatic terms about the great cataract. You will draw up a set of adjectives, which I will give to the Indians, instructing them to allow no one to land who does not use at least three out of five of them in referring to the falls. People whose eloquent appreciation does not reach the required altitude will have to stay there till it does, that's all. We will treat them as we do our juries—starve them into a verdict, and the right verdict at that.”

“Don't mind him, Eva. He is just trying to exasperate you. Think of what I have to put up with. He goes on like that all the time,” said Mrs. Mason.

“Really, my dear, your flattery confuses me. You can't persuade any one that I keep up this brilliancy in the privacy of my own house. It is only turned on for company.”

“Why, Mr. Mason, I didn't think you looked on me as company. I thought I enjoyed the friendship of the Mason family.”

“Oh, you do, you do indeed! The company I referred to was the official party which has just gone to the falls. This is some of the brilliancy left over. But, really, you had better stay after coming all this distance.”

“Yes, do, Eva. Let me go back with you to the Three Rivers, and then you stay with me till next week, when you can visit the falls all alone. It is very pleasant at Three Rivers just now. And besides, we can go for a day's shopping at Montreal.”

“I wish I could.”

“Why, of course you can,” said Mason. “Imagine the delight of smuggling your purchases back to Boston. Confess that this is a pleasure you hadn't thought of.”

“I admit the fascination of it all, but you see I am with a party that has gone on to Quebec, and I just got away for a day. I am to meet them there to-night or to-morrow morning. But I will return in the autumn, Mrs. Mason, when it is too late for the picnics. Then, Mr. Mason, take warning. I mean to have a canoe to myself, or—well, you know the way we Bostonians treated you Britishers once upon a time.”

“Distinctly. But we will return good for evil, and give you warm tea instead of the cold mixture you so foolishly brewed in the harbour.”

As the buckboard disappeared around the corner, and Mr. and Mrs. Mason walked back to the house, the lady said—

“What a strange girl Eva is.”

“Very. Don’t she strike you as being a trifle selfish?”

“Selfish? Eva Sommerton? Why, what could make you think such a thing? What an absurd idea! You cannot imagine how kind she was to me when I visited Boston.”

“Who could help it, my dear? I would have been so myself if I had happened to meet you there.”

“Now, Ed., don’t be absurd.”

“There is something absurd in being kind to a person’s wife, isn’t there? Well, it struck me her objection to any one else being at the falls, when her ladyship was there, might seem—not to me, of course, but to an outsider—a trifle selfish.”

“Oh, you don’t understand her at all. She has an artistic temperament, and she is quite right in wishing to be alone. Now, Ed., when she does come again I want you to keep anyone else from going up there. Don’t forget it, as you do most of the things I tell you. Say to anybody who wants to go up that the canoes are out of repair.”

“Oh, I can’t say that, you know. Anything this side of a crime I am willing to commit; but to perjure myself, no, not for Venice. Can you think of any other method that will combine duplicity with a clear conscience? I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I will have the canoe drawn up, and gently, but firmly, slit it with my knife. One of the men can mend it in ten minutes. Then I can look even the official from Quebec in the face, and tell him truly that the canoe will not hold water. I suppose as long as my story will hold water you and Miss Sommerton will not mind?”

“If the canoe is ready for her when she comes, I shall be satisfied. Please to remember I am going to spend a week or two in Boston next winter.”

“Oh ho, that’s it, is it? Then it was not pure philanthropy—”

“Pure nonsense, Ed. I want the canoe to be ready, that’s all.”

When Mrs. Mason received the letter from Miss Sommerton, stating the time the young woman intended to pay her visit to the Shawenegan, she gave the letter to her husband, and reminded him of the necessity of keeping the canoe for that particular date. As the particular date was some weeks off, and as Ed. Mason was a man who never crossed a stream until he came to it, he said, “All right,” put the letter in his inside pocket, and the next time he thought of it was on the fine autumn afternoon—Monday afternoon—when he saw Mrs. Mason drive up to the door of his lumber-woods residence with Miss Eva Sommerton in the buggy beside her. The young lady wondered, as Mr. Mason helped her out, if that genial gentleman, whom she regarded as the most fortunate of men, had in reality some secret, gnawing sorrow the world knew not of.

“Why, Ed., you look ill,” exclaimed Mrs. Mason; “is there anything the matter?”

“Oh, it is nothing—at least, not of much consequence. A little business worry, that’s all.”

“Has there been any trouble?”

“Oh no—at the least, not *yet*.”

“Trouble about the men, is it?”

“No, not about the men,” said the unfortunate gentleman, with a somewhat unnecessary emphasis on the last word.

“Oh, Mr. Mason, I am afraid I have come at a wrong time. If so, don’t hesitate to tell me. If I can do anything to help you, I hope I may be allowed.”

“You have come just at the right time,” said the lumberman, “and you are very welcome, I assure you. If I find I need help, as perhaps I may, you will be reminded of your promise.”

To put off as long as possible the evil time of meeting his wife, Mason went with the man to see the horse put away, and he lingered an unnecessarily long time in ascertaining that everything was

right in the stable. The man was astonished to find his master so particular that afternoon. A crisis may be postponed, but it can rarely be avoided altogether, and knowing he had to face the inevitable sooner or later, the unhappy man, with a sigh, betook himself to the house, where he found his wife impatiently waiting for him. She closed the door and confronted him.

“Now, Ed., what’s the matter?”

“Where’s Miss Sommerton?” was the somewhat irrelevant reply.

“She has gone to her room. Ed., don’t keep me in suspense. What is wrong?”

“You remember John Trenton, who was here in the summer?”

“I remember hearing you speak of him. I didn’t meet him, you know.”

“Oh, that’s so. Neither you did. You see, he’s an awful good fellow, Trenton is—that is, for an Englishman.”

“Well, what has Trenton to do with the trouble?”

“Everything, my dear—everything.”

“I see how it is. Trenton visited the Shawenegan?”

“He did.”

“And he wants to go there again?”

“He does.”

“And you have gone and promised him the canoe for to-morrow?”

“The intuition of woman, my dear, is the most wonderful thing on earth.”

“It is not half so wonderful as the negligence of man—I won’t say the stupidity.”

“Thank you, Jennie, for not saying it, but I really think I would feel better if you did.”

“Now, what are you going to do about it?”

“Well, my dear, strange as it may appear, that very question has been racking my brain for the last ten minutes. Now, what would you do in my position?”

“Oh, I couldn’t be in your position.”

“No, that’s so, Jennie. Excuse me for suggesting the possibility. I really think this trouble has affected my mind a little. But if you had a husband—if a sensible woman like you *could* have a husband who got himself into such a position—what would you advise him to do?”

“Now, Ed., don’t joke. It’s too serious.”

“My dear, no one on earth can have such a realisation of its seriousness as I have at this moment. I feel as Mark Twain did with that novel he never finished. I have brought things to a point where I can’t go any further. The game seems blocked. I wonder if Miss Sommerton would accept ten thousand feet of lumber f.o.b. and call it square.”

“Really, Ed., if you can’t talk sensibly, I have nothing further to say.”

“Well, as I said, the strain is getting too much for me. Now, don’t go away, Jennie. Here is what I am thinking of doing. I’ll speak to Trenton. He won’t mind Miss Sommerton’s going in the canoe with him. In fact, I should think he would rather like it.”

“Dear me, Ed., is that all the progress you’ve made? I am not troubling myself about Mr. Trenton. The difficulty will be with Eva. Do you think for a moment she will go if she imagined herself under obligations to a stranger for the canoe? Can’t you get Mr. Trenton to put off his visit until the day after tomorrow? It isn’t long to wait.”

“No, that is impossible. You see, he has just time to catch his steamer as it is. No, he has the promise in writing, while Miss Sommerton has no legal evidence if this thing ever gets into the courts. Trenton has my written promise. You see, I did not remember the two dates were the same. When I wrote to Trenton—”

“Ed., don’t try to excuse yourself. You had her letter in your pocket, you know you had. This is a matter for which there is no excuse, and it cannot be explained away.”

“That’s so, Jennie. I am down in the depths once more. I shall not try to crawl out again—at least, not while my wife is looking.”

“No, your plan will not work. I don’t know that any will. There is only one thing to try, and it is this—Miss Sommerton must think that the canoe is hers. You must appeal to her generosity to let Mr. Trenton go with her.”

“Won’t you make the appeal, Jen?”

“No, I will not. In the first place she’ll be sorry for you, because you will make such a bungle of it. Trial is your only hope.”

“Oh, if success lies in bungling, I will succeed.”

“Don’t be too sure. I suppose that man will be here by daybreak to-morrow?”

“Not so bad as that, Jennie. You always try to put the worst face on things. He won’t be here till sunrise at the earliest.”

“I will ask Eva to come down.”

“You needn’t hurry just because of me. Besides, I would like a few moments to prepare myself for my fate. Even a murderer is given a little time.”

“Not a moment, Ed. We had better get this thing settled as soon as possible.”

“Perhaps you are right,” he murmured, with a deep sigh. “Well, if we Britishers, as Miss S. calls us, ever faced the Americans with as faint a heart as I do now, I don’t wonder we got licked.”

“Don’t say ‘licked,’ Ed.”

“I believe it’s historical. Oh, I see. You object to the word, not to the allegation. Well, I won’t cavil about that. All my sympathy just now is concentrated on one unfortunate Britisher. My dear, let the sacrifice begin.”

Mrs. Mason went to the stairway and called—

“Eva, dear, can you come down for a moment? We want you to help us out of a difficulty.”

Miss Sommerton appeared smilingly, smoothing down the front of the dress that had taken the place of the one she travelled in. She advanced towards Mason with sweet compassion in her eyes, and that ill-fated man thought he had never seen any one look so altogether charming—excepting, of course, his own wife in her youthful days. She seemed to have smoothed away all the Boston stiffness as she smoothed her dress.

“Oh, Mr. Mason,” she said, sympathetically, as she approached, “I am so sorry anything has happened to trouble you, and I do hope I am not intruding.”

“Indeed, you are not, Miss Eva. In fact, your sympathy has taken away half the trouble already, and I want to beg of you to help me off with the other half.”

A glance at his wife’s face showed him that he had not made a bad beginning.

“Miss Sommerton, you said you would like to kelp me. Now I am going to appeal to you. I throw myself on your mercy.”

There was a slight frown on Mrs. Mason’s face, and her husband felt that he was perhaps appealing too much.

“In fact, the truth is, my wife gave me—”

Here a cough interrupted him, and he paused and ran his hand through his hair. “Pray don’t mind me, Mr. Mason,” said Miss Sommerton, “if you would rather not tell—”

“Oh, but I must; that is, I want you to know.”

He glanced at his wife, but there was no help there, so he plunged in headlong.

“To tell the truth, there is a friend of mine who wants to go to the falls tomorrow. He sails for Europe immediately, and has no other day.”

The Boston rigidity perceptibly returned.

“Oh, if that is all, you needn’t have had a moment’s trouble. I can just as well put off my visit.”

“Oh, can you?” cried Mason, joyously.

His wife sat down in the rocking-chair with a sigh of despair. Her infatuated husband thought he was getting along famously.

“Then your friends are not waiting for you at Quebec this time, and you can stay a day or two with us.”

“Eva’s friends are at Montreal, Edward, and she cannot stay.”

“Oh, then—why, then, to-morrow’s *your* only day, too?”

“It doesn’t matter in the least, Mr. Mason. I shall be most glad to put off my visit to oblige your friend—no, I didn’t mean that,” she cried, seeing the look of anguish on Mason’s face, “it is to oblige you. Now, am I not good?”

“No, you are cruel,” replied Mason. “You are going up to the falls. I insist on that. Let’s take that as settled. The canoe is yours.” He caught an encouraging look from his wife. “If you want to torture me you will say you will not go. If you want to do me the greatest of favours, you will let my friend go in the canoe with you to the landing.”

“What! go alone with a stranger?” cried Miss Sommerton, freezingly.

“No, the Indians will be there, you know.”

“Oh, I didn’t expect to paddle the canoe myself.”

“I don’t know about that. You strike me as a girl who would paddle her own canoe pretty well.”

“Now, Edward,” said his wife. “He wants to take some photographs of the falls, and—”

“Photographs? Why, Ed., I thought you said he was an artist.”

“Isn’t a photographer an artist?”

“You know he isn’t.”

“Well, my dear, you know they put on their signs, ‘artist—photographer, pictures taken in cloudy weather.’ But he’s an amateur photographer; an amateur is not so bad as a professional, is he, Miss Sommerton?”

“I think he’s worse, if there is any choice. A professional at least takes good pictures, such as they are.”

“He is an elderly gentleman, and I am sure—”

“Oh, is he?” cried Miss Sommerton; “then the matter is settled. He shall go. I thought it was some young fop of an amateur photographer.”

“Oh, quite elderly. His hair is grey, or badly tinged at least.”

The frown on Miss Sommerton’s brow cleared away, and she smiled in a manner that was cheering to the heart of her suppliant. He thought it reminded him of the sun breaking through the clouds over the hills beyond the St. Maurice.

“Why, Mr. Mason, how selfishly I’ve been acting, haven’t I? You really must forgive me. It is so funny, too, making you beg for a seat in your own canoe.”

“Oh no, it’s your canoe—that is, after twelve o’clock to-night. That’s when your contract begins.”

“The arrangement does not seem to me quite regular; but, then, this is the Canadian woods, and not Boston. But, I want to make my little proviso. I do not wish to be introduced to this man; he must have no excuse for beginning a conversation with me. I don’t want to talk to-morrow.”

“Heroic resolution,” murmured Mason.

“So, I do not wish to see the gentleman until I go into the canoe. You can be conveniently absent. Mrs. Perrault will take me down there; she speaks no English, and it is not likely he can speak French.”

“We can arrange that.”

“Then it is settled, and all I hope for is a good day to-morrow.”

Mrs. Mason sprang up and kissed the fair Bostonian, and Mason felt a sensation of joyous freedom that recalled his youthful days when a half-holiday was announced.

“Oh, it is too good of you,” said the elder lady.

“Not a bit of it,” whispered Miss Sommerton; “I hate the man before I have seen him.”

Chapter III

When John Trenton came in to breakfast, he found his friend Mason waiting for him. That genial gentleman was evidently ill at ease, but he said in an offhand way—

“The ladies have already breakfasted. They are busily engaged in the preparations for the trip, and so you and I can have a snack together, and then we will go and see to the canoe.”

After breakfast they went together to the river, and found the canoe and the two half-breeds waiting for them. A couple of rugs were spread on the bottom of the canoe rising over the two slanting boards which served as backs to the lowly seats.

“Now,” said Mason with a blush, for he always told a necessary lie with some compunction, “I shall have to go and see to one of my men who was injured in the mill this morning. You had better take your place in the canoe, and wait for your passenger, who, as is usual with ladies, will probably be a little late. I think you should sit in the back seat, as you are the heavier of the two. I presume you remember what I told you about sitting in a canoe? Get in with caution while these two men hold the side of it; sit down carefully, and keep steady, no matter what happens. Perhaps you may as well put your camera here at the back, or in the prow.”

“No,” said Trenton, “I shall keep it slung over my shoulder. It isn’t heavy, and I am always afraid of forgetting it if I leave it anywhere.”

Trenton got cautiously into the canoe, while Mason bustled off with a very guilty feeling at his heart. He never thought of blaming Miss Sommerton for the course she had taken, and the dilemma into which she placed him, for he felt that the fault was entirely his own.

John Trenton pulled out his pipe, and, absent-mindedly, stuffed it full of tobacco. Just as he was about to light it, he remembered there was to be a lady in the party, and so with a grimace of disappointment he put the loaded pipe into his pocket again.

It was the most lovely time of the year. The sun was still warm, but the dreaded black fly and other insect pests of the region had disappeared before the sharp frosts that occurred every night. The hilly banks of the St. Maurice were covered with unbroken forest, and “the woods of autumn all around, the vale had put their glory on.” Presently Trenton saw Miss Sommerton, accompanied by old Mrs. Perrault, coming over the brow of the hill. He attempted to rise, in order to assist the lady to a seat in the canoe, when the half-breed—said in French—:

“Better sit still. It is safer. We will help the lady.”

Miss Sommerton was talking rapidly in French—with rather overdone eagerness—to Mrs. Perrault. She took no notice of her fellow-voyager as she lightly stepped exactly in the centre of the canoe, and sank down on the rug in front of him, with the ease of one thoroughly accustomed to that somewhat treacherous craft. The two stalwart boatmen—one at the prow, the other at the stern of the canoe—with swift and dexterous strokes, shot it out into the stream. Trenton could not but admire the knowledge of these two men and their dexterous use of it. Here they were on a swiftly flowing river, with a small fall behind them and a tremendous cataract several miles in front, yet these two men, by their knowledge of the currents, managed to work their way up stream with the least possible amount of physical exertion. The St. Maurice at this point is about half a mile wide, with an island here and there, and now and then a touch of rapids. Sometimes the men would dash right across the river to the opposite bank, and there fall in with a miniature Gulf Stream that would carry them onward without exertion. Sometimes they were near the densely wooded shore, sometimes in the center of the river. The half-breed who stood behind Trenton, leant over to him, and whispered—

“You can now smoke if you like, the wind is down stream.”

Naturally, Mr. Trenton wished to smoke. The requesting of permission to do so, it struck him, might open the way to conversation. He was not an ardent conversationalist, but it seemed to him

rather ridiculous that two persons should thus travel together in a canoe without saying a word to each other.

“I beg your pardon, madam,” he began; “but would you have any objection to my smoking? I am ashamed to confess that I am a slave to the pernicious habit.”

There was a moment or two of silence, broken only by the regular dip of the paddle, then Miss Sommerton said, “If you wish to desecrate this lovely spot by smoking, I presume anything I can say will not prevent you.”

Trenton was amazed at the rudeness of this reply, and his face flushed with anger. Finally he said, “You must have a very poor opinion of me!”

Miss Sommerton answered tartly, “I have no opinion whatever of you.” Then, with womanly inconsistency, she proceeded to deliver her opinion, saying, “A man who would smoke here would smoke in a cathedral.”

“I think you are wrong there,” said Mr. Trenton, calmly. “I would smoke here, but I would not think of smoking in a cathedral. Neither would I smoke in the humblest log-cabin chapel.”

“Sir,” said Miss Sommerton, turning partly round, “I came to the St. Maurice for the purpose of viewing its scenery. I hoped to see it alone. I have been disappointed in that, but I must insist on seeing it in silence. I do not wish to carry on a conversation, nor do I wish to enter into a discussion on any subject whatever. I am sorry to have to say this, but it seems to be necessary.”

Her remarks so astonished Trenton that he found it impossible to get angrier than he had been when she first spoke. In fact, he found his anger receding rather than augmenting. It was something so entirely new to meet a lady who had such an utter disregard for the rules of politeness that obtain in any civilized society that Mr. Trenton felt he was having a unique and valuable experience.

“Will you pardon me,” he said, with apparent submissiveness—“will you pardon me if I disregard your request sufficiently to humbly beg forgiveness for having spoken to you in the first place?”

To this Miss Sommerton made no reply, and the canoe glided along.

After going up the river for a few miles the boatmen came to a difficult part of the voyage. Here the river was divided by an island. The dark waters moved with great swiftness, and with the smoothness of oil, over the concealed rocks, breaking into foam at the foot of the rapids. Now for the first time the Indians had hard work. For quite half an hour they paddled as if in despair, and the canoe moved upward inch by inch. It was not only hard work, but it was work that did not allow of a moment's rest until it was finished. Should the paddles pause but an instant, the canoe would be swept to the bottom of the rapids. When at last the craft floated into the still water above the rapids, the boatmen rested and mopped the perspiration from their brows. Then, without a word, they resumed their steady, easy swing of the paddle. In a short time the canoe drew up at a landing, from which a path ascended the steep hill among the trees. The silence was broken only by the deep, distant, low roar of the Shawenegan Falls. Mr. Trenton sat in his place, while the half-breeds held the canoe steady. Miss Sommerton rose and stepped with firm, self-reliant tread on the landing. Without looking backward she proceeded up the steep hill, and disappeared among the dense foliage. Then Trenton leisurely got out of the canoe.

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