

# The Dauntless Lylander by Winona Godfrey

### Henrietta Was His Only Heritage; Then Along Came Phyllis, and Trouble, and Amy

AFTER Aunt Jane died Lylander had begun to feel pretty tired of Iowa. Which was well, it seemed, for there had been something very like invitation in his Cousin Asa's voice as he knocked out his pipe on the porch rail.

"Well, Ly, I guess the car'll just about figure out what's comin' in you out of that stuff."

If he hadn't been feeling bad about Aunt Jane, who had been good to him always, Lylander would have uttered a whoop of derision. The "car" was good! From where he stood he could see its scarred carcass in the shed, a fiver of about the vintage of 1913, driver's side sagged from Asa's two hundred pounds, and was resting one foot while it leaned up against the weather. It was tired, there was no doubt about that, and only Lylander's continuous tinkering (a thing seeming positively inspired at times) persuaded it occasionally to saunter along the road to town.

Lylander understood Asa, who had never liked him much, and meant now that Lylander would not be passionately regretted if he "moved on." Lylander had indeed wondered, by no means infrequently, why he stayed. Now the only tie was broken, and to his sudden ecstasy, eyes that looked Henrietta's eyes, a championing steed prancing to be off, the western sun altar fire as a long-beckoning goal.

This does not happen to be a tale of any adventures of the long trail west. These paragraphs serve merely as a sketchy background to that fateful afternoon when Henrietta, after many vicissitudes, limped into a garage in an suburb of Los Angeles, and seemed to declare with a little bleat her intention to expire right there. Many times had Henrietta threatened to give up for good, but that dauntless tinkerer, Lylander, had always received and passed on to her some timely inspiration from the gods of mechanics which enabled her to proceed, if not with swiftness and elan, at least enabled her to proceed.

Lylander alighted from his alluring chariot, and administered with a practiced hand to its decrepitude, turning a grin and a deaf ear to the fabled comments of the sage woman. It was then—when he emerged dirty but triumphant—that it happened, the big car, all windshields and disk wheels and nickel and 17 kinds of deadwads, whizzed so lightly into the garage that it arrived with the very sound of its warning signal, missing Lylander by half an inch and Henrietta by less than half that, so that her poor old bones fairly jingled, though she was untouched.

The two ladies in the car squeaked a little, and the important-looking gentleman growled something, and the dapper chauffeur gave Lylander a basilisk glare. Our hero, seeing that he had been missed, merely smiled. The party seemed to notice him further, and devoted its attention to some slight irritation in the disposition of the magnificent one.

The ladies descended. The elder, evidently the mother, resembled the car considerably, being large and expensive-looking. The younger—ah! the beauty of language! Never had Lylander's heart been so ravished by a creature. She was not very big, nor very little, but just exactly right. She had hair like California sunshine and eyes like the California sky, and a mouth like the sweetest of California roses. She had the air of a little princess who rules by divine right, and she was dressed entirely up to the fashion hints for day after tomorrow; no, for week after next at least.

"Who ever loved, who loved not at first sight!"

Our poor Lylander felt a weakening in the knees, a tightening of the chest, a lift and a surge of the heart before it fluttered out of him into the keeping of this pearl of all girls!

"Phyllis," said her mother, "do be careful, this place is just full of grease."

Phyllis! Delicious name of Phyllis! Could she possibly have been called anything else? Positively not, O, Phyllis, Phyllis.

They did not appear to notice Lylander. They did not even deign to smile at Henrietta, though once mother stood so near that poor Henrietta was almost obscured, if you happened to be looking at her head-on.

To the enchanted Lylander it seemed not more than two fleeting minutes until the chauffeur had closed the door on the royal family and was taking his place at the wheel of the magnificent one. It could not be that she was going out of his sight forever—fate could not be so cruel. This was the love of his life—one knows that surely in a moment as well as in ten years. And here he stood idly while the miles multiplied between them! He flung himself into Henrietta, who stirred with a slight start, like a hummingbird nestling in a bright blossom.

He pursued the dream along the sunny highways that lead to the City of the Angels, and the country's charm seemed a part of that dream. The pepper trees, gorgeous in their clusters of red beads, the orange groves hung with gold and white, the blue hills in the distance, the humming vines, skylines of mountains, all the vivid colorings of poppy and hibiscus and bignonia, made it the land of enchantment where he was to pluck—oh, soon and surely—the flower of life. And as Henrietta jolted and rattled along, like a complaining but industrious old lady, Lylander was rehearsing a series of highly romantic ways in which he would make Phyllis's acquaintance. He had rescued her from every peril of a movie serial and received pledges of lifelong fealty from her grateful parents, when he sighted

a gas station from which was just departing—the car.

"That was some car that just left," he suggested hopefully to the lean gasman.

"You said it! Blongs to F. J. Willard, I understand. S'got more millions than they is nickels in a dollar, that car. Which was well, it seemed, for there had been something very like invitation in his Cousin Asa's voice as he knocked out his pipe on the porch rail.

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A diamond and platinum chain, value \$10,000! They stood staring at each other. Then Lylander wet his lips and whispered: "Where'd you get it?" "You know," her lips formed.

nouncing bargains in residences, lots and income property. Nobody needed a salesman, and the last man declining his services observed that "the real estate game is awfully overdone on this coast. You wouldn't get any money. That's what you want, too, I suppose."

"Sure," Lylander grinned. He walked thoughtfully down the street. Well—he would look about a bit—and believe in his luck.

He walked miles, going into all the houses open for inspection, tried to outline a selling talk, talked to several owners and agents, learning prices, saying he was just looking around. His spirits rose. Looked easy. Once you got in the game, that is. Now a tangle like this sold for \$12,000; at 5 per cent commission would be \$600. Pretty good day's work, what? Of course, unless you were on your own, you wouldn't get all of that and, of course, if you were on your own you might find it a little difficult to get listings. Anyway, after you'd sold a few houses, you'd have a tidy sum for—ah—options, and that, yes, it looked good.

Here was another attractive place of Spanish type, for sale by builder. He went in. Very nice. Everything in good taste, and—bridey-looking. He had an ecstatic vision of Phyllis! He found only one of the owner's cards—B. W. Anderson, address and phone—and he put it in his pocket, not for particular reason. Just then an automobile stopped in front, and an elderly lady and gentleman alighted, followed by a trim and sprightly figure—daughter, no doubt. She paused in the doorway to exclaim: "What a darling house! May we look around?"

"O, certainly," Lylander was smiling rather eagerly. "No reason sure why he shouldn't give himself a little rehearsal. 'If you will allow me—' and he began to open doors for them, to call attention to this convenience and that view, how pleasant it was to have the morning sun in the breakfast room, and in short made himself agreeable in a sincere boyish fashion. The Brownings were flatteringly responsive. Really it was just the sort of place they were looking for!

"And you design it yourself, Mr. Pratt?" Miss Browning (who was about 40) demanded.

"Oh—yes," said the startled Lylander. "It was built by Mr. Anderson."

"Then you're his agent. Really, Mr. Pratt, the place does suit us. We'll take business with you."

Lylander swallowed hard. "Fine!" He plucked Anderson's card from his pocket with a not very steady hand and quoted the price!

It seemed to be Miss Browning who had the money and the say-so, and it was plain that she was most amenable inclined toward Mr. Pratt. Papa Browning gave some advice, but obviously when his daughter made up her mind something permanent had occurred.

Lylander's own car had a strange tinge to his own ears as he promised to see Mr. Anderson at once, arrange for him to meet the Brownings, and so forth. Miss Browning, having talked herself into enthusiasm, was determined to clinch the bargain right now. No one must get in ahead of her—get her house! All vivaciously, she insisted on giving Lylander a check for \$100 to show her good faith.

When he had bowed and smiled and thanked and got rid of the Brownings, Lylander mopped his brow, not at all certain whether he had made a good start for heaven or jail. Of course, he had no right to do what he had done, and he couldn't understand yet how he'd done it—but just the same he had sold Anderson's house for him. To put it briefly, he found Ander-

son, who naturally was glad to sell his house, and who had, of course, no objection to dealing with the Brownings' agent (as it seemed to him), nor to seeing the light as to a little slice of commission when the deal should be consummated.

And when, after the greatest day of his life, Lylander went to bed, not knowing certainly whether, as Aunt Jane would have said, he was about or horseback, the world was his! Success! It was an apple in his hand from which the size of his bites was entirely optional. He was too excited to sleep for awhile, but at last he dropped off—already a millionaire, the affianced husband of Phyllis! Phyllis, Phyllis, Phyllis!

The deal actually went through without a hitch and Lylander, clothed in the confidence of achievement, turned aside to make a play toward the other goal—And, humbly, having turned one good trick, he was inclined to save invention by trying it a second time.

By the simple expedient of telephoning a question he discovered that the F. J. Willards were domiciled at the Hotel Ambassador, this adding Sherlock Holmes to his roll of Monte Cristo. Then he hiked through the Wilshire district like a location man spotting the home of the queen of society. Why? He was looking for a suitable residence for the Willards!

Having at last found one with what he considered possibilities, and with an automobile stopped in front, and an elderly lady and gentleman alighted, followed by a trim and sprightly figure—daughter, no doubt. She paused in the doorway to exclaim: "What a darling house! May we look around?"

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"About what?" demanded Mr. Willard brusquely, those eyes boring in uncomelyly.

Lylander was trying so hard not to be ashamed. "I—wanted to try to interest you in a—sort of proposition."

"What sort of proposition?" snapped Mr. Willard.

Gosh, it was harder than he'd thought. Lylander gulped. "I thought perhaps you might be interested in a—residence in Los Angeles."

For a second the great man stared at him, a gaze so searching that the poor boy felt the very laundry marks on his collar writhe in embarrassment. "What are you up to, anyway?" said the cold gray eyes in contemptuous speculation. Then with a suddenly cunning half smile: "I might be at that. What's your proposition?" And he exchanged a glance with his wife and Phyllis, who had withdrawn a little.

Lylander explained in a few eager words that he merely had a house in mind that he would like to get Mr. Willard to look at.

"Just a minute," said the latter. He turned to his wife and daughter and spoke in a low voice to which they listened with a really extraordinary interest.

Lylander ventured now to steal a glance at his goddess, and saw her with enchanted eyes in a "cloudy radiance." Adorable Phyllis! She had remembered him. How wonderfully things were going. Of course, he could hardly expect Papa Willard to present him at once, unless— But no, as the great man turned back to Lylander, mother and daughter were walking away leisurely in the other direction.

"Now," said Mr. Willard, "I'll look at your house. And we'll go in my car." There seemed an emphasis on the "my."

"Thank you, sir," Lylander's elation suddenly shriveled in spite of himself, for there was something in the great man's tone, in his manner, that did not chime with this dazing falling in with a strange young man's request. There was no amiable sympathy with young ambition on his grim face, no interest in the errand, rather a sort of watchful attitude that was squelching, to say the least.

Lylander tried to think it was just his way. Besides this first conquest was nothing short of a miracle, and he must make the most of it. Why, it was the chance of his life. A great thing to be thus pleasing J. F. Willard; to be riding in the manager's car one within a week. In his wilder dreams he had not conceived more magic than this! Perhaps it was a dream. To assuage the doubt he surreptitiously pinched himself.

Having given their destination to the chauffeur, as he walked and Lylander, who was so pleased to improve each shining moment with bright conversation. Or attempted to do so, but Mr. Willard began to ask questions, snappy questions about where he had lived and how long had he been in California, and how came he in this business, and some others that seemed—well, sort of sly. Lylander, gulping occasionally, answered truthfully, although it really seemed that the more simple and straightforward his answers the less stock Mr. Willard took in them! Lylander couldn't understand it, but Mr. Willard acted as if he were trying to conceal that he didn't believe a word Lylander said!

They were met by the courteous agent, who showed them over the property, doing all the talking, to Lylander's relief, and treating him, too, quite tactfully. Mr. Willard acted as if he might say something terrible in a minute, and he responded properly enough to the agent's efforts to interest him. But he ended the interview pretty shortly by saying that he had decided to have a country place if he bought at all. The agent assured him that his firm had magnificent places on its lists, and Mr. Willard said he would see as he climbed back into the car.

The agent shook hands with Lylander: "Much obliged, anyway, Mr. Pratt, for bringing Mr. Willard around."

"Quite welcome, I'm sure," said Lylander, but magnificent one rolled away and he again essayed to be entertaining. Mr. Willard now merely said, "Ha," and "Hum," and "Is that so?"

They reached the hotel, alighted—but Mr. Willard did not ask the dauntless one up to meet his daughter. He looked Lylander steadily in the eye.

"Ah, thank you for your interest, Mr.—er—Pratt. Will you give me your address? In case I wish to communicate with you."

"O, certainly, Mr. Willard," Lylander said, and he carefully prepared cards. "Thank you so much, I—if I can be of any use to you, I hope you—He struck there."

"Thanks," drawled Willard, and for the first time his shrewd eyes showed a hint of amusement and—of perplexity.

Lylander walked away. He had done it. He had made the acquaintance of the king, and beheld the princess once more. And she remembered him. He had won to her side. The next time he would be presented to her. Had not the old man—that is, the king—asked for his address, intimated that he would communicate with him? Would he have done that, said that, if he had not been favorably impressed? Of course he would not. Phyllis, I come, I come. Gosh, she was lovely, O, lovely! There were at least two reasons for this, and while his teeming brain dreamed them, he feet reeled off several aimless miles around and about, until he was brought suddenly back to earth by a sign which said, "Alfred Tilbury, plumber."

Mr. Tilbury, wearing a grin on his dirty face, was just entering the shop and greeted Lylander with a cheery: "Hello, Pratt! Come in and look us over."

Lylander preferred his dreams, but accepted the invitation by following the plumber into the dusty little shop, where he listened to a monologue on Mr. Tilbury's future plans. Little he guessed with whom Lylander had hobnobbed that day! Tilbury was going to take over a garage—had a chance to buy in good. Once Lylander would have been interested in a garage, but say, from now on he'd probably be associated with J. F. Willard!

"What are you going into?" Tilbury finally asked.

"Oh, real estate, I guess," returned Lylander lightly.

"Real estate, eh?" repeated Mr. Tilbury thoughtfully. "All right if you're a big bug, but kinda uncertain for the little ones. I'd say. Thought maybe you might like workin' in the garage."

"Why, thanks. I admit I'm a pretty good mechanic, but—I tell you, Tilbury, I've got something pretty big in view just now."

"That so? Well, all right. Want to go over and look around anyway?"

Lylander submitted and accompanied the friendly plumber to the new garage, which was just around the corner. It looked a pretty good proposition—he was interested in spite of himself. But perhaps the important thing was that he and Tilbury did not get home until dinner time.

Lylander saw at once that something had happened to Amy. She was asking about you—like a child's who has been frightened and she started from fits of abstraction when spoken to. It was something plainly not pleasant—and every once in a while she looked at him in a hurt, questioning way.

That puzzled him so much that he almost neglected to conclude the vision of Phyllis on the porch after dinner. Amy joined him soon.

"Mr. Pratt, may I speak to you a moment?"

"Why, surely."

"There was a man here today—mother was out—late this afternoon, asking about you." She twisted her hands together in a curious fashion. "Yes? What'd he want? Leave his name?"

Amy's eyes searched him almost piteously. "He—he was a detective," she whispered.

Lylander stared. "A detective?"

"Why did he want?"

"He wanted to know all about you. How long you'd been here and what sort of fellow you seemed to be."

"Met? Why, what—? Why, I haven't done anything. Why, that's funny!"

His obvious sincere astonishment seemed to relieve Amy and a little color came back to her cheeks.

"Haven't you any idea?"

"Not the remotest."

"He even went out and looked at your car."

"He did!"

"And went up and looked in your room. And asked if any men came to see you or if you stayed out nights. You don't know—you're sure you don't know—?" There was pleading in her low voice. Then suddenly: "Oh, there he is! He's come back!"

Sure enough. A thicket little man was coming up the walk and Lylander, as he turned to face him, looked into steady, shrewd eyes, a good deal like Mr. Willard's, in a face rather hard, but by no means disagreeable.

Amy had slipped into the house.

"Mr. Pratt?" began the caller in a business-like manner.

"Yes."

"My name's McKay. See the young lady's slipped you off. Let's sit down."

"Certainly," Lylander was surprised and curious, but not frightened. Why should he be frightened?

McKay coolly inspected him. "Now, see here, my friend, you put up a great front, but we've got you dead to rights. Why not just hand it over and save a lot of commotion?"

Lylander grimaced. "Is this a joke? Hand what over?" But his throat was dry.

"Mrs. Willard's chain," replied McKay in a steady voice. Lylander's smile went out like a light switched off. He met McKay's eyes squarely, but no words came.

"I'll just give it to you straight," that gentleman said so easily. "Miss Willard recognized you today as the fellow in the garage the day the chain was stolen. I suppose you snipped it off in the cute little way you fellows have. Of course, they thought you had it and we've been looking out for you. You had your nerve factor, Mr. Willard again like you did today. Something up your sleeve, I suppose. You know you had no more connection with that real estate firm than I have. What was the big idea? I'm curious." McKay lighted a cigar and smiled complacently.

Lylander merely continued to look at him. There was a numbness about the boy's heart. They—thought he was a thief. Perhaps nothing ever again hurts in quite the same way as the first blow life gives to young faith in the dream. His thought of Phyllis—and he thought of him! All his fine plans. This was how she had remembered him.

"Better make a clean breast of it," McKay advised not unkindly after a moment. "I'm here to give you the chance. If you hand over the chain, the Willards won't make a fuss. They don't want publicity. If you don't, I haven't got the chain, Mr. McKay," said Lylander quietly. "I've never seen it. Because the Willards happened to see me the day the chain was lost is hardly proof that I—have it."

"Well, there's something funny about your actions, young man. Of course, we haven't had time to check you up good since Mr. Willard phoned us this afternoon, but—you can't get away with it. Why not get yourself off easy? Now, see here, you're only a kid, and you don't look so tough. Suppose I give you till tomorrow to think it over?"

"A hundred years to think it over won't make any difference."

"O, yes, it will," McKay rose. "No use tryin' to beat it, you get me? Well, good night, Mr. Pratt. See you tomorrow." He turned down the steps, rather jauntily, down the walk Lylander sat motionless. They had nothing really on which to hold him. They just suspected and were trying to bluff him. But it wasn't that.

"Lylander!" The wisest voice of Amy at the door made him jump. He rose quickly and went in to her as she switched on the economical little lamp that made the darkness of the shabby hall visible. He could see that his face frightened her without knowing how brightly stricken it was. She kept raising trembling hands to her throat and looking them fast again, while her eyes searched him and pleaded with him—and cursed him. "Has he gone?" she breathed. He nodded, wondering.

She moved quite close to him, as