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Knowing how it irritated the general to lose the game, the judge as he rose from the table said in his most dignified and courtly way: "I formerly played a fairly good game of whist, but have been out of practice so long that I am somewhat rusty. I hope that fact may be taken as an excuse for my mistakes."

Whereupon the general arose with equal dignity and retorted, "I am glad to learn that I have been playing with latent talent and not with a natural born fool!"

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The Blond Giant
 It is Not Safe to Jump at Conclusions
 By CLARISSA MACKIE

Mark Ellsworth bought a magazine of the train boy and settled comfortably back in his seat. The book opened of itself at one of Eunice Ward's charming little love stories, and Mark scanned the columns eagerly for the paragraph that introduced the inevitable man in the case. He was vexed with himself even as his eyes fell upon the offending paragraph.

As usual in Eunice's latest stories the hero was everything to be admired—manly, lovable and big and blond and handsome.

Mark slapped the pages together and cast the magazine from him, staring moodily at the fleeting scenery. He was rather below the medium height, dark and pale and square jawed and very American. Quite the opposite of Eunice Ward's ideal as depicted in her stories. Of course the big fresh faced English type must be the sort of men Eunice admired, for her heroes were all of that description.

The train drew to a stop before a little terra cotta station, and Mark gathered up his traps and hastened out into the October sunshine.

He had cherished a vague hope that Eunice might be there to meet him—once in the earlier stages of their acquaintance she had come for him—but no, Mrs. Raymond, his hostess, sat alone in the motor smiling a warm welcome.

"Eunice was coming, too," she said as they sped along the oiled road toward Windymere, "but at the last moment Mr. Punderson reminded her of a promised walk, so she went with him."

"Who is Mr. Punderson?" asked Mark grimly. "Not Percy Ranier Punderson, the poet chap?"

"Yes; and you will like him so much," returned Mrs. Raymond enthusiastically, her dark eyes flashing one glance at his stern profile.

"No doubt," said Mark dryly. "He's an Englishman, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes."
 "Big and blond and something of a giant?" There was an unconscious note of anxiety in his deep voice.

"Why, yes—in a way," laughed Mrs. Raymond, as she gave him her hand alighting. "I didn't know you men noticed each other's looks much."

"We don't as a rule," returned Mark deliberately, "but we observe and admire poets as we do women, you know."

"You will like Mr. Punderson," predicted Mrs. Raymond, as she directed him to his room.

Mark Ellsworth was sure that he must detest Punderson the poet. As he dressed for dinner his fine forehead was creased with a dark frown as he went over the months of his acquaintance with Eunice Ward. He had been a bosom friend of Dick Raymond's before that gentleman's marriage and since then had been a frequent guest at Windymere. Eunice was Mrs. Raymond's cousin, and it was at Windymere that Mark had met and fallen in love with her among the winding paths of that most fascinating of homes.

The presence of Percy Ranier Punderson at Windymere was significant. Mark had heard of him as a dreamy, soulful individual, and he could not associate Mrs. Raymond's description of the Englishman with the drooping, anemic poet his imagination had conjured.

Eunice gave him a cool little hand and a fleeting glimpse of sea blue eyes that were hidden at once by thickly fringed white lids.

"We had about given you up," she said reproachfully. "You've promised to come down every Saturday for the past month and now, the first week in October, our expectations are at last realized!" The mock regret in her tone quite hid something that Mark was too miserable to recognize.

"I've been very busy," he said absently, "and in town the weeks do slip away. You have not been dull?" His eyes involuntarily turned toward Punderson's broad back.

"Not at all!" she cried hastily. "Mr. Punderson is quite as ardent a pedestrian as I am, and together we have tramped over every road in Mereton, coming home with the most appalling appetites."

"I hope you will walk with me," said Mark, speaking more wistfully than he knew.

"Of course," she replied quickly. "I know the loveliest place in the country, side. We will start tomorrow morning while the others are at church."

The prospect of having Eunice all to himself for several hours put Mark in the best of spirits and during the course of the evening he came to like the big quiet blond giant who seemed a living representation of the heroes who marched through the pages of Eunice's stories.

As they struck into a long amber lighted wood road the next day Mark turned and looked at Eunice, she stepping easily beside him. She wore a simple walking skirt of white serge and a white knitted coat, with a white felt hat perched on her golden hair. She looked very young and very fair, but he thought her voice lacked its usual buoyancy. Then it occurred to him that Eunice might care for Punderson and the poet might be merely

whiling away a pleasant fortnight amid congenial companions. Suppose Punderson was trifling with Eunice's love and she—cared—cared!

"Why do you look so very fierce?" she laughed suddenly.

"I was thinking," he said, somewhat lamely.

"And disagreeable as the thoughts must be judging from your frown you will not sell them for pennies?" She jingled some coins in a tiny pocket of her jacket.

"I was thinking what I'd do to the man who ever caused you one heart-ache!" he burst out passionately.

She looked and faced him with a blank look in her eyes. "Why—why do you say such a thing?" she asked with an effort.

"Because—oh, Eunice, because I love you. You needn't turn away. Of course I know it is of no use—I'm not the sort to attract you—but it relieves my mind to tell you," he ended bitterly.

He did not look at her face; his eyes were fixed on the dead leaves on the ground under their feet.

"How do you know that it is of no use?" she said quietly, and as he looked up, startled, her eyes drooped.

"Eunice!" His hands went out and were withdrawn, clinched, to his sides. "Oh, of course I know I'm not the type you admire—one has only to read your stories to recognize that, Eunice. But, Eunice, if you ever need me I'll fight for you until the last!"

"I need you now, Mark," she said almost inaudibly.

"Ah!" His hands clasped hers this time, and he looked at her eagerly. "Who is it, Eunice? You needn't be afraid to tell me," he urged.

The fringes lifted, and in another instant he would have glimpsed a heaven in their depths, but then there came an interruption. Firm footsteps trod the crisp leaves, and there came into view the massive form of Percy Ranier Punderson. His hands were stuffed in his pockets, and his fair hair was rumpled and tossed out of its usual order. He stopped short at sight of the two, and as his glance fell on Eunice's lovely, agitated countenance a light came into his eyes.

"Ah! I thought I had the woods to myself," he stammered awkwardly.

"I thought you had gone to church with Dora and Dick," observed Eunice, recovering her composure. "I was taking Mr. Ellsworth over to the ruined chapel. Won't you join us?"

"Thank you; no. I was about to turn back. We started for church, but the motor broke down at the cross-roads. The Grenvilles came along and offered seats for two, and, as I was out of humor for church, I walked back." He made as if to retrace his steps, but Eunice's carelessly put question checked him.

"Who was with Alice Grenville?" she asked.

"Why—er—Tommy Lapham, I believe, and—er—her father was driving the machine. I'm afraid you'll be late for luncheon if I detain you any longer," he said, and, with a nod of farewell that included Mark, leaning against a nearby tree, Mr. Punderson tramped back over the fallen leaves and was soon out of sight.

"Shall we go on?" asked Eunice.

Their walk was resumed in a silence that was not broken by any reference to their interrupted conversation. A grimness had settled around Mark's lips, and his chin looked more square than ever. Eunice's fair brow was puckered in a frown, and there was a troubled look in her eyes.

When Mark did open his lips once more it was to speak of the brilliant autumn coloring or the scampering gray squirrels that crossed their path. At last they emerged upon a cleared space crowding a high bluff that jutted into the sea. Here were the charred and crumbled ruins of a once beautiful stone chapel.

Mark removed his hat and drew a deep breath of the sweet pure air. "Windymere is beautiful, but if I had my choice I'd build a home right here on this headland," he said thoughtfully.

"There is a good road that leads into the highway," observed Eunice quietly as she seated herself on the stone steps of the ruined edifice. "I have bought this land, Mark. Don't you think it will make a beautiful home for me?" She was looking at him through drooping lashes.

"Yes," he returned dully, staring away at the glistening waves. He was thinking of the ideal life Eunice would lead with her poetic husband if she married Punderson. And he was sure that she cared for the Englishman.

"I want to tell you something about Mr. Punderson," went on Eunice. "I am sure you will understand that it is entirely confidential."

"Yes," he repeated grimly.

"Well, Mr. Punderson is very much in love with Alice Grenville, and she is flirting outrageously with every man she meets. Just at present it is Tommy Lapham, whom no one takes seriously, yet poor Mr. Punderson is absurdly jealous. If he understood women he might see that Alice is in love with him and that she is afraid somebody will discover that fact. Stupid, isn't he?" A pink flush waved in her cheeks, and her blue eyes were quite hidden.

Mark breathed quickly. He took a step toward her, a light in his dark eyes. "Eunice," he said honestly, "are all women like that—do they try to hide their love from the man who loves them?"

"Not all, Mark," she said in a tone between tears and laughter, "but those of us who are not sure, when we give our love first, we—we must dissemble, such as describing our hero as a blond giant when as a matter of fact— Oh, Mark!"—as he took her in his arms.

"When as a matter of fact"—he repeated, laughing down into her eyes.

"He is like you," she whispered, her lips against his.

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