

Summer Sweethearts

By Mabel McElliott

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CHAPTER XII

They rode together as before. Katharine chatted lightly and Michael answered. Once or twice his great laugh rang out. He went ahead when the bridge path narrowed, glancing back over his shoulder to see if they behaved well.

"She's a bit skittish today," Katharine protested.

She thought of Zoe and the fever she had suffered the night before. The thought of Gibbs Larkin with his bold, exploring dark eyes and the thickening line of his waist, his too-soft, too-intimate voice. Poor Zoe! What was it going to come to?

She thought of John Kaye. Dear Johnny, he was so nice! The girl who married Johnny would be a lucky one. There would be no excitement, of course, but she would have security.

"All right?" That was Michael's voice. He had gone on rather far ahead and she had lost sight of him.

"All right back here..."

He waited at the turn of the path, glancing at the watch strapped to his wrist.

"We'd better turn back. I have an appointment at nine."

Sally Moon! Well, what of it? But Katharine's exclamation was gone for the instant. The morning had a cloud upon it.

"Watch out for that dog," Michael warned as the path wound again into the clearing, facing which one lone white horse stared down into the fertile valley. The terrier which had bothered Fury on the ride down was sitting on the bank, watching, sharply-eyed for his enemy. At first sight of the riders, the small brown dog hunched himself like a streak down the precipitous slope, through thorn and heavy berry bushes, to yelp frantically at Fury's very heels.

The little mare began to dance. She had done this before and Michael, at some pains, had quieted her. But now her nervous gait increased and she deserved her name, Michael, wheeling Prince Charlie, made for Fury's bridge-missed it.

Katharine was not conscious of fear. Fury plunged forward at a violent rate, rearing and kicking, and the girl hung desperately.

"Whoa, Fury! Steady there, girl!"

Then the sickening consciousness of hurtling through the air at incredible speed; the damp earth and the grass rising up to meet one...

From a long way off, a voice reached her.

"My darling!"

Michael's voice. Michael's strong arms lifting her, carrying her. Katharine left sore all over—not broken, she assured herself, only dreadfully sore and shaken.

She opened her eyes.

People were running toward them; a truckman whose vehicle was halted near the field, people from the white house where the dog belonged, a woman in a striped dress and two little girls.

"Oh, is she badly hurt?"

The woman, Katharine thought, had a nice sort of face with wise, tired eyes. The little girls stood staring, all



fiyaway blond hair and bare, sun-browned legs.

"Bring her up to our house," the woman said. To the dog, who had ceased to bark and now covered naughtily in the hedges, she said scoldingly: "Bad Sandy! Bad boy!"

"He'll be punished for this, he knows that," she told them, leading the procession. Katharine closed her eyes again. The truckman had gone to hold Prince Charlie's bridle. Some men down by the River road had stopped Fury. It was very pleasant to be carried thus. Michael's arms were strong and gentle.

Katharine opened her eyes again. They were going up the steps of the white house now. Michael was passing through a doorway. The remodeled farmhouse was comfortable in a homey way. Michael went up a flight of steps and the woman directed him to lay Katharine on a bed.

The woman bent toward her anxiously. "I'll call my doctor," she said in a gentle voice. "Are you very much hurt?"

Michael looked extraordinarily big in this low-ceilinged room, towering over her. His face was dark with anxiety.

"I—I don't believe so," Katharine said faintly.

"Your head's all right?" Michael knelt down by the bed when Mrs. Mersemer went to telephone. They could hear her calling Dr. Cartwright down in the village.

"My boots will sell the spread," Katharine whispered. It was pleasant, having Michael so worried about her. Now he wouldn't be able to ride with Sally Moon. It was such a silly idea that Katharine smiled, and Michael Heatherone watched that smile as a starving man might gaze at a loaf of bread.

"Oh, don't worry about that please!" Mrs. Mersemer cried, coming back. "The spread doesn't matter. Poor child! I do feel so awfully responsible. That bad dog..."

"How about Fury?"

"She's all right," Michael told her. But his tone boded ill for Fury. Maybe he hadn't dreamed it, after all; maybe he had actually called her "my darling."

Presently Dr. Cartwright came and examined her.

"She's had a nasty shock," he said, "but she seems to have come through it all right. You're a very lucky young lady," he told Katharine. "You must stay in bed all today, and tomorrow I'll run in and see you again."

"May I go home doctor?" Katharine knew the little physician well. He had nursed her through most of her childhood ailments.

To her secret delight he shook his head, negatively. "I'd rather you stayed right here," he said, with an interrogative look at Mrs. Mersemer.

"Of course she shall. Or course!" cried her hostess delightedly. "That will relieve me of anxiety. I should be terrified to turn her out now, without being certain she was all right..."

(To Be Continued)

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