

Summer Sweethearts

By Mabel McElliot

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CHAPTER XXXI



Katharine backed the car out of the lane; in a trance she followed the road toward home.

She had Bertine to face. She had an endless tissue of lies before her, but she was not thinking of this as she turned into her own driveway. She was thinking of Michael Heather's kiss upon her lips. What lay before them both she could not guess.

THE grim-faced men met Michael on the steps. "You're Heather?"

"I am," Michael faced them easily. There was a casual poise about the tall young man in the worn tweeds. The elder of the strangers said, "Born at Castle Donegal in Ballymena?"

Michael shrugged his broad shoulders. "I was born in Ireland. My father never said—"

"Raised at Bar-X ranch, five miles out of a town called Watson's Gully, Montana?" the man pursued, quite as if the other had not spoken.

"What's this all about?" Michael asked, with a hint of steel in his quiet voice. "I find you fellows in full charge of my house, asking questions, taking possession without my leave or—"

"Hold your horses, young fellow!" the heavier, taller of the two intruders interrupted. "We're orders to find a Michael Heather, aged 26 born to Francis Albert Drayton Heather and his wife, Mariel, at Donegal in Ireland."

"Well, I've told you I'm he," said Michael in some impatience and, it would seem, disgust. "What about it?"

"Much about it, young fellow me lad," the detective rolled the words on his tongue with unctious, enjoying the flash of anger in his opponent's eyes. "You've come into money, and that's the straight of it. 'Tisn't often we get a job like this and get the back of y'er hand for it, like. Mostly it's crooks we're after—we're a very well known firm, d'ye see?" He extended, between a rather soiled forefinger and thumb, a business card which Michael accepted with every evidence of distrust.

"Malley & Gerhardt, detectives," he read aloud. "All right, Malley & Gerhardt, tell me about it."

"That's talking," approved the elder, motioning his partner to a seat. "They come to us in Omaha where we have our headquarters. They say, 'Find this young Heather if you can.'"

"Who's 'they'?" demanded Michael impatiently.

"The English fellows. Two of them. 'Solitaires,' they call themselves. Seems they'd been in Watson's Gully and nobody knew hair nor hide about where y'd taken off to. Said y'd picked up and beat it last year when y'er partner made off with the money—"

"Oh, they did, did they?" continued Mr. Malley, crossing one plump leg over the other and allowing the ashes of his cigar to sift carelessly all over the floor of the porch. "We lost it there for a while. Y'd a job there for some months, saved y'er money and were sober, they said—"

(To Be Continued)

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