

Summer Sweethearts

By Mabel McElliot

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CHAPTER LIV



"Zoe's a beauty," thought John Kaye, surprised he had not noticed it before. He had always called her a mere child, frivolous and shallow. Today had she shown a deeper, more womanly side? Her ancient scales seemed to have fallen from her eyes...

For a moment they stood, regarding each other. Then the man said, haltingly, "I thought I dropped a glove."

"No, it's not a glove," she said, shaking her head. "Don't believe it. It would have given it to me, and I like this young man's, and he must be all right. Isn't that so, Dirk?" she appealed to her husband.

"I guess so, honey," Dirk Millard looked tired and dirty. This desert sand had made deep grooves in his lantern face. It had been a terrible day—one they would talk about, telling the story with a thousand embellishments, for years to come.

"I think perhaps I should stay," Miss Vincent fretted. "After all, I am virtually in charge of the child. It doesn't seem quite proper."

"Nonsense," yawned Hilda, putting her disordered blond locks. "With a nurse and Mrs. Darragh for chaperons, I don't see very well how you could do anything. Besides a bride doesn't need a chaperon. At least, if she does, I've never heard about it."

Frank winced at this, but Hilda, always happily unconscious of another's reactions to her gay chatter, rambled on.

"He'll bring her back to Silencia after a few days, when she's ready to travel, and they can go on picking up what I suppose was an interrupted honeymoon—probably they quarrelled—and everything will be lovely. Young love, I sighed Hilda sentimentally. "I do so adore it. Delightful time of life, I always say."

"I don't agree," said Dirk, grinning and showing his big, fine teeth. "It's hellish. What say, Frank?" He gave the young man beside him a brotherly nudge and Frank granted angrily and sank deeper into the collar of his coat. Frank was indulging in the luxury of a man-sized hatred for Michael Heathcote who had come winging out of the sky, out of nowhere, to rescue the golden girl with the mysterious eyes. Now the fellow claimed that girl as his wife.

"Well, come along, everybody," said Dirk presently, his words ending Millard's pride on never doing a prodigious yawn. "You know we're going tonight if we expect to reach the ranch by sundown tomorrow."

Frank stood up, stretching magnificent muscles and shaking his blond head.

"Count me out. I'm not going."

"Why, Frank Millard?" began his sister-in-law combatively. "I never heard anything so silly in my life. Of course you're coming with us."

"No. You're all so anxious to get home, you'd just leave this poor kid to the wolves. I'm sticking around."

Frank must be deeply moved, his brother reasoned, to have made such a long speech. Usually Frank's conversation was limited to monosyllables. He was glaring at them all now quite angrily.

Dirk shrugged. "Let him alone, honey. If he wants to stay, let him stay."

"But how will it look?" fretted Hilda. "Why, I never heard anything so silly in my life. And he'll be in the way. They've no place for him."

"Toss out my blanket," Frank grunted. "I'll sleep out."

"Well, it's your funeral," Dirk said philosophically. "It sounds nutty to me. What's wrong with you, anyway?"

"That fellow's no more her husband than I am," said Frank with contempt.

"Come along, girls. The boy's screwy," said Dirk good-naturedly. "Screw, am I?" muttered the blond giant, watching the touring car and its trail of dust as the car dwindled to a speck in the distance. "I'll show 'em!"

He prowled about with the restlessness of a lion cub, smoking innumerable cigarettes, hands plunged deep into his pockets. Presently Mrs. Darragh came to the door, surprised to find him there.

"Why, I thought you'd gone with the others, Mr. Frank."

"No, I'm sticking around."

He offered no explanation of his strange conduct and she asked none. Mrs. Darragh had met the Millards before this. She thought of them as "real city folks," and none of their vagaries could really surprise her. Besides she had seen Katharine's face, lovely in its stillness; she sensed romance.

(To Be Continued)

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