

CLOVERDALE COURIER.

VOL. 10.

CLOVERDALE, TILLAMOOK COUNTY, OREGON, SEPTEMBER 25, 1914

NO. 17

A Question of Value

It Involves the Subject
Love

By IDA SPEED

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Given two men and a woman you'll most always have a romance; two women and one man are apt to produce a riot, but take two women and two men, all in love, and every one of 'em bein' a misfit, as you might say, and it's like a two ring circus—you can't possibly take in all the details.

When this here Miss Daphne Donaldson first throws in with the west it's with no notion except to forgit past unpleasantnesses which, I learn afterward, was caused by her havin' Pullman tastes and her husband havin' a day coach pocketbook.

Course, in order to win her he puts up a bigger front than his bank account calls for, and when he can't live up to the premises she pleads nonsupport and requests her maiden name.

So when we first see her she's got both the divorce and said maiden name and has flew west to escape the gossip and scandal ensuin' from the same.

It took a special trip to freight her trunks out to the ranch, and she had clothes that made the men set up and take notice and the women's eyes turn green with envy.

She shore has the heart broke look, and she ain't been here a week before I see plain that Johnny Duval is goin' to be first aid to the injured.

You see, the biggest part of this ranch is owned by a man back east named Stoner, who was her confidential adviser, and he tells her just to come and make herself at home here till such time as she feels like facin' the world again.

Now, Mary Talbert, whose folks have charge of this outfit, is one of them quiet, practical girls who only know one way to love—that's with a secret, consumin' passion.

Secret, that is only to the object of it, and consumin' all her time in thinkin' about it. The object of Mary's devotion was Johnny Duval.

That such is bad enough.

But about three weeks after Miss Daphne arrives Mr. Talbert gits a letter from this Stoner sayin' he can't come out to look after some matters as he does once each year, but is sendin' a substitute who will make a new contract with Talbert and attend to all business for him.

I drive in to meet this duck, whose name is Smithson, and I find a tall, slim fellow dressed like them pictures in the back of the magazine where it says:

"If you want to feel at ease in any society, wear"—etc., and who can ask more questions than a jackleg lawyer?

When we reach the house Daphne

and Mary are on the east gallery. I make 'em acquainted with Mr. Smithson.

Daphne is standin' foolin' with a chain she always wears around her neck with some kind of a little hoodus on the end of it.

"How do you do?" she says, noddin' her head, indifferent. Then she turns with a rattle of silk and walks in the house.

"Glad to meet you," says Mary, holdin' out her hand. "Have you all had your dinner?"

When we say we haven't she gits up, smoothin' out her fresh gingham dress, and goes in to set dinner out.

That was the difference between 'em.

In a week's time Mr. Smithson looks like he's forgot he was sent here for any purpose but to make love to Mary, who is real nice to him to keep from showin' how she hates to see Johnny and Daphne together so much.

But, listen, that's not the worst.

What does the grass widow do but begin to build a stack with this here Smithson, who don't seem to notice it, he's that took up with Mary Talbert.

It was like singin' "Three Blind Mice." They all fell in with the same words to the same tune, but only produced a jumble in the end.

I watch 'em pretty close and observe more or less human nacher in all of 'em.

From the very first I know why Mary is treatin' Smithson so nice, but it takes a long time for me to glean that Johnny is playin' the same game with Daphne because he don't think Mary cares for him.

I figured that this Daphne didn't take to western ways and folks, and it wasn't so much Smithson as them back east garments of his'n that was holdin' her spellbound.

And it took this here Smithson just a month to do what Stoner usually attends to, gittin' back by return mail.

Before he leaves we begin to work the cattle. The first day we rounded up the north Cross S, and course the women wanted to go on the drive.

Johnny Duval was on his fanciest cuttin' horse, Don, and he was showin' off the least mite, as cowboys will do with back east folks lookin' on.

Smithson was swell in his ridin' togs, with little race spurs, and his mount was a big, handsome bay, but he was powerful in the way.

About the middle of the mornin' Johnny works hard for five minutes out of the herd, and when at last the steer takes to the bushes Smithson spurs up and turns him right back in

the herd, not knowin' enough to see where the brute should go.

"Let him go," yells Johnny, and rips out four uncomplimentary words which wouldn't have sounded so bad to Smithson if the first and fourth hadn't been "you."

Daphne rides over to Smithson at once, her face plumb scarlet.

"I think," she says, dignified, "you'd better take Mary and me home."

So he takes the ladies to the ranch, and that's the last I see of 'em till that evenin', when us boys come up from the brandin' pens, and the two

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