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AN ARBITER OF FATE

Gamaliel Swallows an Ancient Superstition
By CLARISSA MACKIE

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"Here comes Aunt Alvaretta," said Elsie listlessly from her seat in the bow window. "I wonder what has happened. She's got her knit hood on over her sweeping cap, and she is running across the orchard."

Mrs. Parsons leaned over her daughter's shoulder and peered at the tall angular figure hurrying through the orchard that divided the two houses. "Maybe Gamaliel has had another fit. That cat will be the death of Alvaretta with his fits and funny ways; she's worried over him half the time. I'll open the door for her." She went to the side porch and awaited her sister's coming.

Alvaretta came up the narrow path between the rows of chrysantheums, her pramella shod feet flashing in and out of the dead leaves and her faded face quite pink with excitement.

"Is it Gamaliel?" called Mrs. Parsons eagerly as her sister drew near.

Miss Lee stopped short and stared. "Is what Gamaliel?"

"I thought perhaps that cat had another fit," returned Mrs. Parsons sharply; "he's always cutting up some sort of didoes."

"Gamaliel's all right," assured Alvaretta calmly as she followed her sister into the warm sitting room. "How are you, Elsie? Haven't you finished those pillowcases yet?"

"This is the last one," answered Elsie, rising to offer her aunt a rocking chair. "When we saw you running, Aunt Alvaretta, we thought something had happened." She resumed her own seat and bent her fair head above the muslin pillowcase.

"Something unusual did happen," averred Miss Lee with mysterious nods of her head. "I'll have to take off my knit hood; it's hotter'n all get out in this room. For the land—if I haven't got on my sweeping cap! Well, it's all in the story of what happened when I was cleaning the garret this morning."

"What happened?" queried Mrs. Parsons impatiently as she picked up her needles and knitted furiously at some white lace she was making for her daughter's trousseau.

Miss Lee removed her sweeping cap and twirled it thoughtfully on one long finger, her keen, black eyes watching Elsie's downcast face as she told her story.

"As I was saying, I cleaned the garret this morning, or I was just beginning to when I decided I'd clean out that little closet under the rafters. There was a little hair trunk that belonged to Grandmother Lee, and it had all sorts of truck in it. I won't tell you all the stuff there was tucked away in that trunk. Some rainy day you can come, Emeline, and we'll look it over. But among other things there was a little nestboard box and inside of it was a little scrap of lace, marked 'Ann Lee's wedding veil.' That was your great-grandmother, Elsie! There was a scrap of the wedding gown and then screwed up in a little piece of paper was this bit of grandmother's wedding cake!" Alvaretta triumphantly held up a twist of yellowed paper, which she carefully unfolded to discover a morsel of dark, fruity cake with a few flecks of icing clinging to it.

"I'm going to give it to Elsie to dream on," said Miss Lee slowly.

Elsie's pale face flushed hotly and she shrank back in her chair with a protesting gesture of her hands. "You needn't laugh at me, Aunt Alvaretta," she said tremulously. "You know I don't have to dream on wedding cake—my fate's been decided for me." She shot a bitter glance at her mother's averted face.

Mrs. Parsons arose and went to the plant stand in the window, where she proceeded to pick the dead leaves from the geraniums with quick, nervous gestures that betrayed her inward perturbation.

"I didn't know Elsie had decided she was going to marry Jerome Barclay. I thought she was sort of teetering between him and Rob Harris," blurted Miss Alvaretta, getting upon her feet. "I've never taken much stock in your notion of having Elsie get her wedding clothes ready before she'd made up her mind."

"I never said I wanted to marry Jerome Barclay. I—I—can't bear him!" flashed Elsie, with unusual spirit.

Mrs. Parsons turned a cold face toward her daughter. "I thought it was understood," she said severely, "that you was to marry Jerome. He said he wouldn't take 'no' for an answer, and he says you can keep hired help and you needn't do a stroke of work if you don't want to. He can afford to have you live like a lady. He left a diamond ring for you to wear, and he told me to fire ahead and get the clothes ready. He says he knows you will be ready. I don't want to influence you, Elsie, but I've had to work so hard all my life it seems as if I couldn't have you let such a good chance go by." She looked appealingly at the mutinous face of her daughter.

"I wouldn't mind working hard for some folks," half sobbed the girl, turning her eyes away.

Mrs. Parsons sighed and resumed her picking of the dead leaves from

the geraniums. "I didn't know that Rob had given you the chance to say yes or no," she said bitterly.

"Fiddlesticks!" sniffed Miss Alvaretta, with a toss of her head. "I guess Rob and Elsie know whether they want to marry each other without any highfaluting talk about it. Rob Harris is poor, but he's smart as a whip and bound to make his mark in the world. He's got more ginger in his little finger than Jerome Barclay has in his whole lazy body. I don't believe in interfering with other folk's business, and I shan't influence Elsie either way, but I think it's only fair she should have a chance, and here it is."

Miss Alvaretta held out the bit of wedding cake in its twist of paper and dropped it in her niece's outstretched hand. "Elsie Parsons, you take that cake and put it under your pillow to-night. If you dream about Rob Harris you can take it that it's your fate to marry him and nobody else. If you dream of anybody else I reckon it's your duty to marry them whoever they are. There! I've got to be going. Gamaliel will be wanting his milk."

With a pressure of Elsie's hand and a defiant glance at the thin disapproving back of her sister, Miss Alvaretta marched out of the room.

When she had disappeared through the aisles of leafless trees Mrs. Parsons turned around. "I hope you're not going to take any stock in that foolishness, Elsie."

"Mother, I'm going to have my chance," she said quietly. "I'll promise to abide by whatever I dream about tonight. If I dream about Jerome Barclay I'll tell you the truth."

"I'll do the best I can by you, Elsie, whichever way you happen to dream," said Mrs. Parsons after a long pause.

"Thank you, mother," said Elsie, and then they talked of other matters and Elsie's lovers were not mentioned again that afternoon.

After supper there came a scratching and mewing at the side door. "It's Gamaliel," said Elsie as she arose to admit Miss Alvaretta's big black cat. "I suppose he's come over to spend the night."

"The most ungrateful critter that ever lived, remarked Mrs. Parsons as she placed a saucer of milk for the unexpected guest. "Alvaretta waits on that cat hand and foot and five nights out of the week he runs over here to sleep. I shouldn't think you'd want him sleeping in your room, Elsie."

While she addressed Elsie thought of the wedding cake and of what she might dream while its magic lay so near her head, but she forgot it after all until she was about to step into bed. Then she groped in the darkness and found the twisted bit of paper on the bureau and tucked it under her pillow.

She thought persistently of Jerome Barclay, while she tried to banish him from her mind, and so she fell asleep and dreamed of him—clear, vivid dreams of automobile rides around the surrounding country and into the adjacent cities as Jerome Barclay's wife; dreams that were so real that she remembered every detail of each one when she awoke to a realization that her rest had failed to grant her heart's desire. Not once had she even thought of Rob Harris in the misty land of dreams.

Gamaliel yawned sleepily on his cushion and bounced off indignantly as the door was cautiously pushed open and Mrs. Parsons' face was thrust in.

"Well, Elsie, what did you dream?" she asked, with assumed lightness.

Elsie sat up in bed and swept the fair hair back from her dejected face. "I dreamed of Jerome Barclay, mother," she said heroically. "So I'll marry him just as I said I would."

Mrs. Parsons advanced into the room and picked up a scrap of paper from the floor. "What's this?" she asked. "What did you do with the cake, Elsie?"

The girl stared and then slipped her hand hastily under the pillow and drew forth a screwed up piece of paper. "Here it is—no—why, mother, I made a mistake and put a curl paper under the pillow instead of the wedding cake!" The color came into her cheeks and her eyes danced as they had not done in months. She was getting some of her old time spirit back. "There isn't any charm about dreaming on a curl paper, is there, mother?" she asked demurely.

"No, there isn't," said Mrs. Parsons shortly. "Elsie, I believe that Gamaliel ate that cake. See, this is the paper with a few crumbs left in it. I found it near his cushion. There! See him eat the rest of it!" She looked resentfully at Gamaliel as he swallowed the remaining crumbs and licked his lips appreciatively.

"I forgot to say, Elsie, that Rob Harris is downstairs waiting to see you. He says he can't go till he does. I expect your Aunt Alvaretta had something to do about getting him over here. He looks powerfully worried. He's got a little automobile to attend to his business with. I've asked Rob to stay to breakfast. You better hurry." She opened the door and stumbled over the active Gamaliel.

"Drat that cat! Thieving old reprobate!" she scolded, departing. "I'm glad you dreamed what you did, Elsie," she called back.

Elsie watched Gamaliel to her heart and kissed him passionately. "You're the dearest old thing, and you shall wear a white ribbon," she whispered in his perky ear. Then from below there came a prolonged and familiar whistle that was echoed in her heart. She crept to the window and answered it happily, tremulously.

From across the orchard Aunt Alvaretta's voice sounded, calling: "Gamaliel! Gamaliel!"



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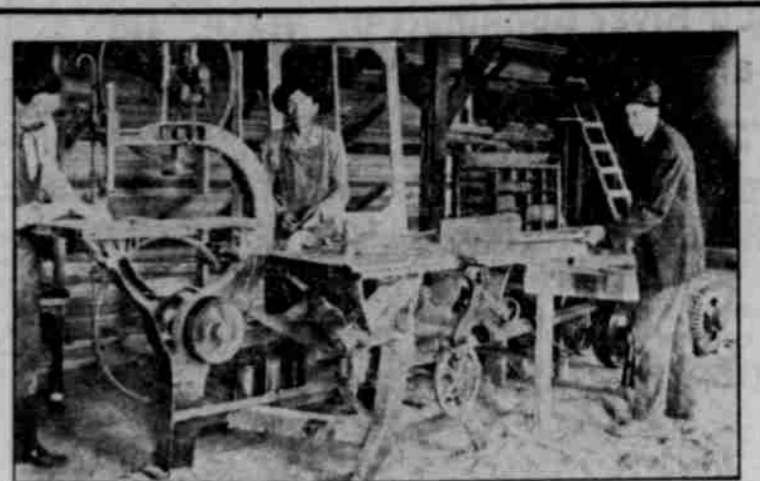
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8:05	Powderdale	3:35
8:15	Switchback	3:55
8:30	Van Horn	4:20
8:40	Mohrs	4:35
8:55	Odell	4:55
9:10	Summit	5:10
9:20	Boucher	5:30
9:40	Winans	5:50
9:45	Arrive Dec.	Leave 1:45
10:15	Leave Dec.	Arrive 1:25
11:25	Troutcreek	1:20
10:40	Woodworth	1:35
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