

SHIFTING SANDS

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WNU Service

CHAPTER XIII —13—

INTENSE as was the joy of the three persons, who a little later set out toward the Homestead in the old yellow dory, they were a silent trio.

Horatio, pulling at the oars, was unusually earnest, Sylvia turned the ring on her finger reflectively and Stanley Heath looked far out over the water, too deep in thought to be conscious of either of them.

When, however, the boat swung into the channel, Sylvia spoke.

"Hortie and I are not coming with you, Mr. Heath," she said. "We will stay behind. Only do, please, promise me one thing. Do not tell Marcia the whole story before we have a chance to hear it. There are ever so many connecting links I am curious beyond words to have you supply."

"Such as—?"

"The jewels in the first place. I can hardly wait to have that mystery solved."

"The jewels are no mystery at all. I can satisfy your mind about those here and now. They were Joan's—Mrs. Heath's. Her maid Corinne took them and disappeared. Soon afterward, purely by accident, I met Paul Latimer, a friend who lives on Long Island, and during the course of our conversation, he asked if I knew a good man servant, saying that Julien, their butler, had just given notice that he was to be married to Corinne, the new parlor maid, and return with her to France."

"The woman's name instantly caught my attention."

"Why shouldn't I do a bit of sleuthing on my own account?"

"Thus far the detectives Joan and I had hired had made no headway at locating the jewels."

"Why shouldn't I have a try at it myself? I got a boat and cruised along to the Latimers' at whose house I had frequently stayed, and with the habits of whose household I was familiar. My plan was to arrive early in the morning before the family was astir and catch the parlormaid alone at her work."

"Should she prove to be our Corinne, I would boldly confront her with the theft and demand the jewels; if, on the other hand, she turned out to be another person altogether, it would be perfectly easy to explain my presence by falling back on my acquaintance with Paul."

"Well, my scheme worked to a dot."

"I reached the Latimers' unobserved; found Corinne alone straightening up the library; faced her and demanded the jewels."

"The instant she saw me she knew the game was up, and, without more ado, produced the gems from her pocket, shouldering all the blame."

"Julien, she protested, knew nothing of the theft. He was a self-respecting, honest man. Should he be told of what she had done it would end everything between them. She loved him. Indeed it was because of him she had committed the crime."

"It proved they had been engaged some time and long before and agreed to save their money and sometime pool it so they might be married and buy a little home in France."

"Julien had saved conscientiously; but Corinne had been extravagant and let the major part of her earnings slip through her fingers. He was now asking how much she had laid aside and to her consternation she found she had almost nothing."

"She was ashamed to face him."

"What could she say?"

"She did not know what impulse prompted her to take the jewels. She had never stolen before in all

her life. The diamonds had been constantly in her care and it had never occurred to her to appropriate them. It had been a sudden, mad temptation created by the need of money and she had yielded to it without thought. Scarcely were the gems in her possession before she regretted her action and longed to undo it. She would have taken them back had she not feared the consequences. She begged Julien should not be told what she had done. If her crime could be concealed from him she was willing to make any restitution I demanded."

"Perhaps I was a sentimental fool. Anyway I simply could not see it my duty to hand the unhappy creature over to the authorities; destroy Julien's faith in her; wipe out the future she had set her heart upon. I felt if given a chance she would make good."

"Promising I would remain silent, I pocketed the gems and came away."

"Whether I acted rightly or wrongly I do not know."

"I suppose by this time the two are married and on their way to France. I believe Corinne told the truth and that under other influences she will become an excellent wife and mother. At least she has the opportunity."

"The other half of my tale—the half I never foresaw nor planned—is familiar to you."

"The fog that drove me out of my course; my subsequent shipwreck and illness; the coming of Currier, our old family servant; the chain of circumstances that brought upon me the calamities from which I have just extricated myself—these are an old story. The only thing that now remains to clear my sky is for me to right myself with Marcia."

"That will be easy," smiled Sylvia.

"I wish I thought so," was Heath's moody answer.

She was not in the house when at last Stanley Heath overtook her, but far up the beach tossing driftwood into the surf for Prince Hal to retrieve.

The man paused, watching them. Hatless, her splendid body aglow with exercise, Marcia had the freedom and wholesomeness of a young athlete. Yet with all her strength and muscular ease, there was a grace unmistakably feminine in her every movement.

When she turned and saw him, she uttered a faint cry, but she did not advance to meet him. Prince Hal did that, racing up the beach, uttering shrill yelps of welcome as he came.

A second and the dog was again at Marcia's side, and in this ecstasy of delight he continued to run back and forth until Stanley Heath had covered the sandy curve that intervened and himself stood beside her.

"Marcia—dearest—I have come back—come to ask your forgiveness. I misjudged you cruelly the night we parted and in anger spoke words I had no right to speak. Forgive me, dear! Forgive me! Can you?"

"I forgave you long ago—before you asked," she whispered.

"Forgave without understanding—how like you! But you must not do that. You have more to forgive in me than you know, Marcia. I have been proud, unbelieving, unworthy of a love like yours. I have made you suffer—suffer needlessly. Listen to what I have to tell and then see if you can still forgive."

Turning they walked slowly along the shore.

"I could have told you about the jewels and how I came by them at the outset had I not suddenly conceived the idea of teasing you. The plan to conceal my story came to me as a form of sport—a subtle, psychological game. Here I was

pitched without ceremony into a strange environment among persons who knew nothing of my background. What would they make of me? How rate me when cut off from my real setting? I resolved to try out the experiment. Women are said to be inquisitive, particularly those living in isolation. My advent could not but stimulate questions. I thought it would be an amusing adventure to circumvent not only your curiosity but also that of the village."

"I placed scant dependence on feminine discernment and constancy."

"When I went to the war, I left behind a girl who pledged herself to love and wait for me. When I came back it was to find her married to my best friend. The discovery shook my confidence in human nature, and especially in women, to its foundations. I derided love, vowing I never would marry and be made a puppet of a second time."

"The remainder of the story you know."

"I stumbled, a stranger, into your home and instantly you set at naught all my preconceived theories of womanhood by believing in me with unreasoning faith. You asked no questions. You did not even exhibit a legitimate curiosity in the peculiar network of circumstances that entangled me. You were a new type of being and I regarded you with wonder."

"Still I was not satisfied. I felt sure that if pressed too far your trust in me would crumble and, therefore, I tried deliberately to break it down by throwing obstacles in its pathway. When suspicion closed in upon me I put you to further tests by withholding the explanations I could easily have made. It was a contemptible piece of egoism—selfish and cruel—and dearly have I paid for it. But at least remember that if I caused you suffering I have suffered also."

"For Marcia, through it all I loved you. I recognized from the moment I first looked into your eyes that a force mightier than ourselves drew us together—a force not to



As He Held Her in His Arms, the Last Shadow That Separated Them Melted Away.

be denied. Nevertheless, so bitter had been my experience I dared not yield to this strange new power. Instead I opposed it with all my strength, giving my love reluctantly, fighting inch by inch the surrender I sensed to be inevitable."

"You, on the other hand, had like myself known betrayal, but you had taken the larger view and not allowed it to warp or mar your outlook on life. When love came knocking a second time, you were neither too proud nor too cowardly to answer it, but freely gave your affection with the gladness and sincerity so characteristic of you."

"I do not deserve such a love. 'Beside the largeness of your na-

ture my own shows itself childish—a small, poor thing for which I blush."

"Help me to erase the past. 'I love you with my whole soul, dear. Everything in me loves you. My life is worth nothing unless you share it."

"Will you?"

"Ah, you need not fear, Marcia. Sylvia has told me everything. Beloved, there is not and never has been a barrier to our marriage. We have misunderstood one another. Let us do so no longer."

"I am a free man—acquitted. Come to me and let us begin life afresh."

She came then, swiftly.

As he held her in his arms, the last shadow that separated them melted away.

Under the glow of the noonday sun, they walked back toward the Homestead, hand in hand.

Sylvia came running to meet them and, throwing her arms about Marcia, kissed her.

"Everything is all right—I can see that," she cried. "Oh, I am so glad—so glad for both of you!"

"Why, I just could not stand it if you were not happy, because I am so happy myself. Hortie is here you know. Didn't Stanley tell you? Why, Stanley Heath, aren't you ashamed to forget all about Hortie and me? Yes, Hortie came this morning. We're engaged. See my ring!"

"Ring!" repeated Heath. "Mercy on us, Marcia, you must have a ring. I cannot allow this young sprite of a niece to outdo you. I am afraid I was not as foresighted as Mr. Fuller, however. Still, I can produce a ring, such as it is. Here, dear, you shall wear this until I can get something better."

He slipped from his little finger the wrought-gold ring with its beautifully cut diamond.

"I—I—do not need a ring," murmured she, drawing back and putting her hands nervously behind her.

"Of course you do," interposed Sylvia. "How absurd! A ring is part of being engaged."

"A very, very small part," Marcia answered.

"Nevertheless, it is a part," the girl insisted. "Come, don't be silly. Let Stanley put it on."

Playfully she caught Marcia's hands and imprisoning them, drew them forward.

On the left one glistened a narrow gold band.

"Jason's!" cried Sylvia. "Jason's! Take it off and give it to me. You owe nothing to Jason. Even I, a Howe, would not have you preserve longer that worn out allegiance, neither would my mother. The past is dead. You have closed the door upon it. You said so yourself. Never think of it again. You belong to Stanley now—to Stanley and to no one else."

As she spoke, Sylvia took the ring from the older woman's hand and held it high in the air.

"The past is dead," she repeated "and the last reminder of it—is—gone."

There was a gleam as the golden band spun aloft and catching an instant the sunlight's glory, disappeared beneath the foam that marked the line of the incoming breakers.

"Now, Stanley, put your ring upon your finger. It is a symbol of a new life, of hope, of happier things. Isn't it so, Marcia?"

"Yes! Yes!"

Sylvia drew a long breath.

"There! Now we'll not be serious a minute longer. This is the greatest day of our lives. There must not be even a shadow in our heaven. Kiss me, Marcia, and come and meet Hortie. Poor dear! He is paralyzed with fright at the thought of appearing into your presence. I left him hiding behind the door. I could not coax him out of the house."

"How ridiculous! You must have made me out an ogre."

"On the contrary, I made you out an enchantress. I told him you

would bewitch him. That's why he became panic-stricken. Do be nice to him—for my sake. He really is a lamb."

Sylvia stepped to the piazza.

"Horatio," called she imperiously. "Come out here right away and meet your Aunt Marcia. And please, Stanley, forgive me for mistaking you for a bandit. I'm dreadfully mortified. Still, you must admit circumstantial evidence was strong against you. All of which proves on what shifting sands rest our moral characters!"

"Say rather our reputations, dear child," Heath corrected.

[THE END.]

SO WHAT?



"Mr. Porter, you're such delightful company, I love to be with you!"

"Yes, that is what my wife says."

"What, that you are delightful company?"

"Oh, no, that you love to be with me."

Cow Has Three Stomachs

In a cow or steer there are three stomachs and each one is edible, a fact few people know. The first stomach is the one commonly known and sold as tripe. On the inside, it is very rough and of a yellow color, resembling a very coarse honeycomb bedspread. The second stomach is much the same as the first only the netting inside is much coarser and each mesh is eight-sided. This tripe is known as the "thimble." The third, and last tripe is like a book with many leaves, both short and wide but all joined to one central hinge. This tripe is known locally as the "Bible," but its correct name is many-plies.—Montreal Herald.

Gold in California

The first discovery of gold in California was in 1842 near the San Fernando mission, near Los Angeles. No real importance was attached to the discovery until February 9, 1848, when the daughter of James W. Marshall, the overseer of a mill owned by John A. Sutter, found a piece of nugget in a mill race on a branch of the Sacramento river near Coloma. This discovery started the gold rush to California. James W. Marshall died old, alone and almost penniless in a mountain saloon.

Province of India

Ladakh is a Tibetan district or Kashmir, comprising the valley of the upper Indus, about 30,000 square miles in extent. It is one of the loftiest inhabited regions of the world, the valleys and plateaus ranging from 9,000 to 17,000 feet. Its capital is Leh, which has the most elevated observatory in Asia. The earliest notice of Ladakh is by a Chinese pilgrim in 400 A. D.; he found Buddhism flourishing there. It was a part of the Tibetan empire until about a century ago when it was captured by the Sikhs.

Symptoms of Hysteria

Hysteria, a morbid state of the nervous system, produces a variety of symptoms, including high fever, which closely resemble those of organic diseases and are difficult to diagnose, writes No. 10,375, State penitentiary, Deer Lodge, Montana, in Collier's Weekly. Some time ago a man, afflicted with recurring spells, was operated on—over a period of years—by five different surgeons who were convinced by his condition that he had appendicitis.