



CHAPTER XVII—Continued

Alone with the westerner, Joyce felt her blood begin to quicken.

"Are you quite . . . recovered?" she asked.

Their eyes met. In his there was a faint cynical smile of amusement.

"Quite."

She understood the double meaning in his words. Her lashes fell to the soft cheeks, then lifted again. "I thought perhaps there might be . . . that you might still be . . ."

He shook his head vigorously. "It was only a dream. I can laugh at it now—and at myself for taking it seriously."

Joyce hit her lip in vexation. There was something not quite decent in so prompt a recovery from her charms. He did not appear to hold even any resentment.

Nor did he. Kilmeny had been brought too near the grim realities to hold any petty pique. He found this young woman still charming, but his admiration was tinged with amusement. No longer did his imagination play upon her personality. He focused it upon the girl who had fought for his life against the ridicule and the suspicions of her friends. It was impossible for him to escape the allure of her fine sweet courage so gallantly expressed in every look and motion.

But Moya let him severely alone. Her pride was suffering because she had shown to all her little world too keen an interest in him. In her anxiety to repudiate any claim he might think she felt she had upon him the girl was scornfully indifferent to his advances. Almost rudely she rejected his gratitude.

"The man does not owe me anything. Can't he see that honors are easy?" she said impatiently to Lady Farquhar. Jack Kilmeny was no quitter. He set that lean jaw of his and would not accept repulse. In four days now the Farquhar party was going to leave Goldbanks and he made the most of his time.

Moya never saw him coming toward her without having her pulses stirred, but her look met his always quietly and steadily. Not once did she give him a chance to see her alone. Even Lady Farquhar, who had been a severe critic of her vagaries, commended now her discretion. Jack rebelled against it in vain. He could not find a chance to speak. It was characteristic of him that he made one.

By shrewd maneuvering he arranged an expedition to the Silent Sam mine. The property itself was of no particular interest. The attractive feature was a descent in ore buckets from the shaft-house, perched far up on the edge of a precipitous cliff, to the mill in the valley below. This was made by means of heavy cables to which the buckets were suspended. After Jack had explained how the men rode back and forth by this means between the mill and the mine India was seized with the inspiration he had hoped for.

"Let's go down in the buckets, dear people."

Lady Farquhar protested and was overruled by a chorus of votes. The miner assured her that it was entirely safe. Reluctantly she gave permission for her flock to make the trip if they desired.

They rode on horseback to the mill. Jack paired with India, making to attempt to ride beside Moya, who brought up the rear with the captain. The westerner, answering the questions of his cousin, was at his debonair best. Occasionally there drifted back to the couple in the rear fragmentary snatches of his talk. He was telling of the time he had been a mule skinner in New Mexico, of how he had ridden mail near Deming, and of frontier days at Tombstone. Casual anecdotes were sprinkled through his explanations to liven them. He spoke in the stirring drawl of the Southwest, which went so well with the brown lean face beneath the pinched-in felt hat and the well-packed vigor of the man.

"And what is 'bucking a sample'?" India wanted to know after one of his stories.

"You just pound some rock up and mix it to get a sample. Once when I was drag-driver of a herd in a round-up—"

Moya heard no more. She turned her attention resolutely to her companion and tried to detach her mind from the man in front. She might as well have tried to keep her heart from beating.

After they had arrived at the mill Jack quietly took charge of the disposition of the party. Verinder and Joyce were sent up in the first bucket. When this was halfway up to the mine the cable stopped to let another couple enter a bucket. Joyce, fifty feet up in the air, waved her hand to those below.

"You next, India," ordered her cousin.

The young woman stepped into the

bucket. "I'm afraid," she announced promptly.

"No need to be. Captain, your turn."

The eyes of the two men met. Ned Kilmeny guessed instantly that the other had arranged this so as to get a few minutes alone with Moya. He took a place beside his sister immediately.

The cable did not stop again until the second pair of passengers had reached the mine.

Moya, followed by Jack, stepped into the bucket, which began to rise steadily as it moved across the valley.

Kilmeny did not lose a minute. "Why don't you let me see you alone? Why do you run away from me?" he demanded.

Little patches of color burned beneath the shadows of her eyes. A sound as of a distant surf began to beat in her ears.

"What nonsense! Why should I run from you?" she asked, meeting with difficulty the attack of his masterful gaze.

"Because you're afraid to let me tell you that I love you," he charged.

"Thought it was Joyce you . . . fancied," she retorted quietly, her pulse hammering.

"So it was. I fancied her. I love you. I'm asking you to marry me."

"You don't have to ask me to marry you because you exaggerate the service I did you."

"I ask you because I love you."

"Thank you very much for the compliment. Sorry I must decline." She did not dare look at him. Her eyes were fixed on the mill far below.

"Why must you—since you love me?"

The telltale pink stained her cheeks. "You take that for granted, do you?"

"It's true, I believe. How can I make love to you as other men do? Lady Farquhar won't let me see you alone—even if you were willing to give me a chance. In two days you are going out of my life. I must speak the truth . . . bluntly. I love you. It has been that way with me ever since you came into my life again, little Moya. But I was blind and didn't see it till . . . till I was alone in the mine with death."

"I . . . am sorry."

"That is not enough. I'm going to have the truth. You saved my life. What for? It is yours . . . if you will take it."

She looked straight at him. "I can't marry you."

"Why can't you? Can you say that you don't love me?"

In the full-charged silence that followed a stifling emotion raced through her blood. The excitement in her set a pulse beating in her throat. Womanlike, she evaded the issue.

"The cable has stopped. What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened. It has stopped because I arranged with the engineer at the hoist to have it stop. When I give the signal it will start again."

"But . . ."

He brushed aside her futile protest. "I'm going to have this out with you. Dare you tell me that you don't love me, Moya?"

He forced her to meet his eyes, and in that moment she felt weak and faint. The throb of passion beat tumultuously against her will.

"Please . . . be generous. What will they think? Let us start," she begged.

"They will think something is wrong with the machinery. But it doesn't matter in the least what they think. It's my last chance, and I'll not give it up. You've got to answer me."

The point where the bucket had stopped was a hundred feet above the ground below. She looked down, and shuddered.

"It's so far down . . . please."

"Then don't look down. Look at me, Moya. It won't take you a moment to answer me."

"I have. I said I couldn't marry you."

man I . . . love. Isn't that a good deal?"

The desire of her, pure as a flame, swept through him. "It's the greatest thing that ever came into my life. Do you think I'm going to let it end there? I'm going to fight for our happiness. I'm going to beat down the things that come between us."

"You can't. It's too late," she cried wistfully.

"It's never too late for love so long as we're both alive."

"Not for love, but . . ."

"You've got to see this as I see it, sweetheart. I'm a man—primitive, if you like. I've done wild and evil things—plenty of them. What of that? I slough them off and trample them down. The heart of me is clean, isn't it?"

"Yes."

To look at him was enough to clear away all doubt. He had the faults that go with full-blooded elemental life, but at bottom this virile American was sound.

"Well! Isn't that enough?"

The little movement of her hands toward him seemed to beg for pity. "Jack! I can't help it. Maybe I'm a little prig, but . . . mustn't we guide our lives by principle and not by impulse?"

"Do I guide mine by impulse?"

"Don't you?" She hurried on to contradict, or at least to modify, her reluctant charge. "Oh, I know you are a great influence here. You're known all over the state. Men follow you wherever you lead. Why should I criticize you—I, who have done nothing all my life but lean on others?"

"Go ahead. When I ask you to marry me I invite your criticism."

"I have to take little steps and to keep in well-worn paths. I can't make laws for myself as you do. Those that have been made may be wrong, but I must obey them."

"Why? Why should you? If they're wrong, fight against them."

"I can't argue with you . . . dear. But I know what I think right. I want to think as you do. Oh, you don't know how I long to throw my Puritan conscience overboard and just trust your judgment. I . . . adore you tremendously. But I can't give in . . . I can't."

The muscles stood out on his lean cheeks as he set his teeth. "You've got to, Moya. Our love has been fore-ordained. Do you think it is for nothing?"

Jack Kilmeny had not been brought up in the dry sunbaked West for nothing. The winds of the Rockies had entered into his character, as well as into his physique. He was a willful man, with a good deal of granite in his make-up. A fighter from his youth, he did not find it easy to yield the point upon which he differed from Moya. There was in her so much of impulsive generosity that he had expected to overpower her scruples. But she stood like a rock planted in the soil.

It came to him as he walked home after a long fight with her that in his heart he did not want her to yield. She was the Moya Dwight he loved because she would not compromise with her conviction. Yet, though he wanted her to stand firm, he hated the thought of giving way himself. It galled his pride that he must come to her with a penny, knowing that she had the means to keep them both modestly. Nor could he, without a pang, think of surrendering the twenty-eight thousand dollars he had fought for and won. He was no visionary. The value of money he understood perfectly. It stood for power, place, honor, the things that were worth having. Given what he had, Jack knew he could double it in Goldbanks within the year. There were legitimate opportunities for investment that were bound to make rich returns. But without a dollar he would be like Samson shorn of his locks.

All through the night he was joined in battle with himself, but when at early dawn he stood on the top of Son-of-a-Gun hill and faced a sky faintly pink with the warning of a coming sun his decision had been made.

On his way back he met Moya and Miss Seldon. Joyce pounced upon him with a grievance.

"You haven't told me yet how much you're going to give for the new hospital, Mr. Kilmeny. You know we're leaving tomorrow, and you'll have to decide at once. Be generous, please. You said yourself it was a good cause."

He nodded agreement. "The most worthy charity I know. I've often wondered why some Andrew Carnegie didn't set the fashion of endowing hospitals by wholesale. They ought to be free to all poor folks out of health. When a man is losing his wages and his family is scrambling he ought not to be facing a thirty-dollar-a-week hospital charge. Yes, I'm for the new hospital, Miss Seldon."

"How strong are you for it?" Joyce asked, laughing at her newly acquired American slang. "Mr. Verinder has promised to give me two dollars for every one I can raise among my other friends. So don't be a—"

"A tightwad," supplied Moya with a smile. She could do a little in the native slang herself.

Jack went into his pocket for a

We both know you'll win in the end. Wouldn't it be fine to work out your success in partnership? Dear, I'd rather marry you while you're still a poor man."

For a moment the vision of it tempted him, but he put the dream away. "No. It won't do. Of course I'm going to win out in the end, but it might take a dozen years to set me on Easy street. For a woman brought up as you have been poverty is hell."

"Then you think I'm only a doll," she flashed. "You want to put me back in that hothouse you mentioned. I'm just an ornament to dress up and look at and play with."

"I think you're a little tinder-box," he said, smiling ruefully.

"Don't you see how it is with me, Jack? I've always craved life. I've wanted to take hold of it with both hands and without gloves. But they would never let me. I've got my chance now . . . if you really love me more than you do your pride and your money. I want to live close to the people—as you do."

"What did that suit cost you?" he asked abruptly.

"Don't remember. Twenty-five pounds, maybe. Why?"

"One hundred twenty dollars, say. And you need dozens of dresses in a season. I'll make a guess that it takes five thousand a year to clothe you. That is nearly twice as much as I'll earn altogether next year if I throw away my stake."

She waved his argument aside. "Stupid boy! I have dresses enough to last me for five years—if you'll let me be that poor man's wife. I can make them over myself later and still be the best-dressed woman in camp."

From above came Captain Kilmeny's shout. "We telephoned down. The engineer has the trouble arranged."

The cable began to move.

"When shall I see you alone, Moya?" Jack demanded.

"I don't know."

"I'm going to see you. We've got to fight this out. I'll not let Lady Farquhar keep me from seeing you alone. It's serious business."

"Yes," she admitted. "I'll tell Lady Jim. But . . . there's no use in letting you think I'll give up. I can't."

"You've got to give up. That's all there is to it." His jaw was set like a vise.

The party above fell upon them as they landed.

"Were you frightened, Moya?" exclaimed Joyce above the chorus of questions.

"Just for a moment." Moya did not look at Jack. "Mr. Kilmeny told me it would be all right."

Jack's eyes danced. "I told her we would work out of the difficulty if she would trust me."

Moya blushed. It happened that Captain Kilmeny was looking directly at her when his cousin spoke.

CHAPTER XVIII

Homing Hearts

Jack Kilmeny had not been brought up in the dry sunbaked West for nothing. The winds of the Rockies had entered into his character, as well as into his physique. He was a willful man, with a good deal of granite in his make-up. A fighter from his youth, he did not find it easy to yield the point upon which he differed from Moya. There was in her so much of impulsive generosity that he had expected to overpower her scruples. But she stood like a rock planted in the soil.

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"A tightwad," supplied Moya with a smile. She could do a little in the native slang herself.

Jack went into his pocket for a

checkbook and a fountain pen. He wrote for a few seconds, tore the check from the stub, and handed it to Joyce.

"That young woman gasped."

"Why—you don't really mean—it's for twenty-eight thousand two hundred and fourteen dollars," she cried.

"And seventeen cents. Please don't forget that," he added.

"But—what on earth do you mean? Jack was looking at Moya, and she at him with shining eyes in which joy swam."

"It's a little thank offering, Miss Seldon."

"Because you were rescued from the mine, I suppose. Still . . ."

"Because I'm engaged to be married to the best woman in the world," he corrected.

Joyce whirled upon Moya with instant divination. "You little wretch, and you never told me."

If Miss Dwight had not known it herself till this moment she gave no sign to that effect. "We're telling you now, dear," she explained.

"How long have you been engaged? Was it yesterday in the bucket?"

Jack laughed. "Nothing so romantic. We've been engaged a little less than half a minute. You get the first chance to wish Moya joy on having won so great a catch. She's marrying a pauper, you know."

"I think we're very rich," differed his sweetheart shyly.

Joyce looked from one to the other suspiciously. "I haven't a notion what either of you mean, but I know I'm going to hang on to this check, Mr. Millionaire Pauper."

Imps of mischief sparkled in the highgrader's eyes. "Don't forget that Verinder has to write one for twice as much."

Miss Seldon could not help laughing. "I'll see to that. He's not a welcher, but . . . I wonder how he'll look when I tell him."

"You ought to tell him as soon as you can," Jack hinted boldly.

"Oh, ought I? Did you say you had been engaged less than a minute, Mr. Kilmeny? How much will you give me to go down now and tell him?"

"I've nothing left to give—except my gratitude."

"You're the first man who ever was so ungrateful as to tell me he would be grateful to have me leave him."

"I'm the first who ever proposed to another girl in your presence. The circumstance is unusual," he flung back gayly.

"I didn't hear you propose. All you did was to announce it," she replied saucily.

"That's true, too," admitted Kilmeny. "Well, I'm going to propose now if it isn't too late. You may stay if you like."

"Thanks, no." Joyce kissed her friend. "I hope you'll be very happy, dear. I . . . I believe you will."

Moya choked on her words. "I know I shall, Joy."

Miss Seldon looked at Jack with an expression in which embarrassment and audacity were blended. "I've always rather liked your pauper," she confided aloud to Moya.

Her confidences had their limits. She omitted to mention what had just popped into her mind, that within the fortnight he had proposed to her too on the same spot.

Jack bowed with exaggerated deference when she shook hands with him. He was just now riding the seventh wave of happiness and felt friendly to the whole world.

"Thank you very much. You're a good scout, Joyce."

"Good gracious! What may that be? Some more of your American slang, I suppose." She broke away from persiflage to add seriously: "You're right about one thing, though. You've got the best girl in the world. Be good to her, Jack Kilmeny."

With that she turned and walked down the hill.

The other two walked up.

"I'm so proud of you, Jack, boy," whispered one of them.

He laughed happily. "I'm proud of myself. I've done the best day's work I ever did for myself when I won Moya Dwight."

"You know what I mean, Jack. What other man would have thrown away a small fortune—all he had—just for me?"

"I can name one other," suggested Kilmeny.

"Ned! But he's a saint."

"And I'm a sinner," her lover replied blithely.

"You're the sinner I love, then."

They had reached a clump of firs. Without knowing how it happened she found herself in his arms. There were both tears and laughter in her eyes as her lips turned slowly to meet his.

"Jack, boy, I'm just the happiest girl alive."

A mist-like veil of old rose hung above the mountain tops. Hand in hand they watched the rising sun pierce through it and flood the crutches of the hills with God's splendid canvases. It was a part of love's egoism that all this glory of the young day seemed an accompaniment to the song of joy that pulsed through them.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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A flapper and her best boy were seated alone together on the sofa, his teeing in for the first time with the latter's new wireless set. Nor did the fact that both of them were wearing their headphones prevent them from snatching an occasional kiss. Just as they were in the middle of one particularly longdrawn-out embrace came the title of the next song: "Take Those Lips Away." "Oh George," gasped the girl, as she drew back, blushing. "Oh, George, they can see us!"

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