

THE ENCHANTED BARN

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There were a lot more things he would like to do to make the place more habitable, but he did not dare. Sometimes even now his conscience troubled him. What did he know about these people, anyway? and what kind of a flighty youth was he becoming that he let a strange girl's appealing face drive him to such lengths as he was going now? Telephone, and electric lights, and stairs, and a fireplace in a barn! It was all perfectly preposterous; and, if his family should hear of it, he would never hear the last of it; of that he was certain.

At such times he would hunt up his young sister and carry her off for a long drive in the car, always ending up at Glenside Road, where she exclaimed and praised to his heart's satisfaction, and gave anew her word not to tell anybody a thing about it until he was ready.

Indeed, Elizabeth was wild with delight. She wanted to hunt up some of her mother's old Turkish rugs that were put away in dark closets, to decorate the walls with pictures and bric-a-brac from her own room, and to smother the place in flowering shrubs for the arrival of the tenants; but her brother firmly forbade anything more being done. He waited with fear and trembling for the time when the clear-eyed young tenant should look upon the changes he had already made; for something told him she would not stand charity, and there was a point beyond which he must not go if he wished ever to see her again.

At last one morning he ventured to call her up on the telephone at her office.

"My sister and I were thinking of going out to see how things are progressing at the Glenside place," he said after he had explained who he was. "I was wondering if you would care to come along and look things over. What time do you get through at your office this afternoon?"

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Graham," said Shirley, "but I'm afraid that won't be possible. I'm not usually done until half-past five. I might get through by 5, but not much sooner, and that would be too late for you."

"Not at all, Miss Hollister. That would be a very agreeable time. I have matters that will keep me here quite late tonight, and that will be just right for me. Shall I call for you, then, at five? Or is that too soon?"

"Oh, no, I can be ready by then, I'm sure," said Shirley with suppressed excitement. "You are very kind—"

"Not at all. It will be a pleasure," came the answer. "Then I will call at your office at five," and the receiver clicked at the other end, leaving Shirley in a whirl of doubt and joy.

How perfectly delightful! And yet ought she to go? Would mother think it was all right? His little sister was going, but was it quite right for her to accept this much attention even in a business way? It wasn't at all customary or necessary, and both he and she knew it. He was just doing it to be nice.

And then there was mother. She must send a message somehow, or mother would be frightened when she did not come home at her usual time.

She finally succeeded in getting Carol at her school, and told her to tell mother she was kept late and might not be home till after 7. Then she flew at her work to get it out of the way before 5 o'clock.

But, when she came down at the appointed time, she found Carol sitting excitedly in the back seat with Elizabeth, fairly bursting with the double pleasure of the ride and of surprising her sister.

"They came to the school for me, and took me home; and I explained to mother that I was going with you to look at a place we were going to move to. I put on the potatoes, and put the meat in the oven, and mother is going to tell George just what to do to finish supper when he gets home," she exclaimed eagerly.

"And, oh, isn't it lovely?" "Indeed it is lovely," said Shirley, her face flushing with pleasure and her eyes speaking gratitude to the young man in the front seat who was opening the door for her to step in beside him.

That was a wonderful ride.

The spring had made tremendous advances in her work during the 10 days since they went that way before. The flush of green that the willows had worn had become a soft, bright feather of foliage, and the maples had sent out crimson tassels to offset them. Down in the meadows and along the roadside the grass was thick and green, and the bare brown fields had disappeared. Little brooks sang tinklingly as they glided under bridges, and the birds darted here and there in busy, noisy pairs. Frail wavering blossoms starred the swampy places, and the air was sweet with scents of living things.

But, when they came in sight of the barn, Elizabeth and her brother grew silent from sheer desire to talk and not act as if there was anything different about it. Now that they had actually brought Shirley here, the new windows seemed fairly to flaunt themselves in their shining mosaic paint and their vast extent of diamond panes, so that the two conspirators were deeply embarrassed, and dared not face what they had done.

It was Carol who broke the silence that had come upon them all.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she shouted. "Shirley, just look! New, great big windows! Isn't that great? Now you needn't worry whether it will be dark for mother days when she can't go out! Isn't that the best ever?"

But Shirley looked, and her cheeks grew pink as her eyes grew starry. She opened her lips to speak, and then closed them again, for the words would not come, and the tears came instead; but she drove them back, and then managed to say:

"Oh, Mr. Graham! Oh, you have gone to so much trouble!"

"No, no trouble at all," said he almost crossly; for he had wanted her not to notice those windows, at least not yet.

"You see it was this way. The windows were some that were left over from another order, and I got a chance to get them at a bargain. I thought they might as well be put in now as any time and you get the benefit of them. The barn really needed more light. It was a very dark barn indeed. Hadn't you noticed it? I can't see how my grandfather thought it would do to have so little light and air. But you know in the old times they didn't use to have such advanced ideas about ventilation and germs and things—"

He felt he was getting on rather famously until he looked down at the clear eyes of the girl, and knew she was seeing right straight through all his talk. However, she hadn't the face to tell him so; and so he boldly held on his way, making up fine stories about things that barns needed until he all but believed them himself; and, when he got through, he needed only to finish with "And, if it isn't so, it ought to be" to have a regular Water-Baby argument out of it. He managed to talk on in this vein until he could stop the car and help Shirley out, and together they all went up the now velvety green of the incline to the big door.

"It is beautiful! beautiful!" murmured Shirley in a daze of delight. She could not yet make it seem real that she was to come to this charmed spot to live in a few days.

Graham unlocked the big doors, and sent them rolling back with a touch, showing what ball bearings and careful workmanship can do. The group stepped inside, and stood to look again.

The setting sun was casting a red glow through the diamond panes and over the wide floor. The new partitions, guiltless of paint, for Graham had not dared to go further, were mellowed into ruby hangings. The stone fireplace rose at the opposite side of the room, and the new staircase was just at the side, all in the ruddy evening glow that carried rich dusky shadows into the corners, and hung a certain vagueness over blemishes.

Then all suddenly, before they had had time to take in the changes, more than the fact of the partitions which they expected, Graham stepped to the side of the door, and touched a button, and behold a myriad of lights burst forth about the place, mak-

ing it bright like noontime. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" breathed Carol in awe and wonder, and "Oh!" again, as if there were nothing else to say. But Shirley only looked and caught her breath. It seemed a palace too fine for their poor little means, and a sudden fear gripped hold upon her.

"Oh Mr. Graham! You have done too much!" she choked. "You shouldn't have done it! We can never afford to pay for all this!"

"Not at all!" said young Graham quickly. "This isn't anything. The electric people gave permission for this, and I thought it would be safer than lamps and candles, you know. It cost scarcely anything for the wiring. I had our regular man do it that attends to the wiring and lights at the office. It was a mere trifle, and will make things a lot more convenient for you. You see it's nothing to the company. They just gave permission for a wire to be run from the pole there. Of course they might not do it for every one, but I've some pretty good friends in the company; so it's all right."

"But the fireplace!" said Shirley, going over to look at it. "It's beautiful! It's like what you see in magazine pictures of beautiful houses."

"Why, it was just the stones that were left from cutting the windows larger. I thought they might as well be utilized, you know. It wasn't much more work to pile them up that way while the men were here than if we had had them carted away."

Here Carol interrupted. "Shirley! There's a telephone!"

Shirley's accusing eyes were upon her landlord.

"It was put in for our convenience while the workmen were here," he explained defensively. "It is a pay phone, you see, and is no expense except when in use. It can be taken out if you do not care to have it, of course; but it occurred to me since it was here your mother might feel more comfortable out here all day if she could call you when she needed to."

Shirley's face was a picture of varying emotions as she listened, but relief and gratitude conquered as she turned to him.

"I believe you have thought of everything," she said at last. "I have worried about that all this week. I have wondered if mother would be afraid out in the country with only the children, and the neighbors not quite near enough to call; but this solves the difficulty. You are sure it hasn't cost you a lot to have this put in?"

"Why, don't you know the telephone company is glad to have their phones wherever they can get them?" he evaded. "Now, don't worry about anything more. You'll find hardships enough living in a barn without fretting about the few conveniences we have been able to manage."

"But this is real luxury!" she said, sitting down on the steps and looking up where the lights blazed from the loft. "You have put lights up there, too, and a railing. I was so afraid Doris would fall down some time!"

"I'm glad to find you are human, after all, and have a few fears!" declared the owner, laughing. "I had begun to think you were Spartan through and through and weren't afraid of anything. Yes, I had the men put what lumber they had left into that railing. I thought it wasn't safe to have it all open like that, and I didn't want you to sue me for life or limb, you know. There's one thing I haven't been able to get hold of haven't managed yet, and that is piping water up from the spring. I haven't been able to get hold of the right man so far; but he's water to this floor. If it is it will make your work much easier and be only the matter of a few rods of pipe."

"Oh, but, indeed, you mustn't do anything more!" pleaded Shirley. "I shall feel so ashamed paying such a little rent." "But, my dear young lady," said Graham in his most dignified business manner, "you don't at all realize how much lower rents are in the country, isolated like this, than they are in the city; and you haven't as yet realized what a lot of inconveniences you have to put up with. When you go back to the city in the winter, you will be glad to get away from here."

"Never!" said Shirley fervently, and shuddered. "Oh, never! You don't know how dreadful it seems that we shall have to go back. But of course I suppose

we shall. One couldn't live in a barn in the winter, even though it is a palace for the summer"; and she looked about wistfully. Then, her eyes lighting up, she said in a low tone, for the young man's benefit alone:

"I think God must have made you do all this for us!" She turned and walked swiftly over to one of the new basement windows, looking out at the red glow that the sun in sinking had left in the sky; and there against the fringes of the willows and maples shone out the bright weather-vane on the spire of the little white church in the valley.

"I think God must have sent you to teach me and my little sister a few things," said a low voice just behind Shirley as she struggled with tired, happy tears that would blur her eyes. But, when she turned to smile at the owner of the voice, he was walking over by the door and talking to Carol. They tumbled joyously into the car very soon, and sped on their way to the city again.

That night the Hollister children told their mother they had found a place in which to live.

CHAPTER X.

The crisis was precipitated by Shirley's finding her mother crying when she came up softly to see her.

"Now, little mother, dear! What can be the matter?" she cried aghast, sitting down on the bed and drawing her mother's head into her lap.

But it was some time before Mrs. Hollister could recover her calmness, and Shirley began to be frightened. At last, when she had kissed and petted her, she called down to the others to come up stairs quickly.

They came with all haste, George and Harley with dish towels over their shoulders, Carol with her arithmetic and pencil, little Doris trudging up breathless, one step at a time, and all crying excitedly: "What's the matter?"

"Why, here's our blessed little mother lying here all by herself, crying because she doesn't know where in the world we can find a house!" cried Shirley; "and I think it's time we told our beautiful secret, don't you?"

"Yes," chorused the children, although Harley and Doris had no idea until then that there was any beautiful secret. Beautiful secrets hadn't been coming their way.

"Well, I think we'd better tell it," said Shirley, looking at George and Carol questioningly. "Don't you? We don't want mother worrying." So they all clustered around her on the bed and the floor, and sat expectantly while Shirley told.

"You see, mother, it's this way. We've been looking around a good deal lately, George and I, and we haven't found a thing in the city that would do; so one day I took a trolley ride out of the city, and I've found something I think will do nicely for the summer, anyway, and that will give us time to look around and decide. Mother, dear, would you mind camping so very much if we made you a nice, comfortable place?"

"Camping?" said Mrs. Hollister in dismay. "Dear child! In a tent?"

"No, mother, not in a tent. There's a—a sort of a house—that is, there's a building where we could sleep, and put our furniture, and all; but there's a lively out of doors. Wouldn't you like that, for Doris and you?"

"Oh, yes," sighed the poor woman; "I'd like it; but, child, you haven't an idea what you are talking about. Any place in the country costs terribly, even a shanty—"

"That's jib, mother, call it a shanty" put in Carol. "Mother, would you object to living in a shanty all summer if it was good and clean and you had plenty of out of doors around it?"

"No, of course not, Carol, if it was perfectly respectable. I shouldn't want to take my children among a lot of low down people—"

(To Be Continued Next Week.)

President Harding has grown restive under the delay of congress in tariff and taxation matters. The president's irritation is but an indication of the way the country feels. It may develop that republican leaders will have impressed upon them that they made a grievous blunder when they gave the tariff precedence over tax revision. The nation as a whole demanded the latter, whereas, aside from a few special interests, there was no demand for tariff tinkering.

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GROW HIGHLY PRIZED COTTON Virgin Islands Produce Long-Staple Variety That is Almost Extinct in the United States.

Cotton raising has become one of the principal industries of the Virgin Islands, Uncle Sam's newest territorial possession, according to Bulletin No. 1, Sea Island Cotton in St. Croix, of the Virgin Islands agricultural experiment station, just issued by the United States Department of Agriculture. Sea-island cotton, the much-prized, long-staple variety which has been rendered almost extinct in continental United States by the boll weevil, is the basis of the Virgin Islands industry. The area devoted to it, while as yet small, produced an average yield of 1,000 pounds of seed cotton to the acre in 1919 and 1920. One of the plots at the government experiment station produced at the rate of 4,450 pounds of seed cotton.

"Roar" of an Ostrich. A lecturer at the London "Zoo" said that very few people knew that an ostrich roared. The roars of an ostrich and a lion were so alike that Dr. Livingstone could never distinguish the difference, save by the fact that the bird roared by day and the lion by night.—Scientific American.

The man who lays up money salts it down.

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Refuge in Silence. Mary Marcia had come to spend the day with relatives and had been told not to leave the yard.

During the morning she spied some little folks at a distance and went off. I had been telling her how naughty it was to go out of the yard, when our next-door neighbor joined the group.

Knowing how fond she was of the neighbor, I said: "Now, Mary Marcia, tell uncle where you went." "For a moment she looked at the ground, then exclaimed: "Oh, I'm not talking now."—Chicago Tribune.

Bum Joke.

"Good morning, merry sunshine!" exclaimed the jolly jester as he waltzed up to the window and passed one through to the teller. "Say, I just thought of a funny one. 'Why is a teller?' Ha! ha! 'What does a teller tell?' Funny, ain't it, huh?"

"Yep," said the teller. "I got the answer once, anyhow. The teller tells when your account is overdrawn!"

And he passed the check back with a mirthless chuckle.—Richmond Times-Dispatch.

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