

GIFT OF THE GROOM

By OLIVE ROBERTS BARTON

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Eric Prescott stood at the window of his little real estate office in Fordport. He had opened it in the fall and now it was spring.

He looked at the landscape complacently well pleased with himself for various reasons. In the first place, coming from the south, he had shivered and shaken all the cold northern winter; but the warm May weather suited him. The freshness of everything, the little yellowish green leaves, the smell of the lilacs and the songs of the birds made Fordport more like home.

Another reason for his felicity was the little office and the row of six nearly completed frame houses half a block down the street. He could see the latter from his window. The outside work had been done before the rough weather and the inside during the winter months. Nothing remained to be done but the trimming, paving and one extra coat of paint on each.

Eric Prescott was engaged to be married to Rose Marshall, the belle of Fordport. When he had settled in the village eight months before Rose was engaged to marry Tom Lyle.

The minute he saw Rose, Eric made up his mind to have her. The fact that she was engaged to Tom Lyle was nothing to him.

Few girls would have been proof against the siege he immediately laid to Rose's favor. His southern accent and excellent taste in clothes, which set off his tall slender figure, made him favorite with all women.

Eric showered gifts of candy, roses, books and music on Rose, who refused them all at first—then accepted a few flowers reluctantly and finally, overwhelmed with many attentions, succumbed completely. Then she and Tom quarreled and that was exactly what Eric wanted. They were soon engaged and Rose was seemingly happy. She was the envy of all the Fordport girls.

The corner house in the row was to be hers when they were married. Eric gave her to understand that before she had accepted him. She joked at home about loving the house as much as she loved Eric.

The house began to look different from the others in the row. The porch was extended around the side and made two feet wider than the other porches.

Rose, busy with her trousseau, appeared to be very happy and the wedding was a month away. She seldom saw Tom Lyle. He was spending most of his time now at the farm a half mile from the village. She congratulated herself that she had escaped a life of monotony in the country. Town life suited her.

One day she met Tom driving two strange men toward the farm. He seemed to be explaining something to them and merely nodded at Rose. She went home thoughtfully. He evidently was not unhappy.

The day following this meeting with Rose, Tom hitched his little black mare to the runabout and drove over to see his chief counselor and confessor, Aunt Polly Goodwin. She was taking a "nap" in her sitting room when Tom drove in at the gate.

"What news, Tommy? Sit right down here. Now tell me—is there much coal on the farm?"

"Yes, Aunt Polly, acres of it they say. Congratulate me. I am a rich man."

"Bless your heart, Tommy," said the old lady, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "I am so glad, so glad for you."

"Thanks, Aunt Polly, but riches do me little good now," he returned a little bitterly.

The old lady looked at Tom keenly. "If you don't mind me mentioning it, Tom, I have been doing a little thinking lately, since you talked of finding coal. May I suggest a little plan? You used to take my advice."

"Fire away, auntie, that's what I came for."

"Well, it is this way. I hate to see a fine girl like Rose Marshall throw herself away on that southern dude, and ruin her life at the same time. Her heart is in the right place, but her head has been turned by Prescott's attentions and his house. Now that you have some money—"

"Money!" he interrupted impatiently. "If you mean that Rose will marry me now that I am rich—"

"Hush, Tom!" she said softly. "Now listen to me. Rose is not to know a word about your good luck. Neither is anyone in town to know it for a little while. This is my plan."

Tom left a half hour later thinking what a wonder Aunt Polly was and with a determined set to his lips boding good or ill for someone.

One day, a week or so before the wedding, Rose stopped in to see Eric at his office.

"I've come to ask about the window seat in the dining-room, Eric," she explained after he had kissed her. "I do not want it varnished. Did you tell Simmons?"

"Eric looked uncomfortable for a minute, then walked to the window and looked over at the house. 'Do you like the place so well, Rose?'"

"I love it. Why?"

"I have just sold it."

"You what?"

"Sold it."

"That house! Our house! Mine! Sold it!"

"Yes."

There sat also a chair, white and shining. "Please explain."

He turned quickly. "I had too good an offer to refuse. A firm in the city offered me ten thousand for it and wanted an immediate answer. You were in Foxburg yesterday and I could not wait to ask you. So I wired 'Yes.' You didn't care so much as that for the house, did you? We can put up another."

She rose unsteadily, the tears starting to her eyes. "I must think it all over, Eric. I am a little upset. Good-by."

Alone in her room, Rose began to think as she had not done for months. The sale of the house, his wedding gift to her, had given her a sudden jolt. But after all a house is only a house, her common sense kept telling her. She must do nothing for which she would be sorry. But something was wrong with her. All her feeling for Eric seemed dead. Surely his thoughtlessness could not kill real love so easily. Rose sat and thought it all out. Then she realized for the first time that her feeling for the southerner was not love at all.

She cried herself to sleep that night. "binking of Tom. 'Oh, what have I done,'" she moaned. "I have spoiled his life and mine, but I would rather live in a cave with him than in a palace with Eric."

In the morning she awoke clear-headed and courageous. Before she dressed she wrote two notes, one to Eric breaking the engagement, and a very short one to Tom, merely asking him to come to see her as she had something to explain.

Tom went to Rose's house. He had not been surprised to get the note. Rose, trying to look matter-of-fact and dignified, met him at the door. And Tom pretended not to notice her burning cheeks and eyes which threatened to run over.

"I will just keep you a minute, Tom," she said simply, "but I wanted you to know something. It is due you. You were entirely in the right when we quarreled and I am very sorry. I was wrong and I want you to know it. And another thing—"

She stopped suddenly, then caught her breath and the color left her face. "I have broken my engagement to Mr. Prescott. I think you should be the first one to know it. I discovered quite accidentally that I did not love him. That is all, Tom," she said, rising and holding out her hand with a smile, "except that mother and I are going away tomorrow for a month or two and I will say good-by. Do say I am forgiven. I would feel better about it, you know."

Tom looked at her steadily, then took her little pink hand in his. Slowly he reached for the other and got it. "Rose!"

Rose dropped her eyes and turned crimson again.

"Rose, do you love me?"

No answer.

"Tell me. Do you love me?"

"Yes, Tom," almost inaudibly.

He gathered her in his arms and kissed her.

"Dearest," he said a little later. "I, too, have something I must get off my mind. I thought I would beat Eric at his own game. 'All's fair in love and war,' he used to say, and so it is."

Rose looked startled. He went on. "Did Eric tell you he had sold the house?"

"Yes."

"Well—I bought it. The farm has valuable coal on it, Rose, and I sold the rights. No one knows it, but I am rich now. I had an idea you did not love Eric Prescott and I determined to try him, too. I got an uncle of mine to make an offer for the house to see if he would sell it. Prescott sent the answer by wire in less than five minutes. Now am I forgiven, dear? The house is still yours, you know."

Rose put her arms around his neck. "You are a dear, but I would rather live in the country," she said.

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JANE CARTER'S CONTRACT

By HELEN ROSS

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Jane Carter rushed up the steps leading to the tiny apartment which she shared with two artist friends at impetuous as herself, and burst into the living room. Her flushed face and sparkling eyes were pleasant to see. "Oh, girls," she cried, "I'm so sorry to be late when it's my night to cook!"

"Yes, you cruel creature, I'm starved," joked Miss Mason. "But what is the excitement you're trying to keep from bubbling over?"

The other occupant of the room, Miss Day, anticipating pleasant news closed her desk.

"I'm too high in the clouds to fry potatoes, but hungry enough to eat them," cried Jane, "so come out with me and I'll treat to a real dinner."

"My, but you're rash! You'll not be able to buy new shoes this week," warned Miss Day.

"Be merciful and tell the news!" implored Miss Mason.

Jane swept aside a number of packages and perched on the cleared space of the table.

"I can't believe my good fortune," she began a trifle unsteadily. "Just as I was going out for lunch a stranger, all topped up in stunning morning costume, asked if I could direct him to Miss Jane Carter, the interior decorator. I hated him to see that shabby hole of a studio, but there was no way out of it. He was awfully nice and didn't look around a bit, and said I was recommended highly as having excellent ideas and good taste. Isn't that lovely? He is the big banker, Daniel Lord, and wants his country home decorated. He took me there in his motor this afternoon and the house is magnificent."

"You deserve it, dear," exclaimed Miss Day. "I can't tell you how glad I am that luck is finally coming your way."

"Really, girls, it will take months to do it as he wishes it done, and while we were out there he suggested one innovation after the other, and is retaining me a great deal longer than necessary to oversee details. Before I left, he made me sign a contract—as if I would balk half way!"

"It's as well to have all that settled," commented the business-like Miss Mason.

"Is he young, old or indifferent?" chimed in Miss Day. "Married?"

"About thirty-eight and unmarried! Now I'll die if I don't get something to eat. If you love me, come!" groaned Jane, jumping off the table.

They left the apartment and started towards an Italian cafe, all talking at once. The sudden change in Jane's fortunes delighted the older girls. Jane was to start water-color drawings of the rooms the following day for Mr. Lord's inspection.

When the drawings were delivered Mr. Lord returned them personally and declared himself delighted, insisting upon paying a liberal retaining fee.

"I hated to take that money," confessed Jane, blushing a rosy red at the recollection of her discussion with Mr. Lord. "Mr. Lord declared that it was only good business to accept it."

"When your time is taken for that length of time, you should be compensated," declared Miss Day.

"All the same, it seems so material," sighed Jane.

"You little dunce," scolded Miss Mason; "all the big decorators do it. What have you to live on while this contract is on deck? It requires your exclusive attention and all other work must be dropped."

As the decorating of the huge house progressed, Mr. Lord found it of such absorbing importance that he frequently called in the evenings to discuss details. His great motor took Jane to any country houses of his friends which possessed unusual features, and the great banker always found time to go along and satisfy his thirst for decorative knowledge.

These spins through the gorgeously colored October country were fairyland to Jane. As they were frequently late returning to town, they dined at queer inns or picturesque farmhouse. Jane's frequent lateness seemed to pass unnoticed by her friends, and as her financial affairs improved, certain luxuries, hitherto unknown, appeared in the apartment.

"Isn't she the darling?" remarked Miss Day. "Just think of her trudging all the way to the market for persimmons because she knew I liked them. Most girls would be too much taken up with their own affairs to think of others. She's wonderfully unselfish."

"Indeed she is," agreed Miss Mason. "Do you know I have an idea that she is very fond of Mr. Lord in a delightfully friendly way, so let's be careful not to spoil her innocent pleasure in his kindness and consideration for her. She is such a sensitive little goose, and if she got the idea that his interest is more for her than her work it would be a shock."

"He can't help admiring her work," answered the loyal Miss Day. "Neither can he help admiring such an earnest little worker. Jane is too sensible to misunderstand his kindness."

She got up to answer the doorbell and returned carrying a long box.

"That's the third box of American Beauties this week," she observed.

"I hope he doesn't overdo it," began Miss Day, anxiously. "If—"

But Jane returned from the country

at this juncture and the sentence was never completed.

"It's just too wonderful!" sighed Jane. "I seem to be living in a dream. I hate to look around and see how little there is to be done. Two more weeks and I'm through."

"Maybe you'll get Mr. Lord's town house to do over," suggested Miss Mason, the practical.

"No, Mr. Lord means to sell that town house and live exclusively in the country. Personally, I can't understand why anybody should desire such an enormous mansion."

"Very likely he means to announce his engagement," observed Miss Day, holding a sketch at arm's length and inspecting it critically.

Jane gave an odd, hysterical giggle and jumped up quickly.

"Good night, girls, I'm going to bed."

But on the threshold she turned. "Is there anything I can do for either of you?" she asked.

"That was brutal of you!" exclaimed Miss Mason, severely.

"It was rather raw to say that and I could bite out my tongue now," answered Miss Day, regretfully. "It's like Jane, too, to forgive a person the second after a nasty dig and offer to do something for her. I never dreamed that she cared about him. Looks as though she does."

Miss Mason nodded slowly. "In that case I suppose it's better that the house will be finished so soon," she said moodily.

The rapidly progressing work did not inspire Jane with any great amount of regret. Her pleasure in it was suddenly gone.

"I'll be happy when it is all over and done with," she told the girls.

The last two weeks seemed to cause her considerable restlessness.

"She has something on her mind as sure as anything," observed Miss Mason. "If this contract is going to make her unhappy, I, for one, am sorry that she ever got it."

"Here too!" replied Miss Day. "One can easily see how she avoids discussing the house or Mr. Lord, and that's not natural when a task has been well and speedily accomplished."

One evening Mr. Lord brought Jane home in his motor, as the slush was unspeakable. He stayed some little time talking about his plans for the future. Jane was noticeably silent, but it seemed an effort for her not to enter into the conversation.

At last Mr. Lord arose. "The day Miss Carter says my house is finished, you must all come out to a celebration dinner. Now don't forget. I'm keeping a big surprise for that event! Isn't that so, Miss Carter?" he asked, smiling enigmatically.

The second he was gone, Jane hurried off to her room.

"I know what the surprise is," announced Miss Mason. "He has fixed up this house for his wife, and perhaps told Jane this evening coming into town."

"I don't know what ever I would do if he were to announce it that night," groaned Miss Day.

At last the house was completed. Mr. Lord called for the trio in his motor, but scarcely a word was spoken on the way out. The tour through the fresh, beautiful rooms filled the girls with sadness. Jane was unusually quiet, and even the lavish praise bestowed upon her failed to lift the veil of quiet which seemed to envelop her. She presided at the dinner table in an equally silent mood.

At last Mr. Lord stood up, a glass of light wine in his hand.

"Now for the surprise!" he cried, gayly. "We must drink to the future mistress of this house!"

Miss Mason and Miss Day choked down a sip of the wine, and dared not look toward poor Jane. There was an awkward pause.

"Won't you give me your good wishes, girls?" asked Jane, in a wee, small voice. "You don't know how many times I have nearly let the cat out of the bag these last few weeks. The only safe course was not to talk at all."

Then the astonished girls saw Mr. Lord put his arm around Jane's waist and draw her towards him.

"Ladies—now drink it this time—to the future mistress of this house!" he exclaimed joyfully.

Dominion Fisheries Important.

Those who know the extent and importance of the Canadian fisheries are not surprised that the Dominion guards her fishing interests so jealously. In 1908 the fish catch in Canadian waters was valued at \$25,451,085. That included all fish products and seals. The capital invested in the fisheries in that year was \$15,508,275. The value of all vessels, boats, fishing implements, lobster plants, freezers and fish houses was embraced in that total. A fishing fleet of 1,414 vessels was employed. Nine of the fleet were engaged hunting for seal. There also were 39,965 boats, manned by 71,070 men. It was noticed in that year that gasoline boats were being used more and more, and that the fishermen were profiting by it.

British Cavalry Lack Horses.

The British army on mobilization will require 132,000 horses, and no one has the slightest idea where they can be found. Good authorities tell us that this number of animals of the military age does not exist in the country. With the growth of mechanical transport the necessity of taking steps to secure a supply of horses in war grows more and more urgent. We can not, unfortunately, mount our cavalry on taxicabs. We still breed the best horses in the world—but they are bought up for the use of foreign armies, while the British war office is counting its pence.—London Mail.

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