

On Paradise Peaks - -

By Charles Collins

A Blithsome Tale of Love and Action

The conventional playthings of millionaires did not amuse old man Angus. He had worked with the big fist in his time, and now he would spend with the open hand. But he wanted space for the golden sewing; he wanted to be monarch of all he surveyed.

So he engaged a geologic age for his landscape gardener and bought himself a Titan's share of the Rocky mountains. The water from eternal snows had gnawed canons; tornadoes had turned sculptor; forests had painted bleak slopes with the blessing of green—in order that old man Angus might have his plaything.

Paradise Peaks, he called it, having a fancy for alliteration.

The Manor, set deep in the lodgepole pine and aspen groves of Clearwater valley, was the heart of the demesne. There old man Angus through the sweet, thrilling months of the mountain summer played grand host to his guests.

He supplied all accessories to adventure, from trout flies to guns that would slay an elephant. The 15 hunting lodges, scattered over Paradise Peaks, each had its arsenal, its library, its store of liquors, its string of horses and its guides at the disposal of guests.

Old man Angus had a plaything that cannot be matched on this continent. He also had a daughter. There the story really begins.

Columbine, aged 20, had been everywhere and seen everything—Angus' money had taken care of all that; but her soul belonged to her native west, and she remained simple, wholesome and feminine.

Of course, this Columbine had her Pierrot—in plural. That summer there were two of them. One was strongly favored by Angus as future son-in-law. Chandler was what society reporters call an "eligible bachelor," which means that he was nearer 40 than 30. His career had been devoted exclusively to the sporting achievements of the unnecessarily rich.

The other Pierrot who had followed Columbine to her mountain habitat fitted into the natural environment, for he was a poet. Columbine had discovered him at the University of Chicago, where she had dabbled in the Pierian spring as a special student in English literature the winter before, and when a few dancing parties at the Quadrangle club had warmed up a casual classroom acquaintance into something more lively, she had invited him out to papa's principality for a summer's airing. She had been timid in making the suggestion, for he, being a faculty man with some exalted title, moved on a higher academic plane than she could ever hope to reach.

He had accepted her invitation, and with some fishing tackle, an old riding suit, and an anthology of Victorian verse in his kit, came to Paradise Peaks to worship nature—and Columbine. He had not suspected that he was pursuing a princess of the continental divide.

Ghent felt at a loss in the Paradise Peaks crowd. Although it was affable enough, and its wives were pleasantly negative, its talk was not his talk. They were all like Angus, impressively rich; and also, like John Eustace Chandler, they were apparently adept at every extravagant amusement. They had been all over the map; and he, Roderick Ghent, had been nowhere in particular, except to Harvard.

Moreover he had not brought along his dress suit. He gathered that dinner was a full dress affair at the Manor, and he would have fled back to civilization and simplicity immediately if the railroad station had not been a hard 40 miles of motor-driving away. In a panic he rushed to Columbine for advice, and she calmed his embarrassment with such tactful sympathy and resourcefulness that his admiration of her reached a new summit of ecstasy. She merely said, with her gentlest smile:

"Don't worry. I think I can find you what you want."

Then she pressed a button and conferred with an austere major domo. Within a few minutes an equipment of what young Mr. Ghent, in his lighter moments, called "soup-and-fish," was laid out in his room, complete from socks to cuff links. What was



Ghent fired from the saddle. The yellow streak collapsed. "That's shootin'" shouted Rip.

more important, the clothes fitted him.

"Am I in the Wild West or the Arabian Nights?" he asked himself as he studied the perfect fit of somebody else's dress coat across his shoulders.

Before Ghent's coming there had been some teasing of Columbine about her learned and poetic tenderfoot. The badinage had been led, of course, by Mr. Chandler of New York, who knew all the Rocky mountains by their first names.

In the dinner-table talk Ghent was asked if he rode.

"I haven't been on a horse for 15 years," he answered cheerfully.

Did he like trout fishing?

Ghent, candor itself, did not know, never having tried it. But he liked to fish.

Ah, yes; where did he do his fishing?

Ghent mentioned northern Wisconsin and black bass, but his remarks were received coldly. Bait-casting for black bass, he began to perceive, was distinctly lower-class. Someone, to save the situation, carelessly referred to a sea bass weighing 421 pounds which he had caught off the Catalina islands after 11 hours of desperate battle.

Did he shoot?

Well, yes—in a sort of a way.

What did he fancy in the line of shooting? Grouse Wild turkey—deer, elk, bear? They were to be found hereabouts in abundance, and Paradise Peaks knew no game seasons.

Ghent could not specify his choice of wild creature for killing, and Mr.

Chandler saw fit to talk in a large manner about the snow-leopards he had shot in the Himalayas the summer of 1914 with his friend, Lieut. Col. Amadoc Jones of the Bengali lancers. The war had ended big game shooting, Mr. Chandler continued, but it was beginning again with the coming of peace, and a man who wanted adventure could now go out and have some sport.

Ghent then knew that his instinct to hate Mr. Chandler was a just and true emotion.

The talk of guns and kills ran around the table until Ghent wanted to shriek. He managed to silence the banker at his elbow who was telling of his great massacre of ducks last November on the Bear river in Utah.

"I find as I grow older," said Ghent, with world-weary air, "that the pleasure of hunting, for its own sake, dies out. I have come to believe that a man has a right to kill each day only enough for that day's food."

The man who had spoken of 17 dozen ducks in one morning's bag thought of eating them all within three meals and considered himself snubbed at a game-hog.

Then Columbine began to talk of books to Ghent. Kenneth Angus, Columbine's brother, a few years older, who had been wrapped in moody silence, pricked up his ears and joined in their conversation intelligently.

Kenneth, who had been blighted in love while at Yale, was in the habit of wandering from one hunting lodge to another, with only an old guide for companion.

After dinner Columbine took Ghent out to a corner of the veranda to see what she called her demitasse view. He began to feel lyric and exalted. Was it because a poem was coming on—or because Columbine in a platonic sort of way, was letting him hold her hand?

With heavy feet that gave satisfactory warning Angus and Mr. Chandler bore down along the long veranda toward them.

Chandler had sensed a foe in Ghent. He did not rate him as a rival, but as an annoyance? So he adroitly proceeded to poison the wells of this wayfarer.

"Ah, Mr. Ghent," he asked in his most clubby fashion, "are you getting an inspiration for a poem from the sunset?"

Angus, in whose code poets were a third and lamentable sex, grunted at this, and Ghent knew that he had been betrayed.

He became nervous and therefore stupid. His throat became dry; he sneezed violently, and followed it with a hacking little cough. Although he didn't know it, this was a high-altitude, dry-climate reaction from the respiratory tract of a lowlander.

But Mr. Chandler seized his opportunity.

"You're not catching cold, are you, Mr. Ghent?" he asked fondly.

Ghent felt himself branded as an invalid.

Bright and early the next morning Columbine sought out Jim Ripley, better known as old Rip, foreman of the guides, to give him certain confidential instructions.

For the benefit of the visiting easterners old Rip dressed himself like the hero of a wild west film; however, he was a simple, gentle soul, master of the craft of mountains and plains.

"Well, Miss Columbine," he said after she had confided in him, "he must be some tenderfoot, but I'll see that he don't come to no harm. Me and him will just play around quiet like."

"I don't think he is very strong," Jim," she said wistfully, "and I don't want the other men to make fun of him."

"I'll give him Eagle, who's the truest horse in the state, and if there's any laughing to be done it will be my own private picnic," old Rip promised.

So when Ghent emerged from the Manor after breakfast, he was accosted by a friendly old customer who asked if he didn't want to be introduced to his horse, and went down to the stables to meet his fate. He observed that Eagle, a flea-bitten gray with a look of responsibility, had an amicable eye; he listened to a droll lecture upon the habits and character of this particular horse; and with an ease that was surprising in the victim of a hacking cough, he swung up into the saddle.

Three days later old Rip reported:

"Don't worry about that tenderfoot of yours, Miss Columbine. I'm learnin' him fast, and he seems to like it. The fust mornin' I took him out for a five-mile walk on Eagle to break him gentle. We just rambled over the sage brush in the front yard and he asked a million questions. In the afternoon I gave him a whirl at the trout in Willow creek. He's a rotten fly-caster—keeps snapping off the flies and cussin' the man that invented 'em. Says it's a fiddlin', foolish sport for silly old prime ministers and heavy swells from Long Island. 'Who wants to keep flippin' a snip of feathers around in a high wind?' he says. The next day we did 10 miles and got some action. And yesterday we tore off 20 and clumb some mountains. The boy's got pep, Miss Columbine, and he's goin' to be a ridin' fool. He fits a horse natural-like."

Columbine began to feel reassured. She observed approvingly that Ghent was taking on a becoming tan instead of the scarlet-nosed sunburn with which Mr. Chandler was showing the effects of the climate.

As for Ghent's mood it improved every hour. Except for the fact that he wasn't seeing enough and Mr. Chandler was seeing too much of Columbine, he was enjoying himself. He continued to freeze up, however, when the mighty hunters began to shoot big game verbally around the dinner table.

A few days later Mr. Chandler began to lust for the blood of a deer, and an expedition to Snowdrift ridge was planned for him. Angus was going along and so were two lesser huntsmen of the dinner table. Mr. Chandler, out of the goodness of his heart, suggested that Ghent should join them.

"You'll see a deer, anyway," he remarked, "and the ozone up on Snowdrift is recommended by doctors."

Ghent accepted promptly. Then Columbine said she would go, too.

"Nonsense!" boomed Angus. "It's too hard a ride for you, my dear."

"Don't be silly, dad," she retorted sharply. "I can ride there and back again without getting out of the saddle. I want to see Mr. Chandler get his buck. Besides, I think that Kenneth is up there at the lodge."

"All right," he growled. "We'll go up there together and chase Kenneth out of the woods."

Old Rip rode with the cavalcade, as was his duty as chief of guides. The man regularly stationed at Snowdrift and Kenneth's familiar spirit were to be conscripted into the party on arrival.

Ghent made no moan and for the first 15 miles he satisfied himself and old Rip as a gay cavalier. So Mr. Chandler sprang another plot to ruin him.

The elder Angus was taking things easily and lagging behind. The two huntsmen, also being men of years, straggled along to keep him company. Old Rip kept within view. Mr. Chandler was persistent