

The Free Traders

By Victor Rousseau

CHAPTER XIV

The Best Laid Plans

Father McGrath had insisted that Lee should remain as a guest at the mission during the two following days, and he insisted on supplying him with an outfit of clothing. He asked their plans and Lee told him.

"The best thing in the wurld," he said. "Ye'll be safe at the house, and dinna ha' any fear of those de'il's agents at Siston lake, for they'll ken all about the pair o' ye long syne, and they darra interfere w' ye the noo. But dinna prolong your honeymoon too long, for ye must be out o' the range before the heavy snows begin."

Lee and Father McGrath had a long talk together that night. Lee told him the whole story of his encounter with Joyce in the range, the dynamiting, and his pursuit of the band at Siston lake and rescue of the girl, culminating with their flight into the forest and Joyce's loss of memory.

At first the father listened and interrupted, and kept giving vent to exclamations of amazement and indignation; but as Lee went on with his story he fell into silence, puffing at his pipe beside the stove and looking at Lee intently.

"Tis amazing!" he said, when Lee had ended. "I canna understand it. For, look you, Anderson, it isna as if this was a country o' savages, whaur a base man could do what he pleased. 'Tis true they sell their feithy hooch, but that's deefrent fra' kidnapping women and attempting murder. There's something at the back o' this that we havena hit upon."

Next morning Lee slept late—so late that it was the recitations of the school children across the open space that aroused him. From his bed he could hear Joyce's voice directing them, and he smiled happily at the thought of her. The morning was his marriage day. The evening of the morning they would be together in their log home, shut off from all the world.

It was a renaissance of youth, this tender joy that filled him. He dressed and strolled across the interval to the schoolhouse.

That was the happiest day of his life. Joyce, at his mandate, agreed to a half holiday, and all that afternoon they strolled through the snow-bound woods, their arms about each other, planning their life together. Lee came more and more to see that to Joyce happiness consisted of the wilderness. She would wilt in a city. She had endured the period of her medical training only as a preliminary to returning into the wilds.

They decided that they would make their homes there, Lee resigning from the police the following spring. They would take up work under Father McGrath, enlarge the log house, create a garden; in time to come settlers would flock in, the whisky traffic would go—they dreamed for hours until the advent of night sent them homeward.

Next afternoon an old Indian and his wife were requisitioned for witnesses; and in the little schoolroom, in the presence of the entire population of the settlement, which consisted of the children, two half-grown girls and a young boy, with an aged squaw or two—all legacies of the great small-pox epidemic of four years before which had devastated the region—Father McGrath performed the simple ceremony that united them, taking the gold ring from his own finger, and handing it to Lee who put it on his bride's.

And Lee, looking at Joyce with a new wonder that was almost fear, discovered the purpose that had sent him into the range.

It was for this, and this alone, that he might find not only his love, but that comrade of his heart's desire whom he had sought all the days of his life.

And in Joyce's confused and blushing face, in her eyes as she raised them shyly toward his own, he read their mutual happiness.

With Joyce's arm drawn shyly through his own, and his shoulders nesting from Father McGrath's hand-clasp, he left the schoolhouse. Outside, the horse stood harnessed to the sleigh, which was loaded with the supplies. Lee handed Joyce inside and followed her. Father McGrath took the box seat of the big sleigh, which had originally functioned in the streets of some provincial city. Father McGrath had driven it to his destination—a detour round the range, with all its worldly goods packed inside it.

The journey was a slow one, the horse slipping on the frozen snow and plunging through the crusts that had formed over the surface. It was even colder than before, and there seemed no doubt that winter had set in at

last. All were glad when the log house came into view.

Father McGrath got down, flapping his arms. Lee helped Joyce out. They set down the supplies.

"I'll help you in w' these goods," said the priest, "but I wilna come inside. And dinna ye be coming back to me, Mrs. Anderson."—Joyce looked adorably confused at the address—and told me tales about your husband, because all the men are alike, as ye ha' yet to learn, and ye're in the trap o' matremony noo, the pair o' ye—tied fast, and there's naething this side o' death can unfasten the knot for ye.

"Guld-bye and guld luck to ye," he added, extending a hand to each.

But in the middle of that hand-clasp he stood still, listening. His face grew grim. Lee listened too. And at first he heard only the night wind stirring among the trees; but then something more ominous, yet very faint, coming out of the distance.

It died away. The two men watched each other's faces with a surmise that did not find vent in utterance. Perhaps it had been—the wind, the waves lapping the shore—but now it came again, louder and unmistakable. Lee dared not raise his eyes to meet Joyce's questioning gaze, lest she should discern the sudden fear.

For it was the put-putting of Rathway's motorboat.

The three might have been figures of stone as they stood there, listening to the sound of the engine, which grew rapidly louder. None of the three uttered a word.

Then the boat came into view, nearing the bank. It contained four men. One of them was Rathway. And even though Joyce was his inseparably, Lee waited for the sensation of an icy hand clutching his heart.

Father McGrath spoke. "Tis Rathway, and I doot not but he's some de'il's wurk afoot. But haud steady, Anderson. He wilna dare—he wilna dare—"

His voice trailed off into silence. The engine of the motorboat had been shut off. Rathway and his men had stepped out. They were ashore, they were coming up from the river toward the house, Rathway a little in the lead of the others. With his hunched shoulders and his great muscular strength, his look of malignant, mocking ferocity, he seemed the nearest thing that Lee had known to incarnate evil.

His face, as he drew near the group, was twisted in a wry, triumphant smile. He looked mockingly at Lee. He looked ironically at Father McGrath. But there was possession anticipated in the look he cast at Joyce, and Lee drew the girl to his side, his arms about her, standing a little in front of her to protect her from the sight of Rathway.

Father McGrath stepped forward. "Ye ha' na business here w' my friends, James Rathway!" he cried. "Ye ken verra weel the agreement we've entered into. So ye can take yersef and your de'il's crew awa'!"

"Aye?" sneered Rathway, regarding the priest with ironic banter. "But I have followed you and this party here because you were not at the mission. It's not my plan to stay."

"What do you want?" McGrath demanded.

"My wife," Rathway returned, stretching out his hand to place it on Joyce's shoulder.

With a loud cry Joyce leaped back, staring about her as if she did not know where she was. Lee let his clenched fist fall. The situation was too big for physical retort.

"Ay, my wife, Father McGrath," Rathway said again. "Married to me two years ago in Montreal. And there's the certificate."

He held out a document.

Father McGrath's first words before looking at it were characteristic: "Tis the first time I've heard o' the mon and na the wumman keepin' the marriage lines, James Rathway."

Lee was holding Joyce, who swayed in his arms. "What does he mean?" he kept repeating. "It's some trick. Tell them it's a trick, Joyce!"

But Joyce seemed neither to hear nor to understand anything. Meanwhile Father McGrath, who had been examining the paper, handed it back with an ironical bow.

"Mees Pelly that was, was united in the bonds of holy matrimony w' Meestair Anderson here three hours syne," he said. "T'd tak her wurrd against your own and ca' that a forgery."

But the priest's face shone deathly white in the moonlight.

"Aye?" sneered Rathway, pointing a long finger at Joyce. "Let her deny it if she dare!"

Joyce said not a word. She lay in Lee's arms as if she had been mortally stricken. A deadly fear began to creep over Lee, over McGrath. Behind

Rathway Shorty and Pierre and a third man grinned and shifted uneasily.

"And that's a lee, anyhow," said Father McGrath scornfully.

Rathway bowed, sneeringly, in turn. "Permit me to go on, Father: believe or disbelieve, it makes no difference. He sent his girl away to school to Montreal. Soon after, it was discovered that Pelly was wanted for an old murder—"

"Lee Number Two," said the priest. "Twas you betrayed him—I ha' nae doots o' that."

"He fled the country," pursued Rathway, unflinching. "As his only friend, fearing that his daughter might come to harm in Montreal, I went down there, saw her, and offered to make her my wife. She consented with alacrity—"

"Oo, aye, and we'll just cut out the alacrity," said Father McGrath in abysmal disgust, "because she didna, and if she did, it'll become you to say so."

"She married me at the Church of the Virgin, as this certificate proves. And it was agreed that she should continue her mission studies for a certain period before coming to live with me as my wife. I proposed to build a comfortable home for her at Siston lake and go into the fur business—"

"Fur?" shouted McGrath. "The only fur you've ever traded in is what ye've put on the tongues and stomachs of your victims, ye cheap poison-peddlin' hooch-went!"

Rathway went on as if he had not heard the insult: "Last month, when she had completed her course, she started north to meet me. As I was away on a business trip, I detailed two of my men to escort her from Little Falls. They met her. This man was with her, and he ordered them away under threat of shooting."

He turned to Lee with a scowl.

"At Mrs. Rathway's urgent request they went away to avoid bloodshed, but waited in the vicinity to make sure that no violence was offered her. As she did not reach their camping place, they became alarmed and went back. They found her lying under her horse, apparently abandoned by him after some accident—if it was only an accident."

"They brought her to Siston lake, where I had just returned. This man

followed them, attacked and stunned me from behind, stole a boat and two packs, and took her away, and appears to have been living a tramp's life in the woods with my wife ever since."

Lee, who was still holding Joyce, started, but Father McGrath held up his hand. "Na, na, let him feenish his lying story," he said.

"That's all," said Rathway. "In spite of all, I am willing to forgive the past and take her back. She was unconscious when this man got her into his power. He shall pay for what he has done, if there's law in this land—but this poor girl has been more sinned against than sinning. I'm willing to acknowledge her as my wife still. And I defy you, Father McGrath, to interfere."

Father McGrath walked a step or two toward Joyce, who was standing, encircled by Lee's arm, her eyes cast down. She raised them to his face in mute appeal.

"My child, there's only one thing to ask of ye. Did you marry this man? Can ye remember?"

Joyce shuddered, and she looked at the priest hopelessly. "Yes, it is true," she answered. "I married him."

A cry broke from Lee's lips. He released Joyce, and stood looking at her with the expression of a man who has received his death blow.

"Yes, it's true, it's true," said Joyce. She was speaking now with the calmness of one for whom nothing matters. "He came to me with the threat that he had my father in his power and would betray him unless I married him. It had been the terror of my father's life for years, that some day he would be arrested for that old murder."

"And therefore—yes, I married him, but I insisted that I was to finish my course before I lived with him as his wife. Then, last month, he wrote to me that he would wait no longer. He said my father, whom he had helped to escape across the frontier, had returned to the district, and that he would notify the authorities unless I came up to him immediately."

"And so I started, and—and God knows I could bear it no longer, and that is why He mercifully gave me forgetfulness!"

And, shuddering, she remained standing where she was like a cataleptic.

"So ye leed there, too!" cried Father McGrath to Rathway in white-hot wrath. "Ye've proved yersef a triple leard the noo, for Pelly's deid—"

"Deed?" shouted Rathway. "Aye, deid these many months, and ye claimed he was alive, and in your power, so that ye could get possession of this pair girl ye've deiced—"

But he broke off, and Rathway made no reply, but watched him as he strode to the spot where Joyce was standing. Gently he took her hand in his and began to whisper in her ear. And all the while there was silence, and yet it seemed as if through that silence innumerable powers were in conflict—man against man, man against law, man against God.

Then Lee cried out in a tone so wild that even Rathway and Rathway's men appeared awed by it:

"She's mine in the sight of God! Joyce, tell me that you care nothing for this trick that has been played on you! Tell me that you will defy this man and come away with me!"

Rathway stepped forward, covering Lee with a pistol.

"By heaven," he swore, "I'll blow your brains out if you meddle with me or mine, and there's no court in this land will hold me guilty."

Lee scarcely seemed to be aware of him. He was holding out his arms to Joyce, and she was trembling, and looking at him, irresolute. Father McGrath was holding her hands and still whispering in her ear. And suddenly a dreadful change came over Lee's face. Confidence was replaced by a look of mortal anguish.

"Joyce!" he cried wildly.

Joyce looked at the priest, who stepped between them; but it was Joyce whom he addressed, not Lee.

"My child, you married James Rathway of your ain free will," he said. "The motive has na bearing on the situation. He didna constrain you by fear of violence. 'Twas to save your father you did it, you say—aye, but 'twas to save him from the just processes of the law. There's nae way out, my dear. This man's your husband."

He looked at Lee. "Tis the saddest thing I've known," he said, "but ye see this makes the ceremony ye've been through valueless. There's nae way out o' it—name at all, lad. So you twa must e'en just say guidbye."

Lee turned to Joyce. He cried her name. She tottered toward him, hands outstretched, groaning before her, as if she were blind.

She found him, their hands clasped each other thus during a period of silence that seemed all eternity compressed into a few moments.

The words came monotonously from Lee's lips: "Joyce, are you—going—to—that man who—calls—himself your—husband?"

She bowed her head. Their eyes met, his in a dumb prolongation of that question, hers in mute, helpless agony.

Then suddenly Lee released her. He straightened himself, stood up stiffly, and squared his shoulders, as if he were on parade. And quietly he turned away.

Then the silence was broken by a wild laugh from Rathway. There was something in that laugh more devilish even than in the situation. For it was amused, shameless, merciless, devoid of any human element; it was like the laugh that the hyena gives over the kiss of some nobler beast that it has supplanted.

"Put his pack out of my house, Pierre! Fling it out into the snow!" he shouted, chucking. "What, your pack, is it? Never mind, we'll let him keep it. Can't turn the poor devil out into the snow to freeze. He'll go to jail later on for stealing it."

He strode up to Joyce and clasped his hand upon her shoulder. "Joyce, my dearie, have you said goodbye to your sweetheart?" he asked. "We'll make this place our headquarters for a little honeymoon before going back to Siston lake—what d'you say to that?"

The girl shrank under his touch. Rathway saw it and scowled. But he turned toward Lee, his face alight with triumph.

"You—take yourself away with your stolen goods, and don't let me catch you hanging round my wife again!" he shouted. "Or I'll shoot you like the dog that you are. And, harken, Mr. Anderson! Don't you ever dare to show your face among decent men again, or I'll have you jailed!"

Father McGrath strode forward, his face working with emotion.

"Aye, James Rathway, ye're feeling your triumph the noo," he cried, "and the yellow cur's come to the top in ye. But ye'll remember that there's a higher power sometimes makes hash of e'en the best laid plans, James Rathway!"

Then he strode to where Lee was standing, and clasped his hand on his shoulder. "Will ye nae come back to the mission w' me this night, Meestair Anderson?" he pleaded.

But Lee stood like a stone, appearing not to be conscious of the priest's question, while Rathway, with an evil smile, put his arm round Joyce's waist and led her, unresistant, toward the log house, followed by his three aides.

And to McGrath that was the most awful moment in his whole career, and all the manhood in him urged him to fight, fight to the death against this human sacrifice. It was only his lifetime of discipline that held him at Lee's side. And, looking into Lee's stony face, an immense pity swelled up in his heart.

The door of the hut closed. Lee

quivered and garted as the priest's hand fell on his shoulder again.

"Lee, lad, ye'll come back w' me," Father McGrath pleaded.

An inarticulate sound like that of some animal broke from Lee's lips. And, shaking himself free from the priest's friendly grasp, he picked up the rifle and the snowshoes, and went slouching off in the direction of the forest. Father McGrath took a step or two toward him, then, shaking his head, watched him as he made his way over the frozen ground into the darkness.

Sighing, the priest turned back to the sleigh. He gathered up the reins; then, with an impulse of sudden fury, shook his fist toward the log house, lying peacefully enough in the bosom of the frozen valley, bathed in moonlight.

"If I warena a priest of God, and believe that He brings all things right in His guid time accordin' to His weel, I'd throttle ye like the hound ye are!" he cried.

CHAPTER XV

Joyce Fights a Good Fight

Joyce let Rathway lead her inside the log house without offering any resistance. She moved like an automaton under the pressure of his arm inside the large room he released her.

"Put down my pack!" he ordered Shorty, who was attending him. "Light some candles and pin something over the window, and then get out!"

In a minute Rathway and Joyce were alone. The girl shuddered as the candle light revealed the man's face to her. She had seen it so many times in fearful dreams, and all the way up through the range. When she had married Rathway she had hoped against hope that something would intervene to save her; but now the blow had fallen. And she stood quite still, her hands crossed on her breast, waiting for what was to come.

Then Rathway seized her in his arms. He kissed her ice-cold lips, cheeks, eyes, and throat. His hands went pawing over her. And as she still stood unresistant and unresponsive, his passion grew the fiercer, and mingled with fury at the realization that this girl, so submissive in his arms, was his in body alone.

He released her and, in his rage, began to growl out jeers and curses.

"A different honeymoon from what you were expecting, Joyce girl!" he cried. "No, no, the same honeymoon, but a different husband. A better one, eh, my girl? Well, can't you speak? Which of your two men do you prefer?"

But Joyce made no reply.

"You've answered me, you drab!" Rathway shouted. "So you've been living with him on the trail these two weeks past! By heaven, I was a fool to take you back from him without killing him! You thought I'd swallow that lie about your having forgotten you were a married woman, did you? Did you ever hear of a woman forgetting that she was married?"

Joyce only watched him with a fixed gaze that made him uneasy.

"You won't pretend to me that your relations with him were innocent. I suppose?"

Still Joyce said nothing, and Rathway grasped her by the wrists.

"Answer me! Were they?"

"Yes, they were innocent." The words issued mechanically from her lips. He glared at her, incredulous, wanting to be convinced, unable to be. Of course the girl was lying. He would rather have known the worst than remain in that state of uncertainty. He didn't understand her. It was barely possible, no more. He was choking at the sight of her—his, yet in spirit a world away. And suddenly he fell upon his knees, seized her hands, and began impressing kisses upon them.

"Forgive me!" he stammered. "I'm mad with jealousy. I know you were unconscious and at his mercy when he took you away. You weren't to blame. I love you, Joyce. I've always been mad about you, you know that. Once, when I lost my head, your father shot me. Won't you forget this other man, this Anderson? He means no good to you. He's after that mine, no doubt, and that's why he forced his company upon you in the range."

"Forget him, Joyce. I love you. I'll make you a good husband, and you shall be a rich woman. We'll give up this life here and go south, where people know how to live. Can you love me, Joyce?"

"No," she answered, "I don't love you. I have always hated you."

"By heaven, I'll show you!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

What One's Eyes Tell

We are told that the eyes of the intellectual man are gray, and it is a fact that most men of genius have gray eyes. Brown eyes are said to express temperament rather than intellect.

Although brown-eyes flash with anger, light up with joy, and change swiftly with jealousy, blue and gray eyes can express greater sadness, says London Tit-Bits.

Green and black eyes are supposed to be the most wicked. Becky Sharp's green eyes played an important part in her various conquests.

The "vamp" in modern fiction usually possessed flashing eyes of either green or black. Actually there are no black eyes; dark brown or dark gray eyes have the appearance of being black in certain lights.

More Advice

People don't care for free advice. Sell your stuff to a magazine.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

HOW TO KEEP WELL

DR. FREDERICK R. GREEN
Editor of "HEALTH"

LIGHTING THE HOME

MUCH has been written about the lighting of schoolrooms, offices and workshops, but little has been said about lighting the home. Yet the home is the place where most of us spend our evenings, when artificial light of some kind is required and where most of the reading is done. Proper lighting is also necessary for all the ordinary household tasks. The way in which a home is lighted has much to do with the ease and comfort of living.

Since the invention of electric light, the incandescent electric bulb has very largely replaced all other forms of lighting. In all cities and most of smaller towns electric lights have taken the place of gas. Even in the country districts today, wherever electric currents are available, it is used in place of the kerosene lamp, which was formerly the best form of lighting obtainable.

The electric bulb gives a far more brilliant light than either gas or the oil lamp. So that it is not strange that undue emphasis has been laid on the intensity of the light. Yet good lighting requires something more than brilliancy. It is not a question of how bright a light is, but rather of how well it illuminates the field and how well suited it is to the human eye.

Unshaded lights of any kind are bad for the eyes. The more brilliant the light the more it needs shading. Even "frosted" light bulbs are too glaring. All lights in the house should have shades dense enough to reduce the brightness of the light. The object of artificial lights is not to throw light into the eyes, but onto the object, whether book, magazine, newspaper, sewing, fancy work or games.

Reflected light, if too bright, is just as trying on the eyes as direct light. So highly polished tables or desk tops should be covered with dull covers or blotters. The indirect method of lighting, by which the light is thrown against the ceiling and reflected downward, has much to commend it.

In purchasing a table lamp or portable lamp or a shade for any lamp, sit down by it and notice two things, first whether the shade throws enough light on the field of vision to illuminate it clearly, and second, whether the shade shields the eyes from the source of light. Unless the shade does these two things, do not buy it, no matter how artistic or decorative it may be.

Dining rooms are best lighted by a central cluster or dome suspended over the table. Many kitchens are lighted by a single unshaded bulb on a drop cord. This is wearing on the eyes. One or more lights enclosed in a diffusing glass shade and fastened near the ceiling is much better. Bedroom lights are naturally placed at the side of mirrors, as are also bathroom lights.

For those who use oil lamps, the problem is much simpler. While not as brilliant as electric light, oil lamps give a much softer light and one less tiring to the eyes. But oil lights should also be shaded, so as to keep the light out of the eyes and throw it on the field of work.

GUARDING HEALTH AFTER FORTY

CHILDHOOD and youth have always been considered the most dangerous periods in life. But increased knowledge and greater care have so reduced the amount of disease among children that the death rate is constantly decreasing. Given a healthy childhood, the individual should have enough surplus energy and resistance to last through early adult life. But by forty this capital is spent and, unless care and good judgment are used, the man or woman finds that just at the time when they should be in their prime they have already laid the foundation of future trouble.

This problem of the conservation of health in middle life is recognized as one of the most important questions in the health field. In a recent article in the Texas State Journal of Medicine, Dr. William M. Brumby, state health officer, discusses it at length.

Although the average length of life has been remarkably lengthened since 1880, he says, it has been largely through the prevention or reduction of disease of infancy and childhood. The amount of heart disease, apoplexy, paralysis, Bright's disease and cancer have doubled in the same period. "There is something radically wrong," he says, "in the habits of our business men, judging from the increase of chronic diseases after forty." Heart disease leads in the actual number of deaths, although stomach disturbances cause the greatest amount of sickness.

Fat, Doctor Brumby says, is fatal after forty. Lightweight people live the longest. Few persons live to be over eighty who are overweight.

The best safeguard against the diseases of middle life and the best assurance for old age is a regular periodic health examination, not postponed until you begin to feel badly, but made every six months or a year, to learn, early and far in advance of any disease, what shape your body is in and how you are standing the wear and tear of your work.

You wouldn't run your car year after year without an overhauling. Why wait until your body begins to knock before giving it any care?