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—PROVARE PER CREDERE—

The Price of Folly

By VICTOR REDCLIFFE

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"A good young man!" said Deacon Levi Darrow, and indeed Royce Aymer seemed worthy of the designation. In the estimation of the venerable church man, Boyd Hapgood was not in the same category, and yet the latter had been the closest chum of Aymer, and at the very moment that the remark was made the latter was bound for home to read for a second time a letter he had received from Hapgood in the city that day.

It was only one of a series that Hapgood had written during six months' sojourn in the big metropolis. He was urging Aymer to join him. He painted glowing pictures of the lures and enjoyments of his new environment. Aymer was quite the reverse of Hapgood, being steady, saving and of fixed character and habits. Hapgood had been somewhat discredited while at Rossville. He traveled with a lively crowd, his parents provided liberally for him and he had all the promptings of the spendthrift. For all the contrast between the two, somehow a genuine friendship had sprung up between them, and there had been a mutual pledge that through all of life they would stick to one another and divide their last crust!

"It's different with Hapgood," reflected Aymer. "He has plenty of spending money, and can dress well and throw it around. Then, too, he has the influence of city relatives to get him a good position. Where would I be, with one common suit and less than one hundred dollars capital? No, Hapgood and the city aren't for me until I can go there under better prospects."

Still, the cautious Aymer had a longing to join his friend. He was sick and tired of slaving from early in the morning until late at night in a general store for a beggarly pittance. One influence alone held him to the town, one especial being acted as though his diligence, seemly courtesy and unpretentious ways appealed to her own practical nature. She was Alice Lisle.

One day there came a hurry call at the store for Aymer. For the first time in six years he asked his employer for half a day off.

"It's my uncle, Mr. Deane," explained Aymer. "He is sick—dying, his messenger tells me, and wishes me to come to him at once."

"Why, he doesn't seem to have paid much attention to you in the past."

"No," agreed Aymer, "but he is old, he is my dead mother's only brother. I guess he has led a pretty lonely and miserable life, and of course I can't refuse to go to him."

Next day the storekeeper received a note from Aymer, stating that he was at his uncle's, that the latter was very low, and had insisted on his remaining with him until the end came.

"A day and a half," commented the storekeeper, "maybe more. If Aymer doesn't make it up with extra work I'll dock him for every lost minute!"

But the opportunity to "dock" Royce Aymer never came. John Graham died the following day, and all Rossville marveled over the astounding circumstances that at the last minute Mr. Graham had left his entire fortune to Aymer. The young heir did not jubilate over this sudden and unexpected accession of wealth. Reserved and unpretentious, he kept his own counsel and applied himself loyally to carrying out verbal instruction given to him by his uncle. These covered certain portions of the inheritance which would consume about a third of it. There was a local church to be endowed. Some benefits were to go to a theological seminary. A new house was to be built for two old ladies who were distant relatives. Very faithfully Aymer attended to these beneficiaries. Then he counted up his resources and at last stood on the threshold of a new life.

In secret his face glowed and his eyes brightened as he realized that he was now prepared to join his friend in the city and exploit its pleasures with the best of them! The only extravagance to which so far Aymer had committed himself was the purchase of an automobile. As he started out in it one morning to look over the new house, just ready for the two old ladies, a telegram was handed him. It was from Boyd Hapgood and it pressed him urgently to come to the city to rescue him from a terrible tangle.

Hiding in an obscure room, shattered in health, trembling at every sound, Royce Aymer found his friend. As the latter recited his experience in a downward path that had led him not only into the highways of folly, but had made of him an embezzler, all the glamour of city life seemed to fade from the view of his loyal friend. Aymer cleared up the money troubles, set his friend on his feet once more, and chastened, disillusioned, started back for Rossville.

It must have been fate that wrecked his automobile near to the Lisle home, and further destiny that made pretty, solicitous Alice his nurse for a week. And in his convalescence Royce Aymer, under the influence of the ideal home life about him, shuddered as he thought of what the devouring city had done for Boyd Hapgood, and was content to forego all its gilded fascinations for the sweetest little wife in the world!

A Woodland Maid

By VICTOR REDCLIFFE

(Copyright, 1919, by the Western Newspaper Union.)

Life at its dreariest had come to Alma Royce at eighteen. Her father had died just as she had reached the acme of girlhood loveliness and had settled into a life which she had reason to hope would have no break for a long time to come. The existence of herself and her father had been an ideal one since she was a mere child. There was not a country estate in the district that could equal Wildwood in extent and beauty, and there for over a decade the Royces had received all the advantages of luxury and ease.

The former owner of the place, John Wayne, died when his only son and heir, Gerald, was a mere lad. Previous to that Alma's father, originally a college professor, had broken down in health and John Wayne, an old college friend, had employed him to systematize and care for his great collection of antiques. When Mr. Wayne died there was a provision made in his will that the old scientist was to continue his work and have a home at Wildwood and its entire charge until his son attained his majority. Of that son after that the Royces only knew that he was receiving a full education abroad.

It was after her father's death that the family lawyer of the Waynes visited Wildwood.

"Miss Royce," he said, "we understand that Mr. Gerald Wayne is about to return to this country and settle up the estate. Doubtless Wildwood will pass into other hands. It may be some time before that may come about, and until it does, we would like to have you remain in charge here."

Alma felt that it was only a question of time when she would have to go out into the wide world cheerlessly alone. And she shrank from the strenuous life ahead of her, contrasting so harsh and unfriendly with her calm, even experience at Wildwood.

Alma was busy one day directing the transplanting of some shrubbery when she noticed a young man, an entire stranger, standing by the garden roadway. His eyes were fixed upon her studiously and interestedly. As her glance met his own he advanced, removing his hat with a courteous bow. Then a seeming afterthought as to introducing himself appeared to occur to him. He took several cards, selecting one indiscriminately and nearing Alma tendered it to her. She read upon its face "Wylie Blair," and under this the name of the law firm which attended to the business of the estate.

"You are Miss Royce, I am sure," spoke the visitor. He was rather grave of manner, young and handsome as he was, as though study or weariness of the world had brought seriousness and surfeit, but a sight of the fair young girl appeared to lighten his natural mood. "I have come to look over Wildwood, preparatory to a possible disposal of it to the best advantage."

A new brightness came into his face as Alma in her pretty intelligent way showed him over the grounds. But it was when she led him inside the sumptuous house that he became absorbed in contemplation of its contents. His being seemed to be in complete harmony with the unique and beautiful, and he revealed over a Carrara marble girl's head by Fischl, a favorite horse study of Rosa Bonheur, Khiva rug, a Sofmake of wide proportions, the antique mahogany highboys, the Venetian teak wood screen before the arabesque fireplace, pearl reading glasses, silver trophy cups won by speedy horses, and books, books, books, gathered from the most exclusive storehouses of the world.

For nearly a week each afternoon this apparent agent and authorized representative of Gerald Wayne appeared at Wildwood. He made a pretense of taking notes, but it was clear from his intent association with Alma that he most prized this innocent, gentle woodland creature. He commended her careful system of keeping the accounts of the estate. He was a rapt listener, as in her well-informed way she recited the value and history of this and that priceless piece of bric-a-brac. At times Alma was puzzled, for while he seemed pleased at the information she imparted, here and there some chance remark showed that he was no novice in art antique.

"I am going away tomorrow, Miss Royce," he said at the end of a week, and on the morrow, as they were seated together on a garden seat, he looked at her earnestly with the words: "You have made Wildwood a revelation to me, and I am satisfied its owner would be a vandal quite to scatter to the winds ruthlessly the labor of long years."

"I am glad," said Alma in her frank, ingenuous way, "and I hope you will tell Mr. Wayne that." Then she sighed and glanced sorrowfully all about her. "I shall miss all the beautiful life I have passed here. It has been a true home to me."

He leaned closer to her and his eyes were glowing strangely. "Why should you go, Miss Royce?" he questioned. "If I were its owner and should ask you to stay because I have learned to love you, what would you say?" The fluttering blush upon her face told him that her soul was responsive to his own. His eyes grew glad. "I ask you to stay," he added, "for I am Gerald Wayne."

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