

The Impostor

(Continued from page 2.)

Mrs. A.: Gone? Gone? What are you talking about, Marion?

Mrs. M. (aside): I knew there was some mystery about the affair.

Beryl: Wake up, old girl; you look as if you were seeing a ghost.

Marion: I am—the ghost of three happy months. . . But I'm not asleep, Beryl. . . I've just wakened up properly. . . Mrs. Ashmead, I've got to catch a train in half-an-hour; may I see you for a moment alone?

Mrs. A. (deeply distressed): A train! What can you mean? Caroline, please

Beryl (rising hurriedly): Of course; come along, Mother.

Nora (in great haste): I'm shockingly late. Cheerio, everybody!

Mrs. M. (with immense firmness): I will remain. As your oldest friend, Elizabeth, I must remain and protect you.

Mrs. A. (very agitated): Oh, no; oh, no, Caroline!

Beryl: Come along Mother; can't you see . . . ?

Mrs. M.: I see a great deal, Beryl; and I see that this is the moment for firmness.

Nora (persuasively): But, Mrs. Morton, Marion says she must catch a train.

Marion (intervening): Never mind . . . After all, everyone must know soon—and I deserve it. Please stay, Beryl and Nora. It won't take long. It's really—really just the confession of an Impostor.

Mrs. A.: Marion!

Beryl: What?

Nora: Oh, what rot!

Mrs. A. (in triumph): I knew it!

(All together.)

Marion: Dear Mrs. Ashmead, try to forgive me! I did not mean to hurt you so much. Yes, it is all quite true. I am a backblocks girl. I've lived all my life in a corrugated iron shack. I've milked cows and worn gum-boots. (Viciously—to Mrs. M.): Yes, and the mud has oozed right over the top of them.

Mrs. M.: Kindly spare us the revolting details.

Mrs. A. (very agitated): Marion, you have a touch of the sun. You are talking wildly.

Marion (taking the centre of the stage): I am perfectly calm, Mrs. Ashmead, and I'm telling the truth. It's the first truth I've told for nearly three months.

Mrs. A.: What do you mean? Does Wilfrid know this?

Marion: Yes, but only this afternoon. I wrote it all to him, as I had meant to write it for you to find after I had gone. But now I see that this was the coward's way.

Mrs. A. (very distressed): Marion, What is all this? Am I dreaming or are you?

Marion (going to her and taking her hand): Dear, I am so sorry. . . It is only a foolish, ordinary little story—but I must tell it quickly, because very soon my taxi will be here. I had just left myself time to write, but now I see that I can explain better. I want to show you that it is not that I am ashamed of my people—only that I am ashamed of myself.

Mrs. A.: Ashamed? Oh, Marion, what have you done?

Marion: Nothing so very dreadful—only this. . . I don't belong to any Southern family. I haven't any position, and—what is the word you all use?—any "social background." My home is a little bush farm, only a hundred and fifty miles from here, right up on the ranges. It's all logs and bush and cows—and mud. But there's love there, and courage, and—and vision—and I'm going back.

Mrs. A. (dazed and relieved): A farmer's daughter! But why not tell us? Oh, Marion, why have you done this?

Mrs. M.: My dear Elizabeth, need you ask? A most successful move!

Beryl (sharply): Mother, don't!

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Nora (gently): Were you just sick of it, Marion?

Marion (eagerly): That was it, Nora—I was so sick of it; tired of the cows and the loneliness and hard work. Yes, and tired of mud and the bush. I did want some fun so dreadfully. You see, I was only twenty-one. . . And besides, my head was stuffed full of silly ideas and dreams out of books. I read every spare minute. I got books from the library in the nearest town; they came up in the cream lorry three at a time, once a week. I spent all my money in that—in that and one other thing. In every art union that was advertised, I bought a whole bookful of tickets.

Mrs. M. (aside): The gambling spirit is rife in the lower classes. I've always heard that.

Beryl: And then you won a prize! How perfectly thrilling, old dear!

Marion: Yes, at last. Oh, not one of the big ones, only three hundred pounds. (Smiles sadly.) I say "only" now, because I have come to think, as you all do, that three hundred pounds is nothing. It was everything to me then. It gave me my chance.

Mrs. M. (very significantly): Your chance—exactly!

Beryl: Mother! Never mind, Marion, we understand—your chance of a spree.

Marion (eagerly): Yes, just that—Oh, I did mean it to be only that! (Pauses—then continues quietly): They were all so sweet and unselfish about it, though that money could have done just everything on the farm. They said I was to please myself, but they didn't like my coming alone—so, in the end, I ran away.

Mrs. M.: And now you are running away again! Quite a habit!

Mrs. A. (sadly): Your poor mother! You did a very cruel thing, Marion.

Marion: Yes, and it has led to many other cruel things.

Mrs. M.: But why come here? Why should we be specially favoured?

Marion (eagerly): That was chance, pure chance; I swear it. I bought that little car for a hundred pounds, and spent another hundred on clothes; and then I thought I'd go for a trip. But I'd only just learnt to drive. You see, my books had taught me a lot, but they

hadn't taught me how to drive a car or to play tennis.

Mrs. M. (viciously): They had taught you, however, how to fall out at the gate of the wealthiest bachelor in the district—a more valuable lesson!

Marion (furiously): How dare you! Do you think I actually planned that? Why, I had never even heard of Wilfrid's name!

Mrs. A. (with an immense effort, breaking a life-long habit): Caroline, how can you? Go on, Marion—I believe you.

Beryl: We all believe you, Marion. You see, we know you.

Marion: You darlings! But you are making it too easy—I must be honest. When you were so good to me, Mrs. Ashmead, when you took me in and gave me such a splendid time; it all seemed just heaven-sent.

Mrs. M. Personally, I should have attributed the favours to another locality. Marion (unheeding): But there was one thing I hadn't reckoned on. (Hesitates.)

Nora (very kindly): Someone you mean—Wilfrid.

Beryl: Of course. Don't mind owning up, old girl. We all think him rather a pet.

Marion (softly): Yes—Wilfrid—and so I am going away. I would have slipped off quietly, but for Mrs. Morton. (With a wan smile): Thank you, Mrs. Morton!

Mrs. M. (grimly): Do not let me detain you further, Miss Norwood.

Nora But it's a real King Cophetua story, Marion. Why spoil the ending?

Mrs. M. (who cannot be expected to stand this): What, Wilfrid Ashmead marry a—a cow-girl! (To Marion): I presume that is the feminine of cowboy, Miss Norwood?

Marion (demurely): We are usually called cow-spankers, Mrs. Morton. The gender is common.

Mrs. M. (shuddering): It is, indeed.

Marion: And so—thank you a thousand times, dear Mrs. Ashmead; I shall always love you for my perfect holiday. Try some day to forgive me. (Mrs. A. is crying quietly.) I am going home.

Nora: But won't it be awful, Marion?

Marion: Awful? Oh, no. Of course I shall miss you all just terribly, and all the fun and the good times. But they're my people. I belong there.

Mrs. A. (sadly): You seemed to belong here so perfectly. Why have you done all this? When it had gone so far why didn't you marry Wilfrid? He cares for you so much.

Marion: I know—and I too. That's why. How could I marry him after all my lies? (Then with brave gaiety and a mischievous glance at Mrs. M.): Besides, think what a stain it would be on all your friends! (Gravely): And then, how can I ever know that Wilfrid would have fallen in love with me if he had met me in my own surroundings? How do I know that he would not be awkward and self-conscious with my father and mother—even, perhaps, a little bit ashamed of those dear people who are pure gold?

Mrs. A. (softly): But he loves you—and you love him, dear child.

Marion (bravely): And if I do—if I did—it is all part of the dream, the play—just one of the stories that I used to read. It will always be my happiest memory. But this is life, and in real life I shall marry a farmer in dungarees and a grey shirt—and some day I shall be happy again. (Starts and looks at her watch.) And now I must go. Dear Mrs. Ashmead, I can't ask you to forgive me.

Mrs. A. (very sadly): How can I let you go, dear child? (Clings to her.)

Mrs. M. (loudly): Elizabeth, how can you? This is deplorable weakness. (Marion struggles with her tears. The girls gather round her.)

Beryl: Give me your address, Marion. I swear I'll write often.

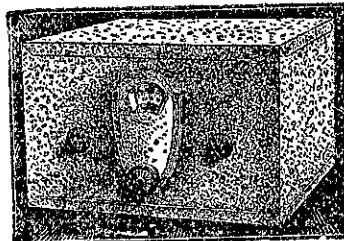
Nora: And in the summer we'll run up and see you. It'll be no end of a lark.

Marion: No, we won't mix life and fiction. This is where the villain departs, alone. . . I won't ask you to say goodbye to the Impostor, Mrs. Morton.

Mrs. M. (with grim humour): On the contrary, it is the one thing that I could say to you that would give me complete satisfaction.

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