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**CASTORIA**

THE CENTAUR COMPANY, NEW YORK CITY.

**The Road to Arcady.**

By TEMPLE BAILEY.

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"How very extraordinary!" said Christopher Kent. He sat up and surveyed the red covered cart drawn by a very plump pony that had stopped by the side of the road.

A girl in a smart costume of tan cord climbed down from the front seat and led the pony out of the shafts, tied him with a long tether so that he might crop the juicy sod and then, returning once more to the cart, helped a somewhat fragile but smiling lady to descend.

"Well, of all things!" said Christopher helplessly.

But words failed him as he watched the further proceedings of the girl in tan.

From the depths of the cart she brought forth a little folding table, which she proceeded to set up in a place screened from the gaze of passing folk by a hedge of wild honeysuckle.

On the table the girl set a shining copper kettle, two cups, two plates, a small teapot and various tin boxes and little glass jars, whose gay labels proclaimed the deliciousness within.

"It's a picnic," the young man decided, and as the older lady lighted the alcohol flame and it burned beneath the copper kettle Christopher sighed.

In ten minutes he was due at the Sunset Inn for his supper. He would eat it with the rest of the surveying party of which he was the head. They would have fried ham and boiled potatoes and pie, and the only woman would be the girl who waited on the table and who was big and frouzy and stupid.

And here within a stone's throw of where he lay under the great oak were two ladies making tea as daintily as if they were in their drawing room.

He laid down his book. "It's a romantic situation," he reflected, "and far be it from me to evade it." With that he stepped jauntily into the open.

He saw the girl lift her head and look at him, and as he went toward her she rose and came forward.

"I am so glad," she said, "to see some one who will tell me if there is a place near here where I can get oats for my pony. I gave him the last this morning."

"I was just coming," Christopher replied gravely, "to find if there was any I could do for you. It is an unusual circumstance, I might say a great treat, to see ladies up here. I felt that I must offer you the hospitality of the mountain road—the keys of our city, as it were."

The girl gave him a quick glance, noting the strength of the tall figure and his air of good breeding. "I am sure," she said, "that you are very kind and now if you will tell me your name—I will present you to my mother, Mrs. Ames."

The older lady acknowledged the introduction genially.

"You must stay and have tea with us," she said. "I am afraid we can't offer you much but tinned things. But they are really good, and Eleanor was able to get some eggs and some lettuce this morning, so she is going to have a salad and make an omelet in the chalet's kitchen."

"This picnic has been an all day affair?" was Christopher's question.

"It has been an affair of two months," Mrs. Ames said, with a smile. "We live in the cart."

"You live?" Words failed the young man as he looked at the two graceful women, each with the indefinable something that proclaims the sheltered woman.

It seemed incredible that they should trust themselves alone in the mountain wilds with their pony and their frail little cart.

But the daughter was explaining smilingly. "We lost everything," she said, "in the panic last fall. And mother's health failed at the same time. The doctor said that she must have the mountain air, and we had the pony—he was a pet from my little girl days—so we bought the cart and started on a trip of adventure."

"We have been on the road two months and haven't had a single uncomfortable experience. Mother has gained ten pounds, and we have had a lovely time."

"But isn't it a bit dangerous?" Kent asked.

"We were a little scared at first," Eleanor admitted, "especially at night. There was always an owl to hoot or a dog to howl or a frog to croak, but after we got used to it we slept like babies."

"Kent shook his head. "There's a pretty tough clang among the miners up here. It's different lower down, where you come in touch only with agricultural communities. But some of these men are very ignorant and very rough."

"Please," the girl cautioned, "please don't tell us about them. We want to reach the top of the mountain, and I am not a bit afraid."

She was making the omelet as she talked, turning it expertly with a thin knife and taking it up when it was puffy and brown.

"It is a food fit for the gods," Kent commented when she had served it with the salad and cream cheese and crackers.

"If you only knew," he continued, "how good it seems to eat once more of the food of civilization. You should see the cooking we have at the Sunset Inn."

"This is the food of Arcady," Eleanor told him. "Mother and I call this the perfect land. And tomorrow we shall reach the heights!"

The way she said it thrilled Kent with a new emotion. How beautiful she was with the dreams in her eyes!

"You must let me watch over you while you are here," he said after a silence. "I am afraid some of these half savage foreigners may make it unpleasant when they know you are unprotected."

But Eleanor would not hear of it. "Indeed we are safe," she protested. "Every one we meet has treated us with fine courtesy."

But he was not convinced, and all that night he slept on the ground with-in calling of the mountain cart.

The next day the pony drew the red cart to the top of the mountain, and there the ladies set up a permanent camp, facing the sunset, with the valleys stretching far below them.

Every day Christopher Kent climbed the forest road, taking with him sometimes a fish that he had caught in the stream or a brace of birds to be broiled over the fire.

And always the two lonely women welcomed him, Mrs. Ames frankly and Eleanor with a dawning shyness that gave him hope.

"I have had a bit of good fortune," he told the girl one morning eagerly. "My uncle has written that when I go back in December I am to have a part interest in his business. It means a big income and a settled place for life."

"And you won't come again to the mountain?" she asked.

"No, my work will be done in town."

She sat very still, looking off over the valley. "Poor mountain!" she said. "How lonely it will be when we are gone and the winter comes!"

She shivered a little. "It's such a gray October day," she added.

"What are your plans?" he questioned.

"Mine? Oh, I don't know!" a little drearily. "When I can leave mother I will go to work. In the meantime we will live with a distant cousin."

It was on his tongue to tell her how he loved her, but he felt that this was not the time or the place. Here he must be her protector, not her lover.

That night he could not sleep, and at last he rose and looked out of the window. The wind moaned and sighed in the trees; the moon was overcast by clouds. Somewhere in the distance he heard a drunken song. As he listened the song grew fainter. Some of the miners were going up the mountain.

He dressed hurriedly and followed. As he came near the little camp he heard the snarl of angry voices mingled with Eleanor's clear tones.

"You must let the pony alone," she said, "at once."

Then, as the whistle of a lash cut the air, she spoke again. "If you touch him," she said, "I'll shoot."

Christopher came into the circle of the firelight on a run. A half dozen swarthy men were grouped about the pony. Within the cart cowered Mrs. Ames. Eleanor stood on the back step and pointed her pistol straight at the snarling crowd.

She was enveloped in a long raincoat, and her hair was braided into two long golden ropes. She looked like a child, with her white face and slight figure, and when she saw Christopher she swayed toward him.

"Oh, make them go away!" she cried helplessly, and the pistol dropped from her nerveless hand.

The men turned and saw him, and at the sight of his set face they at once began apologies. "We just wanted to have some fun with the pony," they said. But he waved them away. "I'll deal with you later," he said, and they slunk away in the shadows.

Then Christopher went to the girl, who was bending over her mother. The older woman revived immediately in the comfort of a strong man's presence. "I was very afraid," she said, "but they looked such brutes."

Eleanor made some coffee under the trees, and when Kent had carried a cup to Mrs. Ames, who was still in the cart, he came back and issued orders. "I am going to drive you down into the valley," he said. "You and your mother must spend the night at one of the farmhouses."

"But—Eleanor protested.

"There are no 'buts,'" he told her. "You are to obey," and he smiled down at her.

The light from the dying fire showed the tenderness in his strong face, and, seeing it, she said "Oh!" with quick drawn breath.

"Dear heart," he murmured, "just once you must obey. But if you could promise to love and honor always we might make a marriage service of it tomorrow. There's a little church in the valley, and I know the minister."

"You are doing it just to take care of me," she said, flushing.

He took her hand in his. "I am doing it because I love you," he said. "Shall we find the little church, Eleanor?"

"Oh, who would have believed that the road to Arcady led there?" she whispered, with a wonderful light in her eyes.

HER PHYSICIAN ADVISED

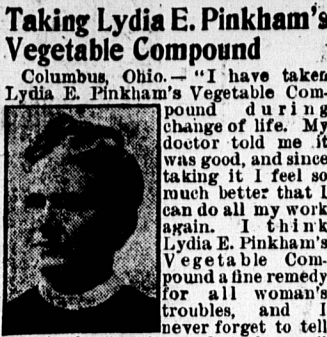
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