The Girl Who Ran Away

By CLARISSA MACKIE

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ALICE PEARCE had dressed rapidly for the early dinner at "Beechcamp," where she was visiting the Merrills at their summer camp. And when the musical notes of a bugle announced that the meal was in readiness, Alice gave a reassuring nod to the reflection of her pretty face and, dressed in white from top to toe like some very young bride, she went out to the great wide veranda where all meals were served except in stormy weather.

The guests numbered a dozen, several of whom Alice recognized as old acquaintances. There was one man who came in a little late and sat down near Mrs. Merrill, on the same side of the table as Alice was sitting. She could not see him, but the corner where he was seemed full of merriment. She was glad of that—glad because the youths on either side of her were jolly college boys—she wanted fun and laughter—lots of it all the time, because life had been rather bitter the last few months for pretty Alice Pearce, especially regarding her affair with Blake Irving! Well, she had run away from Blake since their quarrel and she had made her parents solemnly vow not to inform the remorseful lover of her whereabouts. Mrs. Pearce had shot a guilty look at her grim husband when their daughter exacted this promise, and Alice remembered her father's hearty voice when he said promptly:

"Of course, daughter, your mother and I solemnly promise not to tell Blake where you have gone! Go in peace, and come home with Blake entirely gone from your heart!"

"Of course he has gone from my heart now," Alice had said in a very shaky voice, but they had been cheery to the last, and the girl had no suspicion that the day before the promise had been given, Mrs. Pearce had whispered a few words to Blake.

"I am hundreds of miles away from him," thought Alice, a little drearily, and just then the young man on her left made a funny remark and Alice laughed merrily. Suddenly, the merriment in Mrs. Appleton's corner ceased. Just as if the sound of Alice's laughter had stilled it.

Perhaps it had—who knows?

It was long after dinner was over that Alice set down her coffee cup and stepped through one of the open windows into the moon-splashed night. She paused in ecstasy at the head of the steps. Through an open space she saw the lake, glistening like a silver mirror—boats were down there and she heard the distant tinkle of a guitar. Alice felt a sudden distaste for society—she confessed to a longing for solitude—she wanted to think about Blake—just once more before she ousted him from her heart forever. That was why she had come to Beechcamp. She ran down the steps and stepped into one of the dim, moonlit aisles among the pines. Almost instantly the pines seemed to close about her—behind her!

"It is an illusion!" she breathed quickly, her hands flying to her heart, and so she stood in a listening attitude—listening to the soft music of the breeze through the pine trees, thinking of Blake Irving, and wondering what he was doing at that moment.

Suddenly, she awoke from her reverie. A man's familiar footsteps came down the aisle behind her, she heard Blake's voice, softly calling her, and in her terror Alice Pearce fled. Of course her white dress made her conspicuous, but she was fleet of foot. But always in the distance behind her she heard the crash of heavy footsteps, and now, suddenly she heard a crashing in front of her.

She stopped and slipped into the shadow of a dark thicket, and gasped breathlessly. For she was between two fears—and the last was the greatest fear that she had ever known.

In the moonlit space in front of her a great black bear was standing on his hind legs dabbing at her with great claws, and growling fiercely.

Behind her the footsteps paused a moment and then Blake's voice came low and caressing.

"Darling!" he said, and then he was in front of her thrusting her behind him with one strong hand that did not loose its possessive grip. In his other hand something flashed, once, twice, three times. There was a heavy crash, and then silence except for the sighing breeze in the pines.

"Darling, are you quite all right?" It was Blake's voice, tender, vibrating—the voice she loved.

"Yes," she quavered, and somehow, she found her face pressed tight against his breast, and his arms close about her.

And when the remainder of the house party came hurrying down the aisles, Mr. Merrill in the lead with a shotgun over his shoulder, they found Blake and Alice still standing there hand in hand beside the vanquished bear.

"Aha!" exclaimed Merrill. "So you caught the fellow who has been tearing down my fences and invading my kitchen garden—well, Alice, more scared than hurt, eh? Good thing your young man was in the neighborhood!"

And the happy smile that Alice exchanged with Arline Merrill, revealed the joyous news that she had to tell. But Blake insisted upon telegraphing the news to Mr. and Mrs. Pearce that very night.

Charity Needed

Every little while I discover some new terrible thing the men do to the women. The other day I heard a woman telling of the suffering wives endure from being compelled to listen to their husband's old jokes; it is one of the real burdens of women. I made no reply, but in looking for excuses all I could think of was this: Does it ever occur to women that they are as tiresome to men as men are to women? My general conclusion is we should be more charitable with each other, and talk less.—E. W. Howe's Monthly.

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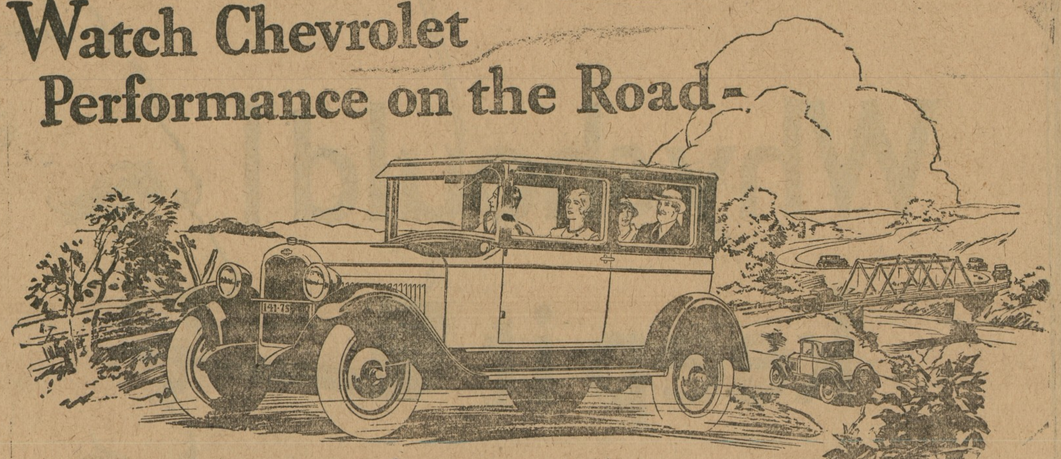

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