

Won't you be William?

When romance begins with love and ends with shooting, that's just commonplace. But when it begins with shooting—that's news

THEY met in the woods on a hill above Silver Springs, Virginia; and their first meeting came perilously near to being their last. For the cause of their introduction was a sixteen-gauge shotgun, which suddenly went bang, discharging a load of bird shot into the thicket where Dick Ballard was resting.

Young Mr. Ballard, who had sat down on a rock to enjoy the landscape, rose hastily and said in a loud, clear voice: "What the hell!"

Instantly a frightened feminine voice exclaimed: "Oh, my soul! I thought you were a quail! Have I killed you?"

"I don't think so," said Dick.

His left hand felt as if it had been stung by a bee. He looked down and saw a thin streak of blood across the back of it. Indignantly he stepped out of the thicket.

"Do I look like a quail?" he demanded.

Then he found himself gazing into a pair of troubled blue eyes, and his resentment vanished. For the girl who had almost murdered him was a very pretty girl. He put his wounded hand in his pocket.

"Well, never mind," he said. "I'm still alive."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" breathed the girl. "I mean, I'm so glad—!"

"So am I," said Dick.

"I'll never go hunting again!" she declared, with such a distressed look that Dick grinned reassuringly.

"It's all right," he said. "You missed me."

"You're very nice about it."

Dick drew his cigarette case from his pocket.

"I'm a nice fellow," he said. "Will you have a—? Hello! What's the matter?"

"Your hand!" gasped the girl. "It's bleeding!"

"Oh, that," he said, and again tried to tuck his hand out of sight. But she caught his wrist and held it.

"You're hurt! I did hit you!"

"It's nothing."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"But you must have it attended to at once," she said decisively. "Come home with me—I live in one of the cottages at the Hillcrest—and I'll put some antiseptic on it."

"I'm stopping at the Hillcrest myself," said Dick.

"Are you? So much the better. Do please let's hurry."

THEY started along the pine ridge toward the hotel.

"I'm Dick Ballard," he said. "I come here every fall. Thought I knew everybody in the place. But I haven't seen you before."

"This is my first visit to Silver Springs," said the girl. "And I don't go around much. I'm working."

"Working?"

"Trying to finish a novel."



Illustrated by
C. D. Williams

"Oh, so you're a writer!"

"I hope so," said the girl.

"Do I know your name, I wonder?"

"No. I'm just beginning. It's Sylvia Hammond."

"Charming!" said Dick.

"Is it?" said the girl.

"I think so."

They came out of the woods and walked toward the lavish hotel that sprawled, with its accompanying brood of cottages, on the high, hunched shoulder of the hill. Below lay the village of Silver Springs, and beyond stretched the valley, blurred by a blue haze. . . .

A path wound among the cottages, which were separated from one another by discreet masses of shrubbery. At the first of these cottages Sylvia Hammond stopped and said: "This is where I live."

"Nice," said Dick.

"I like to be alone."

"You live alone here?"

"Yes. Come in."

Dick followed her into the cabin; but it seemed that Miss Hammond was not so completely alone as she had said. For

on the sofa in her living-room sat a large and rather alarming old lady, in a rusty black dress, whose hands were folded primly in her lap and whose steel-blue eyes looked steadily toward the door. As Dick met that challenging gaze he stopped short. As for Sylvia, she simply stood and stared.

"Aunt Jane!" she gasped, finally.

"Yes," said the old lady. "It's your Aunt Jane, come all the way from Wisconsin to surprise you. Ain't you goin' to kiss me, Sylvie?"

"Oh, Aunt Jane—!" cried Sylvia and, dropping her shotgun, rushed across the room and flung her arms around the grim figure on the sofa. "Aunt Jane!"

"I DON'T know as I'd ought to've come without lettin' you know," said the old lady. "But, anyway, here I be!"

"Darling, I'm so—so glad to see you! But why—? How—? I can't believe you're really here!"

"I'm on my way to Floridy," said Aunt Jane.

"Florida?"

"Yes. Doc Smithers thought I'd ought to go for my rheumatism. He's an old fool, but—well—fact is, I figgered it would be a good chance to stop off and see you, Sylvie."

"Oh. . . . Yes. . . . Of course! Dear Aunt Jane!"

"But Land o' Goshen," said Aunt Jane. "There's your young man standin' like a bump on a log, waitin' for you to introduce him to me. Not that I don't know who he is," she concluded, with a smile that only increased the formidable grimness of her countenance.

Dick was startled. He glanced at Sylvia, and was astonished to see the look of dismay on her face. To add to his bewilderment, Aunt Jane said sharply: "Well! What's the matter with you two? This is William, ain't it, Sylvie?"

"Yes!" said Sylvia, looking straight at Dick. "This is William. . . . William, this is Aunt Jane, of whom I've spoken to you so often."

"Oh!" said Dick. In the shock of learning that his name was William it was all he could think to say.

"Hmmm!" said Aunt Jane. "Quite a

By Dana Burnet



"Oh, dear!" wailed Sylvia, "I guess I'll just have to marry you, William!" Dick drew himself up to his full height. "Not at all," he said. "A gentleman at least knows how to die. Good-by, Sylvia!"

strappin' fellow, ain't you? You can come over here and kiss me if you've a mind to."

"Ah!" said Dick. "Ah—thanks!" And crossing the room, he saluted the somewhat leathery cheek presented to him.

"Now," said Aunt Jane, "we can all set down and talk."

Dick distinctly heard Sylvia gasp.

"No, no!" she said.

"Why not?"

"Because—you see, darling . . . William must go to see a doctor about his hand."

"What's the matter with his hand?"

"I shot him," said Sylvia.

"She shot me," said Dick.

"Land o' Goshen!" said Aunt Jane.

"I was out hunting," explained Sylvia, "and my gun went off, and the first thing I knew I had shot William. It's not serious, though."

"It's not serious," said Dick.

"But he might get an infection," continued Sylvia, hastily.

"That's right," said Dick. "I'd better go at once. You'll excuse me, won't you—er—Aunt Jane?"

"Of course I will," said the old lady; and added: "The very idea, Sylvie! I never knew a girl so careless of her chances as you be!"

"I know it. I've given up hunting," said Sylvia; and added: "I'll walk out to the gate with you, William." She

put a firm hand on his arm. "Be back in a moment, Aunt Jane," she said over her shoulder, and pushed Dick toward the door.

"Well!" he exclaimed when they were out of the house. "Will you kindly tell me who William is, and why I am William, and why—?"

"I can't tell you now! It's too complicated. . . . But I'll explain everything later."

"When?"

"Tonight! Yes . . . I'll meet you to-night after Aunt Jane has gone to bed. Say about ten o'clock—up by the spring?"

"It's a date," said Dick.

"And I am grateful to you for playing up and pretending to be William."

"I could see you were in some kind of jam," he said.

"Jam's no word for it!" said Sylvia, and went thoughtfully back into the house.

AT TEN O'CLOCK that night Dick Ballard hurried up the hill and entered the small latticed summer-house

that marked the location of the Silver Spring. A few minutes later Sylvia joined him. He took her hand and drew her into the shadow of the springhouse.

"Well?" he demanded eagerly.

"Aunt Jane's in bed and asleep."

"Good! I've been dying of curiosity all afternoon." They sat down on a bench. "Now! What about this mysterious bird, William?"

"I'll tell you. May I have a cigarette?"

HE PRODUCED his cigarette case. They both lighted up. Sylvia blew a cloud of smoke through the lattice into the moonlight and commenced abruptly: "In the first place, Aunt Jane wants me to get married. I'm her favorite niece. My three sisters found husbands at home—we live in Belvidere, Wisconsin—but I wasn't looking for a husband, so naturally I didn't find one."

"Naturally!" said Dick.

"I didn't want to find one. I don't now. I want to write. But Aunt Jane has old-fashioned notions. She's pioneer stock, you know. And she felt it was a disgrace that I couldn't get my man."

"I see."

"So she gave me a check for five thousand dollars—she has loads of money!—and told me to strike out for myself. Her idea was," added Sylvia, "that I'd stand a better chance in the more thickly populated sections of the country."

"A sound idea," said Dick.

"So you came East?"

Sylvia nodded.

"I went first to Bar Harbor. I started my novel there. Then I moved down to Newport, then to Easthampton, then here—"

"But where does William come in?" asked Dick, noting that Sylvia's hair had a silver sheen in the moonlight.

"William," said Sylvia, "is a character in my novel."

"A wha—? A character in your—?"

"Yes. He's only a minor character, but I'm awfully fond of him, and unfortunately I got to describing him in my letters to Aunt Jane."

"Ah-ha!" said Dick.

"You see she kept writing and asking me if I'd met any attractive young men and I—well—I put into my letters some of the episodes about William that I intended to use in my novel."

"And they were all pure fiction?"

"Quite pure," said Sylvia. "But finally I got to the point—I was forced to it by sheer dramatic necessity—of telling Aunt Jane that William was in love with me. And that's what got me into trouble. Because Aunt Jane sent me a long night letter urging me to accept William. And like a perfect idiot I wired back that I had."

"Lucky William!" said Dick.

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Leading to Marriage

A Short Short Story complete on this page

By Arnold Bennett

THIS is the story of the episode which led to Mr. Capstain's second marriage.

The illustrious Mr. Capstain sat down at his desk in his vast house in Belgrave Square, London. He was a man of business, a director of the biggest manufactory of its kind in the world. No manufactory could have been directed with less friction. Never a strike there! The delegates of trades unions never troubled there! Mr. Capstain was not only the director, but the working staff, the everything, of the manufactory. He happened to be a novelist, playwright and journalist. He knew that he was not a genius, but he also knew that he was the most popular, the most efficient, and the most prolific literary performer of his time. He made more money and spent more than any other author on earth.

The hour was midnight.

At midnight his day's labor began. He toiled till 7 A. M., with an interval at 4 A. M. for light refreshment. He breakfasted at 7 A. M., went to bed, slept six hours, arose at 1 P. M., lunched at 2 P. M., and had then a glorious stretch of ten hours in which to see the world. This wonderful plan of existence he had taken from the life of Balzac. Herein was his sole resemblance to Balzac.

In the blaze of the electric light he passed his hand over some notebooks. He looked at his fingers. Dust. He rang the bell. A butler entered.

Mr. Capstain was reputed to be the only man in London who employed two butlers. This one was the night-butler, necessary because of Mr. Capstain's nocturnal refreshment and early breakfast.

"Crowther," he asked blandly, "who dusts this room nowadays?"

"The new head housemaid, sir."

"What's her name?"

"Maisie, sir."

"Her surname?"

"I don't know, sir. She's only been here ten days."

"Has she gone to bed yet?"

"Oh no, sir."

"Send her to me."

Mr. Capstain had spoken blandly, for the reason that he never allowed himself to be other than bland. He believed in harmony, as the best aid to industry. He never had the slightest dissension even with his two widowed sisters, who lived with him and on him. They adored him, though he was a plump fellow of forty-five, with a bald head, a manner exasperatingly imperturbable, and an ironic tongue.

The new head housemaid came in. A young lady of pleasant but serious features, very neat.



Illustrated by
R. L. Lambdin

"Crowther," said his master, "you well know that you have no right to come in unless I ring"

"Yes, sir." A rather cultivated voice for a housemaid, even for a head housemaid.

"Maisie," said Mr. Capstain at his blandest. "By the way, what is your surname?"

"Dyton, sir."

"Well, Maisie, I told Crowther yesterday about the inefficient dusting of this room. Did you get the message?"

"Yes, sir."

"See here, then," Mr. Capstain passed his hand again over the notebooks, and showed dusty fingers.

"I'm sorry, sir."

"You possibly don't realize that this room is the most important in the whole house. Everything comes out of it, including your wages."

"I'm sorry, sir. I had to go out. I was detained, and there wasn't time—"

"EXCUSE me, Maisie," Mr. Capstain blandly stopped her. "Your affairs are not mine. You've been here ten days. You and I are at liberty to cease business relations at the end of the first fortnight." Mr. Capstain knew this interesting fact about the conditions of British domestic service because part of his equipment as a novelist was to know everything. He continued: "At the end of your fortnight you will have the goodness to leave. One of my rules here is never to give an order twice."

"Yes, sir."

Maisie turned to leave. Mr. Capstain scribbled "New housemaid" on a notepad.

At the door Maisie turned back and remarked:

"I suppose you wouldn't like me to suggest a plot to you, sir?"

"A plot?" repeated Mr. Capstain, alert.

"Yes, sir."

"If it suits me, I'll pay you five pounds for it," said Mr. Capstain unperturbed.

"Well, sir. There was a girl who had to earn her living, or part of it. She had literary leanings, and tried to be an author. She wrote two novels. One she couldn't sell. The other was published, but it failed completely. She had a son, a young boy. She couldn't be a secretary, because that wouldn't have suited her temperament. So she decided—"

At this point Crowther reentered, apologetic.

"Crowther," said his master, "you well know that you have no right to come in unless I ring."

"The house is on fire, sir."

Mr. Capstain showed no emotion; neither did Maisie.

"Oh, is it?" said the master. "Which floor?"

"Above this, sir. Back."

"Serious?"

"Maybe, sir."

"Then telephone for the fire brigade."

"I have, sir."

"That's good. Get all the servants downstairs before the staircase is alight. Are your mistresses in?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Very fortunate. Thank you. That will do—for the moment."

Exit Crowther.

"Fires always burn upwards, not downwards. So we're in no danger," observed Mr. Capstain. "You're not afraid, Maisie?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"But your things upstairs?"

"I sleep in the basement, sir."

"Good. Now to continue that plot."

"So as she understood and really liked housework," Maisie continued calmly, "she decided to enter domestic service, and she became a housemaid. Her little boy was ill, and she went out one evening to see him—at her sister-in-law's. And that got her into trouble about some dusting. She had to leave. And to find just the right sort of situation was not very easy. Is that a good beginning of a plot, sir?"

"Very," said Mr. Capstain. "Are you a widow?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is called a lady?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Will you sit down, Mrs. Dyton?"

"Thanks." Mrs. Dyton sat.

THEY talked for quite some time—indeed until they heard the beating thud-thud of a fire engine.

"Perhaps we ought to be going," said Mr. Capstain. "Everything's insured, except my manuscripts. I'd better take them."

He opened a drawer and pulled out a pile of manuscripts. Maisie rose to go.

"One moment," said Mr. Capstain. "Forgive me, but you're rather a wonderful young woman. I should like to ask you one question. Do you intend ever again to write?"

"Nothing would induce me to."

"Then you're also a very wise young woman, and I'm relieved," said Mr. Capstain.

They went forth through the double doors to the landing, smelt smoke, discerned the romantic figures of firemen above.