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In His Own Country

BY MORLEY CALLAGHAN

Author of "Strange Fugitive," etc.

A NEW novel by the author who, through his short stories in SCRIBNER'S and his first novel "Strange Fugitive," has placed himself in the front rank of contemporary writers. This novel, which will be completed in the March number, is quite different in theme from "Strange Fugitive" and it reveals even more clearly Mr. Callaghan's strength in the use of the clean, hard, compact style which has aroused the admiration of critics and readers. By means of the words and actions of the characters themselves, this story of a young newspaper man with a strange ambition portrays vividly human relationships.



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I

FOR an hour after lunch Bill lay on the sofa, his hands linked behind his head. Last evening he had talked for hours and now preferred his own thoughts. His mother rocked back and forth in her chair and talked to his wife.

Flora sat on a chair by the hall door, only half listening to Bill's mother, and glancing occasionally along the hall to the front screen door. It was hot in the house; a puff of cool air came along the hall. Tilting to one side in her chair, Flora looked through the screen door, beyond the iron gate at the sidewalk, at the gray dust road and at the field on the other side of the road. Wagon tracks had worn the road down hard and small stones jutted up. She felt moisture on her forehead and wished the old lady would finish her story, for Bill had promised to go swimming down at the blue drop. She looked at him anxiously, afraid that he might change his mind. His eyes were tired and he needed a long sleep. Though he had shaved in the morning, the hair was dark on his face, and black hair grew down on the back of his hands to his knuckles. His long legs were crossed at the ankles.

The old lady rocked steadily and Flora's eyes followed the knot of hair on top of her head, a dark switch twined with gray. Many times she had heard Bill's mother telling the story of her grandmother. Outside, down the street, probably at McGuin's, some one

began to cut the grass on the front lawn, the mower grinding and squeaking, needing oiling. Slowly they were coming to the end of the story: her grandmother, nervous and bewildered, had got off the boat just before it left the old land, and her husband hadn't missed her until they were a long way out. The poor woman had been terrified at the thought of going to a strange land, and so her husband had never heard of her again.

Flora, smiling, got up, leaning against the chair. She heard a horse trotting on the road, the buggy passed the door, swaying, the wheels grinding against the small stones on the road. Bill's mother said: "Your people were a bad lot, Bill, and there's no getting over it."

"Cheer up, Bill," Flora said. "Let's go for a swim."

"There's no getting over it, and Bill's the last."

"What's that you're saying, ma?" he said.

Without waiting for her to answer he got up and went into the kitchen to get the bathing-suits. His mother said she would stay there awhile and rest before going home. Bill put the bathing-suits over his left shoulder, opened the front door, and whistled as he and Flora walked along the street. He walked with a long, easy stride and she had to take his arm to keep up with him. The leaves on the maple-trees alongside the road were covered with gray dust. On Saturday afternoon the streets were quiet; everybody up at the park watching the lacrosse game. They walked

south past the old quarry and beyond the sawmill at the end of the road to the wire fence near Smiley's orchard, heading for the blockhouse. Every year, going swimming, they went this way. It wasn't really a blockhouse, but was made of brick, and there were no windows, just a few air-holes facing the bay, though everybody liked to pretend it had been used years ago for Indian fighting. When they were kids Bill had found out that it had actually been used for storing dynamite, but when they climbed up-stairs and looked through the square holes out over the bay they felt it ought to have been a blockhouse because the Indians could come over the bay from the reservation on the island.

Close to the shore the water was sand-colored and small rocks and pebbles hurt the feet, but twenty feet farther out was the blue line and the drop. Always she limped hurriedly over the pebbles, and stood on the flat, smooth rock just before the drop. Bill was swimming easily ten feet ahead of her. She leaned forward to the water and, swimming jerkily, made a circle over the blue and came in as far as she could till her toes and knees touched bottom; then she paddled with her feet and crawled in on her hands.

She lay on the sand and called, "Heh, Bill," and put her hands over her eyes, shielding them from the strong sun. She heard Bill splashing the water. He sat down beside her shivering. His lips were blue. "It gets colder every year," he said. But the sun was good and they lay on their backs. Her eyes open, she saw beyond the tips of her toes to the blue bay and the outline of the island. Straining her eyes, she saw, to the left, a small sail-boat—opposite the summer cottages, she thought.

"I did some good thinking out there

in the cold water." He jerked himself up suddenly and rubbed the hair on his chin with the palm of his hand.

"Why does the water get colder every year, Bill?"

"Come on now, Flora, girl; don't try and sidetrack me. Aren't you interested?"

"Honest to heaven above, I'm interested, only I know pretty well what you were thinking."

Though she knew he was offended, she had grown tired of listening to him. It was interesting, but at the moment too complicated for her. The sail-boat was out of sight beyond the bend. Behind them she heard shouting, kids playing in the bushes.

"I've been thinking it over," he was saying. "I ought to go down to the city to a place something like Saint Michael's College, and have a real talk about Saint Thomas Aquinas. Just to see if it's a bright idea. Of course I know it's a good one."

It sounded impressive for him to be thinking of going down to the city to one of the colleges. She reached for his hand and listened attentively. All last evening he had talked about Saint Thomas Aquinas and she had been unable to get to sleep. He had come home from the office with a clipping from the paper and had been so excited he had hardly eaten at all because the idea had come to him suddenly.

"Have you sorta cut out the pattern in your own head?" she asked.

"Gee, I'm glad you're still interested, Flora. How does it sound to you?" Sand clinging to his wet bathing-suit fell slowly as he talked.

"You go on and tell it. I'll just rest here with my eyes closed."

He talked slowly and at first she didn't listen attentively, for she knew the

first part of the story. He had been working in the office of the town paper, reading a great many Sunday supplements to find one or two good feature stories they could reprint. He was alone in the office with old Johnny Williams, who owned the paper. Bill did most of the work. Johnny had often declared that when he died Bill would practically own the paper because he had no kids of his own or any other relatives. Bill read a story in a Sunday supplement about Saint Thomas Aquinas, a theologian and philosopher of the Middle Ages who had taken the Aristotelian philosophy and the learning of his time and rearranged it till it was acceptable to the church and a basis for a new Christian culture. Theology and philosophy became parts of the one system. The professor who had written the article had been enthusiastic, and Bill understood readily that Saint Thomas was the superman of the Middle Ages. The story for her had been uninteresting till he developed an idea that had occurred to him after reading the article the second time. A man like himself, willing to work hard, might become the Saint Thomas of to-day, though of course he wouldn't need to bother with philosophy, since the present conflict was between science and religion. All he had to do was make a plan of different fields of science and show definitely that it could become one fine system in accordance with a religious scheme.

"It's too bad I'm not religious," he said; "but it's too bad I'm not scientific, though I might acquire a scientific mind, don't you think?"

Her eyes were closed and she heard some one calling in a high voice back near the stream. "Here, chook, chook, chook!" Mrs. Simpkins, from the stone

cottage near the stream, was feeding the chickens. Often the chickens walked across a narrow plank spanning the stream and scratched in the field opposite the house. Two weeks ago some one hiding in the trees had stolen three of the hens. Bill was saying quietly and slowly: "If a fellow would be willing to work, it oughtn't to be too tough a job."

A breeze from the bay made her shiver. She sat up and said sincerely: "Are you going to do it, Bill?"

"Going to do what?"

"Be something like this man. Saint Thomas, I mean."

"I guess so, but I don't know exactly," he laughed happily. "I just been doing a little thinking. You know what 't's like with me. I always like to work a thing out from all angles."

"Of course you wouldn't make a barrel of money, but I mean could we get along at all on the idea?"

"No, it mightn't mean much that way, but . . ."

She put her head on his shoulder. They followed with their eyes a wave line on the bay. "Billy, you do have fine thoughts," she said.

"Lord, no, Flora!" He was embarrassed and reached for a pebble. "See if I can hit the wave line before it breaks."

"No. Listen; I'll bet a dollar you'll get your name in the papers and the town'll do something about it later on."

She drew closer to him so he could understand that she belonged to him entirely and believed in his importance. He put his arm, dried from the sun, on her back, but her bathing-suit, where she had been lying on it, was still wet, so he withdrew his arm. "Sure bet your boots that I'll kill dead things and you can't go wrong," he said genially. Without knowing why they both started to laugh and, standing up, they link-

ed arms to walk along the beach to the blockhouse.

The door had been torn away and he stood outside and threw stones at the water until she got dressed. Older people usually bathed on the beach in front of the summer resort, but Bill had been coming down to the blue drop for years. When they got dressed they squeezed and twisted the bathing-suits and he hung them over his shoulder. Crossing the stream they stepped from one dry rock to another. He held down the top strand of the wire fence for her. On the dusty road they walked more rapidly. It was five o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was very bright. Few houses were at this end of the road. Over the tops of the houses, beyond the town and curving westward, was the line of the blue mountains. Cultivated fields, pale yellow in sunlight, were on the slopes of blue hills. Flora's father had a farm on a gentle slope of the hills, eight miles northwest of the town.

On the board walk, opposite Tanner's new three-story brick house, Bill noticed that one of the bathing-suits was drying, and, taking it off his shoulder, he flicked it at tall weeds alongside the walk. The weeds close to the road were dust-covered and had no color. He kept on flicking the weeds mechanically.

"Take the frown off your face," she said.

"I'm not frowning."

"Brighten up," she said, but knew that he was having fine thoughts, and to watch the shifting expressions on his face fascinated her. Two or three playful words came easily to her lips, but she remained serious and attempted to follow his thoughts in her own head. At the point where she had left off, at the beach, she started again, though it was

involved and she felt that she had lost track of it. Instead she took Bill's arm, and, passing Samson's cottage, noticed that they had a new shade and curtains on the front window.

The cinder path on their street looked much cooler than the board walk. The two-storied cement house was fourth from the red rough cast one on the corner; then there was Fulton's cottage and McGuin's frame house.

Bill said solemnly before going into the house that it was funny no one in the whole world had ever had an idea like his. "Of course it must be remembered that this Saint Thomas had it soft in some ways. The world was nothing to write home about in those days, and it's some world now. I'd like to talk it over, but few people would take it all in."

"It's such a splendid notion," she said, "though it seems so far away."

"It is far away, but, honestly, it don't sound nutty, does it?"

"Nutty!" she said indignantly, her hand on the door-knob. "I should say not. No one else in town could ever think of such a thing if they thought a million years."

Through the open door Mike, the fox-terrier, jumped at Bill and he kept slapping it on the belly, rolling it on the floor, while she went along the hall to the kitchen. The dog barked while she worked in the kitchen slicing tomatoes for an early supper; then she heard Bill running around the side of the house, the dog squealing eagerly. The tomatoes were sliced, so she leaned on the table and knew Bill was hiding, for there was no sound. Then his feet thudded on the sod, the dog growled and barked, and she smiled. Later on, just before she called him to supper, the dog kept on barking noisily in the back

yard, and, sure that Bill was teasing him, she rapped on the window-pane authoritatively for fear he might annoy the neighbors.

After supper he lay on the sofa and played his mouth-organ. Some of the tunes she liked and kept time, moving the dish-towel in a circle on a plate, but newer tunes were raucous and she called: "For heaven's sake, Bill, keep to the ones you know." The dishes were dried and the table cleared, and he had played most of his tunes. It was too early to go down-street to the movies. They sat on the front veranda watching groups of boys coming down the road, more people than had been on the street all afternoon.

"I wonder who won the lacrosse game," Bill said.

"Here comes Joe Boyle on his wheel. Ask him."

Joe Boyle, pedalling easily, was opposite the house and Bill yelled: "Heh, Joe! Tell us who won the game."

Joe stopped pedalling but didn't get off his wheel. "Meaford," he yelled, and kept on going.

II

Not since the time the doctor thought his mother had a cancer had Bill taken anything so seriously. The new thoughts and intentions that he suggested Flora couldn't understand, and one night, by comparison, estimated their importance to him. She knew nearly everything that had happened to him in the last twelve years, since they had met at high school. Her father drove her in from the farm and Bill had always lived in town. They kept company for ten years, and married when Bill got enough money to build a house, ten minutes' walk from Main Street.

Standing at the window of the front

room up-stairs she looked westward to the station and the water-tower, and over the roof of the station to the steel beams of the shipyard. Most men worked in the yard, but Bill was ambitious and preferred to work for lower wages in *The Standard* office. For two months there hadn't been a boat in the dry dock and no work in the yard, though Bill was busy getting out *The Standard* twice a week. Every night at five o'clock he came home, usually in good humor.

To-night he said solemnly: "I'm going down to the library right after tea." Timidly she asked if he would leave the story that had at first interested him so she could go over it again. He took the paper out of his pocket mechanically. The edges were frayed and, unfolding it, she thought she had torn it. Bill hurried out so that he could have at least an hour in the library before closing-time, and she laid the story about Saint Thomas on the white table oilcloth. There was a big picture of Saint Thomas—not a very attractive-looking man, she decided—and a picture of a Greek, Aristotle, whom she remembered from the ancient-history books in high school. She read two paragraphs and her thoughts wandered, so she started over again. She read all the way through, then dropped her head to her plump arms and closed her eyes. The Middle Ages were far away. Bill's point of view was easier to appreciate when she thought first of Napoleon, then of Alexander the Great, and then of Lord Nelson, and quickly thought of Saint Thomas at the same time. "I wonder what Bill's really going to do," she thought. It was getting dark in the kitchen. It was not dark outside, so she went out to the back yard and stood on the step.

In the yard next door little Mrs. Fulton was picking rhubarb, three light-green stocks conspicuous among red ones in the bunch under her arm. Flora took hold of the clothes-line, twanged it three times, and picked up the clothes-prop lying on the grass. A peach-tree was between her and Mrs. Fulton. She ran the clothes-prop along the line beyond the peach-tree. Mrs. Fulton saw her finally and called: "Nice evening, Mrs. Lawson."

Still holding the clothes-prop, she moved over to the fence and said, "That Bill, of course, he is off again to the library." She liked telling people that Bill went frequently to the library. Mrs. Fulton's husband was a riveter in the shipyard and never went to the library. "He's got important work to do there," she added.

"If my man don't soon get some kind of work to do, we're leaving here, that's what we're doing. The town is going to the dogs."

"It's not much of a place for a man that's ambitious."

"Nor much of a place for a man that wants to earn a living."

"Bill may have to go down to some of the libraries in the city."

"That's very interesting, Mrs. Lawson. What kind of work would it be now? Something for the paper?"

Flora closed her mouth abruptly. She was anxious to tell the woman about Bill and the extraordinary work that he was undertaking, for everybody in town ought to hear about it, but she had no words to explain it properly. She said quickly: "I got to walk down the road a bit and meet Bill."

Mrs. Fulton turned away. Flora went around the house to the front walk. The evening was warm and she walked slowly, because the library did-

n't close till nine o'clock and she knew the road Bill would take on the way home.

On the road near M. P. Starr's red brick house, with the smooth green lawn and carefully clipped hedges, was a small creek and an old wooden bridge. She stood on the bridge looking down at the stream. The middle of the stream was shallow and clear, but at the margin the water was foul with green scum on small ponds. A frog croaked farther up the stream. Turning, she made a croaking noise in her throat, then hoped no one in Starr's house had heard it. Mrs. Starr, who dressed expensively, merely nodded to her when they met on the street and had never asked her in to have a cup of tea with the neighbors. She rested her elbows on the rail. Some one was coming along the road, a big wide-shouldered man with felt hat and a khaki shirt open at the throat.

"Hello, Flora," he said.

"Hello, Pete."

Pete Hastings, an old friend, leaned against the railing and grinned. His brother had a farm up Meaford way, though Pete lived mostly in town. Bill didn't like Pete, who used to take her out riding a long time ago. He had a wide mouth and very strong teeth, and huge palms that he slapped together when there was nothing further to say.

"Taking a little walk, Flora?"

"Nope, Pete; just waiting around for Bill. He's down at the library."

"Yeah, what's he doin' there when he ought to be giving you the time of your life?"

Pete had a handsome generous way of making conversation. He leaned back against the rail to have a long talk.

A man was adjusting carbons in the

corner light. When the light came on it seemed darker on the bridge, a wide circle of light on the road at the corner, and beyond that much darker than before. Flora heard Pete talking and looked down the road for Bill. Three young fellows, appearing under the corner light, lay down in the long grass near the pole, and one laughed gaily while two talked quietly. She knew that later on other fellows would come down from the park, and eight or nine of them would sprawl in the grass, telling jokes and waiting for a girl to pass so they could make whistling noises and laugh out loud. The constable had said once that young fellows on the corner did nothing but hatch mischief. Bill had said that if there was no work in the town, and they had no money to go down to the beach for an evening, they had to do something.

"If Bill's so busy," Pete said, "do you think he'd mind if we went for a walk some evening, a little walk down by the lake, or out on the pier at the dock?"

"No, Bill don't like you much. He doesn't like your ways. He wouldn't like it finding me here on the bridge talking so much with you when it's dark."

"Ho, ho; well, now, is that so? Bill's so serious with his big ideas, a bit of a walk by the lake or on the grass would get his goat for sure."

"And I'm just as glad it would."

"No need to get huffy, Flora."

"He's got a new idea. It's something that'll make his name heard over the mountains and beyond the bay. It'll go farther than that railroad track and into all the big cities." She pointed toward the station.

"Quit your kidding, Flora. Them tracks go a long ways."

"I know, Pete, but no one'll keep up to Bill. He'll always be ahead of you, like the sun glinting on a track and you trying to catch up on it."

"Don't make me laugh. Let's talk about old times when you was the nicest little girl I ever had."

She felt suddenly that she was leaning too comfortably against the railing, talking easily with Pete Hastings. He was a loafer, a man of loose ways, according to Bill, but always ready to make fine conversation. It was dark and people passing on the bridge might see her with him and gossip. Again the frog croaked and she said: "It's pretty dark, Pete."

"Yes, it's pretty dark," he said quietly. "It's nice dark." He spoke sincerely, as though he believed it intensely, and she was nervous and moved away from him, hesitating at the corner of the bridge.

"I'm going, Pete," she said.

"Going?"

"Yes, I'm going; it's dark."

She had explained what she meant simply by saying that it was dark. She heard footfalls coming along the board walk, a man walking rapidly in the shadow, and knew the swing of the shoulders when he came closer. "Oh, Bill!" she called. He crossed from the other side of the road.

"'Lo, Bill," Pete said easily. "Well, so long, Flora, see you again, ch, Bill?" He walked down the road toward Main Street. Bill watched him until he was out of sight. Then he said mildly: "You surely weren't out walking with that bum, were you, Flora?"

"Don't be so silly, Bill. I was walking down-street to meet you and bumped into Pete."

"He's one guy it's easy to bump into."

"I guess he's got lots of time to hang around."

"All right, take my arm and we'll go home, though I wish I was a foot taller and I'd bang him on the nose."

"You're an old silly, Bill."

"I'm not so silly; I just don't like him."

"Who does?"

They walked back to the house. She lit the lamp in the kitchen. She placed the lamp in the centre of the kitchen-table and they both sat down. Tilting back in the chair, his long legs stretched out, he began to tell her about the visit to the library. He talked and slapped the palm of his hand gently on the table for emphasis. He had gone into the library to find anything worth while about scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages. Not that he was interested in philosophy; he wanted to see what this man Saint Thomas had been up against in the Middle Ages. The library had no decent material for him; it was probably the worst library in the whole country. After wasting half an hour he had leaned against a desk talking to the librarian, Miss Hedges, an old maid. Something about Miss Hedges was a bit peculiar, a woman of thirty-five, so very timid, and imagining one was always being personal. At times in the middle of a sentence, talking convincingly to Miss Hedges, he had stopped abruptly, feeling that if he went on rapidly she would suddenly scream, as though insisting that the words he was using in no way expressed his thoughts. "The woman is a fool," he said, "and simply needs a little exercise." But in the library he could find nothing about Saint Thomas that was worth while. He had asked Miss Hedges if she had ever heard of a great work like a summary of all known

fields of science, to demonstrate the relation between science and, offhand, religion. Miss Hedges was surprised at first, and then, like a very ignorant person, she had laughed and said she didn't believe there was such a book. Of course there wasn't. But the woman was a fool, and the library was useless.

"Well, what are you going to do about it, Bill?" Flora asked timidly.

"I'm going to make a beginning."

"How are you going to make a beginning?"

"I'm going to start in on some summaries. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to write a book on geology. Not a text-book, but a summary of what is known about geology, and show it should all justify the faith of a religious man."

"But listen, Bill, you're not religious."

"I know I'm not. Don't kid me about it."

"But don't you think you ought to be, to do the job right?"

"I suppose so," he said casually, "but I'm willing to take all that side of it for granted for the time being."

"Honest, Bill, there'll never be anybody like you."

He grinned at her and reached out to pat her hand. He was pleased but embarrassed.

"Better turn down that lamp-wick. It's beginning to burn," he said.

"Tell you what," she said. "Let's have some ice-cream. I'll pay for it out of my own money. You go down to Millar's and get it, and I'll cut some cake."

"It's a fine night for ice-cream at that. I'll go. Where's the dog?"

"Probably in the front room, sleeping on the best chair."

"Here, Mike," he called. The dog,

in the front room, jumped to the floor.

"Aren't you going to put on a coat?"

"No, it's too warm for a coat really. Come on, Mike."

She got dishes out of the pantry and some fruit cake. A story about old Mrs. Doherty, who was doting, occurred to her and her lips moved, making phrases to use telling it to Bill. She heard an engine whistle and glanced at the clock on the wall by the window. The hooting of the whistle got louder and the clanging of the bell slower and the shunting clearer. "The nine-twenty-five is fifteen minutes late," she thought, hurrying up-stairs in the dark to the front window. She leaned out, looking across the field and down the path to the station lights. People, getting off the train, walked along the station platform. Always she watched for any one who might cut across the path by the water-tower, heading for her house. Leaning out the window, waiting, she thought of Pete Hastings talking to her on the bridge—a funny fellow who puzzled her sometimes. No one came along the path by the water-tower. Out of sight, on the cinder path, she heard Bill talking to the dog. Listening eagerly, as he came closer, she heard him saying: "And what do you think we ought to do about it, Mike, old boy?" She hurried down-stairs and when he came in wondered why she had thought of Pete, while she was leaning out of the window.

III

In the evenings he worked harder than during the daytime at the office. She had expected him to sit at the table in the front room when he began to study earnestly; instead he moved up-stairs to her small sewing-room, declar-

ing it a splendid office. She tried to follow his progress. For an hour after tea she worked in the kitchen, washing the dishes, sewing, or ironing; then deliberately went up-stairs and said: "How is it coming, Bill?" Sometimes he was reading carelessly, feeling his way among six books a high-school teacher had loaned him, and answered good-naturedly: "It's a big field." Once, pointing to the pile of books, he said: "Flora, old girl, how would you like to reduce all that to about a hundred swift pages?" That was the last time he seemed pleased to hear her moving behind him.

The sewing-room was too small for a table, so he used part of the machine as a desk. A summer dress she had been altering became too difficult for hand stitching, and on Friday afternoon, at three o'clock, she used the machine in the sewing-room. Carefully she removed his books and piled them on the floor. He came home early and because of the sound of the machine she didn't know he was in the house till he cleared his throat behind her. She was leaning over the machine. Startled, she straightened up quickly and waited for him to speak first, wondering why she had a guilty feeling.

"A lot you care!" he said angrily. "Going and moving work like that. Why didn't you throw it out while you were at it?"

He kicked the pile of books across the floor and ran down-stairs.

She put her arms on the machine and felt weak. She could not move, though wanting to hurry after him. She felt like a little girl who would never be able to appreciate the harm she had done. For five minutes she sat there, gradually becoming indignant, till she jumped up suddenly and hurried down-

stairs, repeating to herself harsh words she would use on him. He was sitting in the front room on the black leather sofa. A picture of his father and mother hung on the wall directly over his head. She had time to notice the picture on the oatmeal wall-paper because he simply stared at her, bending forward, his face white and tapering. The match clenched between his teeth bobbed up and down. She stood near him and was afraid to speak, and would have calmly turned to walk from the room but knew he would follow her with his eyes. Nervously she sat down beside him, putting her hand on his shoulder. Twice he pushed the hand away, but finally permitted her to explain, smoothing his hair, that she would arrange the sewing-room so neatly he would never know she had been in it. His head jerked back and he bit the match in two, but didn't answer. She went up-stairs, tidied the room carefully, came down, and sat alone on the front veranda.

Twenty minutes later she heard him going up-stairs again and was disappointed that he hadn't come out on the veranda to speak to her.

In the evenings he went on working up-stairs and she never disturbed him. For an hour after supper they gossiped peaceably, then he rubbed the palms of his hands together, cleared his throat, and pushed back his chair from the table, ready to work for three hours. She sat alone on the veranda until twilight, when it was too dark for him to write; then went into the kitchen and lit two lamps and carried one up-stairs, entering the sewing-room unobtrusively without disturbing him. Always he said vaguely, "Thanks, Flora," hardly lifting his head.

Three times in a week she walked

over to Dolly Knox's for the evening. Dolly and her husband "Curly" kept a grocery-store, and in the winter evenings played five-hundred with Flora and Bill. The first time in the week she called on them they talked about Bill's work and Curly found it very amusing. Dolly, who was pretty, though untidy, advised her to put a firecracker under Bill's hat so he would come down to earth. "If Curly left me alone in the evenings, I'd go travelling, far from the old folks at home," Dolly said.

"Of course he doesn't really leave me alone," Flora said quickly. "He's there in the house with me."

She had gone to school with Dolly and liked her cheerful silly ways, but on the way home, talking to herself, she resented Knox's casual opinions, for, even if Curly and Bill were friendly, the Knoxes weren't good enough to dust Bill's boots. So in the evenings she walked by herself, or went down to the show. After the show once she thought she saw Pete Hastings standing at a corner talking to some men. Walking slowly, she hoped he would see her; then suddenly decided it would be better to go home alone. Gladly she would have walked with him; only she kept on wondering whether it would be right or wrong, and it annoyed her to have to think about it. She never stayed out late. She would have to pass the fellows sprawled in the grass under the corner light.

At eleven o'clock in the evening Bill came down-stairs, very tired, and they sat at the kitchen-table. If he was in good humor, she made some toast on the stove while he took Mike for a short run. If he was tired and sullen, he undressed slowly, taking off his shirt and shoes in the kitchen.

Before going out to work one morn-

ing he said to her: "Flora, I'm going down to the city to-morrow morning. I've started in on this thing, and I think it's the most interesting idea in the world."

"Who are you going to see in the city?"

"Somebody at one of the colleges. I hear that Saint Michael's is the one. They teach scholastic philosophy there, and of course they'll know all about Saint Thomas Aquinas."

"Are you going to tell them all about it?"

"I'll tell them all about it and get somebody interested. Maybe they would be willing to help a fellow a lot."

"I feel it in my bones that you'll impress them, Bill."

Early next morning he got up to take the seven-thirty train to the city. He would be home later in the evening, so he didn't carry a club bag. He kissed her warmly and walked across the road to take the path across the field by the water-tower. Up-stairs she watched him from the front window, walking with his head down a little, his straw hat tilted far back on his head. The fox-terrier was following him, trotting easily, his nose to the path. Bill's legs looked very long, walking across the field. It was a dull morning and the sky was gray.

Her eyes got moist, she was so proud of him; and, sitting on the bed, she said: "I'm a silly, an old silly."

She told herself severely that she ought to be happy; there was no excuse for feeling lonely now, since she was practically alone in the house all the time from morning till night. Every day, though, he came home at noon-time.

Early in the afternoon she went down-street to buy groceries. The main

street was brick, the widest of any town in the county. It had been built in days when people believed the town would become the biggest railroad centre on Georgian Bay, and the shipyard for the upper lakes. In those days not many people lived in the town and laborers for the shipyard were brought from the city. Now there were few trains and not many boats for the yard. But there was always the wide brick street. Coming out of Dorst's butcher-store Flora met Mrs. Fulton. The sky had cleared and sunlight was on the wide street. The butcher had thrown pails of water on the sidewalk in front of the store to cool the air.

"On the way home, Mrs. Lawson?" Mrs. Fulton asked.

"Yes, but I was thinking of seeing what's on to-night at the nickel show."

"We can walk over there and down Pine Street home."

They passed the nickel show and saw the posters. Flora told Mrs. Fulton that Bill had gone to the city to see the head of Saint Michael's College. All the way home Mrs. Fulton listened and Flora talked rapidly. Just why had he gone to the city, Mrs. Fulton asked, and twice Flora was ready to explain, but remembered it ought to be kept a secret.

"It's important. They want Bill to look up something for them in the town here," she said, nodding her head vigorously. To mollify Mrs. Fulton, she added: "There's lots of things, of course, the likes of us don't understand at first sight, if you know what I mean."

"If it's something that has to be kept in the dark . . ."

"No, no, it ain't that."

"It does sound as if I'm digging it out of you."

"I'm not minding it at all, Mrs. Fulton. Here we are home anyway."

For supper she had sliced oranges, brown bread, and a cup of tea. Recently she had got plump—not noticeably fat, but, with her dress off, her shoulders and back looked fat, and she had promised Bill to abstain from starchy foods and eat vegetables, fruit, and brown bread for a month.

At seven o'clock she went downtown to the picture show to see the feature picture and part of the comic before the train came in. The Spanish feature picture was exciting and two bull-fighters pleased her. She forgot that she was alone in the show. The comic was less interesting; her thoughts wandered, she closed her eyes and imagined she had followed Bill all afternoon. In the city station she was right behind him, getting off the train, and he looked around for a restaurant. Or maybe he had gone to a hotel because he was naturally neat and tidy and would prefer a good wash. Early in the afternoon he went up to the college. She imagined him standing between tall pillars, speaking to some one with a bald head. She opened her eyes suddenly, her hands moist and cold, nervous because she had no idea what Bill might say. If he were asked too many questions his thoughts might get twisted; then she smiled to herself, watching the comic again, for Bill was far too serious to be long without words.

After the show she walked on Main Street. Most young fellows with good clothes walked along the street after it got dark. They walked sometimes four abreast when without girls. She went as far west as Findlay's flour-and-feed store and down two blocks to the station. The nine-twenty-five was on time, and she hurried, cutting across the well-kept station lawn, hoping no one would

see her. She was on the platform when Bill got off the train. He kissed her awkwardly, as though people were watching, and, without speaking, they crossed the tracks in front of the engine, the bell still clanging. Always when she crossed in front of an engine to take the path home she got a nervous thrill, imagining the engine might suddenly move forward the very moment she tripped on the track. On the path she said: "How'd it go, Bill?"

"Not so good."

"As good as you expected?"

"Nope."

Standing on the station platform in the light from the waiting-room he had seemed tired and worried, and she decided not to ask questions until they got home. She tried now to see the expression on his face, but there was no moon and it was dark. It looked like rain. The air was heavy and the tall grass still. Her feet felt hot and she wondered what Bill would have thought if she had come down the path to meet him in her bare feet.

She lit the lamp in the kitchen and drew two chairs up to the kitchen-table. "Come on now, Bill, tell me about it."

Yawning, he stretched his legs, avoiding her eyes, his hands fumbling awkwardly in his pockets. "There's nothing to tell," he said.

Her lips moved, staring at him. She turned away quickly. She looked at the lamp, then listened intently, as though a noise outside had aroused her. "Is that the wind on the bushes, or does it sound like rain?" she said.

"I don't hear anything," he said mildly.

"It's just the wind on the bushes."

"Now I hear the leaves rustling."

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Figures in a Mexican Renaissance

BEING VARIOUS ENCOUNTERS AMONG THE INTELLIGENTSIA MEXICANA

BY WILLIAM SPRTLING

WITH PORTRAIT SKETCHES BY THE AUTHOR

ON returning to Mexico, one of the first things I attended to was looking up Diego Rivera. He was working on the last stages of his celebrated murals in the patio of the Ministry of Education, and as my companion and I entered the building he could be seen above, on the third-floor gallery, painting, his huge figure perched high on scaffolding.

"Que tal, Diego!" I called up in my limited Spanish. "Comment ça va, Spratling!" was the smiling response in good French. There followed introductions and interrogations, interrupted by the necessity for inspecting the glowing compositions of the recent panels. So interesting were they, and so powerfully did they demand my attention, that I must needs leave Diego in conversation with my friend—a prominent New York stage-designer, who, I was glad, also spoke perfect French—in order to follow up the amazing series of paintings that had taken place since I had last been there.

These were no formulated decorations, nor were they the abstracted results of a carefully individualized manner. It was sound painting, organic in every sense, and the impulse back of it was that of one who is fired by a great social consciousness and imagination,

not merely by what might be "decor" in color. One felt the analysis of the strivings of a nation here. Above the firmly drawn and powerfully painted figures in the panels ran the "canciones" of the people, their letters blazoned on simply draped ribbons which related the series. In some of this series Rivera had even employed caricature, and there was one where could be seen the capitalists of America dining, with only dollars in their plates, and a stock-ticker for a side-dish. Rule by the military class in Mexico also came in for its share of derision. One of the murals illustrated the obvious strength of the peasants as producers of food, with the verse ". . . el dinero sin alimentos no vale nada . . ." draped appropriately above.

Returning to Rivera and S., I found my friend with note-book in hand. Diego was giving him formulas for encaustics and rules for applying paint. I caught a remark to the effect that the self-styled modernists would perhaps be better painters were they willing to learn their craft. Diego was explaining that he found all this wealth of subjective material around him a means rather than an obstacle in his efforts to create form. I thought to myself that there indeed was a sound and proper