

# Harold Bindloss



# *Carson of Red River*

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# **CARSON OF RED RIVER**

## **CHAPTER I BLAKE'S PIANO**

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**The evening was calm, and the window at Blake's flat by the river mouth was open. Kit Carson, standing with his back against the curtains, felt the rather shabby room was homelike, and for long he had not known a home. When he got a holiday he went to Netherhall, and after the drawing office, he liked to carry a gun across the moors; but the big house at the dale head had not the charm that marked Blake's cheap flat.**

**Kit, however, thought the room less shabby than usual. For one thing, Mrs. Blake had got a new rug and the soft green harmonized with the brown stained boards. Then a new cottage piano occupied a corner and a water-color drawing, Kit's present to Mabel Blake, was on the wall. Kit had an eye for line and he thought the drawing was not bad. Perhaps its purchase was something of an extravagance, but Kit was extravagant and Mabel was his pal's wife.**

**Kit felt the charm that marked the flat was really Mabel's. She was plucky and cheerful, although her fight was hard. Blake was a sober fellow, but when he married her had debts, and his pay, like Kit's, was small. Kit was his groom, and at the wedding had**

**rather thought to lose his friend. Instead, he had got another.**

**Mrs. Blake, carrying a tray, came in, and when Blake took her load, gave Kit a happy smile.**

**“The pennies for the meter did not run out, and my birthday feast is served,” she said, and balancing on an arched foot, as if she meant to dance, indicated her dress. “But how do you like my new clothes?”**

**Kit studied her. Mabel Blake was short and light; her figure was boyish and Kit knew her boyishly alert and happy.**

**“I can’t judge the material, but the lines are good. One gets a sense of balance and poise, which, I think, is not altogether the dressmaker’s art. Anyhow, you can dance, and if the shipyard company goes broke we’ll try our luck on the road. You will dance for crowded houses and I will play the lute. Tom, perhaps, might be business manager.”**

**Mabel laughed and Blake grinned, for he knew the others knew his money went.**

**“Isn’t the lute rather out-of-date?” he inquired.**

**“Ah,” said Kit, “there’s its attraction! The troubadours used the lute and your wife has got the joy and confidence people knew in the old spacious days.”**

**“I wonder whether those days were joyous,” said Blake. “All the same, Mabel’s pluck is good. When we married she undertook an awkward job, but she**

never grumbles. Anyhow, you're not a troubadour. Your job's to make drawings for modern machines."

"There's sober Tom!" Mabel remarked. "But supper will soon get cold."

They sat down at the little round table, and Mabel, glancing at Kit, rather thought he ascribed to her qualities that were properly his. Kit, like her husband, had a post in the drawing office at the shipbuilding yard. He was thin but athletic, and as a rule his eyes twinkled. Kit indulged his whimsical imagination and sometimes one did not know if he joked. Mrs. Blake knew him generous and romantic, but he was a first-class draftsman and made progress at the office. In the meantime, Kit, with frank satisfaction, used his knife and fork. At Netherhall one dined ceremoniously and wore evening clothes, but one did not get food like the suppers Mabel cooked on the gas stove. By and by she indicated the piano.

"Sometimes you're not very keen, Kit. For example, I was forced to point out I'd got new clothes and ask for a compliment; and now it looks as if you had not noticed all Tom's extravagance. But perhaps you want to be polite?"

"I saw the piano, and after supper I'll try it. Just now I'm very happily occupied. All the same, I'm glad to see Tom's luck has turned."

"The piano's not yet ours and we'll talk about it again," said Blake. "Until Kit has satisfied his appetite you must leave him alone, Mabel. Although

he's sometimes romantic, he's frankly flesh and blood."

"The flesh is not very conspicuous," Kit rejoined, and gave Mrs. Blake his plate. "One sees why Tom gets fat. If you'd like a sincere compliment may I have some more?"

By and by Blake and Kit carried off the plates, and when they came back Kit turned down the light and signing the others to the window, pulled the curtain along the rod. The flat was at the top of a tall building, the night was fine, and one looked down on rows of houses and the dark river. On the other bank blast-lamps' flames tossed, and the trembling illumination touched skeleton ships. Hammers rang with a rhythmic beat; and at the top of the steep slope steelworks engines throbbed. In the background a pillar of fire, intense and white, was reflected by a cloud. The pillar sank and vanished, and by contrast all was dark.

"Janions' converter," said Kit. "If they roll us the plates as they agreed, you ought soon to run the *Mariposa* down the launching ways. I don't know if her boiler will be ready."

"Then you're not satisfied about the circulation?" Blake inquired, and Kit thought his interest rather keen.

"We are nearly satisfied. Colvin's hurrying me, and when Mabel has had enough I must go back to the office: the tube-shop foreman wants some

**particulars. Anyhow, we mustn't bore Mabel. I like your window, madam. It commands a moving view."**

**"The fires and grime of industry?" said Mabel and laughed. "I begin to doubt if I know you, Mr. Carson. Sometimes you're the minstrel you talk about, and sometimes a shipbuilder. Which would you really like to be?"**

**"I don't know. There's the trouble. Anyhow, I do like your window. It commands the road to countries not yet modernized—where men beat the monkey-skin drums and play the pipes, make love by primitive rules and kill their rivals. For example—"**

**A whistle shrieked on a high note and dropped to a harmonious chord; a ruby beam moved across the trembling reflections. Then a funnel and a vague, long hull stole through the shipyard smoke. The beam faded, the hull was foreshortened and the ship went round a bend. The wave she threw off beat the bank and melted in the dark.**

**"The *Negapatam*, bound for Singapore and the Malay seas," said Kit. "But I expect you get cold."**

**Blake shut the window and pulled chairs to the small gas fire; and Kit thought his doing so characteristic. Tom was a very good sort, but he was sober and, so to speak, rather soft.**

**"Why must you go back to the office on my birthday?" Mrs. Blake inquired.**

**"Well, you see, I get my pay for building ships, and the *Mariposa* will soon be waiting for her fast-**

steaming, anti-incrustation boiler. Our boiler; the very latest thing of the water-tube type!"

"What is a water-tube boiler? And why are you so keen about the *Mariposa's*?"

"In an ordinary marine boiler the flame goes through the flues; in the water-tube pattern the water circulates in tubes and the flame is outside. The type has some drawbacks I mustn't bother you about, but it steams fast and carries a heavy pressure. Well, a foreign government requires four small, swift, shallow boats for tropical rivers and has ordered two; one from us, and one from the opposition yard."

Mrs. Blake nodded. "The *Mariposa's* yours; if she beats the other boat, you will build the lot?"

"Colvin hopes we'll do so. The rivers she'll navigate are muddy, and in a water-tube boiler mud is awkward. We have been forced to modify our standard pattern, but if we get the results we expect, we reckon on beating the other boat. The improvements cannot be patented, and in consequence we don't talk about our plans."

"But if the *Mariposa* wins, your competitors may bribe somebody to study her boiler."

"It's possible," Kit agreed. "All the same, the tubes are covered by a casing, and if the opposition did find out something useful, we'd have begun to build the fleet. Now you know all about it and we have done with shipbuilding. Let's try the new piano!"

He went to the piano and began to play. The others knew his talent, but they thought the music strange and melancholy. Yet the air was haunting.

“It is not piano music,” Blake remarked.

“I expect it was first written for the guitar; Spanish music’s Moorish music. Don’t you hear the strings and the wind in the sand? Can’t you picture the camel-dung fires in front of the black tents, and smell the curling smoke. But I’ll try a song. It’s about the King of Spain who lost Gibraltar, but did not lose all the fellow lost who lost his heart. Do you hear the guitars tinkle under the lattice window?”

“I do not,” said Blake, smiling. “Still, you see, I’m not a lute player.”

“Oh, well, the next lot’s blatantly pictorial,” said Kit and pushed down the pedal. “Shipyard hammers! You can hear that! Now the *Negapatam’s* whistle calls in the smoke and fog. She steals down river; her screw throbs steadily and stops. The pilot’s boat vanishes and the engines beat a quicker rhythm. The dark water heaves and splashes at the bows. She steers south for sunshine and the islands of pearls and spice.”

He shut the piano and swung the revolving stool. “Well, the instrument’s jolly good and I hope it will soon be yours.”

“The company stipulates for punctual payments,” Blake remarked.

“If you can stand for my bringing my fiddle and Mabel will play, I’ll meet the next installment. I’ve

got some fresh music, but my landlady's restive and I imagine she means to be firm."

"Practise when you like," said Mabel. "You have talent, Kit, and I think you know our house is yours."

"I know you are very kind, and Tom's a first-class sort. When I joined up at the yard I was raw and trustful, but he saw me through the boiler shop and steered me past some awkward pitfalls. At the yard, he's old Tom and famous for his staunchness and soberness. Then when he married I got another friend and now your house is home. Well, I hope your birthdays will be happy and numerous. Your faithful servant, ma'am!"

Blake's look was rather embarrassed, but Mabel's smile was frank and kind. She trusted her husband and Tom was altogether her lover. Kit admitted he had not used much reserve, but Mabel knew his sincerity, and when he declared he was her servant he did not boast. He owed his friends much and his habit was to pay his debts. Then Mabel turned her head, as if she listened, and got up.

"I haven't yet given you coffee, and I believe the stove is out. Have you a penny, Tom?"

"Perhaps it's strange, but I have two shillings, and I don't know a stove that cooks like yours," said Kit. "To-night's a festival. Let's be generous!"

"You don't keep house," Mabel rejoined. "So long as the stove is just, I'm content, but sometimes I doubt."

**She took the penny, and when she went off Blake pulled out his wallet.**

**“My debt has bothered me, Kit, and to pay is some relief. I’m afraid I forced you to be frugal.”**

**Kit left the notes alone. When Blake married he was embarrassed for money and Kit urged him to use his.**

**“You must think for Mabel. I don’t want the sum.”**

**“Take the notes,” said Blake, and indicated the piano. “My luck has rather obviously begun to turn.”**

**“I admit I wondered,” Kit remarked.**

**Blake lighted his pipe and knitted his brows. Kit had recently imagined Tom’s look was careworn.**

**“You are entitled to inquire. Not long since I took my model to Allinson and he was interested. In fact he was willing to help me experiment.”**

**“Splendid!” said Kit, for Blake had long experimented on an improvement for the marine oil-engine. “Allinson’s the man to make the thing go.”**

**“If I’d seen him sooner, it would have helped,” Blake remarked, rather moodily. “Anyhow, he agrees the gear will work, and since he thinks we can get a patent, he gave me a small sum for an option. It accounts for the piano, and my paying my debt. The notes are yours. Thank you, Kit!”**

**Kit took the notes and soon afterwards Mabel carried in the coffee. They began to talk about Blake’s invention, but by and by she asked: “Are you going to Netherhall for your holidays, Kit?”**

**“I hope to get off after the *Mariposa’s* trial run.”**

Mrs. Blake smiled, a sympathetic smile. "You want to feel you go in triumph? Well, since you made the boiler drawings, if the *Mariposa* steams very fast, it will be something of a triumph."

"I'd like Evelyn to know I made some progress," Kit admitted modestly.

"You promised to show me her portrait. Have you got it?"

Kit pulled out his pocket-book and Mabel studied the photograph. Evelyn was obviously young, and Mabel thought her attractive, but she was not altogether satisfied. Evelyn's mouth was ominously firm, and one got a hint of hardness. The girl was perhaps ambitious; she was not generous....

"She has not yet promised to marry you?"

"Not yet. Our relations know my hopes and I think, on the whole, approve, but Evelyn is not rich and my poverty is notorious. There's a sort of agreement that if I make good and get a proper post, we may talk about an engagement."

"But are not your relations rich?"

"My uncle, Alan Carson, was accountable for my premium at the shipyard," Kit replied in a thoughtful voice. "He's a very good sort, but he's justified to stop; then, although Netherhall's a beautiful old house, the estate is his wife's. To get me a proper job is my other uncle's part, but, so far, I haven't bothered him, and it does not look as if he were very keen. Anyhow, if he does get me a post, it will probably be abroad."

**“Ah,” said Blake, “the power your old, landowning families use is strange! You command our battleships, you rule the Indian Civil Service, and you marry American millionaires. But where do you expect to go?”**

**Kit smiled. “The Carsons are not landlords, and belong to another lot. We have nothing to do with India and battleships. Our business is to hammer iron, and for the most part our investments are in Canada....”**

**He stopped and getting up, resumed: “Mabel’s tired; I expect you have had enough, and I must push off for the office.”**

**Mabel gave him her hand, told him to come back soon, and let him go.**

## CHAPTER II

# THE DRAWING-OFFICE

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At the top of the steps to the drawing-office Kit stopped and leaned against the rails. The building slips were occupied, and when work was pushed ahead at night he liked to look about the yard. Smoke rolled across the river; the tide ebbed and wet mudbanks reflected the steelworks fires. When the flames got dim, smaller lights trembled on the curving channel. On one side bare, skeletons of ships melted in the gloom, and behind dark walls wheels rolled. Then sparks blew from twinkling forges on a wooden stage and light hammers rattled like a rifle volley.

Kit knew the rivet gang fastened the *Mariposa's* plates, but he must get to work and he pulled out his key. The head draftsman, Blake, and the night watchman had other keys. When Kit opened the door he heard steps and somebody shouted:

“Hello, Mr. Carson!”

Kit turned and saw the boiler-shop foreman in the yard.

“When do you reckon to start us on the *Mariposa's* job?”

“You'll get the drawings in a day or two,” Kit replied. “I expect Robbins will take the plans to Colvin in the morning, and if he is satisfied, we'll

**make the blue prints. You have, no doubt, got your orders?"**

**"All's ready to shove ahead. Robbins doesn't want the tubes to stand in frame for folks to look at, and as soon as the joints are made we'll put the casing on. Well, I reckon my lot won't talk, and nobody but myself will handle the plans. The boat's a pretty model and looks as if she'd go, but our job's to drive her, and I expect the opposition would give something for your prints."**

**"It's possible,"** Kit agreed. **"All the same, I understand their boat's frames are up, and they have, no doubt, begun the boiler. I must get to work at ours. Good-night, Seeley!"**

He shut the door, switched on a light, and sat down. The spacious office throbbed and when the hammers crashed the windows rattled, but on the whole the noise was soothing. For the greater part of twelve hours Kit had been strenuously occupied, and now for a few minutes he could relax.

He pictured Blake and Mabel by the gas fire at the little flat, talking about Tom's good luck. Well, Tom deserved his luck; he was a first-class pal, and at the beginning had helped Kit more than he knew. Then Kit imagined for Tom to meet his household bills was hard; his clothes were not very good and he brought his lunch to the office. Tom, however, had Mabel, and Kit thought she justified all the self-denial a man, for her sake, could use.

Kit pictured her shopping where food was cheap, counting the pennies for the meter-stove, and improvising supper for her husband's friends. Yet she was happy. Mabel had a man's pluck, and sometimes when Kit thought about her he was moved. But he was not at all her lover. Mabel was his pal's wife and, when he was rich, he was going to marry Evelyn. To think about it would not help and he must get his drawing-board.

Unlocking a cupboard, he carried the board to a table and put out his drawing instruments. The boiler was the manager's and the head draftsman's job, but they did not draw the plans. They told Kit their notions, gave him rough sketches, and allowed him to calculate dimensions and work out details. His part was important, and he liked to know the others trusted him. In fact, if the boiler steamed as it ought to steam, he imagined they would frankly acknowledge his help, and their doing so implied his getting a better post. On the whole, he would rather stay at the yard than bother his uncle. So far, it did not look as if his progress interested Jasper Carson.

Kit measured some tubes on the drawing and began to calculate. The calculations were intricate, and by and by he pulled out his watch. His brain was getting dull, and since he did not want to stop until morning, he must brace up. He tried again and found his reckoning accurate. The trouble was, a curved tube was rather small, and the bend was sharp. It

might check the water's even flow and one must allow for incrustation.

Now Kit thought about it, he had stated something like that to Colvin, and in the first plans the tube was larger. He was persuaded the first plans would work, but Colvin did not agree. Kit went to the cupboard for the drawings he had made some time since, and stretching the paper on a board, stopped and moved the light. Where he had used the compasses another time he saw two small marks, as if somebody had used a larger radius to sweep the curve. Kit knitted his brows; he did not think he had lengthened the radius, but if he had done so, it would give an easier curve. He had argued that the curve ought to be easier.

He experimented with his compass. Unless he pressed hard, its point did not leave a mark like the other, and he was puzzled. The plans were kept in the cupboard, and he carried the key; and for some time nobody but Blake had gone to the office at night. Blake had nothing to do with the boiler, and all knew him trustworthy.

Kit admitted it was possible his compass had made the mark, and he resolved he would not bother about it. The tube must be a little larger and the curve easier. He got his scale and a book of tables and resumed his calculations. At length he was satisfied, and all was ready for Robbins to approve. Kit knew Robbins would approve. For long he had labored at the job, but the job was good. Now he was frankly

**tired and, stretching his arms across the table, he let himself go slack.**

**He was young and romantic, and the *Negapatam's* whistle had excited his imagination. Sometimes he felt the steamer's whistles called him from the drawing-office and the smokey yard. He pictured the *Mariposa* pushing up a big calm river and the muddy wave she threw off lapping the mangrove roots. He saw dazzling sunbeams pierce the forest and touch tangled creepers and orchids on the rotting trunks. The little boat stemmed the yellow flood and her boiler steamed as the company's boiler ought to steam.**

**When the boat had run her trial Kit was going for a holiday, and he saw another picture. Evelyn, carrying a fishing rod, balanced on a ledge by a sparkling pool. Her clothes harmonized with the lichen on the stones, and her slender body was posed like a Greek statue. The rod bent, and Kit, in the water, held the landing-net.**

**The picture melted, and another got distinct. Evelyn occupied a hammock under the big oaks at Netherhall; Kit lay in the grass, and in the shade water splashed. Sometimes he joked and Evelyn smiled; sometimes he talked about the *Mariposa's* boiler. When one talked about things like that Evelyn was not bored. Kit sensed in her a practical vein, and she knew he must make his mark. Steamship whistles did not call Evelyn, but Kit smiled, a happy smile. Her**

**part was to make home beautiful, and he was willing for her to curb his romantic extravagance.**

**Kit straightened his bent shoulders. Unless he got on his feet, he would soon be asleep, and he put the plans in the cupboard and locked the door. When he got his hat the watchman came in and pushed a peg into the clock.**

**“You’re going, Mr. Carson! I s’pose nobody else was in the office since I was round?”**

**“I was alone. Why do you want to know?”**

**“Mr. Robbins’s orders was, if anybody but you and Mr. Blake came back at night, I must report.”**

**Kit smiled and went down the steps. Old Robbins used some caution, but he ought to know his men. All the same, since the boiler’s advantages could not be patented, perhaps caution was justified.**

**In the morning Kit carried the plans to the head draftsman’s table, and for a time Robbins measured and calculated. Then he said: “You have used a longer radius for the intake tube’s curve. In fact, to some extent, you have gone back to our original notion.”**

**“That is so,” Kit agreed. “The water must circulate freely.”**

**Robbins smiled. “You’re an obstinate young fellow. I know you liked the first plan, but I begin to think you logical.”**

**He used his scale, and Kit thought about the mark on the other drawing. His experiment with his compass did not banish all doubt, and he admitted he**

was obstinate. Obsessed by the advantage of a flowing curve, he had perhaps unconsciously tried a longer radius. Then Robbins looked up.

“Well, I believe all is right, and if Colvin agrees, we’ll make the prints and templates for the shops. The job’s good, and if the *Mariposa* beats the other boat, I’ll see your part is known. I rather think Colvin studies you, and when a young man’s wanted for a good post his word carries weight.”

Kit went back to his table and took his tools from a drawer. Pulling about some at the bottom, he saw a small worn eraser he knew was not his, for the rubber was not the stuff the company’s draftsmen used. Blake, however, was fastidious and liked another sort. Kit imagined Tom had left the piece on his board, or perhaps he had carelessly carried off Tom’s. He put the thing in his pocket and got to work.

The plans were sent to the shops and the boiler was built. The steamer was launched, and one morning Kit climbed to a stage by the waterside. Fifty yards off, the *Mariposa* rode at a mooring buoy and a number of important gentlemen had gone on board. The current went up river, and oily black eddies revolved along the mud-bank’s edge, but the tide was not yet full and for an hour or two large steamers would not come up the channel.

By contrast with the murky water, dark sheds, smoke, and cinder heaps, the *Mariposa* was spotlessly clean. Her low hull was finely moulded, and the long shade-deck overhead followed her rail’s

bold curve. Tapered masts and slanted funnel harmonized with the flowing lines below. But for her brown teak deckhouse and the black clothes and green and gold uniforms of the group by a door, all on board was white; Kit thought her beautiful. Moreover, she looked speedy.

A bell rang, a little smoke curled from the funnel, and Kit pulled out his watch. The fires were lighted and since the foreign government stipulated that the boiler must steam fast, he must know when steam was up. The smoke was thin and indistinct, and he saw the combustion was good. So far, all went well, but to wait was hard and he lighted a cigarette. A very small defect would spoil the trial, and one could not altogether guard against another's carelessness. Workmen were human.

After a time, steam blew from a pipe and stopped. The mooring chains splashed, a bell rang, and the engines began to throb. Foam tossed about the screw and the *Mariposa* leaped ahead. Her bows lifted and rode on a muddy wave. The wave sank, and re-forming at her rounded stern, broke and trailed away in a long, eddying wake. Small, angry rollers splashed against the mud and Kit's heart beat. Steam was up before the stipulated time and the boat's speed was good, but the harbor commissioners' rules were stern and the engineers dared not yet let her go. When she reached open water, all on board would acknowledge he and Robbins had made a first-class job. After a few

minutes the *Mariposa* vanished round a curve and Kit returned to his drawing-table.

In the afternoon he was called to the manager's office. Two or three directors were in the room, and one said: "You are Jasper Carson's relation?"

Kit said Jasper was his uncle, and the director nodded.

"Then, it looks as if you had inherited some of his qualities. Mr. Robbins declares your help was useful, and perhaps you'll be glad to know the boiler does all we claim, and the boat is nearly a knot faster than the buyers stipulated. Stick to your job and by and by you may get a better. Our rule is to push on a keen man."

"There's another thing, Carson," said the manager. "I have given the cashier some orders—you can take it for a mark of the company's appreciation."

Kit, with something of an effort, replied politely, and went off. His heart beat and the blood came to his skin. He was young and triumph carried a thrill.

## CHAPTER III

## NETHERHALL

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Bleak moors, seamed by dark gullies, enclose Netherdale, and a river, leaping from the peat, breaks on whinstone ledges and plunges into alder-shaded pools. Where the valley widens, larch woods roll up the slopes and Netherhall and its oaks occupy a flat round which the water curves. The house is old and dignified, and belonged to Mrs. Alan Carson. The Carsons were ironmasters, but when Alan married he sold his foundry. For some time the business had not prospered, and Alan was glad to let it go. He was cautious and hesitating, and when he faced obstacles he went another way. As a rule, since his marriage, the way was Mrs. Carson's way.

Four or five hours after Kit left the shipyard, he sat in the grass at Netherhall by Evelyn Haigh's basket chair. He smoked a cigarette and sometimes he talked, but for the most part he was content to look about and study Evelyn. The picture was attractive. For a background, old oaks, tufted by shaggy moss, rolled down to the stream. The leaves were touched by the coppery gleams that mark the oak when summer is young, and blue shadows lurked among the trunks.

Evelyn's clothes were white, but her shady hat and her belt were yellow. Her hair was black; her face

was small, rather thin and finely molded. She was lightly built and her pose was graceful, but her mouth was firm and sometimes her look was calculating. Kit, however, did not notice things like that.

He rested his back against a tree and let himself go slack. The afternoon was hot, and but for the splash of the river, all was quiet.

“You look tired, Kit,” Evelyn remarked.

“I expect I’m lazy. All the same, at the office we were pretty strenuously occupied, and I was keen about the boiler. Now the boat has run her trial, I feel I’m entitled to relax, and when one wants to loaf I don’t know a better spot than Netherhall.”

Evelyn agreed. Slanted sunbeams pierced the shade and touched springing fern and the velvet grass where rabbits fed. Outside the thin wood, a lily-pool in the wide lawn reflected dazzling light, and the sun was on the old house’s front. The stone was stained by lichens, and yellow roses climbed the wall. One smelt flowers and heard the languid hum of bees.

“But the boat’s steaming fast was your triumph,” Evelyn resumed. “Then did you not get a reward?”

“I got fifty pounds a year extra pay and thought myself fortunate!”

“The company is not very generous,” said Evelyn, and laughed. “Sometimes I feel your part, like mine, is rather a joke. You labor at the shipyard for ridiculous pay, but when you visit at Netherhall you

fish and shoot and drive expensive cars. Your aunt and my mother rule the dale, but when nobody is about we use stern economy. You don't, Kit——" She stopped, and touching the little yellow jewel on her neck, resumed: "In fact, I feel you're rashly extravagant."

"To buy keen satisfaction is not extravagant, and when I see you wear my present I know the investment's sound. Anyhow, Mrs. Haigh would not allow me to give you a ring."

Evelyn blushed. Kit was not her acknowledged lover, and Mrs. Haigh declared that before they talked about his marrying Evelyn he must be able to support a wife.

"Mother is very firm, but I think we'll let it go. Well, if you are not extravagant, you certainly are generous. Your sister wanted a wrist-watch, and she has got the watch!"

"Oh, well. Not long since, a pal at the yard paid his debt, and since I didn't expect to be paid, I thought I was entitled to use the money."

"I don't know if you're logical, Kit. If you did not expect to be paid, why did you lend?"

"As a rule, I hate to be logical," Kit rejoined. "You see, Tom's pay is small and the girl he wanted to marry lost her post and could not get another. She had no home and her savings melted. Then relations in New Zealand sent money for her ticket and urged her to join them; but if she went it looked as if she must go for good...." Kit stopped and resumed in a

**thoughtful voice: “Sometimes one must take a plunge, and Mabel’s pluck was fine. She married Tom, and although their fight was hard, now he’s patenting a useful invention, I think their troubles are over.”**

“Ah,” said Evelyn, “perhaps pluck is the greatest quality! So long as one is not afraid, one is not tempted to shabbiness; but after all, the risk your friends ran was daunting, and I’m not very brave.”

Kit’s mouth got tight. Evelyn’s color came and went, and he knew she was moved. She, like him, was young, and passion and adventure called. Perhaps, if he used a strong effort he might carry her away. For all that, Kit knew he must not do so. He did not see Evelyn happy at a flat like Blake’s, and to picture her saving the pennies for the stove was ridiculous. Besides, he had agreed that he must get a proper post.

“Oh, well,” he said, “I expect Tom’s luck was rather remarkable, and his plunge might have cost him and Mabel much. Besides, we agreed we would not be rash.”

Evelyn gave him a strange look, and he doubted if she altogether approved his resignation. To know he had taken the proper line was not much comfort. Then Evelyn smiled.

“What did you buy for yourself? Since you got the money, I expect you bought something,” she said in a careless voice.

Kit played up. "I bought a fiddle bow at a second-hand shop. A pretty good example of a fine old maker's workmanship. In fact, I think the dealer didn't know the treasure he had."

"Then, you did not enlighten him?" said Evelyn, and laughed. "I like to feel you can sometimes conquer your scruples. But suppose the dealer was cleverer than you thought? Don't they fake old fiddle bows?"

"I'm a shipyard draftsman, and you don't cheat a fellow who uses scientific tools."

"It's possible," Evelyn agreed. "At all events, I imagine one does not cheat your Uncle Jasper."

Kit looked up. An old gentleman crossed the grass and stopped a few yards off. Jasper Carson was tall and thin. His hair and brows were white, and his face was lined. His dress was careless and his look, as a rule, ironically humorous, but one got a hint of force. He gave Evelyn a rather baffling smile and said to Kit:

"Loafing after your recent efforts?"

"My efforts were pretty strenuous, sir. Then, on a summer afternoon, loafing has some charm."

Jasper's glance rested on Evelyn. His look was inscrutable, but Kit thought hers got harder, as if she knew him antagonistic.

"In the circumstances, perhaps it's justifiable. You may think my statement strange, Miss Haigh, but long ago I was romantic, and when the days were golden we studied Tennyson. His verses harmonized with old English houses and ancestral trees, but the

**oaks at Netherhall are not the Carsons' oaks and will certainly not be Kit's. Harry's claim is first and his type's the landlord type."**

**Evelyn sensed a sneer. Harry Ledward was Mrs. Carson's relation.**

**"Tennyson is out-of-date, and we are modern," she rejoined. "Kit talked about a steamship boiler and I was not bored."**

**"Kit's an optimist," Jasper remarked, and turned to his nephew. "The *Mariposa* made a first-class trial run, but perhaps you ought to wait until the other boat has steamed across the measured marks."**

**"I'm not anxious. The other boat's no doubt a good boat, but she has not our boiler. In the meantime, it's not important, and although you banter me about loafing, it doesn't look as if you were very much engaged."**

**"Netherhall is soothing," Jasper agreed. "Still I'm not altogether slack. Sometimes I ponder and sometimes I plan."**

**He went off, and Kit's eyes twinkled. "Jasper's plans work, and his obvious duty is to plan for me. All the same, if he wants to send me to Canada, I doubt if I'll go. He has much to do with Canadian engineering and bridge-building works, but I'm satisfied to stop in the Old Country."**

**"He's your friend; I doubt if he is mine," said Evelyn. "I like Alan Carson better."**

**"Alan is a very good sort, but when you doubt Jasper you exaggerate. All who know you are your**

friends."

"I wonder——" said Evelyn in a thoughtful voice. "But, if you're not too languid, let's go to the waterside and see where the big trout rise."

Kit got up and they went to the river, but he felt the tranquillity he had enjoyed was gone. Although he declared Evelyn exaggerated, Jasper had disturbed the brooding calm.

In the evening Kit leaned against the terrace wall and tuned a violin. The long drawing-room window was open, and his sister, Agatha, struck a note on the piano. The evening was hot and the light had begun to go. One smelt wet grass and flowers touched by dew. In the gloom the river throbbed.

Evelyn, Mrs. Haigh, and Mrs. Carson occupied a bench. Mrs. Haigh was short, alert and resolute. Her lips were thin, and when she pondered her mouth got tight. Although she was rather important at Netherdale, she was not rich. Mrs. Carson was tall and dignified. She sprang from old land-owning stock; Netherhall was hers, and she ruled her husband. Alan Carson, on the terrace steps, smoked a cigar. His skin was red, he was rather fat, and dully urbane. Since his marriage he was satisfied to potter about his wife's small estate.

"The Spanish fellow's music," said Kit, going to the window. "Try to follow me; I mayn't stick to the score."

Agatha struck a few notes and Kit's bow touched the strings. He used double stops and the strange