

## The Tail End of a Big Surprise.

**B**Y the side of a low grey racer, there stood one summer morning, a curly-haired, fair young man—not so very young, either—whose cheeks were flushed with excitement as he watched a large, heavy trunk, containing rods, landing-nets, guns, and hunting clothes, being carefully strapped by a servant, to the rear of his car. The three years spent in France had not changed him in any way. He came back precisely the same reckless fellow as when he had sailed across; and within one week, there was not a person of any importance in the city but knew that “young Matthews” had returned.

But, for all, he was a likeable young fellow, and a gentleman. His father could tell you that. They had lived together for years in the big gothic-like mansion near the outskirts of the city.

When the trunk was securely fastened, and everything that was needed placed in the car, Donald took his motoring cap and coat, sprang quickly into the seat, and sang out a farewell word to the servant. The engine began to “purr” softly, and in a moment the gray racer disappeared around a bend in the driveway, amidst a heavy cloud of dust.

As he drew near the business section of the city, he slowed down his machine to a crawl. Lighting up one of his cigars, he lounged back more comfortably in the seat, and gazed absent-mindedly into the throngs of passers-by. Once he almost ran over a child; and at another time an elderly man, narrowly escaping collision, flung back curses at him. But he was unconscious of it all.

His thoughts were soon brought back by hearing his name shouted out by someone quite near.

"Hello Don!"

Glancing into a surging crowd from which the sound came, he saw an old friend and college chum.

"Why, hello Billy Morphet!" he replied, bringing his car to the curbing. "Where did you drop from? I haven't seen you for ages. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh, I've been out of town for the past few months—just taking things easy. I had a dandy time. Arrived home two days ago, and have been doing nothing since. But tell me what the big idea is. What are you doing out so early on such a fine morning."

"Who, me? Why I'm just starting on another one of my many adventures. You'd better join me. I'm going out to the hills for a few weeks on a little vacation trip. What's the verdict! Will you come along? You have nothing special on, have you?"

"No, I'm not doing anything at present; but then it would take some time to prepare, and I'd only be putting you to a lot of inconvenience."

"Not a bit of it! No inconvenience at all. I have plenty of clothes and everything else here. Enough to satisfy three men. Come on!"

Before Billy knew it, he was sitting in the car beside Donald, and they were already on their way up town.

I have to drop in here and have a few words with the 'Governor' before I leave", said Don, stopping in front of a large stone building. "In the meantime you can phone home and tell them you won't be back for a few weeks."

"But say—

"There's nothing to say about it. Hurry now! We want to get away early. There's no use arguing—you're coming along with me."

John Matthews was working silently at his desk when Don entered. It was not until he received a friendly blow on the back that he looked up and noticed him.

"Hello there!"

"Good-morning, Governor," replied Don. "How goes everything this morning?"

"Very well indeed. I see you're an early bird this morning. What brought you down here? It is not very often that you favor me with such a call."

I'm on my way to the hills on that hunting trip, so I thought I would drop in and see you before I left."

"Whew!" said his father, looking surprised. "So I believe. You were to start to-day. I had almost forgotten about it. Who's going with you?"

"I'm taking along Billy Morphet."

"Billy Morphet, eh?" And John Matthews leaned back in his chair and chuckled to himself for a full minute. "Well" he resumed, "I wish you all kinds of luck, and hope you enjoy yourselves. You'd better go now, as I'm rather busy this morning—stacked right up with work—and by the way, let me know when you're returning, and lastly, don't dare come back without some game."

"Leave that to me 'Governor,'" replied Don, on his way to the door. "I'll guarantee you I'll bring back something big—well, so long."

He walked briskly to the car. Billy was waiting for him, with a peculiar smile on his face.



Soon, they had left the city far behind, and were speeding rapidly over the level roads of the country.

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Set in among the picturesque hills of New Hampshire, lies a bright little place called Brockville. A short distance from it, a silvery stream, shaded by overhanging maples, winds through the complicated valleys and opens out into a wider stretch of water, known as 'the lake'. Beyond this runs a long range of hills, thickly studded with pine and fir, and broken only at intervals by protruding, jagged rocks. Among these hills swarm game of every description; speckled trout infest its streams. It is an ideal spot, and appeals strongly to the vacationist as well as to the sportsman.

Don and Billy had not been there two weeks, when Billy was called home by an important telegram, and Don was left to himself.

They had secured rooms at the only hotel in the village, a very respectable place ably managed by the good widow Knollys. It so happened that Miss Belton, who lived in a neighbouring town some miles away, was spending a few weeks vacation there when they arrived. She was a prettily shaped girl of medium height, with an attractive tan complexion, light wavy hair, and the deepest blue eyes imaginable.

When Don was introduced to her, he thought the name in some way sounded familiar, but it was not until Billy had gone, that he made a surprising discovery. He was putting on his army sweater, intending to spend the day in fishing along the streams, when he saw neatly worked in, on the inside of it, the name 'Flossy Belton'. A thrill went through him.

Could Miss Belton be the same person? Surely not—there must be many people of that name in the world.

He determined to find out, and found her shortly afterwards. She was reading a book.

"Good-morning Miss Belton", he said. "I hope I'm not intruding."

"Certainly not! Take a seat. Isn't this a glorious morning? I suppose you are out for another days sport."

"Well, that was my intention when I arose, but since then I have made a somewhat startling discovery, or rather, what may prove to be a startling one."

"Really! What was it?"

"Look!" said Don, sitting down beside her. He turned up the edge of his sweater and showed her the name on the inside.

"Oh!" she said, a new note of interest in her voice. "Where did you get it? Why, I knitted that sweater last year for the Red Cross—I would recognize it anywhere."

"That's just what I thought. I received it from the Red Cross before I left France. What a small world this is after all."

After this incident, there was little hunting or fishing done. Don took an occasional trip to the river for trout, on which occasion Miss Belton always accompanied him; but most of his time was spent either in long friendly walks, or in sitting silently by her, in the garden while she read. His regard for her grew daily, they were seldom apart, and the inhabitants of Brockville were only too glad to have a new topic introduced into their circles, which could be discussed and picked threadbare at will.

One evening when they had returned from a long walk in the hills, feeling rather fatigued, they sat down in the garden at the rear of the house. The moon had just risen above the surrounding hills, and the silvery rays began to pierce through the thickly foliated trees. The scent of roses filled the air. Far off a night bird sang plaintively.

Both remained silent for some time, alone with their thoughts, gazing at the mystic shadows about them. The leaves rustled softly in the warm evening breeze.

"How quite impossible it seems", remarked Don, "that here in New Hampshire hills I should meet you—you who knitted that sweater for me. It seems almost unbelievable."

"Yes, doesn't it though. And to think what great friends we have become. I shall hate the thought of leaving to-morrow."

"Leaving to-morrow."

"Yes," she said sadly. "I suppose I should have told you before. Father is coming here to-morrow, and I am to return with him. I've had such an enjoyable time, that I can hardly bear the thought of leaving—and you have been so good to me—I hope we won't forget each other."

"Forget each other! Why I could never forget you Flossy. The time I spent here has been the happiest of my life. You have no idea what it has meant to me, or how awfully much I'm going to miss you when you're gone."

"And how I'll miss you too, Don."

It was then that Don acted as he had never done before. In her deep blue eyes he read hope; and he told her he loved her, and he asked her for her



love; that he had a home, and a kind father who would welcome her.

She met his gaze half smilingly, half tearfully, and somehow her two soft hands became clasped in his. What passed between them, no one knows; but when she entered the house some time later there was a radiant look on her face, which bespoke exquisite joy and happiness.

Early on the following day, Flossy's father arrived. He was a man of some fifty years of age, inclined to be stout, somewhat florid in complexion, and dressed with scrupulous care. His genial and cheery disposition soon won the confidence and respect of all, and especially of Don, who told him frankly of his intentions. Mr. Belton seemed a little stern at first, but before the morning was over he and Don were going around, linked arm in arm, talking and laughing as if they had been friends all their lives.

Some weeks later, a quiet and pretty wedding took place; two hearts were made happy, and an elaborate reception was given at the home of the bride.

After the wedding, when preparations had been fully made, Mr. and Mrs. Matthews left early one morning in the low grey racer, on their way back to their future home.

Donald Matthews hunting trip to the hills had come to an end.

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It was after dusk. The big gothic-like mansion on the outskirts of the city stood out conspicuously in the gloom. One by one, lights began to appear in the windows, and servants could be seen passing to and fro. Evidently preparations of some kind were being made.

A bright fire crackled in the hearth. John Roderic

Matthews, master of the house, was pacing up and down the library puffing rapidly at a cigar. From time to time he stopped at a table in the centre of the room, picked up two telegrams, and read them over and over again, with a faint smile crossing his face. Putting them down again, he continued pacing the room, mumbling words now and then to himself.

The first telegram was from a friend, and all that was on it was, "Transaction O. K."

The second ran as follows :

"Am returning to-night and bringing big game, as promised." Donald.

About the same time, a car, some ten miles away, was speeding rapidly towards the city. The driver was crouched low in the seat, for the evening breeze was cold. Close beside him sat a young lady, her hair blowing about her face.

"What will your father think of you?" said Flossy. "You have not told him a word about our marriage yet, have you?"

"No, but don't worry a bit about it, dear. It will be alright. Anything I do generally pleases the 'Governor'—there's one thing we can be certain of—he's going to think a lot of you."

But though Donald encouraged her thus, he began to grow nervous as they drew nearer the city.

Finally they arrived, and the car was brought slowly to a halt in front of a long row of winding marble steps. Watkins opened the door for them. He looked rather puzzled at Flossy, but, receiving a glance from Don, he quietly backed away, muttering : "I'm glad to see you're back, sir. I trust you had a pleasant trip?"

"Quite all right, Watkins. See that this lady is made comfortable."



Donald leaving his wife in the living-room, took off his coat and entered the library.

His father was sitting in a richly covered chair, in front of the fire-place. He looked up as Donald entered.

"Well", said his father. You're back at last—it's about time. Do you realize you have been away almost all summer? I thought you were gone for good."

Don remained silent.

"I got that telegram you sent me this afternoon", he continued. "Well, there is some satisfaction in seeing that you had a little luck, Where's all this big game you were talking about?"

"Why—er—er, it's out in the living-room."

"Hey? The living-room! That's a funny place to put it. Better take it out at once—or wait! I'll go along with you and see it."

"Now, now; not so hasty 'Governor'. Don't be in too great a hurry—you don't understand. I suppose I should have informed before—I—I—I'm married."

"You're what?"

"Married."

"Married! Great heavens, what do you mean? Explain yourself."

"Now don't get excited, and not so loud please. I'll explain everything. I met this certain young lady while I was on my trip. I liked her immensely, and consequently married her. That's what I meant by bringing back big game.

Now she is a perfect lady—the best little girl in the world. She is at present in the living-room; I don't want you to say anything to her that might hurt her feelings. If you have anything to say, I want you to say it to me."

"Come! come!" exploded his father. "What nonsense is this? Bring her in here immediately, sir."

"Well, remember what I said—nothing to hurt her feelings, now."

In a moment Donald returned, with a shy-looking girl clinging to his arm, and bravely trying to smile at the stern countenance of John Matthews.

After a silence that seemed an eternity to the anxious couple, John Matthews smiled happily, and walking slowly across the room, put his arms fondly around them.

"Why, bless your hearts," he said, "did you think that I was cross at you?" He chuckled as he continued, "Nothing could have pleased me better. I've been waiting for this all summer. James Belton is an old friend of mine, and we planned all this out beforehand. He persuaded Flossy to spend her vacation in Brockville, and if you remember rightly, it was I who suggested the hunting trip for you. On the morning you left for the hills, I had Watkins call me up when you left the house. Billy Morphet was waiting in my office, and it was easily arranged that he should meet you on the street. I sent that telegram which called him home a week later; and the rest was left to yourselves. I hope you'll forgive me for planning up this little adventure."

The three of them nestled closely together, and Donald murmured: "Dear old dad — I might have known you had a hand in this."

An hour later a banquet was served in the Matthews home, and the new master and his wife were heartily welcomed. And those who were invited to it, afterwards said, that John Matthews smiled that night more contentedly than he had ever done before.