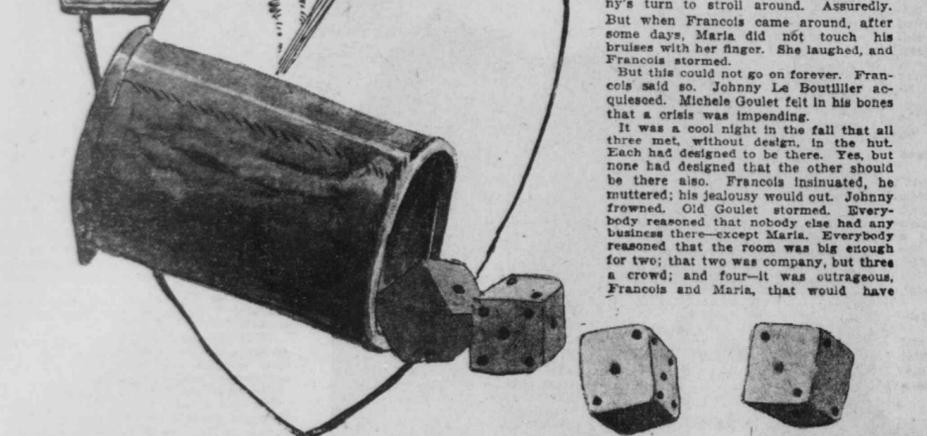


THE VOICE OF THE GREAT NORTH TRAIL

BY WILLIAM HAMILTON OSBORNE



JUST across the border is the Great North Trail. One enters it in summer as a rule. In winter it becomes impassable. This trail is the forest primeval. On this side of it, before one enters, are men and books and railroads. Beyond—how knows? Who enters must leave hope behind. Mike Gooley, that is he. His comfortable but is the lodge house of the Great North Trail. Mike Gooley, what a name—a name to conjure with. His nationality is ascertained and certain at the very instant of the revelation of his name. But yet there is a mistake somewhere, and due to the fact that his name is always heard but never seen. He has spelled it time and time again for some seven thousand men and women, for to that extent numbers the great army which he has escorted by train and through the Great North Trail.

This same Gooley is a Celt. Ah, of course, to be sure. No one would think otherwise. But he is a different kind of Celt. He is Gooley—for his name when spoken is Mike Gooley, true enough, but when written it is wholly something else—Michele Goulet then. A Frenchman—a Frenchman to the marrow. One knows that, finally, but only when his eye lights upon this same Michele Goulet—and one is glad for in the lonely march through the Great North Trail, and in the nights around the camp fire, it is possible to lift the voice in the midst of the great silence to lift the voice in solemn song—

Oh, Michele Goulet, Michele Goulet,
The greatest Man-tota ever knew.
Oh, spell it Goulet, but never Gooley,
Goulet, Goulet, Goulet, Goulet, do.

Goulet is the guide par excellence. Across the Great North Trail he has escorted many, many persons. The President of the United States? Assuredly. And many, many school teachers throughout the long vacation. In the printed itineraries of the railroads he is included, though not by name, in the list of "competent guides at every point." He is all things to all men. He is sublime; he is the great Northwest. He is Michele Goulet. Can man say more?

But there is more, for there is Maria, Michele's daughter. Another name too often the subject of mispronunciation. One must say Ave Maria beneath the breath, and then he may know how to speak of Michele's daughter. Otherwise it were best to call her—well, Miss Goulet. But not now, though. That would never do, for at this time all is different. But one must not anticipate.

Up there, where men are plenty and women few and far between, the sight of Michele's daughter came as a surprise. One held his breath, for she was a flower, was Michele's daughter—a wood flower of the trail. She was worth while. And there were many who understood that and who hopefully desired to wear this flower some day. Most of them did not bother Maria. She sent them off. Good men, they were, too—a bit rough and wild, good as men of the forest go.

But there were three who were very close admirers. Each of these had sworn to have Maria for his own. One was a Canuck, pure and simple. Francois he was, a good sort of chap, but with a temper. The next was an American, a man with a French name, too. This was Johnny Le Boutillier, younger than Francois and lighter in complexion. The third admirer was the greatest of them all. His name was Michele Goulet. He was Maria's father. Francois whispered to himself that already she was his. Johnny Le Boutillier told her out and out that she was his. And old Michele Goulet, he shook his fist and insisted—saw—that she didn't belong to anybody at all—that is, except to him. He informed her that she could marry anybody she chose, only she must remain single always and live with him. Francois, bah! And Johnny Le Boutillier, bah, too! What like were they? Oh, yes, they were well enough in their way—but they were not her kind. Maria smiled—and on all three.

"There is yet time," she said.

"I shall marry you," said Michele.

"Why not? Did not my mother marry?"

"Marry nothing," snapped old Michele, losing sight of the facts in order to prove his point. "What good young woman would marry and leave her old father? And besides," he added, "though making a guarded admission, even if she did marry, she had no old father—she had nobody but me. So we married."

"She had a mother," insisted Maria Goulet.

"What has that to do with it?" retorted Michele. "A mother, bah! Yes, but what is a mother? She had no old father. Therefore, and only therefore, she married. And therefore you should not. Never marry. I do not expect to marry. Come now. What's good enough for me is good enough for you. Look at me."

Maria drove her other two admirers to the frenzy point as well. Francois, the jealous, the black-browed, was easily aroused and hard to appease. There he fought with Johnny Le Boutillier—famous fights, too, by the light of torches, with many men around the combatants bared to the waist. Twice did Johnny Le Boutillier go down and out.

At the next fight between Francois and

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Johnny, Johnny, who had treasured a few things up in his heart, was able, in the language of his pugilistic friend, to "hand her to Francois in the most approved manner. Francois went down, not once, but eight, nine times. Then it was Johnny's turn to stroll around. Assuredly. But when Francois came around, after some days, Maria did not touch his bruises with her finger. She laughed, and Francois stormed.

But this could not go on forever. Francois said so. Johnny Le Boutillier acquiesced. Michele Goulet felt in his bones that a crisis was impending.

It was a cool night in the fall that all three met, without design, in the hut. Each had designed to be there. Yes, but none had designed that the other should be there also. Francois intuited, he muttered; his jealousy would out. Johnny frowned. Old Goulet stormed. Everybody reasoned that nobody else had any business there—except Maria. Everybody reasoned that the room was big enough for two; that two was company, but three a crowd; and four—it was outrageous. Francois and Maria, that would have been well, reasoned Francois with himself. But that idiot Le Boutillier! Johnny Le Boutillier amused himself by trying to stare Francois out of countenance. Michele Goulet—he would have cleared them all out; they had no business there. At length Maria spoke:

"I shall be fair," she said; "fair to all. I will favor no one. I shall favor not Francois, who wants to marry me; nor Johnny Le Boutillier, who would make me his wife." Here she kept her face slightly averted from the ardent glance of Johnny. "Nor will I favor Michele Goulet."

"You don't have to favor me," growled Goulet, "only don't marry. That is obedience, not to marry. Where would we all be if everybody married? I tell you the world would be in a great pickle. Don't favor me, my daughter. I don't ask anything at all of your hands. Only don't marry. You said you would be fair. Be fair. That is the way to be fair. Do not therefore, marry. Then all will be satisfied."

"Satisfied?" retorted Francois. "How can I be satisfied if she does not marry?"

"Satisfied," nodded the old man, "satisfied—that you will not get her."

Maria had waited patiently for the remarks to end. "I shall be fair. Francois has fought for me. He has won. Johnny has fought for me. He has won. Pere Goulet has fought for me. It is worse than fighting—we may say that he has won. Well and good. Now there shall be no more fighting. There shall be no more growing. I shall marry Francois."

Francois leaped to his feet. "My angel!" he cried. Maria waved her hand.

"Or—I shall marry Johnny Le Boutillier," Johnny shuffled his feet with indignation, recognizing that he had at last a fighting chance, began to whistle softly.

"Or—I shall not marry. There!"

"Ha!" cried Father Goulet; "she shall not marry. There!"

"There shall be no more fighting and no more growing," Goulet's daughter, "but there shall be chance and wager. You shall play for me. There." They waited. "You three shall throw dice," she added, "and this shall end it. It is the game. It is gaming. I am the stake. I shall go to the man who wins, whether," she added, "it be Francois."

"Ah!" This from Francois.

She turned her back upon Johnny Le Boutillier. "Or Johnny Le Boutillier," she continued, "or Pere Goulet."

Francois growled, but Francois leaped to his feet.

"I am famous with the dice," he exclaimed. "It is good. I agree."

"Maria Goulet," laughed Johnny Le Boutillier, "you're a dead game sport. I go you."

Father Goulet sniffed the air. "You cubs think you know, but I will show you. I, Goulet, the great dice thrower. I smell victory. I am the winner at once. Let me show you how, youngsters."

He reached forth and grasped an old dice box from a shelf. There were two there and one upon the shelf above. The last box was the newest. It was made of Old Goulet had one box. Another one Maria handed to Francois. The last she gave to Johnny.

"A box for each," she said, "that each may shake well to make well."

Johnny shook his box reminiscently. "The last time I played," he remarked, "was with the bull bear from the States—the monster with the neck. I lost to him—lost a bit, I tell you." He thought of the pugilist trick he had learned. "He was a wonder; that man," he said aloud.

"My son," said Pere Goulet, "he was. That man with his two hands could throw a buck—perhaps a bull moose. Who knows? You say well; he was a monster. True."

Francois shook his box. "You first," said Goulet's daughter. "Each shall have three throws, and I shall keep what do you say? At other times I laugh and say, 'I have never had one!' in a tone which implies just the reverse."

She finished this confession and looked at Mowbray out of the corner of her eyes in a way that drove the last vestige of fear out of his mind. This naive woman, the person whose dignity and coldness he had stood aloof from in absolute embarrassment for so long. He could have laughed at the absurdity of it. Why had she never shown him her real self before? "I think I shall propose to you," he remarked deliberately.

For a second she looked surprised and then her eyes danced.

"Let it be in your best style," she pleaded. "Remember, it's my first and I fear it may be my last, too!"

He leaned toward her and looked straight into her eyes.

"I love you, Betty," he said simply, "and I think you know the rest. Tell me that you do!"

Her cheeks were hot and her lips trembled. A strong hand reached out and took hers in a masterful way, and she suddenly knew that something which she had never dreamed—was true.

"But I asked you," she moaned, when at last she recovered her wonted serenity. "I positively asked you."

"You encouraged me," he corrected, "and that's what they usually do, only your method was brutally direct!"

It was when she began to flush again that he added: "I shall always have something to tease you about, dearest!"

And the squirrel, which had been watching them in the lingering hope that they might possibly have brought him nuts, like sensible people, gave up in disgust and scurried away.

turedly caught at him and, lifting him in the air, dropped him upon the floor.

"You must be polite," said Johnny. Old Goulet swore and kicked at the dog. In the excitement Maria gathered up the dice and replaced the boxes upon the shelf. Then she turned to Johnny.

"You—you have won, monsieur," she said, looking him in the face; "you have won and I am yours."

"My forest flower," said Johnny, with a bit of a catch in his voice, "come—come with me, my little bride."

In the Great North Trail when they marry, they marry. Through the night went Goulet's daughter with the arm of Johnny Le Boutillier about her. The priest's eye brightened when he saw them.

"Bless you, my children," said he in benediction.

As they wandered back toward Johnny's forest mansion at one point they crossed a stream of swiftly running water.

Goulet's daughter suddenly held out her hand. It was closed tight upon something. "See!" she exclaimed, "watch."

He looked. Then with a sudden movement a few white particles darted through the air and splashed into the stream beneath.

Johnny made a sudden movement, as though he would prevent her action. It had dawned upon him what they were.

"They are dice," he exclaimed, "the dice with which I won you. I would have kept

ELIZABETH'S FIRST PROPOSAL

By Keith Gordon

IT was the softest of spring days and Mowbray and Miss Farrar strolled through the greenery of the park with languid abstraction born of the first warm weather and a friendliness of several years' standing. Though their eyes drank in the beauty of the scene about them—the great stretches of greenward, the trees and bushes that were glowing into the tender green of the season as into a sort of silent song—neither of them was thinking of it.

Miss Farrar, indeed, was living over other days, inevitably brought back by the warm breeze and the smell of growing things—other springtimes when life meant only the beautiful possibility of love. And Mowbray was thinking of her and wondering if by any chance it would be worth while to tell her. For in spite of her unquestionable attractiveness he could not help feeling that he would find it hard to look into those calm, clear eyes and talk of love. Yet he was neither cowardly nor inexperienced. He simply had a natural shrinking from being regarded with suppressed amusement by the woman he loved. And in her apparent immunity from such emotions that was what he feared. She would, in all probability, only laugh her light, frank laugh and say, "Nonsense, Clark, don't be silly!"

He sent a speculative glance toward her as she walked beside him looking off in the distance with the preoccupied air of a woman whose whole mind was given to some engrossing and persistent thought.

"Let us sit for a while," she proposed as they reached the top of a knoll, where, under a solitary tree, a bench invited relaxation. Settling the action to the word, she seated herself comfortably with her elbows placed defiantly on the back of the bench—an attitude peculiar to her aggressive moods and one which Mowbray had learned to recognize as premonitory of an intention to talk things out to a finish. He wondered what it would be this time, for he had long since dropped into his role of mentor.

He waited patiently with eyes that roved carelessly over the mansions on the far side of Fifth avenue, which in turn sent back a well-bred stare, knowing that her feelings would soon reach the point of overflow. At last she broke the silence.

"Do I look to you like a person selected by Fate to be distinguished among women—disagreeably distinguished, I mean?" she demanded, turning toward him with a directness which challenged a truthful answer. He regarded her in a manner intended to convey that he was making an expert examination.

"No," he admitted, "I can't say that you do. That is—" He stopped rather vaguely.

"Oh, now don't try to soften the truth," she interrupted quickly. "I'm after facts and I am not going to lay anything you may say up against you."

"I haven't the least idea what it is about, but I am glad that there is going to be no animosity," Mowbray observed politely. Then he settled himself to listen. It was one of his virtues that he never missed his cue.

Her next words came out rather abruptly.

"I'm not especially plain, do you think?"

Her tone was deprecating, but she turned her face toward him in a manner as impersonal as if she were calling his attention to the landscape. Then she continued impartially:

"That is, I suppose I would be classed as 'fair to middling'—is that right?"

He nodded assent with a gleam of mischief in his eye.

"To tell you the truth"—her tone had dropped into the personal, confidential key—"I'm not at all contented about my looks, but I've always flattered myself that I am rather interesting."

"Rather interesting, I think we may say," he agreed suavely.

"And I'm sure I'm affectionate and fairly good tempered and—"

Mowbray encouraged her by a nod.

"I shall have to take your word for that."

"Well, I am domestic. I know I am! So I want you to explain to me"—her voice was growing tumultuous—"but first promise on your honor that you'll never tell how it is that I've reached the age of 35 without ever having had a proposal!"

Mowbray threw himself back and roared, while her arms came down off the bench and she dropped her face upon her hands and sat looking at him with the puzzled air of a pupil at the feet of a master.

"When you've done laughing," she began with dignity.

"Pardon dear, a thousand pardons!"

He had never called her that before and there was something in his voice which bespoke a new hope and confidence, but she was too engrossed in her pursuit of self-knowledge to notice.

"I forgot to say that I'm sensible. Men always like that, you know. Anyway, they pretend to."

She finished in a way that suggested that she had her doubt of their sincerity. With a mighty effort her companion swallowed his mirth and prepared to face the situation with her.

"If it because you haven't wanted any one to ask you?" he inquired diplomatically.

"No, indeed!"

"And no man has ever told you that he

CARRINGTON'S MYSTIC MERMAID

By Henry Tholens

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Y Jove, Jack, you must wait until I get my camera for that afternoon sun over the water. Aren't those clouds magnificent? The rocks on the beach, the woods over yonder, the waves almost too lazy to break as they come rolling up—I can see the picture now, printed deep brown on sepi paper, fast to a prize at the amateur exhibition."

Jack laughed good-naturedly.

"All right, old man; sail in, but hurry up," he said.

Five minutes later George Carrington had snatched his camera from the broad hallway of the Berkeley Inn, snapped it at the waterscape, and he and Jack Grayson were off on a fishing trip. It was the last day of their vacation, spent wandering down the coast at random, seldom two nights in the same place.

The final day's sport over, Carrington sped back to the city in a train, camera, fishing kit and grip beside him, tanned and tired, but happy. He reached his apartments and thought of the last picture of clouds and rocks and sea. He must develop it forthwith, and he did.

"A vacation of jolly good fun without a romance," he mused. "Nature, sunshine, fresh air, a good chum and good fishing. Nothing more to be desired."

The film sank in the developing fluid, and in a few seconds the outlines of a coast scene appeared. First came the blotches of black, representing the high lights, clouds and the crests of waves. By an alchemy, which never ceases to be marvelous, all the delicate gradations of light and shade filled in until the perfect picture appeared.

Then occurred something which caused Carrington to gasp in astonishment and almost drop the developing tray. For in the center of the picture, head and shoulders visible above the crest of a breaker, appeared the form of a young woman, like a mermaid arising out of the sea. There was a saucy tilt to the laughing face, and the bare arms were outstretched as a beckoning mermaid's

might have been. Carrington knew that no human being had been in that expanse of sea while he was on the beach.

With almost feverish haste he made a print from the film. There was no doubt about it. It was no freak effect.

The girl's face, which he had never seen before, seemed to mock him in mystery. Clad in a dainty bathing suit, she fitted into the picture as if an artist hand had posed her there, a dainty bit of indisputably human life that rounded out the scene and perfected it. Fate had tossed a romance into his vacation after all.

He recalled the events of the day. Grayson and he had reached the inn just before noon, tired by a tramp of a half dozen miles from a fishing station farther down the coast. Dinner, then a rest; the snap shot, and the final two hours' fishing that closed the fortnight's holiday, leaving the camera in the hotel office beside his grip while he was gone; then supper and the train back to the city. All this was clear enough. But how did the mermaid creep into his camera? Carrington stared at the laughing face in blank perplexity. Only one point was certain. It was the prettiest face he had ever seen in his life.

A paper he had recently read in a scientific journal flashed across his mind. It dealt with the photographic discovery of a new light ray, invisible to the eye, but duly recorded on the peculiarly sensitized photographic plate.

"Nonsense!" he promptly said. "That's a flesh and blood girl. She has the face of an angel, but angels don't wear bathing suits with all those frills."

Next day he jumped on a train and was whisked to Berkeley Inn. He sought the manager and showed him the picture.

"You recognize her, of course?" Carrington asked with a careless air.

"I should say I did," said the manager with a smile. "That's the handsome one of the Langford girls who were here a month with their aunt. Went back to town only a couple of days ago. Splendid picture. Taken right here on the beach, too," he added in a quizzical tone. "I didn't know you were acquainted."

Carrington rejected the conversational tender. "Yes, I think it's pretty good."

The journey had not been altogether in vain. And while other passengers on that train chatted gaily together, or read their newspapers, or watched the panorama of forests and farmland and the twinkling lights of villages, there was one young man whose eyes and attention did not wander from a photograph he held before him.

Three months later he was at one of Mrs. Bloomer Billings' receptions. He did not know Mrs. Bloomer Billings; but he had seen her during the autumn of the previous year, and without being told, Holmes had decided that he must get an invitation, and he did. Mrs. Billings was a literary lady whose assemblages were diverse and often astonishing. Artists and writers attended them, musicians and player folk, with a leavening of accepted "society." They were truly heterogeneous gatherings.

Eagerly Carrington scanned the rooms. A long-haired violinist had just finished a Beethoven sonata, and there was much clapping of hands. Carrington was presented to Mrs. Billings, who was surrounded by a bevy of pretty girls. A moment of gallant conversation, and then he came face to face with a woman who suppressed wonder. In that group, now in a setting of pink and white, but with the same laughing face of the glistening beach and wave, stood his Lady of the Sea.

An hour later they sat together on a window seat listening to a prima donna's song.

"I have a picture I would like you to see," Miss Langford, he said diffidently. He took the photograph from his pocket-book and showed it to her.

She gave a little startled cry, and the unmounted print fell from her hand.

"Why—why—why were you at Berkeley Inn?" she exclaimed.

"I took a picture of the beach, but not that one," he said slowly. "And yet that is the one I found in my camera."

"Their eyes met for an instant, and the girl flushed crimson. Silent and bewildered she studied the photograph. Suddenly she broke into the laugh of the waterwitch again.

"No less surprising was the picture my sister took of me," she exclaimed excitedly. "The water and rocks were lovely, but I was nowhere to be seen!"

"Now the mystery is no longer mysterious!" laughed Carrington. "It's plain enough. I saw another camera in the hotel office, but never thought until this instant that I might have picked up the wrong one. Your sister took a picture with my camera and I took one with hers." Suddenly he became silent, and after a moment or two stammered, "I suppose this is your sister's property, but may I not keep it?"

The girl tossed her head and smiled in mock hesitation. She had been turning the picture around and around in her hand. Then the smile and the warm blood left her face in company and there was an almost imperceptible tremor of the long dark eyelashes. On the back of the photograph she had read:

Again their eyes met, but hers were quickly withdrawn. Her hesitation was real now.

Both were silent another moment. He was eagerly, expectantly. Her eyes were fixed on the floor, and as she slowly extended her hand and placed the picture in his he felt the warm touch of her fingertips.

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