

A MOVING STORY OF A MAN WITH A PAST

Second Chance

by
HOLLOWAY HORN

Author of "George," "Two Men and Mary", Etc.

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WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

JOHN FINGAL FERGUSON, otherwise Hallett, a man about 35; handsome, prematurely grey. His past history is something of a mystery.

WILLIAM TREVOWE, head of Trevowe's, Ltd., of Mossford. When the story opens Trevowe gives Ferguson a job in the office of his firm.

TEDDY WILSON, otherwise Sternberg, manager of a theatrical company.

MRS. GADDESSEN, A motherly woman with whom Ferguson lodges.

MARY DONOVAN, a secretary on the staff of Trevowe's. She is also a niece of Mrs. Gaddesden.

Lucia Desmond, Principal actress in Wilson's company, and wife of Wilson.

SYNOPSIS
John Fingal Ferguson, 35, good-looking, but prematurely grey, is regarded in the office where he works as something of a mystery. He has not been in Mossford long. He was sent up to Trevowe's by William Trevowe, the managing director, who tells the manager, Mr. Mumford, that he himself has seen to the references of the newcomer. The fact tends to prejudice him in the eyes of his colleagues on the staff. He keeps himself to himself, and the only person he is really friendly with is Mary Donovan, Mr. Mumford's secretary. He makes such good progress in the business that it is obvious he is used to more important work. He is an educated man too. But still he remains a mystery in Mossford.

(Now read on!)

CHAPTER III
WEEK-END WEAKNESS

As the weeks went by, Ferguson found that it was easier to fit into the routine of the office than to adjust himself to the new life outside it. The week-ends were somewhat wearisome. He had no friends, and a town like Mossford caters more for the family than the individual. As far as the office was concerned he was confident. Mr. Goodspeed had returned and taken over the control of the Sales Department. He proved to be a man open to receive ideas—and that is important, even if the ideas were passed on to the Powers that Be as Mr. Goodspeed's.

But Mr. Mumford probably guessed whence the ideas had come.

"By the way, Mumford, how's Ferguson getting on?" Mr. Trevowe asked at the end of a telephone conversation with the Mossford manager.

"Very well indeed, sir."

"Good! I'm pleased. I thought he would."

This, of course, was not repeated to Ferguson, but he knew that he was holding the job down. The way his colleagues treated him showed that, even if their attitude retained the curiosity and suspicion of the early days. But there were times between Saturday midday and Monday morning when Ferguson was consciously lonely and that is a very unsatisfactory state in any man. In London there are many distractions on which a lonely man can fall back, many institutions where he is accepted without question. It is perhaps one of the few definite advantages life in London has over provincial life.

Mrs. Gaddesden, who had apparently taken the lonely man to her heart, was often rather fussy anxious over his welfare, and there were times when he was very glad to have a chat with her. She was an intelligent woman and soon discovered that Ferguson had no intention of telling anything about himself. She was certainly not more curious than the majority of her sex, but she could not fail to notice that he had practically no correspondence of a personal character.

"He doesn't have one letter a week."

"I think I'll get a rod."

"You're welcome to use my husband's."

During the week he went over the rod and tackle of the departed Gaddesden and with a little adjustment it proved to be still usable. On the following Saturday he set out immediately after the midday meal.

The mill was silent; he was completely alone there. It is a curious fact that one is never as consciously alone in such a place as one often is in the midst of a great city. Slowly and methodically he put the rod together, and began his attack on the fish, if any, in the pool above the weir.

SOMEONE TO TEA
Once, he might have had a bite; the float moved and the bait had disappeared. But beyond that, the actual result of the afternoon's fishing was nil, unless one counts the sedative effect of the quiet hours by the gently moving water.

He had brought some tea with him in a vacuum flask and was thinking about it when a girl, wheeling a bicycle, came along the path and over

the little bridge.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Ferguson," Mary Donovan said with a pleasant smile.

"Oh, good afternoon!" he said.

"Any luck?"
"Not in the way of fish, I'm afraid. But it's a lovely spot."
She was standing on the path still holding her cycle.

"I was just about to have a cup of tea. Will you join me?" he suggested.

"Have you enough for two?" she asked.

"Whatever there is, we'll share," he said. "If I know Mrs. Gaddesden she's put up sufficient for at least two."

"I've some chocolate we can make up with," she said as she leaned her cycle against a gate.

He fixed his rod on an iron upright, knowing that it had almost as much chance of getting a fish on its own as with his assistance, and turned to the basket Mrs. Gaddesden had packed for him.

"Do you often come to the Mill?" he asked as he poured out a cup of tea for her.

"No. But I heard someone talking about it last week and decided to come. I recognized you as I came down the path from the road."

"It's a very happy meeting."

"I wonder if it is, Mr. Ferguson. When I saw that it was you, I almost turned back."

"Whatever for? Am I so terrible?" he asked.

"No. But I have a feeling that you like being alone and that it's rather an impertinence to intrude."

"Not at all. Really, I'm a very sociable animal," he said with a smile. "And I've no friends in Mossford at all."

"Then I'm glad I didn't turn back. Most of the men in the office will be at the football match. It's the last game of the season. But you aren't interested?"

"No, I'm not."

"Nor am I. But Mossford takes football very seriously."

"And you don't, I gather?"

"No."

"What do you take seriously? What do you consider important?" he asked.

"That's a very difficult question to be faced with suddenly—within reason. And the happiness of the people I'm fond of—my mother, for example. And, I suppose, seeing that I get as much out of life as I can."

He nodded as if he agreed.

"And now you tell me what you take seriously," she went on.

"I wonder. At one time it was Success. Now . . . I don't know."

"Happiness?" she suggested. "People seem to fight for success—as you call it—and when they've got it they don't think a great deal of it."

Again he nodded: "Life is like that. I'm afraid. Not," he went on, "that I've experienced this thing we call Success."

"You're settling down with us at Trevowe's?"

"I hope so. I'm beginning to feel quite at home there. I find the week-ends rather lonely, though. There is really very little for a lonely person to do in Mossford."

"There's the Conservative Club," she suggested. "But of course you may not be a Conservative."

"In any case, I know no one there. Still, as time passes, I shall get to know people, I suppose."

"You mean to make Mossford your home?" she asked after a silence.

"I hope to," he replied.

"You'll probably find us more reticent than Londoners," she said and added with a smile, "not that I'm particularly reticent, I'm afraid."

"You've been exceedingly kind to me, Miss Donovan," he said. "I do appreciate it."

"Nonsense," she smiled.

"It meant a great deal to me," he insisted. "That Saturday night at your aunt's. . . I wanted a friendly word. . . badly."

REMINDER OF THE PAST
"You'll find that people here are friendly," she said. "Look! The rod!" she suddenly cried, excitedly.

Ferguson grabbed the rod and began to reel in. There was a half-pound perch on the hook.

"Well, I'm bothered!" he said. "That just shows, doesn't it? We were talking about success."

He removed the hook gently from the lower jaw of the fish and dropped it back into the water.

"I don't think I like fishing after all," he said.

"Why?"

"I have a horror of anything being captured or imprisoned."

"But you eat fish!"

"Yes, I haven't caught them."

"I think I understand what you mean," she said quietly.

Suddenly he smiled at her. He rarely did smile and it altered the expression of his face.

"What's the joke?" she asked.

"I've suddenly remembered something. It's an absurd story about a Chinese philosopher called Lu Hsi Chi who spent his life in fishing."

"Well?" she urged.

"But he used no bait—since his object was not to catch fish," he added solemnly.

"He was a philosopher?" she asked gravely, after thinking over what he

had said.

"According to the story," Suddenly she, too, smiled: "I fancy I can understand Lu Hsi Chi," she said.

"Have a cigarette?" he suggested.

"Thank you. Then I must go. I've a date for the pictures to-night. Do you ever go?"

"Occasionally."

He held a match for her and for a while they smoked in silence. Once he glanced at her; she was looking out across the water where the old mill was red in the glint of the setting sun. For the first time, and almost with a shock, he realized that she was a very pretty girl.

"A penny?" he said.

She turned her glance to him and smiled: "Actually, I was wondering what you thought of me."

"I've already told you. I think you're exceedingly sympathetic and kind."

"Anyway, I'm glad you think so. And now, having eaten most of your tea—in order to show you how kind I really am—I will go."

She rose from the bank on which they had been sitting as she spoke.

"The road's at the top of this path? I came across the fields from Ferry Wood. I'll walk up with you and come back to pack up the rod."

He wheeled her cycle up the path and at the top watched her set out down the hill. At the bend in the road she waved to him, and with a queer, exhilarated feeling he turned back to the mill.

The meeting with Mary Donovan made all the difference to the afternoon. He had dissipated the feeling of loneliness. He packed up the rod and tackle which he had used for the first time and set out across the field towards Mossford.

She had said that she was going to the pictures.

He wondered with whom.

Some youngster, he decided, who could meet her on level terms.

He fell to thinking of her delicately cut profile as she had looked across the water to the mill. There was a wistfulness in her face which puzzled him.

And suddenly, as he walked along, he realized that he had not consciously thought of a woman's face since Lucia Desmond had filled his existence.

Lucia Desmond. . . for months he had not thought of her at all. That he could do so this lovely evening, as he walked through the lush meadows to the shadowy wood ahead, without bitterness, was due to his meeting with this Mossford girl who had been kind to him.

He wondered what Lucia Desmond was doing and smiled a little grimly. Even her name was a fake. But that, he realized, was unfair. Lily Smith would hardly do as the name of an actress. And most of them changed their names. Probably she was somewhere on Easy Street.

But it was foolish to dwell on her. She belonged to the past, to that portion of the book of his life which was closed. Here in Mossford a new chapter was opening—indeed, a new book beginning. The past was over; but was there the chance of a future?

He came to the wood, already pearly grey in the deepening dusk, and realized that his spirit was lighter than it had been for a long time.

"Did you have any luck?" Mrs. Gaddesden greeted him.

"I caught one, but I threw him back."

"They're never any good," the wise woman replied. "It's the fun of catching them, I suppose. But there, I never could understand fishing."

As he read his book that evening his attention was apt to wander from the pages. He assured himself that it was no concern of his. Nevertheless, he was wondering who was Mary Donovan's companion.

It might, he realized, have been another girl.

Actually, it was a very well set-up man in a blue serge suit. They were sitting in the second row of the Circle at the Royal. During the interval, when the lights were up, the manager of the cinema came to them and whispered to Mary's companion.

"Right!" he said, and turning to Mary, added: "Shan't be a minute; they're on the phone from the office, confound them!"

Many eyes followed his taut figure as he walked up the gawgary for Inspector Garrod was a well-known figure in Mossford. He had achieved record promotion in the Force and at 32 occupied a position usually reserved for men at least ten years older. Mary Donovan, indeed, was regarded as a lucky girl by most of the people who knew her, and few of them had any doubt as to what the outcome of the friendship would be. It was obvious to all that the young Inspector was very much in love.

"I SHOULD'VE HAD MUCH TO DO WITH HIM"

He came back just as the lights were dimmed for the big feature.



The little town of Rosenort in Manitoba responded to this call and loaded several cars for western neighbours.

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If You Like Books

(By A. H.)

A book that is entirely different from others is "If Winter Don't", by Barry Pain. It is foolish, yes, there is no other word that will describe the strange manner in which it is written. But it is interesting, and a marvelous little "pick-me-up" book. At the end of one chapter the author says, "And now we'll have a little novelty. The Great Novelists of to-day number their sections. We'll have a number without any section. This has never been done before— If you like to laugh, and have a private joke of your own, here is the book for you. Just as an appetizer, the following sections are quoted:

"At the end of his honeymoon Luke Sharpner went to see a man about a dog, and left his wife to prepare Jawbones for his accommodation. She was a good housekeeper, and Luke acknowledged it. Whenever he thought about her at all, he always added 'but she IS a good housekeeper.' He was desperately fair."

"This," said Mabel, opening the door, as Luke began his visit of inspection, "this is your den."

"Luke's ears moved. He kissed her twice. 'But you know, I cannot bear it. There are some words which I am unable to endure, such as salt-cellar, tuberculosis, tennis-net and den.'

"Very well," said Mabel, a little coldly, "we'll call it your cage. And just look. There is a pair of my father's old slippers that I have brought for you. Size thirteen. You've got none quite like that, have you?"

He put one arm round her waist. "Where did you say the dustbin was?" he asked.

"But," she said amazed, "you don't mean to say—Surely you wear slippers?"

"I never was," he replied firmly. Nor did he.

"And now," said Mabel, "come into the kitchen and see the two maids that I have engaged. Two nice respectable sisters named Morse—Ellen Morse and—"

"There isn't an 'I' in Morse," he said gloomily.

"And Kate Morse," Mabel continued. She opened the door into the spotless kitchen, and the two maids sprang instantly to attention. One of them was cleaning silver, the other was still lingering over tea. The first was very long, and the second very short.

Luke slapped his leg enthusiastically. "Oh, by jove," he said, "this is ripping. Morse! Don't you see? Dot and Dash. Dot and Dash."

He howled with laughter. Dash dropped the teapot. Dot had hysterics.

Ottawa Journal.—The Soviet Union has shot 24 more alleged enemies of the State. Mr. Aberhart can't dispose of his enemies so conveniently—but give him time!

An inspector at thirty-two," she mocked.

"Go on. Pull my leg!"

"He seemed rather depressed, I thought," she went on.

"Shouldn't wonder," he said. "Did you like the film? You didn't say."

"It was all right. What do you mean by 'shouldn't wonder?'"

"I think you're enough to depress any man."

"Oh? Do you know anything about him?"

"For several seconds he considered his reply before he said: 'If I were you I shouldn't have much to do with him.'"

"Why not?"

"I'd rather not say."

"But you say that about every man in whom I'm interested?"

"I know I do."

"Tell me, George," she said quietly, "whether you do know anything about Mr. Ferguson."

"I'd rather not talk about him, Mary, if you don't mind. I've given you my advice."

"But is your objection to him just the usual one or is it particular?"

"Both."

"You won't tell me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Oh, confound the fellow!"

"I shan't. And I think it's unfair of you, George, to warn me against him, then refuse to give me a reason."

"I didn't warn you against him. And I wasn't speaking as an official but as a man who happens to be in love with you."

They had reached her home. "Coming in?" she asked.

"Sure! I like your mother very much."

"And she likes you."

"I wish you did, Mary."

"But I do. I've told you so. And I think it's jolly mean of you to refuse to tell me what you know about Ferguson."

"I never said I knew anything about him."

"You didn't actually say it. But I can see that you do."

"In any case, my dear, you will remember that I didn't say I knew him, won't you?"

(To Be Continued)

North Bay Nugget.—We now come to that touching moment, when the late candidate is delivered from the hands of his friends back to his folks.

Toronto Telegram.—The winter season always reduces the number of golf widows but increases the number of bridge widows.

As they walked back to Mary's home after the show, she said, "I met Mr. Ferguson this afternoon."

"Who?"

"Mr. Ferguson. He's just come to Trevowe's from London."

"Ferguson?" said the inspector, as if the name stirred some memory within him.

"Yes, I cycled to the Mill—out on the Ponders Road—and he was fishing there. We had a very interesting chat."

"Do you know anything about him?" Garrod asked.

"Nothing whatever, I wish I did."

"Why?"

"I don't know. He seems a bit out of the ordinary."

"Meaning I'm not?"

"But you are out of the ordinary, silly! You've told me so often, anyway!"

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via North Bay and Canadian National Rly.

Excursion travel will be handled on Train 46 connecting at North Bay with C.N. Train No. 2

On the RETURN journey tickets will be valid for travel on C.N. Train No. 1 from Montreal 7.55 p.m., Sunday, October 31st, and Monday, November 1st, 1937

BARGAIN COACH EXCURSION

Thursday, October 28th

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