

THREE LOVES



CHARLES
MCKELL

A story in three parts is given this month in place of the usual Storyettes.

By ONOTO WATANNA.

I.—CARROTS—HER LIFE IN CANADA.

HER real name was Carrie, but some smart schoolfellow had dubbed her "Carrots," and as her hair was of that colour which children consider violently red, Carrots she had remained ever since. She was half French and half Irish, and her temper was as fiery as her hair.

She went to the same school as I did in Montreal. I was of the smart set, however, for my father was a Q.C. and M.P. and a big man in Canada, and I was a masher among the girls, and spent all my pocket money on chocolate caramels and 'bus rides for them.

Carrots, on the other hand, was a queer, isolated little girl, who refused to be on even civil terms with anyone in the school. This was because they had laughed at her the first day she had come, and she had assumed an antagonistic attitude ever since. The first year fierce and bitter battles

were waged, in which Carrots generally came out the personal victor, though she was punished by the teacher, and afterwards by her stepmother. Then a sort of silence fell on Carrots, and for a long time she went backwards and forwards to school, never so much as exchanging a word with anybody, save the teacher of her class.

Then a number of us passed with scholarships, or otherwise, into the upper school, among them Carrots and myself. Up till then, I had never given her a thought, save to marvel at her red hair, fiery temper, and freckles. I was fifteen, Carrots twelve, the year we passed.

One fine day, I, with my chum and a couple of girls, went down to Nun's Creek in Hochelaga. We hired a boat and went out on the river, ostensibly to fish, though the girls' chatter made that impossible.

apace. At first she was rude and unfriendly. Then she grudgingly showed me a few little tricks in the water.

After a time she unbent a trifle more, and I learned something of her history. Of course you understand that after the first day I had haunted Num's Creek and Carrots, with a persistence possible only in a stubborn English boy. Carrots had a stepmother whom she hated cordially. Her father was a sea captain, and away most of the time. She came naturally by her love of the water.

We spent whole days together on the beach. Sometimes she would sing to me, and I would fall fast asleep.

But one day when I awoke I found Carrots had deserted me, and a sense of terrible loneliness and impending disaster possessed me. Jumping to my feet, and not waiting to find my hat, I sped like the wind along the beach, shouting her name. She came to meet me, her hands full of water lilies, her dress and hair dripping. The latter hung about her in damp curls, but the sun was on it, and it seemed to me the most adorable colour on earth.

"Carrots," I said, "I was afraid."

"Of what?" she asked briefly.

"I don't know. When I awoke, you were gone. I felt dreadfully lonely, Carrots."

"I'm here now," she responded drily.

"Yes," I said lamely; "but, Carrots, don't leave me when I go to sleep again. I am such a sleepy-head, and your singing and the water and the wind and air—I can't help myself."

"And I had something to tell you to-day," she said slowly. "I can't keep you awake to listen."

"What is it, Carrots? Do tell me."

She told me quietly. She was going to England. Some rich uncle had adopted her.

I think I must have been a very stupid boy in those days. I know I stood tongue-tied, staring dizzily at Carrots. When anyone laughs at the idea of a boy experiencing deep feeling and emotion, I always think of my fifteen-year-old self, and the agony that surged through me then. I threw myself down on the sand and hid my face in my arms. Then I heard Carrots' voice. It was very savage.

"If you cry, I'll prick you," she said.

I felt her kneel on the sand beside me.

"What do you want to cry for, you—you boy, you?"

I wasn't crying. I was past tears.

"Look at me," she commanded.

I raised myself up.

"Do you *care*?" said Carrots.

"Carrots, I *love* you," I said. Carrots' great eyes blinked, and then suddenly her arms were about my neck, and we were mingling our tears.

We exchanged keepsakes. I gave her a little ring of my mother's, and Carrots swore to wear it for ever. But poor Carrots had nothing to give, and her hair was red! But I demanded a curl, and as we had only my pocket knife, it took a long time to saw it off.

The next day I saw a long train slowly steam out of the station, and at one of the carriage windows I saw a rosy, tear-stained, freckled, red-haired little girl throw me a kiss, and I ran madly along beside the train, senselessly shouting her name. "Carrots! Carrots! Carrots!"

II.—THE QUEEN.—IN LONDON.

For a long time after Carrots left me, I was really inconsolable. Mother said I "moped," and I know my appetite fell off for a time. As I said before, I was a sentimental chap, and Carrots was my first really great friend.

Other girls had no charms for me, and the set I formerly belonged to, and of which Marie and Ethel were the leaders, I had

acquired an aversion and dislike for, almost equal to that poor little Carrots had felt. I grew to manhood, came to take my degree at Oxford with as much indifference for the opposite sex as I had had liking.

Then I fell in love a second time.

I met her at a dance in London, given by an aunt of mine, whom I was visiting. Aunt Beth was a born match-maker, and deter-

nimed at all hazards to lead me "like a sheep to the slaughter." She was chatting animatedly to me, pointing out different girls, and telling me who they were, how much they were worth, and a lot of other bosh, when suddenly my eye happened to fall on a mass of red-gold hair. I could only see the back of a girl's head; but something in its poise, the exquisite purity and grace of her bare neck and shoulders, and, above all, that hair, fascinated me. Ever since I knew Carrots, I had retained a love for red hair. This girl's hair had only a suggestion of red in it, but the suggestion glorified its gold.

"Who is that girl, Aunt Beth?"

"Which one, Ted?" putting up her *pince-nez*.

"The one with the red hair and white gown."

"Um—m, let me see. Ah, yes, that is a Miss—now, I really can't recollect the name. But, look here, Teddy boy, I want you to see Miss Seymour. I went to school with her mother, and —"

"I want to meet that girl," I said persistently.

"Oh, by all means," said Aunt Beth laughing; but as we made our way across the room, she managed to overtake and make me acquainted with Miss Seymour, the tall blonde she was so very anxious for me to become enamoured of.

She was really a beautiful girl; and as I stood making pretty speeches I forgot the other girl, when, by some peculiar circumstance, we moved down the room together until we were directly in front of her. I was bending over Miss Seymour, murmuring some foolish inanity, when I heard a voice and laugh that had the effect of making the blood rush to my head in a torrent, thrilling me from head to foot. I stopped abruptly in

the middle of my speech to Miss Seymour, and turned quickly. A girl's large eyes were looking straight at me.

"Miss Seymour," I said abruptly, "do you know that young lady with the red hair?"

"Why, yes, of course. She is my cousin."

"Will you introduce me?"

A few minutes afterwards, I was sitting blissfully beside my divinity, and my first day of servitude had begun.

"I am glad you have freckles on your nose, too," I said boldly.



CHARLES
WHEELER

I could only see the back of a girl's head.

She opened her eyes wide, with mock astonishment. They were the first words I had to say.

"Once," I continued with deep feeling, "I was madly in love with a little girl who— who had red hair and freckles."

"Oh, indeed!" She made a mocking little gesture with her hands. "I hope," said she, "red hair and freckles doesn't describe me."

"It does," I said, "exactly."

She flushed.

"And Carrots," I continued, "blushed furiously when she was angry. I certainly shall like you—if I may," I added humbly.

"What, like me by proxy, be—because of this Car—What did you say the name was?"

"Carrots."

"Carrots! Dear me! No, sir, I refuse to be Miss Carrots' proxy. Ah! here comes my aunt. What did you do to Kate Seymour? Desert her?"

"By George! I did forget her."

She laughed with infinite relish.

"And you have brought down on my head the family displeasure in consequence."

"It wasn't your fault."

"Indeed it was. I made eyes at you. You are a *parti*—a big one—and Kate had you a minute ago." She laughed again wickedly.

For a long time after that night I was happy—at least, if there is such a thing as turbulent happiness. There is a certain happiness in being a slave sometimes. At least one has the satisfaction of being near the Queen, and even her royal anger is to be preferred to cold indifference. When I was not pleasing the Queen, I was angering her, so that she never got the chance to be indifferent to me. I wanted to call her "Carrots" for auld lang syne but she objected. I refused to call her "Miss Seymour," and so "The Queen" I named her.

It took me only a few weeks to find out all about her. She made her "refuge"—she called it—with the Seymours, but, despite the fact that she had lived with them a number of years, she felt her dependence bitterly. It had all been different, she told me fiercely, when Mr. Seymour had been alive; but the

rest of the family, who had always regarded her advent as an intrusion, disliked her, and after her uncle's death they had been careful to let her know in every possible way that her presence in their house was merely tolerated.

It was easy enough for me, an outsider, of course, to understand why the Seymour girls (there were five of them) did not like her. The Queen was supremely beautiful. Moreover, since her uncle's death, the Seymours had found themselves in somewhat straitened circumstances—straitened, that is, for a family which has never felt the necessity of curbing its wants and desires as far as money went.

A wise woman was Mrs. Seymour—one after my Aunt Beth's own heart. These two good ladies had put their heads together, and had conceived a scheme by which the family were to regain their fallen fortunes. The five beautiful girls were to marry five wealthy men. I was one of the elect—Kate's, I believe. But I had other plans.

While ostensibly (for the Queen's sake, though she did not know it) on the most cordial terms with Miss Kate Seymour and her family, all my daily pilgrimages to the Seymour's house had but one end and purpose in view—to see the Queen. She must have known this, which may have accounted for her coming down from her stiff, stand-off little perch and meeting me (accidentally, of course) always in the same place. Thus it was not always necessary to go to the Seymour's house to see her.

Since the night of the dance she had assumed a peculiar attitude to me, or, rather, attitudes, I should say, for she changed like April weather. Now she was haughty and remote and cold—this usually when I had been attentive (for her sake) to Miss Kate Seymour. At other times she was as confiding and sweet and jolly as a little girl I once knew years before in Canada. But, whatever her mood, I was her devotee and slave.

In a few weeks' time I had abjectly poured my soul at her feet, confessed all my real and imaginary sins, told her my scarred and battered past. For my pains the Queen rewarded me by intimating that I was a

prevaricator of the worst sort. You see, she was a natural point of interrogation, was the Queen, and she wanted to know every little detail of my life since I had left Montreal, or, rather, since Carrots had (she was extraordinarily interested in Carrots). Since I was ashamed to admit that nothing at all had happened, save that I had got through Oxford, and had taken my degree, I was forced to resort to my imagination for a series of thrilling experiences which I thought would appeal to her, and might possibly win her.

The result of all this was, the Queen was mortally offended, and put a nasty and dangerous barrier between us—her sun shade. It reached just to my eyes, and there was peril in the way she handled it. I looked under the parasol. The Queen's great eyes were moist, her lips were quivering.

All my banter died down in a moment. I forgot myself, and I called her Carrots, knocked the parasol down, and forcibly took her in my arms. A few minutes after I was alone in the road, and my face was stinging where a sharp little hand had fiercely chastised me.

I did not see the Queen for three whole days after this. My feelings were in a turmoil. I had ardently hoped to meet her before the beautiful red mark had disappeared from my countenance; for I knew the Queen had a weakness, and I had hoped to touch it, and at least win from her something akin to pity, which is akin to something else, you know. As it happened, however, every vestige of the mark was gone when I finally did see her again.

She was flirting outrageously with a certain George Manners, for whom I had a violent and unconquerable hatred. The way that girl carried on with him was enough to drive a fellow to — well, flirt desperately with Kate Seymour, for instance, and this I proceeded forthwith to do. Kate aided and abetted me. So did the whole family. So I paid court to her when the Queen was about, and the Queen, with cheeks flaming red and great glistening eyes, pretended not to see—but I knew better. Then a terrible thing happened.

One day when I called at the Seymour's, I found everything in an uproar. The Queen had mysteriously disappeared. Her room was in great disorder, and on the bed, which had not been slept in overnight, a short little note was discovered. Miss Seymour showed it to me, just as if I were one of the family, as I fancy she thought I was likely to become.

"Good-bye. I am gone you perceive. It doesn't matter to you where."

This was all there was in it.

I was so stunned and dazed, I became absolutely daft, and at that moment an agony equivalent only to that I had suffered when Carrots had left me, but keener and more bitter and unavailing, surged through me. I had some queer things to say to Miss Kate Seymour—thing she had never expected. She said she had never dreamed of my attachment to her cousin. She was very sorry. I wondered cynically to myself what she meant by that last sentence. Somehow, unreasonably perhaps, I was holding her responsible for the Queen's loss.

III.—LA CARA.—IN PARIS.

THE third time I fell in love it was with a French opera singer. Her name was "La Cara." Paris had gone mad over a woman's voice and a woman's beauty. One night I joined a party of friends, and went with them to hear her. It was a gala night, and only those in full dress were allowed to enter the doors of the great opera house.

Our party, which was made up entirely of men, were discussing the new prima donna, and eagerly awaiting her appearance. All

but myself had already heard her; hence my indifference. I sat back in my seat and studied the house, musing over the extravagant amount of paint and powder used by the French women, the jewels of the Americans, and the large display of neck and shoulders of the English women.

I was tired of the opera, sick to death of Paris. The sea of faces, the surging murmur of voices rang in my ears and roused in me a home-sick longing that was almost madness

for the surging of the waters of the St. Lawrence, for a savage little voice that had suddenly fluttered down to immeasurable tenderness.

Strange how persistently my first little love came up to my vision—this night in the great gorgeous opera house, and haunted me with the imagined touch of her little tanned hand in mine. I could almost feel its pressure.

And her voice! I thought I heard it. It sang about my ears gently, ripplingly, and then, of a sudden, burst into passionate melody. So vivid was the memory of her that with my eyes closed I almost joined in that old French Canadian boat song.

Row brothers, row, the stream runs fast,
The rapids are near, and the daylight's past.

One of my companions touched my arm, and I awoke to my surroundings, and turned to the stage. My new love was standing there, and it was she who was singing the old boat song. Ah, how beautiful she was! How divine! Her eyes, her form, that hair—they took my breath and held me entranced.

Unmindful of my horror-stricken friends, and the angry expostulations and motions of the audience, I leaned over the side of the box, and, frenzied, I called aloud to her.

I saw her start. She looked up, her eyes met mine, and then—then she sang to me, to me only.

I suppose the audience thought me drunk—Englishmen are pigs in Parisians' eyes. I tried to go behind the scenes and see her, but these mad Parisians had gone wild over her. They were calling and shrieking her name aloud.

"Vive! Vive La Cara! Vive Cara! Vive! Vive!"

Outside the theatre they had taken the horses from her carriage and were drawing her to her hotel, great crowds in evening dress shouting her name aloud, and they had covered her carriage with flowers.

My brain whirling, my heart sick with its fulness, I followed in the wake of the crowd, though I could not shout and cheer her name to the echo, as they were doing.

She was to me a sacred thing. I could see her proud little head bowing and smiling

right and left as she passed through the door of the big hotel amid the cheers of her audience. They followed, I with them. I was desperate. I made a break through the crowd, forcing my way to her, and because she had not seen me I called to her, my face bleached with desperation and passion.

"Carrots!" I said, and my voice startled my own ears. She turned like a flash, and like a flash her face grew suddenly luminous.

"Ah," she said, "is it you?" and no words of mine can tell of the expression of that last little word of hers.

Before the curious gaping crowd we looked into each other's eyes.

"I have looked for you the world over. It is not possible for me to tell you how I love you. It is no place here and now to say this to you, but I may not find opportunity again." I was thinking of the great world, which now claimed her for its own. But her eyes, sympathetic and tender now, were smiling into mine.

"Monsieur," she said, "and I also have something to say to you—a little question. You will follow me? Or must I follow you? I do not fear the crowd."

She bowed to them a final good-night, and, dazzled and bewildered, I followed her. In her old wild fashion she had overcome all barriers, as she used to do when she would reach to almost unattainable places on the St. Lawrence.

Now that I found myself alone with her, I could not find my voice. I could only look and look at her with all my heart and soul in my eyes. Leaning unsteadily against the fireplace I waited for her to speak.

"Is it La Cara or the Queen or—little Carrots you love?" she said.

"It is you," I said hoarsely; "you in all of them. I have loved you always, even when you flaunted me. Look here!" I slipped my hand into my breast pocket and brought forth a long red curl.

Her eyes were brimming with tears and laughter.

"And here!" she said, pulling at a tiny chain about her neck. Then I saw what was at the end of it—my mother's little ring!

"I have worn it always, Ted," she breathed.



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