Frank R. Stockton



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The Associate Hermits



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066354459

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CHAPTER I

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THE DAWN OF A WEDDING-JOURNEY

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Mr. and Mrs. Hector Archibald were prosperous and happy dwellers in a suburb of one of our large towns. Fortune had favored them in many ways—in health and in a good average happiness. They had reached early middle age, and their daughter Kate, their only child, had grown up to be a beautiful and good young woman, and was on the point of marrying a young lawyer—Rodney Bringhurst by name—in every way worthy of her.

Hector Archibald was a little man, with small bright eyes, and hair slightly touched with gray and very much inclined to curl. His disposition was lively. He had a strong liking for cheerful occurrences, and was always willing to do his part in the bringing about of such events. Novelty had a charm for him. He was not bound by precedence and tradition, and if he had found himself at a dinner which began with coffee and ended with oysters on the half-shell, he would have given the unusual meal a most animated consideration, although he might have utterly withheld any subsequent approbation. As a general thing, he revolved in an orbit where one might always be able to find him, were the proper calculations made. But if any one drew a tangent for him, and its direction seemed suitable and interesting, he was perfectly willing to fly off on it.

The disposition of Mrs. Hector Archibald was different. She was born to be guided by customs, fashions, and forms. She believed it was the duty of a married woman to make her home happy, and she did it. But she also believed that in the best domestic circles there were rules and usages for domestic happiness which would apply to every domestic condition and contingency. It frequently troubled her, however, to find that certain customs, forms, or usages of domestic society had changed, and being of a conservative turn of mind, it was difficult for her to adapt herself to these changes. But, thoroughly loyal to the idea that what was done by people she loved and people she respected ought also to be done by her, she earnestly strove to fit herself to new conditions, especially when she saw that by not doing so she would be out of touch with her family and her friends.

Now of course the wedding of their daughter was the only thing in the world that seemed of real importance to Mr. and Mrs. Archibald, and for this all preparations and plans had been agreed upon and made with great good-will and harmony, excepting one thing, and that was the wedding-trip. Strange to say, the young people did not wish to take a wedding-trip. They believed that this old-fashioned custom was unnecessary, troublesome, commonplace, and stupid. In the gardens and grounds of the Archibald mansion, and in the beautiful surrounding country, they had loved each other as lovers, and among these scenes they wished to begin to love each other as a married couple. Why should such distasteful and unpleasant ingredients as railroad-cars, steamboats, and hotels be dashed into the

pleasing mixture of their new lives? It had been arranged that for a year or two, at least, they should live in Kate's dear old home, and why should they not immediately begin that life there?

Mr. Archibald did not favor this plan, and his wife was strongly opposed to it. A wedding without a wedding-trip ought not to be thought of.

"During the honey-moon a young couple should live for each other, with each other, apart from the rest of the world. It is a beautiful custom, which should not be rudely trampled upon," said Mrs. Archibald.

But although Mrs. Archibald cherished a belief that she ought to conform her ideas to the domestic customs of the day, her daughter Kate cherished the belief that the domestic customs of the day ought to conform themselves to her ideas.

"Of course we should like to be alone in the honeymoon," she exclaimed. "We don't object to that; and if there must be a wedding-journey, you and father can take it and we will stay here. Here are servants, books, things to eat, and everything our hearts can desire, and here we would really feel as if we were beginning life as man and wife. As for you two, you both need a vacation, and nothing could be perfectly appropriate and more more delightful everybody than that you should take our wedding-trip. We don't want it; we will make it a present to you. Take it and be happy, and leave us here to be happy. People have done this sort of thing before, so that it is not absolutely wild and unheard of."

Mr. Archibald welcomed this plan with open arms, and hugged it and his daughter to his breast. It suited him admirably, and he declared that all business and engagements of every kind should be set aside, and that he would be ready to start on the wedding-journey with Mrs. Archibald the moment the ceremony should be completed.

"You will wait until the reception is over, father?" said Kate, laughing.

"Yes," said he, "I will wait for that."

This novel proposition sent a chill through every fibre of Mrs. Archibald's physical organism. At first she did not exactly comprehend it, but when she did, the chills increased. When she had recovered herself a little she began to make objections. This was easy enough, for they crowded into her mind like sheep into a pen; but every objection, as she brought it forth, was ruthlessly set aside or crushed to earth by her daughter or her husband, assisted by her expectant son-in-law, of whom she declared she never would have believed such a thing had she been told it.

The discussion ended, of course, by Mrs. Archibald agreeing to go on this absurd wedding-journey. But the good lady's mental troubles were not over when she had given her consent. As this scheme had been devised by those dearest to her on earth, and as it was certain, these dearest persons assured her, to meet with the approbation of all people of advanced thought—at least of those whose thought had advanced far enough to make it worthy of their consideration—she felt that in doing her part she ought to do it honestly and with her whole heart; and at her time of

life, to act as a proxy for a young bride by taking a wedding-journey in that young bride's place was a very difficult thing for Mrs. Archibald to do honestly and with her whole heart. But she would try to do it. Whatever else happened, her family must be kept happy, and it should never be said of her that she hung like a millstone around the combined neck of that family when it was unitedly climbing towards altitudes of felicity, which, although she was not able to discern them, must exist, since that fact had been so earnestly insisted upon by Mr. Archibald, Kate, and Rodney Bringhurst.

Thus was this exceptional hymeneal performance decided upon, and at eleven o'clock on Wednesday, the 6th of June, the marriage service was performed. At noon the guests sat down to breakfast, and at two o'clock that afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Hector Archibald departed on the wedding-trip, leaving behind Mr. and Mrs. Bringhurst at home with each other, and "not at home" to the world.

CHAPTER II

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ENTER MARGERY

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At four o'clock on the afternoon of June 6th Mr. and Mrs. Hector Archibald arrived at a family hotel in the capital of their state. Where they should go from there had not been decided upon. Nothing in regard to their wedding-journey had been decided upon except that they were to return to their home on the 6th of July of that year, and not before. It would have been impossible, with their minds filled with bridal arrangements, for them to make plans for their journey. But at this first stopping-place, where they were free from all responsibility and interruptions, they could, at their leisure, decide where they should go, how they should go, and what they should do when they got there.

After the unrest and turmoil of their own home during the past few weeks, the quiet and repose of this city hotel were delightful. That evening they went to the theatre, and after the performance they had a little supper at a restaurant.

"People may not think we are a newly married pair," said Mr. Archibald, as he poured out a glass of wine for his wife, "but it is not impossible that they may see we know how to enjoy ourselves quite as much as if we were."

The next morning Mr. Archibald procured a number of railroad maps, time-tables, circulars of steamboat excursions, advertisements of mountain retreats and seaside resorts, and he and his wife sat down to study these,

and to decide upon a destination and a route. After an hour or two of indeterminate examination Mr. Archibald declared himself a little tired, and proposed that they should take a recess from their labors and go and call upon their old friends, the Stanley Dearborns.

"People on wedding-tours do not make calls," said Mrs. Archibald.

"That may be true," said her husband, "in ordinary cases, and although I do not care to announce to everybody the peculiarities of the expedition which we have undertaken, I do not mind in the least telling the Stanley Dearborns all about it. Stanley himself would not appreciate it; he would consider it absurd; but then he is not at home at this time of day, and Mrs. Dearborn is just the woman to enjoy a reform movement of this sort. Besides, she is full of ideas about everything, and she may propose some good place for us to go to."

Mrs. Dearborn was at home, and very glad to see the Archibalds. She was a woman whose soul was in touch with the higher education of women—with female suffrage, the emancipation of the enslaved mind wherever it might be found, and with progress generally. She was a member of many societies, belonged to committees without end, wrote reports and minutes by day and by night, and was one of that ever-increasing class of good people who continually walk forward in order that their weight may help the world to turn over.

In spite of her principles and the advanced position of her thought, Mrs. Dearborn actually leaned back in her chair and laughed heartily when she learned what sort of a journey the Archibalds were taking. In this merriment Mr. Archibald joined with great glee.

"Ever since I left home," he said, "I have wanted to have a chance for a good laugh at this trip we are taking. It is the most delightful joke I have ever known."

Mrs. Archibald could not help smiling, but her brow was clouded. "If this expedition is merely a joke," she said, "I do not think we should have undertaken it; but if it is an earnest assertion of our belief that there should be a change in the customs of society, then I think we should take it seriously, and I see nothing to laugh at."

"My dear Harriet," said Mrs. Dearborn, "we can be good and glad at the same time; and that is what I am, I am sure. What you are doing is the initiation of one of the most worthy reforms of the day, and if it should have an effect in breaking up that wretched custom of the bridal tramp, which is considered so necessary in this country, society should rise up and call you blessed. But it is funny, for all that. I am sure that the first woman who dared to go without crinoline was very funny, and when I heard of a hospital for cats I could not help laughing; but I believed in it, and worked for it. And now where are you going?"

"That is what we want to talk to you about," said Mr. Archibald; and for half an hour they talked about it.

At the end of that time it was decided that the mountains were better than the sea or than a quiet lowland nook; and Mrs. Dearborn strongly recommended Sadler's, where she and her husband had spent a part of a summer a few years before.

"We camped out," said she, "and had a fine time. You can camp out at Sadler's more easily and satisfactorily than anywhere else in the world."

Camping suited Mr. Archibald admirably, and, to his surprise, his wife said she might like it very well.

"If people are going to laugh at us," she said, "when they find out we are on a wedding-journey—and they will be sure to find it out in some way or other—I think the fewer people we mingle with the better. I do not think I shall like camping altogether, but I know it is healthful, and I suppose I ought to get used to it. It would be dreadfully lonely for just Mr. Archibald and me, but I suppose we can take some one with us to guide and cook."

"My dear Harriet," said Mrs. Dearborn, "if you are at Sadler's, you can go into any sort of camp you please. I will tell you all about Sadler's. Sadler is a man of progress. His hotel or inn is on the very edge of the forest country, and away from all the centres of resort. He calls his place the terminal link of public travel in that direction. When you leave him you travel privately in any way you like. He has established what he has named a bureau of camping, and he furnishes his patrons with any sort of a camp they may desire. If the party is few in number and of a timid disposition, they can have a camp within shouting distance of his house. If they are brave and adventurous, he will send them out into the depths of the forest. If they like water, he locates them by the shores of a lake. If climbing is their passion, he puts them at the foot of a mountain. Those who want to hunt can do so, and those who dislike fire-arms are placed in a camp where the popping of guns is never heard.

He provides tents, guides, provisions, and even dangers and sensations."

"Safety is what I want," interrupted Mrs. Archibald.

"And that he furnishes," said the other, "for those who desire it."

"Sadler is the man for me!" cried Mr. Archibald. "We will go to him, look over his list of camps, and select one to suit us."

"By-the-way," said Mrs. Dearborn, "a thought has struck me. How would you like to take Margery with you?"

"Margery!" exclaimed Mr. Archibald. "That delightful little girl whom I taught to ride a tricycle when you were visiting us? I would like it ever so much."

It struck Mrs. Archibald that people on bridal trips did not generally take children or young girls with them, but it also struck her that if they were going into camp it might be pleasant and in many ways advantageous to have some one of her own sex with her; but she had no time to formulate these advantages in her mind before Mrs. Dearborn explained in full.

"Since Mr. Dearborn and I came home from Sadler's," she said, "Margery has been perfectly wild to go there, and as soon as the leaves began to bud in the parks she began to talk about it. We saw no possible chance of her going there, for her father is too busy to leave home for any length of time this season, and I cannot go to the mountains this year, for I must visit my sister, who is not well, and there are three summer conventions that I am obliged to attend. But if you could take her with you, I do not believe she would trouble you in the least, and you would give her great

pleasure. Moreover, to speak practically, which I think we always ought to do, it would not be a bad thing on the score of economy, for things are always proportionately cheaper for three people in a camp than for two."

A great many advantages of female companionship now began to creep into Mrs. Archibald's mind: if her husband should take it into his head to go out and hunt at night by the light of a torch; if there should be thunder-storms, and he away with the guide; if he should want to go off and talk to Indians or trappers, and he always did want to go off and talk to people of every class—it would be very pleasant to have even Margery Dearborn with her. So she consented with great good-will to her friend's proposition, and Mrs. Dearborn was much pleased and thankful.

"Margery is a true creature of impulse," she said; "that is really her predominating characteristic, and she will want to bound to the ceiling when she hears she is to go to Sadler's. She is not at home now, but she will be in very soon. You must take luncheon with us."

About a quarter of an hour after that Margery Dearborn came home. She was very glad indeed to see the Archibalds, whom she remembered as the kindest of people; and when she heard they were going to take her to Sadler's, she gave a scream of delight and threw herself upon Mrs. Archibald's neck.

"You are an angel," she cried, "an angel of blessedness, my dear Aunt Harriet! Don't you remember, I used to call you that? Won't you let me call you so still?" And without waiting for an answer, she rushed to Mr. Archibald, with outstretched hands. "Dear Uncle Archibald, you are just as

good as ever, I see. You know, I wouldn't call you Uncle Hector, because hectoring meant scolding, which never had anything to do with you. Sadler's! Oh, when do we start?"

"To-morrow is Saturday," replied Mr. Archibald; "we must get together some things we will need for camp-life, and we can start on Monday."

When the visitors were left to themselves for a few moments, Mr. Archibald said to his wife, "Harriet, I am astounded. This girl, who used to ride bareback and jump over fences, is a young lady now, and a handsome one, too. She is quite a different person from the girl I agreed to take with us."

"Mr. Archibald," said his wife, "you never can remember that in this world people of all ages grow older. She was fourteen when she was visiting us, and that was four years ago, so of course she is a young lady."

"No," he answered, "I don't feel that I am growing any older, and I don't see that you are, and so I totally forget that proclivity in other people. But what do you think now? Can we take this young woman with us to camp? Will she not be a dreadful drag?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Archibald, "I much prefer the young lady to the girl. I don't want to be the only woman in camp, and the nearer the other woman is to my age the better."

"All right," said Mr. Archibald; "if you are satisfied, I am; and, if she will agree to it, we will add our ages for the time being, and divide by three, and then we will all stand on a level."

CHAPTER III

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SADLER'S

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It was in the afternoon of Monday, the 11th of June, when Mr. and Mrs. Archibald, accompanied by Miss Margery Dearborn, arrived at Sadler's, and with feelings of relief alighted from the cramped stage-coach which had brought them eight miles from the railroad station.

"Can this be Sadler's?" said Mr. Archibald, in a tone of surprise.

"Of course it must be," said his wife, "since they brought us here."

"It certainly is the place," said Margery, "for there is the name over that door."

"How do you feel about it?" said Mr. Archibald to his wife.

"I feel very well about it," said she. "Why shouldn't I?"

"How do you feel about it?" he asked of the younger lady.

"Well," she answered, "I don't exactly understand it. I had visions of forests and wilds and tumbling mountain streams and a general air of primevalism, and I am surprised to see this fine hotel with piazzas, and croquet-grounds, and tennis-courts, and gravelled walks, and babies in their carriages, and elderly ladies carrying sun-shades."

"But it seems to me that there is a forest behind it," said Mr. Archibald.

"Yes," replied Margery, a little dolefully, "it has that to back it up."

"Don't let us stand here at the bottom of the steps talking," said Mrs. Archibald. "I must say I am very agreeably surprised."

In the wide hall which ran through the middle of the hotel, and not far from the clerk's desk, there sat a large, handsome man, a little past middle age, who, in a hearty voice, greeted the visitors as they entered, but without rising from his chair. This was Peter Sadler, the owner of the hotel, the legal owner of a great deal of the neighboring country, and the actual ruler of more of said country than could be easily marked out upon a map or stated in surveyors' terms.

In fact, Peter Sadler, was king of that portion of the vast district of mountain and forest which could be reached in a day's journey in any direction. If he had wished to extend his domain to points at a greater distance than this he would have done so, but so far he was satisfied with the rights he had asserted. He ruled supreme in that region because he had lived longer in the vicinity than any other white man, because he had a powerful will which did not brook opposition, and because there was no one to oppose him.



"'CAN THIS BE SADLER'S?'"

On the arable land which lay outside of the forest, and which really belonged to him, there were the houses of the men who farmed his fields, and on the outskirts of the woods were scattered here and there the cabins of the hunters and guides he employed, and these men knew no law but his will. Of course the laws of the State covered the district, but such promulgation and enforcement of these as he might consider necessary were generally left to Peter Sadler, and as to his own laws, he was always there to see that these were observed.

His guests submitted themselves to his will, or they left his hotel very soon. To people of discernment and judgment it was not difficult to submit to the will of this full-bearded, broad-chested man, who knew so much better than they did what they ought to do if they wanted to get all the good out of Sadler's which they were capable of assimilating.

This man, who sat all day in a big rolling-chair, and who knew everything that was going on in the hotel, the farm,

and the forest about him, had been a hunter and a guide in his youth, an Indian-fighter in later years, and when he had been wounded in both legs, so that it was impossible for him ever to walk again, he came back to the scenes of his youth and established an inn for sportsmen—a poor little house at first, which grew and grew and grew, until it was the large, well-kept hotel so widely known by his name.

After dinner, at which meal they were waited upon by women, and not by men in evening-dress as Margery had begun to fear, Mr. Archibald sought Peter Sadler and made known to him the surprise of his party at finding themselves in this fine hotel.

"What did you expect?" asked Peter, eying him from head to foot.

"From what we had heard," replied the other, "we supposed we should find some sort of a preparatory camping-ground in the woods, from which we could go out and have a camp of our own."

"That's just what you have found," said Sadler. "In this house you prepare to camp, if you need preparation. If any man, woman, or child comes here and wants to go out to camp, and I see that they are sickly or weak or in any way not fit to live in the woods, I don't let them go one step until they are fit for it. The air and the food and the water they get here will make them fit, if anything will do it, and if these three things don't set them up they simply have to go back where they came from. They can't go into camp from this house. But if they fancy this hotel—and there isn't any reason why anybody shouldn't fancy it—they can stay here as long as they like, and I'll take care of them. Now, sir, if

you want to go into camp, the first thing for you to do is to bring your family here and let me take a look at them. I've seen them, of course, but I haven't made up my mind yet whether they are the right sort for camp life. As for you, I think you will do. There isn't much of you, but you look tough."

Mr. Archibald laughed. "That's good rough talk," he said, "and smacks more of camp life than anything I have noticed here. I will go and bring my wife and Miss Dearborn."

"There is another reason why I want to see them," said the bluff Peter. "As you are bent on camping, you'll like to choose a camp, and when anything of that kind is on hand I want to talk to the whole party. I don't care to settle the business with one of them, and then have him come back and say that what has been agreed upon don't suit the others. I want a full meeting or no session."

When Mr. Archibald returned with his wife and Margery, he found Peter Sadler had rolled his chair up to a large circular table at the back of the hall, on which was spread a map of the forest. He greeted the ladies in a loud voice and with a cheery smile.

"And so you want to go camping, do you?" said he. "Sit down and let us talk it over. I think the young lady is all right. She looks spry enough, and I expect she could eat pine-cones like a squirrel if she was hungry and had nothing else. As for you, madam, you don't appear as if anything in particular was the matter with you, and I should think you could stand a Number Three camp well enough, and be all the better for a week or two of it."

"What is a Number Three camp?" asked Margery, before the astonished Mrs. Archibald could speak.

"Well," said Sadler, "it is a camp with a good deal of comfort in it. Our Number One camps are pretty rough. They are for hunters and scientific people. We give them game enough in season, and some bare places where they can make fires and stretch a bit of canvas. That is all they want, to have a truly good time. That is the best camp of all, I think. Number Two camps are generally for fishermen. They always want a chance for pretty good living when they are out in the woods. They stay in camp in the evenings, and like to sit around and have a good time. Number Threes are the best camps we put families into, so you see, madam, I'm rating you pretty high. There's always a log-cabin in these camps, with cots and straw mattresses and plenty of traps for cooking. And, more than that, there is a chance for people who don't tramp or fish to do things, such as walking or boating, according to circumstances. There's one of our camps has a croquet-ground."

"Oh, we don't want that!" cried Margery, "it would simply ruin every illusion that is left to me."

"Glad to hear that," said Peter. "If you want to play croquet, stay at the hotel; that's what I say. Now, then, here are the camps, and there's plenty of them to choose from. You've come in a good time, for the season isn't fairly begun yet. Next month every camp will be full, with the hotel crowded with people waiting for their turns."

"What we want," said Margery, rising and looking over the map, "is the wildest Number Three you have." "Oh, ho!" said Peter. "Not so fast, miss; perhaps we'll wait and see what this lady has to say first. If I'm not mistaken, madam, I think you're inclined the other way, and I don't put people into camps that they will be wanting to leave after the first rainy day. Now let me show you what I've got. Here is one, four hours' walk, horses for women, with a rocky stream through the middle of it."

"That is grand!" cried Margery. "Is it really in the woods?" "Now let me do the talking," said Peter. "They are all in the woods; we don't make camps in pasture-fields. Even the Number Sevens, where the meals are sent to the campers from the hotel, and they have bath-tubs, are in the woods. Now here is another one, about three miles west from the one I just showed you, but the same distance from here. This, you see, is on the shore of a lake, with fishing, boating, and bathing, if you can stand cold water."

"Glorious!" cried Margery. "That is exactly what we want.
A lake will be simply heavenly!"

"Everything seems to suit you, miss," said Peter, "just as soon as you hear of it. But suppose we consider more of them before you choose. Some two miles north of here, in the thickest of the forest, in a clearing that I made, there is a small camp that strikes the fancy of some people. There is a little stream there and it has fish in it too, and it runs through one corner of the log-cabin, so there are seven or eight feet of the stream inside the house, and on rainy days you can sit there and fish; and some people like to go to sleep with the running water gurgling close to them where they can hear it when they are in bed. Then there's an owl to this camp. The men heard him there when they were

making the clearing, and he's never left the spot. Some people who were out there said they never felt as much away from the world as they did listening to that little stream gurgling and that owl hooting."

"I believe," exclaimed Margery, "that in a place like that I could write poetry!"

"It would give me the rheumatism and the blues," said Mrs. Archibald, upon which Peter Sadler exclaimed,

"That settles that. Now then, here is another."

Several other camps were considered, but it was the general conclusion that the one by the lake was the most desirable. It had a good cabin with three rooms, with plenty of open space, near by, for the tents of the guides; there was a boat which belonged to the camp, and in every way it seemed so suitable that Mr. Archibald secured it. He thought the price was rather high, but as it included guides, provisions, fishing-tackle, and in fact everything needed, he considered that although it might cost as much as lodgings in a city hotel, they would get more good out of it.

"Has this camp any name?" asked the enthusiastic Margery, in the course of the conference.

"That's about your twenty-seventh question, miss," said Peter, "but it's one I can answer. Yes, it's got a name. It's called Camp Rob."

"Oh!" ejaculated Margery, in a disappointed tone. "What a name!"

"Yes," said Peter, "it isn't much of a name. The first people who went out there named it that, and it stuck to it, and it's all it's got. Camps are like horses—we've got to tell