

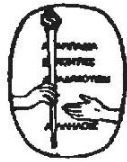
THE FORESTER'S DAUGHTER

A Romance of the Bear-Tooth Range

By

HAMLIN GARLAND

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

THIS little story is the outcome of two trips (neither of which was in the Bear Tooth Forest) during the years 1909 and 1910. Its main claim on the reader's interest will lie, no doubt, in the character of Berea McFarlane; but I find myself re-living with keen pleasure the splendid drama of wind and cloud and swaying forest which made the expeditions memorable.

The golden trail is an actuality for me. The camp on the lake was mine. The rain, the snow I met. The prying camp-robbers, the grouse, the muskrats, the beaver were my companions. But Berrie was with me only in imagination. She is a fiction, born of a momentary, powerful hand-clasp of a Western rancher's daughter. The story of Wayland Norcross is fiction also. But the McFarlane ranch, the mill, and the lonely ranger-stations are closely drawn pictures of realities. Although the stage of my comedy is Colorado, I have not held to any one locality. The scene is composite.

It was my intention, originally, to write a much longer and more important book concerning Supervisor McFarlane, but Berrie took the story into her own strong hands and made of it something so intimate and so idyllic that I could not bring the more prosaic element into it. It remained personal and youthful in spite of my plans, a divergence for which, perhaps, most of my readers will be grateful.

As for its title, I had little to do with its selection. My daughter, Mary Isabel, aged ten, selected it from among a half-dozen others, and for luck I let it stand, although it sounds somewhat like that of a paper-bound German romance. For the sub-title my publishers are responsible.

Finally, I warn the reader that this is merely the very slender story of a young Western girl who, being desired of three strong men, bestows her love on a "tourist" whose weakness is at once her allurements and her care. The administration problem, the sociologic theme, which was to have made the novel worth while, got lost in some way on the low trail and never caught up with the lovers. I'm sorry—but so it was!

CHICAGO, *January*, 1914.

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I

THE HAPPY GIRL

THE stage line which ran from Williams to Bear Tooth (one of the most authentic then to be found in all the West) possessed at least one genuine Concord coach, so faded, so saddened, so cracked, and so splintered that its passengers entered it under protest, and alighted from it with thanksgiving, and yet it must have been built by honorable men, for in 190—it still made the run of one hundred and twenty miles twice each week without loss of wheel or even so much as moulting a scrap of paint.

And yet, whatever it may have been in its youth, it was in its age no longer a gay dash of color in the landscape. On the contrary, it fitted into the dust-brown and sage-green plain as defensively as a beetle in a dusty path. Nevertheless, it was an indispensable part of a very moving picture as it crept, creaking and groaning (or it may be it was the suffering passenger creaking and groaning), along the hillside.

After leaving the Grande River the road winds up a pretty high divide before plunging down into Ute Park, as they call all that region lying between the Continental Range on the east and the Bear Tooth plateau on the west. It was a big spread of land, and very far from an Eastern man's conception of a park. From Dome Peak it seems a plain; but, in fact, when clouds shut off the high summits to the west, this "valley" becomes a veritable mountain land, a tumbled, lonely country, over which an occasional horseman crawls, a minute but persistent insect. It is, to be exact, a succession of ridges and ravines, sculptured (in some far-off, post-glacial time) by floods of water, covered now, rather sparsely, with piñons, cedars, and aspens, a dry, forbidding, but majestic landscape.

In late August the hills become iridescent, opaline with the translucent yellow of the aspen, the coral and crimson of the fire-weed, the blood-red of huckleberry beds, and the royal purple of the asters, while flowing round all, as solvent and neutral setting, lies the gray-green of the ever-present and ever-enduring sage-brush. On the loftier heights these colors are arranged in most intricate and cunning patterns, with nothing hard, nothing flaring in the prospect. All is harmonious and restful. It is, moreover, silent, silent as a dream world, and so flooded with light that the senses ache with the stress of it.

Through this gorgeous land of mist, of stillness, and of death, a few years ago a pale young man (seated beside the driver) rode one summer day in a voiceless rapture which made Bill McCoy weary.

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shoes, her rough hands and sun-tanned face, and listened with wondering joy and pride to his words, which were of a fineness such as she had never heard spoken—only books contained such unusual and exquisite phrases.

A cloud passing across the sun flung down a shadow of portentous chill and darkness. She started to her feet with startled recollection of the place and the hour.

“We *must* be going—at once!” she commanded.

“Not yet,” he pleaded. “It’s only a cloud. The sun is coming out again. I have perfect confidence in your woodcraft. Why not spend another night on the trail? It may be our last trip together.”

He tempted her strongly, so frank and boyish and lovable were his glances and his words. But she was vaguely afraid of herself, and though the long ride at the moment seemed hard and dull, the thought of her mother waiting decided her action.

“No, no!” she responded, firmly. “We’ve wasted too much time already. We must ride.”

He looked up at her with challenging glance. “Suppose I refuse—suppose I decide to stay here?”

Upon her, as he talked, a sweet hesitation fell, a dream which held more of happiness than she had ever known. “It is a long, hard ride,” she thought, “and another night on the trail will not matter.” And so the moments passed on velvet feet, and still she lingered, reluctant to break the spell.

Suddenly, into their idyllic drowse of content, so sweet, so youthful, and so pure of heart, broke the sound of a horse’s hurrying, clashing, steel-shod feet, and looking up Berrie saw a mounted man coming down the mountain-side with furious, reckless haste.

“It is Cliff!” she cried out. “He’s on our trail!” And into her face came a look of alarm. Her lips paled, her eyes widened. “He’s mad—he’s dangerous! Leave him to me,” she added, in a low, tense voice.

XI

THE DEATH-GRAPPLE

THERE was something so sinister in the rider’s disregard of stone and tree and pace, something so menacing in the forward thrust of his body, that Berrie was able to divine his wrath, and was smitten into irresolution—all her hardy, boyish self-reliance swallowed up in the weakness of the woman. She forgot the pistol at her belt, and awaited the assault with rigid pose.

As Belden neared them Norcross also perceived that the rider’s face was distorted with passion, and that his glance was not directed

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upon Berrie, but upon himself, and he braced himself for the attack.

Leaving his saddle with one flying leap, which the cowboy practises at play, Belden hurled himself upon his rival with the fury of a panther.

The slender youth went down before the big rancher as though struck by a catapult; and the force of his fall against the stony earth stunned him so that he lay beneath his enemy as helpless as a child.

Belden snarled between his teeth: "I told you I'd kill you, and I will."

But this was not to be. Berea suddenly recovered her native force. With a cry of pain, of anger, she flung herself on the maddened man's back. Her hands encircled his neck like a collar of bronze. Hardened by incessant use of the cinch and the rope, her fingers sank into the sinews of his great throat, shutting off both blood and breath.

"Let go!" she commanded, with deadly intensity. "Let go, or I'll choke the life out of you! Let go, I say!"

He raised a hand to beat her off, but she was too strong, too desperate to be driven away. She was as blind to pain as a mother eagle, and bent above him so closely that he could not bring the full weight of his fist to bear. With one determined hand still clutching his throat, she ran the fingers of her other hand into his hair and twisted his head upward with a power which he could not resist. And so, looking into his upturned, ferocious eyes, she repeated with remorseless fury: "*Let go* I say!"

His swollen face grew rigid, his mouth gaped, his tongue protruded, and at last, releasing his hold on his victim, he rose, flinging Berrie off with a final desperate effort. "I'll kill you, too!" he gasped.

Up to this moment the girl had felt no fear of herself; but now she resorted to other weapons. Snatching her pistol from its holster, she leveled it at his forehead. "Stop!" she said; and something in her voice froze him into calm. He was not a fiend; he was not a deliberate assassin; he was only a jealous, despairing, insane lover, and as he looked into the face he knew so well, and realized that nothing but hate and deadly resolution lit the eyes he had so often kissed, his heart gave way, and, dropping his head, he said: "Kill me if you want to. I've nothing left to live for."

There was something unreal, appalling in this sudden reversion to weakness, and Berrie could not credit his remorse. "Give me your gun," she said.

He surrendered it to her and she threw it aside; then turned to Wayland, who was lying white and still with face upturned to the sky. With a moan of anguish she bent above him and called upon his name. He did not stir, and when she lifted his head to her lap his hair, streaming with blood, stained her dress. She kissed him and called again to him, then turned with accusing frenzy to Belden: "You've killed him! Do you hear? You've killed him!"

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The agony, the fury of hate in her voice reached the heart of the conquered man. He raised his head and stared at her with mingled fear and remorse. And so across that limp body these two souls, so lately lovers, looked into each other's eyes as though nothing but words of hate and loathing had ever passed between them. The girl saw in him only a savage, vengeful, bloodthirsty beast; the man confronted in her an accusing angel.

"I didn't mean to kill him," he muttered.

"Yes, you did! You meant it. You crushed his life out with your big hands—and now I'm going to kill you for it!"

A fierce calm had come upon her. Some far-off ancestral deep of passion called for blood revenge. She lifted the weapon with steady hand and pointed it at his heart.

His fear passed as his wrath had passed. His head drooped, his glance wavered. "Shoot!" he commanded, sullenly. "I'd sooner die than live—now."

His words, his tone, brought back to her a vision of the man he had seemed when she first met and admired him. Her hand fell, the woman in her reasserted itself. A wave of weakness, of indecision, of passionate grief overwhelmed her. "Oh, Cliff!" she moaned. "Why did you do it? He was so gentle and sweet."

He did not answer. His glance wandered to his horse, serenely cropping the grass in utter disregard of this tumultuous human drama; but the wind, less insensate than the brute, swept through the grove of dwarfed, distorted pines with a desolate, sympathetic moan which filled the man's heart with a new and exalted sorrow. "You're right," he said. "I was crazy. I deserve killing."

But Berrie was now too deep in her own desolation to care what he said or did. She kissed the cold lips of the still youth, murmuring passionately: "I don't care to live without you—I shall go with you!"

Belden's hand was on her wrist before she could raise her weapon. "Don't, for God's sake, don't do that! He may not be dead."

She responded but dully to the suggestion. "No, no. He's gone. His breath is gone."

"Maybe not. Let me see."

Again she bent to the quiet face on which the sunlight fell with mocking splendor. It seemed all a dream till she felt once more the stain of his blood upon her hands. It was all so incredibly sudden. Only just now he was exulting over the warmth and beauty of the day—and now—

How beautiful he was. He seemed asleep. The conies crying from their runways suddenly took on poignant pathos. They appeared to be grieving with her; but the eagles spoke of revenge.

A sharp cry, a note of joy sprang from her lips. "He *is* alive! I saw his eyelids quiver—quick! Bring some water."

The man leaped to his feet, and, running down to the pool, filled his sombrero with icy water. He was as eager now to save his

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rival as he had been mad to destroy him. "Let me help," he pleaded. But she would not permit him to touch the body.

Again, while splashing the water upon his face, the girl called upon her love to return. "He hears me!" she exulted to her enemy. "He is breathing now. He is opening his eyes."

The wounded man did, indeed, open his eyes, but his look was a blank, uncomprehending stare, which plunged her back into despair. "He don't know me!" she said, with piteous accent. She now perceived the source of the blood upon her arm. It came from a wound in the boy's head which had been dashed upon a stone.

The sight of this wound brought back the blaze of accusing anger to her eyes. "See what you did!" she said, with cold malignity. Then by sudden shift she bent to the sweet face in her arms and kissed it passionately. "Open your eyes, darling. You must not die! I won't let you die! Can't you hear me? Don't you know where you are?"

He opened his eyes once more, quietly, and looked up into her face with a faint, drowsy smile. He could not yet locate himself in space and time, but he knew her and was comforted. He wondered why he should be looking up into a sunny sky. He heard the wind and the sound of a horse cropping grass, and the voice of the girl penetratingly sweet as that of a young mother calling her baby back to life, and slowly his benumbed brain began to resolve the mystery.

Belden, forgotten, ignored as completely as the conies, sat with choking throat and smarting eyes. For him the world was only dust and ashes—a ruin which his own barbaric spirit had brought upon itself.

Slowly the youth's eyes took on expression. "Are we still on the hill?" he asked.

"Yes, dearest," she assured him. Then to Belden, "He knows where he is!"

Wayland again struggled with reality. "What has happened to me?"

"You fell and hurt your head."

He turned slightly and observed the other man looking down at her with dark and tragic glance. "Hello, Belden," he said, feebly. "How came you here?" Then noting Berrie's look, he added: "I remember. He tried to kill me." He again searched his antagonist's face. "Why didn't you finish the job?"

The girl tried to turn his thought aside. "It's all right now, darling. He won't make any more trouble. Don't mind him. I don't care for anybody now you are coming back to me." Wayland wonderingly regarded the face of the girl. "And you—are you hurt?"

"No, I'm not hurt. I am perfectly happy now." She turned to Belden with quick, authoritative command. "Unsaddle the horses and set up the tent. We won't be able to leave here to-night."

He rose with instant obedience, glad of a chance to serve her,

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and soon had the tent pegged to its place and the bedding unrolled. Together they lifted the wounded youth and laid him upon his blankets beneath the low canvas roof which seemed heavenly helpful to Berea.

"There!" she said, caressingly. "Now you are safe, no matter whether it rains or not."

He smiled. "It seems I'm to have my way after all. I hope I shall be able to see the sun rise. I've sort of lost my interest in the sunset."

"Now, Cliff," she said, as soon as the camp was in order and a fire started, "I reckon you'd better ride on. I haven't any further use for you."

"Don't say that, Berrie," he pleaded. "I can't leave you here alone with a sick man. Let me stay and help."

She looked at him for a long time before she replied. "I shall never be able to look at you again without hating you," she said. "I shall always remember you as you looked when you were killing that boy. So you'd better ride on and keep a-riding. I'm going to forget all this just as soon as I can, and it don't help me any to have you around. I never want to see you or hear your name again."

"You don't mean that, Berrie!"

"Yes, I do," she asserted, bitterly. "I mean just that. So saddle up and pull out. All I ask of you is to say nothing about what has happened here. You'd better leave the state. If Wayland should get worse it might go hard with you."

He accepted his banishment. "All right. If you feel that way I'll ride. But I'd like to do something for you before I go. I'll pile up some wood—"

"No. I'll take care of that." And without another word of farewell she turned away and re-entered the tent.

Mounting his horse with painful slowness, as though suddenly grown old, the reprieved assassin rode away up the mountain, his head bent low, his eyes upon the ground.

XII

BERRIE'S VIGIL

THE situation in which Berea now found herself would have disheartened most women of mature age, but she remained not only composed, she was filled with an irrational delight. The nurse that is in every woman was aroused in her, and she looked forward with joy to a night of vigil, confident that Wayland was not seriously injured and that he would soon be able to ride. She had no fear of the forest or of the night. Nature held no menace now that her tent was set and her fire alight.

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"If you'll round up our horses, Mr. Nash, I'll rustle breakfast and we'll get going," she said.

Nash, enthralled, lingered while she twisted her hair into place, then went out to bring in the ponies.

Wayland came out a little uncertainly, but looking very well. "I think I shall discourage my friends from coming to this region for their health," he said, ruefully. "If I were a novelist now all this would be grist for my mill."

Beneath his joking he was profoundly chagrined. He had hoped by this time to be as sinewy, as alert as Nash, instead of which here he sat, shivering over the fire like a sick girl, his head swollen, his blood sluggish; but this discouragement only increased Berea's tenderness—a tenderness which melted all his reserve.

"I'm not worth all your care," he said to her, with poignant glance.

The sun rose clear and warm, and the fire, the coffee, put new courage into him as well as into the others, and while the morning was yet early and the forest chill and damp with rain, the surveyor brought up the horses and started packing the outfit.

In this Berrie again took part, doing her half of the work quite as dextrously as Nash himself. Indeed, the forester was noticeably confused and not quite up to his usual level of adroit ease.

At last both packs were on, and as they stood together for a moment, Nash said: "This has been a great experience—one I shall remember as long as I live."

She stirred uneasily under his frank admiration. "I'm mightily obliged to you," she replied, as heartily as she could command.

"Don't thank me, I'm indebted to you. There is so little in my life of such companionship as you and Norcross give me."

"You'll find it lonesome over at the station, I'm afraid," said she. "But Moore intends to put a crew of tie-cutters in over there—that will help some." She smiled.

"I'm not partial to the society of tie-jacks."

"If you ride hard you may find that Moore girl in camp. She was there when we left." There was a sparkle of mischief in her glance.

"I'm not interested in the Moore girl," he retorted.

"Do you know her?"

"I've seen her at the post-office once or twice; she is not my kind."

She gave him her hand. "Well, good-by. I'm all right now that Wayland can ride."

He held her hand an instant. "I believe I'll ride back with you as far as the camp."

"You'd better go on. Father is waiting for you. I'll send the men along." There was dismissal in her voice, and yet she recognized as never before the fine qualities that were his. "Please don't say anything of this to others, and tell my father not to worry about us."

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"We'll pull in all right."

He helped Norcross mount his horse, and as he put the lead rope into Berrie's hand, he said: with much feeling: "Good luck to you. I shall remember this night all the rest of my life."

"I hate to be going to the rear," called Wayland, whose bare, bandaged head made him look like a wounded young officer. "But I guess it's better for me to lay off for a week or two and recover my tone."

And so they parted, the surveyor riding his determined way up the naked mountain-side toward the clouds, while Berrie and her ward plunged at once into the dark and dripping forest below, "If you can stand the grief," she said, "we'll go clear through."

Wayland had his misgivings, but did not say so. His confidence in his guide was complete. She would do her part, that was certain. Several times she was forced to dismount and blaze out a new path in order to avoid some bog; but she sternly refused his aid. "You must not get off," she warned; "stay where you are. I can do this work better alone."

They were again in that green, gloomy, and silent zone of the range, where giant spruces grow, and springs, oozing from the rocks, trickle over the trail. It was very beautiful, but menacing, by reason of its apparently endless thickets cut by stony ridges. It was here she met the two young men, Downing and Travis, bringing forward the surveying outfit, but she paused only to say: "Push along steadily. You are needed on the other side."

After leaving the men, and with a knowledge that the remaining leagues of the trail were solitary, Norcross grew fearful. "The fall of a horse, an accident to that brave girl, and we would be helpless," he thought. "I wish Nash had returned with us." Once his blood chilled with horror as he watched his guide striking out across the marge of a grassy lake. This meadow, as he divined, was really a carpet of sod floating above a bottomless pool of muck, for it shook beneath her horse's feet.

"Come on, it's all right," she called back, cheerily. "We'll soon pick up the other trail."

He wondered how she knew, for to him each hill was precisely like another, each thicket a maze.

Her caution was all for him. She tried each dangerous slough first, and thus was able to advise him which way was safest. His head throbbed with pain and his knees were weary, but he rode on, manifesting such cheer as he could, resolving not to complain at any cost; but his self-respect ebbed steadily, leaving him in bitter, silent dejection.

At last they came into open ground on a high ridge, and were gladdened by the valley outspread below them, for it was still radiant with color, though not as brilliant as before the rain. It had been dimmed, but not darkened. And yet it seemed that a month had

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passed since their ecstatic ride upward through the golden forest, and Wayland said as much while they stood for a moment surveying the majestic park with its wall of guardian peaks.

But Berrie replied: "It seems only a few hours to me."

From this point the traveling was good, and they descended rapidly, zigzagging from side to side of a long, sweeping ridge. By noon they were once more down amid the aspens, basking in a world of sad gold leaves and delicious September sunshine.

At one o'clock, on the bank of a clear stream, the girl halted. "I reckon we'd better camp awhile. You look tired, and I am hungry."

He gratefully acquiesced in this stop, for his knees were trembling with the strain of the stirrups; but he would not permit her to ease him down from his saddle. Turning a wan glance upon her, he bitterly asked: "Must I always play the weakling before you? I am ashamed of myself. Ride on and leave me to rot here in the grass. I'm not worth keeping alive."

"You must not talk like that," she gently admonished him. "You're not to blame."

"Yes, I am. I should never have ventured into this man's country."

"I'm glad you did," she answered, as if she were comforting a child. "For if you hadn't I should never have known you."

"That would have been no loss—to you," he bitterly responded.

She unsaddled one pack-animal and spread some blankets on the grass. "Lie down and rest while I boil some coffee," she commanded; and he obeyed, too tired to make pretension toward assisting.

Lying so, feeling the magic of the sun, hearing the music of the water, and watching the girl, he regained a serener mood, and when she came back with his food he thanked her for it with a glance before which her eyes fell. "I don't see why you are so kind to me, I really believe you *like* to do things for me." Her head drooped to hide her face, and he went on: "Why do you care for me? Tell me!"

"I don't know," she murmured. Then she added, with a flash of bravery: "But I do."

"What a mystery it all is! You turn from a splendid fellow like Landon to a 'skate' like me. Landon worships you—you know that—don't you?"

"I know—he—" she ended, vaguely distressed.

"Did he ask you to marry him?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you? He's just the mate for you. He's a man of high character and education." She made no answer to this, and he went on: "Dear girl, I'm not worth your care—truly I'm not. I resented your engagement to Belden, for he was a brute; but Landon is different. He thinks the world of you. He'll go high in the service. I've never done anything in the world—I never shall. It will be better

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for you if I go—to-morrow.”

She took his hand and pressed it to her cheek, then, putting her arm about his neck, drew him to her bosom and kissed him passionately. “You break my heart when you talk like that,” she protested, with tears. “You mustn’t say such gloomy things—I won’t let you give up. You shall come right home with me, and I will nurse you till you are well. It was all my fault. If we had only stayed in camp at the lake daddy would have joined us that night, and if I had not loitered on the mountain yesterday Cliff would not have overtaken us. It’s all my fault.”

“I will not have it go that way,” he said. “I’ve brought you only care and unhappiness thus far. I’m an alien—my ways are not your ways.”

“I can change,” she answered. “I hate my ways, and I like yours.”

As they argued she felt no shame, and he voiced no resentment. She knew his mood. She understood his doubt, his depression. She pleaded as a man might have done, ready to prove her love, eager to restore his self-respect, while he remained both bitter and sadly contemptuous.

A cow-hand riding up the trail greeted Berrie respectfully, but a cynical smile broke out on his lips as he passed on. Another witness—another gossip.

She did not care. She had no further concern of the valley’s comment. Her life’s happiness hung on the drooping eyelashes of this wounded boy, and to win him back to cheerful acceptance of life was her only concern.

“I’ve never had any motives,” he confessed. “I’ve always done what pleased me at the moment—or because it was easier to do as others were doing. I went to college that way. Truth is, I never had any surplus vitality, and my father never demanded anything of me. I haven’t any motives now. A few days ago I was interested in forestry. At this time it all seems futile. What’s the use of my trying to live?”

Part of all this despairing cry arose from weariness, and part from a luxurious desire to be comforted, for it was sweet to feel her sympathy. He even took a morbid pleasure in the distress of her eyes and lips while her rich voice murmured in soothing protest.

She, on her part, was frightened for him, and as she thought of the long ride still before them she wrung her hands. “Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?” she moaned.

Instantly smitten into shame, into manlier mood, he said: “Don’t worry about me, please don’t. I can ride. I’m feeling better. You must not weaken. Please forgive my selfish complaints. I’m done! You’ll never hear it again. Come, let us go on. I can ride.”

“If we can reach Miller’s ranch—”

“I can ride to your ranch,” he declared, and rose with such new-

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found resolution that she stared at him in wonder.

He was able to smile. "I've had my little crying spell. I've relieved my heart of its load. I didn't mean to agonize you. It was only a slump." He put his hand to his head. "I must be a comical figure. Wonder what that cowboy thought of me?"

His sudden reversal to cheer was a little alarming to her, but at length she perceived that he had in truth mastered his depression, and bringing up the horses she saddled them, and helped him to mount. "If you get tired or feel worse, tell me, and we'll go into camp," she urged as they were about to start.

"You keep going till I give the sign," he replied; and his voice was so firm and clear that her own sunny smile came back. "I don't know what to make of you," she said. "I reckon you must be a poet."

XIII

THE GOSSIPS AWAKE

IT was dark when they reached the village, but Wayland declared his ability to go on, although his wounded head was throbbing with fever and he was clinging to the pommel of his saddle; so Berrie rode on.

Mrs. McFarlane, hearing the horses on the bridge, was at the door and received her daughter with wondering question, while the stable-hands, quick to detect an injured man, hurried to lift Norcross down from his saddle.

"What's the matter?" repeated Mrs. McFarlane.

"He fell and struck his head on a stone," Berea hastily explained. "Take the horses, boys, mother and I will look out for Mr. Norcross."

The men obeyed her and fell back, but they were consumed with curiosity, and their glances irritated the girl. "Slip the packs at once," she insisted.

With instant sympathy her mother came to her aid in supporting the wounded, weary youth indoors, and as he stretched out on the couch in the sitting-room, he remarked, with a faint, ironic smile: "This beats any bed of balsam boughs."

"Where's your father?" asked Mrs. McFarlane of her daughter.

"He's over on the Ptarmigan. I've a powerful lot to tell you, mother; but not now; we must look after Wayland. He's nearly done up, and so am I."

Mrs. McFarlane winced a little at her daughter's use of Norcross's first name, but she said nothing further at the moment, although she watched Berrie closely while she took off Wayland's

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shoes and stockings and rubbed his icy feet. "Get him something hot as quick as you can!" she commanded; and Mrs. McFarlane obeyed without a word.

Gradually the tremor passed out of his limbs and a delicious sense of warmth, of safety, stole over him, and he closed his eyes in the comfort of her presence and care. "Rigorous business this life of the pioneer," he said, with mocking inflection. "I think I prefer a place in the lumber trust."

"Don't talk," she said. Then, with a rush of tender remorse: "Why didn't you tell me to stop? I didn't realize that you were so tired. We could have stopped at the Springs."

"I didn't know how tired I was till I got here. Gee," he said, boyishly, "that door-knob at the back of my head is red-hot! You're good to me," he added, humbly.

She hated to have him resume that tone of self-deprecation, and, kneeling to him, she kissed his cheek, and laid her head beside his. "You're splendid," she insisted. "Nobody could be braver; but you should have told me you were exhausted. You fooled me with your cheerful answers."

He accepted her loving praise, her clasping arms, as a part of the rescue from the darkness and pain of the long ride, careless of what it might bring to him in the future. He ate his toast and drank his coffee, and permitted the women to lead him to his room, and then being alone he crept into his bed and fell instantly asleep.

Berrie and her mother went back to the sitting-room, and Mrs. McFarlane closed the door behind them. "Now tell me all about it," she said, in the tone of one not to be denied.

The story went along very smoothly till the girl came to the second night in camp beside the lake; there her voice faltered, and the reflective look in the mother's eyes deepened as she learned that her daughter had shared her tent with the young man. "It was the only thing to do, mother," Berrie bravely said. "It was cold and wet outside, and you know he isn't very strong, and his teeth were chattering, he was so chilled. I know it sounds strange down here; but up there in the woods in the storm what I did seemed right and natural. You know what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes, I understand. I don't blame you—only—if others should hear of it—"

"But they won't. No one knows of our being alone there except Tony and father."

"Are you sure? Doesn't Mrs. Belden know?"

"I don't think so—not yet."

Mrs. McFarlane's nervousness grew. "I wish you hadn't gone on this trip. If the Beldens find out you were alone with Mr. Norcross they'll make much of it. It will give them a chance at your father." Her mind turned upon another point. "When did Mr. Norcross get his fall."

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"On the way back." Here Berrie hesitated again. "I don't like to tell you, mother, but he didn't fall, Cliff jumped him and tried to kill him."

The mother doubted her ears. "Cliff did? How did he happen to meet you?"

Berrie was quick to answer. "I don't know how he found out we were on the trail. I suppose the old lady 'phoned him. Anyhow, while we were camped for noon yesterday"—her face flamed again at thought of that tender, beautiful moment when they were resting on the grass—"while we were at our lunch he came tearing down the hill on that big bay horse of his and took a flying jump at Wayland. As Wayland went down he struck his head on a stone. I thought he was dead, and I was paralyzed for a second. Then I flew at Cliff and just about choked the life out of him. I'd have ended him right there if he hadn't let go."

Mrs. McFarlane, looking upon her daughter in amazement, saw on her face the shadow of the deadly rage which had burned in her heart as she clenched young Belden's throat.

"What then? What happened then?"

"He let go, you bet." Her smile came back. "And when he realized what he'd done—he thought Wayland was dead—he began to weaken. Then I took my gun and was all for putting an end to him right there, when I saw Wayland's eyelids move. After that I didn't care what became of Cliff. I told him to ride on and keep a-ridin', and I reckon he's clear out of the state by this time. If he ever shows up I'll put him where he'll have all night to be sorry in."

"When did this take place?"

"Yesterday about two. Of course Wayland couldn't ride, he was so dizzy and kind o' confused, and so I went into camp right there at timber-line. Along about sunset Nash came riding up from this side, and insisted on staying to help me—so I let him."

Mrs. McFarlane's tense attitude relaxed. "Nash is not the kind that tattles. I'm glad he turned up."

"And this morning I saddled and came down."

"Did Nash go on?"

"Yes, daddy was waiting for him, so I sent him along."

"It's all sad business," groaned Mrs. McFarlane, "and I can see you're keeping something back. How did Cliff happen to know just where you were? And what started you back without your father?"

For the first time Berrie showed signs of weakness and distress. "Why, you see, Alec Belden and Mr. Moore were over there to look at some timber, and old Marm Belden and that Moore girl went along. I suppose they sent word to Cliff, and I presume that Moore girl put him on our trail. Leastwise that's the way I figure it out. That's the worst of the whole business." She admitted this with darkened brow. "Mrs. Belden's tongue is hung in the middle and loose at both ends—and that Moore girl is spiteful mean." She could

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not keep the contempt out of her voice. "She saw us start off, and she is sure to follow it up and find out what happened on the way home; even if they don't see Cliff they'll *talk*."

"Oh, I *wish* you hadn't gone!" exclaimed the worried mother.

"It can't be helped now, and it hasn't done me any real harm. It's all in the day's work, anyhow. I've always gone with daddy before, and this trip isn't going to spoil me. The boys all know me, and they will treat me fair."

"Yes, but Mr. Norcross is an outsider—a city man. They will all think evil of him on that account."

"I know; that's what troubles me. No one will know how fine and considerate he was. Mother, I've never known any one like him. He's a poet! He's taught me to see things I never saw before. Everything interests him—the birds, the clouds, the voices in the fire. I never was so happy in my life as I was during those first two days, and that night in camp before he began to worry—it was just wonderful." Words failed her, but her shining face and the forward straining pose of her body enlightened the mother. "I don't care what people say of me if only they will be just to him. They've *got* to treat him right," she added, firmly.

"Did he speak to you—are you engaged?" Her head drooped. "Not really engaged, mother; but he told me how much he liked me—and—it's all right, mother, I *know* it is. I'm not fine enough for him, but I'm going to try to change my ways so he won't be ashamed of me."

Mrs. McFarlane's face cleared. "He surely is a fine young fellow, and can be trusted to do the right thing. Well, we might as well go to bed. We can't settle anything till your father gets home," she said.

Wayland rose next morning free from dizziness and almost free from pain, and when he came out of his room his expression was cheerful. "I feel as if I'd slept a week, and I'm hungry. I don't know why I should be, but I am."

Mrs. McFarlane met him with something very intimate, something almost maternal in her look; but her words were as few and as restrained as ever. He divined that she had been talking with Berrie, and that a fairly clear understanding of the situation had been reached. That this understanding involved him closely he was aware; but nothing in his manner acknowledged it.

She did not ask any questions, believing that sooner or later the whole story must come out. The fact that Siona Moore and Mrs. Belden knew that Berrie had started back on Thursday with young Norcross made it easy for the villagers to discover that she had not reached the ranch till Saturday. "What could Joe have been thinking of to allow them to go?" she said. "Mr. Nash's presence in the camp must be made known; but then there is Clifford's assault upon Mr. Norcross, can that be kept secret, too?" And so while the young people chatted, the troubled mother waited in fear, knowing that in

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a day or two the countryside would be aflame with accusation.

In a landscape like this, as she well knew, nothing moves unobserved. The native—man or woman—is able to perceive and name objects scarcely discernible to the eye of the alien. A minute speck is discovered on the hillside. “Hello, there’s Jim Sanders on his roan,” says one, or “Here comes Kit Jenkins with her flea-bit gray. I wonder who’s on the bay alongside of her,” remarks another, and each of these observations is taken quite as a matter of course. With a wide and empty field of vision, and with trained, unspoiled optic nerves, the plainsman is marvelously penetrating of glance. Hence, Mrs. McFarlane was perfectly certain that not one but several of her neighbors had seen and recognized Berrie and young Norcross as they came down the hill. In a day or two every man would know just where they camped, and what had taken place in camp. Mrs. Belden would not rest till she had ferreted out every crook and turn of that trail, and her speech was quite as coarse as that of any of her male associates.

Easy-going with regard to many things, these citizens were abnormally alive to all matters relating to courtship, and popular as she believed Berrie to be, Mrs. McFarlane could not hope that her daughter would be spared—especially by the Beldens, who would naturally feel that Clifford had been cheated. She sighed deeply. “Well, nothing can be done till Joe returns,” she repeated.

A long day’s rest, a second night’s sleep, set Wayland on his feet. He came to breakfast quite gay. “Barring the hickory-nut on the back of my head,” he explained, “I’m feeling fine, almost ready for another expedition. I may make a ranger yet.”

Berrie, though equally gay, was not so sure of his ability to return to work. “I reckon you’d better go easy till daddy gets back; but if you feel like it we’ll ride up to the post-office this afternoon.”

“I want to start right in to learn to throw that hitch, and I’m going to practise with an ax till I can strike twice in the same place. This trip was an eye-opener. Great man I’d be in a windfall—wouldn’t I?”

He was persuaded to remain very quiet for another day, and part of it was spent in conversation with Mrs. McFarlane—whom he liked very much—and an hour or more in writing a long letter wherein he announced to his father his intention of going into the Forest Service. “I’ve got to build up a constitution,” he said, “and I don’t know of a better place to do it in. Besides, I’m beginning to be interested in the scheme. I like the Supervisor. I’m living in his house at the present time, and I’m feeling contented and happy, so don’t worry about me.”

He was indeed quite comfortable, save when he realized that Mrs. McFarlane was taking altogether too much for granted in their relationship. It was delightful to be so watched over, so waited upon, so instructed. “But where is it all leading me?” he continued to ask

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himself—and still that wall of reserve troubled and saddened Berrie.

They expected McFarlane that night, and waited supper for him, but he did not come, and so they ate without him, and afterward Wayland helped Berrie do up the dishes while the mother bent above her sewing by the kitchen lamp.

There was something very sweet and gentle about Mrs. McFarlane, and the exile took almost as much pleasure in talking with her as with her daughter. He led her to tell of her early experiences in the valley, and of the strange types of men and women with whom she had crossed the range.

“Some of them are here yet,” she said. “In fact the most violent of all the opponents to the Service are these old adventurers. I don’t think they deserve to be called pioneers. They never did any work in clearing the land or in building homes. Some of them, who own big herds of cattle, still live in dug-outs. They raged at Mr. McFarlane for going into the Service—called him a traitor. Old Jake Proudfoot was especially furious—”

“You should see where old Jake lives,” interrupted Berrie. “He sleeps on the floor in one corner of his cabin, and never changes his shirt.”

“Hush!” warned Mrs. McFarlane.

“That’s what the men all say. Daddy declares if they were to scrape Jake they’d find at least five layers of shirts. His wife left him fifteen years ago, couldn’t stand his habits, and he’s got worse ever since. Naturally he is opposed to the Service.”

“Of course,” her mother explained, “those who oppose the Supervisor aren’t all like Jake; but it makes me angry to have the papers all quoting Jake as ‘one of the leading ranchers of the valley.’”

She could not bring herself to take up the most vital subject of all—the question of her daughter’s future. “I’ll wait till father gets home,” she decided.

On the fourth morning the ’phone rang, and the squawking voice of Mrs. Belden came over the wire. “I wanted to know if Berrie and her feller got home all right?”

“Yes, they arrived safely.”

The old woman chuckled. “Last I see of Cliff he was hot on their trail—looked like he expected to take a hand in that expedition. Did he overtake ’em?”

“I don’t hear very well—where are you?”

“I’m at the Scott ranch—we’re coming round ‘the horn’ to-day.”

“Where is the Supervisor?”

“He headed across yesterday. Say, Cliff was mad as a hornet when he started. I’d like to know what happened—”

Mrs. McFarlane hung up the receiver. The old woman’s nasty chuckle was intolerable; but in silencing the ’phone Mrs. McFarlane was perfectly aware that she was not silencing the gossip; on the contrary, she was certain that the Beldens would leave a trail of poison-

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ous comment from the Ptarmigan to Bear Tooth. It was all sweet material for them.

Berrie wanted to know who was speaking, and Mrs. McFarlane replied: "Mrs. Belden wanted to know if you got through all right."

"She said something else, something to heat you up," persisted the girl, who perceived her mother's agitation. "What did she say—something about me—and Cliff?"

The mother did not answer, for Wayland entered the room at the moment; but Berrie knew that traducers were already busy with her affairs. "I don't care anything about old lady Belden," she said, later; "but I hate to have that Moore girl telling lies about me."

As for Wayland, the nights in the camp by the lake, and, indeed, all the experiences of his trip in the high places were becoming each moment more remote, more unreal. Camp life at timber-line did not seem to him subject to ordinary conventional laws of human conduct, and the fact that he and Berrie had shared the same tent under the stress of cold and snow, now seemed so far away as to be only a complication in a splendid mountain drama. Surely no blame could attach to the frank and generous girl, even though the jealous assault of Cliff Belden should throw the valley into a fever of chatter. "Furthermore, I don't believe he will be in haste to speak of his share in the play," he added. "It was too nearly criminal."

It was almost noon of the fourth day when the Supervisor called up to say that he was at the office, and would reach the ranch at six o'clock.

"I wish you would come home at once," his wife argued; and something in her voice convinced him that he was more needed at home than in the town.

"All right, mother. Hold the fort an hour and I'll be there."

Mrs. McFarlane met him at the hitching-bar, and it required but a glance for him to read in her face a troubled state of mind.

"This has been a disastrous trip for Berrie," she said, after one of the hands had relieved the Supervisor of his horse.

"In what way?"

She was a bit impatient. "Mrs. Belden is filling the valley with the story of Berrie's stay in camp with Mr. Norcross."

His face showed a graver line. "It couldn't be helped. The horses had to be followed, and that youngster couldn't do it—and, besides, I expected to get back that night. Nobody but an old snoop like Seth Belden would think evil of our girl. And, besides, Norcross is a man to be trusted."

"Of course he is, but the Beldens are ready to think evil of any one connected with us. And Cliff's assault on Wayland—"

He looked up quickly. "Assault? Did he make trouble?"

"Yes, he overtook them on the trail, and would have killed Norcross if Berrie hadn't interfered. He was crazy with jealousy."

"Nash didn't say anything about any assault."

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"He didn't know it. Berrie told him that Norcross fell from his horse."

McFarlane was deeply stirred. "I saw Cliff leave camp, but I didn't think anything of it. Why should he jump Norcross?"

"I suppose Mrs. Belden filled him with distrust of Berrie. He was already jealous, and when he came up with them and found them lunching together, he lost his head and rushed at Wayland like a wild beast. Of course he couldn't stand against a big man like Cliff, and his head struck on a stone; and if Berrie hadn't throttled the brute he would have murdered the poor boy right there before her eyes."

"Good God! I never suspected a word of this. I didn't think he'd do that."

The Supervisor was now very grave. These domestic matters at once threw his work as forester into the region of vague and unimportant abstractions. He began to understand the danger into which Berea had fallen, and step by step he took up the trails which had brought them all to this pass.

He fixed another penetrating look upon her face, and his voice was vibrant with anxiety as he said: "You don't think there's anything—wrong?"

"No, nothing wrong; but she's profoundly in love with him. I never have seen her so wrapped up in any one. She thinks of nothing else. It scares me to see it, for I've studied him closely and I can't believe he feels the same toward her. His world is so different from ours. I don't know what to do or say. I fear she is in for a period of great unhappiness."

She was at the beginning of tears, and he sought to comfort her. "Don't worry, honey, she's got too much horse sense to do anything foolish. She's grown up. I suppose it's his being so different from the other boys that catches her. We've always been good chums—let me talk with her. She mustn't make a mistake."

The return of the crew from the corral cut short this conference, and when McFarlane went in Berrie greeted him with such frank and joyous expression that all his fears vanished.

"Did you come over the high trail?" she asked.

"No, I came your way. I didn't want to take any chances on getting mired. It's still raining up there," he answered, then turned to Wayland: "Here's your mail, Norcross, a whole hatful of it—and one telegram in the bunch. Hope it isn't serious."

Wayland took the bundle of letters and retired to his room, glad to escape the persistent stare of the cow-hands. The despatch was from his father, and was curt and specific as a command: "Shall be in Denver on the 23d, meet me at the Palmer House. Am on my way to California. Come prepared to join me on the trip."

With the letters unopened in his lap he sat in silent thought, profoundly troubled by the instant decision which this message de-

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manded of him. At first glance nothing was simpler than to pack up and go. He was only a tourist in the valley with no intention of staying; but there was Berea! To go meant a violent end of their pleasant romance. To think of flight saddened him, and yet his better judgment was clearly on the side of going. "Much as I like her, much as I admire her, I cannot marry her. The simplest way is to frankly tell her so and go. It seems cowardly, but in the end she will be happier." His letters carried him back into his own world. One was from Will Halliday, who was going with Professor Holsman on an exploring trip up the Nile. "You must join us. Holsman has promised to take you on." Another classmate wrote to know if he did not want to go into a land deal on the Gulf of Mexico. A girl asked: "Are you to be in New York this winter? I am. I've decided to go into this Suffrage Movement." And so, one by one, the threads which bound him to Eastern city life re-spun their filaments. After all, this Colorado outing, even though it should last two years, would only be a vacation—his real life was in the cities of the East. Charming as Berea was, potent as she seemed, she was after all a fixed part of the mountain land, and not to be taken from it. At the moment marriage with her appeared absurd.

A knock at his door and the Supervisor's voice gave him a keen shock. "Come in," he called, springing to his feet with a thrill of dread, of alarm.

McFarlane entered slowly and shut the door behind him. His manner was serious, and his voice gravely gentle as he said: "I hope that telegram does not call you away?"

"It is from my father, asking me to meet him in Denver," answered Norcross, with faltering breath. "He's on his way to California. Won't you sit down?"

The older man took a seat with quiet dignity. "Seems like a mighty fine chance, don't it? I've always wanted to see the Coast. When do you plan for to pull out?"

Wayland was not deceived by the Supervisor's casual tone; there was something ominously calm in his manner, something which expressed an almost dangerous interest in the subject.

"I haven't decided to go at all. I'm still dazed by the suddenness of it. I didn't know my father was planning this trip."

"I see. Well, before you decide to go I'd like to have a little talk with you. My daughter has told me part of what happened to you on the trail. I want to know *all* of it. You're young, but you've been out in the world, and you know what people can say about you and my girl." His voice became level and menacing, as he added: "And I don't intend to have her put in wrong on account of you."

Norcross was quick to reply. "Nobody will dare accuse her of wrongdoing. She's a noble girl. No one will dare to criticize her for what she could not prevent."

"You don't know the Beldens. My girl's character will be on trial

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in every house in the county to-morrow. The Belden side of it will appear in the city papers. Sympathy will be with Clifford. Berrie will be made an issue by my enemies. They'll get me through her."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Norcross, in sudden realization of the gravity of the case. "What beasts they are!"

"Moore's gang will seize upon it and work it hard," McFarlane went on, with calm insistence. "They want to bring the district forester down on me. This is a fine chance to badger me. They will make a great deal of my putting you on the roll. Our little camping trip is likely to prove a serious matter to us all."

"Surely you don't consider me at fault?"

Worried as he was, the father was just. "No, you're not to blame—no one is to blame. It all dates back to the horses quitting camp; but you've got to stand pat now—for Berrie's sake."

"But what can I do? I'm at your service. What rôle shall I play? Tell me what to do, and I will do it."

McFarlane was staggered, but he answered: "You can at least stay on the ground and help fight. This is no time to stampede."

"You're right. I'll stay, and I'll make any statement you see fit. I'll do anything that will protect Berrie."

McFarlane again looked him squarely in the eyes. "Is there a—an agreement between you?"

"Nothing formal—that is—I mean I admire her, and I told her—" He stopped, feeling himself on the verge of the irrevocable. "She's a splendid girl," he went on. "I like her exceedingly, but I've known her only a few weeks."

McFarlane interrupted. "Girls are flighty critters," he said, sadly. "I don't know why she's taken to you so terrible strong; but she has. She don't seem to care what people say so long as they do not blame you; but if you should pull out you might just as well cut her heart to pieces—" His voice broke, and it was a long time before he could finish. "You're not at fault, I know that, but if you *can* stay on a little while and make it an ounce or two easier for her and for her mother, I wish you'd do it."

Wayland extended his hand impulsively. "Of course I'll stay. I never really thought of leaving." In the grip of McFarlane's hand was something warm and tender.

He rose. "I'm terribly obliged," he said; "but we mustn't let her suspect for a minute that we've been discussing her. She hates being pitied or helped."

"She shall not experience a moment's uneasiness that I can prevent," replied the youth; and at the moment he meant it.

Berrie could not be entirely deceived. She read in her father's face a subtle change of line which she related to something Wayland had said. "Did he tell you what was in the telegram? Has he got to go away?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, he said it was from his father."

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"What does his father want of him?"

"He's on his way to California and wants Wayland to go with him; but Wayland says he's not going."

A pang shot through Berrie's heart. "He mustn't go—he isn't able to go," she exclaimed, and her pain, her fear, came out in her sharpened, constricted tone. "I won't let him go—till he's well."

Mrs. McFarlane gently interposed. "He'll have to go, honey, if his father needs him."

"Let his father come here." She rose, and, going to his door, decisively knocked. "May I come in?" she demanded, rather than asked, before her mother could protest. "I must see you." Wayland opened the door, and she entered, leaving her parents facing each other in mute helplessness.

Mrs. McFarlane turned toward her husband with a face of despair. "She's ours no longer, Joe. Our time of bereavement has come."

He took her in his arms. "There, there, mother. Don't cry. It can't be helped. You cut loose from your parents and came to me in just the same way. Our daughter's a grown woman, and must have her own life. All we can do is to defend her against the coyotes who are busy with her name."

"But what of *him*, Joe; he don't care for her as she does for him—can't you see that?"

"He'll do the right thing, mother; he told me he would. He knows how much depends on his staying here now, and he intends to do it."

"But in the end, Joe, after this scandal is lived down, can he—will he—marry her? And if he marries her can they live together and be happy? His way of life is so different. He can't content himself here, and she can't fit in where he belongs. It all seems hopeless to me. Wouldn't it be better for her to suffer for a little while now than to make a mistake that may last a lifetime?"

"Mebbe it would, mother, but the decision is not ours. She's too strong for us to control. She's of age, and if she comes to a full understanding of the situation, she can decide the question a whole lot better than either of us."

"That's true," she sighed. "In some ways she's bigger and stronger than both of us. Sometimes I wish she were not so self-reliant."

"Well, that's the way life is, sometimes, and I reckon there's nothin' left for you an' me but to draw closer together and try to fill up the empty place she's going to leave between us."

XIV

THE SUMMONS

WHEN Wayland caught the startled look on Berrie's face he knew that she had learned from her father the contents of his telegram, and that she would require an explanation. "Are you going away?" she asked.

"Yes. At least, I must go down to Denver to see my father. I shall be gone only over night."

"And will you tell him about our trip?" she pursued, with unflinching directness. "And about—me?"

He gave her a chair, and took a seat himself before replying. "Yes, I shall tell him all about it, and about you and your father and mother. He shall know how kind you've all been to me." He said this bravely, and at the moment he meant it; but as his father's big, impassive face and cold, keen eyes came back to him his courage sank, and in spite of his firm resolution some part of his secret anxiety communicated itself to the girl, who asked many questions with intent to find out more particularly what kind of man the elder Norcross was.

Wayland's replies did not entirely reassure her. He admitted that his father was harsh and domineering in character, and that he was ambitious to have his son take up and carry forward his work. "He was willing enough to have me go to college till he found I was specializing on wrong lines. Then I had to fight in order to keep my place. He's glad I'm out here, for he thinks I'm regaining my strength. But just as soon as I'm well enough he expects me to go to Chicago and take charge of the Western office. Of course, I don't want to do that. I'd rather work out some problem in chemistry that interests me; but I may have to give in, for a time at least."

"Will your mother and sisters be with your father?"

"No, indeed! You couldn't get any one of them west of the Hudson River with a log-chain. My sisters were both born in Michigan, but they want to forget it—they pretend they have forgotten it. They both have New-Yorkitis. Nothing but the Plaza will do them now."

"I suppose they think we're all 'Injuns' out here?"

"Oh no, not so bad as that; but they wouldn't comprehend anything about you except your muscle. That would catch 'em. They'd worship your splendid health, just as I do. It's pitiful the way they both try to put on weight. They're always testing some new food, some new tonic—they'll do anything except exercise regularly and go to bed at ten o'clock."

All that he said of his family deepened her dismay. Their interests were so alien to her own.

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"I'm afraid to have you go even for a day," she admitted, with simple honesty, which moved him deeply. "I don't know what I should do if you went away. I think of nothing but you now."

Her face was pitiful, and he put his arm about her neck as if she were a child. "You mustn't do that. You must go on with your life just as if I'd never been. Think of your father's job—of the forest and the ranch."

"I can't do it. I've lost interest in the service. I never want to go into the high country again, and I don't want you to go, either. It's too savage and cruel."

"That is only a mood," he said, confidently. "It is splendid up there. I shall certainly go back some time."

He could not divine, and she could not tell him, how poignantly she had sensed the menace of the cold and darkness during his illness. For the first time in her life she had realized to the full the unrelenting enmity of the clouds, the wind, the night; and during that interminable ride toward home, when she saw him bending lower and lower over his saddle-bow, her allegiance to the trail, her devotion to the stirrup was broken. His weariness and pain had changed the universe for her. Never again would she look upon the range with the eyes of the carefree girl. The other, the civilized, the domestic, side of her was now dominant. A new desire, a bigger aspiration, had taken possession of her.

Little by little he realized this change in her, and was touched with the wonder of it. He had never had any great self-love either as man or scholar, and the thought of this fine, self-sufficient womanly soul centering all its interests on him was humbling. Each moment his responsibility deepened, and he heard her voice but dimly as she went on.

"Of course we are not rich; but we are not poor, and my mother's family is one of the oldest in Kentucky." She uttered this with a touch of her mother's quiet dignity. "Your father need not despise us."

"So far as my father is concerned, family don't count, and neither does money. But he confidently expects me to take up his business in Chicago, and I suppose it is my duty to do so. If he finds me looking fit he may order me into the ranks at once."

"I'll go there—I'll do anything you want me to do," she urged. "You can tell your father that I'll help you in the office. I can learn. I'm ready to use a typewriter—anything."

He was silent in the face of her naïve expression of self-sacrificing love, and after a moment she added, hesitatingly: "I wish I could meet your father. Perhaps he'd come up here if you asked him to do so?"

He seized upon the suggestion. "By George! I believe he would. I don't want to go to town. I just believe I'll wire him that I'm laid up here and can't come." Then a shade of new trouble came over his

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face. How would the stern, methodical old business man regard this slovenly ranch and its primitive ways? She felt the question in his face.

"You're afraid to have him come," she said, with the same disconcerting penetration which had marked every moment of her interview thus far. "You're afraid he wouldn't like me?" With almost equal frankness he replied: "No. I think he'd like you, but this town and the people up here would gall him. Order is a religion with him. Then he's got a vicious slant against all this conservation business—calls it tommy-rot. He and your father might lock horns first crack out of the box. But I'll risk it. I'll wire him at once."

A knock at the door interrupted him, and Mrs. McFarlane's voice, filled with new excitement, called out: "Berrie, the District office is on the wire."

Berrie opened the door and confronted her mother, who said: "Mr. Evingham 'phones that the afternoon papers contain an account of a fight at Coal City between Settle and one of Alec Belden's men, and that the District Forester is coming down to investigate it."

"Let him come," answered Berrie, defiantly. "He can't do us any harm. What was the row about?"

"I didn't hear much of it. Your father was at the 'phone."

McFarlane, with the receiver to his ear, was saying: "Don't know a thing about it, Mr. Evingham. Settle was at the station when I left. I didn't know he was going down to Coal City. No, that's a mistake. My daughter was never engaged to Alec Belden. Alec Belden is the older of the brothers, and is married. I can't go into that just now. If you come down I'll explain fully."

He hung up the receiver and slowly turned toward his wife and daughter. "This sure is our day of trouble," he said, with dejected countenance.

"What is it all about?" asked Berrie.

"Why, it seems that after I left yesterday Settle rode down the valley with Belden's outfit, and they all got to drinking, ending in a row, and Tony beat one of Belden's men almost to death. The sheriff has gone over to get Tony, and the Beldens declare they're going to railroad him. That means we'll all be brought into it. Belden has seized the moment to prefer charges against me for keeping Settle in the service and for putting a non-resident on the roll as guard. The whelp will dig up everything he can to queer me with the office. All that kept him from doing it before was Cliff's interest in you."

"He can't make any of his charges stick," declared Berrie.

"Of course he can't. He knows that. But he can bring us all into court. You and Mr. Norcross will both be called as witnesses, for it seems that Tony was defending your name. The papers call it 'a fight for a girl.' Oh, it's a sweet mess."

For the first time Berrie betrayed alarm. "What shall we do? I can't go on the stand! They can't make me do that, can they?" She

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turned to Wayland. "Now you *must* go away. It is a shame to have you mixed up in such a trial."

"I shall not run away and leave you and the Supervisor to bear all the burden of this fight."

He anticipated in imagination—as they all did—some of the consequences of this trial. The entire story of the camping trip would be dragged in, distorted into a scandal, and flashed over the country as a disgraceful episode. The country would ring with laughter and coarse jest. Berrie's testimony would be a feast for court-room loafers.

"There's only one thing to do," said McFarlane, after a few moments of thought. "You and Berrie and Mrs. McFarlane must get out of here before you are subpoenaed."

"And leave you to fight it out alone?" exclaimed his wife. "I shall do nothing of the kind. Berrie and Mr. Norcross can go."

"That won't do," retorted McFarlane, quickly. "That won't do at all. You must go with them. I can take care of myself. I will not have you dragged into this muck-hole. We've got to think quick and act quick. There won't be any delay about their side of the game. I don't think they'll do anything to-day; but you've got to fade out of the valley. You all get ready and I'll have one of the boys hook up the surrey as if for a little drive, and you can pull out over the old stage-road to Flume and catch the narrow-gage morning train for Denver. You've been wanting for some time to go down the line. Now here's a good time to start."

Berrie now argued against running away. Her blood was up. She joined her mother. "We won't leave you to inherit all this trouble. Who will look after the ranch? Who will keep house for you?"

McFarlane remained firm. "I'll manage. Don't worry about me. Just get out of reach. The more I consider this thing, the more worrisome it gets. Suppose Cliff should come back to testify?"

"He won't. If he does I'll have him arrested for trying to kill Wayland," retorted Berrie.

"And make the whole thing worse! No. You are all going to cross the range. You can start out as if for a little turn round the valley, and just naturally keep going. It can't do any harm, and it may save a nasty time in court."

"One would think we were a lot of criminals," remarked Wayland.

"That's the way you'll be treated," retorted McFarlane. "Belden has retained old Whitby, the foulest old brute in the business, and he'll bring you all into it if he can."

"But running away from it will not prevent talk," argued his wife.

"Not entirely; but talk and testimony are two different things. Suppose they call daughter to the stand? Do you want her cross-examined as to what basis there was for this gossip? They know something of Cliff's being let out, and that will inflame them. He

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may be at the mill this minute."

"I guess you're right," said Norcross, sadly. "Our delightful excursion into the forest has led us into a predicament from which there is only one way of escape, and that is flight."

Back of all this talk, this argument, there remained still unanswered the most vital, most important question: "Shall I speak of marriage at this time? Would it be a source of comfort to them as well as a joy to her?" At the moment he was ready to speak, for he felt himself to be the direct cause of all their embarrassment. But closer thought made it clear that a hasty ceremony would only be considered a cloak to cover something illicit. "I'll leave it to the future," he decided.

McFarlane was again called to the telephone. Landon, with characteristic brevity, conveyed to him the fact that Mrs. Belden was at home and busily 'phoning scandalous stories about the country. "If you don't stop her she's going to poison every ear in the valley," ended the ranger.

"You'd think they'd all know my daughter well enough not to believe anything Mrs. Belden says," responded McFarlane, bitterly.

"All the boys are ready to do what Tony did. But nobody can stop this old fool's mouth but you. Cliff has disappeared, and that adds to the excitement."

"Thank the boys for me," said McFarlane, "and tell them not to fight. Tell 'em to keep cool. It will all be cleared up soon."

As McFarlane went out to order the horses hooked up, Wayland followed him as far as the bars. "I'm conscience-smitten over this thing, Supervisor, for I am aware that I am the cause of all your trouble."

"Don't let that worry you," responded the older man. But he spoke with effort. "It can't be helped. It was all unavoidable."

"The most appalling thing to me is the fact that not even your daughter's popularity can neutralize the gossip of a woman like Mrs. Belden. My being an outsider counts against Berrie, and I'm ready to do anything—anything," he repeated, earnestly. "I love your daughter, Mr. McFarlane, and I'm ready to marry her at once if you think best. She's a noble girl, and I cannot bear to be the cause of her calumination."

There was mist in the Supervisor's eyes as he turned them on the young man. "I'm right glad to hear you say that, my boy." He reached out his hand, and Wayland took it. "I knew you'd say the word when the time came. I didn't know how strongly she felt toward you till to-day. I knew she liked you, of course, for she said so, but I didn't know that she had plum set her heart on you. I didn't expect her to marry a city man; but—I like you and—well, she's the doctor! What suits her suits me. Don't you be afraid of her not meeting all comers." He went on after a pause, "She's never seen much of city life, but she'll hold her own anywhere, you can gamble

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on that.”

“She has wonderful adaptability, I know,” answered Wayland, slowly. “But I don’t like to take her away from here—from you.”

“If you hadn’t come she would have married Cliff—and what kind of a life would she have led with him?” demanded McFarlane. “I knew Cliff was rough, but I couldn’t convince her that he was cheap. I live only for her happiness, my boy, and, though I know you will take her away from me, I believe you can make her happy, and so—I give her over to you. As to time and place, arrange that—with—her mother.” He turned and walked away, unable to utter another word.

Wayland’s throat was aching also, and he went back into the house with a sense of responsibility which exalted him into sturdier manhood.

Berea met him in a pretty gown, a dress he had never seen her wear, a costume which transformed her into something entirely feminine. She seemed to have put away the self-reliant manner of the trail, and in its stead presented the lambent gaze, the tremulous lips of the bride. As he looked at her thus transfigured his heart cast out its hesitancy and he entered upon his new adventure without further question or regret.

XV

A MATTER OF MILLINERY

IT was three o’clock of a fine, clear, golden afternoon as they said good-by to McFarlane and started eastward, as if for a little drive. Berrie held the reins in spite of Wayland’s protestations. “These bronchos are only about half busted,” she said. “They need watching. I know them better than you do.” Therefore he submitted, well knowing that she was entirely competent and fully informed.

Mrs. McFarlane, while looking back at her husband, sadly exclaimed: “I feel like a coward running away like this.”

“Forget it, mother,” commanded her daughter, cheerily. “Just imagine we’re off for a short vacation. I’m for going clear through to Chicago. So long as we must go, let’s go whooping. Father’s better off without us.”

Her voice was gay, her eyes shining, and Wayland saw her as she had been that first day in the coach—the care-free, laughing girl. The trouble they were fleeing from was less real to her than the happiness toward which she rode. Her hand on the reins, her foot on the brake, brought back her confidence; but Wayland did not feel so sure of his part in the adventure. She seemed so unalterably a part of this life, so fitted to this landscape, that the thought of transplant-

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ing her to the East brought uneasiness and question. Could such a creature of the open air be content with the walls of a city?

For several miles the road ran over the level floor of the valley, and she urged the team to full speed. "I don't want to meet anybody if I can help it. Once we reach the old stage route the chances of being scouted are few. Nobody uses that road since the broad-gage reached Cragg's."

Mrs. McFarlane could not rid herself of the resentment with which she suffered this enforced departure; but she had small opportunity to protest, for the wagon bumped and clattered over the stony stretches with a motion which confused as well as silenced her. It was all so humiliating, so unlike the position which she had imagined herself to have attained in the eyes of her neighbors. Furthermore, she was going away without a trunk, with only one small bag for herself and Berrie—running away like a criminal from an intangible foe. However, she was somewhat comforted by the gaiety of the young people before her. They were indeed jocund as jaybirds. With the resiliency of youth they had accepted the situation, and were making the best of it.

"Here comes somebody," called Berrie, pulling her ponies to a walk. "Throw a blanket over that valise." She was chuckling as if it were all a good joke. "It's old Jake Proudfoot. I can smell him. Now hang on. I'm going to pass him on the jump."

Wayland, who was riding with his hat in his hand because he could not make it cover his bump, held it up as if to keep the wind from his face, and so defeated the round-eyed, owl-like stare of the inquisitive rancher, who brought his team to a full stop in order to peer after them, muttering in a stupor of resentment and surprise.

"He'll worry himself sick over us," predicted Berrie. "He'll wonder where we're going and what was under that blanket till the end of summer. He is as curious as a fool hen."

A few minutes more and they were at the fork in the way, and, leaving the trail to Cragg's, the girl pulled into the grass-grown, less-traveled trail to the south, which entered the timber at this point and began to climb with steady grade. Letting the reins fall slack, she turned to her mother with reassuring words. "There! Now we're safe. We won't meet anybody on this road except possibly a mover's outfit. We're in the forest again," she added.

For two hours they crawled slowly upward, with a roaring stream on one side and the pine-covered slopes on the other. Jays and camp-birds called from the trees. Water-robins fluttered from rock to rock in the foaming flood. Squirrels and minute chipmunks raced across the fallen tree-trunks or clattered from great boulders, and in the peace and order and beauty of the forest they all recovered a serener outlook on the noisome tumult they were leaving behind them. Invisible as well as inaudible, the serpent of slander lost its terror.

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Once, as they paused to rest the horses, Wayland said: "It is hard to realize that down in that ethereal valley people like old Jake and Mrs. Belden have their dwelling-place."

This moved Mrs. McFarlane to admit that it might all turn out a blessing in disguise. "Mr. McFarlane may resign and move to Denver, as I've long wanted him to do."

"I wish he would," exclaimed Berrie, fervently. "It's time you had a rest. Daddy will hate to quit under fire, but he'd better do it." Peak by peak the Bear Tooth Range rose behind them, while before them the smooth, grassy slopes of the pass told that they were nearing timber-line. The air was chill, the sun was hidden by old Solidor, and the stream had diminished to a silent rill winding among sear grass and yellowed willows. The valley behind them was vague with mist. The southern boundary of the forest was in sight.

At last the topmost looming crags of the Continental Divide cut the sky-line, and then in the smooth hollow between two rounded grassy summits Berrie halted, and they all silently contemplated the two worlds. To the west and north lay an endless spread of mountains, wave on wave, snow-lined, savage, sullen in the dying light; while to the east and southeast the foothills faded into the plain, whose dim cities, insubstantial as flecks in a veil of violet mist, were hardly distinguishable without the aid of glasses.

To the girl there was something splendid, something heroic in that majestic, menacing landscape to the west. In one of its folds she had begun her life. In another she had grown to womanhood and self-confident power. The rough men, the coarse, ungainly women of that land seemed less hateful now that she was leaving them, perhaps forever, and a confused memory of the many splendid dawns and purple sunsets she had loved filled her thought.

Wayland, divining some part of what was moving in her mind, cheerily remarked, "Yes, it's a splendid place for a summer vacation, but a stern place in winter-time, and for a lifelong residence it is not inspiring."

Mrs. McFarlane agreed with him in this estimate. "It is terribly lonesome in there at times. I've had enough of it. I'm ready for the comforts of civilization."

Berrie turned in her seat, and was about to take up the reins when Wayland asserted himself. "Wait a moment. Here's where my dominion begins. Here's where you change seats with me. I am the driver now."

She looked at him with questioning, smiling glance. "Can you drive? It's all the way down-hill—and steep?"

"If I can't I'll ask your aid. I'm old enough to remember the family carriage. I've even driven a four-in-hand."

She surrendered her seat doubtfully, and smiled to see him take up the reins as if he were starting a four-horse coach. He proved adequate and careful, and she was proud of him as, with foot on the

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brake and the bronchos well in hand, he swung down the long looping road to the railway. She was pleased, too, by his care of the weary animals, easing them down the steepest slopes and sending them along on the comparatively level spots.

Their descent was rapid, but it was long after dark before they reached Flume, which lay up the valley to the right. It was a poor little decaying mining-town set against the hillside, and had but one hotel, a sun-warped and sagging pine building just above the station.

"Not much like the Profile House," said Way-land, as he drew up to the porch. "But I see no choice."

"There isn't any," Berrie assured him.

"Well, now," he went on, "I am in command of this expedition. From this on I lead this outfit. When it comes to hotels, railways, and the like o' that, I'm head ranger."

Mrs. McFarlane, tired, hungry, and a little dismayed, accepted his control gladly; but Berrie could not at once slip aside her responsibility. "Tell the hostler—"

"Not a word!" commanded Norcross; and the girl with a smile submitted to his guidance, and thereafter his efficiency, his self-possession, his tact delighted her. He persuaded the sullen landlady to get them supper. He secured the best rooms in the house, and arranged for the care of the team, and when they were all seated around the dim, fly-specked oil-lamp at the end of the crumby dining-room table he discovered such a gay and confident mien that the women looked at each other in surprise.

Berrie was correspondingly less masculine. In drawing off her buckskin driving-gloves she had put away the cowgirl, and was silent, a little sad even, in the midst of her enjoyment of his dictatorship. And when he said, "If my father reaches Denver in time I want you to meet him," she looked the dismay she felt.

"I'll do it—but I'm scared of him."

"You needn't be. I'll see him first and draw his fire."

Mrs. McFarlane interposed. "We must do a little shopping first. We can't meet your father as we are."

"Very well. I'll go with you if you'll let me. I'm a great little shopper. I have infallible taste, so my sisters say. If it's a case of buying new hats, for instance, I'm the final authority with them." This amused Berrie, but her mother took it seriously.

"Of course, I'm anxious to have my daughter make the best possible impression."

"Very well. It is arranged. We get in, I find, about noon. We'll go straight to the biggest shop in town. If we work with speed we'll be able to lunch with my father. He'll be at the Palmer House at one."

Berrie said nothing, either in acceptance or rejection of his plan. Her mind was concerned with new conceptions, new relationships, and when in the hall he took her face between his hands and said,

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"Cheer up! All is not lost," she put her arms about his neck and laid her cheek against his breast to hide her tears. "Oh, Wayland! I'm such an idiot in the city. I'm afraid your father will despise me."

What he said was not very cogent, and not in the least literary, but it was reassuring and lover-like, and when he turned her over to her mother she was composed, though unwontedly grave.

She woke to a new life next morning—a life of compliance, of following, of dependence upon the judgment of another. She stood in silence while her lover paid the bills, bought the tickets, and telegraphed their coming to his father. She acquiesced when he prevented her mother from telephoning to the ranch. She complied when he countermanded her order to have the team sent back at once. His judgment ruled, and she enjoyed her sudden freedom from responsibility. It was novel, and it was very sweet to think that she was being cared for as she had cared for and shielded him in the world of the trail.

In the little railway-coach, which held a score of passengers, she found herself among some Eastern travelers who had taken the trip up the Valley of the Flume in the full belief that they were piercing the heart of the Rocky Mountains! It amused Wayland almost as much as it amused Berrie when one man said to his wife:

"Well, I'm glad we've seen the Rockies."

"He really believes it!" exclaimed Norcross. After an hour's ride Wayland tactfully withdrew, leaving mother and daughter to discuss clothes undisturbed by his presence.

"We must look our best, honey," said Mrs. McFarlane. "We will go right to Mme. Crosby at Battle's, and she'll fit us out. I wish we had more time; but we haven't, so we must do the best we can."

"I want Wayland to choose my hat and traveling-suit," replied Berrie.

"Of course. But you've got to have a lot of other things besides." And they bent to the joyous work of making out a list of goods to be purchased as soon as they reached Chicago.

Wayland came back with a Denver paper in his hand and a look of disgust on his face. "It's all in here—at least, the outlines of it."

Berrie took the journal, and there read the details of Settle's assault upon the foreman. "The fight arose from a remark concerning the Forest Supervisor's daughter. Ranger Settle resented the gossip, and fell upon the other man, beating him with the butt of his revolver. Friends of the foreman claim that the ranger is a drunken bully, and should have been discharged long ago. The Supervisor for some mysterious reason retains this man, although he is an incompetent. It is also claimed that McFarlane put a man on the roll without examination." The Supervisor was the protagonist of the play, which was plainly political. The attack upon him was bitter and unjust, and Mrs. McFarlane again declared her intention of returning to help him in his fight. However, Wayland again proved to her that

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her presence would only embarrass the Supervisor. "You would not aid him in the slightest degree. Nash and Landon are with him, and will refute all these charges."

This newspaper story took the light out of their day and the smile from Berrie's lips, and the women entered the city silent and distressed in spite of the efforts of their young guide. The nearer the girl came to the ordeal of facing the elder Norcross, the more she feared the outcome; but Wayland kept his air of easy confidence, and drove them directly to the shopping center, believing that under the influence of hats and gloves they would regain their customary cheer.

In this he was largely justified. They had a delightful hour trying on millinery and coats and gloves. The forewoman, who knew Mrs. McFarlane, gladly accepted her commission, and, while suspecting the tender relationship between the girl and the man, she was tactful enough to conceal her suspicion. "The gentleman is right; you carry simple things best," she remarked to Berrie, thus showing her own good judgment. "Smartly tailored gray or blue suits are your style."

Silent, blushing, tousled by the hands of her decorators, Berrie permitted hats to be perched on her head and jackets buttoned and unbuttoned about her shoulders till she felt like a worn clothes-horse. Wayland beamed with delight, but she was far less satisfied than he; and when at last selection was made, she still had her doubts, not of the clothes, but of her ability to wear them. They seemed so alien to her, so restrictive and enslaving.

"You're an easy fitter," said the saleswoman. "But"—here she lowered her voice—"you need a new corset. This old one is out of date. Nobody is wearing hips now."

Thereupon Berrie meekly permitted herself to be led away to a torture-room. Wayland waited patiently, and when she reappeared all traces of Bear Tooth Forest had vanished. In a neat tailored suit and a very "chic" hat, with shoes, gloves, and stockings to match, she was so transformed, so charmingly girlish in her self-conscious glory, that he was tempted to embrace her in the presence of the saleswoman. But he didn't. He merely said: "I see the governor's finish! Let's go to lunch. You are stunning!"

"I don't know myself," responded Berrie. "The only thing that feels natural is my hand. They cinched me so tight I can't eat a thing, and my shoes hurt." She laughed as she said this, for her use of the vernacular was conscious. "I'm a fraud. Your father will spot my brand first shot. Look at my face—red as a saddle!"

"Don't let that trouble you. This is the time of year when tan is fashionable. Don't you be afraid of the governor. Just smile at him, give him your grip, and he'll melt."

"I'm the one to melt. I'm beginning now."

"I know how you feel, but you'll get used to the conventional boiler-plate and all the rest of it. We all groan and growl when we

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come back to it each autumn; but it's a part of being civilized, and we submit."

Notwithstanding his confident advice, Wayland led the two silent and inwardly dismayed women into the showy café of the hotel with some degree of personal apprehension concerning the approaching interview with his father. Of course, he did not permit this to appear in the slightest degree. On the contrary, he gaily ordered a choice lunch, and did his best to keep his companions from sinking into deeper depression.

It pleased him to observe the admiring glances which were turned upon Berrie, whose hat became her mightily, and, leaning over, he said in a low voice to Mrs. McFarlane: "Who is the lovely young lady opposite? Won't you introduce me?"

This rejoiced the mother almost as much as it pleased the daughter, and she answered, "She looks like one of the Radburns of Lexington, but I think she's from Louisville."

This little play being over, he said, "Now, while our order is coming I'll run out to the desk and see if the governor has come in or not."

XVI

THE PRIVATE CAR

AFTER he went away Berrie turned to her mother with a look in which humor and awe were blent. "Am I dreaming, mother, or am I actually sitting here in the city? My head is dizzy with it all." Then, without waiting for an answer, she fervently added: "Isn't he fine! I'm the tenderfoot now. I hope his father won't despise me."

With justifiable pride in her child, the mother replied: "He can't help liking you, honey. You look exactly like your grandmother at this moment. Meet Mr. Norcross in her spirit."

"I'll try; but I feel like a woodchuck out of his hole."

Mrs. McFarlane continued: "I'm glad we were forced out of the valley. You might have been shut in there all your life as I have been with your father."

"You don't blame father, do you?"

"Not entirely. And yet he always was rather easy-going, and you know how untidy the ranch is. He's always been kindness and sympathy itself; but his lack of order is a cross. Perhaps now he will resign, rent the ranch, and move over here. I should like to live in the city for a while, and I'd like to travel a little."

"Wouldn't it be fine if you could! You could live at this hotel if you wanted to. Yes, you're right. You need a rest from the ranch and dish-washing."

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Wayland returned with an increase of tension in his face.

"He's here! I've sent word saying, 'I am lunching in the café with ladies.' I think he'll come round. But don't be afraid of him. He's a good deal rougher on the outside than he is at heart. Of course, he's a bluff old business man, and not at all pretty, and he'll transfix you with a kind of estimating glare as if you were a tree; but he's actually very easy to manage if you know how to handle him. Now, I'm not going to try to explain everything to him at the beginning. I'm going to introduce him to you in a casual kind of way and give him time to take to you both. He forms his likes and dislikes very quickly."

"What if he don't like us?" inquired Berrie, with troubled brow.

"He can't help it." His tone was so positive that her eyes misted with happiness. "But here comes our food. I hope you aren't too nervous to eat. Here is where I shine as provider. This is the kind of camp fare I can recommend."

Berrie's healthy appetite rose above her apprehension, and she ate with the keen enjoyment of a child, and her mother said, "It surely is a treat to get a chance at somebody else's cooking."

"Don't you slander your home fare," warned Wayland. "It's as good as this, only different."

He sat where he could watch the door, and despite his jocund pose his eyes expressed growing impatience and some anxiety. They were all well into their dessert before he called out: "Here he is!"

Mrs. McFarlane could not see the new-corner from where she sat, but Berrie rose in great excitement as a heavy-set, full-faced man with short, gray mustache and high, smooth brow entered the room. He did not smile as he greeted his son, and his penetrating glance questioned even before he spoke. He seemed to silently ask: "Well, what's all this? How do you happen to be here? Who are these women?" Wayland said: "Mrs. McFarlane, this is my father. Father, this is Miss Berea McFarlane, of Bear Tooth Springs."

The elder Norcross shook hands with Mrs. McFarlane politely, coldly; but he betrayed surprise as Berea took his fingers in her grip. At his son's solicitation he accepted a seat opposite Berea, but refused dessert.

Wayland explained: "Mrs. McFarlane and her daughter quite saved my life over in the valley. Their ranch is the best health resort in Colorado."

"Your complexion indicates that," his father responded, dryly. "You look something the way a man of your age ought to look. I needn't ask how you're feeling."

"You needn't, but you may. I'm feeling like a new fiddle—barring a bruise at the back of my head, which makes a 'hard hat' a burden. I may as well tell you first off that Mrs. McFarlane is the wife of the Forest Supervisor at Bear Tooth, and Miss Berea is the able assistant of her father. We are all rank conservationists."

Norcross, Senior, examined Berrie precisely as if his eyes were a

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couple of X-ray tubes, and as she flushed under his slow scrutiny he said: "I was not expecting to find the Forest Service in such hands."

Wayland laughed.

"I hope you didn't mash his fingers, Berrie."

She smiled guiltily. "I'm afraid I did. I hope I didn't hurt you—sometimes I forget."

Norcross, Senior, was waking up. "You have a most extraordinary grip. What did it? Piano practice?"

Wayland grinned. "Piano! No—the cinch."

"The what?"

Wayland explained. "Miss McFarlane was brought up on a ranch. She can rope and tie a steer, saddle her own horse, pack an outfit, and all the rest of it."

"Oh! Kind of cowgirl, eh?"

Mrs. McFarlane, eager to put Berrie's better part forward, explained: "She's our only child, Mr. Norcross, and as such has been a constant companion to her father. She's not all cowhand. She's been to school, and she can cook and sew as well."

He looked from one to the other. "Neither of you correspond exactly to my notions of a forester's wife and daughter."

"Mrs. McFarlane comes from an old Kentucky family, father. Her grandfather helped to found a college down there."

Wayland's anxious desire to create a favorable impression of the women did not escape the lumberman, but his face remained quite expressionless as he replied:

"If the life of a cow-hand would give you the vigor this young lady appears to possess, I'm not sure but you'd better stick to it."

Wayland and the two women exchanged glances of relief.

"Why not tell him now?" they seemed to ask.

But he said: "There's a long story to tell before we decide on my career. Let's finish our lunch. How is mother, and how are the girls?"

Once, in the midst of a lame pursuit of other topics, the elder Norcross again fixed his eyes on Bera, saying: "I wish my girls had your weight and color." He paused a moment, then resumed with weary infliction: "Mrs. Norcross has always been delicate, and all her children—even her son—take after her. I've maintained a private and very expensive hospital for nearly thirty years."

This regretful note in his father's voice gave Wayland confidence. His spirits rose.

"Come, let's adjourn to the parlor and talk things over at our ease."

They all followed him, and after showing the mother and daughter to their seats near a window he drew his father into a corner, and in rapid undertone related the story of his first meeting with Berrie, of his trouble with young Belden, of his camping trip, minutely describing the encounter on the mountainside, and ended by saying,

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with manly directness: "I would be up there in the mountains in a box if Berrie had not intervened. She's a noble girl, father, and is foolish enough to like me, and I'm going to marry her and try to make her happy."

The old lumberman, who had listened intently all through this impassioned story, displayed no sign of surprise at its closing declaration; but his eyes explored his son's soul with calm abstraction. "Send her over to me," he said, at last. "Marriage is a serious matter. I want to talk with her—alone."

Wayland went back to the women with an air of victory. "He wants to see you, Berrie. He's mellowing. Don't be afraid of him."

She might have resented the father's lack of gallantry; but she did not. On the contrary, she rose and walked resolutely over to where he sat, quite ready to defend herself. He did not rise to meet her, but she did not count that against him, for there was nothing essentially rude in his manner. He was merely her elder, and inert.

"Sit down," he said, not unkindly. "I want to have you tell me about my son. He has been telling me all about you. Now let's have your side of the story."

She took a seat and faced him with eyes as steady as his own. "Where shall I begin?" she bluntly challenged.

"He wants to marry you. Now, it seems to me that seven weeks is very short acquaintance for a decision like that. Are you sure you want him?"

"Yes, sir; lam." Her answer was most decided.

His voice was slightly cynical as he went on. "But you were tolerably sure about that other fellow—that rancher with the fancy name—weren't you?" She flushed at this, but waited for him to go on. "Don't you think it possible that your fancy for Wayland is also temporary?"

"No, sir!" she bravely declared. "I never felt toward any one the way I do toward Wayland. He's different. I shall never change toward him."

Her tone, her expression of eyes stopped this line of inquiry. He took up another. "Now, my dear young lady, I am a business man as well as a father, and the marriage of my son is a weighty matter. He is my main dependence. I am hoping to have him take up and carry on my business. To be quite candid, I didn't expect him to select his wife from a Colorado ranch. I considered him out of the danger-zone. I have always understood that women were scarce in the mountains. Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not one of those fools who are always trying to marry their sons and daughters into the ranks of the idle rich. I don't care a hang about social position, and I've got money enough for my son and my son's wife. But he's all the boy I have, and I don't want him to make a mistake."

"Neither do I," she answered, simply, her eyes suffused with tears. "If I thought he would be sorry—"

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He interrupted again. "Oh, you can't tell that now. Any marriage is a risk. I don't say he's making a mistake in selecting you. You may be just the woman he needs. Only I want to be consulted. I want to know more about you. He tells me you have taken an active part in the management of the ranch and the forest. Is that true?"

"I've always worked with my father—yes, sir."

"You like that kind of life?"

"I don't know much about any other kind. Yes, I like it. But I've had enough of it. I'm willing to change."

"Well, how about city life—housekeeping and all that?"

"So long as I am with Wayland I sha'n't mind what I do or where I live."

"At the same time you figure he's going to have a large income, I suppose? He's told you of his rich father, hasn't he?"

Berrie's tone was a shade resentful of his insinuation. "He has never said much about his family one way or another. He only said you wanted him to go into business in Chicago, and that he wanted to do something else. Of course, I could see by his ways and the clothes he wore that he'd been brought up in what we'd call luxury, but we never inquired into his affairs."

"And you didn't care?"

"Well, not that, exactly. But money don't count for as much with us in the valley as it does in the East. Wayland seemed so kind of sick and lonesome, and I felt sorry for him the first time I saw him. I felt like mothering him. And then his way of talking, of looking at things was so new and beautiful to me I couldn't help caring for him. I had never met any one like him. I thought he was a 'lunger'—"

"A what?"

"A consumptive; that is, I did at first. And it bothered me. It seemed terrible that any one so fine should be condemned like that—and so—I did all I could to help him, to make him happy. I thought he hadn't long to live. Everything he said and did was wonderful to me, like poetry and music. And then when he began to grow stronger and I saw that he was going to get well, and Cliff went on the rampage and showed the yellow streak, and I gave him back his ring—I didn't know even then how much Wayland meant to me. But on our trip over the Range I understood. He meant everything to me. He made Cliff seem like a savage, and I wanted him to know it. I'm not ashamed of loving him. I want to make him happy, and if he wishes me to be his wife I'll go anywhere he says—only I think he should stay out here till he gets entirely well."

The old man's eyes softened during her plea, and at its close a slight smile moved the comers of his mouth. "You've thought it all out, I see. Your mind is clear and your conscience easy. Well, I like your spirit. I guess he's right. The decision is up to you. But if he takes you and stays in Colorado he can't expect me to share the

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profits of my business with him, can he? He'll have to make his own way." He rose and held out his hand. "However, I'm persuaded he's in good hands."

She took his hand, not knowing just what to reply. He examined her fingers with intent gaze.

"I didn't know any woman could have such a grip." He thoughtfully took her biceps in his left hand. "You are magnificent." Then, in ironical protest, he added: "Good God, no! I can't have you come into my family. You'd make caricatures of my wife and daughters. Are all the girls out in the valley like you?"

She laughed. "No. Most of them pride themselves on *not* being horsewomen. Mighty few of 'em ever ride a horse. I'm a kind of a tomboy to them."

"I'm sorry to hear that. It's the same old story. I suppose they'd all like to live in the city and wear low-necked gowns and high-heeled shoes. No, I can't consent to your marriage with my son. I must save you from corruption. Go back to the ranch. I can see already signs of your deterioration. Except for your color and that grip you already look like upper Broadway. The next thing will be a slit skirt and a diamond garter."

She flushed redly, conscious of her new corset, her silk stockings, and her pinching shoes. "It's all on the outside," she declared. "Under this toggerly I'm the same old trailer. It don't take long to get rid of these things. I'm just playing a part to-day—for you."

He smiled and dropped her hand. "No, no. You've said good-bye to the cinch, I can see that. You're on the road to opera boxes and limousines. What is your plan? What would you advise Wayland to do if you knew I was hard against his marrying you? Come, now, I can see you're a clear-sighted individual. What can he do to earn a living? How will you live without my aid? Have you figured on these things?"

"Yes; I'm going to ask my father to buy a ranch near here, where mother can have more of the comforts of life, and where we can all live together till Wayland is able to stand city life again. Then, if you want him to go East, I will go with him."

They had moved slowly back toward the others, and as Wayland came to meet them Norcross said, with dry humor: "I admire your lady of the cinch hand. She seems to be a person of singular good nature and most uncommon shrewd—"

Wayland, interrupting, caught at his father's hand and wrung it frenziedly. "I'm glad—"

"Here! Here!" A look of pain covered the father's face. "That's the fist she put in the press."

They all laughed at his joke, and then he gravely resumed. "I say I admire her, but it's a shame to ask such a girl to marry an invalid like you. Furthermore, I won't have her taken East. She'd bleach out and lose that grip in a year. I won't have her contaminated by

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the city." He mused deeply while looking at his son. "Would life on a wheat-ranch accessible to this hotel by motor-car be endurable to you?"

"You mean with Berea?"

"If she'll go. Mind you, I don't advise her to do it!" he added, interrupting his son's outcry. "I think she's taking all the chances." He turned to Mrs. McFarlane. "I'm old-fashioned in my notions of marriage, Mrs. McFarlane. I grew up when women were helpmates, such as, I judge, you've been. Of course, it's all guesswork to me at the moment; but I have an impression that my son has fallen into an unusual run of luck. As I understand it, you're all out for a pleasure trip. Now, my private car is over in the yards, and I suggest you all come along with me to California—"

"Governor, you're a wonder!" exclaimed Wayland.

"That'll give us time to get better acquainted, and if we all like one another just as well when we get back—well, we'll buy the best farm in the North Platte and—"

"It's a cinch we get that ranch," interrupted Wayland, with a triumphant glance at Berea.

"Don't be so sure of it!" replied the lumberman. "A private car, like a yacht, is a terrible test of friendship." But his warning held no terrors for the young lovers. They had entered upon certainties.

THE END