

Prologue to Love

By
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CHAPTER X—Continued

Before Autumn was aware that there had come any change in the immobility of his posture, Bruce had seized her wrist and turned her about so that she stood facing him. "I should like you to know, just the same," he said.

As he spoke, he drew her violently to him. For an electrifying instant, she knew that all her resistance had crumbled within her and that she was responding to his almost brutal kiss with a fierce and overwhelming joy. Then, with all the strength of her arms, she beat against him, striving to tear herself away from his crushing embrace.

With a low laugh, Bruce grasped her shoulders and flung her from him, so that she reeled backward against the wall of the cabin. She stood, gasping in rage and terror, unable to speak, while he lit another cigarette and lounged indifferently again on the table's edge.

"Now—you have the reason," he said. "You had better not come here again."

She looked across at him, unable at first to give place to the terrifying conviction that had come suddenly upon her. She had done more than cure him of his love for her—she had destroyed even his respect for her.

In a moment she was out of the door into the blindness of a dying sky, a dying world, into a forlorn space that was hollow with the moan of death.

CHAPTER XI

Autumn had gone to the drawing room immediately after dinner and had seated herself at the piano. During the hour she had sat at the table with her father, she had done her best to bring him out of his solitary brooding. But her own frame of mind had been too desolate to make the task easy. She was sorry for him, inexpressibly so.

For weeks Autumn had watched him fighting alone, retreating before the heartless bludgeonings of his own conscience, recovering himself again and beating his way back to a position of self-respect and renewed faith in himself. And always Autumn knew that his love for her was the one precious thing in his life. It was because of her, the daughter of Millicent, that he refused to give up the fight, and because of the memory of Millicent that lived in her.

It was only natural, perhaps, that he should be blind to the fact that by his stubborn struggle he was drawing his daughter into the conflict. He had thought to avoid that by keeping her where she would never have known of it. Had she been content to remain in England, Jarvis would have fought through to the end and died in the comforting knowledge that she could at least begin her own life and live it as she pleased, without the unhappy heritage of the past.

And now another evening was coming serenely to a close, as though the stars of the night before, when she had gone alone to see Bruce, had not shrunk out of the sky, as though all beauty had not become ashes in her heart. Jarvis had gone to his library after dinner, and Autumn sat at the piano, her hands idling over the keys, her eyes inattentively noting the blue dusk that stole from the open window and made a strange, impalpable color of a great bowl of yellow roses.

Presently her hands fell from the keyboard and lay listlessly in her lap. At a sound from the hall, she turned and saw her father standing in the doorway, his cigar in his fingers, his eyes fixed upon her with an unwonted tenderness.

"What was that you were playing, Autumn?" he asked after a moment.

"That was Grondahl's 'Serenade,' Da," she told him.

"I've heard you play it before—and I've asked the name of it," he said, "but I can never seem to remember. Play it again. I like it."

He came into the room and went to a large chair that stood to one side of the French windows where he sat gazing out into the fitful light of the garden as Autumn played. When she came to the end at last, he did not speak, and Autumn got up and moved to the console where the roses stood. She caressed an opulent, full-blown, yellow bloom with thoughtful fingers.

"No more music?" Jarvis enquired at last, a wistful note in his voice that hurt the bruised part of her being.

"Perhaps—later," she said quietly.

"Aye," he said. "I suppose one must be in the mood for it. But that bit, now—the one you just played—means something. It brings a light to one when he hears it."

Old Saint Pat ambled into the room and settled himself on a rug at his master's feet. Autumn left the roses and walked to a chair near her father's.

"Da," she said gently, "what would you say to my going back to Aunt Flo?"

The Laird turned slowly in his chair and looked at her across his shoulder. She glanced at him in-souciantly, almost without interest

in how he should respond to her question. She had really not meant it for a question so much as an announcement.

But the helpless, almost childlike look of dejection that appeared promptly in his eyes gave her a moment's disquietude.

He bent forward and clasped his hands. "You wish to go, Autumn?" he asked, his voice grown wistful.

"Da," she replied, "one can't always do just what one would like to do. I came here because I wanted to—and I've managed to make a mess of everything since I've come."

Jarvis sighed heavily. "I'm sorry, my dear. It hasn't been your fault, either."

"It's the fault of no one in particular," Autumn said. "It was just in the cards."

"Aye. I know. You're still thinking of Geoffrey's son. Isn't that it?"

"I'm thinking—of everything," she responded. "I can't go on living here—with things as they are. I've done my best, Da—or my worst, perhaps, you would say. It will be easier for everyone concerned if I get back to the other side of the world."

She got up again and went to stand before the window. There followed a long silence burdened with the impasse to which their emotions had come. She heard her father clear his throat with a deep rumble, and then she knew that he had risen and was coming slowly toward her. His hand lay for a moment gently upon her shoulder, but she did not turn to look at him.

"I'm sorry, my girl," he muttered. "I cannot tell you how sorry I am. I had hoped—somehow—that you might be happy here—after a time—in spite of everything. I had hoped for too much, it seems."

"I had, too," Autumn replied. "But it wasn't to be."

"I shall miss you more now than ever," Jarvis said, and then, after a long silence: "But you must not stay because of that, Autumn."

"You are making it easy for me to go," Autumn said, somewhat abruptly in spite of herself.

The old man went back to his chair. "Autumn," he said at last, "don't be impatient with me tonight. I'm tired—and your music—"

"I didn't mean that, Da," she said quickly and went to him at once. The Laird's head sank forward, his eyes staring out upon the garden. "I'd be just as glad if I could make it easy for you to stay," he said. "Sometimes I think you—"

His voice stopped and he swept his eyes with his hand. Autumn threw her arms around him and pressed him close to her in silence. Presently he freed himself gently from her embrace.

"You think of your father as a coward, Autumn," he said stoutly. "I may have more courage than you know. Yesterday—when the boy came to see me—I thought I might tell him—tell him all that I told you one night upstairs there. I have my senses still, and I can see things still—with my own eyes. All your silly carrying-on this summer with that mad crowd of Elliot Parr's—it didn't blind me to the truth. I've known from the first what was behind it. I've spent days and nights thinking about it. And when the boy came—before he came to me, I thought—I thought—the right thing to do would be to tell him—so that he'd know—so that he'd understand. Then, I thought—he could do what he liked—and you could do what you liked—and I wouldn't raise a hand to stop it, one way or the other. But—there's no way of accounting for these things, it seems. He came to me—and he stood there as if he had been Geoffrey Lander himself—proud, insolent, careless—and I offered him money for the loss of his sheep. I don't think I expected him to take it—but his manner stirred something in me. It stirred the bitterness and the hatred and the pride that have filled me for twenty years—and I turned him out!" He paused for a moment. "And now—I am turning you out, it seems."

"No, Da," Autumn protested. "It isn't so. You mustn't say that. I am going back—as I told you—because I think it will be best for us all."

Jarvis Dean drew himself up. "Have him over—tonight—in the morning," he said. "Bring him here—and I'll tell him. I'll tell him all I told you. When he has heard—"

"Father, please!" Autumn pleaded. "That would only hurt Bruce—and it would only hurt me. You would be doing that for me, and it would be quite useless. If I love Bruce Lander, it's only another of my silly blunders. I'll get over it—with the ocean between us it ought to be easy. I'm not so hopeless that I shall go on forever breaking my heart over someone who doesn't care for me."

The Laird raised his head and looked at her. "You mean—he—"

"I mean—he doesn't love me, Da," she said, smiling down at him. "though there's nothing so strange about that."

Jarvis was thoughtful for a moment. Then he got up quickly and stood looking at his half-smoked cigar. "I didn't think he'd be such a damned young fool!" he said.

Autumn laughed suddenly, but the

Laird looked at her sternly. "It'll be as you say, then," he said. "It's better so. I'll sell up in the fall and join you."

He patted her shoulder in awkward and inarticulate compassion, and turned away. She could hear his retreating steps on the polished floor, heavy and measured and pondering. To her defeated spirit, it seemed that those footsteps sounded the inexorable, iron stride of the past crushing down the present and the future.

She looked out upon the blurred garden with eyes dull in resignation.

During the days that followed, Jarvis Dean's spirits were lighter than they had been for months. To be sure, it was not pleasant to think that Autumn was leaving the place to which she had come such a short time ago, her heart swelling with anticipation of what the future held for her, her mind full of plans for the new life she was entering. He was sorry for her. And yet, the irking uncertainty of those weeks had been almost more than he could bear at times. Autumn's decision to return to the Old Country had relieved him of that, at least. His own resolve to sell everything and follow her as soon as it could be managed without too great a sacrifice had brought its regrets, its pang of loneliness, but that had



"I've done my best, Da—or my worst."

passed. He had a clear road before him now. He would leave behind him the past and all its burden of unhappiness and spend the rest of his days in a manner befitting a man of ample means whose declining years might easily be his brightest.

It was some such feeling that possessed him as he looked at Autumn now, sitting opposite him at the breakfast table. He had ordered an early breakfast so that he might leave in good time on his journey into the hills to inspect his flocks and to take up some supplies to old Absalom Peek. Tom Willmar had been making the trips back and forth during the summer, but Jarvis was in the habit of going himself at least once during the season. Besides, he had given instructions to have the young Irish lad, Clancy Shane, drive out the few hundred sheep that had been culled from the range and were being brought down to be sold. He wanted to spend a half hour with the boy and assure himself that everything was coming along as it should.

"You might make the trip in with me today, Autumn," he suggested, "if you have nothing else to do. It would be company for me and the drive would do you no harm."

"I thought of it last night," Autumn said. "It will be my last chance to see the flocks before I leave."

"Aye—that's so. Well, get yourself ready and I'll wait for you."

"I'll change in a jiffy, Da," she said, and left the table.

"Put enough lunch in the box for the two of us, then," Jarvis told Hannah. "We'll be back for dinner late."

They were on the road before the day was more than a bright flame on the eastern hilltops and Autumn was guiding the car over the smooth trail at a speed that made her father grip the edges of the seat with both hands.

"The trail will be rougher higher up, Da," she explained once when she glanced sideways at him and saw the grim set of his face. "We'll make good time now and loaf later on."

Noon brought them within sight of the small flock that Clancy Shane was bringing down from the upper ranges and Autumn waited in the car while her father walked down into the valley. Half an hour later he came back.

"I think I'll stay along with Moony," he said. "If you want to go along by yourself and have a word with Absalom, you can pick me up on the way back."

"I'll do that, Da," she said. "Have you any message for Absalom?"

"Just give him the box of stuff

there in the back of the car and tell him I'll be up myself maybe in a week or two."

Autumn started the motor and put her hand on the gear shift.

"Here, now—wait a bit!" Jarvis shouted. "We'll eat first."

For a full hour, Autumn and her father talked and laughed together as they had not done since she was a child. When she got up to go at last, Jarvis went with her to the car and leaned over to kiss her before she started away.

"So long, darling," Autumn called as she put the car into the trail again. "I'll be back before you know it."

Jarvis stood shading his eyes against the mid-day sun, until the car vanished around a bend in the trail, and an inexplicable sadness came over him. He had been too happy for the past hour. He turned and picked his way slowly down into the valley.

It was not until Autumn's visit with Absalom Peek had come to an end and she was preparing to hurry away that she found the courage to tell him that she was bidding him good-bye for the last time. She had stayed with the old herder much longer than she had planned.

"You'll be comin' up again, like as not," Absalom said as they strolled together toward Autumn's car.

"I'm afraid not, Absalom," she told him. "I'm never coming again."

"Eh?" The old man looked at her in surprise.

"I'm going back again—to England, Absalom."

"Now, now! What's wrong, eh?"

"There's nothing wrong, Absalom. I'm just—out of place here."

Absalom thrust his fingers under his weathered hat and scratched his head.

"Well, well," he said at last. "It isn't much of a place for a young girl, I know. It'll go hard with the Laird, I'm thinkin', losin' you again just when he's got used to havin' you round."

Autumn hesitated before she made her reply. After all, it would do no good to tell him that her father had decided to spend the rest of his days abroad.

"I haven't been much of a help to him, I'm afraid," she replied.

"He's past help, that man," Absalom said suddenly. "Not but what he's been a great man in his day. But he's not livin', Miss Autumn."

"Poor Da," Autumn murmured. "He hasn't had an easy life."

"That's right enough. He hasn't. But he won't make it easier by packin' you off to that—"

"He's not sending me away, Absalom," she hastened to assure him. "I'm going because I want to."

Absalom regarded her quizzically. "There's more behind it than that, I'm thinkin'. Though I'm askin' no questions, mind."

She was so staunchly cheerful in her farewell to Absalom, but a hot mist came between her eyes and that unforgettable picture there on the hillside below them. And then, in a moment, she was gone and old Absalom had turned again to his solitary task.

Very late that night, when Autumn lay awake and allowed her mind to drift sleepily back over the journey into the hills, it seemed to her that what she had beheld in the cycle of that day had been sunrise and sunset on the moon, or on some bizarrely landscaped planet hitherto only a fantastic dream in the mind of man. Early morning had clawed great, long scars of black valley down the pale, colossal faces of the hills, frightening and thrilling in their report of what this land had been in ages gone. Noon had made insubstantial islands of the mountain tops, swimming in their mists as on the white lambency of some primordial sea. And in the twilight, the dark patches of pine that marked the valleys in that broad expanse might have been the spoor of creatures unthinkable, in an unthinkable chaos of the earth.

No more of that now! Back again to the artificial, the purposeless life she had known with Aunt Flo. Forget that there had ever been anything else. Forget the reverent somber brow of a mountain bared to the moon. Forget a star unfolding like a bloom of sweet loneliness in the luminous, unnameable color of a summer sky. Forget the drift of mountain rain in the spring, and the fiery torches of Indian paint brush on the gaunt hills. Forget Bruce Lander, and the curious, heartless, dear ways of love, forever.

CHAPTER XII

On an evening within a week of the time set for Autumn's departure, Florian Parr telephoned from Hector Cardigan's place and invited her to go with him to the Hospital Benefit Ball that night in Kamloops.

"Linda is here with me," Florian said. "I had to come up on business, but I see no reason why we shouldn't mix in a little pleasure with it. We brought our duds and we're all dolled up. We haven't seen anything of you for two weeks. I'll run out in the car for you if you say so. How about it?"

"I don't know, Florian," she temporized. "I'm not much in the mood for it."

"Oh, come on!" he urged her. "Where's your community spirit? The natives will never forgive you if you don't support the cause. Hector has promised to chaperon us."

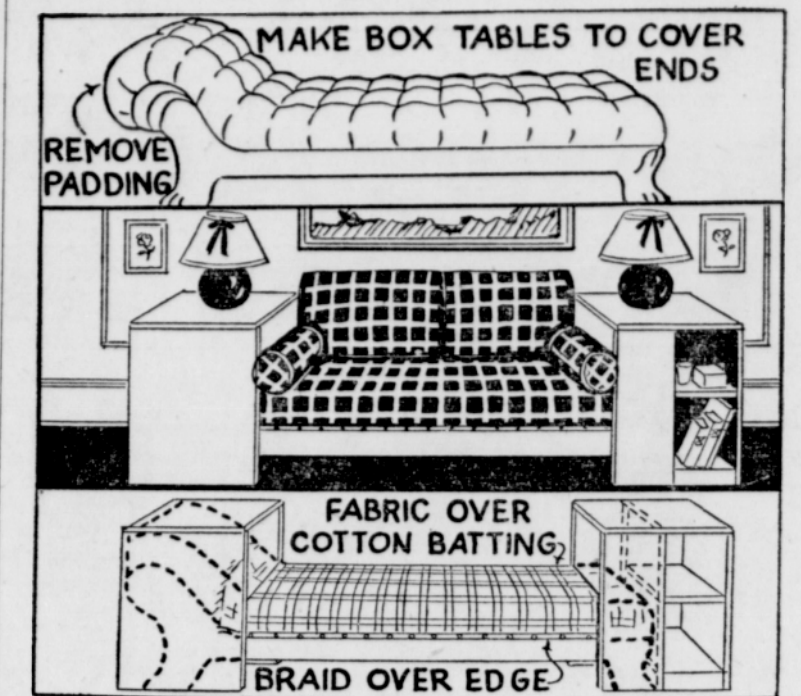
Florian laughed in a meaningful, naive way which nettled her disproportionately.

"Even you think I ought to have someone to look after me," she replied.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

HOW TO SEW

by Ruth Wyeth Spears



An old couch goes modern.

WAS there a couch like the picture at the top of this sketch, in the family "sitting room" when you were a child? Let's get it down from the attic, for just see what can be done with it! Properly streamlined it will look like the middle picture.

First paint the front of frame; then cover well up onto the head portion with cotton batting; next use bright cotton upholstery material. Remove stuffing at high end. Now, make box-like end tables like those illustrated. The dotted lines indicate how the couch fits under these box tables and how a partition and shelves

are put in the one at the lower end. Paint tables to harmonize with fabric. The final touch is the back and end cushions covered with the upholstery material.

NOTE: Full directions for changing an old iron bed into the latest style, are given in Mrs. Spears' Book No. 3; also step-by-step directions for making "The Rug That Grew Up With the Family." Thirty-two pages of fascinating ideas for Homemakers. Ask for Book 3, enclosing 10 cents in coin to cover cost. Address: Mrs. Spears, Drawer 10, Bedford Hills, New York.

AROUND the HOUSE

Items of Interest to the Housewife

To remove feathers from ducks, first pick them dry. This leaves a down all over the skin. To remove the down, wring out a large cloth in boiling water and wrap it around the duck for five minutes. Remove the cloth and the down can be wiped off easily with a dry cloth.

When straining the pulp from liquid such as orange juice, if a piece of cheesecloth is placed inside a strainer none of the pulp can go through.

Give house plants an occasional feeding of a teaspoonful of bone meal dug into the earth in flower pots.

Give your cacti plants all the light possible during the winter. Keep in a cool place and in a dry atmosphere.

Tips of canned asparagus may be removed whole if the bottom instead of the top of can is opened.

As chocolate burns easily, it is safest to melt it over hot water.

Grape Juice With Grapefruit.—Two tablespoons of grape juice added to a grapefruit after it has been cut gives a delicious flavor and a pretty color.

To prevent gowns slipping from wooden coat hangers, cover the hangers with velvet.

Where There's a Will Things Usually Get Done!

The teacher was examining the pupils in arithmetic.

"Now," he said, "I'll give you one more sum. If a cat falls down a bottomless well, and for every two feet it climbs up it falls down three, how long will it take to get out?"

One boy took a slate, and after filling both sides with a mass of figures, asked for another.

"Good gracious!" snapped the teacher, "haven't you the sense to see the cat will never get out?"

"Don't be in a hurry, sir," replied the boy. "There's plenty of time and heaps more slates. If you wait long enough, I'll bring the little beggar out in Australia."

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NR TO-NIGHT

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