HESPER

...BY...

HAMLIN GARLAND

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HAPTER XI CONTINUED

lad's face was suddenly illumi-
He threw out his small palm.
o it!" he cried out, and his tone
conviction.
mond continued: "You like me,
like you. You can't live in the
s, and your sister can't live
So it seems that I must be your
other and look after you. And,
e, you must mind what I say,
take a birch to you."
threat seemed not to appall the
"Can I work in the mine?"
; you can't work in the mine, but
d something on top for you to
ou must take care of those lungs
urs for awhile. But come, let's
we can't catch the stage."
let me stay till tomorrow!"
d the boy. "I don't want to go
It's too beautiful to miss."
mond reflected a moment. "Very
but you'll want that stage ride.
ne of the finest roads in the
tains. You rattle down the can-
omorrow, sure thing. Remember

gether they went down toward the
where a group of men were
ing a log cabin. "Here is where
re to live, provided your sister
nts."
nett came riding up the hill about
wn and immediately at sight of
began a jocose tirade. "You
p! You young flyaway! A nice
de you've given us. Ann hadn't
a wink for a week till she got
message yesterday. How long
you been here?"
ymond hastened to say, "I induced
to wire as soon as he turned up."
d you been here all the time, you
rattlepate?"
is was not afraid of Barnett.
I was down there looking for
He pointed toward the town of

ell, I'm to bring you home—in-
ly!"
uis took shelter behind Raymond.
you don't. Tell him, Rob."
ymond winked at Barnett. "He's
tomorrow on a promise to me.
I've made a bargain with him.
an tell you about it on the way.
ver, he is going by stage. He's
se."
en they were alone Barnett said:
most unaccountable of all things
human heart. That boy is crazy
you. By the way, how's the
?"
most as good as ever."
ur constitution is a wonder. And
ining deal?"
ery promising."
the talk that followed Raymond
ed for the first time of the pro-
consolidation of the Red Star
two or three other heavy proper-
and they fell into a discussion of
camp.
f I had my way," said Barnett,
have this meddling idiot Larned
wn out of the camp. What busi-
has he here? He's a rank out-
r anyway, and this union is a
der of war."
aymond raised a warning hand.
reful, Don. It doesn't do for you to
such things up here. This union
come to stay, and you who employ
r will do well to treat it with a
ain measure of respect."
But you're an employer too."
aymond laughed. "Oh, my little
don't count. They're all pros-
tors or cowboys, and, besides, I
k right with them and am classed
a working miner. Your case is dif-
ent."
arnett went away calmly superior.
came back from a conference with
kay, the superintendent of the Red
r, less haughty of manner, but dis-
tly more acrid of tone. "Mackay
this confounded union is growing
ly and that practically every in-
ing miner joins at once. I told him
ip the thing in the bud, and he has
n to formulate a plan to do so."
Wait a year," warned Raymond.
ait till I pay for my mine."
hat night as Louis sat before the fire
the center of the unfinished cabin
face shone with joy and the heart
the tall miner grew very tender to-
rd him. It was good to have this
young brother of his love to keep
company. A new sensation arose
n having some one to plan for and
protect.
he dreaming lad, outstretched on a
e of blankets with his hands under
head and his small feet, clothed in
ccasins, extended to the blaze, sud-
ly turned and said: "Rob, this is
kind of life for me. Wouldn't fa-
r have liked this? I'd be perfectly
ppy if I didn't have to pack off down
hill tomorrow. Why couldn't Ann
e up here?"
Maybe, by and by, when we get our
in fixed up, we will ask your sister
d Mrs. Barnett to come up and visit
," said Raymond.
Louis started up. "Oh, will you? If
n were here I would never want to
back east again—never! I could
e here always."
A foot outside disturbed Raymond,
d a man's voice called, "Is Rob Ray-
nd here?"
In the unfinished doorway stood a
eerful young fellow in a white som-
ero and a neatly fitting dark suit.
ark Munro!" exclaimed Raymond,
d they shook hands. "Sit down.
is is a boy friend of mine from the

Springs," he said, indicating Louis. "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, old man. Just lined you out today. I heard that a man named Raymond had taken a lease with Kelly, but I didn't know it was you till I saw you with Barnett today. Well, this is wonderful! Where you from? What have you been doing since we—graduated?" There was something in his voice that eluded Louis. Raymond gave Munro a warning glance.

"Oh, a little of everything—cattle ranching, hunting, mining. I saw you last night in Hanley's saloon."

"Why didn't you speak up?"

Raymond hesitated. "I didn't know whether you"—

"Oh, rats! I'm not one to dodge. What did getting fired amount to anyway? I was ready to leave."

Raymond repeated his warning sign. "Have you been back—home?"

Munro smiled broadly. "You bet! I went back and swelled around in high feathers—told my side of the story—understand? I didn't let the institution get the drop on me. But, see here, come up to the saloon; I want to talk things over with you. The boys are bound to make me take a hand in this union."

"Can't do it now, Jack. But come down again. Louis is going back tomorrow, and I'll be alone for a day or two, and then we can talk freely."

"All right. There are a whole lot of things I want to turn over. By the Lord, this is wonderful—our meeting up here!" He was reluctant to go. "You bring up the old days. Well, so long."

When Raymond returned to his seat his face was grave and his eyes deeply reflective.

Louis was much interested in the stranger. "Who was that, Rob?"

"A chap I used to know."

Next morning after breakfast Raymond hurried Louis off down the canyon to the stage and in his letter to Ann repeated his pledge to look carefully after the boy's health and to keep him out of mischief.

Louis arrived at the Springs fairly hysterical with joy over his wonderful day's ride and set about to describe Skytown.

His absence had been a revelation of his value to Ann. She had not realized up to that moment how deeply his care was woven into her daily life. It was jealousy of Raymond's power—an acid juice—which had turned her pity for him, while wounded and helpless, into resentment, and now that he was well and triumphantly drawing the boy to his side her heart was bitter with hatred, but she gave her consent to Louis' return because she dared not do otherwise, and in a letter to Raymond she said:

I resign Louis into your hands, because his happiness is more than my own and because he no longer regards my wishes. I have heard much of the gambling and drinking of mining camps. I beg of you to guard him. He is so fine and sweet now, and defilement is so easy.

Upon reading this letter the camp suddenly became a dark and dangerous place to the young miner. He found it harder to make excuse for profanity and foul jests of the miners, and he went less and less among them and spent more of his time with the lad watching him draw or listening to him while he read.

Their cabin became the center of the finer spirits of the camp. Dolan and one or two of his friends often came in of an evening to smoke a pipe and play a friendly game of cards. "A visit to the bungalow always pays," said one young fellow whose weakness was drink. "They send a fellow away feeling respectable."

Mrs. Kelly supervised the housekeeping as well as she could, and the

"This is a boy friend of mine."

place was at least warm and cheerful. Once a fortnight Louis rode down the trail to spend Sunday with Ann, but Raymond steadily refused to join him, though he suffered keenly of loneliness. —"I am a miner now," he said. "I've taken myself out of that life." And Louis did not know when he carried these words to his sister that they conveyed a deeper meaning. Ann was aware that Raymond was holding aloof from her, and, while she respected him for his consideration, she was, after all, a woman and resented his self mastery a little.

She was beginning to be bored to hopelessness by the narrow life at the Springs, under conditions which seemed to the outsider ideally beautiful. But Louis came down each time browner, more manly in bearing—almost comical in his assumption of Kelly's walk and Raymond's impassive face. He always had exciting tales to tell and seemed so entirely happy and so well that Ann had not the heart to ask him to return east with her. She even found herself listening with interest to his account of the doings of his heroes, for he had placed Matthew Kelly on the same pedestal with Robert.

Mrs. Barnett responded graciously to his invitation to come up and see the peak, but explained that the high altitude was destructive to her, and Ann shrank from meeting Raymond again, though she expressed to him in a letter a tepid sort of gratitude for his care of her brother.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE day Barnett telephoned to his wife that he would not take luncheon at home. There was nothing unusual in the words of this announcement, but Jeannette's keen ear detected restrained excitement in his calm drawl.

"What's the matter?" she asked quickly.

"Nothing, my dear; nothing," he glibly responded.

"Don Barnett, I know better. Tell me this instant!"

He was in for it. "Well, Mr. Mackay, our superintendent, was tarred and ridden on a rail by the miners this morning"—

"Gracious heavens!"

—"and I'm getting off up the stage road to meet him."

"What did they do it for?"

"Oh, it's the same old business. The men didn't like some regulation of his and struck, and—but it's a long story; I won't go into it now. I'll get back in time for dinner, probably."

In an hour Millionaire row was humming with news of the outrage. Reports, confused, conflicting, flew along the wires east and west, and the afternoon papers were filled with dramatic details of the opening of a big strike in Skytown and the story of how the union leaders had mishandled Mackay, the superintendent of the Red Star Mining corporation.

All this would have interested Ann very little had not her brother been in the midst of the disorder. She immediately wired Raymond to come down and got a reply from him saying, "Louis is on the way—" himself came riding in at dusk.

Raymond's letter to Barnett took serious view of the situation:

I don't think Mackay the proper man to attempt to reorganize the working hours of this camp. Don't try to put him back, and don't make too much of this little affair. The whole camp is uneasy at this time. The union is getting very strong and likely to make it hot for independents like Kelly and myself.

"What is it all about?" asked Jeannette.

Don looked bored. "Oh, really now, don't ask me to go into the cause of a strike. A woman never understands such a situation. However, here is what Rob says:

Mackay posted his notices Saturday night, putting the new nine hour schedule into effect Monday morning. Sunday the camp boiled. The union put forth its decree, and of course at the morning hour a big crowd gathered to see Mackay face his men. He came riding up (the jackass!) in tan colored English riding breeches and a little two billed gray cap—you know the kind. Of course they hooted him and headed his horse back down the slope. He was red headed, naturally, and, being a double distilled idiot, hired a couple of desperadoes from Bozie as guards and came back. This time the boys jerked him and his men from their horses and hustled them down the canyon at the boot toe. I did what I could to prevent this, but the men who had the matter in charge had been drinking, and the crowd was with them. My men are not in the union, but I hear ominous threats. I advise you not to attempt to put the new schedule into operation at the present time.

The effect on the valley of Mackay's recital of his maltreatment was most wonderful. The principal mine owners of the Springs met to discuss their campaign. The valley called for the blood of those who had dusted the sacred person of their representative, and the sheriff was ordered to arrest and bring down the insolent "red necks" who had humbled the proud and confident Red Star superintendent. "This spirit of lawlessness must be checked or it will run into riot," said Barnett, who developed unexpectedly into a leader of the mine owners by virtue of his large interests in the Red Star.

The sheriff valiantly responded to the call and, with a half dozen deputies, marched up into the glittering mist of the high peaks and came down again empty handed and sullen.

A meeting of the officers of the Red Star and allied companies was called, Barnett presiding. Most resolute resolutions were passed. Mackay was instructed to press his demands to the full. Barnett naturally opposed a conference with the miners. "Either they come to our terms or we close down the mines," he said. "It is our cue to be firm in this demand."

The sheriff, who had been invited to be present and tell his tale, put in a warning word.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you're dealing with a lot of free miners and prospectors—men who won't be driven and can't be scared. If it had been just a case of ignorant dagoes I would have brought 'em down, but they've got leaders that you can't monkey with. When Bob Smith, Denver Dan and that devil Jack Munro met me with their holsters tied down I threw up my hands. You are from the east, where things are different. About one-third of the men on the peak are old prospectors and free miners, and if they stay by the proposition you've got to take a sneak or put up the fight of the age."

"We stand pat," said Barnett, "and we shall insist on your arresting the men who assaulted Mr. Mackay."

The sheriff made an elaborate bow. "Right you are, Mr. Barnett, but I'll want a hundred deputies to do it with."

Moving with such secrecy as he could, the sheriff collected and swore in some ninety men, the boldest and hardiest to be found in all the towns of the valley. They were not sedate and considerate citizens, but they were brave, or at least reckless, and without exception experienced wearers of guns. They professed themselves quite able and willing to bring down anybody in the hills. After being armed and provisioned they were to be sent round by way of a railroad which was building toward the camp from the south.

Barnett was heedful of his words at home and made light of the probable opposition of the miners, but Louis, with a boy's ability to discern what was going on, soon acquired a pretty clear idea of the plan, and when Ann asked him not to return to the heights on Monday he was ominously calm, but asserted his right to go where he pleased.

"Rob wants me and needs me, and I'm going. You can put me in jail, but that is the only way. If there is going to be war, I am going to be in it, and I'm going to be on the side of the miners."

Ann wrote a swift and fervent note to Raymond:

I am trusting Louis to your care because he will not stay. You have won his heart from us, and we are powerless to prevent his return. Guard him, for the sake of his boyish sweetness, for my sake.

She wrote no further, for as her mind dwelt upon that camp of ruffian miners and their desire for battle a bitter resolution swept over her. "I will test his love for me." With cold intensity she announced her purpose. "If you insist on going back to that camp I shall go too."

"You must not go," said Louis. "It's no place for you."

"It is no place for you."

He, asserted himself again. "I can take care of myself."

"Mr. Raymond has asked me to keep you here." She went to him and put her arm about his neck. "Stay with me, laddie. I am missing you these days."

In the end she seemed to prevail, but she took no pleasure in her victory, for he went about the house like a young eagle pinioned. Nothing save the news of the camp interested him, and when the time came for the sheriff to start on his new raid he became greatly excited. "There'll be a battle," he said to Ann. "I'm going."

"No, no!" she pleaded.

He turned upon her with a resentful stamp of his heel. "I can't stay here like a kid."

She changed her tone. "Very well. When shall we start?"

He looked at her steadily, and into his eyes came a softer gleam. "I've just thought," he began reflectively; "you can stay with Mrs. Kelly till we build a wing for you. She's a nice woman and lives in the cunningest little log cabin. That settles it! We will go right away, today!"

Ann was at a loss, but did not show it. "If you are determined to go, then there is no use in waiting. Let us start at once!"

While Mrs. Barnett suggested what to wear Don ordered a carriage to take Ann and himself to the train, and Louis saddled his horse for his return trip up the stage road. "I'll beat you up," he shouted to Ann and galloped away with shining face.

The railway which ran up Bear canyon was still building and had not yet reached the divide, so that a stage ride of some twenty miles connected the town of Grand View with Sky camp. Ann and Barnett were noticeable persons in the car, which was filled with roughly clad workmen of all kinds. Ann was conscious of their admiration for her, and it deeply annoyed her. Two or three of the better dressed men, who were on speaking acquaintance with Barnett, came up to ask him what he thought of the strike.

"I didn't know it was a strike," said he, ignoring their evident desire to be introduced to Ann.

"Oh, it's a strike all right. Your man Mackay wasn't much hurt, was he?"

"Not badly."

"He was a little too previous. I hope the sheriff won't try to do anything more about it. The boys up at Sky are a little sharp set about that business. Ain't goin' up there yourself, are ye?"

"Yes; I've always been on good terms with my men. I think I can help to arrange some sort of a compromise."

The two miners looked at each other. At length the older of them said in a tone that meant a good deal to ears accustomed to western inflections: "Well, I reckon the whole thing has been exaggerated. My claim is just below Bozie, and so, of course, I don't know much more about Sky than you do. Still I wouldn't advise your going in at this time."

At Grand View a couple of stages met them, and as Ann waited on the platform for Don to secure a carriage she observed that on the seat of each of the coaches two guards sat, negligently nursing rifles which glittered in the sunlight. Soon the whips began to crack, and the coaches rolled away one by one, leaving Barnett to follow in a road wagon which he had hired for their own especial use.

The sun was sinking to midafternoon, and Mogalyon on the left was in full glory of ermine and saffron. The air was keen and crisp, the sky cloudless, and the road, except for an occasional mudhole, was very good. Barnett remarked, "We ought to pull into Bozie before dark on these roads."

Night came abruptly. A thin gray scum rose swiftly on the western sky and suddenly grayed the brightness of the sun. The world grew instantly stern and cold. The road, after climbing a ridge, descended into a gorge with firs on either side, and when they came out upon the flat meadow to the northwest of Mogalyon only the lights of Skytown could be seen.

At the moment that Don was pointing out the lights two horsemen appeared in front and in the middle of the road.

"Halt!" cried a clear voice.

The driver pulled his tired horses to a stand so energetically that his hands rose above his head.

"Is Donnelly Barnett with you?" asked one of the men as he rode nearer.

"I'm Barnett. What do you want of me?" asked Don coolly.

"Not a thing," answered the horseman. "That's just it. We have no use for you, and I've been watching to meet you and say that the boys want you to continue your quiet, uneventful life at the Springs."

"Who are you?"

"We're a couple of Skytown vedettes. Who is the lady?"

"That doesn't concern you. Go on, driver."

The driver took up the reins, but the voice of the vedette grew sterner, "Stay where you are!" Then, turning to Barnett: "I'm your best friend, Donnelly. The boys understand that you are backing Mackay in his plans, and it isn't safe for you to enter the camp. I advise you to turn around right here and go back."

Ann spoke up: "Please let us go on. Mr. Barnett is taking me in to meet my brother, and I am cold and hungry."

There was something thrilling in the calm, clear sweetness of her voice, and the first of the vedettes, pressing nearer, leaned from his saddle to ask:

"Who is your brother, lady?"

"His name is Louis Rupert. He is only a boy, and I am going in to care for him."

"Rob Raymond's kid. I know him," replied the vedette. "But I thought he was visiting you in the Springs."

"He was, but he went back to the camp today, and I am very anxious about him."

"He's all right, lady, so long as Rob Raymond has him in hand. You are welcome, but Barnett is on the outside and must stay there."

"I decline to acknowledge your authority," responded Barnett, now thoroughly angry.

The horseman laughed softly, irritatingly. "Strangers don't go with us at the present time. I must ask you to camp right here or go back to Grand View till I can communicate with the president of the union. If you are here to talk compromise the men will be glad to meet you, but my judgment is that you better retire to Grand View. I will see that this lady gets to her brother."

Ann was not a timid girl, but the thought of riding away into the blackness of the night with these sinister guards made her flesh chill and her nerves creep. "Don't leave me, Don," she whispered.

Barnett stormed at the horsemen. "It is impossible! If I am forced to go back she must go with me. What right have you to interfere in our plans?"

The answer came quickly, coldly, every word telling. "I'll tell you. The boys have learned that you have been chiefly instrumental in pushing the sheriff into another raid, and if trouble comes they'll kill you. It isn't safe for you to be on the hill tomorrow. Now you needn't be afraid to trust the lady to me." The vedette removed his hat. "I am not a man to be feared by women."

Ann again spoke. "I can't consent to your going into danger for me, Don. Turn back, and I will go on."

"It is madness!" he said in a low voice. "These men are not fit escorts for you. We will both go back and wait—until morning."

Ann's teeth were chattering with cold. "I dread that long drive. We must be almost at our destination."

The two horsemen conferred together, and at last one of them returned to say: "Driver, you may come on until you reach the first cabin at the foot of the hill. There the lady will get out, and you will drive Mr. Barnett back before daylight tomorrow morning."

As they drew up before the shanty door the leader of the vedettes rode forward and said gently: "Lady, the road from here to the summit is lined with cabins, and no harm can possibly come to you while I have you in charge. Or, if you like, you can stay here till morning; but I would advise you to go on to Mrs. Kelly's. There is no cabin suited to your needs on this side of the peak."

Ann, stiff and weary and hungry, rose in her seat with a sort of desperation. "I will go," she said with trembling voice.

The vedette, dismounting quickly, helped her to the ground, while the second man, leaning low on his horse, entered into a muttered conversation with an unkempt man in the doorway.

Barnett argued and insisted on going on to Kelly's.

"Not one step farther!" sternly commanded the vedette. "But you can sleep here till daylight if you wish."

Ann interposed. "Don, I beg of you to go home. I don't want you to go any farther. I am not afraid now. This man will take me to Mrs. Kelly's. I'm sure of it, and Louis will be there by this time, and Mr. Raymond."

"Sure thing, lady. And it isn't late—not more than 7 o'clock. We'll almost get there in time for supper. Can you ride a horse?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will put you on my saddle, and I will walk and lead the horse." The light from the doorway fell upon him as he approached her, and the sight of his boyish face reassured her.

As Barnett saw her rise to the saddle he burst out: "This is preposterous! You must not go up there. The boy isn't worth it. I'm going with you or fight!" He drew his revolver, but some one caught his hand from behind and twisted the weapon out of his grasp.

"Go on, Jack. We'll take care of him," called the man in the cabin door.

As the light of the lamp was left behind and the darkness settled round

"Halt!" cried a clear voice.

her a convulsive terror seized upon the girl. The horse, stumbling over loose rocks in the road, which ran back and forth on the hillside like folds of braid, passed now and again under dark and silent pines.

Once, as her guard came back toward her, something rose in her throat, some elemental dread, and her breath rushed hoarsely through her lips. "If Robert only knew my need of him," she thought, "he would surely come to me."

The man's voice was gentle as he said: "You see, lady, the camp is in a terrible excitement. We heard today that the sheriff was coming with a posse, and the boys kind o' hold five or six o' those one lungers in the Springs responsible. They are particularly down on Barnett for putting Mackay up to that trick. But you'll be perfectly safe at Kelly's."

At length Ann's leader turned to round a dark, high point of rocks, the trail began to descend and a few minutes later they came to a warmly lighted cabin, on the door of which the guide resolutely knocked. The latch was immediately lifted, and a small, pale woman with a blur of yellow hair about her head appeared in the light.

"Mrs. Kelly, I've brought you a boarder," began the vedette.

Ann caught sight of a boy at the table and gave a cry of joy. "Oh, Louis, Louis!"

With a whoop the boy rushed from the cabin and flung his arms around her.

"Oh, Ann, but I'm glad to see you! Where is Cousin Don? Which way did you come? Rob has gone down to Bozie to meet you."

Ann turned to thank her guide, who was looking at her with undisguised admiration.

"It was a great pleasure," he replied, with an assumption of grand manner. "Introduce me, please," he said to Mrs. Kelly.

"I must introduce myself first," said the little woman. "I am Mrs. Kelly, and your guard is Mr. Jack Munro."

Ann gave him her hand. "I thank Mr. Munro, but I think he should have allowed Mr. Barnett to come into shelter. It seemed cruel to send him back on that long, cold drive."

Munro remained unmoved. "Oh, he'll stay at Clayson's overnight."

Mrs. Kelly put in a word. "I think you better come into shelter. You must be cold and hungry. Won't you step inside, Mr. Munro?"

"No, thank you. It is a great temptation, but I've work to do."

And so, chilled and hungry, Ann entered the pleasant home of the Kellys, and the terror of the dark ride became a part of the outer world, shut away by the strong, rude door.

"Rob has gone down to the stage office," explained Mrs. Kelly. "We thought you'd come that way."

Mrs. Kelly put Ann down to some tea and cold meat, and while she was still at the table and in the midst of her story Raymond flung open the door.

"Here she is!" he called to some one behind him, and his white face and glowing eyes testified to his great anxiety.

Ann rose to meet him with a rush of trust and confidence that filled her throat and rendered her wordless, but she held her hand toward him.

He seized it. "I was greatly alarmed when I heard that you were coming alone. How did you come? How did you find the way?"

Ann then said, "Your friend Munro met us, turned Don back and piloted me up the hill."

Raymond turned to a big man who stood waiting. "Miss Rupert, this is Matthew Kelly, my mining partner."

Ann gave her hand into Kelly's enormous palm with a look of admiration. "I am glad to know you, Mr. Kelly. I have heard Louis speak of you very often."

Continued Next Week