

HESPER

BY
HAMLIN GARLAND

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CHAPTER XI CONTINUED

"Light 40. Well, you tell him that Rob Raymond borrowed him for a lady." He turned to Ann. "Come; we must get out of this."

She obeyed like a child, all her imperious nature in subjection to his will. Lifting her to the saddle, he led the horse out the back way and through an alley into the main street and so to the hills. As they reached a fairly level spot in the trail he turned and looked back over the roofs of the houses.

"The sheriff is retreating—wherein he shows good sense." He pointed above them, where on Pine mountain Munro's vedettes stood waiting, backed by a thousand miners, jocular with battle hunger, shouting faint defiance.

"I am sorry to be such a burden to you," said Ann. "I know you longed to be there with Matthew Kelly, and I have forced you to fight."

"I will be honest. I had that impulse. You see, I've been so in the habit of mixing in—but it was only a dash, for you were beside me." And then he added, "And you are more to me than any other thing in the world."

She had no reply to this, no near turn of phrase, no smile. She looked away in silence, her breath a little troubled, her throat contracted.

In fear of the effect of his words, Raymond hastened to the impersonal. "If this trouble is turned aside it will be due to Matt."

"Why should they obey him? Is he an officer?"

"Not now, but he was the first marshal of the camp and afterward chief of police. Everybody knows him, and his influence is as great as that of any one man. His presence here today undoubtedly prevented a desperate battle."

As they neared the Kelly cabin Raymond said: "I am deeply chagrined by this experience. I really thought we were going away from disorder."

"Please do not trouble your mind with it any more," she answered decisively. "It was an experience which will give me something new to think about."

Kelly did not return till late. At about 9 o'clock he knocked at Raymond's door. "Get your gun," he said quietly. "We're on guard tonight."

And together they paced to and fro on the hillside, listening to the yells of drunken men up the street and to distant gunshots as the storm of battle swept away to the south of them. By midnight all was silent. The sheriff's forces were either repulsed or captured.

CHAPTER XV.

NOTWITHSTANDING the excitement of the day, or perhaps because of them, Ann slept soundly. She was awakened as before, by the sound of the little coffee mill, but she did not rise as promptly as on the first morning and was still dozing when Nora appeared with a piece of corn cake and a cup of coffee.

"You feel tired this morning, I know. Well, now, take your breakfast in bed."

Ann was conscious smitten. "No, no; you poor dear thing! I am ashamed to have you waiting on me."

"It's so little—a mere spot or two." "Yes, but you have so many steps. After this I forbid you doing anything of the kind for me, and I've been thinking why can't we hire a Chinaman to work for us? Unless I can do something to relieve you I will not stay. You are tired. I wish you would ask Mr. Raymond to find us a helper today."

"Hello, sis!" shouted Louis. "Aren't you up yet? You'll never make a miter." Here he poked his head in at the door. "Jupiter, wasn't yesterday an exciting day? It makes me sick to think I didn't go down to Bozle with you. Rob has been telling me about Matt's shielding the sheriff. It must have been great. I was out on the hillside. We all thought the sheriff was coming up that way, but he didn't. He turned back and went into camp, and last night Jack went down and pitched into him, and they had a battle."

"They did? Was any one killed?" "Ten."

Nora gasped. "Merciful powers!" "So Perry says. Our side won." Ann frowned. "Our side! You are not taking sides with these lawless miners?"

Louis wished to sidetrack this discussion. "Our things have come."

"Have they? Very well; I'll get up at once and unpack. I want you to help me a little here."

"And I want you to help fix up our bungalow."

"Agreed. Now run away and find a hammer and some tacks."

Together they worked to render her room a little less bleak, and together they crossed the path to Raymond's cabin, where they toiled merrily. Ann was just leaving the bungalow to help Mrs. Kelly with the midday meal when Munro dashed up and swung himself from his horse.

"Good morning, lady Ann! How fares the day?"

Something unduly presuming in his tone, she looked at him and she gave him intended to check and humble

him. "I am quite well, thank you." He was not of those whom disdainful eyes abuse. He hugged himself and shivered ecstatically. "Wow, but that was a cold breeze! Some one must have left the bars down. You're not going to draw the line on me, are you? What do you know against me?"

"I know nothing against you or for you either," she replied.

She was turning to go when he stopped her, and his tone was hard and dry. "You were in Bozle yesterday with Raymond. Don't do that again. When you want an escort let me know. I'll send a man that knows enough not to take a lady into danger and who has 'savvy' enough to keep his horses for the return trip."

"Thank you. You are very kind, but I'm not in need of additional protection," Ann Kelly replied.

"Goodly till tomorrow," he called after her in mockery, his voice as musical as a lute.

This interview, short as it was, left the girl with the feeling of having been grasped and shaken by a rude hand. And yet her anger was not unalloyed with admiration. His magnificent audacity and the grace and dash of his advance interested her.

Raymond saw Munro riding away and wondered what his errand could have been, and when Louis told him that the gambler had stopped and detained Ann in the path his teeth set in anger. "The little hound!" he growled under his breath. "I'll put an end to that!"

Immediately upon finishing his supper he went up the path to Hanley's to find "the bookend." Munro was in his place, sitting high above his faro layout, clicking a couple of silver dollars together, talking with gleeful intensity to Denver Dan, who stood at his shoulder broadly smiling. The saloon was packed with men, all in high spirits over the precipitate flight of the sheriff.

Munro sighted him at last and called out: "Hello, Rob! How goes it?"

Raymond did not reply till he reached his side. "I want to talk with you, Jack," he said in a low voice.

Munro studied him for a moment, then turned to Dan. "Take my place a minute."

Dan complied, and Raymond led the way into the open air, and when they were well out of the crowd he turned and said:

"You intercepted Miss Rupert today?"

"I met her, yes. What about it?"

"Just this. You're not fit to shake the hand of a decent girl, much less a cultured, high bred woman like Ann Rupert, and you know it!"

Munro was staggered. "What business is it of yours?" he asked, with instant anger.

Raymond's wrath was self contained. "Keep your temper, Jack. We've summered and wintered together, and you can't make any mistakes about what I mean. I know the kind of women you live with and the kind of life you lead, and I tell you to keep away from the Kelly cabin."

Munro did not snarl as Raymond expected. His voice became softly insinuating as he said: "Suppose she was interested in my conversation? The lady had a chance to go. The path was open, but she lingered, she smiled."

"You're a liar!"

Munro was now very confident. "Am I? Ask the boy; he saw her talking with me. I say the lady was gracious."

The gambler took on the air of an injured comrade. "Now, see here, Rob; you're away out of limits. I acknowledge I've known a whole lot of cheap women, but that's all the more reason why I should be able to tell when I meet the real thing. Her name is as safe with me as with you. Probably she's tied up back in the states any way, so that neither of us has any chance of interesting her. But it's an open course and no favors, and so long as she doesn't hand me out the 'key milt' I'm going to make the most of my chance, and from this moment"—he took off his hat—"I reform. I throw up my job at Hanley's. I cut off 'booze' and I shake 'Eau Colonne'."

Raymond was impressed by his rival's manner. "You can quit gambling, and I hope you can quit liquor alone, but I see trouble when you shake Claire. But that doesn't matter. For the sake of old times I want to avoid a quarrel with you, Jack. But I warn you that if Miss Rupert finds your presence disagreeable you go, and you stay! As you say, she is probably engaged to a better man than either of us. But she is here because of the boy, and I feel a certain responsibility for them both, and the man who presumes on a chance acquaintance with her will answer to me."

"All right. Leave it to her, Rob," said Munro almost jocularly. "If she turns me down I'll pull out of my own accord, lightning sure. Good night!"

Raymond walked away with a sense of failure. Munro had directly writhed out of his grasp and was probably exulting at his own cleverness. He was lifting at his own confidence tone, which Munro had taken in saying, "The way was open; she lingered."

Out of the tumult of life doubt he emerged with an accession of courage.

He had been so in the habit of mixing in—but it was only a dash, for you were beside me." And then he added, "And you are more to me than any other thing in the world."

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as Jack's. Her tolerance of him is due to ignorance of his real character. Mrs. Kelly must tell her."

He saw the light in Kelly's home, and its allurement was stronger than ever before, but he resolutely held his way to his own fireside, there to bitterly nurse the entire evening over his poverty and the false position in which Munro had cleverly placed him.

He repeated of his resolute passing of her door when he heard next day that a couple of the independent operators had spent the entire evening with Kelly and that one of them talked a great deal to Ann. The sting of it lay in the fact that Tracy was a fine young fellow, studious and capable. "You are a fool," Raymond said to himself. "You threw away a chance to be happy. Don't do it again."

CHAPTER XVI.

NOT a day passed that the captain of the patrol did not ride down to the door of the Kelly cabin and leap from his saddle with some fanciful greeting, carefully and ornately uttered. So much he retained of his Kentucky breeding.

"The sheriff's army grows apace, but does not march," he announced one morning.

Ann could not understand this humorous defiance of law—this colossal recklessness. "What will you do when it does march?"

"Meet it and bust it."

"Tell me, now," she said to him at another time, "what is your real motive? Why should you be the champion of the rights of labor?"

He astonished her by giving back earnestness for earnestness. "I'll tell you, my lady. Labor has got to fight. This union is the coming thing. The toilers have not only got to stand together, but they've got to drill. I happen to have a little military training, and I'm going to give western labor its first lesson in the power of military organization."

"Rob and Kelly both stand for the thing that is going out. They think any man has the same chance they have, but I tell you this union that they despise is the coming order."

In truth, Kelly and Raymond were watching Munro's rise to power with growing uneasiness. He was now in almost complete control of the camp, and though he still deferred to the union and its committees, his reckless bravery, his prompt execution of orders and his knowledge of military forms had made of him the chief source of command, the only adequate regulative force on the peak. Those on the outside did not hesitate to call him "the arch devil of the district," and the whole western world was filled with his doings, his reckless speeches.

His fame had fired the hearts of all the dead shots and restless spirits of the west, and from an irregular squad of twenty-five or thirty men his forces had risen to nearly 200 heavily armed and hardy horsemen.

Raymond, though keeping keen eyes upon Munro, was unable to find cause for war in any word or act of the gambler, nor could he fathom Ann's mind either toward Munro or himself. She appeared to find Munro diverting and spoke of him only in that way. If she understood his "home life," it made no change in her attitude. It was inconceivable that a refined girl should tolerate a man who passed from one ignorant and vicious woman to another, and yet Ann's greeting remained gracious, if not friendly. What it was when they were alone, he dared not think.

As for Raymond himself, he continued to punish himself by putting aside the many opportunities which came to plead his own suit, and took a morbid sort of pleasure in his renunciation. "There will be one man at least who will not persecute her," he said savagely and bent his best energies to the work of developing his talism.

One afternoon as Ann and Mrs. Kelly sat sewing and chatting together a woman suddenly appeared in the open door. She was large and high colored, her hat was awry, and there was a wild glare in her eyes and a look in her face that froze even Nora into silence. Both stared at their strange visitor in breathless apprehension till she pointed her unsteady finger at Ann and hoarsely cried out:

"So you're the one that's cut me out?" The muscles of one cheek contorted and her eyelid drooped like that of a paralytic as she fixed a baleful look on the astonished girl. After a moment's pause she stepped uncertainly upon the threshold and leaped against the jamb. "Well, you'd better watch out. If you don't give him up, I'll kill you!"

"She's crazy," whispered Nora.

The intruder fumbled in her absurdly flamboyant skirt and at last drew out a pistol. "Now you better hop!" she said, with menacing calmness.

Ann rose, white and calm. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Who am I? I'm Jack Munro's wife, that's who I am, and I want you to let him alone, that's what I want. You can understand that, can't you?" Her big, flabby face again contorted horribly.

Nora found tongue. "You go away or I'll call Matt!"

"Call him. What do I care for him? I ain't afraid of no man livin'. No, sir; let him come. But I got no war with you; you're all right. But that thing there, with her fancy dresses—I'll pink her with a bullet if she don't let my Jack alone."

If the drunken creature had swept a handful of mire into her face Ann could not have been more revolted, more degraded. Fixing a look of disdain on the woman, she said: "You are quite mistaken. Your Jack is less than nothing to me. I despise him and all he represents."

The other wildly laughed. "Ah, yes, you can talk—your mouth—but I know the truth. You're a liar!"

She turned to go, but she gave him intended to check and humble

with him? I saw you yesterday." She raised the pistol. "I tell you, I'll blow you into kingdom come if you don't promise right now to give him up!"

As she advanced the two little lads at play just outside appeared in the doorway, and the sight of them steeled the little mother's heart. "Go away, darlin's," she called to them. "Quick, run for dad!"

The woman turned to see who was behind her, and the desperate Nora seized her by the wrist. "Give me the gun!" she called.

"I won't! Let go me!" shrieked the intruder, jerking hard in the effort to free her hand.

Ann seized the other arm. "I promise," she said quietly, fixing her eyes full upon those of the infuriated woman, who ceased to struggle. "Now go away."

"You promise?"

"I promise!"

The woman again laughed harshly, drunkenly. "I don't trust you. I'll kill you; then I know. Let go me!" she called. "Let go or I'll smash your face!"

"Matt! Oh, Matt!" called Nora as she clung desperately to that terrible wrist.

Help came from an unexpected quarter. Like a flash, Woo, the new Chinese

cook of the household, rushed into the room and flung himself on the mad wretch. His long fingers encircled her throat. "Drop it!" he curtly commanded. "Drop gun!" For a few moments the woman struggled, then the revolver fell to the floor, and Nora snatched it up.

Woo turned the gasping, hiccupping creature to the door and flung her out upon the ground. "You drunk. Go home. Stop home. Be sabbie you—you sabbie me," he said as he bent above her.

Ann interposed. "Don't hurt her, Woo."

He stood beside her while she slowly regained a sitting posture. "She belly dangles. Me go tell Munro. She fight-me kick."

The poor creature now seemed dazed and broken and began to weep, and with her tears became as abjectly pitiful, as pathetically tawdry, as she had been hideous and menacing in her wrath. Ann shuddered with a bitter nausea, a disorder that was half physical weakness, half mental repulsion. There was something ghastly beyond words in this creature sitting in utter abandonment in her rumpled flannel, which the pitiless sun dissected. Stopping, she took the miserable one by the arm. "Get up. You must not sit there."

Slowly the woman rose, all thought of revenge swallowed up in a wave of maudlin self pity. "You're all again me—all of ye! I guess you wouldn't like it to have your husband stolen by another woman. You let me alone!" she said to Woo, with a flash of anger. "You pigtail, what business you got to lay hands on a white lady?"

The creature began to pour forth a flood of vile epithets, directed toward the patient Woo, who tried again and again to lift her and was in the midst of a howl of wrath when Matt came round the corner of the house.

"What's all this?" he asked sharply.

The woman suddenly rose to her feet, well aware that a man had arrived, and began to mumble and weep again. Nora ran to her husband. "Woo, Matt, drive her away. She tried to kill us."

"Who is she? Who are you, and what are you doing here anyway?"

The woman, quite dismayed, began to retreat. "It's all right. She promised. I'm going now."

Woo explained. "She Munro's wife. Belly drunk—allee same crazy. Take um gun—go shoot lady." He pointed at Ann. "Me choke um. She fall on ground. No get up. Nola catchee gun."

Kelly followed the invader. "You go back to where you came from and stay there or I'll be the worse for ye, ye murderin' omelhaum."

Ann went to her room and flung herself down upon her bed in such abasement as she had never known in all her life. She could not deceive herself. She had brought this horrible assault upon herself by something more than tolerance of Munro.

The woman's ignorance and tastelessness, her common voice, her badly fitting garments, her incredible baseness of speech, all came back. "Ann Rupert a rival to that being?" Of course she had never for an instant

had appealed to her and she had listened.

"Rob should have warned me," she complained, her mind going back to the man she could trust. At the moment she could not see or would not acknowledge that Raymond had ventured as far as he dared in revealing Munro's private life. She was too angry with herself and every one around her to be just. As her flaming wrath died she grew cold and bitter. "This is what comes of going outside one's own proper world. I shall leave the peak at once, and I hope I shall never see it or hear it spoken of again."

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this a strange effect?"

His eyes were shining, his face pale and his voice vibrant as he abruptly said: "Come with me; the time has come. I want to talk with you."

"What has happened?" she asked in alarm.

He took her by the arm. "You promised to listen. You are not afraid of me, are you?"

"No, but I do not understand. Where is Louis? Has anything happened to him?"

"Louis is safe with Kelly. I want to see you because things have happened to me. Come, I must see you alone."

They moved off up the path toward the overlook, and notwithstanding her brave words, the girl wavered in the gust of this man's overmastering excitement. The mist closed round them, all signs of other human presence disappeared, and they soon stood alone in a world of gray light wherein neither sky nor horizon line appeared. All that remained of the earth was a little strip of ground beneath their feet.

Raymond stopped at last and held toward Ann a small, irregular piece of rock. "Do you see that?" he hoarsely inquired.

She took it wonderingly. "Is it ore?"

"Yes, and it's heavy with gold. Kelly's luck has won again. We've opened a vein that will make us both rich." There was no tremor or doubt in his tone.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried out, with unaffected pleasure. "Now Mrs. Kelly can go to live in the valley."

"Never mind the Kellys now," he cried out impatiently. "I have a great deal to say to you, and I want to say it here. I'm going to try and win you. It's my manner was excellent, his voice tense with passion. "I am bold to recklessness today."

He had never been humble. Now he rose above her, masterful, an avowed lover, and his eyes burning down into hers made her shrink and shiver as if from cold.

He misread the movement. "Are you warm enough?" he asked tenderly. "I hope you are, for I want to tell you—explain to you—why I am here. Let us sit here." He indicated a flat rock. "This is our only opportunity. No one will know—no one can see us. Will you listen?"

"I will listen," she said quietly and took a seat, drawing her cloak about her.

He took a seat a little in front, so that he could see her face, which was radiant as a rose in the mist. "I've been trying to write you a letter ever since you came. I wanted to set myself right with you on Louis' account. I love the lad, and I wanted you to know that I was trying to do him good."

"I know that. I trust you now."

"That assurance is sweet to me, but I want to tell you now that the only mystery in my life is this: I am a West Point cadet—I mean, I was."

"Were you, really?" She looked at him with such unmistakable relief and gladness that he faltered.

"Wait. I was only there two years. I was court-martialed for breach of discipline and gross insubordination at the beginning of my third year."

He hastened on. "You mustn't judge me hastily. It came on my return after furlough. That's the time when the routine and discipline pinch hardest on the men. After two years of gruel that I hated I had a visit home—a delicious free time—and to get back into school, back into those cold, gray barracks, was like going into a strait-jacket. The first few weeks after the vacation are times of disorder, a period of boyish delirium, and I took my share in it. My breach of discipline was nothing more than a boy's frolic. I should have been punished for it, and that would have ended it, but I bribed one of the officers, the disciplinarian, and when he rounded me up he rasped me till I lost my head. Being a quick tempered youth, I answered him. He abused me shamefully, and I struck him in the face, and that ended my stay at West Point."

"Oh, how foolish! How wrong!"

"No, it was not wrong. I would do it again. The small sneak used a tone in addressing me which no man has a right to use to another. You wouldn't suppose a tone could hurt, but it did. It cut like a lash. Well, that ended my career as a soldier. My home was on the Ohio river, not far from Cincinnati, and my family still lives there. Our whole country is rich in traditions of General Grant, and my father had selected me out of all his sons to be the soldier of his family. You know how some men try to map their sons' careers. Don't you see, I couldn't go home?"

"Yes, I can see it was hard for your father. Was your mother living?"

"Yes, she's living yet. I write her every week, but not one word has passed between my father and me since my dismissal. Naturally enough, I drifted west and into cattle ranching. I liked the excitement of it, and I'd been trained to ride and to shoot. I gradually became cow boss and foreman, and so you found me, with a few thousand dollars saved up. Your coming changed every current in my life. I became ambitious to do something, to be rich. I came here, I bought this mine, and there shines my gold." He held it toward her again. "Now I can go home. My court martial becomes a joke. Don't you see? My father is human. He would not receive me poor and disgraced. With a big mine behind me the case will be different."

"Are we all purchasable with gold?" she asked.

Continued in Next Saturday's Guar

Big Bargains

Saturday afternoon and evening at Gough's hardware store. No goods reserved. Everything goes at auction to the highest bidder. Preliminary sale of the day.