

# Black Rock

By RALPH CONNOR

(Continued from First Page.)

But when Slavin, our saloon keeper rose to reply the men jumped up of the seats and yelled till they could yell no more. Slavin stood, evidently in trouble with himself, and finally broke out:

"It's speechless I am entirely. What's come to me I know not nor how it's come, but I'll do my best for you."

And then the yelling broke out again. I did not yell myself. I was too busy watching the varying lights in Mrs. Mayor's eyes as she looked from Craig to the yelling men on the benches and tables and then to Slavin, and I found myself wondering if she knew what it was that came to Slavin.

## CHAPTER XI

THE TWO CALLS

WITH the call to Mr. Craig I fancy I had something to do myself. The call came from a young congregation in an eastern city and was based partly upon his college record and more upon the advice of those among the authorities who knew his work in the mountains. But I flatter myself that my letters to friends who were of importance in that congregation were not without influence, for I was of the mind that the man who could handle Black Rock miners as he would be ready for something larger than a mountain mission. That he would refuse I had not imagined, though I ought to have known him better. He was but little troubled over it. He went with the call and the letters urging his acceptance to Mrs. Mayor. I was putting the last touches to some of my work in the room at the back of Mrs. Mayor's house when he came in. She read the letters and the call quietly and waited for him to speak.

"Well," he said, "should I go?"

She started and grew a little pale. His question suggested a possibility that had not occurred to her. That he could leave his work in Black Rock she had hitherto never imagined, but there was other work, and he was fit for good work anywhere. Why should he not go? I saw the fear in her face, but I saw more than fear in her eyes as for a moment or two she let her rest upon Craig's face. I read her story, and I was not sorry for either of them. But she was too much a woman to show her heart easily to the man she loved, and her voice was even and calm as she answered his question.

"Is this a very large congregation?"

"One of the finest in all the east," I put in for him. "It will be a great thing for Craig."

Craig was studying her curiously. I think she noticed his eyes upon her, for she went on even more quietly:

"It will be a great chance for work, and you are able for a larger sphere, you know, than poor Black Rock affords."

"Who will take Black Rock?" he asked.

"Let some other fellow have a try at it," I said. "Why should you waste your talents here?"

"Waste?" cried Mrs. Mayor indignantly.

"Well, busy, if you like it better," I replied.

"It would not take much of a grave for that funeral," said Craig, smiling.

"Oh," said Mrs. Mayor, "you will be a great man, I know, and perhaps you ought to go now."

But he answered coolly: "There are fifty men wanting that eastern charge, and there is only one wanting Black Rock, and I don't think Black Rock is anxious for a change, so I have determined to stay where I am yet awhile."

Even my deep disgust and disappointment did not prevent me from seeing the sudden leap of joy in Mrs. Mayor's eyes, but she, with a great effort, answered quietly:

"Black Rock will be very glad and some of us very, very glad."

Nothing could change his mind. There was no one he knew who could take his place just now, and why should he quit his work? It annoyed me considerably to feel he was right. Why is it that the right things are so frequently unpleasant?

And if I had had any doubt about the matter next Sabbath evening would have removed it, for the man came about him after the service and told him that he approved his decision, though the self sacrifice involved did not appeal to them. They were too truly western to imagine that any inducements the east could offer could compensate for his loss of the west. It was only fitting that the west should have the best, and so the miners took certainty as their right that the best man they knew should stay with them. But there were those who knew how much of what most men consider worth while he had given up, and they loved him no less for it.

Mrs. Mayor's call was not so easily disposed of. It came close upon the other and stirred Black Rock as nothing else had ever stirred it before.

I found her one afternoon gazing vacantly at some legal documents spread out before her on the table and evidently overcome by their contents. There was first a lawyer's letter informing her that by the death of her husband's father she had come into the whole of the Mayor estates and all the wealth pertaining thereto. The letter asked for instructions and urged an immediate return with a view to a personal superintendence of the estates. A letter, too, from a distant cousin of her husband urged her immediate return for many reasons, but chiefly on account of the old mother, who had been left alone, with none nearer of kin than himself to care for her and cheer her old age.

With these two came another letter from her mother-in-law herself. The crabbled, trembling characters were even more eloquent than the words which preceded the letter closely:

"I have lost my boy, and now my husband is gone, and I am a lonely woman. I have many servants and some friends, but none near to me, none so near and dear as my dear son's wife. My days are not to be many. Come to me, my daughter. I want you and Lewis' child."

"Must I go?" she asked, with white lips.

"Do you know her well?" I asked.

"I saw her only once or twice," she answered, "but she has been very good to me."

"She can hardly need you. She has friends. And surely you are needed here."

She looked at me eagerly.

"Do you think so?" she said.

"Ask any man in the camp—Shaw, Nixon, young Winton, Geordie, Ask Craig," I replied.

"Yes, he will tell me," she said.

Even as she spoke Craig came up the steps. I passed into my studio and went on with my work, for my days at Black Rock were getting few, and many sketches remained to be filled in.

Through my open door I saw Mrs. Mayor lay her letters before Mr. Craig, saying, "I have a call too." They thought not of me.

He went through the papers, carefully laying them down without a word while she waited anxiously, almost impatiently, for him to speak.

"Well," she asked, using his own words to her, "should I go?"

"I do not know," he replied. "That is for you to decide. You know all the circumstances."

"The letters tell all."

Her tone carried a feeling of disappointment. He did not appear to care.

"The estates are large?" he asked.

"Yes, large enough—twelve thousand a year."

"And has your mother-in-law any one with her?"

"She has friends, but, as she says, none near of kin. Her nephew looks after the works—Iron works, you know. He has shares in them."

"She is evidently very lonely," he answered gravely.

"What shall I do?" she asked, and I knew she was waiting to hear him urge her to stay, but he did not see or at least gave no heed.

"I cannot say," he repeated quietly.

"There are many things to consider. The estates—"

"The estates seem to trouble you," she replied almost fretfully.

He looked up in surprise. I wondered at his slowness.

"Yes, the estates," he went on, "and tenants, I suppose; your mother-in-law, your little Marjorie's future, your own future."

"The estates are in capable hands, I should suppose," she urged, "and my future depends upon what I choose my work to be."

"But one cannot shift one's responsibilities," he replied gravely. "These estates, these tenants, have come to you, and with them come duties."

"I do not want them," she cried.

"That life has great possibilities of good," he said kindly.

"I had thought that perhaps there was work for me here," she suggested timidly.

"Great work," he hastened to say. "You have done great work, but you will do that wherever you go. The only question is where your work lies."

"You think I should go," she said suddenly and a little bitterly.

"I cannot bid you stay," he answered steadily.

"How can I go?" she cried, appealing to him. "Must I go?"

How he could resist that appeal I could not understand. His face was cold and hard and his voice was almost harsh as he replied:

"If it is right, you will go, you must go."

Then she burst forth:

"I cannot go. I shall stay here. My work is here. My heart is here. How can I go? You thought it worth your while to stay here and work. Why should not I?"

The momentary gleam in his eyes died out, and again he said coldly:

"This work was clearly mine. I am needed here."

"Yes, yes," she cried, her voice full of pain. "You are needed, but there is no need of me."

"Stop! Stop!" he said sharply. "You must not say so."

"I will say it, I must say it!" she cried, her voice vibrating with the intensity of her feeling. "I know you do not need me. You have your work, your plans, your plans. You need no one. You are strong. But, and her voice rose to a cry, "I am not strong by myself. You have made me strong. I came here a foolish girl, foolish and selfish and narrow. God sent me grief. Three years ago my heart died. Now I am living again. I am a woman now, no longer a girl. You have done this for me. Your life, your words, your self, you have shown me a better, a higher, a nobler life than I had ever known before, and now you send me away?"

She paused abruptly.

"Blind, stupid fool!" I said to myself.

He held himself resolutely in hand, answering carefully, but his voice had lost its coldness and was sweet and kind.

"Have I done this for you? Then surely God has been good to me. And you have helped me more than any words could tell you."

"Helped?" she repeated scornfully.

"Yes, helped," he answered, wondering at her scorn.

"You can do without my help," she went on. "You make people help you. You get many to help you. But I need help too."

She was standing before him with her hands tightly clasped. Her face was pale, and her eyes were deeper than ever. He sat looking up at her in a kind of haze as she poured out her words hot and fast.

"I am not thinking of you," his coldness had hurt her deeply. "I am selfish. I am thinking of myself. How shall I do? I have grown to depend on you, to look to you. It is nothing to you that I go, but to me."

She did not dare to finish.

By this time Craig was standing before her, his face deathly pale. When she came to the end of her words, he said in a voice low, sweet and thrilling with emotion:

"Ah, if you only knew! Do not make me forget myself. You do not guess what you are doing."

"What are you doing? What is there to know but that you tell me easily to go?"

She was struggling with the tears he was too proud to let him see.

He put his hands resolutely behind him, looking at her as if studying her face for the first time. Under his searching look she dropped her eyes, and the tears came slowly up to her neck and face. Then, as if with a sudden resolve, she lifted her eyes to his and looked back at him unflinchingly.

He started, surprised, drew slowly near, but his hands upon her shoulders, surprise giving place to wild joy. She never moved her eyes. They drew him toward her. He took her face between his hands, and she did not move. He stood back from her, threw up his head and laughed aloud. She came to him, put her hand upon his breast and said, "Kiss me."

He put his arms about her, bent down and kissed her lips again and then reverently her brow. Then, putting her back from him, but still holding both her hands, he cried:

"No, you shall not go! I shall never let you go!"

She gave a little sigh of content and, smiling at him, said:

"I can go now." But even as she spoke the flush died from her face, and she shuddered.

"Never!" he almost shouted. "We shall walk hand in hand together."

"Ah, if we could, if we only could!" she said pitifully.

"Why not?" he demanded fiercely.

"You will send me away. You will say it is right for me to go," she replied sadly.

"Do we not love each other?" was his impatient answer.

"Ah, yes, my love," she said, "but love is not all."

"No!" cried Craig. "But love is the best."

"Yes, and it is for love's sake we will do the best."

"There is no better work than here. Surely this is best." And he pictured his plans before her.

She listened eagerly.

"Oh, if it should be right," she cried, "I will do what you say! You are good; you are wise. You shall tell me."

She could not but have recalled him better. He stood silent some moments, then burst out passionately:

"Why, then, has love come to us? We did not seek it. Surely love is of God. Does God mock us?"

He threw himself into his chair, pouring out his words of passionate protestation. She listened, smiling, then came to him and, touching his hair as a mother might her child's, said:

"Oh, I am very happy! I was afraid you would not care, and I could not bear to go that way."

"You shall not go!" he cried aloud, as if in pain. "Nothing can make that right."

But she only said: "You shall tell me tomorrow. You cannot see tonight, but you will see, and you will tell me."

He stood up and, holding both her hands, looked long into her eyes, then turned abruptly away and went out.

She stood where he left her for some moments, her face radiant and her hands pressed upon her heart. Then she came toward my room. She found me busy with my painting, but as I looked up and met her eyes she flushed slightly and said:

"I quite forgot you."

"So it appeared to me."

"You heard?"

"And saw," I replied boldly. "It would have been rude to interrupt, you see."

"Yes, I am so glad and thankful!"

"Yes; it was rather considerate of me."

"Oh, I don't mean that!" the flush deepening. "I am glad you know."

"I have known some time."

"How could you? I only knew today myself."

"She flushed again.

"Do you mean that people—she began anxiously.

"No; I am not 'people.' I have eyes, and my eyes have been opened."

"Open?"

"Yes, by love."

Then I told her openly how weeks ago I struggled with my heart and mastered it, for I saw it was vain to love her because she loved a better man, who loved her in return. She looked at me shyly and said:

"I am sorry."

"Don't worry," I said cheerfully. "I didn't break my heart, you know, I stopped it in time."

"Oh!" she said, slightly disappointed. Then her lips began to twitch, and she went off into a fit of hysterical laughter.

"Forgive me," she said humbly, "but you speak as if it had been a fever."

"Never is nothing to it," I said solemnly. "It was a near thing."

At which she went off again. I was glad to see her laugh. It gave me time to recover my equilibrium, and it relieved her intense emotional strain. So I rattled on some nonsense about Craig and myself till I saw she was giving no heed, but thinking her own thoughts, and what these were it was not hard to guess.

Suddenly she broke in upon my talk:

"He will tell me what to do," she would say till I began to realize how impossible it would be for him to betray such trust and be anything but true to the best of his ability."

So much did I dread Craig's homecoming that I sent for Graeme and old man Nelson, who was more and more Graeme's trusted counselor and friend. They were both highly excited by the story I had to tell, for I thought it best to tell them all, but I was not a little surprised and disgusted that they did not see the matter in my light. In vain I protested against the madness of allowing anything to send these two from each other. Graeme summed up the discussion in his own emphatic way, but with an earnestness in his words not usual with him.

"Craig will know better than any of us what is right to do, and he will do it, and no man can turn him from it, and," he added, "I should be sorry to try."

Then my wrath rose, and I cried:

"It's a tremendous shame! They love each other. You are talking sentimental humbug and nonsense."

"He must do the right," said Nelson in his deep, quiet voice.

"Right! Nonsense! By what right does he send from him the woman he loves?"

"He pleased not himself," quoted Nelson recently.

"Nelson is right," said Graeme. "I should not like to see him weaken."

"Look here," I stormed. "I didn't bring you men to back him up in his nonsense. I thought you could keep your heads level."

"Now, Connor," said Graeme, "don't rage. Leave that for the heathen. It's

know I had pledged myself to do all I could to help him."

But when I came upon him that night, sitting in the light of his fire, I saw he must be left alone. Some battles we fight side by side, with comrades cheering us and being cheered to victory, but there are fights we may not share, and these are deadly fights, where lives are lost and won. So I could only lay my hand upon his shoulder without a word. He looked up quickly, read my face and said, with a groan:

"You know?"

"I could not help it. But why groan?"

"She will think it right to go," he said desperately.

"Then you must think for her. You must bring some common sense to bear upon the question."

"I cannot see clearly yet," he said. "The light will come."

"May I show you how I see it?" I asked.

"Go on," he said.

For an hour I talked, eloquently, even vehemently, urging the reason and right of my opinion. She would be doing no more than every woman does, no more than she did before. Her mother-in-law had a comfortable home, all that wealth could procure, good servants and friends. The estates could be managed without her personal supervision. After a few years' work here they would go east for little Marjorie's education. Why should two lives be broken? And so I went on.

He listened carefully, even eagerly.

"You make a good case," he said, with a slight smile. "I will take time. Perhaps you are right. The light will come. Surely it will come. But," and here he sprang up and stretched his arms to full length above his head, "I am not sorry. Whatever comes I am not sorry. It is great to have her love, but greater to love her as I do. Thank God, nothing can take that away. I am willing, glad, to suffer for the joy of loving her."

Next morning before I was awake he was gone, leaving a note for me:

My Dear Connor—I am due at the Landing. When I see you again, I think my eyes will be clear. Now all is dark. At times I am a coward and often, as you sometimes kindly inform me, an ass, but I hope I may never become a male. I am willing to be led, or want to be, at any rate. I must do the best, not second best, for her for me. The best only is God's will. What else would you have? Be true to her these days, dear old fellow. Yours, CRAIG.

How often those words have braced me he will never know, but I am a better man for them: "The best only is God's will. What else would you have?" I resolved I would rage and fret no more and that I would worry Mrs. Mayor with no more argument or expostulation, but, as my friend had asked, "be good to her."

CHAPTER XII

LOVE IS NOT ALL

THOSE days when we were waiting Craig's return we spent in the woods or on the mountain sides or down in the canyon beside the stream that danced down to meet the Black Rock river, I talking and sketching and reading and she listening and dreaming, with often a happy smile upon her face. But there were moments when a cloud of shuddering fear would sweep the smile away, and then I would talk of Craig till the smile came back again.

But the woods and the mountains and the river were her best, her wisest, friends during those days. How sweet the ministry of the woods to her! The trees were in their new summer leaves, fresh and full of life. They swayed and rustled above us, flinging their interlacing shadows upon us and their swaying and their rustling soothed and comforted like the voice and touch of a mother. And the mountains, too, in all the glory of their varying robes of blues and purples, stood calmly, solemnly, about us, uplifting our souls into regions of rest. The changing lights and shadows fitted swiftly over their rugged fronts, but left them ever as before in their steadfast majesty. "God's in his heaven," what would you have? And ever the little river sang its cheerful courage, fearing not the great mountains that threatened to bar its passage to the sea. Mrs. Mayor heard the song, and her courage rose.

"We, too, shall find our way," she said, and I believed her.

But through these days I could not make her out, and I found myself studying her as I might a new acquaintance. Years had fallen from her. She was a girl again, full of young, warm life. She was as sweet as before, but there was a soft shyness over her, a half-shamed, half frank consciousness in her face, a glad light in her eyes that made her all new to me. Her perfect trust in Craig was touching to see.

"He will tell me what to do," she would say till I began to realize how impossible it would be for him to betray such trust and be anything but true to the best of his ability."

So much did I dread Craig's homecoming that I sent for Graeme and old man Nelson, who was more and more Graeme's trusted counselor and friend. They were both highly excited by the story I had to tell, for I thought it best to tell them all, but I was not a little surprised and disgusted that they did not see the matter in my light. In vain I protested against the madness of allowing anything to send these two from each other. Graeme summed up the discussion in his own emphatic way, but with an earnestness in his words not usual with him.

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"Now, Connor," said Graeme, "don't rage. Leave that for the heathen. It's

bad form and useless besides. Craig will walk his way where his light falls, and, by all that's holy, I should hate to see him fail, for if he weakens like the rest of us my North star will have dropped from my sky."

"Nice selfish spirit," I muttered.

"Entirely so. I'm not a saint, but I feel like steering by one when I see him."

When, after a week had gone, Craig rode up one early morning to his shack door, his face told me that he had fought his fight and had not been beaten. He had ridden all night and was ready to drop with weariness.

"Connor, old boy," he said, putting out his hand, "I'm rather played. There was a bad row at the Landing. I have just closed poor Colley's eyes. It was awful. I must get sleep. Look after Dandy, will you, like a good chap."

"Oh, Dandy will be banged!" I said, for I knew it was not the fight nor the watching nor the long ride that had shaken his iron nerve and given him that face. "Go in and lie down. I'll bring you something."

"Wake me in the afternoon," he said. "She is waiting. Perhaps you will go to her." His lips quivered. "My nerve is rather gone." Then, with a very small smile, he added, "I am giving you a lot of trouble."

"You go to thunder!" I burst out, for my throat was hot and sore with grief for him.

"I think I'd rather go to sleep," he replied, still smiling.

I could not speak and was glad of the chance of being alone with Dandy.

When I came in, I found him sitting with his head in his arms upon the table fast asleep. I made him tea, forced him to take a warm bath and sent him to bed, while I went to Mrs. Mayor. I went with a fearful heart, but that was because I had forgotten the kind of woman she was.

She was standing in the light of the window waiting for me. Her face was pale, but steady; there was a proud light in her fatigued eyes, a slight smile parted her lips, and she carried her hand like a queen.

"Come in," she said. "You need not fear to tell me. I saw him ride home. He has not failed, thank God! I am proud of him. I know he would be true. He loves me!"—she drew in her breath sharply, and a faint color tinged her cheek—"but his love is not all—ah, love is not all! Oh, I am glad and proud!"

"Glad?" I gasped, amazed.

"You would not have him prove faithless," she said, with proud defiance.

"Oh, it is high sentimental nonsense!" I could not help saying.

"You should not say so," she replied, and her voice rang clear. "Honor, faith and duty are sentiments, but they are not nonsense."

In spite of my rage I was lost in amazed admiration of the high spirit of the woman who stood so straight before me, but as I told how worn and broken he was she listened with changing color and swelling bosom, her proud courage all gone and only love, anxious and pining, in her eyes.

"Shall I go to him?" she asked, with timid eagerness and deepening color.

"He is sleeping. He said he would come to you," I replied.

"I shall wait for him," she said softly, and the tenderness in her tone went straight to my heart, and it seemed to me a man might suffer much to be loved with love such as this.

In the early afternoon Graeme came

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to her. She met him with both hands outstretched, saying in a low voice:

"I am very happy."

"Are you sure?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes," she said, but her voice was like a sob, "quite, quite sure!"

They talked long together till I saw that Craig must soon be coming, and I called Graeme away. He held her hands, looking steadily into her eyes, and said:

"You are better even than I thought. I'm going to be a better man."

Her eyes filled with tears, but her smile did not fade as she answered:

"Yes, you will be a good man, and God will give you work to do."

He bent his head over her hands and nodded an easy good evening, but Graeme strode to his and, putting one hand on his shoulder, held out his other for Craig to take.

After a moment's surprise Craig rose to his feet and, facing him squarely, took the offered hand in both of his and held it fast without a word. Graeme was the first to speak, and his voice was deep with emotion.

"You are a great man, a good man. I'd give something to have your girl."

Poor Craig stood looking at him, not daring to speak for some moments. Then he said quietly:

"Not good or great, but, thank God, I'm quite a traktor."

"Good man?" went on Graeme, patting him on the shoulder. "Good man! But it's tough."

Craig sat down quickly, saying, "Don't do that, old chap!"

I went up with Craig to Mrs. Mayor's door. She did not hear us coming, but stood near the window gazing up at the mountains. She was dressed in some rich soft stuff and wore at her breast a bunch of wild flowers. I had never seen her so beautiful. I did not wonder that Craig gazed with his foot upon the threshold to look at her. She turned and saw me. With a glad cry, "Oh, my darling, you have come to me!" she came, with outstretched arms. I turned and fled, but the cry and the vision were long with me.

It was decided that night that Mrs. Mayor should go the next week. A miner and his wife were going east, and I, too, would join the party.

The camp went into mourning at the news, but it was understood that any display of grief before Mrs. Mayor was bad form. She was not to be annoyed.

But when I suggested that she should leave quietly and avoid the pain of saying goodbye she flatly refused.

"I must say goodbye to every man. They love me, and love of them."

It was decided, too, at that time, that there should be nothing in the way of a testimonial, but when Craig found out that the men were coming in her with all sorts of extraordinary gifts he agreed that it would be better that they should unite in one gift. So it was agreed that I should buy a ring for her. And were it not that the contributions were strictly limited to \$1 the purse that Slavin handed her when Slavin read the address at the fair would

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supper would have been many times filled with the gold that was pressed upon the committee. There were no speeches at the supper except one by Slavin in reply to Mrs. Mayor's behalf. She had given me the words to say, and I was thoroughly prepared, else I should not have got through. I began in the usual way:

"Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. Mayor is—"

But I got no further, for at the mention of her name the men stood on the chairs and yelled until they could yell no more. There were over 250 of them, and the effect was overpowering. But I got through my speech. I remember it well. It began:

"Mrs. Mayor is greatly touched by this mark of your love, and she will wear your ring always with pride."

And it ended with

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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