



The Free Traders

By Victor Rousseau

(Continued from last week)

They had only just arrived in time to escape the storm, for already the flakes were whirling down outside.

"Well, you were right," said Lee. "It's lucky we're going to have a roof over us tonight. Look, here's firewood piled! Now I wonder who's been living here?"

The girl did not answer him. She was staring about her with the same look of bewilderment, and Lee saw that she was trembling. He drew her into his arms.

"Dearest, you mustn't let things trouble you," he said. "All will come right. And what can anything matter, so long as we have each other?"

"It makes me afraid, Lee," she answered in a low tone. "Oh, Lee, I—I seem to be nearer to remembering than ever before. There ought to be—there used to be a table here, and—a woman sat here sewing, a woman with fair hair, and her face bent over her work, and looking up sometimes to smile at a man—a tall man, several years older than herself, with iron-gray hair, who never smiled, but was always kind to her. And then she would look down to smile at a child playing beside her. Was I that child, Lee?"

"If you were, if this was your home, dearest, you should be happy here."

"I don't know, Lee. I wish now that we'd camped on the ridge. I wish I'd never come here. I've the feeling that—that it means the end." She began to cry softly. "It's not—not just the fear of remembering this place, but it's what is associated with it—something terrible."

She ceased and looked out at the fast falling snow. It was still only the middle of the afternoon, but the wind was rising, whistling about the cabin, and everything was a desolate gray.

Inside the log house it was half dark.

Suddenly the girl uttered a cry and clutched at Lee's arm.

"Lee! Did you see that? That shadow!"

She was half hysterical, and her nervousness communicated itself to Lee, for he had had the confused impression that a shadow had glided across the room beyond, through the open door.

Instantly he darted after it, but there was nothing to be seen. He came back.

"It wasn't anything. We're getting nervous."

"I'm sure there was—something, Lee," she clung to him.

"Stay here, and I'll search the place."

"No, don't leave me! Let me go with you!"

They went together, looking into all the rooms and about the house, but there was no sign of anyone. Lee went to the back door to look for footprints, but if any had been made, they would have been obliterated in a moment by the wind that was driving the dry snow about the door sill in little whirling clouds.

"It was imagination," said Lee. She assented, and, going into the kitchen, began to make the preparations for their meal, while Lee took the kettle down to the stream and filled it with water.

But when he returned she had ceased to work and was sitting on a chair, her head bent down, her hands clasped on her knees, staring desolately in front of her.

Lee stood beside her. "Dearest, if I could do anything to help you—"

"You can't help me. I—I don't know what to do."

Her voice was strained, hard, almost unrecognizable. Lee knelt at her feet conscious of a sense of utter helplessness. He took her hands in his, and found that they were as cold as ice. Her body was strained into unnatural rigidity. It was almost as if she were a prisoner on some torture table, so set were all her muscles, as though she were bracing herself against some unendurable pain.

"Yes, you can help me!"

The words came quickly from her lips, and, raising her head, she gave him a strange, penetrating look. "You—you haven't been frank with me, Lee."

"You know all that there is to know about me. But what do I know about you? You say you love me, you won my love—my love, that of the nameless woman; and you have my poor little two weeks' life story in your possession. You know everything that there is of me—oh, you know it so intimately. Can you not see how it humiliates me, to think that I have no personality of my own at all, nothing to myself, no life, hardly a thought, even, that is not yours?"

"Dearest—"

But she went on implacably: "What do I know of you? Who are you? Lee Anderson? That's only a name. You have your life, your past. How many women has it contained, women you perhaps think of regretfully, sometimes even with tenderness—?"

"I'd have told you that when the time came. I loved one woman—I thought I did. She was—well, I gave her my love foolishly, that's all. And it wasn't love. There is only you, has only been you—"

"How do I know you are telling me the truth, Lee Anderson?"

"You don't mean that, dear. We've given our love to each other, with trust and faith. It's just the loneliness and the dread and the fear of remembering the part that makes you doubt everything. Look into my eyes and see if you can doubt them."

The hardness of her laugh surprised him. "I don't trust men, Lee Anderson."

Lee felt stupefied. But deeper than the hurt was his pity for her, a soul cut off from the past, with only himself to guide her. He could understand that the desire for a personality of her own might well inspire her bitterness.

"I think the best way I can prove my love for you," he answered, "is just to say nothing till your mood has passed."

"No, Lee, there is a better way than that, a much better way. Be frank with me. Let me share your life. Who are you? Lee Anderson? That's only a name to me. Tell me why you came into the range, and how you found me."

He began to tell her; but, because it was impossible to speak of their experiences at Slaton lake, he made it appear that he had saved her—as he had said before—after the fall, and carried her into the woods. He omitted much, but he distorted nothing.

"What were you doing in the range? What are you here for?" Her voice was breathless, her eyes seemed to burn into his face.

"I—think—I—know. You must tell me the truth. You came here to find someone. You are a member of the police. Whom have you come to find?"

And as Lee remained silent, she continued:

"It wasn't a man named Pelly, was it? An old man, an old friendless man, who had been betrayed, sold by someone he trusted? A man who had done no wrong to anyone, but who, a whole generation before, had killed the scoundrel who tried to ruin his wife? Hadn't he atoned for that by a lifetime of exile?"

"What do you know of him?" cried Lee.

"He is my father! This is our home! Yes, I'm Joyce Pelly, his daughter, as you have always suspected. And I suspected you from the beginning. And you—you forced your presence upon me under the guise of protecting me from my friends."

"That is not so!"

"To gain your wretched ends by winning a woman's confidence and then betraying her. And you dared—yes, you dared—"

"I never dreamed who you were. Won't you believe my word of honor that I am incapable—?"

But she went on, still implacable: "You dared to pretend you loved me, you traitor, in order to discover my father's hiding place when I—I was coming up to him—but why—why? I can't remember all. I only know that I remember I'm his daughter. And I tell you I hate you with a hate ten times as great as the love I thought I felt for you!"

Lee stood up before her. "I only ask you to believe me," he began, "when I say that I didn't know, guess, dream who you were. How should I have known he had a daughter—this man I'd never seen? I knew nothing—"

But suddenly her icy coldness seemed to dissolve in helpless misery. "Oh, leave me! Leave me for a little while, or I shall go mad!" she cried.

And she put her hands over her face and began weeping wildly.

CHAPTER X

The Tunnel Under the Rock

Lee stumbled out of the cabin, dazed, stupefied by Joyce's revelation. The man he sought stood, an invincible barrier, between himself and the woman he loved. Never, if he had any

power to read the human heart, could Joyce Pelly look on him again with anything but hate and horror.

Beneath her gentle nature there lay, he knew, a soul of steel, calm and resolved. He could now look upon her only as a relentless enemy as long as her father lived. His little spell of happiness was ended forever.

And he groaned as he strode through the blizzards, and beat his fists into the whirling snow.

Then to the man there came temptation fiercer than any he had known as he perceived the one way out, the only way.

It was only necessary to find Pelly, to warn him out of the district forever, to return to Manistee, making a report that Pelly was dead, in order to win Joyce, taking her away with him, earning her gratitude, her love—

But would she love him then? Could their happiness be based on that diabolism?

Perhaps he could win her. And then? Resign from the police, of course, and bear the burden of the shame for the rest of his days, reading it in Joyce's eyes, their children reading it in their parents' eyes.

No, even that was not possible. There was no escape for him.

And he thanked God that he did not have to weigh those possibilities, though he would never have yielded. For stronger even than conscience was the thought of the force he was so proud to serve.

Those countless guardians of the law had endured the icy blasts of the treeless tundras, they had looked unflinchingly into the face of death, death by violence, by cold, by hunger, and on the battlefield; it was all part of the game whether one faced a moral enemy or a physical one. Even in thought there could be no tempering with diabolism.

And it was only for a moment that Lee weighed these possibilities as he strode through the storm. Then he squared his shoulders resolutely and threw off the burden. He would take Joyce to the Moravian mission as he had planned, there hand her over to the priest, and—leave her to go to his task, the apprehension of her father.

The storm was growing fiercer. Lee, awakening to the realization of externals as the icy flakes whipped his face, discovered that he had left the clearing far behind him; he could no longer discern the cabin in the distance through the whirling snow. He had been traveling across the ridges of the broken ground, apparently making unconsciously for the shelter of the friendly forest behind it, with the instinct of a wounded beast to take cover.

Well, he must go back, and they two must face that night together, and the next day. There was no help for it.

As he strode on, suddenly instinct pulled him up sharply. He had been tramping through a mass of withered undergrowth and bramble; and now, directly in front of him, he perceived a great gorge, so concealed in this growth that he had all but stepped over the edge.

He advanced cautiously and peered down into it. It was an extraordinary formation. He had seen such before, in that and other regions, where the limestone, pushed up through molten granite by volcanic action at some prehistoric time, and then abraded by rain or torrent, left strange hollows and gullies.

But he had never seen one on such a scale as this.

He was looking into a natural nest.

(Continued next week.)

HOME MANAGER—

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Advertisements are the wise counselors in the spending of money that the clever housewife needs daily.

The business of running a home is made easier by reading the advertisements.

Billy—Andrew Gump preached for us today.

Mother—How do you know?

Billy—He didn't have any chin, and had a long nose, but what makes me think it was him is that he yelled "Oh Min" after he'd finished praying.

Household Dept.

VALUABLE HOUSEHOLD RECIPES AND SUGGESTIONS

From every nook and corner we hope to receive some splendid ideas for simplifying household tasks. If you have never written, do so this week, won't you? Don't be timid, for your hint or recipe may be just the very one that will help some housewife somewhere to solve her problem. If you have already sent in a hint or recipe, come again. For the best hint or recipe we publish every week we will pay 50 cents. Address Household Department, Beaverton Review.

Lemon Pie—Yolks of four eggs, six tablespoons sugar, a few grains of salt, one and one fourth cups milk, whites of four eggs, seven eighths cup powdered sugar, one lemon. Beat yolks slightly. Add sugar, salt, grated lemon, and milk. Mix plate with paste as for custard pie. Pour in mixture. Bake in moderate oven until set, and then remove from oven and cool slightly. Cover with meringue made of powdered sugar, the whites of the eggs, and the juice of the lemon.—Mrs. J. E. Mittel.

Golden Frosting—Cream two tablespoons of butter, then stir in gradually enough powdered sugar to make it stiff. Add 1 teaspoon vanilla, 3 teaspoons strong coffee, and if desired one teaspoon strong cocoa. It is excellent.—Mrs. W. J. Alexander.

Lemon Pie—Juice and grated rind of three lemons, two cups sugar, seven eggs. Boil grated rind, juice, egg yolks, and sugar in double boiler. When cool fold in beaten whites and brown for a few minutes in the oven. This makes two pies.—Mrs. J. E. Mittel.

An empty lard pail turned upside down on the closet shelf, makes a good hat rack, keeping both crown and brim in shape.

Have you gilt frames that are tarnished? Rub lightly with a soft sponge just moistened with turpentine.

Instead of pinning or sewing dress shields in place in waists sew thin tape or baby ribbon to them and to armholes of the waist, and tie them in place.

They are easy to remove when washing waist or changing the shield from one waist to another.

To remove iron rust from white goods, soak them for 3 or 4 days in buttermilk and then wash in the ordinary way.

A teaspoonful of sugar moistened with vinegar, taken very slowly, will cure obstinate attacks of hiccough.

Do you make paper funnels to stick in your fruit pies to keep them from running over. A short piece of uncooked macaroni will be much more convenient.

After buying new tinware, rub it well with lard and then heat thoroughly in the oven. Tinware if so treated will never rust.

Use a piece of window glass to hold the cook book open flat so you can read it without badly soiling it by handling.

Iron cement suitable to mend cracks in stoves and around pipes, can be made by mixing equal parts of common salt and sifted wood ashes made into a paste with cold water. Add a bit of stove polish to color and let set before heating the iron.

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