

The
Homesteader
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"The Cow Puncher," Etc.

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CHAPTER VII—Continued.
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"Nothing wrong at home, I hope, Mr. Harris?" said the young neighbor, noting his troubled appearance. "Nobody sick, or anything?"

"Yes, there is something wrong," said Harris, trying vainly to conceal the bitterness in his voice. "Beulah's left us."

"Who, Beulah? I can hardly believe that, Mr. Harris. It was only last night I was talking with her."

"Well, she's gone. Left through the night. We—well, I tell you, George—we had a little disagreement, but I'd no notion she'd take it so much to heart. Of course you know about the trouble with Jim yesterday. Taking everything together—there won't be no flowing today." Harris had said more than he meant; he could feel the color mounting into his hair, and the bad English of his last words betrayed a subtle recklessness rather than carelessness of speech.

"Don't you believe a word of it," said George. "I know Jim, and I know Beulah, and if anybody else hinted what you've said you'd want to use that rifle on them. Like enough Beulah's staying somewhere around the neighborhood, and she'll be back when she has time to think it over."

"That proves you don't know Beulah," said Allan. "As for Jim, I was never able to get below that smile, and I saw more of him than you did, George."

"Well, I hope you find a way out," said George sincerely. "It would have been like her to come over to our place, but she isn't there. Maybe you'll find her at Morrison's."

"That's possible," said Harris. "We'll go over there, anyway." But Morrison knew no more of Beulah's whereabouts than did George, and inquiry at other homes in the neighborhood was equally futile. Harris shrank from carrying his search into the town, as he dreaded the publicity that would be attached to it. But as the day wore on and the search continued fruitless he finally found himself at Plainville. If Beulah and Jim were really married the Presbyterian minister would be likely to know something of the matter, and Rev. Andrew Guthrie was a man of sense and discernment.

Mr. Guthrie received his guest cordially, albeit with some wonderment as to which member of the family might be sick, but delicacy forbade a direct question. Now, in agricultural communities it is something of an offense to approach any matter of importance by frontal attack. There must be the due amount of verbal skirmishing, reconnoitering and outflanking before the main purpose is revealed. Consequently Harris, for all his torture of suspense, spent some minutes in a discussion of the weather, the crops, and the prospect of a labor shortage in harvest.

"They're all well at home, I hope?" said Mr. Guthrie at length, feeling that the custom of the community had been sufficiently honored.

"Yes, all that's there," said Harris. "As that's there? I didn't know any of your folks were away. Perhaps Mrs. Harris is down East? I'm sure a summer amid the orchards of her old home would be a delight to her and, of course, Mr. Harris, you are able to gratify yourself in these little matters now."

Harris received these remarks with a mixture of feelings. The minister's reference to his financial standing carried with it a certain gratification, but it consorted poorly with his recent conversations with his wife and with his present mission.

"And Beulah," continued the minister, conscious that his first shot had gone wild. "She's a fine young woman now. I see her in church occasionally. In fact, I was speaking with Mrs. Burton, the choir leader, a day or so ago, and Beulah's name was mentioned between us."

"It was about Beulah I came to see you," said Harris, with averted eyes. Then in a few words he gave his version of what he knew and what he suspected.

"I fear I can add nothing to your information," said Mr. Guthrie. "They haven't been here, and, as you say, if Beulah contemplated marriage, I think she would have called on me. Travers, too, I knew a little, and thought him a decent chap. But we must find the girl and talk this over quietly with her. Is there any place in town she would be likely to go to? What about Mrs. Goode's boarding house? I will just

call up on the telephone. I can make inquiry without the necessity of any explanations."

Inquiry at the house of Mrs. Goode brought a strong ray of light out of the darkness. Beulah had been there during the morning, and had explained that she was leaving on the west-bound train, which even now was thrumming at the station. On learning this, without a word Harris sprang into the buggy, while Allan brought a sharp cut of the whip across the spirited horses. They reached the railway station half a minute too late; the train was already pulling out, and as Harris' eyes followed it in anger and vexation they plainly saw Jim Travers swing lithely onto the rear platform.

With an oath the farmer reached for his rifle, but Allen wrenched it from his hands before any onlookers noted the action. "Don't be a fool," he whispered, and started the horses homeward.

CHAPTER VIII.

Into the Farther West.

During the drive homeward Harris' thoughts persistently turned to the share his wife had had in Beulah's departure, and his feeling toward Mary grew more and more hostile. He resolved, however, that there should be no open breach between them; he would neither scold nor question her, but would impress her with his displeasure by adopting a cold, matter-of-fact, speak-when-you're-spoken-to attitude toward her.

Under the circumstances it was not remarkable that Harris' work began to loom larger than ever in his life. The space left vacant by his daughter he filled with extra energy driving the great plows through the mellow summer-fallow. A new tank-man was engaged and the rumble of the engine was heard up and down the fields from early morning until dark. From his wife he held aloof, speaking with strained courtesy when speech was necessary. She, in turn, schooled for years in self-effacement, hid her sorrow in her heart, and went about her work with a resignation which he mistook for cheerfulness, and which confirmed him in his opinion that she knew more of Beulah's intentions than she had cared to admit. Only with Allan his relations remained unchanged; indeed, the attachment between the two grew deeper than ever. The young man avoided any reference to Beulah; what he felt in his own heart he kept to himself, but the father shrewdly guessed that he laid the whole blame on Travers.

Meanwhile Mary plodded along with her housework, toiling doggedly from five in the morning until half-past nine or ten at night. Beulah's departure had left all the labors of the home upon her hands; her husband had made no suggestion of securing help, and she had not asked any. One or two postcards she had had from Beulah, but they brought no great information. They came in the open mail; her husband was welcome to read them if he chose, but as he had sought his own company exclusively since Beulah's departure she made no attempt to force them upon him.

At last one morning came a letter, a big fat letter, left in by a neighbor passing by, as the custom was for any settler going to town to bring out the mail for those who lived along his route. She tore the envelope open nervously and devoured its contents with hungry eyes.

"My Dear Mother:
"Here I am, in the shadow of the Rockies. That may sound poetical, but it's a literal fact. It is still early in the evening, but the sun has disappeared behind the great masses to the west, and the valley which my window overlooks is filling up with blackness. The Arthurs are pure gold, and I have told them everything. They don't blame anyone, not even father. How is he? Slaving as usual, I suppose."

"Well, I must tell you about my trip. When I left the house that night I had no idea where I was going, but the simplest thing seemed to be to go first to Plainville.

"You've no idea how heavy that suitcase got, but I took my time, as there was nothing to gain by reaching town before daylight. When I got there it struck me it might be a good plan to have some breakfast, so I walked round to Goode's boarding-house. After breakfast I went over to the station, and asked what the fare was to Arthurs' station; I found I had enough money for the trip, and I bought a ticket without further ado.

"The homestead rush is on here in earnest; the trains are crowded, mostly with Americans, and the hotels are simply spilling over.

"I wanted to ask some one about Arthurs, and I didn't like to inquire in the hotel. There was a lot of drinking going on there. But near the door were two young men talking, and I overheard one of them mention Arthurs' name. Pulling myself together, I asked him if he could tell me where Arthurs lived.

"Yes, miss," he answered, lifting a big hat and showing when he spoke a clean set of teeth. "It's twenty-five miles up the river. Were you expecting him to meet you?"

"I explained that I had intended to

drop in on them by surprise, but I had had no idea they lived so far from town.

"Oh, that's not far," he said. "Can you ride?"

"Everybody here rides horseback. It's the standard means of locomotion. And the women ride astride. I was a bit shocked at first, but you soon get used to it. But twenty-five miles is different from a romp round the pasture-field, so I said I was afraid not."

"Arthurs is coming down with the buckboard," remarked the other man. "I passed him on the trail as I came in."

"Sure enough, a little later Arthurs himself drew up at the hotel. I wouldn't have known him, but one of the young men pointed him out, and it would have done you good to see how he received me. 'And you are Jack and Mary's daughter,' he said, taking both my hands in his and holding me at arm's length for a moment. Then, before I knew it, he had drawn me up and kissed me. But I didn't care. All of a sudden it seemed to me that I had found a real father. It seems hard to say it, but that is how I felt.

"Well, he just couldn't keep away from me all evening. He showered me with questions about you and father, which I answered as well as I could, but I soon found I couldn't keep my secret, so I just up and told him all. He was very grave, but not cross. 'You need time to think things over, and to get a right perspective,' he said, 'and our home will be yours until you do.'

"We drove home the next day, up a wonderful river valley, deep into the heart of the foothills, with the blue mountains always beckoning and receding before us. Mrs. Arthurs was as surprised and delighted as he had been, and I won't try to tell you all the things she said to me. She cried a little, too, and I'm afraid I came near helping her a bit. You know the Arthurs lost their little girl before they left Manitoba, and they have had no other children. They both seemed just hungry.

"There's nothing so very fine about their home, except the spirit that's inside it. I can't describe it, but it's there—a certain leisurely way of doing things, a sense that they have made work their servant instead of their master. And still they're certainly not lazy, and they've accomplished more than we have. When they left Manitoba in the early days, discouraged with successive frosts, they came right out here into the foothills with their few head of stock. Now their cattle are numbered in thousands, and they have about a township of land. And still they seem to live for the pure happiness they find in life, and only to think of their property as a secondary consideration.

"Now I really must close. Mrs. Arthurs sends a note, and I'm quite sure it's an invitation. Oh, mother, what could be lovelier! Now, don't say you can't. Father has plenty of money; let him hire a housekeeper for a while. The change will do him good. 'Love to you, dearest, and to Allan. If he still thinks of me."

"BEULAH.

"P. S.—I forgot to mention that Jim Travers left Plainville on the same train as I did. He could hardly believe his eyes when he saw me there. I told him I was going west on a visit, but I don't know how much he guessed. Said he was going west himself to take up land, but he wanted to call on some friends first, and he got off a few stations from Plainville. Between you and me, I believe he changed his plan so that the incident—our being on the train together, you know—could not be misunderstood if the neighbors got to know of it. It would be just like Jim to do that."

With Beulah's letter was a short but earnest note from Lillian Arthurs, assuring the mother of her daughter's welfare, and pressing an invitation to spend the autumn in the glorious scenery and weather of the foothill country. Mary Harris read both letters over again, with frequent rubbing of her glasses. Love for her daughter, desire to see her old friend once more, and growing dissatisfaction with conditions at home, all combined to give weight to the invitation so earnestly extended. "If I only could! But it would cost so much."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)


Bird Outruns Horse.

Anyone who has traveled through Western Texas becomes familiar with the mesquite tree, or, as it sometimes grows, a shrub. In some places where it may grow to be thirty or forty feet high, it is commonly known as the chaparral, says the American Forestry Magazine of Washington. Here it is scrubby and masses into dense clumps, it being the home of that famous bird the "road-runner" or chaparral cock, and other interesting species. It is a form of big, ground cuckoo, that only takes to flight when hard pressed; while on open ground it can run so fast that an ordinary horse cannot keep up.

Excellent Philosophy.

Life is like a game of whist. I don't enjoy the game much; but I like to play my cards well and see what will be the end of it.—George Eliot.

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"French Leave."

Many authorities believe that the term "French leave" originated in a French custom in the eighteenth century of withdrawing from crowded assemblies without taking leave of host or hostess. Others maintain that the word "French" is a corruption of "frank," meaning "free."

Somewhat Hard on Humanity.

Every man's experience of today is that he was a fool yesterday and the day before yesterday. Tomorrow he will most likely be of exactly the same opinion.—Mackay.

Did it Seem That Long?

Santa Cruz News—"She was sixty-nine years of age and she had been married for more than a century."—Boston Transcript.

Land of the Orris Root.

Orris root, which is used as a basis of many perfumes, is obtained only around Florence and in the neighborhood of Verona.

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Ancient Popular Pastime.

The Chinese have played ball in various ways from times of remote antiquity. For centuries games of ball have been known and played in Japan. Ethiopian and East Indian traditions refer to games with balls played many centuries ago.

Rose Leaves Again.

Rose bowls are no longer old fashioned, but modern, comes the word from New York. The idea of keeping rose leaves has been revived and Chinese pattern bowls are becoming very popular.

When Green and Tender.

It is in our salad days that we are most particular about our dressing.—Boston Transcript.

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