

The Taking Of Lorena

How the Surrender Came About.

By ANNE HEILMAN.

Although it was the third week in April, there were sudden and chill whiffs of wind from the north, accompanied by flying particles of ice and snow, grim warning that winter had not yet renounced its sway in the northland.

Floyd Jordan, striding down the steep mountain trail, halted irresolutely near the abrupt turning at Farrell's bluff. He appeared to be meditating deeply. Suddenly he threw up his head, squared his shoulders and hurried on, not in the direction of the boarding house in the gulch, but toward Farrell's cabin.

Farrell's cabin was two log houses joined together and chinked with mud. There were other cabins of the same simple architecture scattered over the mountain side and nestled in the gulches, but white curtains hung at the Farrell windows, and the windward side of the living room was hung with gay Navajo blankets; the brown fur of a mountain bear was on the floor, and its mate was spread luxuriously beneath the red pillows of a couch. And, set like a torch in the south window, a geranium, potted in a brilliant Indian basket, lifted its scarlet blooms.

But Jordan felt without seeing this harmony. He was looking into the face of the girl who had opened the door. It was a face of light and shade that spoke the swift thought before the voice found words, a face to hold a man's glance in a crowd. She resumed her seat by the fire without replying to Jordan's genial greeting.

He seemed to fill the room. Six feet two and broad shouldered, he looked even larger in the clumsy canvas coat, corduroys and high leaved boots of the prospector. He whipped his hat against his knee, evidently disconcerted by the girl's hostile attitude.

"That you, Floyd Jordan?" inquired a voice from the inner room.

"Yes, Mrs. Farrell. How're you feeling?"

"Somewhat better, I'm glad to say. Sit down and warm yourself, Floyd. It isn't to be wondered at that people have rheumatics in a land where there's ten months winter."

Lorena closed the door. "Floyd Jordan, what are you coming here again for?" she burst out suddenly.

"Wouldn't be very neighborly not to drop in with your mother sick and your dad away, would it?"

"Didn't I tell you that I never would speak to you again and that I never wanted to see you?" she said fiercely, taking a few steps toward him. Even in that moment, with her eyes blazing with unjust and unreasonable anger, the miner's heart throbbled acknowledgment of the tall, pliant, reedlike grace before him.

"Yes, Lorena, but I have just a little hope that you don't always mean what you say."

"Don't you think I mean it when I tell you I've heard how you bragged to the boys at the store that you could take me whenever you got good and ready?"

"I never said anything of the kind. Some one has garbled my words to suit his own purpose. I've been mad about you—I've loved you from the first time I ever set eyes on you, and I've never said a disrespectful word about you. I've been thinking of building a cabin on my claim, if you'll have me, Lorena. If you won't I'll sell out and go back east."

"You can't go any too quick to suit me," answered the girl, her voice tense with scorn. "And you can tell those loafers at the store that I'm not to be had so easily. I'd rather die than marry you, Floyd Jordan."

"I reckon that settles it," said Jordan, rising and buttoning his coat. "Please tell your mother goodbye for me." And he was gone.

"Lorena Farrell, what have you done?" demanded her mother, limping into the room. "You ought to know that Floyd couldn't have said

anything like that about you. I depend on it, those Blake girls made it all up. You've driven him away for good this time. He'll keep his word. He always does. He will go back east, mark my word!"

Lorena stealthily opened the door and looked after her lover's retreating figure. He had almost reached the bluff. Something stirred in her throat.

The long stretch of trail that ran away through the dreary landscape seemed like her life, and Floyd was going out of it. Her heart yearned for him. What would her life be without him?

"Lorena, where are you?" called Mrs. Farrell, emerging again from the bedroom. The girl was not in the room. The mother opened the door and looked out. A wall of whirling white met her vision.

"She has gone after him and is caught in the storm!" gasped the mother.

A knock sounded on the door. Floyd entered, noisily stamping the snow from his feet. "Thought I'd come back and have another talk with Lorena"—he began.

"Oh, Floyd, she's gone after you!" cried the distracted woman, wringing her hands. "She got sorry right after you left!"

"I'll find her," said Floyd quickly; "don't worry." And he dashed back into the storm.

When Lorena softly closed the kitchen door she could just see Floyd rounding the bluff. "Floyd, oh, Floyd, come back!" she called, all her reserve gone, her fierce pride thrown to the stormy winds that blew the fringe of her shawl into her eyes.

Realizing that he could not hear her, she started after him, but by the time she had covered half the distance a sea of white swept in between and blotted him from her view.

She hurried on, calling his name repeatedly, but the furious wind tore at her breath and walled her about with fleecy clouds. Suddenly she felt that she was off the trail.

She turned to the right and then to the left, but could not find it. Desperately she struggled on, until her tired limbs compelled a pause in the shelter of a bluff. She leaned panting against a rock, all unconscious of a pair of eyes which glared from a willow thicket near by.

The green lights in the eyes flared brighter, a long red tongue licked long, snarling jaws hungrily, and forth from the covert stole a lank gray wolf.

Lorena uttered a startled cry. This was no coyote to be chased with a stick. It was a wolf of timber stock, a great beast, strong as a mastiff! He emitted low snarls as he slunk in half circles across in front. He was undecided.

While he circled, drawing a little nearer at every turn, Lorena fell back—back toward the bluff, keeping her white face always toward the creeping beast.

She took off her heavy shawl and suddenly threw it blanketwise over the wolf's head. Then she fled desperately.

Once clear of the scrub, she ran on, plunging through drifts, stumbling, falling to rise again and push her flight. Of direction she could take no heed. All she could do was to place distance between herself and the famished brute. But when, weary and breathless, she paused for rest out of the drab drift stole the lank gray shadow.

With a terrified shriek Lorena ran on until she had to stop, spent, unable to take another step. She saw the wolf, licking his hungry jaws, leaping toward her with no indecision left.

Lorena screamed and closed her eyes. Two shots roared out. Looking up, she saw Floyd Jordan, with smoking revolver in his hand, standing over the prostrate beast.

"Floyd, oh, Floyd!" she sobbed as he came to her with eyes tender and anxious. He picked her up from the snow, wrapped her in his coat and held her against his breast.

The storm was lifting. Farrell's cabin could be discerned not a quarter of a mile distant.

"I'm dead sure now I'll build that cabin on my claim," Floyd said as they started homeward.

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