

THE FORESTER'S DAUGHTER

A Romance of the Bear Tooth Range

By HAMLIN GARLAND

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She confronted him with gravity. "It's too late for you to cross the ridge."



"I told him I wouldn't stand for his coarse ways, and I won't!"

"It'll be dark long before you reach the cut-off. You'd better not try to make it."

"I think I can find my way," he answered, touched by her consideration. "I'm not so helpless as I was when I came."

"Just the same you mustn't go on," she insisted. "Father told me to ask you to come in and stay all night. He wants to meet you. I was afraid you might ride by after what happened today, and so I came up here to head you off." She took his horse by the rein and flashed a smiling glance up at him. "Come, now, do as the supervisor tells you."

"Wait a moment," he pleaded. "On second thought I don't believe it's a good thing for me to go home with you. It will only make further trouble for us both."

"I know what you mean. I saw Cliff follow you. He jumped you, didn't he?"

"He overtook me, yes."

"He hesitated. "He was pretty hot and said things he'll be sorry for when he cools off."

"He told you not to come here any more—advised you to hit the outgoing trail—didn't he?"

"He flushed with returning shame of it all, but quietly answered, "Yes, he said something about riding east."

"Are you going to do it?"

"Not today, but I guess I'd better keep away from here."

She looked at him steadily. "Why?"

"Because you've been very kind to me, and I wouldn't for the world do anything to hurt or embarrass you."

"Don't you mind about me," she responded bluntly. "What happened this morning wasn't your fault nor mine. Come, father will be looking for you."

With a feeling that he was involving both the girl and himself in still darker storms, the young fellow yielded to her command, and together they walked along the weed-bordered path, while she continued:

"This isn't the first time Cliff has started in to discipline me, but it's obliged to be the last. He's the kind that think they own a girl just as soon as they get her to wear an engagement ring. But Cliff don't own me. I told him I wouldn't stand for his coarse ways, and I won't!"

Wayland tried to bring her back to humor. "You're a kind of 'new woman.'"

She turned a stern look on him. "You bet I am! I was raised a free citizen. No man can make a slave of me. I thought he understood that, but it seems he didn't. He's all right in many ways—one of the best riders in the country—but he's pretty tolerable doing nothing."

Mrs. McFarlane greeted Norcross with cordial words and earnest hand-clasp. "I'm glad to see you looking so well," she said, with charming sincerity.

"I'm browner anyway," he answered, and turned to meet McFarlane, a short, black bearded man with fine dark eyes and shapely hands—hands that had never done anything more toilsome than to lift a bridle rein or to

clutch the handle of a gun. He was the horseman in all his training, and though he owned hundreds of acres of land, he had never so much as held a plow or plied a spade. His manner was that of the cow boss, the lord of great herds, the claimant of empires of government grass land. Poor as his house looked, he was in reality rich. Narrow minded in respect to his own interests, he was well in advance of his neighbors on matters relating to the general welfare, a curious mixture of greed and generosity, as most men are, and though he had been made supervisor at a time when political pull still crippled the service, he was loyal to the flag. "I'm mighty glad to see you," he heartily began. "We don't often get a man from the sea level, and when we do we squeeze him dry."

His voice, low, languid and soft, was most insinuating, and for hours he kept his guest talking of the east and its industries and prejudices, and Berrie and her mother listened with deep admiration, for the youngster had seen a good deal of the old world and was unusually well read on historical lines of inquiry. He talked well, too, inspired by his attentive audience.

Berrie's eyes, wide and eager, were fixed upon him, unwaveringly. He felt her wonder, her admiration, and was inspired to do his best. Something in her absorbed attention led him to speak of things so personal that he wondered at himself for uttering them.

"I've been dilettante all my life," was one of his confessions. "I've traveled; I've studied in a top-dress sort of fashion; I went through college without any idea of doing anything with what I got; I had a sort of pride in keeping up with my fellows, and I had no idea of preparing for any work in the world. Then came my breakdown and my doctor ordered me out here. I came intending to fish and loaf around, but I can't do that. I've got to do something or go back home."

At last Mrs. McFarlane rose and Berrie, reluctantly, like a child loath to miss a fairy story, held out her hand to say good night, and the young man saw on her face that look of adoration which marks the birth of sudden love, but his voice was frank and his glance kindly as he said:

"Here I've done all the talking when I wanted you to tell me all sorts of things."

"I can't tell you anything."

"Oh, yes, you can; and, besides, I want you to get me into the service. But we'll talk about that tomorrow. Good night."

After the women left the room Norcross said:

"I really am in earnest about entering the forest service. Landon filled me with enthusiasm about it. Never mind the pay. I'm not in immediate need of money, but I do need an interest in life."

McFarlane stared at him with kindly perplexity. "I don't know exactly what you can do, but I'll work you in somehow. You ought to work under a man like Settle, one that could put you through a training in the rudiments of the game. I'll see what can be done."

"Thank you for that half promise," said Wayland, and he went to his bed happier than at any moment since leaving home.

Young Norcross soon became vitally engaged with the problems which confronted McFarlane, and his possible enrollment as a guard filled him with a sense of proprietorship in the forest, which made him quite content with Bear Tooth. He set to work at once to acquire a better knowledge of the extent and boundaries of the reservation. It was, indeed, a noble possession. Containing nearly 800,000 acres of woodland and reaching to the summits of the snow lined peaks to the east, south and west, it appealed to him with silent majesty. It drew upon his patriotism. Remembering how the timber of his own state had been slashed and burned, he began to feel a sense of personal responsibility.

He bought a horse of his own, although Berrie insisted upon his retaining Pete, and sent for a saddle of the army type, and from sheer desire to keep entirely clear of the cowboy equipment procured puttees like those worn by cavalry officers, and when he presented himself completely uniformed, he looked not unlike a slender young lieutenant of the cavalry on field duty, and in Berrie's eyes was wonderful alluring.

He took quarters at the hotel, but spent a larger part of each day in Berrie's company, a fact which was duly reported to Clifford Belden. Hardly a day passed without his taking at least one meal at the supervisor's home.

As he met the rangers one by one he perceived by their outfits, as well as by their speech, that they were sharply divided upon old lines and new. The experts, the men of college training, were quite ready to be known as Uncle Sam's men. They held a pride in their duties, a respect for their superiors, and an understanding of the governmental policy which gave them dignity and a quiet authority. They were less policemen than trusted agents of a federal department. Nevertheless, there was much to admire in the older men, who possessed a self reliance, a knowledge of nature and a certain rough grace which made them interesting companions and rendered them effective teachers of camping and trailing, and while they were secretly a little contemptuous of the "schoolboys," they were all quite ready to ask for expert aid when knotty problems arose. It was no longer a question of grazing, it was a question of lumbering and reforestation.

Nash, who took an almost brotherly interest in his apprentice, warningly

said: "You want to go well clothed and well shod. You'll have to meet all kinds of weather. Every man in the service—I don't care what his technical job is—should be schooled in taking care of himself in the forest and on the trail. I often meet surveyors and civil engineers, experts, who are helpless as children in camp, and when I want them to go into the hills and do field work they are almost useless. The old style ranger has his virtues. Settle is just the kind of instructor you young fellows need."

Berrie also had keen eyes for his outfit and his training, and under her direction he learned to pack a horse, set a tent, build a fire in the rain and other duties.

"You want to remember that you carry your bed and board with you," she said, "and you must be prepared to camp anywhere and at any time."

The girl's skill in these particulars was marvelous to him and added to the admiration he already felt for her. Her hand was as deft, as sure, as the best of them, and her knowledge of game psychology more profound than any of the men excepting her father.

One day toward the end of his second week in the village the supervisor said: "Well, now, if you're ready to experiment I'll send you over to Settle, the ranger, on the Horseshoe. He's a little lame on his pen hand side, and you may be able to help him out. May be I'll ride over there with you. I want to line out some timber sales on the west side of Ptarmigan."

This commission delighted Norcross greatly. "I'm ready, sir, this moment," he answered, saluting soldier-wise.

The next morning as he rode down to the office to meet the supervisor he was surprised and delighted to find Berrie there. "I'm riding too," she announced delightedly. "I've never been over that new trail, and father has agreed to let me go along." Then she added earnestly: "I think it's fine you're going in for the service, but it's hard work, and you must be careful till you're hardened to it. It's a long way to a doctor from Settle's station."

He was annoyed as well as touched by her warning, for it proclaimed that he was still far from looking the brave forester he felt himself to be. He replied, "I'm not going to try anything wild, but I do intend to master the trailer's craft."

"I'll teach you how to camp if you'll let me," she continued. "I've been on lots of surveys with father, and I always take my share of the work. I threw that hitch alone." She nodded toward the pack horse, whose neat load gave evidence of her skill. "I told father this was to be a real camping expedition, and as the grazing season is on we'll live on the country. Can you fish?"

"Just about that," he laughed. "Good thing you didn't ask me if I could catch fish." He was recovering his spirits. "It will be great fun to have you as instructor in camp science. I seem to be in for all kinds of good luck."

They both grew uneasy as time passed for fear something or some one would intervene to prevent this trip, which grew in interest each moment, but at last the supervisor came out and mounted his horse, the pack ponies fell in behind, Berrie followed, and the student of woodcraft brought up the rear.

CHAPTER VI. In Camp.

FOR several miles they rode upward through golden forests of aspens. On either hand rose thick walls of snow white boles, and in the mystic glow of the gilded leaves the face of the girl shined with unearthly beauty.

Twice she stopped to gaze into Wayland's face, to say, with hushed intensity: "Isn't it wonderful? Don't you wish it would last forever?"

Her words were poor, ineffectual, but her look, her breathless voice, made up for their lack of originality. Once she said: "I never saw it so lovely before. It is an enchanted land!" with no suspicion that the larger part of her ecstasy arose from the presence of her young and sympathetic companion. He, too, responded to the beauty of the day, of the golden forest as one who had taken new hold on life after long illness.

Meanwhile the supervisor was calmly leading the way upward, vaguely conscious of the magical air and mystic landscape in which his young folk floated as if on wings, thinking busily of the improvements which were still necessary in the trail and weighing with care the clouds which still lingered upon the tallest summits, as if debating whether to go or to stay. He had never been an imaginative soul, and now that age had somewhat dimmed his eyes and blunted his senses he was placidly content with his path. The rapture of the lover, the song of the poet, had long since abandoned his heart. And yet he was not completely oblivious. To him it was a nice day, but a "weather breeder."

"I wonder if I shall ever ride through this mountain world as untroubled as he seems to be?" Norcross asked himself after some jarring prosaic remark from his chief. "I am glad Berrie responds to it."

At last they left these lower, wooded forest aisles and entered the unbroken cloak of fir whose dark and silent depths had a stern beauty all their own.

The horses began to labor with roaring breath. A dozen times he thought, "We must be nearly at the top," and then other and far higher ridges suddenly developed. Occasionally the supervisor was forced to unsling an ax and chop his way through a fallen tree, and each time the student hur-

ried to the spot, ready to aid, but was quite useless.

"One of the first essentials of a ranger's training is to learn to swing an ax," remarked McFarlane, "and you never want to be without a real tool. I won't stand for a hatchet ranger."

The sky was overshadowed now and a thin drizzle of rain filled the air. The novice hastened to throw his raincoat over his shoulders, but McFarlane rode steadily on, clad only in his shirt sleeves, unmindful of the wet. Berrie, however, approved Wayland's caution. "That's right; keep dry," she called back. "Don't pay attention to father, he'd rather get soaked any day than enroll his sicker. You mustn't take him for a model yet awhile."

He no longer resented her sweet solicitude, although he considered himself unentitled to it, and he rejoiced under the shelter of his fine new coat. He began to perceive that one could be defended against a storm.

After passing two depressing marshes, they came to a hillside so steep, so slippery, so dark, so forbidding, that one of the pack horses balked, shook his head and reared furiously, as if to say, "I can't do it, and I won't try." And Wayland sympathized with him. The forest was gloomy and cold and apparently endless.

After coaxing him for a time with admirable gentleness, the supervisor, at Berrie's suggestion, shifted part of the load to her own saddle horse, and they went on.

Wayland, though incapable of comment, so great was the demand upon his lungs, was not too tired to admire the power and resolution of the girl, who seemed not to suffer any special inconvenience from the ruffled air. The dryness of his open mouth, the throbbing of his troubled pulse, the roaring of his breath, brought to him with increasing dismay the fact that he had overlooked another phase of

of a splendid stream was heard. But still the supervisor kept his resolute way, making no promises as to dinner, though his daughter called: "We'd better go into camp at Beaver lake. I hope you're not starved," she called to Wayland.

"But I am," he replied so frankly that she never knew how faint he really was. His knees were trembling with weakness, and he stumbled dangerously as he trod the loose rocks in the path.

They were all afoot now descending swiftly, and the horses romped down the trail with expectant haste, so that in less than an hour from timber line they were back into the sunshine of the lower valley, and at 3 o'clock or thereabouts they came out upon the bank of an exquisite lake, and with a cheery shout McFarlane called out: "Here we are, out of the wilderness!" Then to Wayland, "Well, boy, how did you stand it?"

"Just middling," replied Wayland, reticent from weariness and with joy of their camping place.

With businesslike certitude Berrie unsaddled her horse, turned him loose and lent a skillful hand at removing the panniers from the pack animals, while Wayland, wildly, but a little uncertain, stood awkwardly about. Under her instruction he collected dead branches of a standing fir, and from these a few cones kindled a blaze, while the supervisor hobbled the horses and set the tent.

One by one the principles of camping were taught by the kindly old rancher, but the hints which the girl gave were quite as valuable. For Wayland was eager to show her that he could be and intended to be a forester of the first class or perish in the attempt.

McFarlane went further and talked freely of the forest and what it meant to the government. "We're all green at the work," he said, "and we old chaps are only holding the fort against the thieves till you youngsters learn how to make the best use of the domain."

Berrie was glowing with happiness. "Let's stay here till the end of the week," she suggested. "I've always wanted to camp on this lake, and now I'm here I want time to enjoy it."

"We'll stay a day or two," said her father, "but I must get over to that ditch survey which is being made at the head of Poplar, and then Moore is coming over to look at some timber on Porcupine."

The young people cut willow rods and went angling at the outlet of the lake with prodigious success. The water rippled with trout, and in half an hour they had all they could use for supper and breakfast, and, behold, even as they were returning with their spoil they met a covey of grouse strolling leisurely down to the lake's edge. "Isn't it a wonderful place?" exclaimed the happy girl. "I wish we could stay a month."

"It's like being on the Swiss Family Robinson's island. I never was more content," he said fervently. "I wouldn't mind staying here all winter."

"I would!" she laughed. "The snow falls four feet deep up here. It's likely there's frost on the divide this minute, and camping in the snow isn't so funny. Some people got snowed in over at Deep Lake last year, and nearly all their horses starved before they could get them out. This is a fierce old place in winter time."

As the sunset came on the young people again lolled down to the water's edge, and there, seated side by side on a rocky knoll, watched the phantom glow lift from the willows and climb slowly to the cliffs above, while the water deepened in shadow and busy muskrats marked its glossy surface with long silvery lines. Mischievous camp birds peered at the couple from the branches of the pines, uttering satirical comment, while squirrels, frankly insolent, dropped cones upon their heads and barked in saucy glee.

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