The Forester's Daughter

A ROMANCE OF THE BEAR TOOTH RANGE

By HAMLIN GARLAND

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SYNOPSIS

Wayland Norcross, an eastern youth seeking health in Colorado, meets Berea McFarlane, called Berrie, typical ranch girl, daughter of the supervising ranger of Bear Tooth forest.

Berrie is greeted by her lover, Cliff Belden, a cowboy, supposed to be interested in a saloon at Meeker's Mill, where Norcross is bound. Berrie guides Norcross to his destination.

A shower intercepts them and the girl gives the youth her raincoat. There is a rough element at Meeker's, and Norcross chooses Landon, the ranger, as his companion. Landon loves Berrie.

CHAPTER IV.

A Warning.

MEANWHILE his own troubles increased. Frank's dislike had grown to an impish vindictiveness, and if the old man Meeker had any knowledge of his son's devilties he gave no sign.

"I don't know why I stay," Wayland wrote to Berea. "I'm disgusted with the men up here—they're all tiresome except Landon—but I hate to slink away, and, besides, the country is glorious. I'd like to come down and see you this week. May I do so? Please send word that I may."

She did not reply, and, wondering whether she had received his letter or not, he mounted his horse one beautiful morning and rode away up the trail with a sense of elation, of eager joy, with intent to call upon her at the ranch as he went by.

Hardly had he vanished among the pines when Clifford Belden rode in from his ranch on Hat creek and called at Meeker's for his mail.

Frank Meeker was in the office, and as he both feared and disliked this big contemptuous young cattleman he set to work to make him jealous.

"You want to watch this one lung boarder of ours," he warned, with a grin. "He's been writing to Berrie, and he's just gone down to see her His highfalutin ways and his fine white hands have put her on the slant."

"I'm not worrying," retorted Belden.

"You'd better be. I was down there the other day, and it 'peared like she couldn't talk of anything else but Mr. Norcross, Mr. Norcross, till I was sick of his name."

An hour later Belden left the mill and set off up the trail behind Norcross, his face fallen into stern lines. Frank writhed in delight. "There goes Cliff, hot under the collar, chasing Norcross. If he finds out that Berrie is interested in him he'll just about wring that dude's neck."

"I've been wondering about you," she said.

Meanwhile Wayland was riding through the pass with lightening heart, his thought dwelling on the girl at the end of his journey.

As he reached the McFarlane ranch it seemed deserted of men, but a faint column of smoke rising from the roof of the kitchen gave evidence of a cook, and at his knock Berrie came to the door with a boyish word of frank surprise and pleasure. She was dressed in a blue and white calico gown, with the collar turned in and the sleeves rolled up, but she seemed quite unembarrassed, and her pleasure in his coming quite repaid him for his long and tiresome ride.

"I've been wondering about you," she said. "I'm mighty glad to see you. How do you stand it?"

"You got my letter?"

"I did, and I was going to write and tell you to come down, but I've had some special work to do at the office."

She took the horse's rein from him, and together they started toward the stables.

This action of stabling the horses, a perfectly innocent and natural one for her, led one of the hands, a coarse minded sneak, to watch them from a corral. "I wonder how Cliff would like that?" he evilly remarked.

Berea was frankly pleased to see Wayland and spoke of the improvement which had taken place in him. "You're looking fine," she said as they were returning to the house. "But how do you get on with the boys?"

"Not very well," he admitted. "They seem to have it in for me. It's a constant fight."

Her face grew grave. "I reckon you got started wrong," she said at last. "They'll like you better when you get browned up and your clothes get dirty. You're a little too fancy for them just now."

"I don't believe I want any more of their company. What's the use? As you say, I've started wrong with them, and I don't see any prospect of getting right; and, besides, I like the rangers better. Landon thinks I might work into the service. I wonder if I could? It would give me something to do."

She considered a moment. "We'll think about that. Come into the kitchen. I'm cook today. Mother's gone to town."

The kitchen was clean and ample, and the delicious odor of new made bread filled it with cheer. As the girl resumed her apron Wayland settled into a chair with a sigh of content. "I like this," he said aloud. "There's nothing cowgirl about you now; you're the Anglo-Saxon housewife. You might be a Michigan or Connecticut girl at this moment."

Her cheeks were ruddy with the heat and her eyes intent on her work, but she caught enough of his meaning to be pleased with it. "Oh, I have to take a hand at the pots and pans now and then. I can't give all my time to the service, but I'd like to."

He boldly announced his errand. "I wish you'd take me to board. I'm sure your cooking would build up my shattered system a good deal quicker than your aunt's."

She laughed, but shook her head. "You ought to be on the hills riding hard every day. What you need is the high country and the air of the pines."

She had read that victims of the white plague always talk in this cheerful way about themselves, and she worked on without replying.

"If I were here—in the valley—you and I could ride together now and then, and you could show me all the trails. Why not let me come here and board? I'm going to ask your mother if I may not do so."

"Of course you can come here," she said when she saw he was in earnest. "Mother will be glad to have you, although our ranch isn't a bit pretty. Perhaps father will send you out with one of the rangers as a fireguard. I'll ask him tonight."

"I wish you would. I like these foresters—what I've seen of them. I wouldn't mind serving under a man like Landon. He's fine."

Upon this pleasant conference Cliff Belden unexpectedly burst. Pushing the door open with a slam, he confronted Berry with dark and angry face.

"Why, Cliff, where did you come from?" she asked, rising in some confusion. "I didn't hear you ride up."

"Apparently not," he sneeringly answered. "I reckon you were too much occupied."

She tried to laugh away his black mood. "That's right, I was. I'm chief cook today. Come in and sit down. Mother's gone to town, and I'm playing her part," she explained, ignoring his sullen displeasure. "Cliff, this is Mr. Norcross, who is visiting Uncle Joe. Mr. Norcross, shake hands with Mr. Belden." She made this introduction with some awkwardness, for her lover's failure to even say "Howdy" informed her that his jealous heart was aflame, and she went on quickly, "Mr. Norcross dropped in on his way to the postoffice, and I'm collecting a snack for him."

Recognizing Belden's claims upon the girl, Wayland rose. "I must be going. It's a long ride over the hill."

"Come again soon," urged Berrie "Father wants to see you."

"Thank you. I will look in very shortly," he replied and went out with such dignity as he could command, feeling, however, very much like a dog that has been kicked over the threshold.

Closing the door behind him, Belden turned upon the girl. "What's that consumptive 'dogie' doing here? He 'peared to be very much at home with you—too dern much at home!"

She was prepared for his displeasure, but not for words like these. She answered quietly: "He just dropped in on his way to town, and he's not a dogie!" She resented his tone as well as his words.

"I've heard about you taking him over to Meeker's and lending him your only slicker," he went on, "but I didn't expect to find him sittin' here like he owned you and the place. You're taking altogether too much pains with him. Can't he put his own horse out? Do you have to go to the stable with him? You never did have any sense about your actions with men. You've all along been too free of your reputation, and now I'm going to take care of it for you. I won't have you nursin' this runt any longer!"

She perceived now the full measure of his base rage, and her face grew pale and set. "You're making a perfect fool of yourself, Cliff," she said, with portentous calmness.

"Am I?" he asked.

"You sure are, and you'll see it yourself by and by. You've no call to get wire edged about Mr. Norcross. He's not very strong. He's just getting well of a long sickness. I knew a chill would finish him, that's why I gave him my slicker. It didn't hurt me, and maybe it saved his life. I'd do it again if necessary."

"Since when did you start a hospital for eastern tenderfeet?" he sneered, then his tone changed to one of downright command. "You want to cut this all out, I tell you! I won't have any more of it! The boys up at the mill are all talkin' about your interest in this little whelp, and I'm getting the branding iron from every one I meet. Sam saw you go into the barn with that dude, and that would have been all over the country tomorrow, if I hadn't told him I'd sew his mouth up if he said a word about it. Of course I don't think you mean anything by this coddlin'."

"Oh, thank you," she interrupted, with flaming, quick, indignant fury. "That's mighy nice of you. I went to the barn to show Mr. Norcross where to stall his horse. I didn't know Sam was here."

He sneered: "No, I bet you didn't."

She fired at this. "Come now! Something nasty is in your mind. Go on! What have I done? What makes you so hot?"

He began to weaken. "I don't accuse you of anything. I—but I"—

"Yes, you do—in your heart you distrust me—you just as much as said so!"

He was losing his high air of command. "Never mind what I said, Berrie. I"—

She was blazing now. "But I do mind—I mind a whole lot—I didn't think it of you," she added as she realized his cheapness, his coarseness. "I didn't suppose you could even think such things of me. I don't like it," she repeated, and her tone hardened, "and I guess you'd better pull out of here—for good. If you've no more faith in me than that I want you to go and never come back."

"You don't mean that!"

"Yes, I do! You've shown this yellow streak before, and I'm tired of it This is the limit. I'm done with you."

She stood between tears and benumbing anger now, and he was scared. "Don't say that, Berrie!" he pleaded, trying to put his arm about her.

"Keep away from me!" She dashed his hands aside. "I hate you. I never want to see you again!" She ran into her own room and slammed the door behind her.

Belden stood for a long time with his back against the wall, the heat of his resentment utterly gone, an empty, aching place in his heart. He called her twice, but she made no answer, and so at last he mounted his horse and rode away.

Young Norcross, much as he admired Berrie, was not seeking to exchange her favor for her lover's enmity, and he rode away with an uneasy feeling of having innocently made trouble for himself as well as for a fine, true hearted girl.

"What a good friendly talk we were having," he said regretfully. "And to think she is to marry that big, scowling brute! How could she turn Landon down for a savage like that?"

He was just leaving the outer gate when Belden came clattering up and reined his horse across the path and called out: "See here, you young skunk! You're a poor, white livered tenderfoot, and I can't bust you as I would a full grown man, but I reckon you better not ride this trail any more."

"Why not?" inquired Wayland.

Belden glared. "Because I tell you so. Your sympathy hunting game has just about run into the ground. You've worked this baby dodge about long enough. You're not so almighty sick as you put up to be, and you'd better hunt some other cure for lonesomeness or I'll just about cave your chest in."

All this was shockingly plain talk for a slender young scholar to listen to, but Norcross remained calm. "I think you're unnecessarily excited," he remarked. "I have no desire to make trouble. I'm considering Miss Berea, who is too fine to be worried by us."

His tone was conciliating, and the cowman, in spite of himself, responded to it. "That's why I advise you to go. She was all right till you came. Colorado's a big place, and there are plenty other fine ranges for men of your complaint. Why not try Routt county? This is certain, you can't stay in the same valley with my girl I serve notice of that."

"You're making a prodigious ass of yourself," observed Wayland, with calm contempt.

"You think so, do you? Well, I'll make a jack rabbit out of you if I find you on this ranch again. You've worked on my girl in some way till she's just about quit me. I don't see how you did it, you measly little pup, but you surely have turned her against me!" His rage burst into flame as he thought of her last words. "If you were so much as half a man I'd break you in two pieces right now, but you're not. You're nothing but a dead on the roof lunger, and there's nothing to do but run you out. So take this as your final notice. You straddle a horse and head east and keep a-ridin', and if I catch you with my girl again I'll deal you a whole hatful of misery. Now, that's right!"

Thereupon, with a final glance of hate in his face, he whirled his horse and galloped away, leaving Norcross dumb with resentment, intermingled with wonder.

"Truly the west is a dramatic country! Here I am involved in a lover's wrath and under sentence of banishment all within a month! Well, I suppose there's nothing to do but carry out Belden's orders. He's the boss," he said as he rode on. "I wonder just what happened after I left? Something stormy evidently. She must have given him a sharp rebuff or he wouldn't have been so furious with me. Perhaps she even broke her engagement with him. I sincerely hope she did. She's too good for him."

And so from point to point he progressed till, with fine indignation, he reached a resolution to stay and meet whatever came. "I certainly would be a timorous animal if I let myself be scared into flight by that big bonehead," he said at last.

Nevertheless he felt very weak and very much depressed as he rode up the street of the little town and dismounted at the forest service building.

CHAPTER V

The Supervisor of the Forest.

NASH, who was alone in the government office, looked up from his work. "Come in," he called heartily. "Come in and report."

"Thank you. I'd like to do so. And may I use your desk? I have a letter to write."

"Make yourself at home. Take any desk you like. The men are all out on duty."

"You're very kind," replied Wayland, gratefully. There was something reassuring in this greeting and in the many signs of skill and scientific reading which the place displayed. It was like a bit of Washington in the midst of a careless, slovenly, lawless mountain town, and Norcross took his seat and wrote his letter with a sense of proprietorship.

"I'm getting up an enthusiasm for the service just from hearing Alec Belden rave against it," he said a few minutes later, as he looked up from his letter.

Nash grinned. "How did you like Meeker?"

"He's a good man, but he has his peculiarities. Belden is your real enemy. He is blue with malignity—so are most of the cowmen I met up there. I wish I could do something for the service. I'm a thoroughly up to date analytical chemist and a passable mining engineer, and my doctor says that for a year at least I must work in the open air. Is there anything in this forest service for a weakling like me?"

Nash considered. "I think we can employ you, but you'll have to go on as fire guard or something like that for the first year. You see, the work is getting to be more and more technical each year. As a matter of fact"—here he lowered his voice a little—"McFarlane is one of the old guard and will have to give way. He don't know a thing about forestry and is too old to learn. His girl knows more about it than he does. She helps him out on office work too."

Wayland wondered a little at the freedom of expression on the part of Nash, but said, "If he runs his office as he runs his ranch he surely is condemned to go."

"Well, you get Berrie to take up your case and you're all right. She has the say about who goes on the force in this forest."

It was late in the afternoon before Wayland started back to Meeker's with intent to repack his belongings and leave the ranch for good. He had decided not to call at McFarlane's, a decision which came not so much from fear of Clifford Belden as from a desire to shield Berea from further trouble, but as he was passing the gate the girl rose from behind a clump of willows and called to him: "Oh, Mr Norcross! Wait a moment!"

He drew rein and, slipping from his horse, approached her. "What is it, Miss Berrie?" he asked, with wondering politeness.

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—for us both."

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

"He overtook me, yes."

"What did he say?"

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 domineering."

Mrs. McFarlane greeted Norcross with cordial word and earnest handclasp. "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 tepid 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 Berea, 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 intercede for me with your father and 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 wondrous 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 reforestration.

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 cayuse 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. Maybe 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 Berea 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 become used 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 ranger'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 grouse 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.

To be Continued.

The First Victim.

Chief Justice Doherty used to relate an experience which befell him during a visit to a country house in Ireland. His friend, the host, sent a car to the railway station to bring him to the place. He had not gone far when the horse became restless and finally upset the car into a ditch. The judge asked the driver how long the animal had been in harness.

"Half an hour, sur."

"I mean how long since he was first put in harness?"

"Shure, I've tould you—half an hour, sur," answered the driver. "An' the masther said if he carried ye safe he'd buy him."—Pittsburgh Chronicle-Telegraph.

NOTICE OF PROBATE OF WILL.
STATE OF IOWA,
County of Delaware, ss.

To All Whom It May Concern:

You are hereby notified that the last will of John Jordison, deceased, has been filed, opened and read, and Monday, the 4th day of October, A. D., 1915, fixed as the time, and the court house in Manchester the place for hearing and proving the same.

Witness my hand and seal of said Court, this 17th day of August, 1915.

A. O. STANGER,
Clerk District Court.

3-wks.

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