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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 Bessie McFarlane, called Bessie, typical ranch girl, daughter of the supervising ranger of Bear Tooth forest.

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

Nash, the ranger at Bear Tooth, gives Wayland points on forestry. Bessie's father offers him a place in the service. Bessie decides to go with them over the trail.

Cliff notices Bessie's interest in the tenderfoot and warns him away. He also takes his betrothed to task. She resents this and breaks their engagement.

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 their gilded leaves the face of the girl shone 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 calm by leading the way upward, vaguely conscious of the magical air and wondrous 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 dim-

med 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 unmoved as he seems to be?" Norcross asked himself after some jarring prosaic remark from his chief. "I am glad Bessie responds to it."

At last they left these lower, wondrous forest aisles and entered the unbroken cloak of firs 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 unseat an ax and chop his way through a fallen tree, and each time the student hurried 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. Bessie, 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 unroll his slicker. You mustn't take him for a model yet awhile."

He no longer resented her sweet soliloquy, 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 Bessie'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 rarefied 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

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the ranger's job. "I couldn't chop a hole through one of these windfalls in a week," he admitted, as McFarlane's bias again liberated them from a fall-an tree.

He was beginning to be hungry also—and he had eaten a very early breakfast—and he fell to wondering just where and when they were to camp, but he endured in silence. "So long as Bessie makes no complaint my mouth is shut," he told himself. "Surely I can stand it if she can." And so struggled on.

Up and up the pathway looped, crossing minute little boggy meadows on whose bottomless ooze the grass shook like a blanket, descending rivines and climbing back to dark and muddy slopes. The forest was dripping, green and silent now—a mysterious menacing jungle.

"I'm glad I'm not riding this pass alone," Wayland said as they paused again for breath.

"So am I," she answered, but her thought was not his. She was happy at the prospect of teaching him how to camp.

At last they reached the ragged edge of timber line, and there, rolling away under the mist, lay the bare, grassy, upward climbing naked neck of the great peak. The wind had grown keener moment by moment, and when they left the storm twisted pines below its breath had a wintry nip. The rain had ceased to fall, but the clouds still hung densely to the loftiest summits. It was a sinister yet beautiful world—a world as silent as a dream, and through the short, thick grass the slender trail ran like a timid serpent.

"Now we're on the divide," called Bessie, and as she spoke they seemed to enter upon a boundless Alpine plain of velvet russet grass. "This is the Bear Tooth plateau." Low mounds of loose rock stood on small ledges, as though to mark the course, and in the hollows dark ponds of icy water lay, half surrounded by masses of compact snow.

"This is a stormy place in winter," McFarlane explained. "These piles of stone are mighty valuable in a blizzard. I've crossed this divide in August in snow so thick I could not see a rod."

Half an hour later they began to descend. Wind twisted, storm bleached dwarf pines were first to show, then the firs, then the blue green spruces, and then the sheltering depths of the undeposited forest opened, and the roar 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 Bessie unsaddled her horse, turned him loose and lent a skillful hand at removing the panniers from the pack animals, while Wayland, willing, 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 blinks 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."

Bessie 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 into 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 strutting leisurely down to the lake's edge. "Isn't that 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 like there's snow 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 near

by 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 gold 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.

Wayland forgot all the outside world, forgot that he was studying to be a forest ranger, and was alive only to the fact that in this most bewitching place, in this most entrancing hour, he had the companionship of a girl whose eyes sought his with every new phase



Seated Side by Side on a Rocky Knoll.

of the silent and wonderful scene which shifted before their eyes like a noiseless yet prodigious drama.

At last the girl rose. "It is getting dark. I must go back and get supper."

"We don't need any supper," he protested.

"Father does, and you'll be hungry before morning," she retorted, with sure knowledge of men.

He turned from the scene reluctantly, but once at the campfire cheerfully gave his best efforts to the work in hand, seconding Bessie's skill as best he could.

The trout, deliciously crisp, and some potatoes and butter cakes made a meal that tempted even his faint appetite, and when the dishes were washed and the towels hung out to dry deep night possessed even the high summit of stately Ptarmigan.

McFarlane then said, "I'll just take a little turn to see that the horses are all right, and then I think we'd better close in for the night."

When they were alone in the light of the fire Wayland turned to Bessie: "I'm glad you're here. It must be awesome to camp alone in a wilderness, and yet, I suppose, I must learn to do it."

"Yes, the ranger often has to camp alone, ride alone and work alone for weeks at a time," she assured him. "A good trailer don't mind a night trip any more than he does a day trip, or if he does he never admits it. Rain, snow, darkness, are all the same to him. Most of the boys are fifteen to forty miles from the postoffice."

He smiled ruefully. "I begin to have new doubts about this ranger business. It's a little more vigorous than I thought it was. Suppose a fellow breaks a leg on one of those high trails?"

"He mustn't!" she hastened to say. "He can't afford really to take reckless chances; but, then, father won't expect as much of you as he does of the old stagers. You'll have plenty of time to get used to it."

McFarlane upon his return gave some advice relating to the care of horses. "All this stock which is accustomed to a barn or a pasture will quit you," he warned. "Watch your bronchos. Put them on the outward side of your camp when you bed down and pitch your tent near the trail, then you will hear the brutes if they start back. Some men tie their stock all up, but I usually picket my saddle horse and hobble the rest."

It was a delightful hour for schooling, and Wayland would have been content to sit there till morning listening, but the air bit, and at last the supervisor asked: "Have you made your bed? If you have turn in. I shall get you out early tomorrow." As he saw the bed he added: "I see you've laid out a bed of boughs. That shows how eastern you are. We don't do that out here. It's too cold in this climate and it's too much work. You want to hug the ground—if it's dry."

The weary youth went to his couch with a sense of timorous elation, for he never before slept beneath the open sky.

After the supervisor had rolled himself in the blanket, long after all sounds had ceased in the tent, there still remained for the youth a score of manifold excitements to wakefulness: at last he fell into an uneasy

CHAPTER VII. Storm Bound.

Wayland was awakened by the mellow voice of his chief calling: "All out! All out! Day-light down the creek!" Then, breathing a prayer of thankfulness, the boy sat up and looked about him. "The bog night is over at last, and I am alive," he said and congratulated himself.

"How did you sleep?" asked the supervisor.

"First rate—at least during the latter part of the night," Wayland briskly lied.

"That's good. I was afraid that Ad-tronack bed of yours might let the white wolf in."

"My blankets did seem a trifle thin," confessed Norcross.

"It doesn't pay to sleep cold," the supervisor went on. "A man wants to wake up refreshed, not tired out with fighting the night wind and frost. I always carry a good bed."

It was instructive to see how quietly and methodically the old mountaineer went about his task of getting breakfast. First he cut and laid a couple of eight inch logs on either side of the fire, so that the wind drew through them properly; then, placing the Dutch oven cover on the fire, he laid the bottom part where the flames touched it. Next he filled his coffeepot with water and set it on the coals. From his panicle he took his dishes and the flour and salt and pepper, arranging them all within reach, and at last laid some slices of bacon in the skillet.

At this stage of the work a smothered cry, half yawn, half complaint, came from the tent. "Oh, hum! Is it morning?" inquired Bessie.

"Morning," replied her father. "It's going toward noon. You get up or you'll have no breakfast."

Thereupon Wayland called: "Can I get you anything, Miss Bessie? Would you like some warm water?"

"What for?" interposed McFarlane before the girl could reply.

"To bathe in!" replied the youth.

"To bathe in! If a daughter of mine should ask for warm water to wash with I'd throw her in the creek!"

Bessie chuckled. "Sometimes I think daddy has no feeling for me. I reckon he thinks I'm a boy."

"Hot water is debilitating and very bad for the complexion," retorted her father. "Ice cold water is what you need. And if you don't get out of there in five minutes I'll douse you with a dipperful!"

This reminded Wayland that he had not yet made his own toilet, and, seizing soap, towel and brushes, he hurried away down the beach, where he came face to face with the dawn. The splendor of it smote him full in the eyes. From the waveless surface of the water a spectral mist was rising, a light veil, through which the stupendous cliffs loomed 2,000 feet in height, darkly shadowed, dim and far. The willows along the western margin burned as if dipped in liquid gold, and on the lofty crags the sun's coming created keen edged shadows, violet as ink. Truly this forestry business was not so bad after all. It had its compensations.

Back at the campfire he found Bessie at work, glowing, vigorous, laughing. Her comradeship with her father was very charming, and at the moment she was rallying him on his method of bread mixing. "You should rub the lard into the flour," she said. "Don't be afraid to get your hands into it—after they are clean. You can't mix bread with a spoon."

"Sis, I made camp bread for twenty years afore you were born."

"It's a wonder you lived to tell of it," she retorted, and took the pan away from him. "That's another thing you must learn," she said to Wayland. "You must know how to make bread. You can't expect to find bakershops or ranchers along the way."

In the heat of the fire, in the charm of the girl's presence, the young man forgot the discomforts of the night, and, as they sat at breakfast and the sun rising over the high summits flooded them with warmth and good cheer and the frost melted like magic from the tent, the experience had all the satisfying elements of a picnic. It seemed that nothing remained to do. But McFarlane said, "Well, now you youngsters wash up and pack while I reconnoiter the stock." And with his saddle and bridle on his shoulder he went away down the trail.

Under Bessie's direction Wayland worked busily putting the camp equipment in proper parcels, taking no special thought of time till the tent was down and folded, the panniers filled and closed and the fire carefully covered. Then the girl said: "I hope the horses haven't been stampeded. There are bears in this valley, and horses are afraid of bears. Father ought to have been back before this. I hope they haven't quit us."

"Shall I go and see?"

"No, he'll bring 'em if they're in the land of the living. He picked his saddle horse, so he's not afoot. Nobody can teach him anything about trailing horses, and, besides, you might get lost. You'd better keep close to camp."

Thereupon Wayland put aside all responsibility. "Let's see if we can catch some more fish," he urged.

To this she agreed, and together they went again to the outlet of the lake, where the trout could be seen darting to and fro on the clear, dark food, and there cast their flies till they had secured ten good sized fish.

"We'll stop now," declared the girl. "I don't believe in being wasteful!"

Once more at the camp they prepared the fish for the pan.

As they were unpacking the panniers and getting out the dishes for their

meal thunder broke from the high crags above the lake, and the girl called out:

"Quick! It's going to rain! We must reset the tent and get things under cover."

Once more he was put to shame by the decision, the skill and the strength with which she went about re-establishing the camp. She led, he followed in every action. In ten minutes the canvas was up, the beds rolled, the panniers protected, the food stored safely. But they were none too soon, for the thick gray veil of rain which had clothed the loftiest crags for half an hour swung out over the water, leader gray under its folds, and with a roar which began in the tall pines, a roar which deepened, hushed only when the thunder crashed resoundingly from crag to crest, the tempest fell upon the camp and the world of sun and odorous pine vanished almost instantly, and a dark, threatening and forbidding world took its place.

But the young people, huddled close together beneath the tent, would have enjoyed the change had it not been for the thought of the supervisor. "I hope he took his slicker," the girl said between the tearing, ripping flashes of the lightning. "It's raining hard up there."

"How quickly it came. Who would have thought it could rain like this after so beautiful a morning?"

"It storms when it storms in the mountains," she responded with the sententious air of her father. "You never can tell what the sky is going to do up here. It is probably snowing on the high divide. Looks now as though those cygnets pulled out some time in the night and have hit the trail for home. That's the trouble with stall fed stock. They'll quit you any time they feel cold and hungry. Here comes the hail!" she shouted as a sharper, more spiteful roar sounded far away and approaching. "Now keep from under!"

"What will your father do?" he called.

"Don't worry about him. He's at home any place there's a tree. He's probably under a balsam somewhere, waiting for this ice to spill out. The only point is, they may get over the divide, and if they do it will be slippery coming back."

For the first time the thought that the supervisor might not be able to return entered Wayland's mind, but he said nothing of his fear.

The hail soon changed to snow, great, clinging, drowsy, soft, slow moving flakes, and with their coming the roar died away and the forest became as silent as a grave of bronze. Nothing moved save the thick falling, feathery, frozen vapor, and the world was again very beautiful and very mysterious.

"We must keep the fire going," warned the girl. "It will be hard to start after this soaking."

He threw upon the fire all of the wood which lay near, and Bessie, taking the ax, went to the big fir and began to chop off the dry branches which hung beneath, working almost as effectively as a man. Wayland insisted on taking a turn with the tool, but his efforts were so awkward that she laughed and took it away again. "You'll have to take lessons in swinging an ax," she said. "That's part of the job."

Gradually the storm lightened, the snow changed back into rain and finally to mist, but up on the heights the clouds still rolled wildly, and through their openings the white drifts bleakly shone.

"It's all in the trip," said Bessie. "You have to take the weather as it comes on the trail." As the storm lessened she resumed the business of



You'll have to take lessons in swinging an ax," she said. "That's part of the job."

cooking the midday meal, and at 2 o'clock they were able to eat in comparative comfort, though the unmet snow still covered the trees, and the water dripped from the branches.

"Isn't it beautiful!" exclaimed Wayland, with glowing, boyish face. "The landscape is like a Christmas card."

"It wouldn't be so beautiful if you had to wallow through ten miles of it," she sagely responded. "Daddy will be wet to the skin, for I found he didn't take his slicker. However, the sun may be out before night. That's the way the thing goes in the hills."

To the youth, though the peaks were storm hid, the afternoon was joyous. Bessie was a sweet companion. Under her supervision he practiced at chopping wood and took a hand at cooking.

He had to admit that she was better able to care for herself in the wilderness than most men, even western men, and, though he had not yet witnessed a display of her skill with a rifle, he was ready to believe that she could shoot as well as her sire. Nevertheless he liked her better when engaged in purely feminine duties, and he led the talk back to subjects concerning which her speech was less blunt and manlike.

He liked her when she was joking, for delicious little curves of laughter played about her lips. She became very amusing as she told of her "visits east" and of her embarrassments in the homes of city friends. "I just have to own up that about all the schooling I've got is from the magazines. Sometimes I wish I had pulled out for town when I was about fourteen; but you see, I didn't feel like leaving mother, and she didn't feel like letting me go, and so I just got what I could at Bear Tooth." She sprang up. "There's a patch of blue sky. Let's go see if we can't get a grouse." Together they strolled along the edge of the willows. "The grouse come down to feed about this time," she said. "We'll put up a covey soon."

Within a quarter of a mile they found their birds, and she killed four with five shots. "This is all we need," she said, "and I don't believe in killing for the sake of killing. Rangers should set good examples in way of game preservation. They are deputy game wardens in most states, and good ones too."

The night rose formidably from the valley while they ate their supper, but Bessie remained tranquil. "Those horses probably went clean back to the ranch. If they did, daddy can't possibly get back before 8 o'clock, and he may not get back till tomorrow."

Norcross, with his city training, was acutely conscious of the delicacy of the situation. In his sister's circle a girl left alone in this way with a man would have been very seriously embarrassed, but it was evident that Bessie took it all joyously, innocently. Their being together was something which had happened in the natural course of weather, a condition for which they were in no way responsible. Therefore she permitted herself to be frankly happy in the charm of their enforced intimacy.

She had never known a youth of his quality. He was so considerate, so refined, so quick of understanding and so swift to serve. He filled her mind to the exclusion of unimportant matters like the snow, which was beginning again. Indeed, her only anxiety concerned his health, and as he toiled amid the falling flakes, intent upon heaping up wood enough to last out the night, she became solicitous.

"You will be soaked," she warningly cried. "Don't stay out any more. Come to the fire. I'll bring in the wood."

Something primal, some strength he did not know he possessed sustained him, and he toiled on. "Suppose this snow keeps falling?" he retorted. "The supervisor will not be able to get back tonight—perhaps not for a couple of nights. We will need a lot of fuel."

He did not voice the fear of the storm which filled his thought, but the girl understood it. "It won't be very cold," she calmly replied. "It never is during these early blizzards, and, besides, all we need to do is to drop down the trail ten miles, and we'll be safely out of it."

"I'll feel safer with plenty of wood," he argued, but soon found it necessary to resort to his labors. Coming in to camp, he seated himself beside her on a roll of blankets, and so together they toiled the fire and watched the darkness roll over the lake till the shining crystals seemed to drop from a measureless black arch, soundless and oppressive.

"What time is it now?" she asked abruptly.

He looked at his watch. "Half after 8."

"If father isn't on this side of the divide now he won't try to cross. If he's coming down the slope he'll be here in an hour, although that trail is a tolerably tough proposition this minute. A patch of dead timber on a dark night is sure a nuisance even to a good man. He may not make it."

"Couldn't I rig up a torch and go to meet him?"

She put her hand on his arm. "You stay right here," she commanded. "You couldn't follow that trail five minutes." "You have a very poor opinion of my skill."

"No, I haven't; but I know how hard it is to keep direction on a night like this, and I don't want you wandering around in the timber. Father can take care of himself. He's probably sitting under a big tree snoring his pipe before his fire—or else he's at home. He knows we're all right, and we are. We have wood and grub and plenty of blankets and a roof over us. You can make your bed under this flap," she said, looking up at the canvas. "It beats the old balsam as a roof. You mustn't sleep cold again."

"I think I'd better sit up and keep the fire going," he replied heroically. "There's a big log out there that I'm going to bring in to roll up on the windward side."

"It'll be cold and wet early in the morning, and I don't like to hunt blizzards in the snow," she said. "I always get everything ready the night before. I wish you had a better bed. It seems selfish of me to have the tent while you are cold."

Continued in next week's Banner.