

The Finding of Jasper Holt

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The girl on the bank caught her breath, but said nothing. Must they swim across? Was there no other way? She watched Holt standing, strong and manly, in the middle of the stream, the water above his waist. Presently, when he had gone more than half way across he turned and came back to her.

She was white with excitement, but her lips were set and her eyes were bright with the intention of doing his bidding.

"I am sorry. There is no other way, and we must hurry, for the sun is getting low. We should reach that house before dark."

He stooped and gathered her in his strong arms, lifting her shoulder high, and stalked out into the stream before she knew what he was doing.

"Oh, please, I can walk as well as you," she deprecated.

"Put your arms around my neck, please," he commanded, and waded in, holding her high and dry above the water.

She obeyed instantly, in trust and shy wonder, and the water rose about them, but did not touch her.

Once, when they were in the middle of the stream, Holt's foot slipped and for an instant it seemed as though he would lose his balance, but he lifted her the higher and almost instantly recovered himself. In a moment more they had crossed the stream, and he had set her down upon the bank and was shaking the water from his garments as if it were a common thing which he had done and he enjoyed it. She looked down at herself. Not a shred of her garments was wet, while he was drenched almost to the arm pits.

"You are all wet!" she exclaimed, conscience stricken.

"You wouldn't expect me to keep dry in all that, would you?" he asked, with his eyes dancing.

Then they laughed like two children, and a frightened chipmunk ran chattering away in the trees.

"Are you all right?" he asked solicitously. "Are you perfectly dry?" His voice was husky with emotion and his eyes tender.

"Of course I'm dry," she answered dubiously, as if half ashamed of the fact. "Why wouldn't I be when I'm treated like a baby? It seems to me you didn't quite keep to the terms of our partnership."

"This was one of the big things," he said, "only I didn't want you to know it. To tell you the truth, I didn't know whether that stream was fordable or not; and, besides, I knew that if you got your clothes wet again it would hinder you in walking. Come, we must make that house before dark. I'm hungry, aren't you? And we're pretty sure to find bacon and corn bread at least. How does that sound?"

"Good!" she cried, laughing, and took the hand that was held out to her. Together they ran on over the rough ground toward supper and rest.

But the way was longer than they thought, and Holt had not been able to calculate on the slow steps of the girl who was unused to such long tramps, nor to going without adequate food. The sun went down and the darkness was upon them before they were anywhere near the little house.

Once Jean stumbled and almost fell, and a sound like a half sob came from her throat as she clutched at his arm to save herself. It was then he picked her up like a tired child and carried her over the rough ground, until she protested so vigorously that he was forced to set her down and both stopped to rest. For, indeed, Holt's own strength was somewhat spent by this time, though he showed no outward sign of fatigue, having been trained in a school that endures until it drops.

By this time they felt as if they had known each other for years, for there is nothing like a common peril and a common need to make souls know one another, and to bring out the true selfishness or unselfishness of each character. Because these two had been absolutely forgetful of self, each left for the other a most extraordinary attraction and reverence.

As they sat there under the stars, resting, it came to their minds how far from strangers they now seemed, and yet how little they knew about each other's lives. They sat, they looked at each other, and they thought of the things that had happened since they had met.

of the other's fineness.

"I cannot be mistaken," thought Jean. "He is fine and noble—all that a man ought to be. He looks as if he had never done anything wrong, yet is strong enough to kill the devil if he would."

But this time the little house in the distance had put a light in its window, and guided them twinklingly to its door, where three great dogs greeted them from afar and disputed their entrance.

The house was not very large, only three rooms. A man and his wife and some hired hands huddled around a kerosene light, the men smoking and playing cards; the wife knitting silently in the rear.

They looked up curiously to hear the stranger's story, half incredulous. They had not heard of any railroad accident. They lived 20 miles from the railroad and went to town only once a fortnight.

"This your wife?" questioned the householder of Holt.

Jean's face flamed scarlet as a new embarrassment faced her. She had not thought of proprieties until now. Of course they existed even in the wilderness.

Holt explained haughtily.

"H'm!" said the man still incredulous. "Any more in your party? Wal, my woman'll take keer your woman fer t'night, an' in the mornin' we ken talk business. Yas, I've got horses, but I need 'em." The man looked cunningly from one to the other of the men.

Jean looked at Holt, and thought how far above these people he seemed as he stood haughtily by the door in his wet and draggled clothing, with the bearing of a young king.

"Oh, I can pay for the horses," said Holt, "and see that they are returned, too, if that is what is the matter." And he pulled out a roll of bills and threw several carelessly on the table.

"Wal, that alters the case," said the man more suavely; "of course, fer a consideration—"

"Can we get some supper?" asked Holt, cutting him short. "We've had very little to eat all day, and this lady is tired and hungry."

The man's wife bustled forward. "Fer the land sake!" she exclaimed, "hungry this time o' night? We ain't got much ready, but ther' was some corn bread and po'k lef' from supper, ef they'll do. The men is pow'ful eatahs."

She set out the best her house afforded, eyeing Jean's tattered silk robe enviously between trips to the cupboard. The men went on with their card game and Jean and Holt ate in silence. The girl was beginning to dread the night and to wish for the silence of the starlit world and the protection of her strong, true friend. She did not like the look of the men who fumbled the dirty cards and cast bold glances in her direction.

She was even more frightened when she learned the arrangements that were to be made for the night. She was assigned to a bunk in a small closet like room opening from the big room in which they were all sitting—which appeared to be kitchen, parlor and dining room combined, and was to be, for that night at least, sleeping room for Holt and the other men, several rolls of army blankets being the only visible provision made for their comfort.

Holt managed to get opportunity to whisper to her as the men were disputing over their game while the housewife retired to the guest chamber to "red up."

"Don't you worry," he reassured her softly. "I'll bunk across in front of your door. You can sleep and trust me."

She flashed up at him a bright, weary smile that sent a thrill of joy through him and made him feel that nothing in life could be better than to defend this girl who trusted him.

In the early rose and gold of the morning Jean awoke to the smell of cooking ham and the sizzle of eggs frying just the other side of her thin partition, and knew that she had slept in safety under guard of her new found friend.

"Jasper! Jasper Holt!" said a strange, sweet voice within her soul, and she wondered at the beauty of the name and the thrill of possession that came to her.

She had a little money carefully saved since her coming. It was to take her to her home when the trip was over, and she had the door open at the house where her father worked. The serious school life and church work to which she had been devoted herself; and, above all, the love and sympathy over the sweet memories that existed between this girl and her parents. A wistful look

for a khaki skirt and blouse, of doubtful cut and shabby mien, but whole and clean. For these she gave \$2 and the remains of the once treasured, but now tattered and traveled staine, silk robe she wore. And so it was as a western girl, in riding skirt and blouse, that she emerged from the little closet where she had slept, but so wholly was she able to subjugate her clothes, and so exquisitely did her flower face and golden brown hair set them off, that they took on a style and beauty entirely out of their nature; and their former owner stared in wonder and sighed with envy as she beheld. It had not been the silken garment that made this girl a queen, but her own beauty of countenance and regal bearing; for here were her own old clothes worn like a royal robe, making the stranger lovely as the morning.

Holt looked at the girl in startled wonder when she appeared, so trig and sweet in her traveling garb, ready for the next stage of her journey, and trembled with joy at the day that was before him; albeit the end of the journey would bring sadness and parting, he knew. He wanted to knock down the men who stared insolently, offering audible comments on her complexion and bearing that made the swift, frightened color come to her cheeks. He ate his breakfast in haughty silence, sitting between Jean and one of the men, and shielding her as far as possible from any need of conversation save with her hostess, who waited on them all and hovered admiringly round her young guest's chair with offers of molasses and mush that were fairly overwhelming.

"Any need for a clergyman?" asked the ugliest of the three men, leaning forward across the table, his knife and fork held perpendicular each side of his plate, a large piece of ham aloft on his fork. He gave an ugly wink at the others and they laughed coarsely and meaningly.

"Yas, you could git the elder by goin' about 10 mile out o' yer way," added another, and devoted himself audibly to his thick cup of muddy coffee.

Holt ignored these remarks and began asking questions of his host about the crops and the exact location of the house with regard to railroads, wondering, meanwhile, if Jean understood their rough jokes, and hoping she did not.

If she did she was serene with it all, and smiled her very sweetest on her hostess, making her heart glad at the parting by the gift of a pair of cheap, but pretty, little cuff pins that had been fastened on the front of her traveling robe.

So they mounted and rode away, Jean like the queen of a girl that she was, and her companion no less noble in his bearing. The joy they felt in the day and each other was only equalled by their own shyness in speaking of it.

CHAPTER VI.

They talked about many things that morning as they rode happily toward Hawk Valley. Holt felt no anxiety, now, about reaching there by night, for he knew exactly where he was and how to get there. He had bargained with one of the men for firearms, and he could now shoot enough to keep them from hunger even if they were delayed. He had matches in his pocket and an old cowboy hat on his head, and he felt rested and fit for the journey. For the first half of the way, at least, he could give himself up to the bliss of a companionship such as he had never known in the whole of his young life. Reverence, awe, adoration were in his glance as he looked at the girl, and a great, wistful sadness grew as the day lingered toward evening.

They rode first straight down to the telegraph station, which was about 15 miles from the settler's cabin, and sent reassuring telegrams from the forlorn little office set out alone in the middle of the prairie; one to Jean's father and mother back in the eastern home, and one to her sister, Eleanor Harrington, in Hawk Valley.

"Don't worry about accident. Am safe and well and shall reach Hawk Valley tonight.—Jean," said the first message. The second Holt worded for himself, for he had left the girl outside the station on her horse. She had asked him to be sure and tell her sister that he was with her so she would not worry, but the message he sent was:

"Safe and well, and on my way to you with a friend who will look out for me. Expect to reach Hawk Valley tonight.—Jean."

Inquiry concerning the accident brought little information. The wreck had been on the "other road" and the agent "hadn't heard much." He "didn't know whether many lives were lost or not," and he "guessed it was the engineer's fault, anyhow—it usually was."

They rode on their way in happy converse. Jean was led to tell of her home life. Not that Holt questioned her, but she seemed to love to talk of home and picture her family, her friends, the places where her father preached, the companions of her girl-work, the serious school life and church work to which she had been devoted herself; and, above all, the love and sympathy over the sweet memories that existed between this girl and her parents. A wistful look

came into his eyes as he thought what might have been his life if someone had cared for him and trusted in him that way; or if he had had a sister like this girl.

Suddenly, in the middle of the afternoon the girl looked up and asked: "Will your mother worry? Did you send her a telegram, too?"

"My mother?" he said in a strange, cold voice. "My mother never worries about me. She isn't that kind. I doubt if she even knows where I am these days. I've been west for a long time. Father died and mother married again since I left home. I don't suppose she would even hear of the accident. There's no one to care where I am." There was a bitterness in the young voice and a hardness on the handsome features that cast a pall over the beauty of the afternoon for Jean.

"Oh," she said, looking at him earnestly. "Oh, don't say that! I'm sure someone cares."

There were tears in her eyes. He looked so noble and good to her, and her heart went out to him utterly in his loneliness. In that moment she knew that she cared with all her heart, that she would always care. It was strange and wonderful, but she felt she would always care!

He looked at her with wonder again and a yearning that he could not hide.

"I believe you would care!" he exclaimed.

She smiled through a sudden mist of tears.

"Yes, I should care, I couldn't help it," she said. "You have done so much for me you know, and I—know you so well—" she hesitated; "I don't see how anybody who belonged to you could help caring." Her cheeks were rosy with the effort to say what she meant without seeming unmaidenly.

His brow darkened.

"Belonged!" he said bitterly. "Belonged! Yes, that's it. I don't belong! I don't belong anywhere!"

His voice was so different and so harsh that it almost frightened her. She watched him, half afraid as he brought his horse to a sudden stop and looked about him. Then he changed the subject abruptly: "This is a good place to camp for supper and rest," he said, as if he had quite forgotten what they had been saying.

He swung down from the saddle, hobbled his horse, and came around to her side to help her alight; but stood a moment looking earnestly, tenderly into her eyes, and she looked back at him trustingly, wonderingly, with the worshipful homage a woman's eyes can hold for the man who has won her tenderest thoughts. She did not know she was looking that way, bless you, no! She would have been filled with confusion if she had known it. It was unconscious, and the man knew so and treasured her look the more for that.

"I believe you do care, now," he said in a voice filled with a sort of holy awe that made the girl's heart leap up and the color flame into her cheeks.

Then before she could answer or think to be embarrassed, he lifted her reverently from the saddle and put her on the ground.

He hobbled her horse, unstrapped the pack of provisions and went off to gather up firewood, but when he returned she was sitting where he put her under the tree, her face buried in her hands, her slender form motionless.

He stood for a moment and watched her, then came over and knelt down beside her, and taking her hands gently from her face, looked into the dewy depths of her sweet eyes and spoke:

"Don't!" he pleaded gently. "Let's have supper now, and then we'll talk it all out. Will you come and help me make a fire?"

There was something in his strong, tender glance that helped her to rise to his call. A lovely smile grew in her eyes. She let him help her to her feet, and casting aside the reserved shyness that had fallen over her like a misty veil, she ran here and there, gathering sticks and helping to make the fire blaze; talking merrily about the supper they were preparing just as she had done all day; but her heart was in a tumult of wonder.

Holt shot a couple of rabbits and put them to roast before the fire. Jean set herself to toast the soggy corn bread and make it more palatable. Their merry laughter rang out again and again as they prepared their simple meal. They were like two children playing house. No one looking on would have seen any difference in their demeanor from what it had been all day. It was only when Holt was out in the open, shooting rabbits, that he allowed the sadness and gloom to settle down upon his young face. It was only when he was away gathering more wood that Jean, left to watch the sputtering rabbits, let the corn bread burn, while her face grew thoughtful and her eyes sweet with a tender light.

It was when the supper was eaten and the fire flickering low in the dying light of sunset that Holt came and sat down beside the girl, and again a great silence fell between them.

Holt had planned their homecoming to be in the dark. For the girl's sake he would not have witnessed to their

arrival. This thoughtfulness sprang from finer feelings than the people of Hawk Valley dreamed that he possessed. There remained but a little over an hour's ride now to reach Hawk Valley, and Holt did not mean they should get there before 9 o'clock at the earliest.

He sat gravely quiet, his strong hands folded across his raised knees, his back against a tree, looking bravely, wistfully, off into the distance. He seemed a great deal older, now, with that grave, sad expression. Jean stole a glance at him now and then, as she plucked at the vegetation about her, and wondered why this appalling silence, which she seemed powerless to break, had so suddenly fallen upon them.

Then the man's voice broke the stillness in a low, tense tone. "There's something I must tell you."

The very air seemed waiting to hear what he would say. The girl scarcely breathed.

"It wouldn't have been the square thing for me to tell you that I loved you if I had been the only one that cared; but we've been through all this together, and it's as if we had known each other for years—and you care too! I can see it in your eyes. I'm not worthy of it—but you care—and it's up to me to help you stop it. It would be an easier job, perhaps, if I were used to being trusted, but it's an honest fact that you're the first respectable person that has really trusted me since I can remember, and it comes hard—"

His voice broke as if an alien sob had wandered into his bronzed throat. A sob swelled in the girl's throat, too, and her little briar-scratched hand stole out and just touched his arm reassuringly with a feather glance of pressure, and withdrew as if to say: "I will bear my part of this trouble, whatever it is—please don't suffer more than your own part."

(Continued Next Week.)

Proud British Sergeant.

From Stars and Stripes.

A veteran sergeant of the Third division who has seen duty in all parts of the world where American troops have been stationed in the last 18 years, tells the following story of his first experience with rank in the British army:

"Many years ago, before I had risen above the role of a 'buck' in the rear rank, I was standing in a barrack in China, enjoying the pleasures of a recent pay day and a short leave. There were no other Americans in the room, and I felt rather lonesome. Finally a British non-com. wandered in and began to view the array behind the mahogany with an envious eye. Thinking that possibly his financial standing did not warrant the purchase of a drink, I asked him to join me in having a little refreshment.

"For an instant the Tommy seemed shocked. Then he stiffened up like a general inspecting an army and snorted out: 'What, me, for five years a lance corporal in the Queen's Own, drink with a private?'"

"I was kind of stunned for a minute, but I finally recovered enough to express my opinion of both him and the Queen's Own. Then I bought a drink for the bartender."

Squabs and Squads.

From the San Francisco Chronicle. By way of providing exercise for its hundreds of girl employes, officers of the ordnance department in Washington arranged last summer daily military drills for the fair young war workers. It was a great success until a girl who hadn't left her dignity behind when she went to the capital from Peoria, protested to a group of her mates that she had not given all to the government when it needed her, just to be insulted.

"I'm a lady," she said, "and I don't propose to stand in line out there and have anybody, even if he is an officer, and has a gold bar on his shoulder, call me fresh names. I'm surprised you girls stand it."

"Why, what's the matter, Ethel?" one of her surprised friends demanded. "I was with you all afternoon and I didn't see a thing out of the way. Everything was perfectly lovely."

"Lovely!" Ethel cried. "Lovely! Didn't you hear that lieutenant stand there and yell 'Squabs right!' and 'Squabs left!' every few minutes?"

An Oversight.

From Whizz-Bang.

At a Saturday morning inspection a private was not wearing a belt.

First Sergeant: "Have you a belt?"

Private: "No, sir."

First Sergeant: "You report to the quartermaster sergeant for a new one and tell him to charge you for the one lost. I'll stop this carelessness."

Private: "All right, sir; but I loaned you the belt about two weeks ago and you still have it."

A Safe Safe.

From the Ontario Post.

The O. D.—Who watches that safe during the night?

Private (on night guard duty)—That's all right, lieutenant; I sleep on it.

Fight on Lloyd George.

From the New York Tribune.

The Reces is giving the politicians an opportunity to lay their plans for a battle which is likely to involve the premiership of England. The first battle, which may be decisive, probably will come when Austen Chamberlain introduces his budget at the reassembling of parliament. By that time it is expected the Paris conference will have completed the bulk of its labors, and the critics of the government will no longer have to face the charge of injuring Britain's international position by their desire to make domestic changes. The budget, which is bound to hit all classes, will serve as a good weapon to use against the government.

Lord Northcliffe, who is a crafty, savaire fighter, pretends in his papers that Lloyd George's attack is hardly worth considering, but it is plainly evident that the publisher is planning to overthrow the premier at the first opportunity that presents itself. When Northcliffe strikes it will be no gentle blow, but a thrust backed by all the power of the publisher, who controls as many politicians as newspaper-men, and that is a considerable