

The BRANDING IRON

by Katharine Newlin Burt



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CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

There were blistered spots above that pathetic, mistaken signature. The poor girl had meant to sign herself "Respectfully," and somehow that half broke his heart.

He drank the strong coffee Wen Ho brought for him, two great cups of it, and he ate a piece of broiled elk meat. Then he went out again and walked rapidly down the trail. It was not yet dark; the world was in a soft glow of rose and violet, opalescent lights. The birds were singing in a hundred chantries. And there, through the firs, a slight to stop his heart, Joan came walking toward him, graceful, free, a swinging figure, bareheaded, her rags girded beautifully about her. And up and up to him she came soundlessly over the pine needles and through the wet snow-patches, looking at him steadfastly and tenderly, without a smile. She came and stood before him, still without dropping her sad, grave look.

"Mr. Gael," she said, "I hev come back. I got out yonder an'—her breast heaved and a sort of terror came into her eyes—"an' the world was awful lonely. There ain't a creature out yonder to care for me, for me to care for. It seemed like as if it was all dead. I couldn't bear it."

She put out her hand wistfully asking for pity, but he fell upon his knees and wrapped his hungry arms about her. "Joan," he sobbed, "Joan! Don't leave me. Don't—I couldn't bear it!" He looked up at her, his worn face wet with tears. "Don't leave me, Joan! I want you. Don't you understand?"

Her deep gray eyes filled slowly with light, she put a hand on either side of his face and bent her lips to his. "I never thought you'd be wantin' me," she said.

CHAPTER XIV

Concerning Marriage.

And it was springtime; these prisoners of frost were beautifully sensitive. They, too, with the lake and the aspens and the earth, the seeds and the beasts, had suffered the season of internment. In such fashion Nature makes possible the fresh undertakings of last summer's reckless prodigals; she drives them into her mock tomb and freezes their hearts—it is a little rest of death—so that they wake like turbulent bacchantes drunk with sleep and with forgetfulness. Love, spring says, is an eternal fact, welcome its new manifestations. Remating bluebirds built their nests near Joan's window; they were not troubled by sad recollections of last year's nests nor the young birds that flew away. It was another life, a resurrection. If they remembered at all, they remembered only the impulses of pleasure; they had somewhere before learned how to love, how to build; the past summers had given practice to their singing little throats and to their rapid wings. No ghosts forbade happiness and no God—man-voiced—saying, because he knew the ugly human aftermaths, hard sayings of "Be ye perfect."

What counsel was theirs for Joan and what had her human mentor taught her? He had taught her in one form or another the beauty of passion and its eternal slowness, for that was his sincere belief. By music he had taught her, by musical speech, by the preaching of heathen sage and the wit of modern arguers. He had given her all the moral schooling she had ever had and its golden rule was, "Be ye beautiful and generous." Joan was both beautiful and made for giving, "free-hearted" as she might herself have said, Friday's child as the old rhyme has it—and to cry out to her with love, saying, "I want you, Joan," was just, sooner or later, to see her turn and bend her head and hold out her arms.

Prosper had the reward of patience; his wild leopardess was tamed to his hand and her sweetness made him tender and very merciful.

Their gay little house stood open all day while they explored the mountains and plunged into the lake, choosing the hot hour of noon. Joan made herself mistress of the house and did her woman's work at last of tidying and beautifying and decking corners with gorgeous branches of blossoms while Prosper worked at his desk. He was happy; the reality of Joan's presence had laid his ghost just as the reality of his had laid hers. His work went on magically and added the glow of successful creation to the glow of satisfied desire. And his sin of deceit troubled him very little, for he had worked out that problem and had decided that Pierre, dead or alive, was unworthy of this mate.

But sometimes in her sleep Joan would start and moan, feeling the touch of the white-hot iron on her shoulder. Her hatred of Pierre's cruelty, her resolution to be done with him forever, must have vividly renewed itself in those dreams, for she would cling to Prosper like a fright-

ened child, and wake, trembling, happy to find herself safe in his arms.

So they lived their spring. Wen Ho, the silent and inscrutable, went out of the valley for provisions, and during his absence Joan queened it in the kitchen. She was learning to laugh, to see the absurd, delightful twists of daily living, to mock Prosper's oddities as he mocked hers. She was learning to be a comrade and she was learning better speech and more exquisite ways. It was inevitable that she should learn. Prosper, in these days, spent his whole soul upon her, fed her with music and delight, and he trained her to sing her sagas so that every day her voice gained in power and flexible sweetness. She would sing, since he told her to, her voice beating its wings against the walls of the house or ringing down the canyon in untrammelled flight. Prosper was lost in wonder of her, in a passionate admiration for his own handiwork. He was making, here in this God-forsaken solitude, a thing of marvel; what he was making surely justified the means. Joan's laughable simplicity and directness were the same; they were part of her presence; no civilizing could confuse or disturb them; but she changed, her brain grew, it absorbed material, it attempted adventures. Nowadays Joan sometimes argued, and this filled Prosper with delight, so quaint and logical she was and so skillful.

They were reading out under the firs by the green lip of the lake, when Wen Ho led his packhorse up the trail. He had been gone a month, for Prosper had sent him out of the valley to a distant town for his supplies. He didn't want the little frontier place to prick up its ears. Wen Ho



There Were Blistered Spots About the Pathetic, Mistaken Signature.

had ridden by a secret trail back over the range; he had not passed even the ranger station on his way. He called out, and, in the midst of a sentence Joan was reading, Prosper started up. Joan looked at him smiling. "You're as easily turned away from learning as a boy," she began, and faltered when she saw his face. It was turned eagerly toward the climbing horses, toward the pack, and it was sharp and keen with detached interest, an excitement that had nothing, nothing in the world to do with her.

It was the great bundle of Prosper's mail that first brought home to Joan the awareness of an outside world. She knew that Prosper was a traveled and widely experienced man, but she had not fancied him held to this world by human attachments. Concerning the "tall child" she had not put a question and she still believed her to have been Prosper's wife. But when, leaving her place under the tree, she came into the house and found Prosper feverishly slitting open envelope after envelope, with a pile of papers and magazines, ankle-high, beside him on the floor, she stood aghast.

"What a lot of people must have been writing to you, Prosper!"

He did not hear her. He was greedy of eye and finger-tips, searching written sheet after sheet. He was flushed along the cheek-bones and a little pale about the lips. Joan stood there, her hands hanging, her head bent, staring up and out at him from under her brows. She looked, in this attitude, rather dangerous.

Prosper sped through his mail, made an odd gesture of desperation, sat still a moment staring, his brilliant, green-gray eyes gone dull and blank, then he gave himself a shuddery shake, pulled a small parcel from under the papers, and held it out to Joan. He smiled.

"Something for you, leopardess," he said—he had told her his first impression of her.

She took the box haughtily and walked with it over to her chair. But he came and kissed her.

"Jealous of my mail? You foolish child. What a girl-thing you are! It doesn't matter, does it, how we train you or leave you untrained, you're all alike, you women, under your skins. Open your box and thank me prettily, and leave matters you don't understand alone. That's the way to talk, isn't it?"

She flushed and smiled rather doubtfully, but, at sight of his gift, she forgot everything else for a moment. It was a collar of topaz and emerald set in heavy silver. She was awestruck by its beauty, and went, after he had fastened it for her, to stand a long while before the glass looking at it. She wore her yellow dress cut into a V at the neck and the jewels rested beautifully at the base of her long, round throat, faintly brown like her face up to the brow. The yellow and the green brought out all the value of her grave scarlet lips, the soft, even tints of her skin, the dark lights and shadows of hair and eyes.

"It's beautiful," she said. "It's wonderful. I love it."

All the time very grave and still, she took it off, put it on its box, and laid it on the mantel. Then she went out of doors.

Prosper hurried to the window and saw her walk out to the garden they had made and begin her work. He was puzzled by her manner, but presently shrugged the problem of her mood away and went back to his mail. That night he finished his novel and got it ready for the publisher.

Again Wen Ho, calm and uncomplicated, was sent out over the hill, and again the idyll was renewed, and Joan wore the collar and was almost as happy as before. Only one night she startled Prosper.

"I asked Pierre," she said slowly, after a silence, in her low-pitched voice, "when he was taking me away home, I asked, 'Where are you going?' and he said to me, 'Don't you savvy the answer to that question, Joan?' And, Prosper, I didn't savvy, so he told me and he looked at me sort of hard and stern, 'We're a-goin' to be married, Joan.'"

Prosper and Joan were sitting before the fire, Joan on the bearskin at his feet, he lounging back, long-legged, smoke-velled in one of the lacquered chairs. She had been fingering her collar and she kept on fingering it as she spoke and staring straight into the flames, but, at the last, quoting Pierre's words and tone, her voice and face quivered and she looked at him with eyes of mysterious pain. In them a sort of uncomprehended anguish.

"Why was that, Prosper?" she asked; "I mean, why did he say it that way? And what—what does it stand for, marrying or not—?"

Prosper jerked a little in his chair. "Well, Joan, I'll go into the subject with you one of these days, when the weather isn't so beautiful. It's really a matter of law, property rights, and so forth. Come out and look at the moon."

"Listen!" They stood side by side at the door. "Some silly bird thinks that is the dawn. Look at me, Joan!" She lifted obedient eyes.

"There! That's better. Don't get that other look. I can't bear it. I love you."

A moment later they went out into the sweet, silver silence down to the silver lake.

Four months later the name of Prosper Gael began to be on everyone's lips, and before everyone's eyes; the world, his world, began to clamor for him. Even Wen Ho grumbled at this going out on tremendous journeys after the mail for which Prosper grew more and more greedy and impatient. His novel, "The Canyon," had been accepted, was enormously advertised, had made an extraordinary success. All this he explained to Joan, who tried to rejoice because she saw that it was exquisite delight to Prosper. He was by way of thinking now that his exile, his Wyoming adventure, was to thank for his success, but when a woman, even such a woman as Joan, begins to feel that she has been a useful emotional experience, there begins pain. For Joan pain began and daily it increased. It was suffering for her to watch Prosper reading his letters, forwarded to him from the western town where his friends and his secretary believed him to be recovering from some nervous illness; to watch him smoking and thinking of himself, his fame, his talents, his future; to watch him scribbling notes, planning another work, to hear his excited talk, now so impersonal, so unrelated to her; to see how his eagerness over her education slackened, faltered, died; to notice that he no longer watched the changeful humors of her beauty nor cared if she wore bronze or blue or yellow; and worst of all, to find him staring at her sometimes with a worried, impatient look which scuttled out of sight like some ugly, many-legged creature when it met her own eyes—painful, of course, yet such an old story. Joan, who had never heard of such experience, did not foresee the inevitable end, and, in so much, she was spared. The extra pain of forfeiting her dignity and self-respect did not touch her, for she made none of those most pitiful, unavailing efforts to hold him, to cling; did not even pretend indifference.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Terrible or Ridiculous.

If anger proceeds from a great cause, it turns to fury, if from a small cause, it is peevishness; and so it is always either terrible or ridiculous.—Jeremy Taylor.

Styles in Hats for Mid-Winter;

Fabric-Fur Coats for Girls

THERE may be little difference between a fall hat and a winter hat so far as material and trimmings are concerned, but there is considerable difference in the way materials and trimmings are used. Styles do not stand quite still and mid-winter millinery, now being shown, differs from that of early September, even though the velvet, hatters' plush and ostrich

and velvet on hats or dressy wear. In both of these the sectional crown and narrow visor brim are featured.

There are fabric furs and fabric furs, some of them particularly well suited to these little children's coats, and besides these there are furry fabrics that are not imitations of natural skins, but are just the thing for even the littlest wearers when they go out



SMALL CLOSE-FITTING TURBANS

of the first fall hats are just as extensively used now.

In the latest hats, metal cloths, gold and silver laces, metallic flowers and fur trimmings of various sorts make their appearance. Lines, too, have changed a little and small close-fitting turbans, or poke shapes, with deep sectional crowns are coming into prominence. Novel brim treatments are seen and colors become brighter to compensate for the more sedate tones of winter wraps. In hats for formal evening wear the large picture hat of velvet or hatters' plush is still pre-eminent, but it has been supplemented

dooring in frigid weather. In winter coats for little girls there is no material at hand that has more advantages than certain fabric furs and few that have as many. To begin with, they are warm—which is the first essential—they are remarkably durable and will stand much punishment, and they are handsome and easy to make up.

The pretty coat shown in the picture, for a little girl of six or more is a fine example of the fabric-fur coat. You can imagine it in light brown, cocoa, tan, beige or gray, with band trimming of duvetine suede or other plain material, in a darker



LITTLE GIRL'S FABRIC-FUR COAT

by clever little dance hats of silver or gold brocade and by evening bandeaux in the form of wide metallic ribbon or wreaths of metallic leaves.

Four examples of the later millinery are shown in the illustration. The hat at the top has a cuff brim embroidered with chenille in bright colors. The crown is of brown velvet made in sections and piped with silk in the same color. At the right an extremely new shape takes the form of a hatters' plush "topper" and is trimmed with a huge cascade of gold braided and monkey fur. The two hats below show the use of metallic cloth, gold lace and metallic flowers

shade and a lining of crepe or other plain lining material. Good-looking composition buttons, placed in two groups of three each and one on the collar, are fastened by means of cord loops and the collar may be kept in its pictured adjustment by a pair of snap fasteners—one at each side. The prevailing silk cord-and-tassel girdle, which is the single bequest of the Chinese influence to children's coats, is here present, matching the coat in color, and slips through little strap supports at each side.

The plain, fine-felt hat worn with this coat is the best possible choice in headwear and will look best when it matches the coat or its banding in color, or one may choose a hat of velours or heavier trimmed simply with ribbon. Sometimes the choice of fabric for a coat allows a hat to match of the same material. In this case a tam or a hat on the lines of the felt hat pictured is chosen.

Julia Bottomley
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Sir Roger de Coverley.
The name is that of a member of an imaginary club, under whose auspices the Spectator was supposed to be edited. Sir Roger is the type of an English gentleman of the time of Queen Anne (1702-1714), and figures in thirty papers of the Spectator. He is noted for his modesty, generosity and hospitality. The name Sir Roger de Coverley was also given to a dance, similar to the Virginia reel, and supposed to have been the original of it. The title is derived from the English squire described in the Spectator.

Observant.
"She was married in the same church where three ceremonies had been previously performed for her?"
"Yes."
"A familiar environment, eh?"
"Quite. She even noticed that a tear in the altar carpet hadn't been mended since her last trip."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

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