

The BRANDING IRON

by Katharine Newlin Burt



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SYNOPSIS

John Landis, eighteen years old, wife of Pierre, is the daughter of John Carver, who murdered her mother for adultery. Her lonely life, with her father, in a Wyoming cabin, unbearable, Joan leaves him to work in a hotel in a nearby town. Joan meets Pierre, and the two, mutually attracted, are married. Pierre tells Pierre story of Joan's mother. Pierre forges a cattle brand. Frank Hollivell, young minister, presents books to Joan. Pierre forbids her to read them. Madened by jealousy, Pierre ties Joan and burns the Two-Bar brand into her shoulder. Hearing her screams, a stranger bursts into the house and shoots Pierre. The stranger revives Joan, telling her Pierre is dead, urges her to go with him.

CHAPTER X

Prosper Comes to a Decision.

Perhaps, in spite of his gruesome boast as to dead men, it was as much to satisfy his own spirit as to comfort Joan's that Prosper actually did undertake a journey to the cabin that had belonged to Pierre. It was true that Prosper had never been able to stop thinking, not so much of the tall, slim youth lying so still across the floor, all his beauty and strength turned to an ashen slackness, as of a brown hand that stirred. The motion of those fingers groping for life had continually disturbed him. He went back stealthily at dusk, choosing a dusk of wind-driven snow so that his tracks vanished as soon as made. The roof of Pierre's cabin made a dark ridge above the snow, veiled in cloudy drift. He reached it with a cold hand and slid down to his window, cautiously bending his face near to the pane. He expected an interior already dark from the snow piled round the window, so he cupped his hands about his eyes. At once he let himself down out of sight below the sill. There was a living presence in the house. Prosper had seen a bright fire, the smoke of which had been hidden by the snow-spray, a cot was drawn up before the fire, and a big, fair young man in tweeds whose face, rosy, sensitive, and quiet, was bent over the figure on the cot. A pair of large, white hands were carefully busy.

Prosper, crouched below the window, considered what he had seen. It was a week now since he had left Landis for a dying man. This big fellow in tweeds must have come soon after the shooting. Evidently he was not caring for a dead man. The black head on the pillow had moved. Now there came the sound of speech, just a bass murmur. This time the black head turned itself slightly and Prosper saw Pierre's face. He had seen it only twice before; once when it had looked up, fierce and crazed, at his first entrance into the house, once again when it lay with lifted chin and pale lips on the floor. But even after so scarce a memory, Prosper was



There Was a Living Presence in the House.

startled by the change. Before, it had been the face of a man beside himself with drink and the lust of animal power and cruelty; now it was the wistful face of Pierre, drawn into a tragic mask like Joan's when she came to herself; a miserably haunted and harrowed face, hopeless as though it, too, like the outside world, had lost or had never had a memory of sun. Evidently he submitted to the dressing of his wound, but with a shamed and pitiful look. Prosper's whole impression of the man was changed, and

the change there began something like a struggle. He was afflicted by a crossing of purposes and a stumbling of intention.

He did not care to risk a second look. He crept away and fled into the windy dusk. He traveled with the wind like a blown rag, and, stopping only for a few hours' rest at the ranger station, made the journey home by morning of the second day. And on the journey he definitely made up his mind concerning Joan.

Prosper Gael was a man of deliberate, though passionate, imagination. He did not often act upon impulse, though his actions were often those attempted only by passion-driven or impulsive folk. Prosper could never plead thoughtlessness. He justified carefully his every action to himself. These were cold, dark hours of deliberation as he let the wind drive him across the desolate land. When the wind dropped and a splendid, still dawn swept up into the clean sky, he was at peace with his own mind and climbed up the mountain trail with a half-smile on his face.

In the dawn, awake on her pillows, Joan was listening for him, and at the sound of his webs she sat up, pale to her lips. She did not know what she feared, but she was filled with dread. The restful stupor that had followed her storm of grief had spent itself and she was suffering again—waves of longing for Pierre, of hatred for him, alternately submerged her. All these bleak, gray hours of wind during which Wen Ho had pattered in and out with meals, with wood for her stove, with little questions as to her comfort, she had suffered as people suffer in a dream; a restless misery like the misery of the pine branches that leaped up and down before her window. The stillness of the dawn, with its sound of nearing steps, gave her a sickness of heart and brain, so that when Prosper came softly in at her door she saw him through a mist. He moved quickly to her side, knelt by her, took her hands.

"He has been cared for, Joan," said Prosper. "Some friend of his came and did all that was left to be done." "Some friend?" In the pale, delicately expanding light Joan's face gleamed between its black coils of hair with eyes like enchanted tams. Prosper could see in them reflections of those terrors that had been tormenting her. His touch pressed reassurance upon her, his eyes, his voice.

"My poor child! My dear! I'm glad I am back to take care of you! Cry, let me comfort you. He is not lying there alone. He is dead. Let's forgive him, Joan." He shook her hands a little, urgently, and a most painful memory of Pierre's beseeching grasp came upon Joan.

She wrenched away and fell back, quivering, but she did not cry, only asked in her most moving voice, "Who took care of Pierre—after I went away and left him dead?"

Prosper got to his feet and stood with his arms folded, looking wearily down at her. His mouth had fallen into rather cynical lines and there were puckers at the corners of his eyes. "Oh, a big, fair young man—a rosy boy-face, serious-looking, blue eyes."

Joan was startled and turned round. "It was Mr. Hollivell," she said, in a wondering tone. "Did you talk with him? Did you tell him—?"

"No, hardly," Prosper shook his head. "I found out what he had done for your Pierre without asking unnecessary questions. I saw him, but he did not see me."

"He'll be comin' to get me," said Joan. It was an entirely unemotional statement of certainty.

Prosper pressed his lips into a line and narrowed his eyes upon her. "Oh, he will?"

"Yes, he'll be takin' after me. He must 'a' ben scart by somethin' Pierre said in the town durin' their quarrel an' have come up after him to look out what Pierre would be doin' to me. . . . I wisht he'd 'a' come in time. . . . What must he be thinkin' of me now, to find Pierre a-lyin' there, dead, an' me gone! He'll be takin' after me to bring me home."

borring ranch. They would make a search, but winter would be against them with its teeth bared, a blizzard was on its way. By the time they found her, thought Prosper—and he quoted one of Joan's quaint phrases to himself, smiling with radiance as he did so—"she won't be carin' to leave me." In his gay, little, firelit room, he sat, stretched out, lank and long, in the low, deep, red-lacquered chair, sipping strong coffee, smoking, reading. He was singularly quiet and content. The devil of disappointment and of thwarted desire that had wived him in this carefully appointed hiding-place stood away a little from him and that wizard imagination of his began to weave. By dusk, he was writing furiously and there was a glow of rapture on his face.

CHAPTER XI

The Whole Duty of Woman.

Joan waited for Hollivell and, waiting, began inevitably to regain her strength. One evening as Wen Ho was spreading the table, Prosper looked up at his writing to see a tall, gaunt girl clinging to the door-jamb. She was dressed in the heavy clothes, which hung loose upon her long bones, her throat was drawn up to support the sharpened and hollowed face in which her eyes had grown very large



Joan's Eyes Wandered Curiously About the Brilliant Room.

and wistful. She was a moving figure, piteous, lovely, rather like some graceful mountain beast, its spirit half-broken by wounds and imprisonment and human tending, but ready to leap into a savagery of flight or of attack. They were wild, those great eyes, as well as wistful, Prosper, looking suddenly up at them, caught his breath. He put down his book as quietly as though she had indeed been a wild, easily startled thing, and, suppressing the impulse to rise, stayed where he was, leaning a trifle forward, his hands on the arms of his chair.

Joan's eyes wandered curiously about the brilliant room and came to him at last. Prosper met them, relaxed, and smiled.

"Come in and dine with me, Joan," he said. "Tell me how you like it." She felt her way weakly to the second large chair and sat down facing him across the hearth.

"It's right beautiful," said Joan, "an' right strange to me. I never seen any thing like it before. That"—her eyes followed Wen Ho's departure half-fearfully—"that man and all."

"Is that what he is? I—I didn't know." She smiled rather sadly and ashamedly. "I'm awful ignorant, Mr Gael. I just can read an' I've only read two books." She flushed and her pupils grew large.

Truly, thought Prosper, it was like talking to a grave, trustful, and most impressionable child, the way she sat there, rather on the edge of her chair, her hands folded, letting everything he said disturb and astonish the whole pool of her thought.

At dinner, Prosper, unlike Hollivell, made no attempt to draw Joan into talk, but sipped his wine and watched her, enjoying her composed silence and her slow, graceful movements. Afterward he made a couch for her on the floor before the fire, two skins and a golden cushion, a rag of dull blue which he threw over her, hiding the ugly skirt and boots. He took a violin from the wall and tuned it, Joan watching him with all her eyes.

"I don't like what you're playin' now," she told him, impersonally and gently.

"I'm tuning up."

"Well, sir, I'd be gettin' tired of that if I was you."

"I'm almost done," said Prosper humbly.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

How Times Change. The wild life used to consist of hunting the game in the daytime and sleeping at night, but now it consists of sleeping in the daytime and hunting the game at night.—Cleveland Plain Dealer

Too many people use their homes as filling stations where they fill up, pay up and rush on.

The AMERICAN LEGION

(Copy for This Department Supplied by the American Legion News Service.)

PADDOCK WILL DEFEND TITLE

Noted Sprinter Will Compete in Athletic Program at Legion National Convention.

With the announcement that Charles W. Paddock, "Human Flash," will compete, interest in the athletic program to be held during the American Legion national convention in San Francisco has increased among Legionnaires over the country.

Paddock is known as the highest type of American athlete. In addition to holding most of the world's sprinting records, he was a soldier in the World War, a writer, leader of boy scout activities and has displayed talent in many other lines.

Paddock left high school to serve in the field artillery during the war. He attended a training school at Camp Zachary Taylor near Louisville and received a commission of second lieutenant. He won most of the sprinting events at the Interallied Championship games in Paris and has since established a number of world records in the dashes.

The famous sprinter told Legion convention officials that he will be on hand to defend his laurels in all distances up to the 100-yard dash. Legionnaires are confident that Paddock will celebrate his reunion with World War comrades by smashing some of his present world records.

In addition to the track and field meet, there will be numerous other athletic events during convention week at San Francisco, including tennis, baseball, basketball, football, golf, rifle shoot, band contests, drum and bugle corps competitions, swimming and other sports.

All Legionnaires are eligible to compete in the athletic program.

PLAN TO MEET "NATIVE SONS"

"Mr. Visiting Doughboy" and "Mr. Gob" May Expect Warm Reception in San Francisco.

If you are an American Legion "buddy," and expect to attend the fifth annual convention of the organization at San Francisco, you might well begin to rehearse for your first meeting with a "Native Son."

California is filled with "Native Sons," especially San Francisco. There are two divisions or varieties—the common or garden type, and the cultivated variety. The cultivated "Native Son" is immensely proud of his nativity and parades it on every occasion by wearing the "little bear" emblem, marking membership in the "Native Sons of the Golden West." California does not pretend to comprise all the Golden West, but whenever you mention the Golden West, your true Californian jumps to his feet and gives three cheers. To him the Golden West signifies California.

The cultivated natives, meaning the native sons and native daughters, comprise about 50,000 of the state's great and growing population. Numerically they are but a drop in the bucket. But it wouldn't do for a minute to tell a native that, at least not one of the cultivated variety.

Throughout California parlors have been superseded by living rooms, except in the circles of the NSGW and NDGW. Each group or lodge is constituted a "parlor" and all are subject to the dictates of a grand parlor, presided over by a grand president. In California there are 160 "parlors." San Francisco alone has 28, with a membership of 17,000 in the two organizations in that city.

Members of the NSGW and the NDGW might be termed professional Californians. They make the accident of birth a ritual and join the order.

Perhaps it is a mistake to speak of the native son and daughter as a professional Californian. Every son and daughter of California is a professional Californian. Every one is a booster. They'd as soon think of relinquishing their citizenship as quitting California for keeps—most of them sooner. They know California is the greatest state there ever was or ever will be, that California has the finest climate, the grandest scenery, the richest soil, the huskiest athletes, the most flourishing business, the finest men and most beautiful women.

It is with these people and with that spirit that "Mr. Visiting Doughboy" and "Mr. Gob," who attend the Legion convention will collide, when they hit the convention city. Californians are proud of their heritage, proud of their sunsets and fogs, cool summers and warm winters, the hotels, cafes and Market street, and everything else that goes to make up San Francisco, which if you do not already know it, is by far the greater and most important part of California. When you are in San Francisco, ask any native son for anything you wish, and if you escape without being presented the city hall, or the exposition auditorium, where the Legion convention is to be held, it will be because that particular native son isn't functioning just right at the moment.

STILL AIDING WAR HEROES

Mrs. Alice P. Bristol, Through Legion Auxiliary, Continues Efforts in Behalf of Ex-Service Men.

Mrs. Alice P. Bristol, chairman of the committee for co-operation with other agencies of the American Legion Auxiliary, is continuing a record of service work begun at the first call to arms in 1917. Mrs. Bristol, along with a number of other brave workers of Stratford, Conn., "carried on" the home work while the men of that city, many of their own blood, were at the front in the fight. By dint of this service, Mrs. Bristol, through the American Legion Auxiliary is still aiding the cause of those who did their part for their country.

As a recognition of the splendid war work of the women of Stratford, the selectmen formed an organization which they termed the "Minute Women of Stratford," and at the close of the war, awarded each one of the workers a handsomely engraved certificate attesting this service. The work consisted of home relief, sale of Liberty bonds and war saving stamps, and the countless other duties which the good women of America were called on to perform for the men in uniform.

Since the armistice, Mrs. Bristol has headed local unit work, and has been instrumental in many important moves for relief of the ex-service man. It was through her suggestion, it is said, that the men of Connecticut in hos-



Mrs. Alice P. Bristol.

pitals in other states received a cash gift for Christmas. But her work as national committeewoman of the American Legion Auxiliary is another important post which has been entrusted to her.

To Mrs. Bristol was given the chairmanship of a committee seeking close co-operation with other well-known women's organizations of the country. This committee aims to establish relationship between all bodies working for civic betterment, relief of former service men, and countless other duties with which the womanhood of America has become associated.

One of the first steps of this committee was to effect liaison between the American Legion Auxiliary and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. An application for membership in the federation, through President Kate Waller Barrett was accepted, and the auxiliary assumed an immediate participation in the councils of federated club work. The Legion's Auxiliary is also a participant in the National Council of Women, composed of nearly fifty organizations. This council includes such organizations as the American Association of University Women, International Sunshine society, Ladies of the Maccabees, National Council of Jewish Women, National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers' associations, National Federation of Music Clubs, National Florence Crittenton mission, National Kindergarten association, Needlework Guild of America, Women's Christian Temperance union, Y. W. C. A., and others.

During the convention of the auxiliary in San Francisco, the committee plans a "Co-operation Night" at which representatives of practically every body holding membership in the council will be asked to be present to hear further plans for service as outlined by the Legion's Auxiliary. It is expected that a definite program of co-operation will be an outgrowth of the meeting. Auxiliary officials believe that because the membership of the organization approximates that of most other women's bodies in the country, no constructive program, looking to progress along the lines indicated for their work, can be successful unless joined by their organization.

Texas Will Have Exhibit.

Not only will the traditional "old gray mare" from Texas be there, but a long-horned Texas steer will be taken by the Lone Star state Legionnaires to the national convention of the American Legion at San Francisco. Plans for special stunts on the way to and at the convention were made recently by John C. Townes, Texas department commander.

Campaign Lies.

"I hear as how the opposin' candidate for mayor is tellin' around that you're in favor of law and order," remarked Two-Gun Gene of Holster, Ariz.

"He better be careful," retorted the present incumbent, "or I'll sue him fer criminal libel."—The American Legion Weekly.

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If a girl's the apple of a young man's eye he thinks she is a peach.

Eloquence is but ordinary gab with its holiday clothes on.

Chas. E. Backus



Health is the Most Valuable Asset You Have

Newago, Mich.—"Some years ago I was troubled with dizziness, palpitation, loss of appetite and sore and painful stomach. I tried the best physicians I could hear of, and also several put-up medicines, but nothing did me any good. Some physicians said it was my heart; some said it was my stomach; while others said it was my nerves. I got so bad I could not work very steadily, when a friend came to see me and insisted upon my trying Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. I was discouraged, but tried it anyway, and after taking the second bottle I felt much better. I then bought six bottles and I believe the 'Discovery' saved my life. It was rightfully named 'Golden Medical Discovery.' I would recommend it to all who need such a medicine.—Chas. E. Backus.

All druggists, tablets or liquid; or send 10c to Dr. Pierce's Invalids' Hotel in Buffalo, N. Y., for a trial pkg.

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