

THE BRANDING IRON

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.
—12—

She only drew gradually into herself, shrinking from her pain and from him as the cause of it; she only lost her glow of love-happiness, her face seemed dwindled, seemed to contract, and that secret look of a wild animal returned to her gray eyes. She quietly gave up the old regulations of their life; she did not remind him of the study-hours, the music-hours, the hours of wild outdoor play. She read under the firs, alone; she studied faithfully, alone; she climbed and swam, alone—or with his absent-minded, fitful company; she worked in her garden, alone. At night, when he was asleep, she lay with her hand pressed against her heart, staring at the darkness, listening to the night, waiting. She never expressed her trouble, even to herself. She did not give it any words. She took her pain without wincing, without complaint. Besides, although she was instinctively waiting, she did not foresee the end.

It was in late October when, somewhere in the pile of Prosper's mail, there lay a small gray envelope. Joan drew his attention to it, calling it a "queer little letter," and he took it up slowly, as though his deft and nervous fingers had gone numb. Before he opened it he looked at Joan and, in one sense, it was the last time he ever did look at her; for at that moment his stark spirit looked straight into hers, acknowledging its guilt, and bade her a mute and remorseful farewell.

He read and Joan watched. His face grew pale and bright as though some electric current had been turned into his veins; his eyes, looking up from the writing, but not returning to her, had the look given by some drug which is meant to stupefy, but which taken in an overdose intoxicates. He turned and made for the door, holding the little gray folded paper in his hand. On the threshold he half faced her without lifting his eyes.

"I have had extraordinary news, Joan. I shall have to go off alone and think things out. I don't know when I shall get back." He went out and shut the door gently.

Joan stood listening. She heard him go along the passage and through the second door. She heard his feet on the mountain trail. Afterward she went out and stood between the two sentinel firs that had marked the entrance to that snow-tunnel long since disappeared. Now it was a late October day, bright as a bared sword. The flowers of the Indian paint-brush burned like red candle flames everywhere under the firs, the fireweed blazed, the aspen leaves were laid like little golden tiles against the metallic blue of the sky. The high peak pointed up dizzily and down, down dizzily into the clear emptiness of the lake. This great peak stood there in the glittering stillness of the day. A grouse boomed, but Joan was not startled by the sudden rush of its wings. She felt the sharp weight of that silent mountain in her heart; she might have been buried under it. So she felt it all day while she worked, a desperate, bright day—hideous in her memory—and at night she lay waiting. After hours longer than any other hours, the door of her bedroom opened and an oblong of moonlight, as white as paper, fell across the matted floor. Prosper stepped in noiselessly and walked over to her bed. He stood a moment and she heard him swallow.

"You're awake, Joan?" Her eyes were staring up at him, but she lay still.

"Listen, Joan." He spoke in short sentences, waiting between each for some comment of hers which did not come. "I shall have to go away tomorrow. I shall have to go away for some time. I don't want you to be unhappy. I want you to stay here for a while if you will, for so long as you want to stay. I am leaving you plenty of money. I will write and explain it all very clearly to you. I know that you will understand. Listen." Here he knelt and took her hands, which he found lying cold and stiff under the cover, pressed against her heart. "I have made you happy here in this little house, haven't I, Joan?" She would not answer even this except by the merest flicker of her eyelids.

"You have trusted me; now trust me a little longer. My life is very complicated. This beautiful year with you, the year you have given to me, is just a temporary respite from—from all sorts of things. I've taught you a great deal, Joan. I've healed the wound that bruto made on your shoulder and in your heart. I've taught you to be beautiful. I've filled your mind with beauty. You are a wonderful woman. You'll live to be grateful to me. Some day you'll tell me so."

Her quiet, curved lips moved. "Are you tellin' me good-by, Prosper?"

By
Katharine Newlin Burt
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parture, came out at noon and found herself in the small, gay house alone. She sat in one of the lacquered chairs and saw after a long while that the Chinaman was looking at her.

Wen Ho, it seemed, had been given instructions. He was to stay and take care of the house and the lady for as long as she wanted it, or him. Afterward he was to lock up the house and go. He handed her a large and bulky envelope, which Joan took and let lie in her lap.

"You can go tomorrow, Wen Ho," she said.

"You no wait for Mr. Gael to come back? He say he come back."

"No. I am not going to wait. I guess—here Joan twisted her mouth into a smile—"I'm not one of the waiting kind. I'm a-going back to my own ranch now. It won't seem so awful lonesome, perhaps, as I was thinking last spring that it would."

She touched the envelope without looking at it.

"Is this money, Wen Ho?"

"I tink so, lady."

She held it, unopened, out to him.

"I will give it to you, then. I have no need of it."

She stood up.

"I am going out now to climb up this mountain back of the house so's I can see just where I am. I'll come well."



Joan Shrank Back into the Shadows of the Pines.

down tonight for dinner and tomorrow after breakfast I'll be going away. You understand?"

"Lady, you mean give me all this money?" babbled the Chinaman.

"Yes," said Joan gravely; "I have no need of it."

She went past him with her swinging step.

She was coming down the mountain-side that evening, very tired, but with the curious, peaceful stillness of heart that comes with an entire acceptance of fate, when she heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the hollow of the canyon. Her heart began to beat to suffocation. She ran to where, standing near a big fir tree, she could look straight down on the trail leading up to Prosper's cabin. Presently the horseman came in sight—the one that rode first was tall and broad and fair, she could see under his hat-brim his straight nose and firmly modeled chin.

"The sta-buster!" said Joan; then, looking at the other, who rode behind him, she caught at the tree with crooked hands and began to sink slowly to her knees. He was tall and slight, he rode with inimitable grace. As she stared, he took off his sombrero, rested his hand on the saddlehorn, and looked haggardly, eagerly up the trail toward the house. His face was whiter, thinner, worn by protracted mental pain, but it was the beautiful living face of Pierre.

Joan shrank back into the shadows of the pines, crouched for a few minutes like a mortally wounded beast, then ran up the mountain-side as though the fire that had once touched her shoulder had eaten its way at last into her heart.

Book Two: The Estray

CHAPTER I

A Wildcat.

The Lazy-Y ranch-house, a one-storied building of logs, was built about three sides of a paved court. In the middle of this court stood a well with a high rustic top, and about this well on a certain brilliant July night, a tall man was strolling with his hands behind his back. It was a night of full moon, sailing high, which poured whiteness into the court, making its cobble embedded in the earth look like milky bubbles and drawing clear-cut shadows of the well-top and the gables and chimneys of the house. The man slowly circled the court, beginning close to the walls and narrowing till he made a loop about the well, and then, reversing, worked in widening orbits as far as the walls again. His wife, looking out at him through one of the windows, thought that, in the moonlight, followed by his

own squat, active shadow, he looked like a huge spider weaving a web. This effect was heightened by the fact that he never looked up. He was deep in some plan to which it was impossible for her not to believe that the curious pattern of his walk bore some relation.

From the northern wing of the ranch-house, strongly lighted, came a tumult of sound: music, thumping feet, a man's voice chanting couplets:

Oh, you walk right through and you turn around and swing the girl that finds you.
And you come right back by the same old track and turn the girl behind you.

Someone was directing a quadrille in native fashion. There was much laughter, confusion and applause. None of this noise disturbed the man. He did not look at the lighted windows. He might really have been a gigantic insect entirely unrelated to the human creatures so noisily near at hand.

A man came round the corner of the house, crossed the square, and, lurching a little, made for the door of the lighted wing. Shortly after his entrance the sound of music and dancing abruptly stopped. This stillness gave the spider pause, but he was about to renew his weaving, when, in the silence, a woman spoke.

"You, Mabel, don't you go home," she said.

She had not spoken loudly, but her voice beat against the walls of the court as though it could have filled the whole moonlight night with dangerous beauty. The listener outside lifted his head with a low, startled exclamation. Suddenly the world was alive with adventure and alarm.

"Mind your own business, you wildcat," answered a man's raucous voice. "She's my wife, which is somethin' that your sort knows nothin' about. Come on, you Mabel. If you think that outlaw can keep me from takin' home my wife, you're betting wrong."

Another silence; then the voice again, a little louder, as though the speaker had stepped out into the center of the room.

"Mabel is not a-goin' home with you," it said; and the listener outside threw back his head with the gesture of a man sensitive to music who listens to some ecstatic melody. "She happens to be stoppin' here with us tonight. You say that she's your wife, but that don't mean that she belongs to you, body and soul, Bill Greer—not to you, who don't possess your own body or soul. Why, you can't keep your feet steady; you can't pull your hand away from mine. You can't hold your tipsy eyes on mine. Do you call that ownin' your own body?"

A deep, short, alarming chorus of laughter interrupted the speech. The speaker evidently had her audience.

"So you don't own anything tonight," went on the extraordinary, deliberate voice; "surely you don't own Mabel. You can't get a claim on her, not thataway. She's her own. She belongs to her own self. When you're fit to take her, why, then come and tell us about it, and if we judge you're a-tellin' us the truth, mebber we'll let her go. Till then—" a pause which was filled with a rapid shuffling of feet. The door flew open and in its lighted oblong the observer saw a huddled figure behind which rose a woman's black and shapely head.

"Till then," repeated the deep-toned, ringing voice, "get out!" And the huddled man came on a staggering run which ended in a backward fall on the cobble of the court.

The man who watched trod lightly past him and came to the open door. Inside, firelight beat on the golden log walls and salmon-colored timber ceiling; a lamp hanging from a beam threw down a strong, conflicting arc of white light. A dozen brown-faced, booted young men stood about, three musicians were ready to take up their interrupted music, the little fat man who had called out the figures of the quadrille stood on a barrel, his arms folded across his paunch. A fair-haired girl, her face marred by recent tears, drooped near him. Two of the young men were murmuring reassurances to her; others surrounded a stout, red-faced girl who was laughing and talking loudly. The Jew's eyes wandered till they came to the fireplace. There another woman leaned against the wall.

The music struck up, the dancing began again, the two other girls, quickly provided with partners, began to waltz, the superfluous men stood up together and went at it with gravity and grace. No one asked this woman, who stood at ease, watching the dancers, her hands resting on her hips, her head tilted back against the logs. As he looked at her, the intruder had a queer little thrill of fright. He remembered something he had once seen—a tame panther which was to be used in some moving-picture play. Its confident owner had led it on a chain and held it negligently in a corner of the room, waiting for his cue. The panther had stood there drowsily, its eyes shifting a little, then, watching people, its inky head had begun to move from side to side. He remembered the way the loose chain jerked. The animal's eyes half closed, it lowered its head, its upper lip began to draw away from its teeth. All at once it had dropped on its belly. Someone cried out, "Hold come beast!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Banish Fear.

Good work can only be done by people who have abolished fear; sublime thoughts come only as we put fear behind.—Elbert Hubbard.

CHIC AFTERNOON GOWNS;

HATS OF SILVER AND GOLD

THE efforts of designers, in all manner of costumes, at present, seems to be to achieve the greatest degree of simplicity and still advance novelties in trimming and materials. The early tendency toward intricate lines and drapes has apparently been put aside in favor of the straight silhouette, the very long skirt giving way to ankle lengths or even shorter styles. Naturally, with these restrictions, the novelty of each costume must depend on its material, its color or its trimming, but there is such a variety in these that the designers do not lack

some form or other. In the group of dressy small hats shown here, each model boasts the sheen of metal.

If a hat is of velvet a most attractive trimming is gold lace, such as ornaments the hat at the top of the group. This model is of green velvet and is further ornamented with a brilliant gold pin. The hat at the right is of silver cloth with crown and upper brim of black velvet. The little cloche shape at the left shows the influence of the Chinese fashion in its decoration, which takes the form of a conventional Chinese design in gold em-



DRESSES WITH NOVEL TRIMMIN

means to work with and new fashions do not suffer because of their uniformity in outline.

In the illustration two new dresses are shown that display a great deal of individuality, though their lines are almost identical. The dress at the left is of georgette with a woven design of chenille which gives a brocade effect. The draped sleeve fastens at the shoulder and elbow with tiny bows of velvet ribbon and a huge velvet poppy is posed at the waistline. There is a slight drape to the skirt, which falls in two points at the side.

The model shown at the right is made of blue georgette crepe and has

broidery. A narrow gold ribbon is used as a band about the crown.

The jeweled model makes its bow in the little hat shown below, at the right. In this model jeweled pins are used against a background of heavy corded cloth of gold. The sectional crown is also piped with the same gold material. The hat shown below is an attractive off-the-face model, in which the trimming takes the form of gold stitching over the entire crown and brim. The tabs at the sides are finished with loops of gold beads.

Metallic brocades and all metal hats are very popular for evening wear. Sometimes the metal cloth combines two colors, such as gold and blue or



HATS OF SILVER AND GOLD

an embroidered design in silk and metallic threads of blue and silver. The treatment of the collar and of the skirt is particularly interesting, the skirt being plaited to form panels over the hips and encircled with roses made of the crepe.

All is not gold that glitters on winter hats, but if not gold then it is silver or jewels, jet or brocade, because to be fashionable it seems there must be a glitter to the hat in

Jubie Bottomley
(© 1922, Western Newspaper Union.)

To Avoid Spotting Furniture. Place a piece of waxed paper a little larger than vase or jardiniere under centerpiece or dolly used, and this keeps any moisture from going through to furniture. Sometimes a few drops of water will be unnoticed and a spot appears on your table.

WRIGLEYS



Take it home to the kids. Have a packet in your pocket for an ever-ready treat.

A delicious confection and an aid to the teeth, appetite, digestion.

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Sometimes a man's sins find him out—but generally it's his wife.

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Sore hands on retiring in the hot sudsof Cuticura Soap, dry and rub in Cuticura Ointment. Remove surplus Ointment with tissue paper. This is only one of the things Cuticura will do if Soap, Ointment and Talcum are used for all toilet purposes.—Advertisement.

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