

The Branding Iron

By Katharine Newlin Burt

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SYNOPSIS

Joan 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. Carver tells Pierre story of Joan's mother. Pierre forgives a cattle brand. Frank Halliwell, young minister, presents books to Joan. Pierre forbids her to read them. Maddened by jealousy, Pierre ties Joan and burns the Two-Bar brand into her shoulder.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

When this pain left her, when she was free of her bonds, no force nor fear would hold her to Pierre. She would leave him as she had left her father. She would go away. There was no place for her to go to, but what did that matter so long as she might escape from this horrible place and this infernal tormentor? She did not look about to see the actuality of Pierre's silence. She thought that he had dropped the brand and was sitting near the table with his face hidden. How long the stillness of pain and fury and horror lasted there was no one to reckon. It was most startlingly broken by a voice. "Who screamed for help?" it said, and at the same instant a draft of icy air smote Joan. The door had opened with suddenness and violence. With difficulty she mastered her pain and turned her head.

Pierre had staggered to his feet. Opposite him, framed against the open door filled with the wan whiteness of the snow, stood a spare, tall figure. The man wore his fur collar turned up about his brow, a sharp aquiline nose stood out above frozen mustaches, keen and brilliant eyes searched the room. He carried his gun across his arm in readiness, and sniffed the air like a suspicious hound. Then he advanced a step toward Pierre.

"What devil's work have you been at?" said he, his voice cutting the ear in its sharpness of astonished rage, and his hand slid down along the handle of his gun.

Pierre, watching him like a lynx, side-stepped, crouched, whipped out his gun and fired. At almost the same second the other's gun went off. Pierre dropped.

This time Joan's nerves gave way and the room, with its smell of scorched flesh, of powder and of frost, went out from her horrified senses. For a moment the stranger's stern face and brilliant eyes made the approaching center of a great cloud of darkness, then it, too, went out.

CHAPTER VII

The Judgment of God.

The man who had entered with such sudden violence upon so violent a scene stood waiting till the smoke of Pierre's discharge had cleared away, then, still holding his gun in readiness, he stepped across the room and bent over the fallen man.

"I've killed him!" he said, just above his breath, and added presently, "That was the judgment of God." He looked about, taking in every detail of the scene, the branding iron that had burnt its mark deep into the boards where Pierre had thrown it down, the glowing fire heaped high and blazing dangerously in the small room, the woman bound and burnt, the white light outside the uncurtained window.

Afterward he went over to the woman, who drooped in her bonds with head hanging backward over the wounded shoulder. He untied the silk scarf and the rope and carried her, still unconscious, into the bedroom, where he laid her on the bed and bathed her face in water. Joan's crown of hair had fallen about her neck and temples. Her bared throat and shoulder had the firm smoothness of marble, her lifeless face, its pure, full lips fallen apart, its long lids closed, black-fringed and black-browed, owing little of its beauty to color or expression, was at no loss in this deathlike composure and whiteness. The man dealt gently with her as though she had been a child. He found clean rags, which he soaked in oil and placed over her burn, then he drew the coarse clothing about her and resumed his bathing of her forehead.

She gave a moaning sigh, her face contracted woefully, and she opened her eyes. The man looked into them as a curious child might look into an opened door.

"Did you see what happened?" he asked her when she had come fully to herself.

"Yes," Joan whispered, her lips shaking.

"I've killed the brute."

Her face became a classic mask of tragedy, the drawn brows, horrified eyes and widened mouth.

"Pierre? Killed?" Her voice, hardly more than a whisper, filled the room with its agony.

"Are you sorry?" demanded her rescuer sternly. "Was he in the habit of tying you up or was this—branding—a special diversion?"

Joan turned her face away, writhed from head to foot, put up her two hands between him and her agonizing memories.

The man rose and left her, going softly into the next room. There he stood in a tense attitude of thought, set down presently with his long, narrow jaw in his hands and stared fixedly at Pierre. He was evidently trying to fight down the shock of the spectacle, grimly telling himself to become used to the fact that here lay the body of a man that he had killed. In a short time he seemed to be successful, his face grew calm. He looked away from Pierre and turned his mind to the woman.

"She can't stay here," he said presently, in the tone of a man to himself. He looked about in a hesitant, doubtful fashion. "G—P" he said abruptly and snapped his fingers and thumb. He looked angry. Again he bent over Pierre, examined him with thoroughness and science, his face becoming more and more calm. At the end he rose and with an air of authority he went in again to Joan. She lay with her face to the wall.

"It is impossible for you to stay here," said he in a voice of command. "You are not fit to take care of yourself, and I can't stay and take care of you. You must come with me. I think you can manage that. Your husband—if he is your husband—is dead. It may or may not be a matter for sorrow to you, but I should say that it ought not to be anything but a merciful release. Women are queer creatures, though. . . . However, whether you are in grief or in rejecting, you can't stay here. By tomorrow or next day you'll need more nursing than you do now. I don't want



"Don't Waste Time. There Will Be Snow Today."

to take you to a neighbor, even if there was one near enough, but I'll take you with me. Will you get ready now?"

His sure, even, commanding voice evidently had a hypnotizing effect upon the dazed girl. Slowly, wincing, she stood up, and with his help gathered together some of her belongings, which he put in the pack he carried on his shoulders. She wrapped herself in her warmest outdoor clothing. He then put his hand upon her arm and drew her toward the door of that outer room. She followed him blindly with no will of her own, but, as he stopped to strap on his snowshoes, her face lightened with pain, and she made as if to run to Pierre's body. He stood before her. "Don't touch him," said he, and, turning himself, he glanced back at Pierre. In that glance he saw one of the lean, brown hands str. His face became suddenly suffused, even his eyes grew shot with blood. Standing carefully so as to obstruct her view, he caught at the corner of an elk hide and threw it over Pierre. Then he went to Joan, who stared at him, white and shaking. He put his arm around her and drew her out, shutting the door of her home and leaning against it.

"You can't go back," said he gently and reasonably. "The man tried to kill you. You can't go back. Surely you mean to go away."

"Yes," said Joan; "yes. I did mean to go away. But—but it's Pierre."

He bent and began to strap on her snowshoes. There was a fighting brilliance in his eyes and a strange look of hurry about him that had its effect on Joan. "It's Pierre no longer," said he. "What can you do for him? What can he do for you? Be sensible, child. Come. Don't waste time. There will be snow today."

Joan bent over her head and followed him across the snow.

CHAPTER VIII

Delirium.

It is not the people that have led still and uneventful lives who are best prepared for emergencies. They are not trained to face crises, to make prompt and just decisions. Joan had made but two such resolutions in her life: the first when she had followed Pierre, the second when she had kept Halliwell's books in defiance of her husband's jealousy. The leaving her father had been the result of long and painful thought. Now, in a few hours, events had crashed about her so that her whole life, outer and inner, had been shattered. Beyond the pain and fever of her wound there was an utter confusion of her faculties. Before she fainted she had, indeed, made a distinct resolve to leave Pierre. It was this purpose, working subconsciously on her will, as much as the urgent pressure of the stranger, that took her past Pierre's body out into the dawn and sent her on that rash journey of hers in the footsteps of an unknown man. This being seemed to her then hardly human. Mysteriously he had stepped in out of the night, mysteriously he had condemned Pierre, and in self-defense, for Joan had seen Pierre draw his gun and fire, he had killed her husband. Now, just as mysteriously, as inevitably it seemed to her, he took command of her life. She was a passive, shipwrecked thing—a derelict.

As the silent day slowly brightened through its glare of clouds, she plodded on, setting her snowshoes in the tracks her leader made. The pain in her shoulder steadily increased, more and more absorbed her consciousness. She did not know that they were traveling north and west toward the wildest and most desolate country, that every time she set down her foot she set it down farther from humanity. She began soon to be a little light-headed and thought that she was following Pierre.

At noon they entered the woods, and her guide came behind her and led her through fallen timber and past pitfalls of soft snow. Suddenly, "I can't go no more," she sobbed, and stopped, swaying. At that he took her in his arms and carried her a few hundred feet till they entered a cabin under the shelter of firs.

"It's the ranger-station," said he; "the ranger told me that I could make use of it on my way back. We can pass the night here."

Joan knew that he had carried her across a strange room and put her on a strange bed. He took off her snowshoes, and she lay watching him light a fire in the cold, clean stove and cook a meal from supplies left by the owner of the house. She was trying now to remember who he was, what had happened, and why she was in such misery and pain. Sometimes she knew that he was her father and that she was at home in that wretched shack up Lone river, and an ineffable satisfaction would relax her cramped mind; sometimes, just as clearly, she knew that he was Pierre who had taken her away to some strange place, and, in this certainty, she was even more content. But always the horrible flame on her shoulder burnt her again to the confusion of half-consciousness. He wasn't John Carver, he wasn't Pierre, who, in God's name, was he? And why was she here alone with him? She could not frame a question; she had a fear that, if she began to speak, she would scream and rave, would tell impossible, secret things. So she held herself to silence, to a savage watchfulness, to a battle with delirium.

The man brought her a cup of strong coffee and held up her head so that she could drink it, but it nauseated her and she thrust it weakly away, asking for cold water. After she had drunk this, her mind cleared for an instant; she tried to stand up.

"I must go back to Pierre now," she said, looking about with wild but resolute eyes.

"Lie still," said the stranger gently. "You're not fit to stir. Trust me. It's all right. You're quite safe. Get rested and well, then you may go wherever you like. I want only to help you."

The reassuring tone, the promising words coaxed her and she dropped back. Presently, in spite of pain, she slept.

She woke and slept in fever for many hours, vaguely aware, at times, that she was traveling. She felt the motion of a sled under her and knew that she was lying on a warm hide of some freshly killed beast and that a blanket and a canvas covering protected her from a swirl of snow. Then she thought she heard a voice babbling queerly and saw a face quite terribly different from other human faces. The covering was taken from her, snowflakes touched her cheek, a lantern shone in her eyes, and she was lifted and carried into a warm, pleasant-smelling place from which were magically and completely banished all sound and bitterness of storm. She tried to see where she was, but her eyes looked on incredible colors and confusions, so she shut them and passively allowed herself to be handled by deft hands.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

The AMERICAN LEGION

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

HEADS LEGION AD. MEN'S POST

Maj. Reed Landis, One of the Airplane Aces, Chairman of Committee on Aeronautics.

Maj. Reed G. Landis, chairman of the American Legion's national committee on aeronautics is a man qualified to speak and act on this subject, according to his war record. Major Landis has nearly a dozen enemy airplanes to his credit, and was in some stirring engagements.

Of course great deeds are to be expected of the son of such a visible American figure as Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, but the young man has won a record "of his own."

Major Landis was a member of the old First Illinois cavalry when the troops massed on the Southern border in 1916. Though discharged from service there, he was recalled in 1917, and was sent to the first officers' training camp, only to be transferred to the air service, becoming a student of the ground school. He took flying instruction at the University of Illinois flying field, was sent to England and assigned to the Fortieth squadron, British expeditionary forces, then flying the "single seaters." He accounted officially for ten Hun planes before he was relieved



Maj. Reed G. Landis.

from the British service to take command of the Twenty-fifth squadron of the American forces. After commanding this organization for a short time, he was ordered home and was attached to General Woods' headquarters staff at Chicago as departmental air service officer.

For his ability with aircraft, Major Landis was awarded the highly coveted British Flying Cross, a decoration much sought by all English aviators. As a writer, he has contributed to a number of periodicals, with special articles on the air service.

Major Landis has been commander of the Advertising Men's post of the American Legion in Chicago, and has been called on to speak before many Legionnaires throughout the country. In addition to his duties as chairman of the national aeronautics committee.

MAY REOPEN BONUS CASE

Result of Minnesota Supreme Court Decision Likely to Affect "Non-Residence" Ruling.

Claims of from 10,000 to 15,000 veterans who registered and were inducted into the service from Minnesota, disallowed by the bonus board on a "nonresidence" ruling, may be reopened as a result of the recent decision of the state supreme court in the case of Everett Baum.

In its ruling the supreme court held that a person temporarily residing in Minnesota at the time of the call for registration who registered and who thereafter left the state but returned to be inducted by the draft board into the service, is entitled to the state bonus.

Baum, who was born in Pennsylvania, came to Minneapolis in May, 1917, obtained work and registered for the draft in June. The following January he went to Oregon and Washington, but returned in July at the call of the draft board. He entered the service and a year later was honorably discharged.

The bonus board disallowed his claim on the grounds that he was not a bona fide resident of Minnesota. The supreme court ruled that he was a resident because "the place of residence is the place of work."

It is pointed out by American Legion members that if this is the case, the 10,000 or 15,000 similar applications involving nearly \$3,000,000 from others, who constituted the state's floating population on registration day, June 5, 1917, and who were subsequently inducted, may also be affected by this decision.

CARE OF VETERANS' CHILDREN

Government Bureau Will Co-Operate With Legion in Plan for Attention to Dependents.

Full co-operation of the children's bureau of the United States Department of Labor will be extended to the American Legion in the plan for care of dependent children of World War veterans. This assistance to the program of the Legion on a problem which Legion leaders believe will eventually approximate care of disabled, will be rendered in every possible way, according to Miss Grace Abbott, chief of the children's bureau, in charge of welfare work for the government.

Miss Abbott has clearly outlined to George A. Withers, chairman of the Legion's national committee on children's homes, her ideas of what the veterans' organization should undertake in this work. In the first place, Miss Abbott says that every effort should be bent toward keeping the children of the Legion whose fathers have died, or are incapacitated, with their mothers or near relatives who are willing and competent to care for them. Miss Abbott declares that in the past it has been a common practice to take away children from the remaining parent if means are insufficient to care for the dependents. Usually, according to child welfare workers, this operates adversely, causing a double loss to the child. Sometimes a mother is allowed to struggle on under a load obviously too great for her shoulders, and the family becomes demoralized—sometimes delinquent. Here, thinks Miss Abbott, is where the Legion posts may help in this portion of the problem by friendly help and care, and by lending assistance in the schooling.

Miss Abbott says that foster homes are generally regarded as better than institutional, if children must be taken from their parents or relatives.

"Such an institution," declared Miss Abbott to Chairman Withers, "should be the last resort after every effort has been made to keep the family together, rather than the beginning of a program. If you could get every post to report to the state department, and in turn to report to national headquarters as to the success in caring and providing for these children, helping families to remain together, in finding ways of providing scholarships for the education of the children, etc., then finally as to the institutional care which may be necessary, I think you would make sure that the Legion children were having the right kind of opportunity for home life, for special care, if physically defective in any way, and for education, which is their right."

The government welfare worker holds that members of the Legion who are to handle this vital problem for its members should be named from the ablest men in the organization, and that they should approach the question as one which is certain to require diligent study, great expenditure of time, and much patience and ingenuity.

Foreign-born men who had conscientious objections against serving in the United States military and were exempted have been denied citizenship by Federal Judge John M. Killits of Toledo, Ohio. This matter has been the subject of a long and bitter fight by members of the American Legion throughout the country, and officials of the Veterans' organization were well pleased with the action denying to such men the rights of citizenship.

Judge Killits, in his opinion, declared that the court was unable to see how any applicant, who, on the grounds of conscience, objected to bearing arms in his country's defense, can take the oath of citizenship without reservations and that he, as the court, was unwilling to accept any such oath with reservations to it.

"Without any intention to reflect upon the quality of the profession of conscientious objectors," declared Judge Killits, "we feel that it is enough that the country must endure the native born of that persuasion whose citizenship is a birthright without extending the number by the favor of the naturalization laws."

Many posts of the Legion have fought against granting of citizenship rights to such applicants since the close of the war, and, in a number of cases, the fight has been successful. The Toledo instance, however, is believed to be the first decision of a federal court in the matter.

Ohio is in Lead.

Ohio leads all other states in the number of local voltures of La Societe des 40 Hommes et 8 Chevaux, the "playground of the Legion," though only one-half of the state is organized. The department now has 45 voltures, with Iowa second with 37, Illinois third with 36, Pennsylvania fourth with 31, and New York fifth with 28. The largest volture of La Societe is in Los Angeles county, California, where the local membership is 316. Polk county, Iowa (Des Moines), is second with 214; Linn county, Iowa (Cedar Rapids), third with 205, and Cook county, Illinois (Chicago), with 204 is fourth. These are the only voltures which number a membership of over 200. Membership in La Societe is based on activities in the organization of the American Legion, and is selective.

MRS. COFFMAN ILL SEVEN YEARS

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Sidell, Ill.—"I was a nervous wreck. I was suffering from a pain in my left side, which was almost unbearable, and I could not even let my bed clothing rest on my body at night. I had been sick for seven years, but not so bad until the last eighteen months, and had become so run-down that I cared for nobody, and would rather have died than live. I couldn't do my work without help, and the doctors told me that an operation was all there was left. I would not consent to that, so my husband brought me a bottle of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and begged me to take it. I have taken fourteen bottles of it and I feel ten years younger. Life is full of hope. I do all my housework and had a large garden this year. I never will be without the Vegetable Compound in the house, and when my two little girls reach womanhood I intend to teach them to take it. I am never too busy to tell some suffering sister of my help, and you can use my name and letter to spread the good news of Lydia E. Pinkham's medicines."

—Mrs. IDA M. COFFMAN, R. B. 2, Sidell, Ill.

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