

# THE BRANDING IRON

By Katharine Newlin Burt

## "SHE LEAVE LETTER"

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 forges a cattle brand. Frank Hollwell, young minister, presents books to Joan. Pierre forbids her to read them. Mad-dened 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. At the stranger's home Joan's injuries are attended to. She is introduced to a new world of books and fine clothing by the stranger, Prosper Gale, a writer. Gale becomes interested in Joan, who responds in part.

## CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

"There's books about everything, ain't there?—isn't there—Mr. Gael? Why, there's books about lovin' an' sickness an' about cattle an' what-not, an' about women an' children—" She was shirking the knowledge of her "case," but at last she pressed her lips together and opened the book. She fell to reading; growing anxiety possessed her face; she sat down on the nearest chair; she turned page after page. Suddenly she gave him a look of anger.

"I ain't none of this, Mr. Gael," she said, smote the page, rose with dignity, and returned the book.

He laughed so long and heartily that she was at last forced to join him. "You was—you were—Jobbin' me, wasn't you?" she said, sighing relief. "Did you know what that volume said? It said like this—I'll read you about it—" She took the volume, found the place and read in a low tone of horror, he helping her with the hard words: "One of the most frequent forms of phobia, common in cases of psychic neurasthenia, is agoraphobia in which patients the moment they come into an open space are oppressed by an exaggerated feeling of anxiety. They may break into a profuse perspiration and assert that they feel as if chained to the ground. . . . And here, listen to this, 'atophobia, the fear that high things will fall; atrophobia, fear of thunder and lightning; pantophobia, the fear of everything and everyone' . . . Well, now, ain't that too awful? An' you mean folks really get that way?"

Their talk was for some time of nervous diseases, Joan's horror increasing.

"Well, sir," said she, "lead me out an' shoot me if I get anyways like that! I believe it's caused by all that queer dressin' an' what-not. I feel like somethin' real bad in this shirt an' all, an' when I get through some work I'll feel a whole lot better. Don't you say I'm one of those nervous break-downs again, though, will you?" she pleaded.

"No, I won't, Joan. But don't make one of me, will you?"

"How's that?"

"By wearing those clothes all day and half the night. If you expect me to teach you, you'll have to do something for me, to make up for running away. You might put on pretty things for dinner, don't you think? Your nervous system could stand that?"

"My nervous system," drawled Joan, and added startlingly, for she did not often swear, "G—d!" It was an oath of scorn, and again Prosper laughed.

But he heard with a sort of terror the sound of her "man's work," to which she energetically applied herself. It meant the return of her strength, of her independence. It meant the shortening of her captivity. Before long spring would rush up the canyon in a wave of melting snow, crested with dazzling green, and the valley would lie open to Joan. She would go unless—had he really failed so utterly to touch her heart?

Was she without passion, this woman with the deep, savage eyes, the lips, so sensuous and pure, the body so magnificently made for living? She was not defended by any training, she had no moral standards, no prejudices, none of the "ideals." She was completely open to approach, a savage. If he failed, it was a personal failure. Perhaps he had been too subtle, too restrained. She did not yet know, perhaps, what he desired of her. But he was afraid of rousing her hatred, which would be fully as simple and as savage as her love.

That evening, after she had dressed to please him, and sat in her chair, tired, but with the beautiful, clean look of outdoor weariness on her face, and tried, battling with drowsiness, to give her mind to his reading and his talk, he came to her and knelt down, drawing down her hands to him, pressing his forehead on them.

For a moment she was stiff and still, then, "What is it, Mr. Gael?" she asked in a frightened half-voice.

He felt, through her body, the slight recoil of spirit, and drew away, and arose to his feet.

"You're angry?"

He laughed.

"Oh, no, I'm not angry; why should I be? I'm a superman, I'm made—let's say—of alabaster. Women with great eyes and wonderful voices and the beauty of broad-browed nymphs walking gravely down under forest

arches, such women give me only a great, great longing to read aloud very slowly and carefully a 'Child's History of the English Race!' He took the book, tossed it across the room, then stood, ashamed and defiant, laughing a little, a boy in disgrace.

Joan looked at him in profound bewilderment and dawning distress.

"Now," she said, "you are angry with me. You always are when you talk that queer way. Won't you please explain it to me, Mr. Gael?"

"No!" said he sharply. "I won't." And he added after a moment, "You'd better go to bed. You're sleepy and as stupid as an owl."

"Oh!"

"Yes, and you've destroyed what little superstitious belief I had left concerning something they tell little ignorant boys about a woman's intuition. You haven't got a bit. You're stupid and I'm tired of you— No, Joan, I'm not. Don't mind me. I'm only in fun. Please! D—n! I've hurt your feelings."

Her lips were quivering, her eyes full. "I try so awful hard," she said. It was a lovely, broken trail of music.

"Dear child! Joan, don't you ever think of me?"

"Yes, yes; all the while I'm thinking of you. I wisht I could do more for you. Why do I make you so angry? I know I'm awful—awfully stupid and ignorant. I—I must drive you most crazy, but truly"—here she turned quickly in his arm and put her hands

about his neck and laid her cheek against his shoulder—"truly, Mr. Gael, I'm awful fond of you." Then she drew quickly away, quivered back into the other corner of her great chair, put her face to her hands. "Only—I can't help seein'—Pierre."

Just her tone showed him that still and ghostly youth, and again he saw the brown hand that moved. He had stood between her and that sight. The man ought to have died. He did not deserve his life nor this love of hers. Even though he had failed to kill the man, he would not fail to kill her love for him, sooner or later, thought Prosper. If only the hateful spring would give him time. He must move her from her memory. She had put her hands about his neck, she had laid her head against his shoulder, and, if it had been the action of a child, then she would not have started from him with that sharp memory of Pierre.

Joan had made her plans. She would wait till spring, partly to get back her full strength, partly to make further progress in her studies, but



She Was Truly Sorry That She Had Hurt Him by Running Away.

mosty in order not to hurt this hospitable Prosper Gael. The naivete of her gratitude, of her delicate consideration for his feelings, which continually triumphed over an instinctive fear, would have filled him with amusement, perhaps with compunction, had he been capable of understanding them. She was truly sorry that she had hurt him by running away. She told herself she would not do that again. In the spring she would make him a speech of thankfulness and of farewell, and then she would tramp back to Pierre's homestead and win and hold Pierre's land. As yet, you see, Prosper entered very little into her conscious life. Somewhere, far down in her, there was a disturbance, a growing doubt, a something vague and troubling. . . . Joan had not learnt to probe her own heart. A sensation was not, or it was, she was puzzled by the feeling Prosper was beginning to cause her, a feeling of miserable complexity; but she was not yet mentally equipped for the confronting of complexity. It was necessary for an emotion to rush at Joan and throw down as it were, her heart before she recognized it; even then she might not give it a name. She would act, however, and with violence.

So now she planned and worked and grew beautiful with work and planning, while Prosper worked, too, and his instruments were delicate and deadly and his plans made no account of hers. He worked on her subconsciousness, undermining her path, and at nights and in her sleep she great waves of life.

But she was in his cool and pas-

reaction, one at last that came near to wrecking his purpose.

"Your clothes are about done for, Joan," Prosper laughed one morning, watching her belt in her tattered shirt; you'll soon look like Copbetua's beggar maid."

"I'm not quite barefoot yet." She held up a cracked boot.

"I was going to tell you that there are a skirt and a sort of coat in—in a closet in the hall. Do you want to use them?"

She went out to look. In five minutes he heard her laugh, and, still laughing, she opened the door again.

"Oh, Mr. Gael, were you really thinking that I could wear these? Look."

He turned and looked at her. She had crowded her strong, lithe frame into a brown tweed suit, a world too narrow for her, and she was laughing to show him the misfit.

"These things, Mr. Gael," she said—"they must have been made for a tall child."

Prosper had too far tempted his pain, and in her vivid phrase it came to life before him. She had painted a startling picture and he had seen that suit, so small and trim, before.

Joan saw his face grow white, his eyes stared through her. He drew a quick breath and winced away from her, hiding his face in his hands. A moment later he was weeping convulsively, with violence, his head down between his hands. Joan started toward him, but he made a wicked and repellent gesture. She fled into her room and sat, bewildered, on her bed.

All at once the question came to her: for whom had the delicate fabrics been bought, for whom had this suit been made? "It was his wife and she is dead," thought Joan, and very pitifully she took off the suit, laid it and the other things away, and sitting by her window rested her chin in her hands and stared out through the blue pines. Tears ran down her face because she was so sorry for Prosper's pain. And again, thought Joan, she had caused it, she who owed him everything. Yes, she was deeply sorry for Prosper, deeply; her whole heart was stirred. For the first time she had a longing to comfort him with her hands.

For all that day Prosper fled the house and went across the country, now fording a flood of melted snow, now floundering through a drift, now walking on springy sod, unaware of the soft spring, conscious only of a sort of fire in his breast. He suffered and he resented his suffering, and he would have killed his heart, if by so doing, he could have given it peace. And all day he did not once think of Joan, but only of the "tall child" for whom the gay canyon refuge had been built, but who had never set her slim foot upon the threshold. Sunset found him miles away in the foothills of a low, many-folded range across the plain. He was dog tired, so that for very exhaustion his brain had stopped its tormenting work. He lit a fire and sat by it, huddled in his coat, smoking, dozing, not able really to sleep for cold and hunger. Prosper hated the night and its beautiful desolation, he hated the God that had made this land. He cursed the dawn when it came delicately, spreading a green arc of radiance across the east. And then, as he arose stiffly, stamped out his fire and started slowly on his way back, he was conscious of a passionate homesickness, not for the old life he had lost, but for his cabin, his bright hearth, his shut-in solitude, his Joan. Very dear and real and human she was, and her laughter had been sweet. And she must be anxious about him. She would have sat up by the fire all night. . . . His eagerness for her slighted comfort gave his lagging steps a certain vigor, the long walk back seemed very long indeed. Noon was hot, but he found water, and by sundown he came to the canyon trail. He wanted Joan as badly now as a hurt child wants its mother. He came, haggard and breathless, to the door, called "Joan," came into the warm little room and found it empty. Wen Ho, to be sure, pattered to meet him.

"Mister Gael been gone a long time, velly, long, all night. Wen Ho, he fix bed, fix breakfast—oh, the lady? She gone out yestiddy, not come back. She leave a letter for him, there on the table."

Prosper took it, waved Wen Ho out, and, dropping into the big chair, opened the paper. There was Joan's big handwriting, that he himself had taught her. Before, she could only sign her name.

"Mister Gael, dere friend: You have ben too good to me an' it has ben too hard for you to keep me when you were all the while amissin' her an' it hurts me to think of how I must have ben terrible hard for you all this winter to see me where you had ben ust to seein her an' me wearin her pretty things all the while. Now dere friend this must not be no more. I will not stay to trouble you. You have ben awful free-hearted. When you come back from your wanderin an' tryin to get over your bein so unhappy you will find your house quiet an' peaceful an' you will not be hurt by me no more. I am not able to say all I hev feelin about your goodness an' I hev not always ben as kind to you. In my thoughts an' axions but that has ben my own fault no more. I want you to believe this, Mister Gael. I am goin back to Pierre's ranch to work on his land an' some day I will be hopin to see you come ridin in an' I will keep on learnin as well as I can an' mebbe you will not be ashamed of me. I feel awful bad to go but I would feel more bad to stay when I must hurt you so. Respectably

"JOAN."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## CLOTHES FOR OUTDOORING; PRETTY JUNIOR FALL HATS

THE lure of outdoors is never stronger than during the crisp days of autumn. Cool winds carry an invitation to invigorating exercise, and with the new materials, in outer wear to choose from, the problem of appropriate and comfortable apparel grows more and more simple. In knitted materials particularly there has been a tremendous development with the sports idea growing stronger all the time. These fabrics have "caught on" for junior styles in millinery follow the modes for grownups to some degree. This is more apparent in materials than in trimmings, and in the small, close-fitting shapes the difference in styles, for different ages, seems sometimes to be only a difference in head size.

In the group of young girls' hats shown here, velvet, embroideries, sectional crowns and shapes all have their prototypes in the autumn styles



Sport Suit and Knitted Fabric.

and remain with us as established parts in the scheme of things in women's apparel.

A new weave in brushed camel's hair is used for making the attractive costume shown in the picture. A wide brown stripe in the material is manipulated to make the collar and cuffs, and it also appears as a band about the jacket and skirt. The pockets and jacket opening are faced with the lighter material.

A costume of this kind may be worn for any number of outdoor activities.



Various Hat Styles for Girls.

It is ideal for country club wear, or for active sports and is not out of place as a street suit in town. The material combines warmth with lightness and what is equally desirable, it has a breezy, youthful look.

Utility is the second consideration in some of the new sport costumes that have lately made their appearance. These are dressy affairs made of bright-colored silk or wool and are embroidered with all-over designs in equally brilliant colors. An interesting model is of putty-colored silk, loosely crocheted, with alternate bands of soft, buff-colored suede.

One is apt to run across a youngish grandmother trying on hats designed for the debutante these days,

Julia Bottomley

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