

# HOSTILE VALLEY

By Ben Ames Williams



CHAPTER I

**T**HE pot which boiled over that day in Hostile Valley had been years brewing; two years, or twenty, according to the point of view. Huddy Ferrin may have been its chief ingredient; but Jenny Pierce had also a major part in what ensued.

Jenny had never lived for long in any other world than this deep glen. It was almost twenty years since her father died; and her mother sold their farm in Liberty and came, with Jenny in her arms, to lodge here with old Marm Pierce, who was Jenny's grandmother.

Marm Pierce, before their coming, dwelt alone in one half of what had been a farmhouse of some size, on the old Haven place. The house itself was built by her father long ago. When he died, her brother Win, who had a wandering foot, and who had never spent more time here in the Valley than he must, wished to sell; but Marm Pierce would not.

"I was born in this house and I'm a mind to die here," she told him stoutly. "Half of it's mine, and half's yours. You go on and sell your half if you want; but I aim to go on living in mine."

But obviously it was impossible to sell half a house; and Win Haven raged at her obstinacy. She remained unshaken and the result was one of those quarrels which become more bitter with years, which grow and thrive on their own acid juice. The house and the farm they divided half and half, by a straight line drawn through the very middle of the house itself; and since then, Marm Pierce kept rigidly to her half—and her brother maliciously allowed his side of the house to molder and decay. He made no repairs, gave the rotting boards no preserving touch of paint; and he refused to permit his sister to remedy his own neglect. She boarded off her half of the cellar; nailed up the connecting doors.

Jenny, as she grew older, for a while used to imagine dreadful things lurking in the other side—Marm Pierce called it the Win-side—of this strange house divided; and when windows fell out and doors sagged on their hinges, she sometimes crept secretly into the empty rooms to peer into shadowed corners, and start and run at the squeak of a mouse. Till one morning, thus venturing, she found Win Haven himself in a drunken sleep on the floor, and fled in stark dismay, weeping with fright, to her grandmother.

"Good enough for you," Marm Pierce told her sharply. "You keep out of the Win-side of the house after this. Let him lay there and rot in his own dirt if he's a mind."

Thereafter, Jenny obeyed this injunction, though she eventually lost any particular fear of Win Haven. He was a restless man, appearing and disappearing at long intervals, gone sometimes for months, sometimes for years. But always the day came when Jenny and her grandmother heard some stir of movement in the empty rooms so close to those in which their own lives were lived; and old Marm Pierce would say tartly:

"Well, that Win's back again!"

Jenny sometimes encountered him. He was already an old man, who grew older; yet there was youth in him too, and a vigorous spirit and a wise old eye. Bearded sometimes, by the life he led; leering sometimes with an appreciative glint as he watched Jenny's young beauty passing by. But wise and keen for all of that. A man with mirth and malice in him. Sometimes, in his own side of the house, he sang far into the night drunken, ribald songs, for the sake of annoying Marm Pierce with whom so long ago he had quarreled.

But as the Win-side of the house began to crumble, and the roof to leak, and the windows to sag, he came less often. There was no decent shelter in the rotting rooms. Jenny and Marm Pierce might forget him for months on end.

The farm was remote, approached by a byway which led off the road that ran up and down the Valley; but even the Valley road itself was little traveled. As long ago as Jenny's childhood, the Valley was already a solitary place, with only scattered families here and there. The farm was hidden within a belt of woodland, halfway between the Valley road and the brook. Some meadow land Marm Pierce tended year by year, hiring neighbors to cut back the encroaching underbrush, and to harvest the hay; and

she and Jenny made a garden sufficient for their needs. The meadows that were part of Win's half of the farm were long since gone back to birch and popple and young hackmatack; a youthful wilderness.

In this remote spot Jenny grew from a baby into childhood. She never vividly remembered her mother, who died soon after they came to Granny Pierce's farm to live. Thereafter the old woman and the little girl dwelt here alone; and Jenny grew older.

Marm Pierce was not a solitary, however; she had some skill with roots and herbs, and a certain healing power in her, and since there was no doctor nearer than Liberty village, folk hereabout were apt to turn to her to tend their lesser ills. So visitors came not infrequently to seek Marm Pierce's ministrations, or to cut and mow her hay, or plow her garden, or merely for the sake of passing by. The old woman's sharp tongue was kindly, too; her wit pleased more than it hurt. And either from friendliness, or from a desire to keep her good opinion, neighbors did her a favor when they could. If a man were going to Liberty village for supplies, he was apt to stop by to ask whether there were any errand he might do. If a man had more apples than he could well market, he brought her a barrel. The bins in her cellar were well filled with potatoes and other roots, every fall; and when her cow calved, there were helpers ready if the need arose.

Jenny, as she grew older, wore none of the shyness natural to farm children. She saw a surprising number of people, and met them in friendly fashion, so that even when a stranger came into her life, she could greet the newcomer unafraid. Also, as she grew older, she took to herself the liberty of the fields, and the deep woods; and she knew every foot of the brawling stream that from Carey's bridge came in swirls and cascades through a narrowing gorge, to relax in wide sluggish pools as it entered the cedar bog a little below.

Sometimes Marm Pierce went with her; or rather, sometimes when the old woman went searching here and there for the herbs she required, she took the child along, and taught Jenny to recognize all those plants which comprised her simple pharmacopoeia. Later, as she found it not so easy to get about, she sent Jenny herb-gathering alone.

The girl learned from her grandmother some of that infinite lore which the older woman had through the years acquired. Before Jenny was fifteen, she knew that if you wanted pullets, you must choose blunt-pointed eggs for the hatching; that a piece of red flannel wet twice a day with strong camphor will cure bumblefoot; that ground tobacco stems will keep lice out of the hens' nests; that castile soap and tobacco ashes make the best dentifrice; that borax, or the yolk of an egg mixed with soda, will cure dandruff; that a fence of heavy paper will keep cut worms away from young plants; that wood ashes mixed with salt will seal the cracks in a stove; that sulphur is good for mange; that a laudanum drench will relieve colic.

One day in the spring of the year when she was sixteen years old, she saw Will Ferrin for the first time; and that day she ceased to be a child and was thereafter in her heart, without herself wholly understanding the change, a woman. Will was at the time just past twenty-one years old; and he had lived all his life on his father's farm, sprawled up the slope of the ridge above the brook, on the east side of the Valley. The farm was a good one, even though its tilled acres were contracted since the old days when Enoch, great-grandfather of young Will, and his three sons worked it well.

Will, when he could be spared from the farm work, sometimes came down to fish the stream; and he had thus come on this day when Jenny first saw him. Jenny and Will, though they had lived for a dozen years within a mile or so of one another, had never met at all. Will came to fish a few of the deep holes in the gorge; and Jenny wandered through the woods to the streamside, seeking here and there the springing herbs which Marm Pierce liked to gather in the flood tide of June.

Jenny by old habit moved through the forest silently, finding pleasure in surprising the birds at their pleasant occupations, in catching quick fleeting glimpses of small

creatures unawares. She was no more a disturbing element in the forest than the creatures which lived there, and Will, his ears filled with the rushing song of the water as he fished, heard nothing of her coming.

He had crossed to the west side of the stream for his fishing, so that his back was toward her when she first discovered him. She saw a tall, strong figure in blue overalls and blue shirt and a battered old hat, the overalls tucked into rubber boots that ended just below his knee. She saw him, and she paused, a little way off, standing utterly still, leaning with one hand against a tree, motionless and yet not rigid, beautifully at her ease.

She watched him for a moment; and he lifted a fine trout out of the stream. It fell flopping by his side,



She Watched Him for a Moment.

and he dropped the rod to pln it with his hands. So doing, he turned sidewise to her, so that she saw his face, and the shock of straw-colored hair under the hat, and his delighted grin.

But as he pinned the fish, he uttered an exclamation of pain, and snatched one hand away and looked at it; and Jenny, with the quick sympathy which all women have, came toward him. She was six paces off when he heard or felt her presence there, and turned and looked up at her; and his eyes widened in quick surprise, and then he said something, laughing. And he got up, the trout in one hand, his rod in the other, and held the fish for her to admire.

"Handsome, ain't he?"

She asked: "Did he stick the hook into you?"

Will was puzzled. "No!"

"I could see you hurt your hand, when you grabbed him."

"Oh," he remembered; and he extended the hand which held the fish, turned it so that she could see an inflamed and swollen finger joint. "Got a felon," he said. "It's sore as time!"

She took his hand in her two hands, gently, looking at the felon. "Granny can cure that," she said. "If you'd come on home with me."

"So!" he ejaculated, in pleased surprise. "Can she now? I've heard tell that Marm Pierce is a mighty hand at curing ills; but I thought a felon you just had to take and stand it."

She frowned in thought, with an amusing affectation of maturity. "I've just forgot what it is you do," she confessed. "But Granny, she'll know." And she urged: "It ain't only a little ways through the woods to our place."

Will said heartily: "Why, let's go along, then. Like trout, does she? I've a couple here. You'll have to show me the way."

She nodded; and he fetched his fish from a moss bed where he had laid them under ferns; and the two young people went together through the woods back toward Marm Pierce's farm. There was no path; but there would be, by and by. It needs only a little tracing and retracing of the same way in wild land where no foot has trod, to leave a thread of trail along the

ground. And—Jenny would come often by this way, in the years that were to follow; would come thus to the brook and wait here on the chance that Will might find time for the fishing; would even cross the brook and climb the steep path beyond, and so go up through the orchard to the Ferrin farm for a glimpse of him.

But now the way was trackless, and Will followed on her heels. He said: "Guess you're Jenny Pierce. I never see you before."

"Yes, I be," she assented; and she added, with a glance over her shoulder: "Nor I never see you."

"I'm Will Ferrin," he explained. She stopped as though in surprise; she turned, and looked at him, and her eyes were wide with wonder.

"Will Ferrin? You live right up there?" She pointed.

"Certain." He was puzzled by her surprise.

But she made no explanation, only nodded; yet it seemed to her incredible that he could have been, all her life, so near without her knowing. There was already in her heart such certainty, and poignant bliss at being near him now.

When they emerged into the back pasture behind Marm Pierce's barn, he came to walk beside her. Jenny, for no reason, smiled. Her head was high and proud; she brought him home to old Marm Pierce like a trophy, like a prize.

They found the old woman in the kitchen. "Granny," said the girl. "This here is Will Ferrin, and he's got a felon on his finger. I told him you could cure it for him."

Marm Pierce, brisk, black-eyed, white-haired, with a quick-thrusting tongue, said sharply: "Take it in time and I could. Howdy, Will. Let's see it. If you'd had any sense, you'd have come before now!"

Jenny cried softly: "You already knowed him? You never told me, Granny!"

Marm Pierce looked at the girl with swift probing eyes. "Told you?" she echoed. "Why should . . . ?" She checked the question unasked, reading her answer in the girl's warm color and soft tones; and she spoke briskly to Will again. "It's a bad one," she said. "I dunno as I can do it a mite of good, but you set down and we'll see!"

Will obeyed her, and the old woman, with another wise glance at Jenny, turned to the cupboard above the sink where many of her stores were kept, and rummaged there.

Jenny said: "I couldn't remember what it is you do, Granny."

"Take a piece of wild turnip," Marm Pierce explained. "There's some here somewheres." She found it. "I'll grate it up, and mix it with turpentine, and put it on that finger of yours, Will. It'll kill the pain right away; and if it works the way it's s'posed to, it'll eat the felon out, too. Be a hole there tomorrow morning, clear in to the bone."

She was busy with the grater at the sink, her shoulders moving as she worked energetically.

"I'll give you some salve to put on it tomorrow," she said. "That'll heal it right up, like as not. If it don't, you let me know . . ."

What followed, Jenny watched without speaking; or rather she watched Will, and his eyes that were so deeply blue, and his straw-colored hair rough and unkempt across his brow, and the youthful lines of his mouth and chin. Marm Pierce gave the girl a sidelong scrutiny, while she affected to be busy with her ministrations; till presently the thing was done, and Will offered them the trout by way of payment, and departed, and Jenny—though even then her feet wished to follow him, to follow him anywhere, forever, wherever he should go—stayed in the door to watch him disappear through the barn.

She turned then to her grandmother with shining eyes. "He looked back and waved, Granny!" she cried.

"Sh'd think he would," Marm Pierce assented crisply. "Ungrateful young imp if he didn't. You get the yarbs I sent you for, Jenny?"

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

## "Les Miserables" Playing At The Carolina In Wilmington

Theatre-goers in this section have a real treat in store for them this week when "Les Miserables", popularly acclaimed as one of the greatest pictures of the year, plays at the Carolina Theatre in Wilmington Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Fredric March is at his best as the hero, Jean Valjean, the fresh, honest country youth, who stole a loaf of bread because he was starving and for this crime was brutalized by five years in the galleys of a French prison ship and found his whole life shadowed by the law.

As the fanatical detective, Javert, who hounded him from pillar to post, Charles Laughton offers an entirely new and great characterization, and Sir Cedric Hardwicke, the distinguished English stage and screen star, is brilliant as the beneficent Bishop Bienvenu.

Released from the prison ship an unfeeling beast, Valjean is inspired to a noble and prosperous life by the Bishop Bienvenu. But because he has broken his parole, he remains a hunted man always thanks to the sinister Javert.

The love story is provided by Cosette, Valjean's ward, played by Rochelle Hudson, and Marius, a young revolutionary, played by John Beal.

"Roberta" Coming  
Starring Irene Dunne, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, RKO-Radio brings to the screen a colorful picturization of "Roberta," the musical play which has been making theatrical history on the stage. This picture plays at the Carolina Theatre, Wilmington, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

Lavishly produced, the picture retains all of the popular features of the stage play, but also presents a number of specially brilliant entertainment highlights, including a spectacular fashion show. Miss Dunne's singing, the

spectacular dancing of Astaire and Miss Rogers, and sparkling novelty episodes enliven the production, which is expected to eclipse even the success of "The Gay Divorcee."

Jerome Kern, known as the King of musical comedy composers, wrote two new melodies for the picture, both of which have been acclaimed as popular hits. They are "Lovely to Look At," a beautiful romantic melody; and "I Won't Dance," a sensational rhythm number.

In addition, the popular Kern compositions, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," "Touch of Your Hand," "Let's Begin," "I'll Be Hard to Handle," and "Yesterday," from the original stage show are colorfully presented.

Irene Dunne's golden voice is heard singing "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," "Touch of Your Hand," "Yesterday," a Russian song, and a new melody, "Lovely to Look At."

Dances said to outshine those they did in "Flying Down to Rio" and "The Gay Divorcee" are introduced by the winged footed Astaire and Miss Rogers. They do steps for every mood. A novel number in which they are heard talking with their feet is done to "I'll Be Hard to Handle" as a breath-taking, pulse-tingling taps routine. In another sequence they sway and whirl with incredible grace to the beautiful strains of "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes."

### CIVIC CLUB MET FRIDAY EVENING (Continued from Page 1.)

cal solos. She was accompanied at the piano by Mrs. R. I. Mintz. The program also included a number of impromptu talks. In the absence of the president, R. I. Mintz, G. Van Fesperman, the vice-president, was toastmaster.

During the business session, a committee including Dr. Wm. S. Doshier, Rangwald Johnson and G. Van Fesperman was appointed to investigate the advisability of erecting attractive signs at Supply and at Bell Swamp calling attention of tourists to the attractive features of Southport and inviting them to this city.

The following citizens were added to the club membership: M. B. Watkins, H. M. Shannon, Robert Jones, William Jergenson, Dick Brendle and Mr. Hornsby.

### COUNTY AGENT DODSON RECEIVES ALLOTMENT CARDS

(Continued from page 1.)  
better to give each tenant an individual card including the number of pounds he is supposed to be allowed to sell under the provisions of his tobacco contract.

In case an allotment card is lost, County Agent Dodson said that his office should be notified immediately. However, no duplicate card will be issued before a period of two weeks has elapsed.

So far this year there has been no ruling from the Secretary of Agriculture which will allow a farmer to sell a part of his crop on an allotment granted to someone else and contract signers will be able to sell just the number

of pounds contained in allotment cards.

Robt. C. St. George  
Com. Local Legis.

(Continued from page 1.)  
H. D. Williams, sergeant at arms.  
R. O. Johnson, American ficer.

Another important business transaction at the meeting was the appointment of commander R. C. St. George, T. Reid, the retiring commander as delegates to the convention of the American Farmers' Union to be held in Fayetteville August 4th, 5th and 6th. Yaskell and Mayor Johnson were named as alternate

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