



CHAPTER II—His father's death brings Will back to the Valley, but he returns to Augusta, still unconscious of Jenny's womanhood, and love. Neighbors of the Percies are Bart and Amy Carey, brother and sister. Bart, unmarried and something of a ne'er-do-well, is attracted by Jenny, but the girl repulses him definitely. Learning that Will is coming home, Jenny, exulting, sets his long-empty house to rights, and has dinner ready for him. He comes—bringing his wife, Huldy. The girl's world collapses.

And when supper was on the table Jenny bade them both good night, in strong steady tones, and took herself away. Out through the barn, down the orchard slope, down the steep trail to the stream.

She went blundering through the dark woods, her eyes hot and dry with tears that would not flow.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Jenny, struggling through the deep woods, her eyes burning for the anodyne of tears, emerged at last into the open meadow land and saw the dim bulk of the barn ahead, she ran stumbly, in haste to come home to Marm Pierce and the old woman's understanding arms. She rounded the barn and saw a light in the kitchen; but she saw too a team here in the yard, and so was warned that her grandmother was not alone, and had time to steady herself before she came to the kitchen door.

Bart was here. He had been in Liberty village when Will drove through, had hailed Will and heard an answering call; but Will did not halt, so Bart had not seen Huldy. Yet he had seen, dimly, the form of a woman in the seat beside Will; and before Jenny arrived now, he had told this much to old Marm Pierce, sitting by the stove before the open oven door.

"Brought some one to keep house for him, like as not," was the opinion he hazarded; but Marm Pierce knew misgivings, even before Jenny appeared. Jenny came in comely enough, but her countenance was a haggard mask, eloquent of torment and of pain; and Marm Pierce rose quickly and came between the girl and Bart, to shield Jenny from his eyes.

"He come finally, did he, Jen?" she asked. "You're late enough." "He only just got there," Jenny explained. "I stayed to put the supper on."

Marm Pierce nodded, and she told Jenny: "Bart see Will go through the village. He says as how there was a woman with him in the car." Jenny said in husky tones, "Yes, Granny. It's his wife. Will's got married."

Her voice was terribly steady, as rigid as steel. Marm Pierce was shocked motionless; and even Bart could in this moment read Jenny's secret in her eyes. Before the old woman could move, he stood up and came toward the girl.

"Why, Jen," he said warmly, "I guessed you liked Will pretty well yore own self, didn't you?" He chuckled, yet not in a fashion to cause her any pain. "I always had a notion you did," he confessed. "I knew with him around there wa'n't a chance for me, but when he went away, I kind of thought . . ."

And he urged: "Don't you grieve for Will, Jen! There's men enough, not as fine as him maybe, but . . ." Marm Pierce said harshly: "Bart, you shut your mouth. Let the child alone!"

ter's kind of low." "Guess I've scared them, if there was any in here," she said. He grinned. "Sho," he said flatly, "no trout wouldn't ever be



She Saw or Felt or Heard a Movement on the Bank Above Her.

afraid of you. Wonder to me they ain't nibbling at yore toes." She looked down at her bare feet, and realized that she was standing here with her wet skirt drabbed about her knees. So she came ashore, and wrung out the hem of her skirt, and sat down with her back to him to pull on her stockings and shoes. He stood behind her, coming no nearer, speaking of casual things, till she rose to face him again.

He asked then: "In a hurry, are you?" "Granny'll be wondering where I've went to." "Set and talk," he urged. "I want to talk to you, Jenny."

"Walk along with me, then," she proposed, and moved resolutely on her way. But as she passed him, he caught her arm. Deep silent wood lay all about them, and the shadows were cool. "You don't ever give me a chance to talk to you, Jenny," he protested.

"What about, Bart?" she asked gravely. He laughed. "Sho, there's a plenty of things for a fellow and a girl to talk about, Jenny. High time you got on to that."

She stood, her head a little bowed, thinking of Will. "I do know that, Bart," she said. "But not you and me."

"What's the matter with me?" he asked, half angrily. "Why, you're all right," she said honestly. "You've been mighty good to Granny and me, fetching things from the village, and helping with the hay, and the farming, and all. But—not the sort of thing you mean, Bart."

"How do you know?" he challenged, curiously abashed by her calm serenity. "You can't tell. You might get to . . ."

She shook her head. "Not you, Bart," she said simply. His clasp on her arm relaxed, and she moved quietly away from him. There was in the move nothing in the least dramatic; and yet Bart perceived that there was in it nevertheless finality. He stared after her, baffled, rebuffed; he did not follow, stood where she had left him. And when she was gone he said only:

"Well, I'll be . . ." He did not say what he would be; but later, on his way up the brook to his home, he grinned at his own discomfiture.

Win Haven was at the farm when he got there; and Bart confessed the incident. The older man demanded impatiently: "Shucks, why'n't you just grab on to her? Any woman, she has to be rushed, Bart. Took off her feet before she knows what's going on."

Bart shook his head. "Jenny knowed well enough what I wanted," he said in amused discomfiture. "Knowned before I did. Yes, sir, she was way out in front of me. I couldn't see nothing but her heels." And he urged: "You step in and have a glass of cider. How come you're around here again, anyway? I thought you'd gone."

"Got me a job in Liberty," Win explained. "But I can handle a glass of cider. Sure." He added boastfully: "Just the same, if I was a young one, and a ripe gal like that running wild in the woods around, I'd . . ." And he told, with a senile and fatuous unctious, what he would do.

Jenny went home, but she said nothing about Bart. It was weeks later before Marm Pierce remarked one evening: "Wonder why Bart don't ever stop in, the way he used to? What's got into him, Jenny?" Jenny told her, then, about that encounter by the brook; and the old woman chuckled with appreciation and contentment, sure that Bart need worry her no more.

That was an open winter in the Valley, with little snow, and deep frost; and the mud in the spring was worse than usual. It was mid-May before a plow could be put in the ground, June before the clods could be broken. But in the last week of May Jenny heard that Will Ferris was coming home.

Jenny, though she had said nothing to the older woman, had been expecting word of him; he had told her, on that day of his father's funeral, that he would return this year. It did not occur to her that Will might change his mind, that he might do less than he had planned. Through the long month of May she slipped away at brief intervals, and threaded the wood toward the brook—her feet had begun to mark there a permanent trail—and climbed to the Ferrin farm to see whether he had come. Day by day the house stood shuttered and empty, and she returned to the long weariness of waiting. The long ripeness of spring made longing fill her heart, and one day she came home to Marm Pierce with shining eyes.

The old woman had long since guessed where Jenny went on these excursions; she saw the girl's face now, and chuckled, and asked shrewdly: "Will home, is he?" Jenny looked startled; then the deep color flooded her cheeks. "No, Granny," she said. "But Pat Prentice was plowing the lower field, and he told me Will had wrote and hired him to do it. Said Will 'lowed to get here Monday.'"

Marm Pierce sniffed scornfully. "Guess Will's worked for day wages so long he thinks money's easy come by. Hiring work done that he might full as well do his own self. Guess he could've come this week if he had a mind."

Jenny laughed at her. There was a bubbling happiness in the girl that would not be downed. "You're just talking to make me argue about it, but I won't," she said; and she cried: "I don't care if he never does a lick of work, long's he does come home, Granny." And suddenly there were deep tears in her eyes and her voice was husky. She clung to the old woman. "I want to see him," she whispered. "I want to awful," she cried. "Seems like he's been gone so long."

Marm Pierce felt quick misgiving in her. "Dunno why you should be so worked up about it," she protested. "Like as not he won't only stay long enough to do his farming and get out again."

"He will. He will stay," Jenny insisted happily. "You wait and see."

And during the intervening days, Jenny rode on a flood of anticipation. Will was to arrive on Monday. Jenny took broom and mop and dust cloth and departed to make Will's house ready for him. Marm Pierce made some mild remonstrance.

"No need of that," she protested. "Like as not he's already hired it done." Her tone was mild with scorn.

"A man wouldn't think of that," Jenny urged. "He'll come home expecting to roll up in blankets the first night; and the blankets, they'll be damp, give him a cold. I'm going over and clean up, and air everything, and get fires going in the stoves and have everything ready for him . . ."

"House is locked up," Marm Pierce insisted. "You can't get in!" Jenny cried joyously: "Yes I can! The lock's broken on the window in the side room. I've climbed in through that before now."

"Like as not he'll put you in jail for housebreaking," the old woman predicted, yet she let Jenny go. It was dusk before the girl came home, tired and happy. "It's done, Granny," she said. "Every room swept, and everything dusted, and the kitchen floor scrubbed, and the bed made. I found the window curtains put away in the bureau. They're kind of creased, but I'm going to press them out tomorrow."

"You've got smut on your face," Marm Pierce retorted. Jenny laughed softly. "I cleaned out the stove," she said. "It was terrible full of soot, so's you couldn't make it draw. And I aired the sheets and blankets in the sun, and had fires going all day—there's plenty wood in the shed—and tomorrow I'm going to take over some milk and eggs and biscuits and doughnuts and butter and everything, and have supper ready for him."

The older woman was tenderly amused. "How do you know he won't get here for noonday dinner?" "I'll have dinner ready, too, in case," Jenny decided. "I'll take a fowl, and make a stew and some dumplings. He'll like coming home to a house that's all ready for him, Granny . . ."

"What I should come over and help you?" the old woman offered; and Jenny hesitated, uncomfortable, ill at ease.

"It's a long walk for you, Granny," Marm Pierce chuckled. "Go along with you, then. Like as not you'll stay and clean up after supper, too!"

And Jenny nodded wisely, happily; there was an audacious triumph in her. Suddenly she hugged the old woman close.

"I might," she said. "I might as though a heavy foot had stepped upon the light mesh."

Will turned back into the room. He passed Huldy silently; but she caught his arm.

"Where you going?" "After him," said Will, in thick tones strange to his own ears.

"Why?" she challenged. He shook loose, freed himself

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