

HOSTILE VALLEY

By
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THE STORY

PROLOGUE.—At a gathering of cronies in the village of Liberty, Maine, Jim Saladine listens to the history of the neighboring Hostile Valley—its past tragedies, its superb fishing streams, and, above all, the chief desire is to see the reputedly glamorous Huldry Ferrin.

CHAPTER VI.—Amy Carey commits suicide. Before Huldry's return Zake Dace had been showing her attention, and his defection (he has succumbed completely to Huldry's will) is believed to have led Amy to take her life. Saladine comes to the Valley. Bad roads cause him to stop at the Ferrin farm, where he meets Huldry. She endeavors to detain him, but remembering what he has heard of the woman, he is uneasy, and leaves her to fish an adjacent stream.

CHAPTER VII

Jenny went down brook that morning to do Marm Pierce's bidding in the matter of the lily root. The girl made her way to a pool she knew, with a rip of singing water at the head, crawled out on a log and lay at length, reaching deep into the water with a heavy kitchen knife to loose one of the roots from the mucky bottom. Saladine came upon her while she was thus engaged.

Along any well-fished stream there is sure to be a trail that will lead even a stranger to the most advantageous spots from which to try each pool. Saladine was quick to discover such a path here. When he first found it, he saw a boot track in the muck, and knew that another angler had gone down brook this same morning. He thought regretfully that if the other man had fished the pools, the trout would be not so readily responsive now; and as he went on, he began to wonder about this man who had gone downstream before him, and to watch alertly, waiting to overtake the other.

But it was not a man whom presently he encountered, but a woman, lying along a log which extended into one of the pools, with her head lower than her heels, her ankles crossed, and her heels toward him.

While he checked in his tracks, still and astonished, she brought up out of the water an object which he recognized; one of the thick fleshy root-stocks of the water lily. She washed it clean, and then she rose to her hands and knees on the log, and sat back on her heels, and so came to her feet and turned to face Jim on the bank behind her here.

Her dark eyes widened at sight of him; and Jim looked at her with a pleasurable appreciation. The beauty which she wore was not a simple matter of hair and lips and eyes, of coloring and conformation. She was, Saladine thought, illumined and made radiant by some inward glory.

He told her: "I didn't look to run into anyone, this far from the road."

"It's not far to where I live," she said simply; and she asked: "Done anything?"

"Not much," he said apologetically. "Some one fished down through ahead of me. That'd scare the trout. I see his tracks. Likely he passed you?"

"There's a steam mill working, down below," she reflected. "Likely it was one of the men from there." She was clearly uneasy. "I've got to go," she decided, and before he could speak to detain her, she was gone. She vanished among the trees, and he had an impression of an almost musical harmony as she moved.

The girl set out for home swiftly, disturbed by this encounter, her eyes watchful of the woods around. She came back to the house, and Marm Pierce saw her uneasiness and asked:

"What happened, Jenny? See some one?"

"A man, down brook," Jenny explained. "Fishing, he was." She hesitated. "He didn't bother me," she said. "He was kind of like Will, big, and steady. But he said he'd seen tracks all down the brook, along the path. I didn't know who might be around."

"This man, did he look like he might be from Augusta?" Jenny shook her head. "No, more like folks around here," she declared. "But no one I ever see before."

They exhausted the subject presently, and must by and by have forgotten it. But a little before noon, when he was done fishing, Saladine, mistaking Will Ferrin's directions and seeking the road to Carey's farm instead, and so came to the house divided. Marm Pierce and Jenny were in the dining room when rain suddenly began to fall. Jenny

rose to close a window, and as she did so, Saladine came running around the house to take shelter on the porch; and Jenny called over her shoulder:

"Granny, here's that man I see down brook!" They saw him pass the windows and go toward the kitchen door, and the girl made haste to open to him there.

When Saladine thus saw Jenny again, he was surprised afresh at her beauty, and amused at this second encounter. The rain had wetted him.

"Come in and set," Jenny invited him. "Till the rain's done. You're soaked through!" She pushed the screen door wide.

"Till drip on your floors," Saladine pointed out. "And it's not cold! I'll stay here on the porch till it passes. Then maybe you can put me on the way to Carey's."

"Come in, come in!" Marm Pierce insisted. "Water won't hurt the floors, and you'll catch your death out there!"

So he leaned the loose sections of his disjointed rod against the weather-boarded wall and stepped into the kitchen. "I fished down brook, after I saw you," he said to the girl. "It's all a bog, below there. I got enough of that, and cut back up to the road. Will Ferrin told me to take the first road right."

When he spoke that name, the girl's pulse caught, then pounded in a quicker beat. To think suddenly of Will could always shake her long composure. She stepped back, into the shadowed end of the kitchen by the sink; but Marm Pierce—she had put aside her knitting—came out from the dining room and said briskly:

"Chunk up the fire, Jenny," and to Jim: "You get up close and dry."

Jenny obeyed, glad of this pretext of activity; and Saladine told them his name and errand here. "The road in here fooled me," he explained. "I thought it'd bring me to Carey's. It looks like a traveled road."

She nodded, with clucking chuckle. "Tis!" she agreed. "A lot of people come in here, take it by and large!"

"Why?" Her little black eyes twinkled at him. "If you lived anywhere around here, you'd have heard of Marm Pierce," she told him, a crotchety pride in her tones. "Folks come to me for doctoring. Yards and simples. I've healed a pile of hurts in my day."

"A real doctor can't make a living here, so they come to me, and pay me with help in hay time, or they get my wood in, and do the chores that's too heavy for Jenny."

"It must be hard for just the two of you," he hazarded.

Marm Pierce eyed him shrewdly. "Now you're wishing you dast ask questions," she guessed. "You've got eyes in your head to see the looks of this house, and you've got a head on you to wonder about the why of it!"

She related, almost proudly, her ancient stubborn quarrel with her brother. He said, amused:

"Looks to me you cut off your own nose to spite your face!"

"Folks get so they hanker for a fight, around here," Marm Pierce declared. "Quarreling with your kin comes natural in Hostile Valley. I take a heap of satisfaction out of seeing the Win-side of this house go to rot and ruin. Serves him right, I say!"

"He around?" Saladine asked.

"He sneaks back, onet in so often, to see to't I'm letting things alone," she said. "Or he says that's why." Her tone was dry with scorn.

Then old Marm Pierce asked: "You say you come in by Will's?"

And at his assent, she said: "Will's a fine man! He deserves better!"

Saladine explained: "I left my car at Will's. Miss Ferrin showed me the path down to the brook."

Marm Pierce's tone was suddenly unfriendly. "Guess likely you visited with her for a spell?" Saladine shook his head; and the other said tartly: "It's a wonder she let you get away!"

There seemed no reply to this; but Saladine, standing by the stove, was deeply uncomfortable. He had caught one foot between two bowlers, and had felt a sharp burning pain in his ankle. Moving a step away from the stove just now, that hurt reminded him of its existence with a pain so sharp that he winced, and limped. The old woman looked at him shrewdly.

"Your foot hurt?" she asked.

"I twisted it," he confessed, and she came to her feet with a spry alacrity.

"High time you was a'telling me," she said. "I can tend that for you. Set down and take off your shoe."

She began to heat something in a saucepan on the stove. "How'd you do it?" she asked.

He said with a smile at his own clumsiness: "A fool thing. All down brook today, I kept feeling as if some one was watching me. So I kept looking back, and naturally I stepped into a hole." And he said, watching her: "This Valley's a gloomy place for a stranger, ma'am!"

She nodded. "It is that," she agreed. "And for folks that live here, too. I could tell you tales." And then suddenly she became motionless, her head cocked, listening. "Heavy foot a-coming," she said softly, and looked toward the outer door.

Saladine, seated, did not immediately rise; and Marm Pierce was busy, so it was Jenny who crossed to the door.

She was thus the first to see Bart, striding toward the house through the rain. He bore a burden in his arms, a woman. Her head hung down over his elbow, and her upturned face streamed with rain. Huldry Ferrin, limp and still and broken! That dark red garment she wore was drenched and shapeless now.

Jenny instinctively recoiled; but Marm Pierce came to fling the door wide. Bart stepped up on the porch, panting. He crossed the threshold and his dripping burden stained the clean scrubbed floor.

For an instant none spoke. Jenny, like one poised for flight, backed into the dining room. There was a hideous ringing in her ears, and she stared at Huldry with blank, glazed eyes. Even Marm Pierce was startled into silence.

Then Bart told them in explosive ejaculation: "She fell off the ledge back of Will's. I fetched her here—case you could—do anything."

So Marm Pierce recovered her wits and took quick command. "Carry her in here," she bade; and led the way into the dining room. Jenny moved aside, and Bart deposited Huldry upon the couch against the further wall. Jenny saw that he was curiously disheveled. Something—a dead stub which he had brushed in his passage through the wood—had gouged three deep scratches on his cheek; and the shoulder of his shirt was torn. His garments all were soaked, save that across the front of him, where he had carried Huldry in his arms, the faded blue of his overalls was of a lighter hue than elsewhere. Her body, pressed against his, had kept the denim there, save for two thin trickles, completely dry.

And Jenny remembered that ledge where she had seen Huldry, lying in the sun, on a day long ago; and she remembered, shudderingly, the steep declivity below.

Then Bart was speaking, still panting a little.

"I was fishing," he said. "Down below Will's place. Heard her let out a screech, and then a kind of thump; and I scrambled up to the foot of the ledge and there she was. I 'low she's dead and done for," he confessed. "But I never took time to think of that!"

Marm Pierce nodded. "Aye, done for, finally," she said in low, almost triumphant tones.

"I could've lugged her home, up the hill," Bart admitted. "But it's steep, and I thought you might do something. It's some further over here than up to Will's; but it's easier going. Looked to me I could get her here as quick as there!"

He was rubbing his right hand with his left, and Jenny saw that the right was bruised and swollen, a split across one knuckle.

"You hurt your hand," she suggested huskily.

"Fell on it; fell and landed on a rock," Bart agreed.

The girl turned toward the couch; she stood beside it, her back against the wall, her hands spread at her sides and her palms pressing against the plaster. She looked down at the hurt woman over her shoulder, sidewise, with wide eyes; her lips were white and still. Bart stood in the middle of the room.

"I thought first off she was alive," he repeated.

Marm Pierce said softly to herself, like an old crane mumbling some mysterious charm: "The blood still runs!" She darted out to the kitchen, lightly, swiftly, moving like a shadow; she returned with some white stuff in her hand, and clapped this against the wound on Huldry Ferrin's neck, from which a thin stream flowed. She held her hand pressed there.

"Dead, ain't she?" Bart asked huskily.

"You'd best fetch Will, Bart," she directed.

"What'll I tell him?"

"Tell him anything you're a mind!" she said impatiently.

"I'd better stay here," the young man urged. "There might be something I could do!"

"I can do anything needs doing," Saladine volunteered. He saw Bart's glance touch his bare foot. "I sprained my ankle down in the woods," he explained. "Marm Pierce was boiling up some liniment for me."

"Land!" cried the little old woman. "I declare, my wits are skimming!" She flitted to the kitchen. "I'd be letting this boil dry in another minute. Nothing stinks like burned vinegar! What's the matter with me?"

Saladine followed her into the kitchen. Bart stayed with Jenny in the dining room.

"I'll set it back to cool, or it'd take the hide off you," Marm Pierce decided, and suddenly she was busy with another saucepan, water, some twists of herbs from the cabinet above the sink. "I might try a hot steep on her chest," she whispered, half to herself. "No good just standing by."

And she called: "Jenny! Jenny!" The girl came softly to the door.

"Jenny, you loose her clothes," Marm Pierce directed. "I'll want to rub this on her chest, soon's it's ready. Get her wet things off, easy as you can, not moving her. Get a blanket 'round her..."

Jenny tried to speak; and after a minute she managed an assenting word. "Yes, Granny," she said, and closed the door.

Her knees were wavering; she turned and set her back against the door, and stood there weakly, looking toward the couch where Huldry's broken body lay.

So, slowly, at last she moved across the room.

Jenny approached the task of tending Huldry with a deep reluctance; but this was not because of the part Huldry had played in her life heretofore. She had cause enough to hate the woman, not so much because Huldry had pre-empted the place in Will's heart to which the girl so long had yearned, but because Huldry had wronged Will and flouted him and embittered all his life these later years. But in this hour Huldry was no longer the woman whom Jenny at once hated and despised; but only one who was hurt to death, and needed tenderness. So after this first reluctance, Jenny began the task imposed upon her with gentle hands and pitying solicitude.

Once while she worked Marm Pierce called some question, and Jenny answered it almost heedlessly; but a moment later she was alert, watching the hurt woman keenly. For Huldry had stirred; and Jenny saw a faint movement of the other's breast.

But Huldry did not rouse, and when there was no more that Jenny could do, she stood beside the couch, lost in dim dreams and long thoughts of what had been.

After a long time, the pattern of the past began to shift and change, and Jenny glimpsed the future. Huldry was hurt, was dying. She would die, and Will would be left alone.

Alone, and free. And Jenny, understanding, felt her pulse quicken its beat, and her cheeks grow warm. Her eyes began to shine.

She had for the moment forgotten Huldry, in her thought of Will; yet she still stood above the hurt woman, looking down at her. And now suddenly she forgot Will again; for Huldry moved. Jenny saw her eyes half open, saw the lids crack, and the eyes—blank and wandering—stare up at the ceiling.

Then Huldry's eyes met Jenny's and held them for a pulse beat that was eternity. She looked at Jenny, and then her lips twisted a little in that familiar, half-insolent, half-challenging smile.

And from these lips came a sound, a low murmur of ironic laughter, perhaps a word.

Jenny bent lower, infinitely gentle; she whispered:

"It's all right, Miss Ferrin! We're taking care of you. Don't try to talk, ma'am. Just rest yourself."

The smile widened, and this time Huldry spoke audibly. Her voice was thin and strained, yet the words were clear enough. And they cut and burned and stung; for she said:

"You can have him now!"

Jenny's eyes widened at that, as though at a blow. She recoiled, faintly, her cheek crimson; but she gathered patient strength again.

"Hush, ma'am," she whispered. "We've sent for Will. He'll be right here. You rest yourself."

Huldry's head moved faintly, as though it were terribly heavy, as though she moved it by a slow tremendous effort. Her mouth was smiling still, dry lips twisted mockingly; and she spoke yet once more.

"He's finally fixed it so's he can have you," she said clearly, in that thin, strained, burning tone. "It was Will knocked me off..."

She gasped and seemed to choke



"He Hit Me!"

as though she would cough. Her breath withheld, she whispered:

"He hit me!"

Her mouth opened wider. She seemed to strain as though in the effort to produce one further word. Her lips drew tight across her teeth. Then she coughed faintly, convulsively; and her breast swelled

the world in which she must hereafter dwell.

A world forever shadowed by the knowledge that Will, no matter under what ugly provocation, had struck this woman down to her destruction in the end.

Will, whom Jenny loved.

Blind, spinning chaos whirled like stars through the girl's thoughts; but through this chaos like a lightning stroke came her grandmother's voice. Marm Pierce called, from the kitchen:

"Jenny, I'm opening the door!"

and remained distended, hollow, aching, for a long instant. Till the mockery faded from her eyes and left them blank and glazed; and she lay still, her smile now a fixed and mirthless grin.

And there was no beauty in this that had been Huldry now.

For a space after the woman died, there lay in the dining room a long silence of horror and dismay. Jenny could not for her life have moved. But the deep silence was broken presently, by a sound, sharp and startling; and at the same time hollow and sodden, as though a chair had overturned and fallen on a rotten floor.

Jenny heard it with half her mind; and a moment later she heard a stir in the kitchen, and movement there, and voices too. Yet it was as though these things were far off, remote from her and from

(Continued next week)

Two hundred-ten years ago the town of Brunswick was founded in a wilderness thirteen miles east of Smithville, now Southport.

Common sense is the rarest commodity on the market.

Short Session Of Recorder's Court

Only two cases were disposed of here in Recorder's court Wednesday before Judge Peter R. John O. Everett, colored, found guilty of disturbing religious worship but judgment in his case was suspended upon payment of the cost and a fine of \$10.00.

Arthur Fair, colored, was found guilty of assault but judgment was withheld until the defendant could be examined by a doctor in an effort to determine his sanity.

Sign Welcomes Yacht Visitors

A large red, white and sign erected on the banks of inland waterway by Captain M. Wells and Son is the welcome greeting from Southport to travelers who pass there by way of the canal. This sign was erected several days ago and has caused some comments from visiting yachtsmen.

ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE
Having qualified as administrator of the estate of L. W. Gann, deceased, late of Brunswick county, North Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against the said estate to exhibit them to the undersigned, Southport, North Carolina, on or before October 16, 1935, or this will be pleaded in bar of recovery. All persons indebted to the said estate will please make immediate payment. Dated, this 15th day of Oct. 1935. G. V. FESPERMAN, Administrator of L. W. Gann.

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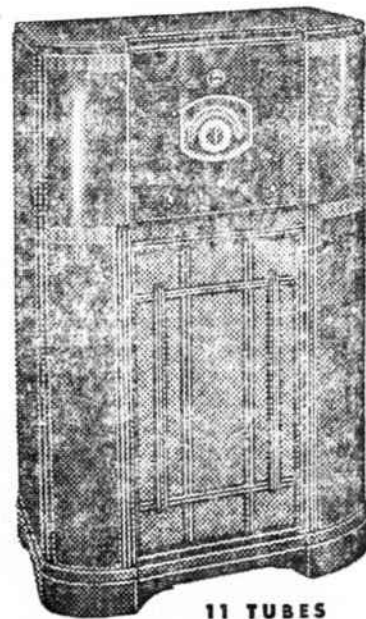
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