

# THE FORESTER'S DAUGHTER

A Romance of the Bear Tooth Range

By HAMLIN GARLAND

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## CHAPTER V.

The Supervisor of the Forest.

NASH, who was alone in the government office, looked up from his work. "Come in," he called heartily. "Come in and re-

port." "Thank you. I'd like to do so. And any time you want, I have a letter to write."

"Make yourself at home. Take any desk you like. The men are all out on duty."

"You're very kind," replied Wayland, gratefully. There was something reassuring in this greeting and in the many signs of skill and scientific reading which the place displayed. It was like a bit of Washington in the midst of a careless, slovenly, lawless mountain town, and Norcross took his seat and wrote his letter with a sense of proprietorship.

"I'm getting up an enthusiasm for the service just from hearing Alec Belden save against it," he said a few minutes later, as he looked up from his letter.

Nash grinned. "How did you like Meeker?"

"He's a good man, but he has his peculiarities. Belden is your real enemy. He is blue with malignity—so are most of the corners I met up there. I wish I could do something for the service. I'm a thoroughly up to date analytical chemist and a passable mining engineer, and my doctor says that for a year at least I must work in the open air. Is there anything in this forest service for a weakling like me?"

Nash considered. "I think we can employ you, but you'll have to go on as the guard on something like that for the first year. You see, the work is getting to be more and more technical each year. As a matter of fact—here he lowered his voice a little—"McFarlane is one of the old guard and will have to give way. He don't know a thing about forestry and is too old to learn. His girl knows more about it than he does. She helps him out on office work too."

Wayland wondered a little at the suddenness of expression on the part of Nash, but said, "If he runs his office as he runs his ranch he surely is condemned to go."

"Well, you get Berrle to take up your case and you're all right. She has the say about who goes on the force in this forest."

It was late in the afternoon before Wayland started back to Meeker's with intent to repack his belongings and have the ranch for good. He had decided not to call at McFarlane's, a decision which cost him as much from the door of Clifford Belden as from a desire to shield Berra from further trouble, but as he was passing the gate the girl rose from behind a clump of willows and called to him: "Oh, Mr. Macross! Wait a moment!"

He drew rein and, slipping from his horse, approached her. "What is it, Miss Berrle?" he asked, with wondering politeness.

She confronted him with gravity. "It's too late for you to cross the ridge."

"It'll be dark long before you reach the cut-off. You'd better not try to make it."

"I think I can find my way," he answered, touched by her consideration. "I'm not so helpless as I was when I came."

"Just the same you mustn't go on," she insisted. "Father told me to ask you to come in and stay all night. He wants to meet you. I was afraid you might be by after what happened today, and so I came up here to head you off." She took his horse by the rein and flashed a smiling glance up at him. "Come, now, do as the supervisor tells you."

"Wait a moment," he pleaded. "On second thought I don't believe it's a good thing for me to go home with you. It will only make further trouble for us both."

"I know what you mean. I saw Cliff follow you. He jumped you, didn't he?"

"He overtook me, yes."

"What did he say?"

He hesitated. "He was pretty hot and said things he'll be sorry for when he cools off."

"He told you not to come here any more—advised you to hit the outgoing trail—didn't he?"

He flushed with returning shame of it all, but quietly answered, "Yes, he said something about riding east."

"Are you going to do it?"

"Not today, but I guess I'd better keep away from here."

She looked at him steadily. "Why?"

"Because you've been very kind to

me, and I wouldn't for the world do anything to hurt or embarrass you."

"Don't you mind about me," she responded bluntly. "What happened this morning wasn't your fault nor mine. Come; father will be looking for you."

With a feeling that he was involving both the girl and himself in still darker storms, the young fellow yielded to her command, and together they walked along the weed bordered path, while she continued:

"This isn't the first time Cliff has started in to discipline me, but it's obliged to be the last. He's the kind that think they own a girl just as soon as they get her to wear an engagement ring. But Cliff don't own me. I told him I wouldn't stand for his coarse ways, and I won't."

Wayland tried to bring her back to humor. "You're a kind of 'new woman.'"

She turned a stern look on him. "You bet I am! I was raised a free citizen. No man can make a slave of me. I thought he understood that, but it seems he didn't. He's all right in many ways—one of the best riders in the country—but he's a pretty tolerable domineering."

Mrs. McFarlane greeted Norcross with cordial words and earnest hand-clasp. "I'm glad to see you looking so well," she said, with charming sincerity.

"I'm browner anyway," he answered, and turned to meet McFarlane, a short, black bearded man with fine dark eyes and shapely hands—hands that had never done anything more toilsome than to lift a bridle rein or to clutch the handle of a gun. He was the horseman in all his training, and though he owned hundreds of acres of land, he had never so much as held a

plow or piece a spade, his manner was that of the cow boss, the lord of great herds, the claimant of empire of government grass land. Poor as his horse looked, he was in reality rich. Narrow minded in respect to his own interests, he was well in advance of his neighbors on matters relating to the general welfare, a curious mixture of greed and generosity, as most men are, and though he had been made supervisor at a time when political pill still crippled the service, he was loyal to the flag. "I'm mighty glad to see you get a man from the sea level, and when we do we squeeze him dry."

His voice, low, hoarse and soft, was most insinuating and for hours he kept his guest talking of the east and his industries and prejudices, and Berrle and her mother listened with deep admiration, for the youngster had seen a good deal of the old world and was unusually well read on historical lines of inquiry. He talked well, too, inspired by his attentive audience.

Berrle's eyes, wide and eager, were fixed upon him unwaveringly. He felt her wonder, her admiration, and was inspired to do his best. Something in her absorbed attention led him to speak of things so personal that he wondered at himself for uttering them.

"I've been dicitrate, all my life," was one of his confessions. "I've traveled; I've studied in a tepid sort of fashion; I went through college without any idea of doing anything with what I got; I had a sort of pride in keeping up with my fellows, and I had no idea of preparing for any work in the world. Then came my breakdown and my doctor ordered me out here. I came intending to fish and loaf around, but I can't do that. I've got to do something or go back home."

At last Mrs. McFarlane rose and Berra, reluctantly, like a child loath to miss a fairy story, held out her hand to say good night, and the young man saw on her face that look of adoration which marks the birth of sudden love, but his voice was frank and his glance kindly as he said:

"Here I've done all the talking when I wanted you to tell me all sorts of things."

"I can't tell you anything."

"Oh, yes, you can't, besides, I want you to intercede for me with your father and get me into the service. But we'll talk about that tomorrow. Good night."

After the women left the room Norcross said:

"I really am in earnest about entering the forest service. Landon filled me with enthusiasm about it. Never mind the pay. I'm not in immediate need of money, but I do need an interest in life."

McFarlane stared at him with kindly perplexity. "I don't know exactly what you can do, but I'll work you in somehow. You ought to work under a man like Settle, one that could put you through a training in the rudiments of the game. I'll see what can be done."

"Thank you for that half promise," said Wayland, and he went to his bed happier than at any moment since leaving home.

Young Norcross soon became vitally engaged with the problems which confronted McFarlane, and his possible enrollment as a guard filled him with a sense of proprietorship in the forest, which made him quite content with Bear Tooth. He set to work at once to acquire a better knowledge of the extent and boundaries of the reservation. It was, indeed, a noble possession. Containing nearly 800,000 acres of woodland and reaching to the summits of the snow lined peaks to the east, south and west, it appealed to him with almost majestic, it drew upon his patriotism. Remembering how the timber of his own state had been slashed and burned, he began to feel a sense of personal responsibility.

He bought a horse of his own, although Berrle insisted upon his retaining Pete, and sent for a saddle of the army type, and from sheer desire to keep entirely clear of the cowboy equipment procured puttees like those worn by cavalry officers, and when he presented himself completely uniformed, he looked not unlike a slender young lieutenant of the cavalry on field duty, and in Berrle's eyes was wondrous alluring.

He took quarters at the hotel, but spent a larger part of each day in Berrle's company, a fact which was duly reported to Clifford Belden. Hardly a day passed without his taking at least one meal at the supervisor's home.

As he met the rangers one by one he perceived by their outfits, as well as by their speech, that they were sharply divided upon old lines and new. The experts, the men of college training, were quite ready to be known as Uncle Sam's men. They held a pride in their duties, a respect for their superiors, and an understanding of the governmental policy which gave them dignity and a quiet authority. They were less policemen than trusted agents of a federal department. Nevertheless, there was much to admire in the older men, who possessed a self reliance, a knowledge of nature and a certain rough grace which made them interesting companions and rendered them effective teachers of camping and trailing, and while they were secretly a little contemptuous of the "schoolboys," they were all quite ready to ask for expert aid when knotty problems arose. It was no longer a question of grazing. It was a question of lumbering and reforestation.

Nash, who took an almost brotherly interest in his apprentice, warningly said: "You want to go well clothed and well shod. You'll have to meet all kinds of weather. Every man in the service—I don't care what his technical job is—should be schooled in taking care of himself in the forest and on the trail. I often met surveyors and civil engineers, experts, who are helpless as children in camp, and when I went them to go into the hills and do field work they are almost useless. The old style ranger has his virtues. Settle is just the kind of instructor you young fellows need."

Berrle also had keen eyes for his outfit and his training, and under her direction he learned to pack a horse, to cut a trail, build a fire in the rain and other duties.

"You want to remember that you carry your bed and board with you," she said, "and you must be prepared to camp anywhere and at any time."

The girl's skill in these particulars was marvelous to him and added to the admiration he already felt for her. Her hand was as deft, as sure, as the best of them, and her knowledge of canyon psychology more profound than any of the men excepting her father.

One day toward the end of his second week in the village the supervisor said: "Well, now, if you're ready to experiment I'll send you out with Settle, the ranger, on the Horseshoe. He's a little lame on his pen hand side, and you may be able to help him out. Maybe I'll ride over there with you. I want to line out some timber sales on the west side of Ptarmigan."

This commission delighted Norcross greatly. "I'm ready, sir, this moment," he answered, saluting soldier-wise.

The next morning as he rode down to the office to meet the supervisor he was surprised and delighted to find Berra there, and riding too. He had expected to find only Settle, the ranger, on the Horseshoe. He's a little lame on his pen hand side, and you may be able to help him out. Maybe I'll ride over there with you. I want to line out some timber sales on the west side of Ptarmigan."

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