

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE whole affair was finally compromised for nine thousand dollars. Radway, grateful beyond expression, insisted on Thorpe's acceptance of an even thousand of it. With this money in hand, the latter felt justified in taking a vacation for the purpose of visiting his sister, so in two days after the signing of the check he walked up the straight garden path that led to Renwick's home.

It was a little painted frame house, back from the street, fronted by a precise bit of lawn, with a willow bush at one corner. A white picket fence effectually separated it from a broad, shaded, not unpleasing street. An osage hedge and a board fence respectively bounded the side and back.

Under the low porch Thorpe rang the bell at a door flanked by two long, narrow strips of imitation stained glass. He entered then a little dark hall from which the stairs rose almost directly at the door, containing with difficulty a hat-rack and a table on which rested a card tray with cards. In the course of greeting an elderly woman, he stepped into the parlor. This was a small square apartment carpeted in dark Brussels, and stuffily glorified in the bourgeois manner by a white marble mantel-

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piece, several pieces of mahogany furniture upholstered in haircloth, a table on which reposed a number of gift books in celluloid and other fancy bindings, an old-fashioned piano with a doily and a bit of china statuary, a cabinet or so containing such things as ore specimens, dried seaweed and coins, and a spindle-legged table or two upholding glass cases garnished with stuffed birds and wax flowers. The ceiling was so low that the heavy window hangings depended almost from the angle of it and the walls.

Thorpe, by some strange freak of psychology, suddenly recalled a wild, windy day in the forest. He had stood on the top of a height. He saw again the sharp puffs of snow, exactly like the smoke from bursting shells, where a fierce swoop of the storm struck the laden tops of pines; the dense swirl, again exactly like smoke but now of a great fire, that marked the lakes. The picture superimposed itself silently over this stuffy bourgeois respectability, like the shadow of a dream. He heard plainly enough the commonplace drawl of the woman before him offering him the platitudes of her kind.

"You *are* lookin' real well, Mr. Thorpe," she was saying, "an' I just know Helen will be glad to see you. She had a hull afternoon out to-day and won't be back to tea. Dew set and tell me about what you've been a-doin' and how you're a-gettin' along."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Renwick," he replied, "I'll come back later. How is Helen?"



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"She's purty well; and sech a nice girl. I think she's getting right handsome."

"Can you tell me where she went?"

But Mrs. Renwick did not know. So Thorpe wandered about the maple-shaded streets of the little town.

For the purposes he had in view five hundred dollars would be none too much. The remaining five hundred he had resolved to invest in his sister's comfort and happiness. He had thought the matter over and come to his decision in that secretive, careful fashion so typical of him, working over every logical step of his induction so thoroughly that it ended by becoming part of his mental fibre. So when he reached the conclusion it had already become to him an axiom. In presenting it as such to his sister, he never realized that she had not followed with him the logical steps, and so could hardly be expected to accept the conclusion out-of-hand.

Thorpe wished to give his sister the best education possible in the circumstances. She was now nearly eighteen years old. He knew likewise that he would probably experience a great deal of difficulty in finding another family which would afford the young girl quite the same equality coupled with so few disadvantages. Admitted that its level of intellect and taste was not high, Mrs. Renwick was on the whole a good influence. Helen had not in the least

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the position of servant, but of a daughter. She helped around the house; and in return she was fed, lodged and clothed for nothing.

So though the money might have enabled Helen to live independently in a modest way for a year or so, Thorpe preferred that she remain where she was. His game was too much a game of chance. He might find himself at the end of the year without further means. Above all things he wished to assure Helen's material safety until such time as he should be quite certain of himself.

In pursuance of this idea he had gradually evolved what seemed to him an excellent plan. He had already perfected it by correspondence with Mrs. Renwick. It was, briefly, this: he, Thorpe, would at once hire a servant girl, who would make anything but supervision unnecessary in so small a household. The remainder of the money he had already paid for a year's tuition in the Seminary of the town. Thus Helen gained her leisure and an opportunity for study; and still retained her home in case of reverse.

Thorpe found his sister already a young lady. After the first delight of meeting had passed, they sat side by side on the haircloth sofa and took stock of each other.

Helen had developed from the school child to the woman. She was a handsome girl, possessed of a slender, well-rounded form, deep hazel eyes with the



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level gaze of her brother, a clean-cut patrician face, and a thoroughbred neatness of carriage that advertised her good blood. Altogether a figure rather aloof, a face rather impassive; but with the possibility of passion and emotion, and a will to back them.

"Oh, but you're tanned and—and *big!*" she cried, kissing her brother. "You've had such a strange winter, haven't you?"

"Yes," he replied absently.

Another man would have struck her young imagination with the wild, free thrill of the wilderness. Thus he would have gained her sympathy and understanding. Thorpe was too much in earnest.

"Things came a little better than I thought they were going to, toward the last," said he, "and I made a little money."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried. "Was it much?"

"No, not much," he answered. The actual figures would have been so much better! "I've made arrangements with Mrs. Renwick to hire a servant girl, so you will have all your time free; and I have paid a year's tuition for you in the Seminary."

"Oh!" said the girl, and fell silent.

After a time, "Thank you very much, Harry dear." Then after another interval, "I think I'll go get ready for supper."

Instead of getting ready for supper, she paced excitedly up and down her room.

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"Oh, why *didn't* he say what he was about?" she cried to herself. "Why didn't he! Why didn't he!"

Next morning she opened the subject again.

"Harry, dear," said she, "I have a little scheme, and I want to see if it is not feasible. How much will the girl and the Seminary cost?"

"About four hundred dollars."

"Well now, see, dear. With four hundred dollars I can live for a year very nicely by boarding with some girls I know who live in a sort of a club; and I could learn much more by going to the High School and continuing with some other classes I am interested in now. Why see, Harry!" she cried, all interest. "We have Professor Carghill come twice a week to teach us English, and Professor Johns, who teaches us history, and we hope to get one or two more this winter. If I go to the Seminary, I'll have to miss all that. And Harry, really I don't *want* to go to the Seminary. I don't think I should like it. I *know* I shouldn't."

"But why not live here, Helen?" he asked.

"Because I'm *tired* of it!" she cried; "sick to the soul of the stuffiness, and the glass cases, and the—the *goodness* of it!"

Thorpe remembered his vision of the wild, wind-tossed pines, and sighed. He wanted very, very much to act in accordance with his sister's desires, although he winced under the sharp hurt pang of



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the sensitive man whose intended kindness is not appreciated. The impossibility of complying, however, reacted to shut his real ideas and emotions the more inscrutably within him.

"I'm afraid you would not find the girls' boarding-club scheme a good one, Helen," said he. "You'd find it would work better in theory than in practice."

"But it has worked with the other girls!" she cried.

"I think you would be better off here."

Helen bravely choked back her disappointment.

"I might live here, but let the Seminary drop, anyway. That would save a good deal," she begged. "I'd get quite as much good out of my work outside, and then we'd have all that money besides."

"I don't know; I'll see," replied Thorpe. "The mental discipline of class-room work might be a good thing."

He had already thought of this modification himself, but with his characteristic caution, threw cold water on the scheme until he could ascertain definitely whether or not it was practicable. He had already paid the tuition for the year, and was in doubt as to its repayment. As a matter of fact, the negotiation took about two weeks.

During that time Helen Thorpe went through her disappointment and emerged on the other side. Her nature was at once strong and adaptable. One by

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one she grappled with the different aspects of the case, and turned them the other way. By a *tour de force* she actually persuaded herself that her own plan was not really attractive to her. But what heart-breaks and tears this cost her, only those who in their youth have encountered such absolute negations of cherished ideas can guess.

Then Thorpe told her.

"I've fixed it, Helen," said he. "You can attend the High School and the classes, if you please. I have put the two hundred and fifty dollars out at interest for you."

"Oh, Harry!" she cried reproachfully. "Why didn't you tell me before!"

He did not understand; but the pleasure of it had all faded. She no longer felt enthusiasm, nor gratitude, nor anything except a dull feeling that she had been unnecessarily discouraged. And on his side, Thorpe was vaguely wounded.

The days, however, passed in the main pleasantly for them both. They were fond of one another. The barrier slowly rising between them was not yet cemented by lack of affection on either side, but rather by lack of belief in the other's affection. Helen imagined Thorpe's interest in her becoming daily more perfunctory. Thorpe fancied his sister cold, unreasoning, and ungrateful. As yet this was but the vague dust of a cloud. They could not forget that, but for each other, they were alone in the



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world. Thorpe delayed his departure from day to day, making all the preparations he possibly could at home.

Finally Helen came on him busily unpacking a box which a dray had left at the door. He unwound and laid one side a Winchester rifle, a variety of fishing tackle, and some other miscellanies of the woodsman. Helen was struck by the beauty of the sporting implements.

"Oh, Harry!" she cried, "aren't they fine! What are you going to do with them?"

"Going camping," replied Thorpe, his head in the excelsior.

"When?"

"This summer."

Helen's eyes lit up with a fire of delight. "How nice! May I go with you?" she cried.

Thorpe shook his head.

"I'm afraid not, little girl. It's going to be a hard trip a long ways from anywhere. You couldn't stand it."

"I'm sure I could. Try me."

"No," replied Thorpe. "I know you couldn't. We'll be sleeping on the ground and going on foot through much extremely difficult country."

"I wish you'd take me somewhere," pursued Helen. "I can't get away this summer unless you do. Why don't you camp somewhere nearer home, so I can go?"

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Thorpe arose and kissed her tenderly. He was extremely sorry that he could not spend the summer with his sister, but he believed likewise that their future depended to a great extent on this very trip. But he did not say so.

"I can't, little girl; that's all. We've got our way to make."

She understood that he considered the trip too expensive for them both. At this moment a paper fluttered from the excelsior. She picked it up. A glance showed her a total of figures that made her gasp.

"Here is your bill," she said with a strange choke in her voice, and left the room.

"He can spend sixty dollars on his old guns; but he can't afford to let me leave this hateful house," she complained to the apple tree. "He can go 'way off camping somewhere to have a good time, but he leaves me sweltering in this miserable little town all summer. I don't care if he *is* supporting me. He ought to. He's my brother. Oh, I wish I were a man; I wish I were dead!"

Three days later Thorpe left for the north. He was reluctant to go. When the time came, he attempted to kiss Helen good-by. She caught sight of the rifle in its new leather and canvas case, and on a sudden impulse which she could not explain to herself, she turned away her face and ran into the house. Thorpe, vaguely hurt, a little resentful, as



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the genuinely misunderstood are apt to be, hesitated a moment, then trudged down the street. Helen too paused at the door, choking back her grief.

"Harry! Harry!" she cried wildly; but it was too late.

Both felt themselves to be in the right. Each realized this fact in the other. Each recognized the impossibility of imposing his own point of view over the other's.

## PART II

### THE LANDLOOKER

