

***STANLEY JOHN
WEYMAN***

***WHEN
LOVE
CALLS***

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HER STORY

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"Clare," I said, "I wish that we had brought some better clothes, if it were only one frock. You look the oddest figure."

And she did. She was lying head to head with me on the thick moss that clothed one part of the river-bank above Breistolen near the Sogn Fiord. We were staying at Breistolen, but there was no moss thereabouts, nor in all the Sogn district, I often thought, so deep and soft, and so dazzling orange and white and crimson as that particular patch. It lay quite high upon the hills, and there were great gray boulders peeping through the moss here and there, very fit to break your legs if you were careless. Little more than a mile higher up was the watershed, where our river, putting away with reluctance a first thought of going down the farther slope towards Bysberg, parted from its twin brother who was thither bound with scores upon scores of puny green-backed fishlets; and instead, came down our side gliding and swishing, and swirling faster and faster, and deeper and wider, every hundred yards to Breistolen, full of red-speckled yellow trout all half-a-pound apiece, and very good to eat.

But they were not so sweet or toothsome to our girlish tastes as the tawny-orange cloud-berries which Clare and I were eating as we lay. So busy was she with the luscious pile we had gathered that I had to wait for an answer. And

then, "Speak for yourself," she said. "I'm sure you look like a short-coated baby. He is somewhere up the river too." Munch, munch, munch!

"Who is, you impertinent, greedy little chit?"

"Oh, you know," she answered. "Don't you wish you had your gray plush here, Bab?"

I flung a look of calm disdain at her; but whether it was the berry juice which stained our faces that took from its effect, or the free mountain air which papa says saps the foundations of despotism, that made her callous, at any rate she only laughed scornfully and got up and went off down the stream with her rod, leaving me to finish the cloud-berries, and stare lazily up at the snow patches on the hillside--which somehow put me in mind of the gray plush--and follow or not as I liked.

Clare has a wicked story of how I gave in to papa, and came to start without anything but those rough clothes. She says he said--and Jack Buchanan has told me that lawyers put no faith in anything that he says she says, or she says he says, which proves how much truth there is in this--that if Bab took none but her oldest clothes, and fished all day and had no one to run upon her errands--he meant Jack and the others, I suppose--she might possibly grow an inch in Norway. Just as if I wanted to grow an inch! An inch indeed! I am five feet one and a half high, and papa, who puts me an inch shorter, is the worst measurer in the world. As for Miss Clare, she would give all her inches for my eyes. So there!

After Clare left, it began to be dull and chilly. When I had pictured to myself how nice it would be to dress for dinner again, and chosen the frock I would wear upon the first

evening, I grew tired of the snow patches, and started up stream, stumbling and falling into holes, and clambering over rocks, and only careful to save my rod and my face. It was no occasion for the gray plush, but I had made up my mind to reach a pool which lay, I knew, a little above me, having filched a yellow-bodied fly from Clare's hat with a view to that particular place.

Our river did the oddest things hereabouts--pleased to be so young, I suppose. It was not a great churning stream of snow water foaming and milky, such as we had seen in some parts, streams that affected to be always in flood, and had the look of forcing the rocks asunder and clearing their path even while you watched them with your fingers in your ears. Our river was none of these: still it was swifter than English rivers are wont to be, and in parts deeper, and transparent as glass. In one place it would sweep over a ledge and fall wreathed in spray into a spreading lake of black, rock-bound water. Then it would narrow again until, where you could almost jump across, it darted smooth and unbroken down a polished shoot with a swoop like a swallow's. Out of this it would hurry afresh to brawl along a gravelly bed, skipping jauntily over first one and then another ridge of stones that had silted up weir-wise and made as if they would bar the channel. Under the lee of these there were lovely pools.

To be able to throw into mine, I had to walk out along the ridge on which the water was shallow, yet sufficiently deep to cover my boots. But I was well rewarded. The "forellin"--the Norse name for trout, and as pretty as their girls' wavy fair hair--were rising so merrily that I hooked and landed one

in five minutes, the fly falling from its mouth as it touched the stones. I hate taking out hooks. I used at one time to leave the fly in the fish's mouth to be removed by papa at the weighing house; until Clare pricked her tongue at dinner with an almost new, red tackle, and was so mean as to keep it, though I remembered then what I had done with it, and was certain it was mine--which was nothing less than dishonest of her.

I had just got back to my place and made a fine cast, when there came--not the leap, and splash, and tug which announced the half-pounder--but a deep, rich gurgle as the fly was gently sucked under, and then a quiet, growing strain upon the line, which began to move away down the pool in a way that made the winch spin again and filled me with mysterious pleasure. I was not conscious of striking or of anything but that I had hooked a really good fish, and I clutched the rod with both hands and set my feet as tightly as I could upon the slippery gravel. The line moved up and down, and this way and that, now steadily and as with a purpose, and then again with an eccentric rush that made the top of the rod spring and bend so that I looked for it to snap each moment. My hands began to grow numb, and the landing-net, hitherto an ornament, fell out of my waist-belt and went I knew not whither. I suppose I must have stepped unwittingly into deeper water, for I felt that my skirts were afloat, and altogether things were going dreadfully against me, when the presence of an ally close at hand was announced by a cheery shout from the far side of the river.

"Keep up your point! Keep up your point!" some one cried briskly. "That is better!"

The unexpected sound--it was a man's voice--did something to keep my heart up. But for answer I could only shriek, "I can't! It will break!" watching the top of my rod as it jiggled up and down, very much in the fashion of Clare performing what she calls a waltz. She dances as badly as a man.

"No, it will not," he cried back, bluntly. "Keep it up, and let out a little line with your fingers when he pulls hardest."

We were forced to shout and scream. The wind had risen and was adding to the noise of the water. Soon I heard him wading behind me. "Where's your landing net?" he asked, with the most provoking coolness.

"Oh, in the pool! Somewhere about. I am sure I don't know," I answered wildly.

What he said to this I could not catch, but it sounded rude. And then he waded off to fetch, as I guessed, his own net. By the time he reached me again I was in a sad plight, feet like ice, and hands benumbed, while the wind, and rain, and hail, which had come down upon us with a sudden violence, unknown, it is to be hoped, anywhere else, were mottling my face all sorts of unbecoming colors. But the line was taut. And wet and cold went for nothing five minutes later, when the fish lay upon the bank, its prismatic sides slowly turning pale and dull, and I knelt over it half in pity and half in triumph, but wholly forgetful of the wind and rain.

"You did that very pluckily, little one," said the on-looker; "but I am afraid you will suffer for it by and by. You must be chilled through."

Quickly as I looked up at him, I only met a good-humored smile. He did not mean to be rude. And, after all, when I was in such a mess it was not possible that he could see what I was like. He was wet enough himself. The rain was streaming from the brim of the soft hat which he had turned down to shelter his face, and trickling from his chin, and turning his shabby Norfolk jacket a darker shade. As for his hands, they looked red and knuckly enough, and he had been wading almost to his waist. But he looked, I don't know why, all the stronger and manlier and nicer for these things, because, perhaps, he cared for them not one whit. What I looked like myself I dared not think. My skirts were as short as short could be, and they were soaked: most of my hair was unplaited, my gloves were split, and my sodden boots were out of shape. I was forced, too, to shiver and shake from cold; which was provoking, for I knew it made me seem half as small again.

"Thank you, I am a little cold, Mr.----, Mr.----," I said, grave, only my teeth would chatter so that he laughed outright as he took me up with--

"Herapath. And to whom have I the honor of speaking?"

"I am Miss Guest," I said, miserably. It was too cold to be frigid to advantage.

"Commonly called Bab, I think," the wretch answered. "The walls of our hut are not soundproof, you see. But, come, the sooner you get back to dry clothes and the stove, the better, Bab. You can cross the river just below, and cut off half-a-mile that way."

"I can't," I said, obstinately. Bab, indeed! How dared he?

"Oh, yes, you can," with intolerable good-temper. "You shall take your rod and I the prey. You cannot be wetter than you are now."

He had his way, of course, since I did not foresee that at the ford he would lift me up bodily and carry me over the deeper part without a pretence of asking leave, or a word of apology. It was done so quickly that I had no time to remonstrate. Still I was not going to let it pass, and when I had shaken myself straight again, I said, with all the haughtiness I could assume, "Don't you think, Mr. Herapath, that it would have been more--more--"

"Polite to offer to carry you over, child? No, not at all. It will be wiser and warmer for you to run down the hill. Come along!"

And without more ado, while I was still choking with rage, he seized my hands and set off at a trot, lugging me through the sloppy places much as I have seen a nurse drag a fractious child down Constitution Hill. It was not wonderful that I soon lost the little breath his speech had left me, and was powerless to complain when we reached the bridge. I could only thank heaven that there was no sign of Clare. I think I should have died of mortification if she had seen us come down the hill hand-in-hand in that ridiculous fashion. But she had gone home, and at any rate I escaped that degradation.

A wet stool-car and wetter pony were dimly visible on the bridge; to which, as we came up, a damp urchin creeping from some crevice added himself. I was pushed in as if I had no will of my own, the gentleman sprang up beside me, the boy tucked himself away somewhere behind, and the little