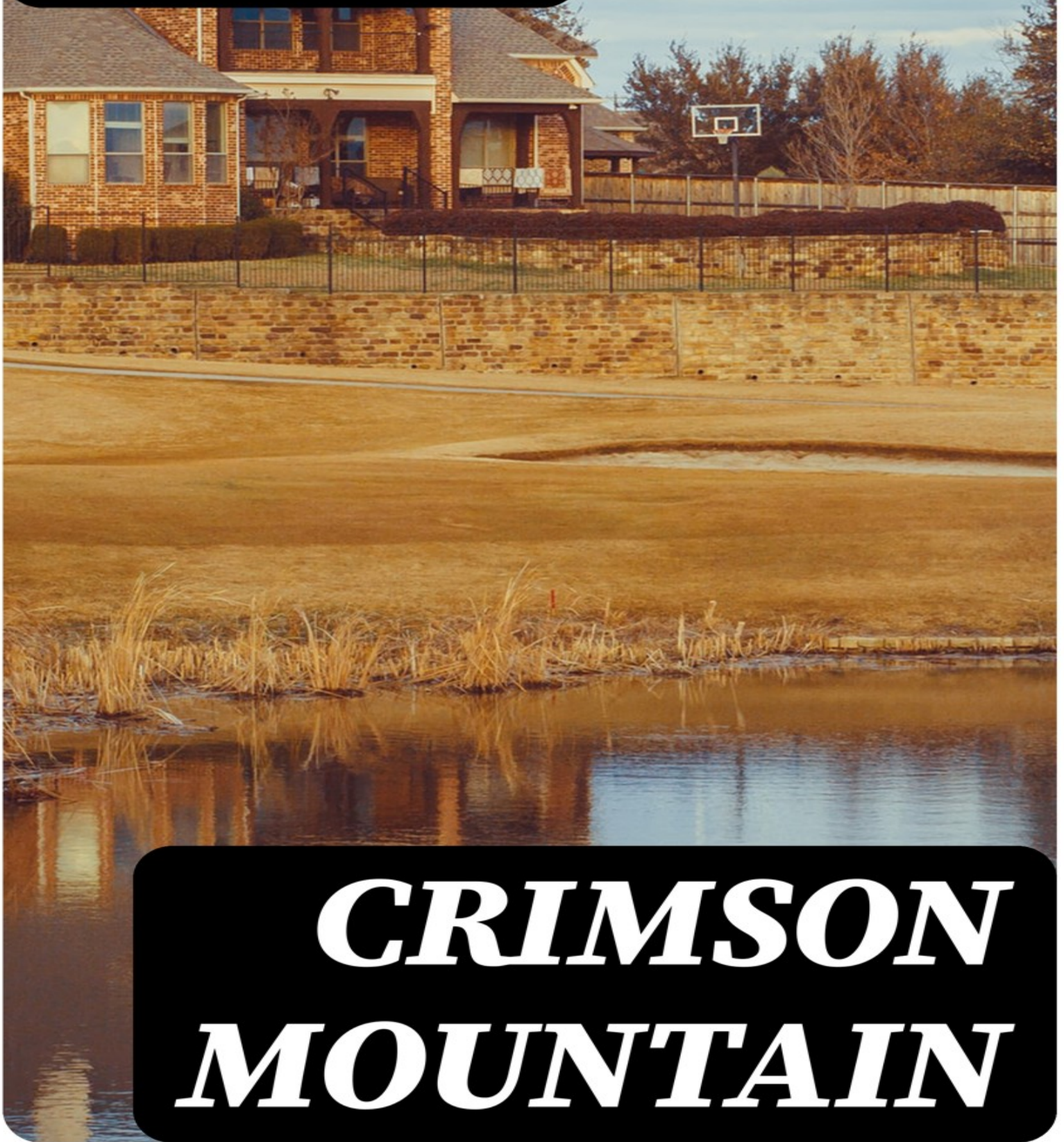


***GRACE
LIVINGSTON
HILL***



***CRIMSON
MOUNTAIN***

Grace Livingston Hill

Crimson Mountain

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER XI

CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER XIII

CHAPTER XIV

CHAPTER XV

CHAPTER XVI

CHAPTER XVII

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

Laurel Sheridan stood right in the way as Phil Pilgrim rounded the curve and came rattling down the old road from the cow pasture where he used to sometimes drive a few cattle to the railroad junction long years ago when he was a mere boy living on his grandfather's farm.

She was a pretty girl with a halo of gold hair and big, troubled blue eyes, and what was she doing there? This wasn't a regular road, just a cow path to the junction.

Phil hadn't wanted to take this road to-day. It held no pleasant memories. He had come here as a boy because there had been no other place for him to go when both his father and mother died. His grandfather had sent for him, and they had lived there together, a couple of sorrowful hearts, one young, one old, never even getting well acquainted with one another, and both grieving silently for the ones who were gone. Then one morning his grandfather didn't wake up as usual at dawn, and when Phil returned from his early trip driving the cows to pasture, he found him dead in his bed with the first look of peace on the tired old face he had ever seen him wear.

The boy had walked down the mountain and gotten the undertaker and a couple of men who had been friendly to them, and they had buried the old man in the little hillside cemetery across the road and a short distance down the mountain from the house. After that Phil locked the plain little home and went down to the village and got himself a job, also a place to work for his board and room. From that time on, he began to save up till he could buy a simple

stone to mark his grandfather's resting place, a mate to the stone his grandfather had put up above his grandmother's grave.

It was to visit that simple little burying ground, to make sure his orders had been carried out about the stone, that Phil Pilgrim had taken that road that day. Of course it was a rough road, scarcely more than a cow path in some places, but it passed both the old home and the cemetery. He wanted to stop a moment at the old house and look it over carefully, for he had received a letter the day before saying that the government was planning to build a munitions plant in that neighborhood and wanted to buy his land. He wanted to be sure whether he should sell it all or perhaps retain the house and a bit of land to rent. But it had been a sad pilgrimage and only brought back desolate days when it had seemed to him that life was nothing but a burden, young though he was.

He did not linger long after his investigations were over. With lifted hat he passed the little plot of ground at the edge of the road with its two white stones that gleamed side by side, and he drove on down the mountain rapidly, glad to be away again out into a world that was not shrouded in sorrow.

Phil brushed his hand across his forehead and eyes and drew a deep sigh. He was bidding a final good-bye to that sad youthful part of his life.

True, he had been out and away from it for a number of years now. He had worked his way through high school, working Saturdays and after school in a filling station. Later he had won a scholarship to college and had been a dedicated student there. Now he was through and had the coveted diploma, which had been his goal for his dead mother's sake. And now suddenly the world had gone mad

with war! So, he had taken the next step that duty demanded of him and enlisted. Life didn't look any too bright, anyway, even now when he had finished doing what he had been striving for so long. He hadn't had time for friends or relaxation, except a little dash of athletics now and then when he had found that he could make his ability to run and swim into a source of more revenue.

But now all that was over. He was a soldier. He was wearing a uniform. He was going into a new life. And if, as some of them said, the next scene would be battle, with maybe death ahead, well, what of it? Would it be any worse than all the other changes that had come into his empty, hardworking young life? Would there perhaps be heaven, as his mother had always believed, where all the hard things would be over and joy ahead forever? Well, it might be! But there must surely be some conditions to that, and he had never learned the conditions. If his mother had lived, she might have taught him. Perhaps she had tried, but she was so sorrowful during those last days after his father was gone, and she was so ill and weak! Well, if there was a way out of this maze, he would find it if he could, and work his way through, as he had worked it through other hard things. How he had gone out at night alone and practiced running, and in the dark, swimming, when his hard day's work was over! Oh, of course that had been good for him, too, keeping him in fine trim physically in spite of his plodding days and nights of study and hard work. Yes, he would find a way through!

He wasn't looking forward eagerly to war, yet he must take it as he had taken all the rest, a way to attain on earth, or to reach heaven if there was a heaven.

He drew a deep, heavy sigh.

Thoughts like these were unprofitable. He must get on. There were people in the village he must see. His old employer was a grim, silent man, but he had been kindly at the end and had even allowed a small bonus on the last few months' work. He wanted to thank him for that kindness. Then there was a small bank account he must look after. A teacher in the high school to thank, who had given good advice and helped him to understand some of the difficulties that might have hindered him. He must not forget any who had been his friends. They might have forgotten him by this time, doubtless had, for the months had been long and there were many boys coming and going about the village. But still he would feel better to have hunted them all out and thanked them for their kindness.

A flight of purple grackles soared across the sky and dropped their bright iridescent blackness down among the autumn trees. They scattered on the ground, searching for favorite foods, filling the air with their strange fall sounds, those sounds that make summer seem so definitely a thing of the past and the autumn sunshine only a passing gesture. Phil turned his eyes to the scene he was passing and remembered days when he had wandered alone wishing for things that never came. There was a great flat stone by the roadside. He had sat there the morning he got the thorn in his foot and tried to extract it. There was the big tree whose gnarled roots had made an armchair where he came to study now and then when he had some hard task to master. It was cushioned with velvet moss. Sometimes when he had been sitting there for a while he would get the idea that maybe in the future something nice would happen to him and then he could forget all the gloom and drabness of his life and be really happy. Yes? He had actually believed that. And now look what was happening! Just out of college! No

job, no special friends, no opportunity to forge into things and do something really worthwhile. War ahead! Just war! Life in a training camp! It hadn't been very exciting so far. And then what? Nothing to get excited or happy about. Joy? Maybe there wasn't any such thing as joy in this earth anyway, although he had always fancied that he saw other people having it.

Well, he mustn't get morbid. It certainly hadn't been a cheerful thing to come to his grandfather's old farm and the little cemetery. Still he had to come and see that everything was all right before he went back into camp and would no longer be able to order his life as he pleased. He had to be sure he wanted to sell.

Then, with another deep sigh, he swung his car around the curve of the hill, jolting along over the stony way, and there, right ahead of him, was a car standing with its hood open and a girl in front of it looking anxiously toward him. Fool girl getting in his way! He almost ran over her! Why did girls always have to get in the way? This was no road for a girl to be on anyway, a cattle path! How did she get here?

He ground on his brakes and came to an abrupt halt before her.

"I beg your pardon," he said politely. "Are you having engine trouble?"

"Yes, but I don't know what it is." The girl lifted her very blue eyes apologetically, and instantly he wondered where he had seen those eyes before. Yet of course that was absurd. He didn't have much to do with girls, especially not out here in the country. He'd never had anything to do with girls, even in school, when he lived on Crimson Mountain. He was too busy studying and working. It must be something in his subconscious memory that was brought to him by the look in that girl's eyes.

These thoughts were vaguely passing through his mind as he sprang, annoyed, from his car and went to investigate the other one. What a nuisance it was to be interrupted at this point in his journey, when he had only just so much time and quite a good many things he wanted to do before he went on his way back to camp to meet whatever was about to be the next scene in his life.

Laurel Sheridan had turned from the highway several miles back into a wooded road that she thought was the shortcut around the high hill that was familiarly known in that vicinity as Crimson Mountain because of its gorgeous color in the autumn. But Laurel did not choose that road for its beauty, although it was glowing and lovely. She was in a hurry. She was going to be late for an appointment, and she was worried. She thought she remembered that this road was supposed to be the shortcut to Carrollton. But it didn't seem to be so short. It certainly was farther than she remembered. Could she have made a mistake? It wasn't a very good road either, but she had come so far now she couldn't turn back. Oh, this must be right.

So, frantically she stepped on the gas and mounted the hill, surprised at the sharp turn to the right that the road took when it ought to have turned left. She glanced at the clock in the car, calculating whether she could possibly get to that high school before it was entirely too late for her purpose.

She was two-thirds of the way up the hill, and beginning to count the distance ahead and discount time, when suddenly her car began to buck like a balky horse, and then it stopped dead!

She cast an annoyed glance at her dial. She couldn't be out of gas, could she? Horrors! With no filling station probably till she got to the foot of the mountain on the other

side. She seemed to be all turned around. Which way was Carrollton, anyway? She certainly must have taken a wrong turn somewhere. Oh, it couldn't be her gas was out! And she was still going up. Oh, if she could only make the top of the hill, perhaps she could coast down safely and make a filling station. In vain she tried to start the car again, yet the dial showed a little gas. What a fool she had been to take this road, with no place to get help if she had trouble. This couldn't be the old shortcut across Crimson Mountain. She hadn't had any doubt when she turned into the dirt road. It had seemed just as she remembered it, but now as she gave a quick look around, somehow it didn't seem so familiar. She must have made a mistake. She tried to think back to the days of her little girlhood when her class had been brought into the woods for a picnic one day. What a happy time they'd had, and how she had always looked wistfully toward that dirt road into which their cars had turned that day to bring them to the lovely woods on the top of old Crimson. The look of that rough dirt road had always held a charm for her all that next winter after the picnic, whenever they drove down the highway. To tell the truth, that was the main reason why she had turned into it to-day, although she had heard it was a shorter way, and she was in a hurry. After all, it was nearly five years since she had been in this region, and there might have been two roads. She had passed one about a quarter of a mile before she reached this one. But it had seemed to her too fine a road to lead to the old picnic place. She was positive that the picnic road of old had been a dirt road, and that first road had been paved. But of course it might have been improved since early days. Well, what should she do now? If she could only get her engine going, perhaps she could turn around and go back. Take that other road. Wouldn't that be best?

But try as she would, she could not make her engine speak, and she drew an impatient sigh as she got out of her car and walked to the front. She was afraid of that hood. She had never succeeded in getting it open. The car had always been kept in order for her by the man at the garage, but now there was no one but herself to depend on. She hadn't any idea what she was going to do when she got the hood open, but that was what all men did first when anything was the matter with a car—they opened the hood. So she struggled to open it and throw it back nonchalantly as she had seen the men in the filling stations do. But struggle as she might, that hood refused to open. Till suddenly the handle she held gave a lurch, and up it came! At least it came up about eight inches and then lurched back again and seemed to settle down harder than ever.

But Laurel was not a girl to give up easily, and she was becoming more and more conscious of that school committee she had promised to meet, where she was going to apply for a job. So she went at the matter more vigorously this time and finally managed to swing up that hood and anchor it. She cast a troubled glance inside that mysterious engine, but nothing came of it. She had never had experience in machinery of any sort, and none of those pipes and tubes and screws made sense to her. For the first time, it occurred to her as strange that anyone could have thought out and made a thing so complicated and that, being made, it could manage to carry people around the country. Before this she had always taken cars for granted and thought nothing about them.

And so, having walked all about that engine and studied each part carefully without getting any light, she straightened up and stood there, trying to think what she should do next. Was it thinkable that she could walk down to

the village and send somebody back from a filling station or garage after her car? She hadn't the slightest idea how far it would be, if indeed she was on the right road to Carrollton.

Then suddenly she heard the sound of a swiftly coming car. It was up around that curve ahead. She cast a quick, anxious glance at the road. It seemed so narrow, and her car was right in the middle. There was a deep gully at one side and a steep embankment edged by thick woods on the other.

And then Phil Pilgrim's car came sweeping around the curve straight at her, and she stood petrified, her big blue eyes wide and startled.

He stopped just before he reached her.

Phil Pilgrim went over to the car and studied it a minute, swung himself in behind the wheel and tried out various parts of its mechanism with no result, swung out to the ground again and back to the engine, stooping to get a better view. Then he straightened up, looked at the girl, and said in a crisp, reproachful tone, as if it was entirely her fault, "Your generator's shot."

"Oh!" said Laurel meekly. "Just what does that mean? What do I have to do?"

"Well, it means you'll have to have a new generator," he said with a grim smile. "What are you doing here anyway? This isn't a road. It's only a cattle path." He wanted her to understand that it was none of his affair. He had business in other directions.

"Oh!" she said again breathlessly. "I didn't know. Well, would there be someplace near here where I could telephone for one?"

His smile became a half grin, or was there a shade of almost contempt in his tone as he answered?

"Well, not exactly!" He said it crisply. "They haven't established public telephone service yet on this highway."

"Oh, of course not," said Laurel with a timid, apologetic smile. "I ought to have known better, of course. You see, I thought this was a shortcut to Carrollton. I must have made a mistake somewhere. But at least I can walk down to the highway, can't I? It can't be so far away. Or is it?"

There was an appeal in her voice and her eyes that made Phil Pilgrim ashamed.

"Oh, I guess it won't come to that," he said gruffly. He would have to take her to the town of course, and that would make no end of delay for him. What a nuisance that would be! He half wished he had not come up to Crimson himself this afternoon, but then, what would the girl have done if he hadn't? He wasn't a youth who had practiced looking after himself and his own interests first. His mother had taught him courtesy and gentlemanliness before she left him in this world alone.

Then suddenly, into the middle of his perplexity and the strained silence that his words had brought, came a rushing, stampeding sound of many hooves, pounding along the road around which young Pilgrim had just come. And then, appearing as suddenly as he had done, came cattle. They looked to Laurel like millions as their brown faces and wild, excited eyes surmounted by terrifying horns showed around the curve and pelted straight at her.

She cried out in terror, and then she was speechless with horror as the frightened creatures came on, led by two angry bulls escaped from their keepers, who were now running wildly in pursuit and shouting to them but only adding to the confusion.

It was not a large herd and would not have been unmanageable, perhaps, if it had not been for those two

unexpected cars and the man and girl. But now the animals snorted and plunged ahead, climbing up and over one another, angrily dashing this way and that, clambering upon the running boards of the cars, and shying, startled, away. The girl stood paralyzed with fear, her brain refusing to act, every muscle frozen. An instant more and she felt she would be down beneath those awful trampling hooves, crushed and bleeding, and that would be the end!

Then just as she felt that she was losing consciousness and knew it would be impossible either to run or withstand the onslaught that was coming, strong arms behind her caught her up, away above that horde. With what seemed like superhuman strength, she was lifted up the steep embankment, above where the two cars stood.

Though barely higher than the struggling creatures, she no longer felt their hot breath on her face, and even the screaming of the cattle, the roaring of the bulls, seemed below her.

And yet the creatures were still there, struggling past in one wild melee. She could dimly feel their crowding, pushing forms jostling now and again, when one of them struggled up the bank. But they could not reach her, for the young man held her close in his arms. Her face was down on his chest, and his back and shoulders were taking the brunt of the crowding animals, his body protecting her at their every turn.

Gradually she came to herself and realized these things, feeling strangely safe there in the midst of all the confusion.

It seemed an eternity while those puffing, snorting, frightened steers were floundering frantically past them. The young man held his place on that steep hillside, now and then sliding, shoved aside, and almost falling, yet holding his footing, with Laurel in his arms. In reality it was

only a very short time, for the animals were not many, and the two men and three boys who were attending them were doing their best to get them back to the road and to corral the angry bulls.

The attendants did not seem even to notice the man and the frightened girl on the bank above the cars. Or if they saw them, they had no time to look at them and wonder. They were just a part of the obstacles that had caused the confusion. Fool people who came onto a cattle road where they had no right to be! If they got frightened or hurt, it was their own fault. There was a sign at both ends of this road, and surely anybody in this age of the world could read. And if this was an accident, it wasn't their accident, and they had no time to stop. It was their business to prevent an accident of their own. And so they presently passed on.

It seemed hardly credible that the wild, teeming creatures were gone, and the two were alone at last. Then suddenly Laurel realized that she was in the arms of a strange young man! She opened frightened eyes, almost afraid to break this blessed silence that had left them there together, alive and safe.

Pilgrim looked down at her with troubled eyes.

"Are you all right?" he asked in a low tone, almost as if those departed steers were enemies who might hear and return.

The touch of his arms around her, the tone of his voice, thrilled Laurel as nothing had ever done before, but the only reply she seemed able to make was a trembling nod. She was not a girl given to thrills or to tears, but suddenly she felt tears coming and knew they would greatly complicate the scene. She must not let them come. He would think she was a fool. She closed her eyes quickly to drive them back, but two great tears rolled out and down her cheeks.

"You are hurt!" he charged anxiously. "Did one of those beasts touch you? Did their horns reach you anywhere? I tried hard to cover you. Where are you hurt?"

"No, no, I am not hurt," she protested quickly, struggling to rise. "I was only frightened and kind of shaken up. It is silly, of course. But you were wonderful. You saved my life! You can put me down now. I'm quite all right!"

"That's good," said Pilgrim. "I'm glad. But I guess we won't let you down on this steep hillside. Listen! What was that?"

He lifted his head alertly and looked back toward the curve around which the cattle had come so suddenly. Then his face grew serious. "We must get out of here before another bunch of cattle comes," he said sternly. "There are two more farmers up here where they raise a few cows, and when one of the three gets a bunch ready to ship, the other two try to send some at the same time. This is the cattle path straight down to the railroad junction. They have probably arranged to have the four o'clock train stop and take on their stock. That's the way it used to be when I lived up this way. Are you quite sure you are all right?" He gave her another intense look.

Then, without giving her opportunity to answer, he strode firmly down to the road with Laurel still in his arms, gave one quick glance behind and ahead, and put her in the seat of his own car.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

We'll have to get off this road before any more steers come," said Pilgrim anxiously as he swung in behind the wheel of this car, slammed the door shut, and began to back and cut, back and cut, to turn around in the narrow road. "You won't mind riding to the village in my old roadster?"

"Of course not," said Laurel, struggling for her normal self-control. "You've been wonderfully kind. I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't come along. I wouldn't have been here long enough to do anything. Those creatures would likely have trampled me to death. I was simply petrified! I couldn't have moved an inch. You saved my life!"

He gave her a quick look.

"I'm glad I was here!" he said crisply. "I almost didn't come this way."

"God must have sent you," said Laurel reverently.

"Maybe," he said thoughtfully. "I've never had much to do with God!"

"Neither have I," said Laurel soberly, her eyes very thoughtful. "But I've heard people say He cares."

"Could be," said the young man cryptically. "But I've never seen reason in my life to think He cared. Still, if He were going to care for anybody, I should think He might care for you!"

Suddenly he lifted his head alertly.

"Listen! There's that sound again! I thought I heard the voice of one of Hunsicker's men. There'll be more animals

coming or I'll miss my guess. You don't mind if I go some, do you? I think we maybe can beat 'em to it. We'd better get by before they start out from the next farm."

His face set grimly. The girl cast a frightened glance at him, gripping the cushion of the seat tensely, her heart beating wildly again.

They fairly flew up the long hill, bordered on the one hand now by a rough wall of fieldstone, piled up without cement, and on the other hand by a deep gully. She could see a wooden gate ahead flanked by a great red barn so weathered that it blended with the autumn trees standing around it, and out of its wide door were coming more steers! Laurel caught her breath involuntarily, and Pilgrim turned and flashed a quick, reassuring smile as they flew on.

"Don't worry," he said. "We're going to make it. They haven't started yet. I'll take care of you."

There was something about his quiet assurance that calmed her fears.

As they rushed past the old wooden gate now, Laurel could see the group of animals coming down toward the road from the old red barn. Though they were moving in a fairly quiet and orderly mass, the sight of their brown backs, their woolly brown heads, topped by that terrifying fringe of horns, was anything but comforting.

As they swept past the gate and onward, Pilgrim turned toward her.

"We're all right now," he said gently. "We've passed their gate, and they are going the other way, so they can't catch up with us. There's only one more farm to pass, and we'll likely be able to miss any there. It might even be that they won't be sending any cattle down. They are not very successful cattle raisers. But anyway, we'll get ahead of them, I'm sure."

So silently they drove on, rushing over the rough cart road.

And then they came in sight of another little old farmhouse set almost sullenly back from the road. But there were no animals in sight. There wasn't even a dog around nor any chickens.

Laurel relaxed and sat back more comfortably.

Pilgrim watched her furtively.

"You're not frightened anymore," he said in a satisfied tone. "We've passed all the farms now. Those last people must have moved away or died or something. And now it won't be far to a garage where we can send someone back for your car. But look around. Isn't this a lovely spot? I always liked it here."

They had reached the top of the hill and were passing through the woods. Laurel exclaimed in delight over the beauty of the way. Pilgrim watched her as her face lit up at each new turn.

"There's a thrush!" she said joyfully. "There isn't any birdsong quite like that, is there? And I've been away from them so long they sound just wonderful to me."

"Yes," said Pilgrim a bit sadly. He was thinking that the last time he remembered hearing the thrushes sing was while they were burying his grandfather, the grandfather with whom he had lived so long and whom he had known so little.

He gave another furtive look at the girl beside him. Suddenly he spoke. "Where have I seen you before? Did you ever live in Carrollton?"

Her face clouded sadly. "Yes," she said, "I lived there when I was a little girl."

He looked at her sharply. "I see," he said. "And I've seen you as a little girl, going about the town, or perhaps in

school. And your eyes have stayed the same. It's your eyes that made me think I had seen you before." He looked at her gravely and shook his head. "No, I'm too old for that. I must have finished high school before you entered, or at least in your first year. I was working in a filling station at least part-time, long before you were in high school, I guess. Who are you, anyway? I'm sure I've seen you, though I may not have known your name. It couldn't possibly be Sheridan, could it?"

"Yes, I'm Laurel Sheridan."

"Sheridan! Langdon Sheridan's daughter?"

"Yes."

"And when you were a little child, you used to drive down in your father's car when it came for gas and oil! You used to come with the chauffeur and sit in the backseat with your doll or a book while I filled up your car."

"Oh!" said the girl. "Yes, that's right. And now I remember you. You were the one they called Phil! Isn't that right?"

"That's right," said the young man, and there was a certain grimness about the set of his lips and the firm line of his jaw. Then after a pause he added, "Yes, I was working in a filling station, and you were living in a stone mansion on Bleeker Street, the daughter of the most important man in the town, heiress to a fortune! There wasn't any chance that we should have met even enough to have remembered one another. Though I do remember that little girl with the big blue eyes, the eyes that looked at me back there in the road when I almost ran into you. I couldn't place you at first, but I remembered those eyes."

"Yes, and I remember the nice boy that waited on us at the filling station, the boy they called Phil. And afterward I heard of Phil Pilgrim who won the prize at high school for his scholarship and his marvelous feats in running and

swimming. Were you that one? I only heard the talk about you when I was in high school. So you are the boy who was so noted a character in those days on the athletic field?"

Pilgrim bowed assent. "Yes, I went to college afterward, and that was a way to help along financially."

"Oh, of course. Why, how wonderful that I should meet you this way! How wonderful that you came along just when I was in such dire need!"

"It's kind of you to feel that way," said Pilgrim with a touch of aloofness in his voice. "I certainly am glad I was able to help you a little. It will make a pleasant incident to remember when I am overseas—or wherever they are sending me."

"Oh!" said Laurel in a small, sorry voice. "Are you—to go overseas?"

"Oh, I don't know what they are going to do with me. That's not my lookout. But it will be all right, whatever it turns out to be. After all, I haven't had such a fancy life thus far that I can make any kick at what's coming." He turned a cool grin toward her.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Laurel. "But where did you live in Carrollton? I don't remember that I ever heard."

"No, you wouldn't," said the young man with a sigh. "It wasn't in your region at all. In fact, if you're interested, we're going to pass the old farmhouse in about two minutes, where I lived alone with my grandfather for a good many years."

"We are?" said Laurel. "Yes, I am interested. I'd like to know all about you. You saved my life, you know, and of course I'm interested."

He turned another frank gaze on her. "That's good of you," he said. "Well, there it is, up on the brow of the hill.

Just an old farmhouse, and all run down now. Nobody's lived there since Grandfather and I were there."

Laurel turned troubled eyes on the bleak old farmhouse glooming there on the hillside, gloomy even among the gorgeous autumn foliage on the few big trees around it.

"Oh—is that really where you lived?" said the girl with a pitiful tone in her voice. "And—what became of your grandfather?" And then when she saw the look on the young man's face, she wished she hadn't asked.

Phil Pilgrim took a deep breath, lifted his right hand from the wheel, and pointed across and down the road to the two sad little white stones among the grass by the roadside.

"He is lying over there beside Grandmother," he said solemnly.

Laurel looked at the two small white stones gleaming there in that desolate field among the pretty foliage of Crimson Mountain. "Oh, I'm sorry," said the girl softly and turned toward the young man, eyes bright with tears.

Phil Pilgrim gave her a grateful shadow of a smile and turned his head quickly away, looking off toward the mountains beyond his old home.

They drove on in silence for two or three minutes, the thoughts of each mingled with the story of the dreary home and the two white stones that marked a resting place.

Then all at once they swept around a group of trees, and there below them lay the village, with a filling station half hidden at their feet down the road a half mile.

"There!" said the young man, pointing down. "There's our filling station. It won't be long now," and he tried to say it cheerfully.

"Well, I'm glad you will soon be relieved of responsibility on my behalf. I don't know how to express my gratitude."

"Don't try, please. It has been a pleasure."

Then a moment later a paved road ambled up from the valley and crept away into a wide opening in the woods at the right, and Laurel exclaimed excitedly, "Oh, but isn't that the road to the picnic grounds! That's the road I thought I was taking up from the other side."

"Yes, that's the road you should have taken, Miss Sheridan, if you came in on Route Thirty. This is the new stretch of road that used to be the shortcut from Route Thirty. But I'm glad you didn't, for then I shouldn't have had the pleasure of rescuing you and perhaps would never have known anything of you except the memory of the little girl with the gold curls and the eyes! But you must have gone at least two miles out of your way."

Then he drove down with a sweep and into the road in front of the gasoline pumps, but Laurel had a sudden sinking feeling that she was never going to see him again. Absurd of course! He was only a stranger. What difference did it make whether she ever saw him again or not? Three hours ago she had had no consciousness of his existence, and here she was feeling awful because she thought she wouldn't see him anymore. What a little idiot she was! It was all because she had been through such a shock. All those awful creatures practically climbing over her! She shuddered as she remembered it again, her fright, her horror! And then those arms! Lifting her high above the milling, snorting horde, holding her safe above it all. She never could forget it! Oh, he was no stranger now, and never could be. He had saved her life! And yet he was going away. She wouldn't see him anymore.

She watched him as he swung out of the car and went to speak to the young proprietor of the garage. She saw the grave, pleasant smile with which he greeted the man, who evidently recognized him and flashed an intelligent look as

Phil Pilgrim went on to tell about the car up on Crimson Mountain, which was stalled and needing, he thought, something done to the generator. The gesture with which he pointed to another car standing near made it plain to Laurel as she watched. Yes, he was good-looking, and probably it was just as well that he was going away. Though she had never thought herself one to get her head turned by a handsome face, a courteous smile. But then, having had one's life saved, it was nice to have as her rescuer one with an attractive appearance, something pleasant to remember.

She finished this homily to herself as Phil came back to explain to her, "He's sending a man up immediately after your car. I've told him just where to find it. If you'll give him the keys, he'll tow the car down and let you know what has to be done. Now, in the meantime, I don't suppose you want to just hang around here, do you? Haven't you someplace you would like to go while you are waiting? I'll be glad to take you wherever you suggest. I've practically nothing to do till the midnight train comes in, when I have to meet a man who wants to see my farm. I'll be glad to see you through till your own car is seaworthy."

"Oh, thank you, but I couldn't think of troubling you further after all you have done for me. I'll be quite all right now. And I'm within walking distance now of several people I know."

"You're not fit to walk," said Phil Pilgrim in his firm tone. "You don't realize how much you were shaken by that experience on the mountain. I'm sorry to have to force my company on you any longer, but I guess there's no way out, unless you can think of some friend you'd rather have take you places."

He smiled his engaging smile, and Laurel felt that breathless catch in her breath as she answered. "Oh no,

there's no one I'd rather have take me. I just don't want to be any further nuisance to you."

"Well, so far you haven't been a nuisance. In fact, you've helped to bring me out of an unpleasant situation that duty forced me into. I came here to look at my worthless property and see whether I should accept an offer I've had for it or hold it till I get back from wherever I'm going. I also came to look at the family graves that belong to my care and see if they are getting the attention I had ordered. It wasn't a very cheerful errand. Having concluded it, there was time to be passed till I could meet my man, so if I can be of any further service, it will relieve a tiresome monotony, and you will be doing me a favor. Where were you going when I met you on the mountain and your car balked?"

"Oh!" said Laurel with a startled look. "I was going in a great hurry to an appointment, but I guess it's way too late for that now." She lifted her hand and glanced anxiously at her wristwatch. "Well, maybe not. Perhaps I had better go and see if anybody is there yet. I wouldn't like them to think I hadn't kept my word. If you would be so good as to take me to the high school. I was to have met the board there an hour ago. They are probably gone now. But at least I could say I came as soon as I was able."

"Sure!" said Phil. "Have you there in two minutes. But surely you're not still in high school?" He gave her a mischievous grin.

She smiled appreciatively.

"No," she said, "nothing so good as that. I'm applying for a position as a substitute, in place of a teacher who is very sick. You see, that fabulous fortune you thought I was supposed to inherit vanished when my father died, and the 'stone mansion' was sold, so I am in search of a position to earn my living." She said it cheerfully, but there was a hint