

The Free Traders

By Victor Rousseau

WNU SERVICE

Copyright by W. G. Chapman.

Lee did not push his inquiries. On the whole he felt it would be preferable that her memory should return to her while she was at the mission.

The next morning broke cloudy, the snow was frozen hard, and banks of heavy snow clouds were piling up in the north. The girl's knee had still not troubled her, and they made even faster progress. Early in the afternoon the prospects of a storm became so threatening that Lee proposed they should encamp on a ridge of land some half a mile in front of them.

"We can find a safe nook in there," he suggested.

"Oh, no," answered the girl, "there's a large log house about half a mile beyond that, and we'll be much more comfortable there."

As Lee looked at her, he realized that she had been speaking without realizing what she had been saying. Suddenly she realized it too.

"Now what made me say that?" she asked. "But I'm sure somehow that there is a cabin there. I know this place quite well, only it's as if I'd seen it in a dream. Oh, Lee, what if I should remember? I don't want to never, never! I want our new life and our love!"

He put his arms about her and tried to comfort her, but the look of sadness lingered on her face, and every now and then, covertly watching her, Lee would see that same perplexed knitting of her brows.

They passed the ridge, the trail ran around the bend of the lake, and suddenly they saw the log building in front of them.

Lee looked at the house in surprise, for it was built in the most substantial way, and contained apparently five or six rooms. The settler who had constructed it must have meant to make it his permanent home, for the ground around it had been cleared for an acre or more; but it seemed to have been unoccupied for several years, for the land was overgrown with brush and spindly birch, into the



They Passed the Ridge, the Trail Ran Around the Bend of the Lake—and Suddenly They Saw the Log Building in Front of Them.

thick of which serried cohorts of young spruce-trees were rallying in ranks, like the vanguard of an army.

The door was unbolting, and when they went in they were startled at the aspect of the interior. The rooms were filled with furniture, nearly all of it made by the settler, but extraordinarily well done. There were mellowed and faded but substantial carpets on the floors. There were fungus growths on the walls; but in spite of all the evidences of decay, the interior looked the habitation of a prosperous settler.

They went from room to room. The contents of the kitchen had been scrupulously respected, in accordance with trappers' law. There were porcelain plates, cups and saucers, cooking utensils, a large sheet-iron stove half full of charred logs.

Lee went all over the place, calling to the girl with the enthusiasm of a boy.

"It's just the place for us!" he cried. "We'll find out who owns it and buy it from him, and spend our honeymoon here."

In his exuberance he failed to perceive the depression that had settled upon her.

They had only just arrived in time to escape the storm, for already the flakes were whirling down outside.

"Well, you were right," said Lee, "it's lucky we're going to have a roof

over us tonight. Look, here's fire-wood! Now I wonder who's been living here!"

The girl did not answer him. She was staring about her with the same look of bewilderment, and Lee saw that she was trembling. He drew her into his arms.

"Dearest, you mustn't let things trouble you," he said. "All will come right. And what can anything matter, so long as we have each other?"

"It makes me afraid, Lee," she answered in a low tone. "Oh, Lee, I—I seem to be nearer to remembering than ever before. There ought to be—there used to be a table here, and—a woman sat here sewing, a woman with fair hair, and her face bent over her work, and looking up sometimes to smile at a man—a tall man, several years older than herself, with iron-gray hair, who never smiled, but was always kind to her. And then she would look down to smile at a child playing beside her. Was I that child, Lee?"

"If you were, if this was your home, dearest, you should be happy here."

"I don't know, Lee—I wish now that we'd camped on the ridge. I wish I'd never come here. I've the feeling that—that it means the end." She began to cry softly. "It's not—not just the fear of remembering this place, but it's what is associated with it—something terrible—"

She ceased and looked out at the fast falling snow. It was still only the middle of the afternoon, but the wind was rising, whistling about the cabin, and everything was a desolate gray.

Inside the log house it was half dark.

Suddenly the girl uttered a cry and clutched at Lee's arm.

"Lee! Did you see that? That shadow?"

She was half hysterical, and her nervousness communicated itself to Lee, for he had had the confused impression that a shadow had glided across the room beyond, through the open door.

Instantly he darted after it, but there was nothing to be seen. He came back.

"It wasn't anything. We're getting nervous."

"I'm sure there was something, Lee." She clung to him.

"Stay here, and I'll search the place."

"No, don't leave me! Let me go with you!"

They went together, looking into all the rooms and about the house, but there was no sign of anyone. Lee went to the back door to look for footprints, but if any had been made, they would have been obliterated in a moment by the wind that was driving the dry snow about the doorsill in little whirling clouds.

"It was imagination," said Lee.

She assented, and, going into the kitchen, began to make the preparations for their meal, while Lee took the kettle down to the stream and filled it with water.

But when he returned she had ceased to work and was sitting on a chair, her head bent down, her hands clasped on her knees, staring desolately in front of her.

Lee stood beside her. "Dearest, if I could do anything to help you—"

"You can't help me. I—I don't know what to do."

Her voice was strained, hard, almost unrecognizable. Lee knelt at her feet conscious of a sense of utter helplessness. He took her hands in his, and found that they were as cold as ice. Her body was strained into unnatural rigidity. It was almost as if she were a prisoner on some torture table, so set were all her muscles, as though she were bracing herself against some unendurable pain.

"Yes, you can help me!" The words came quickly from her lips, and, raising her head, she gave him a strange, penetrating look. "You—you haven't been frank with me, Lee."

"You know all that there is to know about me. But what do I know about you? You say you love me, you won my love—my love, that of the nameless woman; and you have my poor little two weeks' life story in your possession. You know everything that there is of me—oh, you know it so intimately. Can you not see how it humiliates me, to think that I have no personality of my own at all, nothing to myself, no life, hardly a thought, even, that is not yours?"

"Dearest—" But she went on implacably: "What do I know of you? Who are you? Lee Anderson? That's only a name. You have your life, your past. How many women has it contained, women you perhaps think of regretfully, sometimes even with tenderness—?"

"I'd have told you that when the time came. I loved one woman—I thought did. She was—well, I gave her my love foolishly, that's all. And it wasn't love. There is only you, has only been you—"

"How do I know you are telling me the truth, Lee Anderson?"

"You don't mean that, dear. We've given our love to each other, with trust and faith. It's just the loneliness and the dread and the fear of remembering the past that makes you doubt everything. Look into my eyes and see if you can doubt them."

The hardness of her laugh surprised him. "I don't trust men, Lee Anderson."

Lee felt stupefied. But deeper than the hurt was his pity for her, a soul cut-off from the past, with only himself to guide her. He could understand that the desire for a personality of her own might well inspire her bitterness.

"I think the best way I can prove

my love for you," he answered, "is just to say nothing till your mood has passed."

"No, Lee, there is a better way than that, a much better way. Be frank with me. Let me share your life. Who



"To Gain Your Wretched Ends by Winning a Woman's Confidence and Then Betraying Her, and You Dared—Yes, You Dared—"

are you?—Lee Anderson?—That's only a name to me. Tell me why you came into the range, and how you found me."

He began to tell her; but, because it was impossible to speak of his experiences at Siston Lake, he made it appear that he had saved her—as he had said before—after the fall, and carried her into the woods. He omitted much, but he distorted nothing.

"What were you doing in the range? What are you here for?" Her voice was breathless, her eyes seemed to burn into his face.

"I think—I know. You must tell me the truth. You came here to find someone. You are a member of the police. Whom have you come to find?"

And as Lee remained silent, she continued:

"It wasn't a man named Pelly, was it? An old man, an old friendless man, who had been betrayed, sold by someone he trusted? A man who had done no wrong to anyone, but who, a whole generation before, had killed the scoundrel who tried to ruin his wife? Hadn't he atoned for that by a lifetime of exile?"

"What do you know of him?" cried Lee.

"He is my father! This is our home! Yes, I'm Joyce Pelly, his daughter, as you have always suspected. And I suspected you from the beginning. And you—you forced your presence upon me under the guise of protecting me from my friends."

"That is not so!"

"To gain your wretched ends by winning a woman's confidence and then betraying her. And you dared—yes,

you dared—"

"I never dreamed who you were. Won't you believe my word of honor that I am incapable—?"

But she went on, still implacable: "You dared to pretend you loved me, you traitor, in order to discover my father's hiding place when I—I was coming up to him—but why—why? I can't remember all. I only know that I remember I'm his daughter. And I tell you I hate you with a hate ten times as great as the love I thought I felt for you!"

Lee stood up before her. "I only ask you to believe me," he began, "when I say that I didn't know, guess, dream who you were. How should I have known he had a daughter—this man I'd never seen? I knew nothing—"

But suddenly her icy coldness seemed to dissolve in helpless misery. "Oh, leave me! Leave me for a little while, or I shall go mad!" she cried. And she put her hands over her face and began weeping wildly.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

NEW COUNTY GOVERNMENT BILL AS PASSED BY HOUSE

(Continued from March 19.)

(Editorial Note. — Although this Bill has been vetoed by the Governor, The People is completing its publication this week as a matter of record.)

SECTION 24. Provided, further, That the Supervisor shall file in the office of the County Board of Commissioners every Monday morning an itemized statement of his commissions as Supervisor, roads and bridges inspected, number of hours spent with chain gang, name of road in township worked, character of work, number of miles worked, number of miles delayed, the amount of clay and method of putting down on roadbed.

SECTION 25. That all able-bodied male persons in the County of Barnwell, between the ages of twenty-one and fifty-five years, inclusive, shall be required to pay a commutation tax of three (\$3.00) dollars per annum to the County Treasurer, at the same time State and County taxes are payable, the same to be expended for road purposes in the townships from which it is collected; and such persons failing or refusing to pay such commutation tax shall be required to perform in lieu thereof five days work upon the public roads in the township in which they reside, subject to the order of the Supervisor of roads; Provided, That the provisions of this Section shall not apply to ministers of the gospel actually in charge of a congregation, teachers actually employed in teaching in the public schools and students who may be attending any school or college at the time when the commutation tax hereinbefore provided for shall become due.

SECTION 26. It shall be the duty of the County Auditor for said County to make a list of all persons liable to road duty in his County, alphabetically arranged by Townships, and deliver said list to the County Treasurer on or before the 15th day of October in each year, and it shall be the duty of such rural policeman as may be in office and the Board of Assessors of said County to aid the County Auditor in the preparation of such list, by furnishing him the names of persons who are liable for said commutation tax.

SECTION 27. Every person in said County liable for said road tax, shall return himself for taxation to the County Auditor is hereby authorized and directed to solicit and take such returns. Hereafter the County Auditor shall make out and deliver to each member of the Board of Assessors and such officers as are in office, lists of the names of the persons who have returned themselves for taxation in the respective Townships of such officers. Said officers shall furnish the County Auditor with the names of all persons liable to road duty in their respective townships who have not returned themselves for such taxation. The County Auditor in each year hereafter, on or before the 15th day of October, shall make out and deliver a list of the names of all persons liable to road tax in said County, alphabetically arranged by Townships to the Treasurer of the said County.

SECTION 28. That pending the nomination of the County Board of Commissioners of Barnwell County, by the Senator and members of the House of Representatives of Barnwell County, to the Governor for appointment, as herein provided; that the five members of the Board of County Directors of Barnwell County, now in charge of the County's affairs, be, and they are hereby, appointed, declared and created as the five members of the Board of County Commissioners of Barnwell County under this Act with full power and authority to carry on the affairs and business of Barnwell County, in accordance with the provisions of the Sections herein, and until their successors are appointed and qualified as herein provided.

SECTION 29. That the Board of County Directors of Barnwell County, immediately upon the approval of this Act, turn over and deliver to the Supervisor and incoming County Commissioners of Barnwell County, all property in their possession, charge and control belonging to the County of Barnwell, and that the receipt of said Supervisor and Commissioner be a full and complete acquittance to each of said directors for the respective properties so delivered to said Supervisor.

SECTION 30. That the office of Supervisor of Barnwell County be, and the same is hereby, created; said

Supervisor to be appointed by the Governor upon recommendation of a majority of Legislative Delegation from Barnwell Co., to include the Senator of Barnwell County, for a period of two years and until his successor is appointed and qualified, at a compensation of Eighteen Hundred (\$1,800.00) Dollars per year, payable monthly; Provided, however, That the Supervisor, shall be subject to any instructions of a majority of the County Commissioners as in their discretion they may deem necessary from time to time.

SECTION 31. That the Supervisor of Barnwell County shall have general jurisdiction over all public roads, bridges and ferries, not including, however, roads, bridges and ferries under charge and control of the State Highway Department of South Carolina, and to have full control of the chain gang of Barnwell County, all convicts thereon, all vehicles, wagons, carts, dumps, motor vehicles, livestock and all tools used in connection therewith, including the motor trucks, tractors, and all other property in possession of said County incident to the County chain gang, and is charged with the upkeep and repair of all such property; and is hereby vested with full power and authority to properly care and provide for the same, and is charged with the upkeep of all roads and bridges within the County.

SECTION 32. That said Supervisor so appointed and commissioned, shall enter into a bond in a licensed surety company in the penal sum of One Thousand (\$1,000.00) Dollars, conditioned for the faithful performance of his duties, to be approved by the Clerk of Court.

SECTION 33. That pending the nomination of the Supervisor of Barnwell County as herein provided, the now acting Supervisor of Barnwell County in charge of the properties incident to said office, be, and he is hereby, appointed, declared and created, as the Supervisor of Barnwell County, under this Act, with full power and authority to carry on the business incident to said office, in accordance with the provision of the Sections therein, and until his successor is appointed and qualified.

SECTION 34. That the County Senator and the Members of the House of Representatives of said County, either or any of them, shall have the right and authority at any time and from time to time to meet with the County Commissioners and the Supervisor and advise with them looking to an economical administration of the County's business and affairs.

SECTION 35. All Acts or parts of Acts inconsistent herewith are hereby repealed.

SECTION 36. That this Act shall take effect immediately upon its approval by the Governor.

Vamp Theatre, Thur., April 2

PRICES: \$1.00, \$1.50 and \$2.00, Plus Tax. SEATS NOW SELLING AT J. and J. MARKET.

MAIL ACCOMPANIED BY REMITTANCE IN FULL (TAX INCLUDED) AND SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE WILL BE FILLED IN ORDER.

ATTRACTION EXTRAORDINARY

CHUCK HOLTSMORTH AND HIS 10 PIECE JAZZ BAND AND AUGMENTED ORCHESTRA

AN ALL STAR CAST OF BROADWAY'S FAVORITES

THE SMARTEST OF MUSICAL REVUES EXALTING THE HUMAN FORM WITH A CHORUS OF NYMPHS AND SPANISH SEÑORITAS

LAND OF JOY

WEALTH OF SCENERY AND MARVELOUS ELECTRICAL EFFECTS AND A COMPANY of 50

