

FRONTIER LEGACIES

THE SPIRIT OF SWEETWATER



HAMLIN GARLAND

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by

HAMLIN GARLAND





Hauvin Garland

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THE MYSTERY OF MOUNTAINS

As the sun sinks
And the cañons deepening in color
Add mystery to silence
Then the lone traveller lying out-stretched
Beneath the silent pines on some high range
Watches and listens in ecstasy of fear
And timorous admiration.

In the roar of the stream he catches
The reminiscent echo of colossal cataracts;
In the cry of the cliff-bird
He thinks he hears the eagle's scream
Or yowl of far-off mountain-lion;
In the fall of a loose rock
He fancies the menacing footfall of the grizzly bear;
And in the black deeps of the lower cañon
His dreaming eyes detect once more
Prodigious lines of buffalo crawling snake-wise
Athwart the stream,
Or files of Indian warriors
Winding downward to the distant plain,
Where camp-fires gleam like stars.

PART I

CHAPTER I

One spring day a young man of good mental furnishing and very slender purse walked over the shoulder of Mount Mogallon and down the trail to Gold Creek. He walked because the stage fare seemed too high.

Two years and four months later he was pointed out to strangers by the people of Sweetwater Springs. "That is Richard Clement, the sole owner of 'The Witch,' a mine valued at three millions of dollars." This in itself was truly an epic.

Sweetwater Springs was a village in a cañon, out of which rose two wonderful springs of water whose virtues were known throughout the land. The village was wedged in the cañon which ran to the mighty breast of Mogallon like a fold in a king's robe.

The village and its life centered around the pavilion which roofed the spring, and Clement spent his evenings there in order to see the people, at least, as they joyously thronged about the music-stand and sipped the beautiful water which the Utes long, long ago called "sweet water," and visited with reverence and hope of returning health.

Since the coming of his great wealth, Clement had not

allowed himself a day's vacation, and he had grown ten years older in that time. There were untimely signs of age in his hair and in the troubled lines of his face. He was a young man, but he looked a strong and stern and careworn man to those whose attention was called to him. He was a conscientious man, and the possession of great wealth was not without its gravities.

For the first time he felt it safe to leave his mine in other hands. He had a longing to mix with his kind once more, and in his heart was the secret hope that somewhere among the women of the Springs he might find a girl to take to wife. He arranged his vacation for July, not because it was ever hot at the Creek, but because he knew the Springs swarmed at that time with girls from the States. It would have troubled him had any one put these ideas into words and accused him of really seeking a bride.

He was a self-unconscious man naturally, and he hardly realized yet how widely his name had gone as the possessor of millions. He supposed himself an unnoticed atom as he stood at the spring on the second night of his stay in the village. Of a certainty many did not know him, but they saw him, for he was a striking figure—a handsome figure—though that had never concerned him. He was, in fact, feeling his own insignificance.

He was standing there in shadow looking out somberly upon the streams of people as they came to take their evening draught at the wonderful water of the effervescing

spring. The sun had gone behind the high peaks to the west, and a delicious, dry coolness was in the cañon.

It seemed to Clement to be a very fashionable and leisurely throng—so long had he been absent from people either modish or easeful. He felt himself to be hopelessly outside all this youth and brilliancy and merriment, and he looked upon it all with a certain wistfulness.

He perceived at length that the strollers were not all of the same conditions. There were rough, brown cow-boys from La Junta and Cajon, and miners in rough dress down from the gulches for a night, but mainly the promenaders appealed to him with elegance of dress and manner.

Many of the ladies came without hats, which added to the charm of their eyes and hair. Some of them looked twice at the tall man with the big mustache and broad hat, who seemed to be watching for some tardy friend.

As he studied them his memory freshened and he came to understand them better. He analyzed them into familiar types. This was a banker and his wife from some small town—the wife fussy and consequential, the husband coldly dignified. This group was composed of a doctor and his daughters. Behind them came a merchant from some Nebraska town—he rough of exterior, his children dainty of dress and very pretty. Occasionally a group of college-bred girls came up without escort—alert, self-helpful and serene. They saw Clement at once, and studied him carefully as they drank their beauty cup at the circular bench

before the spring. All good-looking men had interest to them.

All classes came, a varied stream, yet they were Western, and of the well-to-do condition for the larger part.

The deft boy swung the glasses of water on his tripartite dipper with ceaseless splash and clink. There was a pleasant murmur of talk in which an Eastern listener would have heard the “r” sound well-defined. There were many couples seated about the pavilion on the benches and railings. It was all busy yet tranquil. Each loiterer had fed, had taken his draught of healing water—and this was the hour of pleasant gossip and repose. Clement fell at last to analyzing the action of the boy who supplied the water at the pool. He slammed the glasses into the pool, and set them on the bench with a click as regular as a pump. Occasionally, however, he was indifferent. With some of his customers he handled the glasses as if they contained nectar, thus indicating his generous patrons. Once he stopped and dipped the glass into the pool with his own hand—a doubtful action—and extended it with a bow to a young lady who said “thank you” so sweetly that he blushed and stammered in reply.

All this fixed Clement’s attention, and as the young girl lifted the glass in her slim hand he wondered how she had escaped his notice for a single moment. A woman at his side said sighfully, “There is that consumptive girl again, she hasn’t long to stay.” She was as pale, as fragile, and as

lovely as the mountain columbine. Her face was thin, and her head shapely, but her eyes! They burned like rarest topaz—deep, dark and sad. Clement shivered as he felt them fixed upon him, and yet he could not turn away as he should have done.

He gazed at her with a sudden feeling which was not awe, nor compassion, nor love, but was all of these. He felt in his soul the subtlest sadness in all the world—the sadness of a strong man who looks upon a beautiful young girl who is dying.

Extremest languor was in every movement. She was dressed in dark, soft garments—very simple and graceful in effect, and her bearing was that of one accustomed to willing service from others. Her smile was as sad as her eyes which had in them the death-shadow.

Clement's action, the unwavering self-forgetful intentness of his look, arrested her attention, and she returned his gaze for an instant, and then turned away and took the arm of an elderly gentleman who stood beside her. She moved slowly, as an invalid walks when for the first time she is permitted a short walk in the outdoor air, leaning heavily on her companion.

The big miner roused himself and stood straight and tall, hesitating whether to follow or not—a sudden singular pain in his heart, as if he were losing something very close to his life.

He obeyed the impulse to follow, and moved down the

path, just out of reach of observation, he fancied. As he made way through the crowd he grew aware again of his heavy limbs, of his great height, of his swinging, useless hands. It had been so long since he had mingled with a holiday company, he appeared as self-conscious as a boy.

Once the fair invalid turned and looked back, but she was too far away for him to discern the expression of her face. He was not possessed of self-esteem enough to believe she had turned to look for him.

He followed them in their slow pace till they turned in at the doorway of the principal hotel of the village. They entered at the ladies' door while he kept on to the main entrance and rotunda. There was no elevator in the house, and the invalid paused a moment before attempting the stairway. It was pitiful to see her effort to make light of it all to her companion, who was quite evidently her father. She smiled at him even while she pressed one slim hand against her bosom.

Clement longed to take her in his arms and carry her up the stairway—it seemed the thing most worth doing in all the world—but he could only lean against the desk and see them go slowly stair by stair out of sight.

“Who are they?” he asked of the clerk whom he detected also watching them with almost the same breathless interest.

“Chicago merchant, G. B. Ross. That’s his daughter. She’s pretty far gone—consumption, I reckon. It looks tough to see a girl like that go off. You’d think now——”

Clement did not remain to hear the clerk moralize further; he went immediately to his own hotel, paid his bill, and ordered his baggage sent to the other house. He wondered at himself for this overpowering interest in a sick girl, and at his plan to see her again.

He reasoned that he would be able to see her at breakfast time, provided she came down to breakfast, and provided he hit upon the same hour of eating. He began to calculate upon the probable hour when she would come down. It was astounding how completely she occupied his thought already.

He struck off up the cañon where no sound was, other than the roar of the wild little stream which seemed to lift its voice in wilder clamor as the night fell. Its presence helped him to think out his situation. He had grown self-analytical during his life in the camp, where he was alone so far as his finer feelings were concerned, and he had come to believe in many strange things which he said nothing about to any friend he had.

He had come to believe in fate and also in intuition. A powerful impulse to do he counted higher than reason. That is to say, if he had a powerful impulse to run a shaft in a certain direction he would so act, no matter if his reason declared dead against it. The hidden and uncontrollable processes of his mind had given him the secret of "The Witch's" gold, had led him right in his shafting and in his selection of friends and assistants—and had made him a

millionaire at thirty-seven years of age. He was prone to over-value the intuitional side of his nature, probably—an error common among practical men.

Fate was, with him, luck raised to a higher power. What was to be would be; the unexpected happened; the expected, hoped for, labored for, did not always happen. All around him men stumbled upon mines, while other men, more skilful, more observant, failed. The luck was against them.

It was quite in harmony with his nature that he should be absorbed in the singular and powerful impulse he had to seek an acquaintance with that poor dying girl.

Dying! At that word he rebelled. God would not take so beautiful a creature away from earth; men needed her to teach them gentleness and submission. More than this, he had an almost uncontrollable impulse to go to her, and putting aside doctors say to her:

“I am the one to heal you.”

He had never had an impulse to heal before, but the fact that it was unaccountable and powerful and definite, fitted in with his successes. He gave it careful thought. It must mean something because it had never come to him before, and because it rose out of the mysterious depths of his brain.

She must not die! The wind, the mountains, the clear air, the good, sweet water, the fragrant pines, the splendid sun—these things must help her. “And I, perhaps I, too, can help her?”

Back in the glare of the hotel rotunda, with its rows of bored men sitting stolidly smoking, idly talking, his impulse and his resolution seemed very unmanly and preposterous. It is so easy to lose faith in the elemental in the midst of the superficial and ephemeral of daily habit.

CHAPTER II

Clement was an early riser, and, notwithstanding his restless night, was astir at six. The whole world had changed for him. It was no longer a question of ore and amalgams, it was a question of when he should see again that sad, slender woman with the hopeless smile.

He had now a great fear that she would not be able to come down to breakfast at all, but as her coming was his only hope of seeing her he clung to it. Eight o'clock seemed to him to be the latest hour that any one not absolutely bedridden would think of breakfasting, and at four minutes past the hour he entered the dining-room.

The negro waiter tried to seat him near the door, but he pushed on down the hall toward a little group near one of the sunny windows, which he took to be the sick girl and her father, and so it proved.

His seat at a table next to theirs brought her profile between him and the window, and the light around her head seemed to glorify her till she shone like a figure in a church window. She seemed not concerned with earth. He was more deeply moved than ever before in

his life, but he concealed it—the only sign of emotion was in the tremor of his hands.

He studied the sick girl as closely as he could without seeming to stare. She was even more lovely than he had thought. His eyes, accustomed only to rough women, found in her beauty that which was flower-like, seraphic.

Her face was very thin, and her neck too slender to uphold the heavy masses of her brown hair. Her hands were only less expressive of suffering than her face. The father was as bluff and portly and irascible as she was patient and gentle. He bullied the waiter because he did not know how else to express his anxiety.

“Waiter, this steak is burned—it’s hard as sole leather. Take it back and bring me——”

“Please don’t, father; the trouble is with me. I have no desire for food.” She smiled at the waiter so sweetly that he nodded as if to say, “I don’t mind him, miss.”

The father turned his attention to the country.

“Yes, there is another fraud. I was told it would help your appetite, and here you are with less than when you left Hot Springs. If I’d had my way——”

She laid a hand on his arm, and when he turned toward her his eyes were dim with tears. He blew his nose and coughed, and looked away after the manner of men, and suffered in silence.

Once she turned and looked at Clement, and her eyes had a mystical, impersonal look, as though she saw him afar

off, not as an individual but as a type of some admirable elemental creature. He could not fathom her attitude toward him, but he thought he saw in her every action the expression of a soul that had relinquished its hold on things of the earth. Her desire to live was no longer personal. She did all that she did for her father and her friends wholly to please them.

The desire to aid her came upon Clement again—so powerful it carried with it an unwavering belief that he could help her.

What was his newly-acquired wealth good for if he could not aid her? Wealth? Yes—his blood! He looked at his great brown hand and at his big veins full of blood. Why should she die when he had so much life?

Meanwhile his common sense had not entirely fled him. He perceived that they were not poor, and he reflected that they had probably tried all climates and all the resources of medical science; also that the father had quite as much red blood in his veins as any other man; and these considerations gave him thought as he watched them rise and go out upon the little veranda.

Clement was not a markedly humble person under ordinary conditions. He had a fashion of pushing rather heedlessly straight to his purpose—which now was to speak to her, to meet her face to face, to touch her hand and to offer his aid. Naturally he sought the father's acquaintance first. This was not difficult, for the waiters in the dining-room

had been pointing him out to the guests as “Mr. Clement, the meyonaire minah.” The newspaper correspondents had made his name a familiar one to the whole United States as “one of the sudden multi-millionaires of Gold Creek.”

The porter had “passed the word” to the head waiter, and the head waiter had whispered it to one or two others. It was almost as exciting as having a Presidential candidate enter the room. Clement was too new in his riches, however, to realize the extent of all this bustle about him.

When he rose to go one waiter removed his chair, another helped him lay his napkin down, a third brushed his coat, and the head usher kindly showed him where the door opened into the hallway. It was wonderful to Clement, but he laid it to the management of the hotel.

There were limits to his insanity, and he did not follow the girl out on the veranda, but when Mr. Ross came down a few minutes later to get a cigar Clement plucked the proprietor of the hotel by the arm.

“Introduce me to Mr. Ross, won’t you?”

The landlord beamed. “Certainly, Mr. Clement.” He took Mr. Ross by the lapel familiarly. “Ah, good-morning, Mr. Ross. Mr. Ross, let me introduce my friend, Mr. Clement; Mr. Clement you may have heard of as the owner of ‘The Witch’ and the ‘Old Wisconsin.’”

Mr. Ross shook hands. He was not exactly uncivil, but he was cool—very cool. “I have heard of Mr. Clement,”

he said. He softened a little as he got a good look at the powerful, clear-eyed young fellow.

The landlord expanded like one who has accomplished a good deed. "I thought so, I thought so. Mr. Clement, let me say, is a square business man. Whatever he offers you is worth the price!" He winked at Clement as he turned away.

Clement began, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Ross, for taking this liberty, but I wanted to know you and took the first chance that offered. I have no mine to sell—I want to know you—that's all. I wanted to meet somebody outside the mining interest. I saw you and your daughter at the pavilion last night. She seems to be not—very strong." He hesitated in his attempt to describe his impression of her.

The father's theme was touched upon now. "No, poor girl, she is in bad condition, but I think she's better. The air seems not to have made her worse, at any rate. I haven't much faith in climate, but I believe she has improved since we left Kansas City and began to rise."

He had a marvelous listener in Clement, and they consumed three cigars apiece while he told of the doctors he had tried and of the different kinds of air and water they had sought.

His eyes were wet and his voice was tremulous.

"The fact is, Mr. Clement, she don't seem to care about living—that's what scares me. She's just as sweet and lovely as an angel. She responds to any suggestion, 'Very well, papa,' but I can see she does it for me. She herself has lost