

Humble Folk

By C. B. LEWIS.

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In a way they had been engaged for a year or more, Tom Salters and Linda Green—in a way, I say, because the humble people living in the coves or scattered cabins on the sides and crests of the northern mountains do not speak of "engagements."

It is taken for granted that when a "young feller" "hangs around" the cabin of a mountaineer possessing a marriageable daughter he has matrimony in view, and when the nearest neighbors are called in to see the couple jump the broomstick or stand up before a traveling preacher to be made one there is no surprise and little comment.

The father of Linda Breen had no questions to ask of Tom Salters. He had known his father for years. Tom had as yet no questions to ask of Linda's sire. Neither Linda nor her mother had referred to the subject. Many times when Joe Breen and the young man were out hunting squirrels or walking to the village together Tom would suddenly say without preface: "Reckon me'n Linda better git hitched."

And the father of Linda would throw away the old quid, bite off another and after chewing away for a couple of minutes would reply:

"Yes, I reckon."

That evening the father would have a few words to say to the mother in private, and at a later hour she would casually remark to the daughter:

"Tom Salters wants you, and I reckon you'll be goin' in a few days."

Nineteen times out of twenty the marriage would follow. There would be a new squat of land taken up, a new pole cabin built, and another family would go on making mountain history. But in this case no marriage followed. It was all on account of the arrival of Tom Salters' uncle from a village in the lowlands. He was in business down there and wanted help, so he had come for Tom.

Tom had no education, but he had native wit. He was known to be a "right smart" young man. The uncle talked of a broader field, a chance for education and a rise in the world. Linda must wait. At the end of a year or two Tom could come back and marry her and take her away.

And in the twilight of summer's evening Tom and Linda sat on a log in front of her father's cabin, a space of a foot between them. Both looked into vacancy, and he told her of the plan.

He talked in a jerky, disjointed way, but she understood as well as if he had been a silver tongued orator. He had asked for her hand. He meant to marry her. He had no thought of disloyalty. The road seemed straight and plain to him, and he did not dream that there was a knife at her heart as she listened.

Men will never understand how far-reaching woman's intuition is. The girl followed Tom's words, and yet she saw months and months and months ahead of them.

Two or three times she instinctively reached out her hand as if to detain him, but drew it back without his having observed the action. Two or three times there were tears in her eyes, but she took care that he should not see them.

"Well, what do you reckon?" he asked as he had finished and the silence had lasted for a long minute.

"Better go, I reckon," was the reply.

What other answer could she have made, a tousled, barefooted, ignorant girl of the mountains, and yet would her womanly pride seek to detain him when he had proposed the separation?

They sat together for five minutes longer, and then they separated; she to enter the cabin and seek its darkest corner to let her tears flow and to shake hands with her father and mother and bid them goodby.

It may be said of the lovers that both could "write a scrawl or two and foot could read a scrawl or two," so scrawls passed between them. They were weakly at first, and then there were longer intervals. If Tom did not write, Linda could not answer. Then one day there came a neighbor who had seen Tom in person in his new field.

The speaker did not mean to wound or bruise, but he had seen a new Tom Salters, one who was no longer of those on the mountains. He had forgotten the crags and peaks for the streets of the town.

When the man had departed Linda's mother wanted to look her in the eyes. Linda wanted to do the same by her mother. Instead of so doing both turned their heads away. They said nothing of Tom.

What happened was all simple and natural. Tom Salters had entered upon a new life. It offered numberless attractions to the young man who had never traveled ten miles from the cabin in which he had been born, and it was but natural that he should soon begin to forget the old life and all that he had left behind.

His scrawls were indited at longer intervals and finally ceased altogether. He came to almost ignore the few mountaineer men he had known in other days. They looked at his new clothes, noted his speech and walk and went away shaking their heads. In their opinion this was rank disloyalty to the mountains.

By and by there came another messenger to the cabin in the cove where Linda waited. Again there was no desire to wound or bruise, but simply to impart news. Tom Salters was "shin-

ing up" to a handsome young girl down there in the town.

He had become almost a gentleman. No matter how right smart he had been before leaving home, he had surely become right smarter after his life among townfolk. He would never return. He would marry and settle down where he was.

At this and much more Linda listened to with her elbows on her knees and her head in her hands. She sat thus after the caller had departed, and her mother dared not break the silence. It was Linda herself who broke it at last by lifting her head and quietly saying:

"I never reckoned on his comin' back. We hasn't goin' to speak of him no mo'."

The mother crossed the room and patted the daughter on the shoulder, and the incident was closed. Mr. Breen was not even informed of the gossip.

Linda had not sung for months. She began singing now. She had not rambled from the cabin for weeks. She now began taking long walks. Laughter came to her lips once more, and when she stopped at the little post-office and was told that there was no letter her smile was not replaced by a look of disappointment.

"Linda's forgot about Tom and is gittin' perter than ever," remarked the father to the mother one evening as they sat alone.

The mother did not answer. She looked at him in contempt. As a mother she knew that Linda was simply breaking her heart. The true woman suffers most when she laughs most. She was watching Linda. There was an undefined fear that the girl's reck-

lessness spurr'd him to marriage.

Weeks passed, however, and nothing happened—nothing except that Linda grew pale cheeked and thin, and a note of defiance rang in her laughter. She was suffering and yet defying the pain.

Then came a crisis. She was a mile down the mountain road one day, seated on a bowlder where she had often sat before watching the highway winding down into the lowlands and the wild world she knew not of, when a human figure came into view half a mile below. She recognized it even at that distance. A blush came to her cheek, and her eyes dashed. Tom Salters was coming back at last.

She saw that he was dressed as she had last seen him and that he walked with weary step and dejected attitude. Until he was within a quarter of a mile the girl was blushing and trembling and ready to raise her hand and shout a glad welcome. Then she became a thing of stone, except that she moved her eyes to note his progress. He did not discover her until he was within a hundred feet. Then he dropped the satchel he was carrying and sprang forward, her name on his lips.

The girl slightly inclined her head, but there was ice in her look. "And aw you won't shake hands! You won't howdy! You won't say!"

She motioned to him to sit at her feet, and in a weary, hopeless way he obeyed. He waited a long minute and then in a husky voice began:

"I have come back to stay. I was a fool to go away. I was bo'n up yere, an' I might have known I wasn't fit for down there. Mebbe somebody told you that I tried to be one of 'em. Yes, I did. I wore shoes. I wore store

clothes. I tried to talk like 'em an' act like 'em, but I wasn't fitten. I thought I might be, but I never could be. Won't you speak to me, Linda?"

"Go on," she replied, still without looking at him.

"Mebbe—mebbe somebody from up yere told you about—about a gal down there. Yes, there was one. I fell in love with her, an' she—she made fun of me. She laughed at me. An', Linda, the fellers mocked me an' put upon me an' made game of me. I dun couldn't stand it no mo', an' so I have come back—come back to you—all. Won't you speak to me?"

For two minutes the girl sat and looked down the road as she had looked before. Then she rose, passed Tom and went up the road—went slowly up the road toward home and never looked back.

Unlearned, unlettered and ignorant of the ways of the world, she had the heart of the highest woman in the land, and she demanded expiation for a lover's disloyalty. Her mother read in her face what had happened and simply put an arm around her and whispered:

"There, there, child—by and by." One evening three months later Linda sat in the moonlight on the same old log at the door. Again her elbows were on her knees and her face in her hands. By and by some one knelt before her and lifted her head and looked into her eyes and said:

"Can't you do it now, Linda?"

"Yes, I reckon," she replied as she gave him her hand.

And that, too, was "just like a woman!"

LABOR NEWS

Bakers and Confectioners' International has decided by a very large majority to enforce the creation of a sick and benefit fund, from and after the first of next January. All bakers and confectioners belonging to subordinate unions who are under 45 years of age will have to contribute to the fund.

In Mertz, Germany, with 5,000 population, there are three unskilled to every four skilled workmen. Muelhausen, with 100,000 population, has sixty-nine unskilled laborers in every 100. In Strasburg, with a population of 175,000, there are two skilled to every three unskilled.

In the fall of 1792 the pioneer union of the shoe workers was organized in Philadelphia. It grew to be considered a power, and in 1796 a strike in all the shops of the city was ordered to enforce a demand for an increase in wages. It lasted but a few days, the employers recognizing the demand.

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