

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whittman
Darwin Thoreau Twain
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
Doré Dante Pushkin Alcott
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The Man in Lonely Land

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THE MAN IN LONELY LAND

by

KATE LANGLEY BOSHER

Author of "Mary Cary" and "Miss Gibbie Gault"

MCMXII

TO MY BROTHER

EDWARD PORTIUS LANGLEY

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I

GENERAL

Mr. Winthrop Laine threw his gloves on the table, his overcoat on a chair, put his hat on the desk, and then looked down at his shoes.

"Soaking wet," he said, as if to them. "I swear this weather would ruin a Tapley temper! For two weeks rain and sleet and snow and steam heat to come home to. Hello, General! How are the legs to-night, old man?" Stooping, he patted softly the big, beautiful collie which was trying to welcome him, and gently he lifted the dog's head and looked in the patient eyes.

"No better? Not even a little bit? I'd take half if I could, General, more than half. It's hard luck, but it's worse not to know what to do for you." He turned his head from the beseeching eyes. "For the love of heaven don't look at me like that, General, don't make it—" His breath was drawn in sharply; then, as the dog made effort to bark, to raise his right paw in greeting as of old, he put it down carefully, rang the bell, walked over to the window, and for a moment looked out on the street below.

The gray dullness of a late November afternoon was in the air of New York, and the fast-falling snowflakes so thickened it that the people hurrying this way and that seemed twisted figures of fantastic shapes, wind-blown and bent, and with a shiver Laine came back and again stood by General's side.

At the door Moses, his man, waited. Laine turned toward him. "Get out some dry clothes and see what's the matter with the heat. A blind man coming in here would think he'd struck an ice-pond." He looked around and then at the darkey in front of him. "The Lord gave you a head for the purpose of using it, Moses, but you mistake it at times for an ornament. Zero weather and windows down from the top twelve inches! Has General been in here to-day?"

"No, sir. He been in the kitchen 'most all day. You told me this morning to put fresh air in here and I put, but me and General ain't been in here since I clean up. He's been powerful poorly to-day, sir."

"I see he has." Laine's hand went to the dog and rested a moment on his head. "Close up those windows and turn on the lights and see about the heat. This room is almost as cheerful as a morgue at daybreak."

"I reckon you done took a little cold, sir." Moses closed the windows, drew the curtains, turned on more heat, and made the room a blaze of light. "It's a very spacious room, sir, and for them what loves books it's very aspirin', but of course in winter-time a room without a woman or a blazin' fire in it ain't what it might be. Don't you think you'd better take a little something, sir, to het you up inside?"

Laine, bending over General, shook his head. "No, I don't. I want sleep. I came home early to try and get a little, but —"

"You ain't had none to speak of for 'most a week." Moses still lingered. "I wish you'd let General come in my room to-night. You can't stand seein' him suffer, and you'll be sick yourself if you keep a-waitin' on him all night. Can't I get you a little Scotch, sir, or a hot whiskey punch? I got the water waitin'. They say now whiskey ain't no permanent cure for colds, but it sure do help you think it is. Experience is better than expoundin' and —"

Again Laine shook his head. "Get me some dry clothes," he said, then went to the table and looked over the letters laid in a row upon it. "Have a taxi-cab here by quarter past six and don't come in again until I ring. I'm going to lie down."

A few minutes later, on a rug-covered couch, General on the floor beside him, he was trying to sleep. He was strangely tired, and for a while his only well-defined feeling was one of impatience at having to go out. Why must people do so many things they don't want to do? He put out his hand and smoothed softly General's long ears. Why couldn't a man be let alone and allowed to live the way he preferred? Why — "Quit it," he said, half aloud. "What isn't Why in life is Wherefore, and guessing isn't your job. Go to sleep."

After a while he opened his eyes and looked around the book-lined walls. When he first began to invest in books he could only buy one at a time, and now there was no room for more. He wondered if there was anything he could buy to-day that would give him the thrill his first books had given. He had almost forgotten what a thrill could mean. But who cared for books nowadays? The men and women he knew, with few exceptions, wouldn't give a twist of their necks to see his, would as soon think of reading them as of talking Dutch at a dinner-party, and very probably they were right. Knowledge added little to human happiness. Science and skill could do nothing for General. Poor General! Again he smoothed the latter's head. For years he had barked his good-bye in the morning, for years watched eagerly his coming, paws on the window-sill as dusk grew on, for years leaped joyously to meet him on his return, but he would do these things no longer. There was no chance of betterment, and death would be a mercy—a painless death which could be arranged. But he had said no, said it angrily when the doctor so suggested, and had tried a new man, who was deceiving him.

"You are all I have, General"—his hand traveled softly up and down the length of the dog's back—"and somewhere you must wait for me. I've got to stay on and play the game, and it's to be played straight, but when it's called I sha'n't be sorry."

From a box on a table close to him he took a cigar, lighted it, and watched its spirals of smoke curl upward. Life and the smoke that vanisheth had much in common. On the whole, he had no grievance against life. If it was proving a rather wearisome affair it was doubtless his own fault, and yet this finding of himself alone at forty was hardly what he had intended. There was something actually comic about it. That for which he had striven had been secured, but for what? Success unshared is of all things ironic, and soon not even General would be here to greet him when the day's work was done. He blew out a thin thread of smoke and followed its curvings with half-shut eyes. He had made money, made it honestly, and it had brought him that which it brought others, but if this were all life had to give—He threw his cigar away, and as General's soft breathing reached him he clasped his hands at the back of his head and stared up at the ceiling.

Why didn't he love his work as he used to? He had played fair, but to play fair was to play against the odds, and there were times when he hated the thing which made men fight as fiercely to-day as in the days of the jungle, though they no longer sprang at each other's throats. On the whole, he preferred the cavemen's method of attack. They at least fought face to face. As for women—

He got up, stooped down, and patted General softly. "I'm sorry to leave you, old man, but you'll sleep and I won't be long. Why Hope didn't telephone what she wanted me to do, instead of beseeching me to come to her that she might tell me, is beyond male understanding. But we don't try to understand women, do we, General?"

The big brown eyes of the collie looked up in his master's face and in them was beseeching adoration. With painful effort he laid first one paw and then the other on Laine's hand, and as the latter stroked them he barked feebly.

For a moment there was silence, the silence of understanding comrades, then Laine turned away and began to dress.

II

THE REQUEST

Hands in his pockets and back to the fire, Mr. Winthrop Laine looked around the room which his sister, Mrs. Channing Warrick, believed was a library, and again wondered why she had sent for him instead of telephoning what she wanted. He wasn't going to do it. That is, if it were one of the old pleadings that he would come to her parties or go to some one else's he would decline to do it, and usually the important matter on which she must see him proved something of that sort. Five years ago he had cut out things of this kind and —

"Oh, Winthrop, I'm so glad you've come!" Laine stooped and kissed his sister. "And going out to prove it." In a gown of clinging silver over soft satin she was very lovely, and as he held her off he looked at her critically. "That is a pretty dress you have on, but there isn't enough of it. What on earth did you make me come for if you're going out? When a man is my age he is privileged to stay at home and enjoy himself, not —"

Mrs. Channing Warrick stopped the buttoning of her long white gloves and looked up in her brother's face. "Do you enjoy yourself when you stay at home?"

"I enjoy myself much more at home than in other people's houses. Where are you going to-night?"

"To the Warings. There'll be cards after dinner. I suppose you declined."

"I wasn't invited."

"Hilda wanted you, but knew it was useless." Again the big blue eyes were raised to her brother's. "What makes you so horrid, Winthrop? If you go on ignoring people as you do —"

"I'll have to have paid pall-bearers at my funeral, won't I? Not a bad idea. Well, why this summons to-night?"

Mrs. Warrick pressed the last button of her glove securely, eased her skirt over her hips, and sat down carefully. "To ask you to do something for me," she said. "Channing won't be back until tomorrow, and there is no one to meet her except Decker if you don't. Outside of an automobile Decker has no sense and —"

"Meet whom?" Laine flicked the ashes from his cigar into the grate. "Who is it you want me to meet?"

"Claudia Keith. She is a cousin of Channing's and lives somewhere in Virginia on the Rappahannock River, miles from a railroad, and has never been to New York alone before. I thought I had told you she was coming, but I see you so seldom lately that I forget what I tell you and what I don't. The children think it's inhuman. After a while you won't know how to behave in company, and what will your old books and your money matter if —"

"By and by nothing will matter, my dear, but Decker's honk will be heard before I understand what you're getting at, if you don't hurry. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to meet the nine-fifteen train from the South and —"

"Pick out an unknown person and bring her to a hostless house? I wish I was as nice as you think I am, dear madam, but I'm not. I suppose you also want me to apologize to your guest for your absence from home, tell her a pretty fairy tale and say —"

"If you'd say the right thing I'd like you to make up something, but you wouldn't. I certainly have no idea of breaking an engagement, however, just to be home when a country cousin of Channing's arrives. Being such an out-of-the-world sort of person she may think it is strange, so please tell her —"

"I'll tell her nothing." Laine lighted a fresh cigar. "I'm going home."

"But you can't! You're to stay to dinner, that's why I didn't telephone you about Claudia. The children chose taking dinner with you as their compensation for having to stay in on account of the

weather, and they're hanging over the banisters this very minute." Mrs. Warrick got up and with care straightened her skimpy skirts. "Please don't let them eat too much. They can have—"

"Not a bit more than they want." Laine took the white fur coat which the maid had laid on the chair a minute before and held it for his sister to put on. "All this sloppy stuff given to children of the present day will mean anemic men and women to-morrow. I'll take dinner with them, and if they are sick I'll take the blame, but not if the Virginian has opinions of her own concerning modern manners. Are you sure you're well wrapped?"

"Sure. I hope Decker can find her, but I doubt it. Maybe she can manage by herself. Anyway, I've done all I could. Good night, and please don't let the children eat too much of a mixture. You'll come and see Claudia, won't you?"

Laine shook his head. "I haven't time."

"Time! Of all nonsense!" She turned and kissed him. "The children will have you at dinner, anyhow, and that's why I sent for you. Good night, mean man!"

She gathered up her skirts, and Laine, following her to the door, at which the second man stood waiting to throw a roll of carpet down the snow-sprinkled steps to the car at the curb, watched it until the corner was turned, then walked toward the dining-room, where two young people threw two pair of arms around his legs and rent the air with two ecstatic shrieks.

"There's turkey and giblet gravy and salad and loads of things, Uncle Winthrop, and I am going to sit at the head of the table, and Timkins says I may pour the coffee for you in the library, and—"

"Mother said I could have some ice-cream and two pieces of cake if they weren't very big." And Channing Warrick, Junior, aged seven, made effort to remove Dorothea Warrick, aged ten, from her point of vantage next her uncle's right hand. But breath was lost in the high toss given him by the strong arms which had sent him in the air, and as he landed on his feet he laughed in gasping delight.

"Come on." Dorothea's voice was eager. "It's ready, and so am I, and at eight we've got to be in bed."

III

SCIENTIFICS

As he took his seat at the perfectly appointed table, Mr. Winthrop Laine nodded at first one child and then the other. "What very piggy relations I have," he said, opening his napkin. "Not a word of greeting to an ancient uncle, but just an announcement of what there is to eat. One would think you were starving."

"We are." Dorothea laid down her napkin and got up. "Excuse me for leaving my seat, but mother 'said we could have a good time to-night, and we can't if we're particular about manners. I hate manners. I guess I get it from you, Uncle Winthrop. I heard Miss Robin French say you didn't have any. She said she'd invited you to her house a dozen times, and you'd never been once, or made a party call or anything."

"What's a party call?" Channing's mouth was full of soup. "What's a party call, Uncle Winthrop?"

"It's the penalty one has to pay for being invited where one doesn't want to go. What were you saying, Dorothea?"

"I've forgotten. Channing is just as rude as if he were somebody! Oh yes—I started to say I'm sorry we were piggy about mentioning the food first. We've been crazy to see you. We had something to tell you. I think I'll sit down here right by you; it's too far off behind those flowers, and I'll kiss you now if you don't mind." And Dorothea's arms were around her uncle's neck and her cheek was laid lovingly to his.

"Of course." Laine unfastened the arms, drew the child's head down, kissed her, and patted the little hands before sending their owner to her seat. "Being the beginning of a woman you kiss and make up, which is more than your heathen brother does. Not another one!" The dish of almonds was withdrawn from Channing's reach. "Let me see your hands, sir! And you a member of polite society! Ah, here's the turkey. And it's the drumstick you said you

wanted, did you, Channing? Drumsticks were put on turkeys just for little boys. I always got the drumstick and the gizzard."

"I don't want any drumsticks!" Channing's lips quivered. "I want—"

"And he can't have the gizzard, Uncle Winthrop, really he can't. Maybe you don't know about Fletcherizing, and you ought to be thankful you don't, but you can't Fletcherize a gizzard, not if you chew all night, and if there's breast enough for everybody, I think he'd better have that. And I'll take plenty of gravy, please, and stuffing, if there's oysters in it. Wait a minute!" Dorothea's hand went up and her head went down. "I'd like to say grace: 'I thank Thee, Lord, for this sure-enough food and for Uncle Winthrop being here, and please let it happen again and don't let it make us sick. Amen.'"

Through the grace Channing's fork had been suspended, but his jaws had not stopped work; and at the last word he leaned forward and made a dive for the olives, two of which he put in his mouth at once.

To the man at the foot of the table the situation was perplexing. His niece and nephew, born of wealth and surrounded by abundance, were eating with the eagerness of little pigs; eating as if afraid their plates would be withdrawn before they had had their fill. On the tip of Channing's nose a drop of gravy glistened in the candle-light, and Dorothea was swallowing much too rapidly for health.

Looking up, she caught her uncle's eye and leaned back in her chair. Hands on her breast and eyes half closed, she sighed regretfully. "I'm full already, and we're not half through," she said, and beckoned to the butler, who came closer. "What kind of salad is it, Timkins, and is there mayonnaise on it or that thin stuff?"

Timkins coughed slightly behind his hand. "It's mushrooms and white grapes with mayonnaise, I think, Miss, but—"

Dorothea's eyes closed tightly. "Just my luck. I've never tasted it but once, and it's perfectly grand, Uncle Winthrop. Mother had it for lunch the day that scraggy-looking woman and her daughter were here from London. Mother said she was Lady somebody, but

our cook is much nicer-looking on Sundays. She didn't eat her salad."

"You ate it." Channing's fork was pointed accusingly at Dorothea.
"You licked the plate."

"I certainly did." Dorothea stood up, shook herself, sat down again, and carefully arranged her knife and fork. "We were in the pantry. Antoinette was ill and Timkins let us come in. You see, Uncle Winthrop, it's this way. We are scientifics, Channing and I. We've been brought up on a book, and we don't get enough to eat. Mother says everything has been learned out of science now—I mean about how much children can eat, and how much they can drink, and how much air they can sleep in, and how to breathe right, and Antoinette says when we were little we used to be weighed every day. And that's why we stuff so when we get a chance. I'm ten, going on eleven."

"And I'm seven, going on eight"—Channing had not yet yielded the turkey in sight for the salad to come, and his fork was still being steadily applied—"and all we have for supper—"

"Is bread and milk." Dorothea's hand waved silence to Channing. "Antoinette says the milk is magnificent, but I'd rather have something with more taste that isn't so grand. I wish I'd been born before all this science had been found out. If we sneeze we have to be sprayed, and if we cough we're sterilized or something, and the only word in the English language Antoinette pronounces right is germs! You'd think they were ghosts, the way she lifts her eyes and raises her hands when she says it. And she don't know what they are, either. Did you kiss me when I was a baby, Uncle Winthrop?"

"I did."

"In the mouth?"

"In the mouth."

"Well, they don't let anybody kiss babies that way now. But if ever I have any I'm going to let people kiss them and squeeze them, too. I mean nice people. I don't believe in scientifics for children."

"But, my dear Miss Warrick" — Mr. Laine was also waiting on his young nephew — "suppose your husband does. Surely a man should have some say in the upbringing of his family!"

"Father don't." Dorothea leaned forward and selected an olive critically. "Father would let us have anything we want, but he says mother must decide. He's so busy he hasn't time to see about children. He has to make the money to buy us —"

"Milk." Channing pushed his plate back. "I hate milk. Gee! I'm full. You can have my salad, Dorothea, if you'll give me your ice-cream. It didn't make you sick the day you ate all that lady left."

"You ate leavings!" Laine's voice made effort to be horrified.

"Dorothea Warrick ate leavings from a lady's plate!"

"It wasn't leavings. She didn't touch it. I was peeping through the door and I heard her say she never ate trash. It was grand. Nobody told me not to eat it, and I ate."

"An inherited habit, my dear." Laine put the almonds, the olives, and the mints beyond the reach of little arms. "Once upon a time there was a lady who lived in a garden and she ate something she ought not to have eaten and thereby made great trouble. She had been told not to, but being a woman —"

"I know about her. She was Eve." Dorothea took some almonds from her uncle's plate and put one in her mouth. "She was made out of Adam's rib, and Adam was made out of the dust of the earth. Ever since she ate that apple everybody has been made of dust, Antoinette says."

Channing sat upright, in his big blue eyes doubt and distress. "Was Dorothea and me made out of dust, Uncle Winthrop?"

"Dust, mere dust, my man."

For a moment there was silence and seeming thought, then Dorothea's head bobbed up and down. "Well, we can't help it, and there's no use letting things hurt that you can't help! But I don't think mother knows, Uncle Winthrop, and please don't tell her. She