

# ENDURING PROMISES *of the* HEART by Penelope Pottifer: VOLUME TWO

BY VALERIE LOVELESS

John got tired after many hours of hiking rough terrain while tracking a herd of deer. It was now afternoon and he decided to take a little break as he took his pack off his back and opened his bed roll. He rolled it out underneath a tall pine tree that afforded him plenty of shade from the afternoon sun.

“It’s no wonder Lavy thinks I always sleep on the ground,” he said aloud to himself. “I always keep my bed on my back.” John lay back and noticed a rock was protruding up through his slim bed roll poking him in the ribs of his back. He rolled over and lifted the edge of the roll and removed the offender. Then he rolled it back out and lay back down. He listened to the sounds of the breeze through the leaves, and a bird chirped here and there, and he quickly fell to sleep.

John dreamed of a time he was in Canada and he was walking through the streets of an old logging town. He was chasing after a pretty girl with bouncy, amber-blond curls. He just wanted the chance to talk to her. He pushed through tall loggers that all seemed to be ten feet tall, but he could not squeeze through the crowd fast enough. He called to her, “Miss!” but she never turned around. He almost got close enough that he could reach out and tap her on the shoulder, but before he did a large, shaggy, gray dog jumped in his face, paws on his shoulders, and knocked him over, it began licking his face and he was unable to push it off. John woke up to realize that something was, indeed licking his face. He blinked his eyes open and looked up into the face of a little black bear cub. The cub stood on John’s chest and began to lick his face again with a warm, wet, soft tongue. John carefully lifted his head. He saw another bear cub digging in his pack, trying to get at some dried beef he had wrapped in a sack, tucked deep down into the bag.

John looked around at his camp. There was no sign of the mother bear, but she was likely not far off, if not just out of sight. John pushed the little cub off his chest, it was easy-- unlike in his dream, and reached for his shotgun. He used the barrel as a hand hold and the butt as a brace to pull himself up to a crouched position then he checked to see if his gun was loaded. It was. That was good.

John lifted the butt of the gun into his shoulder and kept it pointed in front of him as he slowly and quietly crept around. He wasn’t afraid of bears, generally. They usually left you alone, but if you got between a mother bear and her cubs, you could say your prayers and say goodbye to the world because she would have no mercy. John silently crept over to his pack and pushed the little bear off. It made an adorable growling noise and then went after its sibling, playfully swatting at it.

John went to grab the shoulder strap of his pack but before he lifted it to his shoulder, he heard a crashing of branches behind him and a fierce roar. He turned toward the sound just in time to see the mother bear barreling towards him. He thought fast and put his gun between himself and the bear. There was no time to try to shoot it. She had him. She pinned him down on his back, but he held her back from tearing through his jugular with his shotgun as a shield, holding back the fierce jaws and angry paws of the beast.

John knew that if he could get the gun to go off now, it would scare her and give him the chance to get away, so he used his legs to try to lift and push the bear off him long enough to pull back on the slide and position his finger on the trigger.

Mother bear came back down on John's gun, her hot breath and wet slobber hitting him in his face, he pulled the trigger and the gun shot off with an echoing bang. Mother bear jumped back and ran away from John, but her cubs went the opposite direction, still leaving John between an angry mother bear and her babies.

*Not good*, John thought. She would undoubtedly double back and attack him again until she either got ahead of him with her cubs and felt they were out of danger, or she or John were dead. John grabbed his pack and threw it on his back. He left his bed roll though, not having enough time to roll it up. He was going to try to get ahead of the cubs. That way mother bear would catch up with them and John would be well away.

John raced through the thick underbrush and jumped over boulders agilely, his shotgun still in hand. He could hear the baby bears crashing through the trees up ahead and calling for their mother. He easily overtook the cubby little creatures and decided he would try to scare them back toward their mother. "Hey!" He shouted with arms raised in the air. "Go on! Get!" The little bears, half curious paused, and half scared turned and headed back the way they had come.

"There." John said to himself. "No harm done." He rubbed his strained neck from the exertion of pushing a 600-pound bear off himself. He had a few bleeding scratches on his hands and forearms, but nothing too severe. Then John heard horses galloping his way. He realized there was a trail just another hundred yards in front of him. He watched as two horses with one rider, a small blonde woman, raced past. He hoped, for her sake, she would keep going and her horses wouldn't see the bear and spook.

John wanted to make sure that he got out of the bear's territory, he was certain he was near the valley that funneled into the logging road and going toward humans was the best way to get out of bear country.

John walked quietly toward the setting sun. He was disappointed that he had lost his bed roll. It would be rough to sleep on the bare ground without any blankets, but he could hike back up in a few days and retrieve it. Maybe the loggers would let him borrow a cot at their camp. John was almost to the road when he heard the cranky mother bear growling and roaring again. John froze. He lifted his gun to his shoulder and looked around cautiously. The light of the day was dimming. John thought he had a better chance seeing the bear coming if he were out on the open road. He really hoped he wouldn't have to shoot a mother bear, but if it came down to her or him, he chose him. He crept out into the road and headed in the direction of the logging camp. He was probably a few miles from it, and they often allowed the trappers to bed there with them.

John heard a rustling and the roaring of the bear behind it. He lifted his gun again to the tree line and waited for her to come out at him. He was surprised when instead he saw a woman, her dress torn to shreds and her face and hands bleeding. She looked terrified and fell to the ground, protecting her neck and head with her hands. Then came the bear. It crashed out of the trees in a fury of fur. John saw the bear going for the woman and he still didn't have the heart to shoot the mother of two cubs so he ran with all his might, and just as the bear was about to pounce down on the woman John rammed the bear with his shoulder, throwing all of his weight into it.

He felt the bones of the creature meeting with his and his vision went black momentarily. He and the bear rolled over each other a few times and then separated as the bear scrambled to get up, dazed.

John, still with gun in hand, lifted the gun to his shoulder and pointed it at the bear. She stood on her hind legs and let out another roar. John fired a shot off just over her shoulder, as a warning. Stunned, she got back down on all fours and snorted as she shook her massive furry head. "Go on!" John yelled. "leave us be and find your cubs!" John knew she couldn't understand but hoped she would obey, because he would not have time to load his gun again. She stumbled back a few steps, protested weakly, then turned and ran

back into the tree line. John chased after her yelling and waving his arms, so that she would not come back for him again. He prayed she was sufficiently scared enough to stay away from him.

John ran to the woman in the road. “Hey, hey, it’s alright.” With wide and frightened eyes, she unhooked her hands from behind her head and looked at John.

“Lavy? What are you doing out here?” He asked as he pulled her into his arms. She was shaking.

“Nan, she brought me up here then stole my horse and left me for dead!” Lavender took a deep breath and pulled herself out of John’s arms. He stood up and took her by the arm, assisting her up.

“That Nan.” John sighed. “Everyone knows this is bear country.”

“I didn’t.” Lavender huffed, “I’ve never been up here in my life. I didn’t even know which way to go back to town once I got chased off the trail by that stupid bear.

“She’s got a couple of cubs. They get very angry if you come between them and their cubs, and I’m afraid I had already worked her up before she found you.”

“Thank you for your rescue. I thought I would be a supper for sure, I was prepared for the end.”

“Are you alright? Are you hurt?”

Lavender looked herself over, besides a few scratches and her dress being torn all over the bottom of her skirt, she was fine. Then she looked over John. He had blood dripping down his arms, and a brutal looking cut across his forehead. “You, however, are not alright.” Lavender took a white hanky out of her skirt pocket and put it to John’s head wound. He winced in pain.

“I didn’t realize she had got me.” He said, smiling.

“It’s not as bad as it looks. It’s just a scratch but a bleeder.” She took his hands and gently tried to wipe the blood from them as well but most of it had already dried.

“See, I’m fine as well, looks worse than it is.”

“John, I hate to impose upon you further, but I need to get home.” Lavender said, her eyes pleading for further rescue.

“I’m afraid I can’t help you with that.” John said. Lavender’s heart sank. Her father was right. He was just another ill-mannered mountain man. “At least not tonight.”

“Oh.” Lavender’s brows knit together.

“I was headed to the logging camp for the night. I don’t have a horse, so I would never be able to get you back to town before morning, so we will have to sleep there, and I’ll borrow a horse to get you home first thing in the morning. Come on, we better get a move on.”

“I—” Lavender started to protest, but she knew it was hopeless. She would have to sleep in the logging camp and there was nothing she could do about it.

They walked side by side for an hour, not saying much. It got dark and Lavender kept tripping on bumps and rocks in the road. She groaned slightly.

“Are you alright?” John stopped and Lavender stopped too.

“It’s my feet. I’m not wearing walking shoes, you see?” Lavender’s fine boots were hard soled and afforded her no comfort or flexibility walking on such rough terrain.

“No, matter,” John said as he lifted her off the ground and into his arms in one fail swoop.

“OH!” Lavender said as he took her greatly by surprise. “Thank you.”

“I’m going to have a talk with that father of Nan’s when we get back to town tomorrow. What’s his name? Paul?”

“Pauly.” Lavender said quietly as she was being gently rocked in Johns strong arms, sleepiness was coming on.

“That was a dangerous stunt she pulled, leaving you up here alone! At the end of the day-- no way to get yourself back home. If I hadn’t come along you would be dead. No doubt about it. If I had any say in it, she would be jailed. I know that’s harsh, putting a young lady in jail, but this is serious disregard. Maybe now your father will appreciate the kind of gentlemen I am when I bring you home to safety. Don’t you think Lavy?”

But Lavender didn’t respond. John looked down at her face and saw that she had drifted off peacefully to sleep. He kissed her forehead and kept walking. It wasn’t long before he got to the logging camp and quietly asked for a bed for the night. They pointed out a small shack of a cabin that had a few cots in it. He laid Lavender down on a cot and gently tucked her in, then took a bed roll that was piled on the far wall with several others and took it out side to sleep by the fire.



Lavender awoke and first noticed a musty smell around her. She opened her eyes and was confused as to where she was. She looked around and saw several small dusty cots, empty. There was daylight streaming in through holes and slits in the walls and roof of the small cabin she was in. Then she remembered about Nan, John and the bear. In the distance she could hear saws and axes, occasionally a man would shout something. She lay in the cot for just a few minutes thinking about what had happened to her. She began plotting how she would take care of Nan when she got home, and how she would explain to her father about spending the night in a logging camp with the man that her father was adamant about her staying away from. At first Lavender fancied the thought that her father would be pleased that John saved her life and he would allow him back into the store. Maybe in time he would even allow John to talk to her.

Lavender sat up and felt the soreness of her whole body. Hiking through the woods in a corset and fine ladies boots left her feeling like she had been dragged behind a horse. The pain shot through her and made her want to cry. She instantly became grumpy and made up her mind about what to do about John. She would tell him as soon as she saw him.

She heard a gentle knock on the door. “Come in,” her voice creaked.

“How are you this morning?” A bright eyed, and fresh-looking John stooped down as he entered through the low cabin door. He had clearly washed and even shaved. He looked more handsome than ever. Lavender had to catch her jaw from hitting the floor.

“I’m fine. I’m ready to go.” She said sullenly.

“Alright. Do you want some coffee or tea first? It’s a long way home, even by horseback.

“Yes, I remember. I rode most of the way up here myself.” Lavender frowned.

John shook his head. Lavender knew she was being unpleasant with him and was waiting for him to chastise her for being so rude when he had just saved her.

“I’m so sorry this has happened to you.” He sat on the cot next to hers and took her hand gently. “I’ll get you to the comfort of your home as soon as possible, I promise.”

Lavender sighed. Now she felt bad for her behavior. He was truly the kindest gentleman she had ever met. He was an enigma. How does a mountaineer gain such manners? “Thank you.” She smiled, more politely. “I’ll take a coffee before we go.”

“Of course, I’ve got some ready for you.” John said as he stood. Lavender tried to stand as well but realized that her feet were so sore, she couldn’t put much weight on them. She winced in pain and took several painful steps. John looked back at her and before she could say a word, he whisked her off her feet. He carried her to a large boulder and set her gently down. There were sounds of a sawmill and axes nearby, but Lavender could see no one. All the loggers must have left for work before she awoke.

“There we are.” He said, as he handed her a coffee in a blue, speckled, enamel covered mug that had been bent too many times to count. “Sorry, there is no milk or sugar.”

“Thank you. It’s fine.” Lavender said as she sipped the bitter drink carefully. “John,” Lavender began as John sat closely next to her on the large rock. “I think it would be best if you-- we kept my rescue a secret from my father.”

John said nothing. So, Lavender felt compelled to explain. “My father is not a reasonable man, Mr. Buxton. He—He will not see this as a rescue. He will probably think you kidnapped me. Pauly and my father, they never see the bad in Nan. Nothing will be done regarding her, and if my father thinks you just happened to chance upon me in the mountains... Well... He won’t think that it was chance, I’d hate to hear what he would accuse you of.”

John shook his head in agreement, he smiled but it didn’t look sincere.

“I know this is a terrible way to thank you for saving my life.” Lavender looked down at her coffee shamefully.

“We better get you home now.” John said as if nothing grievous had previously been said. “Let’s get a move on.” He took her cup from her and threw out the rest of the coffee on the ground then lifted her up and walked her over to a horse that was saddled and ready to go. He carefully helped her up on the horse then lifted himself up. Without saying a word, he urged the horse on, and they galloped off down the road.



After hours of silent riding at full speed they were just a mile away from town. John stilled the horse and jumped off.

“What are you doing?” Lavender asked.

“You ride into town and tell your father that you found your way to the logging camp yourself. Tell them that Big Jim lent you this horse and let you stay the night.”

“Oh. Thank you. I’m sorry it must be this way. You understand, don’t you?”

John looked up at Lavender, his expression was mysterious to Lavender. He took her battered and scratched hand and kissed it gently. “I won’t give up, Lavy.” He looked into her eyes, “I won’t give up on you.”

Lavender blinked in surprise. She thought John would never talk to her again, being that she would be keeping his rescue of her a secret. “Good bye, Mr. Buxton,” she said as she kicked the horse in the flank and it walked away, John walking the opposite direction. She looked back at him, and he was looking back at her. He waved and smiled. She blushed as she waved and smiled back.

To be continued...