JACK BALLINGTON, FORESTER

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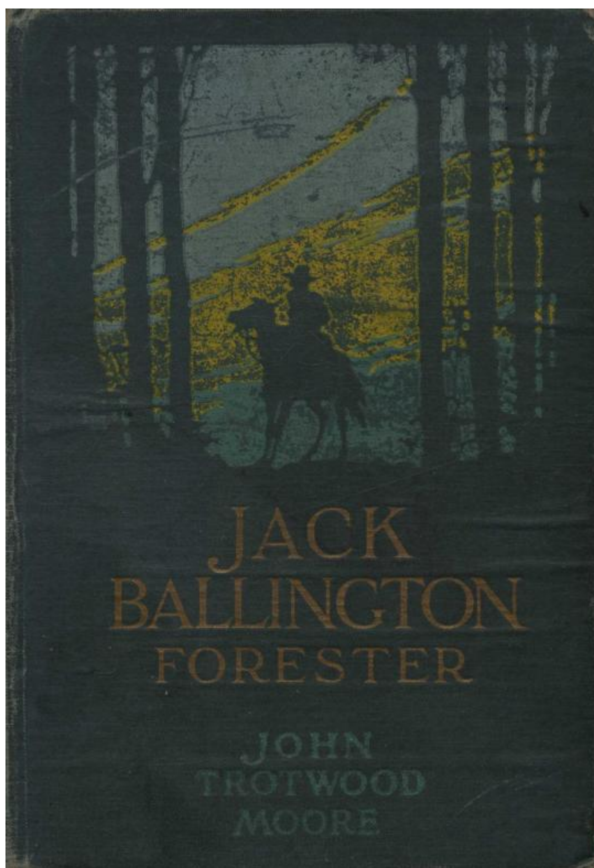
JACK BALLINGTON
FORESTER

BY

JOHN TROTWOOD MOORE



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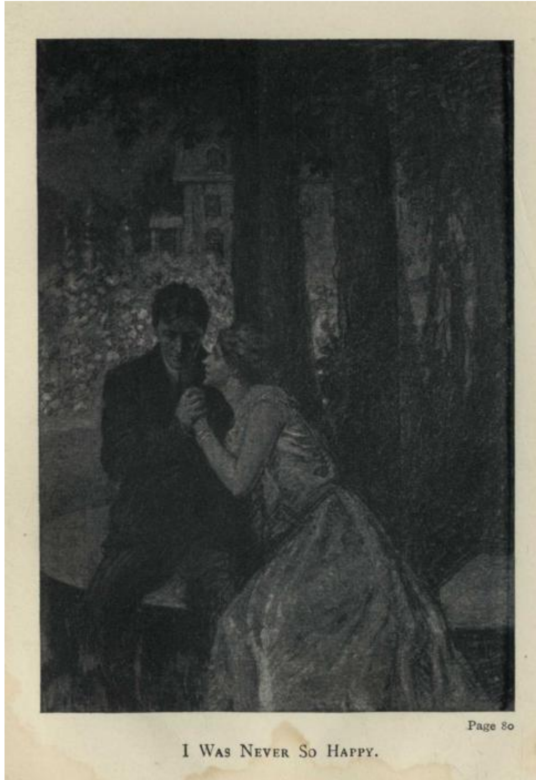

I WAS NEVER SO HAPPY (Page 80)

AUTHOR OF "OLD MISTIS;" "A SUMMER HYMNAL;"
"THE BISHOP OF COTTONTOWN;"
"UNCLE WASH," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE GIBBS

THOMAS LANGTON
TORONTO, CANADA.

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TO THE TWINS
HELEN AND MARY DANIEL MOORE

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"Stop Her—He'll Kill Her," I Cried

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FOREWORD

I am the child of the Centuries. I am the son of the Æons which were. I have always been, and I shall always be. To make me it has taken fire, star-dust, and the Spirit of God—the lives of billions of people, and the lights of a million suns.

I have grown from sun and star-dust to the Thing-Which-Thinks.

It were the basest ingratitude if I were not both thankful to God and proud of my pedigree.

What has come to me has been good; what shall come will be better: for I am Evolution, and I grow ever to greater things. Life has been good; death will be better; for it is the cause of all my past, making for a still greater future.

And this I know, not from Books nor from Knowledge, but from the unafraid, never silent voice of Instinct within me, which is God.

My debt to the past is great: I can never, in full, repay it; for they, my creditors, passed with it. They left me a world beautiful: shall I make it a world bare? They left a world bountiful: shall I leave it blazed and barren to the sands of death?

I am in debt to the Past. Shall the Future present the bill to find that I have gone to my grave a bankrupt? Find that I have wantonly laid waste the land, leaving no root of wild flower, no shade of tree, no spring that falleth from the hills?

Shall I destroy their trees for the little gain it may bring to my short Life-tenantry? Shall I make of their land a desert by day and a deluge by night? Shall I stamp with the degeneracy of gullies my own offspring, and scar with the red birth-mark of poverty the unborn of my own breed?

I live, charged with a great Goodness from the Past: I can die, paying it, only

by a greater Kindness for the Future.

I
THE HEIR OF THE BLUEGRASS

JACK BALLINGTON, FORESTER

CHAPTER I
SOUL-DREAMS AND THE SOIL

Those who live near to Nature learn much: for it is only by living close to her that we learn from her. The best advice ever given on longevity was from the cheery old gentleman who said: "To live long, live naturally; eat what you want, and walk on the sunny side of the street."

School children think that some wise man made all the hard rules of grammar that grown-up folks try to teach them. They do not know that the child-man learned to talk first and that the rules were made from his speech. It is like the simple people at the circus who think the trained horse is dancing to the music; it is the music that is dancing to him. From the facts of life we draw our rules just as the scholars made rules of grammar from the facts of language.

Nature is the One great Fact.

I was thinking of one of her facts the other day—she has so many—but one I had noticed very plainly: the man who lives close to her is an optimist.

Let the farmer fail year after year, and still he plants, hoping. Let the merchant fall behind one year and he is shaken; another year, and he quits. One season of deep water-hauling sends the fisherman home to his fields. When the wild game vanishes the pioneer hunter becomes the pioneer farmer. The merchant, the lawyer, the doctor,—there never was one who did not dream, betimes,

over his books, that he would yet live to retire and till his acres.

Every failure in life goes back to the soil for a new start.

That is the fact; now for the rule. It is this: God intended that man should be, first of all, a soil-worker. And tilling the soil includes not only planting, but bringing all growing and living things thereon to strength.

Rearing things on the soil is man's natural vocation, since neither drought, nor flood, nor failure, can shut out from his heart that instinct of hope which has come down through so many centuries of soil-loving ancestors. The hoping instinct has been housed in him so long that it is part of his heredity.

Maritime nations found empires, but not religions. Religions come from the soil. Men, living in the open, watching their flocks by night, find in the eternal wonder of the soul-questioning stars that which satisfies their own souls.

Imagine fighting Rome founding a religion! Or bookish Greece! Or the trading Saxon!

Religions come from mangers. All great soul-dreams were born amid flocks and herds.

This is my own story, and the telling of it shall be in my own way. And as I am not a writer, but a forester, doubtless my telling will be all awry. For I have seen enough of life to know that the generals who have won in the field of fiction, like the generals who have won in the field of fact, have won because they have had the drilling.

And in my case the drilling has been only trees—trees, and their children, the flowers.

CHAPTER II
LITTLE SISTER

This is my story, as I said, and the telling of it must be in my own way. That is why I am giving this chapter first—because it happened first—four years before the real story began. Another reason is that in the telling of it I can set forth the characters of the old general, my grandsire, who believed in fighting; of my Aunt Lucretia, his daughter, who believed in pedigrees; of Eloise, the beautiful and daring one, who believed in dancing and riding and shooting, and in making those who loved her miserable; of Colonel Goff, an Englishman, who believed in horses and hounds; and of Little Sister, who believed in Uncle Jack; and even of

myself, Uncle Jack, who believed in trees.

Little Sister is the three-year-old daughter of my brother Ned Ballington, who, with his lovely wife, Thesis, and his major domo, Uncle Wash (a colored gentleman of the Old School), and his other live things and birds, resides on the farm adjoining ours.

But Little Sister, whose real name is Mildred, and her brother, two years younger, who was baptized Edward, but whom Uncle Jack had nicknamed Captain Skipper, because nothing could keep him still, spent the most of their time at The Home Stretch, the home of their great grandsire, General John Rutherford, where also lived their Aunt Lucretia, and Eloise, and Uncle Jack.

It was either very hot or very cold on those days when Uncle Jack did not drive them over to spend the day, and maybe a night, too. Once in a great while the footing was too slippery for the pony. But these omissions occurred, at the most, perhaps twice each summer and winter; for the heart of the Middle Basin, that beautiful bluegrass country in which they live, beats in the breast of Summer.

John Rutherford, the First, built The Home Stretch in 1800. It adjoined the lands of Andrew Jackson, and the very spirit of the old fighter hangs over the place. For John Rutherford had loved him—nay, had lived, fought, and died for him—at New Orleans. There is a tradition that Old Hickory himself named the place—in fact, that John Rutherford owned it for no other reason than that his horse beat Andrew Jackson's in the home stretch. The bet was a thousand acres of land. The race track may still be seen at Clover Bottom, just across the way, where Stone's River makes a bend around a hundred acres of land, rich as ever the crow made a granary of, and as level as Chalmette Plain, where Jackson's riflemen stopped the British before New Orleans.

Little Sister was a fair, frail, sensitive little tot. Her bright blue eyes, pale pink face and dark brown hair kept one thinking of full summer moons rainbowed at night. And her temper—she was fire and powder there—a flash, maybe a clenched small fist, a small foot brought down in sudden scorn—an explosion—and then she was sobbing for forgiveness in your arms. That was Little Sister.

Once she slapped Aunt Lucretia in the face. "I can't see where in the world she gets her temper from," Aunt Lucretia said; "for if there is an angel on earth it is Thesis, her mother. General Rutherford" (Aunt Lucretia always called her father General Rutherford), "this child ought to be spanked till she is conquered. Her mother sends her over here expecting us to make her behave."

"Tut, tut, Madam," said the General (he always called his daughter madam), "that is not the way to break colts. That kind of a conquering would spoil her. She'll need all of that temper, when she knows enough to control it, to get through life and land anywhere near the wire first. Besides, with her sensitiveness, don't you see she is suffering now more than if we had punished her? If she

were a plug now" (for the General hated nothing so much as a plug), "she would never be sorry till you made her sorry with a beating. But the conscience of a thoroughbred beats hickory, and gentleness, Madam, is away ahead of blows in everything but war—and we are not fighting now."

Then to make sure that she did not get a whipping, Uncle Jack, who was eighteen and preparing for college, would snatch her away from Aunt Lucretia and take her out to see the colts. At sight of them her troubles vanished; for her love of all live things which are born on a stock farm was as deep as her Ballington blood. A great burst of sunshine would spread over her conscience-stricken face.

"O Uncle Jack, aren't they just too sweet for anything? Do let me get down this minute and hug them—every one!" And Uncle Jack would let her, if he had to catch each colt himself.

The clear-cut way she talked English! And her great heart of motherhood! These were the two wonderful things in a tot so small. It was not difficult to see where she inherited the first. But how could so tiny a thing have such a great mother-heart? She loved everything little—everything *just born* on the place. The fact that anything in hair, hide or feathers had arrived was a cause of jollification. "O do let me see the dear little things!" would be her cry. And she generally saw them if Uncle Jack were around.

One day they missed her from the house and Uncle Jack quickly tracked her to the cow barn. It had occurred to him that the day before he had shown her the Short-Horn's latest edition, a big, double-jointed, ugly, hungry male calf, who slept all day in a bedded stall, a young Hercules in repose, and only waked up long enough to wrinkle his huge nose and sleep again.

There Uncle Jack found her. She had climbed over the high stall-gate to pet and coddle the great calf. She had placed her own beautiful string of beads around his tawny neck.

"Come out of there," laughed Uncle Jack. "What do you see pretty about that great ugly calf?"

"O Uncle Jack," and she sighed affectedly, "I am truly sorry for him. He is not pretty, to be sure—and so I have given him my beads. And he doesn't seem to be very bright, nor at all well mannered, poor dear—but—but," she added reflectively—"he has a lovely curly head and he seems to be such a healthy child!"

On another occasion they missed her. It was nearly night. Everybody started out in alarm to hunt for her. Aunt Lucretia was the first to find her, coming from the brood-sow's lot.

"Where in the world have you been, child?" she asked as she picked her up.

"Playing with the little yesterday-pigs," said Little Sister. "And Aunt Lucretia, I ought to have come home sooner, I know, but I kissed one of the cunningest of the little pigs good night, and all the others looked so hurt, and squealed so

because I didn't kiss them too, I just had to catch and kiss every one before they would go to sleep."

Inheritance had played a tremendous part in Little Sister. Most children crow and lisp and talk in divers languages before they learn to talk English; while some never learn at all. But not so with her. The first long word she attempted was perfectly pronounced. The first sentence she put together was grammatically correct. The correctness of her language for one so small made it sound so quaint that Uncle Jack had her always talking. Her earnestness and intensity only added to her originality.

Pete was a little darky on the farm whose chief business was to entertain Little Sister when everything else failed. His repertoire consisted of all the funny tricks of a monkey. But his two-star performances were racking like Deacon Jones' old clay-bank pacer and playing 'possum. Little Sister never tired of having Pete do these two things. They were very comical. Everybody knew Deacon Jones, with his angular, sedate, solemn way of riding, and the double-shuffling, twisting, cork-screw gait of the old pacer. The ludicrous motions of the pacer had struck Pete early in life, and he had soon learned to get down on all-fours and make Deacon Jones's horse ashamed of himself. The imitation was so perfect that Ned and Uncle Jack used to call in their friends to see the show, which consisted of Pete's doing the racking act, while Little Sister, astraddle of his back, with one hand in his shirt collar, and the other wielding a hickory switch, played the Deacon.

One evening, before company, Pete had paced around so many times that he was leg-weary. Little Sister, astride his back, whacked him in the flanks vigorously and exclaimed: "Come, pace along there, damn you, or I'll put a head on you!"

The company nearly fell out of their chairs, while Thesis blushed and Ned stammered an apology. Then he remembered that only a few days before he had heard his grandsire, the swearing old Indian Fighter, make the same remark to Pete for being slow about bringing his shaving water; and he knew that if Little Sister was proud of anyone, it was of her great grandsire, who fought valiantly with "Stonewall" in the Valley.

Ned and Thesis gave the old gentleman a talk, and begged him to be careful of his oaths in the presence of Little Sister: but when he had heard it, he laughed more than he had laughed for a year, and straightway proceeded to buy her a doll that cost a gold eagle, and was as large, and nearly as beautiful, as Little Sister herself.

The spring that Little Sister was four years old, the General, as was his custom

every morning before breakfast, went out to the barn and paddock to see the brood mares and colts. A stately brown mare, ankle-deep in blue grass, stood in the paddock nearest the house, under a great maple tree, its falling branches almost concealing her. She turned every now and then in a nervous, unhappy way, and, going up to the brown, new-born weakling of a colt lying in the blue grass, and which seemed unable to rise, she lowered her shapely head till her nozzle caressed it and then she whinnied softly. Something was very badly wrong and she knew it.

The old General had been looking on for quite a while, frowning. When the General was sorry for anything he expressed his sympathy by a nervous strutting and swearing. When he was angry or fighting—as his battles in Virginia proved—he was as silent as a stone wall, and as staunch. *Then* he never swore.

"The damned little thing's deformed, Jim," he said to the negro stable boy who was standing near. "Poor old Betty," and he rubbed his favorite saddle mare's nose, "she is distressed."

There was the sound of fox hunters coming up the pike. The hounds passed first, in a trot, nosing. Then the two hunters rode up to the rock fence where the General stood. One of them rode a docked hunter with ungainly long head and sloping rump and shoulders. Both horse and rider were unmistakably English; the man was middle-aged, portly, and handsome. The other rider was a young man riding a Tennessee saddle horse.

"Good morning, General," said the Englishman, saluting, "can't you join us to-day? Thought we'd exercise the pack a bit. The blooming old chap was out last night—over in the hills after a negro's chickens—and we'll take up his trail and have a little chase. Fawncy striking him in that stretch of Stone's River bottom—aw—but we'll have a chase!"

"No—no—Goff," said the old General, impatiently, "I'm pestered to death with this little colt. I don't know what to do with it."

The hunter glanced over into the paddock.

"O that old ambling saddle mare of yours! Aw—you know what we did with them in England—two centuries ago—anything with that Andalusian jennet blood in it—that old pacing gait—killed 'em—aw! exterminated 'em, sir! Always told you so. They're fit for nothing but for old women to ride to church on."

The younger man broke out into a boisterous laugh. His face was round and weak, his mouth wide, his eyes insincere, and his laugh was affected and betook of his eyes.

"The Colonel's right, Grandpa. Tell Jim to kill it an' come on with us."

The old General glanced at him quickly. "Braxton Bragg Rutherford, my son, when you enter West Point you will find it a rule there that very young officers do not try to impress their views on their superiors until asked."

”Colonel Goff, suh,” he said, turning to the Englishman, ”that old mare has carried me for fifteen years and never stumped her toe. Her dam carried me through the Valley campaign with Stonewall Jackson. She helped us chase Banks and Fremont out of God’s country. She saved my life once because she could outfoot Yankee cavalry. You were with me and know it. I owe the whole family a debt I can never repay, and suh, I’ll be damned if I don’t hate to kill her colt.”

Colonel Goff looked over the fence at the colt lying in the grass. Then he said to the negro, aside: ”Pull out its legs, my man—there—that will do. Hold them up!”

The legs were knuckled over at the ankles, deformed evidently. When it tried to stand it came down limply in a heap.

Colonel Goff turned and, beckoning to the negro, whispered: ”Jim, take it into the stall there and destroy it without letting the General know.” Then he added in a louder tone, ”Come, General, we’ll wait till you get your cup of coffee and join us.”

But the General shook his head. Rough he was and used to war and death, yet this was old Betty’s colt. Goff, knowing his stubbornness, saluted, and rode on after the hounds.

The old man stood thinking. He examined the deformed limbs again. Very sternly he looked the colt over. Very sternly he reached his conclusion, and once reached it was irrevocable. Jim, knowing, put in apologetically:

”Giner’l, hit’ll never walk, we’ll hafter kill it.”

”I don’t want to see it done, Jim. I’ll go in. Po’ ole Betty—that she should be played off on like that!” He stroked the mare’s neck with a kindly pat, and went in.

Breakfast was ready for him. He sat down, abstracted, worried. Uncle Jack, his grandson, eighteen, slender, and slightly lame, and who didn’t love to talk of the war, nor the thought of going to West Point, and who wanted always to study about trees and a better way of farming, sat next to Little Sister. The General told him of his misfortune. ”It is a great disappointment to me, suh, old Betty, my favorite saddle mare—I’ve ridden her for fifteen years—the best mare in Tennessee, by gad, suh, the very best!

”It’s weak, puny and no-count, Jack,” he went on as he tested his coffee—”deformed or something in its front, and knuckles over, can’t stand up.”

”That’s too bad,” said Uncle Jack; ”I’ll go out after breakfast and see what I can do for it, Grandfather.”

”No use,” said the General, gruffly. ”It’ll be merciful to destroy it. I’ve told Jim, too; it’ll be better off dead.”

Little Sister had not seemed to listen, but she had heard. This last remark of her grandsire stopped a spoonful of oatmeal half way to her mouth. The next

instant, unobserved, she had slipped from her chair and gone to the barn.

"I tell you, Jack, I think this breeding business is a poor lottery," went on the old General after a while. "To think of old Betty, the gamest, speediest, best mare I ever owned—"

There were protesting screams from the barn. They were instantly recognized as Little Sister's. Uncle Jack glanced at her empty place, paled, kicked over two chairs and a setter dog which blocked the door, and rushed to the barn.

A tragedy was on there. A negro stood in old Betty's stall with an ax in his hand. On some straw in a far corner lay a sorry-looking colt. But it was not alone, for Little Sister stood over it, shaking her tiny fist at the black executioner, and screaming with grief and anger:

"You shan't kill this baby colt—you shan't—don't you come in here—don't! How dare you, Jim?"

The flash of her keen blue eyes had awed the negro in the doorway. He had stopped, hesitating, in confusion.

"Go away, Jim," said Uncle Jack firmly. "Come, Little Sister, let us go back to grandpa." But for once in her life Uncle Jack had no influence over her. She was indignant, grieved. She fairly blazed through her tears and sobs: she would never speak to grandpa again as long as she lived! As for Jim, she would kill him as soon as she got big enough! She wouldn't even speak to Uncle Jack unless he promised her that the baby colt should not be killed!

"Poor little colt," she said as she put her arms around its neck and her tears fell over its big, soft eyes, "God sent you last night and they want to kill you to-day."

Uncle Jack brushed away a tear himself and, stooping, picked up the colt's feet, one at a time, examining the little filly.

Little Sister watched him intently: to her mind Uncle Jack knew everything. The tears were still in her eyes when Uncle Jack looked up quickly and said in his jolliest way: "Hello, Little Sister, this filly is all right! Deformed be hanged! She's sound as a hound's tooth, just weak in her tendons and we can soon fix them. Give her a little time for strength. No, they'll not kill her, little one—" and he caught the little girl up, giving her a hug.

The tears gave way to a crackling little laugh. Little Sister was dancing in the straw for joy! What fun it was to help Uncle Jack fix her up! She brought him the cotton batting herself and gravely watched him as he made stays for the weak tendons and bent ankles. Finally, when he had the filly fixed and had called Jim, who held her in his arms to the mother's flank until she had had a good breakfast, the little girl could not keep still. In a burst Of generosity she begged Jim's pardon and said she intended to give him a pair of grandpa's boots that very day. In return for this Jim promptly named the filly "Little Sister."

But having once said that the colt was "no-count," the old General refused to notice it. "Po' little thing," said he, a month after it was able to pace around without help from its stays, "po' little thing! What a pity they didn't kill it."

But Uncle Jack and Little Sister, with the help of old Uncle Wash, nursed it, petted it and helped old Betty to raise it. And the next spring their reward came in a nervous, high-strung but delicate looking little slip that was indeed a beauty. The General would surely relent now! But those who thought so did not know the old man. He merely glanced at the weanling and remarked again: "The damned little weakling! That old Betty should ever have played off on me like that!" He turned indifferently away. Whereupon both the filly and the little girl turned up their noses behind his back.

The fall that the filly was three years old the big county fair came off, with pacing stakes for the best three-year-old. The purse was a thousand dollars, but greater still was the glory!

The old General had entered a big colt named Princewood for the stakes. This colt had been carefully trained for two seasons and had already cost his owner more than he was worth. "But it's the reputation I am after, suh," the General said to the driver, "the honor of the thing. Our farm has already taken it twice, you know."

Now Uncle Jack was something of a whip himself. He could not ride because of a lame knee, so he became an expert in driving. The old General had failed to notice how all the fall he had been giving Betty's filly special attention with a hot brush now and then. Wrapped up as he was in Princewood's wonderful speed, he had not noticed that Uncle Jack had frequently called for his light road wagon, and that he and Little Sister, now six years old, had taken delightful spins down the shady places in the cool byways, where the footing was good and there was no gravel or stones, and nobody could see them when they asked the high-strung little filly "to step some," as Little Sister expressed it.

Then at supper one night, when Colonel Goff had dropped in as he often did, the old General began to brag about Princewood's wonderful speed and of the way in which his favorite grandson, Braxton Bragg, could drive him.

"Why, Goff," said the General, "that boy is a wonder! He drove the colt to-day a mile with one hand in 2:25."

Uncle Jack winked at Little Sister, and she had to cram her mouth full of peach preserves to keep from laughing. The General saw and guessed there was a joke on him somewhere, and being one of those who loved to joke others, but did not love to be joked himself, he flushed red and began to praise Braxton Bragg openly, hoping it would go home to his other grandson who sat so quietly at the table winking at Little Sister and with something evidently up his sleeve....

"Yes, suh," said the General after a while, "Princewood will simply eat up

the field, and Braxton Bragg—ay, there's a boy for you!—he'll be a great soldier some day—Braxton Bragg will simply drive the hoofs off the whole bunch."

Then Eloise looked up. Eloise was fifteen and lithe, with her red-gold hair just being put up, and so graceful and beautiful that Little Sister worshipped her, as did also Uncle Jack and Braxton Bragg, and Colonel Goff for that matter.

Eloise had caught the wink that Uncle Jack gave, and understood it in an instant. For Eloise knew things, especially about horses.

"And you really think Braxton Bragg and Princewood will eat up the field," she said ever so sweetly and respectfully to the old General. "My, I'd like ever so much to take the field end of that," she added indifferently, but winking at Uncle Jack.

"My dear," said the old General, "I don't gamble with sweet school girls; but if Princewood fails to make good, I'll just give you that fine Whiteman saddle you've been wanting all the time——"

"I can't play a one-sided bet like that; it isn't fair," said Eloise. "I'd like to be as generous as you are, sir, and put up a forfeit. But dear me," and she sighed like the exiled queen in the fairy tale, "I'm dowerless and own nothing."

"Good," said Colonel Goff. "Brave girl! now that lets *me* in. General, just let me take the bet off your hands. Now then, Eloise, I'll take you dowerless—for you are a dower all unto yourself," he said, bowing grandly, "and I'll bet you—mark me now—I'll bet you that new English saddle mare I've just imported, against your own sweet self, that my friend the General's Princewood will win that race!"

"It's a go," cried Eloise, rising gracefully and taking his hand, "red-leather-bargain-done-for-ever," she added laughing.

The General looked pleased—he showed it in his bland smile and the vigorous nodding of his head. He whispered to Goff: "By gad, Goff, but all joking aside—she'll make you the finest wife alive!"

Eloise heard and looked over at Jack with a smile, but Jack's head was down on his breast and there was no smile on his lips.

Never remotely—in any way—in his dreams—(and being a poet, he dreamed often) had he thought of Eloise belonging to anyone but him!...

It looked as if all the county was there on the fine fall day of the race. It was one of those sweet old country fairs where the yeomanry of the hills and the lassies from the valleys make holiday, and the heifers with polished horns share the glory with the fillies, bedecked with ribbons, and stepping proudly in air to music.

The field was a large one; for the purse was rich and the honor even richer.

"And Princewood's a prime favorite, suh," chuckled the old General as he walked around, holding by the hand a little girl who went everywhere with him, and who wondered whether, after all, Uncle Jack really knew. And so hearing so

much that was braggart of Princewood, she all but lost faith: as is the way of us all if we do not touch, now and then, the shrine of our Truth.

Eloise was there, now flirting with the country beaux, and now riding Colonel Goff's saddle mare in the rings for blue ribbons. By two o'clock she had the mare's head-stall full of them, and one big one adorned her own riding whip as "the best lady rider." Seeing her beauty and grace, Colonel Goff murmured to himself:

"By gad, but I'll make her Lady Carfax some day."

The bell had already rung twice for the race and all the owners and horses were supposed to be preparing to score down, when a new entry drove in. He sat in a spider-framed four-wheeled gentleman's road cart instead of in a sulky, which would make him at least four seconds slow in a race like that. And he wore a cutaway business suit and a soft felt hat, and not a gaudy jockey cap and silk coat as did Braxton Bragg, who drove Princewood and was bragging about what he was going to do.

The newcomer nodded familiarly to the starting judge and paced his nervous looking little filly up the stretch.

"Who is that coming into this race in that kind of a thing?" asked the old General of a farmer standing near, for his eyesight was failing him.

"Why, General, don't you know yo' own grandson? That's young Jack Ballington," said the man.

"The hell you say!" shouted the excited old man. "Why dammit, has Jack gone crazy? He always was a fool!" And he clattered over a bench with his wooden leg and hobbled up the stretch to head off the pair.

"By gad, suh, Jack," he shouted, "are you going to drive in this race?"

Jack nodded and smiled, while he soothed the nervous little filly with gentle words.

"And what's that little rakish looking thing you've got there?"

"That's Little Sister, Grandfather," he said, good-naturedly. "I'm really just driving her to please our little girl and see how she'll act in company."

The old General was amazed, indignant, outraged. "Why, you're the daddy of all damned fools that ever lived!" he blurted. "They'll lose you both in this race! Get off the track, Jack, for God's sake, and don't disgrace old Betty this way—why, that old mare—I've ridden her for fifteen years! Why, I rode her dam clear through the war. She helped chase Banks and Fremont out of the valley—why that little no-count thing—Jack, she'll drop dead if you extend her."

Jack smiled. "It's just for a little fun, Grandfather, and to please the little girl; for it's her pet, you know. I'll just trail them and if she's too soft I'll pull out the second heat. But she's better than you think," he added indifferently.

The old General expostulated, threatened; but Jack laughed good-naturedly

and drove off. Then the old General repented. It was comically pathetic to hear him call out: ”Jack, Jack, don’t tell anybody it’s old Betty’s colt, will you? Promise me, boy. Why, I rode her for fifteen years. I rode her dam all through the valley of Virginia with Stonewall Jackson.” But Uncle Jack drove on, chuckling to himself: ”I’ll bet ten to one he’ll be telling it before I do.”

When the little filly got into company she was positively gay. She forgot all about herself, and like great people the world over she lost her nervous ways when the great effort was on, and went away at the go of the starter with a rush that almost took Uncle Jack’s breath from him.

He pulled her quickly down. ”Ho—ho, Little Sister—if you do that again you’ll give us all dead away, and that will spoil the fun.” He glanced quickly around to see if anyone saw him. But the crowd were all busy watching Princewood. So Uncle Jack trailed behind, the very last of the bunch, but with the little filly fighting indignantly for her head all the way.

Nobody seemed to see them at all, that is, nobody but a little girl, who clung nervously to the old General’s middle finger, and wondered, with her child’s faith fiercely battered, if her Uncle Jack, her Uncle Jack who knew it all and could do anything, if he, the mighty, was really going to tumble from his lofty throne in her mind?

Then she got behind the General’s big Prince Albert coat tail, and wiped away two nervous little tears. Princewood had paced in way ahead. She stuck her fingers in her ears, so that she could not hear the shouts, and her little nervous lips closed tight with indignant shame. When she took them out the shouting was over, but she heard the old General say, ”Wasn’t it a walkover? That fool grandson of mine has always made me tired. I don’t believe the little thing can go round again.”

This cut into the soul of the little girl. She pretended to go after a glass of the big red lemonade that they sold under a near-by tree; but really she went to cry in the dark hall under the grand stand and to wipe her tears on the frills of the pretty little petticoat Mother Thesis had made for her just to wear to the fair.

There was one who knew, however, because she really had horse sense. She was riding a beautiful English saddle mare across the infield, and she looked like a young Diana in her dark blue riding suit, and she sat her horse like the Centaur’s wife. As she rode across the grassy infield, Braxton Bragg came up, and catching her mare by the bit, stopped her short. His little round, weak face was focused into a smile. Eloise flushed, vexed that he should seize a moving mare by the bit, for it is against all good horsemanship to do it; just as one pilot would resent another interfering with his wheel. She looked down on him without a smile.

”Say, Eloise,” he said as one who seeks a compliment, ”how do you like the way I did it?”

Long ago Eloise had said of Braxton Bragg: ”Answer a fool according to his folly.” Therefore she smiled dryly now and said, ”Beautifully. How entirely and completely you do fill that sulky seat, Braggy.” Braxton Bragg, not knowing what satire was, took this for a compliment, and smiled again. Then, encouraged, he whispered low to her: ”You’ve never given me a chance to show you just how much I could do for love of you, Eloise.”

”Oh,” she answered, ever so sweetly.

”Yes,” he sighed affectedly, trying to look love-lorn, cocking his head with affected sadness and succeeding only in looking ridiculous.

”Oh,” she said sweetly again. If he had had sense he would have seen the sweetness was for ends of her own. ”Oh, how sweet of you and how cruel of me, Braggy.” Her tone was very clear. If he had only looked down the past he might have remembered that whenever she had called him Braggy she had been planning to do him.

He sighed again, which shut his mouth the second time. Eloise, demurely, but inwardly nearly bursting, did likewise. ”Well?” he asked, expectantly.

”Yes,” said Eloise encouragingly.

”I mean—can’t—I now?”

”There’s never a better time than the present, Braggy, you remember the school books say.” Then she reached down and, pretending earnestness, said:

”You’ve got a walk-over, it’s plain. It’s yours for the asking, Braggy. And so—well—it’s big odds I’m giving you, Braggy,” and she laughed like a wood thrush, ”but if you win that race I’ll be yours alone henceforth and forever, Braggy.”

He paled, taking her hand, which fell sidewise down past her saddletree, in his.

”Oh Eloise—dearest,”—he started bookishly, but ended in his own way, which was mentally unlearned: ”Gee—but I’ll win or bust!”

”And if you don’t,” began Eloise, ever so indifferently. ”Of course you will,” she smiled; ”but if you don’t, Braggy, now dear, why you’ll just send me that set of seal-skins for that fashionable hennery I’m going to at Washington?”

”Good! Good!” he cried boisterously. ”What odds you give me! You against a hundred dollar seal-skin! Oh, my, let me get busy!” And he rushed off, smirking back sillily at her.

”A saddle mare, a saddle, and a set of sealskins all in one day. Well, that’s going some,” Eloise chuckled as she rode up to the fence where Uncle Jack stood. Reaching down from her saddle, she tapped him on the shoulder.

He looked up into her laughing eyes, and flushed, for he had always loved her.

”Jack, Jack, you are a dandy! You did it beautifully! O, the stride of that

rush before you called her down! Say, how do you like my mare? Isn't she a beauty?"

"If you say so," he said slowly, testing her, "I'll lay up the next heat; let *him* win." He had remembered Goff's bet.

She flushed. Then she rapped him over the shoulder lightly with her whip.

"Why, Jack, that would be horrible! Do you think I'd have made the bet if I hadn't believed in you, loved you, brother mine?"

Jack flushed. "Do you, Eloise—do you—"

Eloise laughed. "Like a sister. Aunt Lucretia says we've got to marry each other, so what's the use of my kicking? But listen—now—say, Jack—you've played right into my hand. I'll need that Whiteman saddle for this beautiful thing. So hold up a while till I ride over and close that bet with the General. Now is my time! He's crazy about that great lobster of his and I could win The Home Stretch on this bet if I had anything to put up."

She wheeled her horse, threw a kiss down at Jack, and galloped off to find the General.

When Little Sister got back from her cry the General was gone. He was over at the table talking to Uncle Jack.

"Now, Jack," said he, "don't disgrace old Betty any more. Why, I rode her fifteen years. I rode her—"

Uncle Jack had always been so quiet that it was a distinct surprise to the old General when he showed an unsuspected grit and gameness.

"Hang her old dam, Grandfather, and your cursed old war in Virginia! Drop dead, will she? Well, sir, you are likely to see something drop yourself before this heat is over." And he turned on his heels and walked off.

The old General looked at him astounded, and with positive admiration.

"By gad," he said to himself, "he's either crazy or got more sense than us all. By gad, to think of him getting mad and having grit like that! He may make a soldier yet," and he chuckled with pride.

Now Uncle Jack meant business. He changed his cart for a sulky. Again they got the word. Princewood, having the pole and all advantage, flashed ahead in his big lumbering pace, Little Sister in the very rear, struggling for her head. Slowly, gradually, Uncle Jack let her have it. Steadily, like moving machinery set in grooves of steel, she came up on them, relentlessly, mercilessly cutting them down, one after another. At the half there was nothing but Princewood ahead and no one even saw her yet, for the shout was: "Princewood! Princewood!" This heat would make the race his.

"Princewood's got 'em, General!" yelled a countryman, his mouth so wide open from excitement that tobacco juice ran down his chin whiskers and into his shirt collar. "Princewood's got 'em! There's nothin' that kin head 'im!"

”He’s got ’em!” yelled the partisans of the old General, packed solidly around him and cackling with half crazy joy. ”Now jes watch sum’thin’ drop.”

But a girl sitting on her horse and looking over the crowd saw it differently. A daring, knowing, triumphant smile lingered around her mouth. And not in heaven, nor in the star-lighted lake below, ever shone two stars rippling into little wavelets of glint and glory like those in the eyes of her.

The General, seeing her, shouted: ”Yes, watch it drop! No saddle for you, young lady!”

Down went her keen, fun-loving eyes to those of the old soldier. ”It’s dropped already, General—see! I own that saddle now!”

Something had happened. The little filly felt the reins relax and a kindly chirrup come from her driver. In a twinkling, in the whir of a spinning wheel, she was up with the big fellow, half frightened at her own speed, half doubting that it was really she who did it, half sobbing with the keen thrill of it, like a great singer who for the first time hears her own voice filling a great hall.

”*Princewood! Princewood!*” shouted the crowd around their idol, the General, ”*Princewood’s broke the record!*”

The old General rose in happy anticipation: ”Yes, boys, it looks like the record is busted by—”

Here his jaw dropped as if paralyzed; for his trained eye took in the situation and the word died in his mouth. What was that little bay thing that had so gamely collared his big horse? Who is that quiet-looking fellow in the soft hat handling the reins like a veteran and leading the march like Stonewall’s Foot-Cavalry in the Valley? His grandson, Jack, was in a cart; this man sat in a sulky. And Jack was driving a little limp-waisted, hollow-flanked—

”Who the devil—” he began, when someone clinging to his middle finger looked up, great smiles chasing tears down her cheeks and so excited she could scarcely breathe.

”Why, it’s Little Sister, Grandpa! Now isn’t she just too sweet for anything?”

The next instant the little filly laughed in the big pacer’s face, who had quit in a tangled break, as much as to say: ”*You big braggart duffer, have you quit already?*” and then, like a homing pigeon loosed for the first time, she sailed away from the field.

”Princewood—Princewood has broke the record—” shouted the farmer who hadn’t caught on and was shouting for Princewood, but was looking at the champion pumpkin in the window of the Agricultural Hall.

And then the old General lost his head and what little religion he had left. For he jumped on a bench, his wooden leg rattling as he danced up and down, like a flock of goats in a barn loft, and this is what the town crier in the courthouse

window, a mile away, heard him yelling:

"Damn Princewood! Damn the record! It's Little Sister—Little Sister—my own mare—old Betty's filly. I rode her fifteen years! I rode her dam—"

"Oh—" sang out mockingly a beautiful girl, sitting her horse beside him, with a laugh that sounded like a wood thrush's. "But I've won a saddle and a seal-skin cloak and the sweetest mare in the world! Say, Braggy," for Braxton Bragg just then drove in, the last of the whole procession—"that engagement is all off, isn't it?"

Then Uncle Jack, who had stopped and got out of the sulky, came up, his face aglow. And she, her eyes still fired to starry beauty, leaned from the saddle and kissed him.

"You darling Jack, how can I ever get even for this?"

"I said he'd be telling about it first," said Uncle Jack, wagging his head at the crowd, where the old General stood telling them that it was *he* who had bred the great little filly and that it was *his old mare* who was the dam of her!

"And the little old no-count thing did play off on you sure enough, didn't she, Grandpa?" came from the tear-eyed tot beside him, so naively in earnest and telling such a plain unvarnished truth that even the old General's partisans had to wink and nudge each other as they walked off. The old General laughed as he picked her up and said: "And here's the little girl that saved her, gentlemen, the smartest girl in Tennessee; and she's got more horse sense than her old granddaddy!"

There was one more heat, of course; but it was only a procession, and those behind—and that meant the field—cannot swear to this day which way Little Sister went....

II

"A TWILIGHT PIECE"

... "And all that I was born to be
and do, a twilight piece."
—*Robert Browning.*

CHAPTER I
THE FLAME IN THE WOOD

Home again and Tennessee in April! When the train swept over the Highland Rim, the woods, not yet in full leaf, seemed afire with the clustering blooms of the pink azaleas. On both sides, in little sudden and short valleys, and farther off on dwarf-oak hillsides, they blazed. Far beyond their faint, mist-like flush mingled with the sky line in the distant openings, and seemed an arc of soft sunset clouds.

Cream-white dogwoods rose up in open spaces against the blurred, pink backgrounds, clustering like evening stars in rose cloud-banks. Anon they grew in separate groups, down in little dells, and each of these tiny bowls was full of them.

Their odor, soft and fragrant, swept through the train, dew-damp and like old memories in sweetness.

This seems to me to be the main thought about all wild flowers, that they alone are God's idea of beauty and not those that bloom in gardens and hot houses through the skill of man. If, from any cause, such as the gas from a comet's tail, men should vanish in a night, none of these last would live to bloom again. Like their makers they would pass from the earth. But like Nature's Maker the wild sweet things of the wood and meadows and mountains would bloom again, although man were not, mirroring God's idea of beauty even to the desert.

If it is Nature's great desire that that which is best shall live, the wild flowers have Nature's underwriting of approval. Ancient Linnæus said of one unfolding: "I saw God in his glory passing near me and bowed my head in worship."

Through all the ages those who see, whether poet or planter, think the same great thoughts. Tennyson said of the flower plucked from the crannied wall, that if he could know what it was he should know what God and man were. They bring a larger thought even than that, for they prove that God *is Beauty.*

Even as I was thinking this the train rushed through what had once been a wood, but was now a burnt and scarred spot, bare of life. The azaleas in their beauty, were the flame in the woods which Nature had kindled: but this desolate spot was the flame which had come from the hand of man...

When the train stopped for water at the little station I got out and gathered a great bunch of flowers for Eloise....

Then as we dropped down into the Middle Basin, filled with the blue grass in its spring glory, whole acres of hepaticas twinkled up at us like fallen fireflies.

At last I was home again, and home with a new mission, new ideas. For four years I had studied trees and flowers in a German university. I had prepared

myself to be a forester. Now I was looking out of the car window at the wantonness that had turned hillsides into gullies and rich loam into beds of clay. The little streams that I had remembered running from a familiar wood, now crawled, winding amid sand dunes bare of trees. The folly of it hurt me. I saw that here was work for me to do.

CHAPTER II
THE HOME-STRETCH

How familiar were the hills around the little Hermitage Station! And how grateful was the sweet clear air of its dew-bathed meadows after the noise and smoke of the train!

My Aunt Lucretia imprinted two chilly kisses from tight-shut lips on each of my cheeks. She was a large, strong, stout woman, with a fine, high nose and full mouth, which, when it would, could settle quickly into close-shut lips of determination. Her eyes were hazel and keen: kindly when quiet; but quick to flash and far-seeing.

Without a word and very deliberately she looked me over through her gold nose glasses. I smiled as I remembered how often I had seen her pass on a horse she was purchasing in the same way. Down the six feet of my height her keen eyes went, dwelling, I imagine, a bit longer on my legs where the old lameness had been in my knee since my boyhood sickness from typhoid fever. Again I smiled, for in that same way I had seen her linger over the doubtful tendon of a horse. But the noted German surgeon, Hoffman, had, in my first year at Berlin, skillfully removed the floating cartilage, and I saw my Aunt Lucretia's face light up, satisfied with the straight limb, and my weight upon it. Then she looked lengthwise across my shoulders, and a surprised pleasure shone in her eyes. I had grown from a frail boy into an athlete.

We had not said a word. I stood smiling at her, and she, as was her custom, would not speak until her survey was done. Very deliberately she looked me over. I had seen her examine Young Hickory, lineal descendant of Andrew Jackson's famous Truxton in the same way.

I was eager to say something and get to Eloise. I had caught a glimpse of her face at the surrey's door.

"I thought you would grow into that," Aunt Lucretia remarked, as she read-

justed her glasses. Then, as if to impress on me her long expressed thought, she added, ”You have grown beautifully up to your pedigree, Jack.”

I laughed. ”Well, if you have passed on me, here goes,” I said boisterously, as I seized her around the neck and gave her a kiss, which knocked off her glasses.

”Tut—tut, Jack, that will do! Kissing is silly and thoroughly unsanity. There is Eloise waiting for you—but no kissing—no hugging her—none of it,” she added.

I saw the straight, fine figure draw back half haughtily into the carriage, and a half-protesting look flash for an instant over the pretty face, profiled through the open space. She threw back her head in the old tribute-demanding way, and her half-closed lids veiled her eyes under great curving, brown-red brows. I caught a gleam of the old daring fun in them, as she smiled and held out both her hands, taking mine.

”Awfully glad to see you, Jack—welcome home.”

My heart betrayed itself in the quick glance I gave her. She had developed so wonderfully in those four years. And how I had longed to see her!

She sat smiling kindly into my eyes; I stood looking sillily into hers, holding both of her hands in mine, forgetful of Aunt Lucretia, and with no word that I could say to Eloise.

”Eloise,” I began haltingly at last, ”is it—have you—is it really you?”

I bent down to kiss her, but she fenced away and drew back smiling.

I dropped her hand, hurt.

”Jack,” and her tone tried to compensate me, ”behave now—everybody is looking.” Then she added louder, ”Have you really grown into this handsome chap—and no lameness any more?”

”Tut—tut,” broke in Aunt Lucretia, half irritated, ”you two make me tired. Of course he has—you have both grown wonderfully up to your pedigree—I always said so—nothing strange in that. And as you are both grown now,” she added patronizingly and with the old return of authority, ”I intend to marry you to each other before Christmas—see if I don’t.”

I blushed and Eloise smiled—a trace of the old fun-loving tease breaking across the corners of her mouth. Her beautiful clear blue-hazel eyes smiled up into mine, full of the old fun and daring.

I bent over her. ”Eloise, aren’t you really going to kiss me?”

”It is unsanitary, Jack,—and—” she glanced at Aunt Lucretia—”bad form and—”

I turned, hurt, and shook hands with old Thomas, the driver.

”Mighty glad to see you back home, Marse Jack, mighty glad!” said he.

I looked closely at his horses, with that pretended admiration that I knew would please him, in order to hide my chagrin. There was embarrassment in it too, for I knew I was under inspection from the eyes of Eloise.

”I declare, Marse Jack,” he went on, ”dis sho’ly ain’t you, is it? I declar to goodness if you ain’t biggern yo’ daddy wuz, and yo’ gran’pa—the ole Jineral.” He grew easily loquacious. ”When I fust seed you a-comin’ out dat cyar dore, I didn’t know you, and yit I sed to myself, *sholy I’ve seed dat face—hit ’pears mighty complicated to me somehow*.”

A smothered laugh from Eloise. ”That is what I’ve been trying to say, Thomas, but couldn’t, to save me, think of the right word. Thank you so much—’*complicated*,’ Jack—that’s too good!”

I showed plainly that I did not like this from Eloise. Ridicule we may bear, but not from our beloved. And I had loved Eloise always, but never so much as now. Then she suddenly broke into a smile, and said in her sweet sisterly way of old: ”Forgive me, Jack—I haven’t lost my old teasing way with you, have I?”

”I don’t want you to,” I said quietly.

”Well, what do you think of her?” broke in Aunt Lucretia.

”I can’t tell you how beautiful I think she is, Aunt Lucretia,” said I.

Eloise laughed, and looked dreamily up. How quickly her eyes had changed from daring to dreams. In her low, even laugh lay four years of fashionable Washington schooling. In the soft tones of her voice were a thousand music lessons. In the well-gowned girl before me was training, the spirit of gentlefolk, centuries of correct pedigrees. She had always been strong, and with a form as lithe as a young frost-pinched hickory. How she could ride a horse and handle a gun! Her hair had been yellowish and flossy, now it was like the distant flush of a red-top meadow, mower-ripe. I had left her an over-long school girl, thin and callow, daring, caring for nothing so much as running a risk of her neck and limbs in trees, and bare-back gallops on any half-broken colt on the farm. But now—

Aunt Lucretia, watching me, guessed.

”Oh, well, she’ll pass, won’t she?” she said rather braggartly for her, I thought. ”You’ll believe what I kept writing you now, eh? Though you never referred to it once, not once.”

”Oh! Aunt Lucretia,” began Eloise protestingly. Even her voice had changed. It was not the imperative, rollicking, colt-breaking voice of the school girl I had known four years ago. It was now like a fall of soft, freestone water over a moss-lined rock bed, purling into a deep pool below, sand-bordered and waveless.

”Please don’t tease him,” she began again.

Aunt Lucretia laughed triumphantly: ”Oh, never mind. I want to rub it in on Jack. He needs it curried into him. He hasn’t written me a line to show that he intended to carry out my wishes until I grew positively uneasy, for fear he’d marry one of those Hessians, whose ancestors Washington crossed the Delaware to whip that night.”

(Hadn't written, I thought. But no one shall ever know what I had dreamed and hoped in those four years.)

I was looking into Eloise's eyes; she flushed, for I saw she knew my thoughts.

"You shan't be hard on Jack," she said, taking my part as it seemed to save herself. "Jack, dear," and she took my hand in hers, her eyes for the first time flashed with sympathy, "we must do as of old, we must pool interests, when she is against us we must combine to beat her. And to prove it I am going to defy her and kiss you, for you've heard her say that we are betrothed, and this is always the first thing after a betrothal," and with the old daring in her eyes she looked up at me.

I remember into what a perfect Cupid's bow her hitherto straight lips curved, and I flushed crimson as my lips met hers. Aunt Lucretia, seeing this, said with emphatic shame, "Tut—tut, unsanitary and silly! Get into the surrey, Jack. Thomas, drive these two fools home!"

In my heart I thanked Aunt Lucretia for that tirade. I knew Eloise of old. She was always on the side of the under dog. For that reason she had kissed me. Still, with all her pretense I noticed that Aunt Lucretia had arranged that we should sit together, and had seated herself in front with Thomas, where she could watch her roan span trot off.

"Eloise," I whispered, dropping my hand on hers, "is it really you? I never dreamed you would be so beautiful. I have loved you always, Little Sister. Don't you love me a little?"

She laughed at my low voice. Then she suddenly grew serious, and said in a tone that hurt me, "Of course I do, Jack, as your adopted sister. But don't!" she protested, as I tried to kiss her cheek. "You are acting so queerly; as if we were really in love!"

I drew back, very much hurt. "Eloise!"

"Don't be silly, Jack, or you'll spoil it all. Haven't I always been your little sister?"

"But surely, Eloise," I said, my heart in my throat, "after all these years—you don't know how I've loved you always, and lately yearned for home and you."

She gave me a startled look. "Jack, we must stop this. I have something to tell you."

The hills swayed as the surrey rushed by. I saw the old field mistily, the distant trees and the white lime roads. I was almost reeling in the fear which her tone had brought.

"What do you think of them?" asked Aunt Lucretia proudly.

I looked at the handsome pair, stepping like one, at a good three minutes' gait.

”Splendid,” I said. ”I should guess they were Young Hickory’s, and their dam, Nuthunter.”

Uncle Thomas could not restrain a laugh. These horses were his pride. ”Ain’t los’ none of yo’ hoss sense hobnobbin’ with them furrin’ folks, Marse Jack. You sho’ hit it ’zactly!”

”I was afraid,” went on Aunt Lucretia, ”that I might not be successful in straightening out the Nuthunter legs; he hasn’t the best of hocks, you know. But did you ever see anything more beautiful?” she added.

”I never,” I answered, looking steadily into Eloise’s eyes.

”Jack,” laughed Eloise, ”I must discipline you.”

For answer I caught up her hand behind Aunt Lucretia’s back and kissed it.

”I’m sorry for you, Jack,” she said with her old quietness, ”but—but—well, I’ll see you to-night and explain.” Then she looked out and exclaimed, ”The Home Stretch, Jack! Isn’t it beautiful? Has it changed any?”

CHAPTER III
THE HICKORIES

We drove up to the great mansion built of home-baked bricks. It sat on a blue grass slope, and before it lay twenty acres of blue grass lawn, tree-peopled: oaks, ash, poplars; and elms, red and white; and a great broad-topped gum. Eloise and I remembered this last best of all, for in the fall it early turned into a great, flaming brushheap of red, crimson streaked with black. Scattered about on the lawn, filling the gaps, were single trees of dogwood. In the dusk they shone like silver nosegays in dark vases.

The evening dank was in the air as we drove up; that rare odor, which is really no odor, but only a memory of one; and as we whirled up the drive there came a whisp of perfume, blue grass cut before its time, fresh spring hay, for a sick brood mare, in the meadow beyond.

The night sounds made me homesick, even though I was at home; a whip-poorwill, a whinnying mare, the lowing of a lonesome calf in the barn. Far off, in the faint purple twilight, stood the hills; and nearer was the black fringe of trees which moated Stone’s River. Here was home and April, and my heart was eager for them.

This was The Home Stretch, the home of my grandsire, General John

Rutherford. His daughter, my Aunt Lucretia, ran the farm for him, as she did everything else within ten miles of her, for my grandsire was old, and had lost a leg while fighting with Stonewall Jackson in the Valley.

Eloise guessed my thoughts. Her voice was quiet and tender as she said, ”You should see our hickories, Jack!”

I jumped from the surrey at the door, and drew her with me. ”Let us look at them first of all,” I said, ”because there was our playhouse, there were our dreams.”

She smiled as she pointed to the walks still lined with sunken ale bottles, their mouths projecting upward as borders for our flower beds.

Aunt Lucretia had gone into the house. Thomas had wheeled the surrey and team to the barn.

The land we stood on had once belonged to Andrew Jackson. Here he had lived before he had moved to the farm four miles away known as the Hermitage. Clover Bottom had been the pride of a great, strong heart. In the field beyond had stood the pioneer store where Jackson and Coffee had traded, with Indians. Beyond that was the far-famed circular field, in the great bend of Stone’s River, and level as a floor, where Truxton and Plowboy and the unbeaten Maria had once raced. Still farther beyond Stone’s River circled like a tube of quicksilver through the green of the wooded hills.

Never before was honesty put to such a test as when Andrew Jackson gave up this home to pay an unjust debt. Without complaint he moved further into the wilderness, and built his great double log-cabin home. That cabin is now a shrine!

Here stood the giant hickories in a group, the rugged, stately trees. Why did he plant them here? Or had the old hero, with that love of his for the unbending tree for which he was named, let them stand unscathed, as Nature had placed them? They stood in a great group, cathedral-like, one taller and more stately than his fellows, like a spire.

Of all the trees the hickory is the conqueror. Its purpose in life is to withstand. It is a fighting tree, rough of dress, careless of manner, rude in its unpolished bark. To be frightened by the hails of heaven is not for it. The hurricane cannot quell it. From its youth it has fought the storm, and when the storm has tired it has still stood, tattered but glorious.

Every fall in one great flaming pyre as of a burning bush wherein there is Divinity, they have blazed and burned before our wondering eyes. A warrior tree, and yet, withal, what no warrior ever was: a giver of gifts, not a wrecker of those already garnered; not bullets, not shells, not grape shot dropped on the land; but nuts. Some day, truly, the real conqueror of the world will conquer like this tree—overcoming in a hail of kindness flung from loving hands.

"It was these trees," I said, turning to Eloise, "that sent me to Germany to study forestry; these trees and Dr. Gottlieb. How is he? I can hardly wait till morning to run over to his cabin."

Eloise laughed. "Oh! you were always a poet, Jack. Dr. Gottlieb is the same, and he is famous now; such books he has written of flowers and trees!"

"Do you know they use his text-books in Germany?" I asked proudly; "and that last work of his, 'Tree Influence on Precipitation,' was talked about in all the universities. Look," I said, pointing to a scarred and gullied hillside across the road, showing bare even in the twilight, "there is the great work to be done in our land, there is the coming field for the young brains of our country—that, and better farming, and the watering of our great barren spots in the West. We've cut down our trees wantonly—our pioneer sires did so before us,—for the land had to be cleared or they would have died. But now if I can only get them to change! You should see the German and French system. When I came through France, along their coasts, both on the Mediterranean and the Channel, were great forests planted to break the winds and storms. I was told that a century ago the winds began to make deserts of their coasts, encroaching mile after mile into the land. Now, with the trees planted, it is a garden again."

Eloise was listening silently. Then she said, "Jack, that is all very fine, and it took courage in you to do it, to go over there. It was not Aunt Lucretia's idea; hers was a horse-farm for you; and the General's was West Point and war. He has never been the same toward you, Jack—I can see it—since you would not go to West Point."

"He never cared for me as he did for Braxton," I said. I winced, for I loved my old grandsire.

"He has not written me a line since I have been gone," I went on.

"Poor Jack," and she took my hand in hers in the old way, "and I have always teased you cruelly, Jack."

"And Eloise," I said, "I have always loved you."

"Jack," she said, "Little Brother,"—those words I knew of old meant condescension—"I knew it would not do. I wanted you to love someone else. You know Aunt Lucretia's silly conditions." She flushed in the twilight. "I hoped while you were away," she went on, "if we didn't write you'd forget me."

"And instead," I said, bringing her hand to my lips, "I thought of no one else but you. I came back loving you, Eloise, more than ever; as a man's love is greater than a boy's."

She grew suddenly stern. "Jack, Jack, haven't I told you not to?"

"Not?" I cried. "Did any real lover ever have a choice? It's not his part to decide—"

"Listen, Jack; you know I would not lie to you, but you must understand

how foolish—how useless—"

"Come to supper, Jack—Eloise." It was Aunt Lucretia calling. "Here is father and Colonel Goff," she added as we walked up the steps. "Father has grown quite deaf, Jack, since you saw him."

Colonel Goff, handsome, alert, and quick even to bluntness, came forward, and shook my hand.

"Glad to see you back again, Jack—welcome home."

My grandfather sat in his great chair, facing the lawn. His wooden leg rested on the railing. Great curls of tobacco smoke rose from his corner of the porch.

There was the old nervous, staccato clatter of wood and cane meeting on the floor as he arose to greet me. I saw the stern, unyielding face give back no smile of pleasure as he took my hand. He stood looking at me doubtfully, his mind evidently weakening with old age. The sadness of it flashed over me, for his mind had been the mind of a strong man in his day. My Aunt Lucretia promptly screamed in his ear, "This is Jack, Father; he has come home."

"Jack, ah—ah—Jack, glad to see you, suh; and who did you say it was, Lucretia?"

"Your grandson, Jack Ballington. He has been away studying in Germany," she screamed again.

"Aha," said the old man, "aha—of course—wouldn't go to West Point, though the President himself gave him the appointment in my behalf. Aha—Jack—a brooding, dreaming sort of a feller—always mooning around trees and writing poetry. Won't fight—not a damn one of 'em will. And what a chance to fight you would have now! What a bully scrap we are going to have! Have you heard, suh," he turned, and spoke sharply to me, "have you heard that the Spaniards blew up our battleship the other month, and that we are going to blow hell out of 'em? And they've been needing it for two centuries. Ah! If I were only younger, wouldn't I be in! Imagine it, Goff," he said, turning to him, "imagine me fighting under the old flag again! Didn't think I'd ever live to see that day when we were charging Banks in the Valley. Ah, 'twas a family scrap—only a family fight—like old man Tully and wife—have to fight a little at home now and then, so they'd love each other more when they made up. Ah, suh, I'd give this farm to be your age again, and a chance to fight under the old flag once more. Joe Wheeler wrote me the other day that President McKinley would make me a Brigadier, if I'd go in. By gad, suh, I sat down, and shed tears to think I was too old!"

He was silent awhile; then, "Ha, ha, but I read in the paper to-day that the Spanish Prime Minister is out in a statement saying it'll be easy to whip us, because we're divided North and South, and that the Southern Confederacy will arise again! He is right. We have already arisen. I see in every Southern State

ten times more have volunteered than their quota calls for. Yes, we'll arise, and will help McKinley whip hell out of them!" He stamped his wooden leg on the floor.

"Now, Braxton Bragg—ah, he's in it. Do you know, suh, that he's a Captain in the First Tennessee, and they are preparing now to go to the Philippines? Ah, what a chance, what a chance you had, suh! And what do you say you did in Germany?"

"I studied forestry and farming, sir," I said, flushing hot under his words, "and with it I took two years' training in the military school at Berlin, taking instructions up to the rank of captain in the Emperor's Guards."

"The hell you did!" he shouted excitedly. "Did you have sense enough to do that? Those soldiers are the best drilled soldiers in the world, Goff. Your damned English to the contrary notwithstanding," he added, smiling at the Colonel. "In the Emperor's Guards! Strike a match, Lucretia, and let me see him." In the light of the match he stood up I stood above him six good inches. That and my shoulders breadth surprised him, for he went on: "You left here a crippled stripling, mooning all the time over flowers and such cat-hair, and crying if anybody cut down a tree. But you'll never fight, none of you ever have! Sissy is the word for the whole kit of the world's mooners. Still, you do surprise me, suh, now and then; I'll be honest about it; like this studying military in Germany. Ha—ha—think of it!"

"And beating you and your whole bragging bunch with Little Sister—have you forgotten that, sir?" asked Eloise, nervily thrusting her intense face into his, her eyes flashing, ready as she always had been to fight my battles for me.

My grandsire laughed good-naturedly. He had always had respect for Eloise in her fighting moods, as had everybody else on the farm. His voice was decidedly conciliatory as he said, "There, dear,—maybe I am too hard on Jack—ha—ha—guess that was neatly turned, and we took our medicine like men and soldiers. Eh, Goff?" He turned to me suddenly. "If you'd only quit this tree foolishness and fight; but you won't do it, suh—not a damned one of you ever did! And your lameness?"

"It was a cartilage in my knee, sir; Dr. Hoffman, the famous surgeon, took it out soon after I went over. I am not lame now, sir, at all."

"Glad to hear it, suh, glad to hear it."

He was silent for a moment, looking out into the dusk. "And you know all about trees—aha—well, there's only one tree in the world I care a damn for; there it is, and it is dying. My mother loved it. She used to nurse me there," he added tenderly, his voice dropping low.

"It's that beautiful elm at the dining-room window, Jack," explained my Aunt.

”The most perfect tree I ever saw,” went on my grandsire, reminiscently. ”The others just grew up any way, but that one stood like the great feathered eagle plume in the hair of the Comanche chief, Setting Sun. He was the first Indian I killed on the plains—in a hand to hand fight—and that eagle feather in his hair—I'll never forget it. And that elm was like it—and—and my mother loved it,” he said, his voice muffled up in huskiness. He blew his nose vigorously, and went on more cheerily, ”Make yourself at home, suh—do what you please. I wanted you to be a soldier, suh, like Braxton Bragg, ah, what a man that boy has developed into at West Point! But it isn't born in you—can't make a fighter out of a dreamer.”

He sat down, and Aunt Lucretia, taking my hand, led me in. ”Goff,” I heard him say, ”that fight at Winchester when we charged into the town—you led me a little you know, and—”

I felt Eloise's hand in mine as we went down the hall. ”I hate him,” she said, tossing her head back toward the old man. ”It's mean and sinful; but I hate him! After all these years to greet you in that way. And Braxton Bragg—you should see what a fool he is, Jack, in his captain's straps, and living hourly up to his name!”

CHAPTER IV
COLONEL GOFF

Colonel Goff followed us shortly afterwards into the hall. He had ridden over on his English hunter while Eloise and I had been on the lawn greeting our tree friends. He was immaculately groomed, in polished boots, puttees and cap, an English crop in his hands. Fifty years old, his black hair slightly streaked with gray, he was handsome, and there was a masterful air about him that even an enemy must have admired. A younger son of the Earl of Carfax, he had come to America when my grandsire was fighting with Stonewall Jackson in Virginia. He had volunteered for service, and had been placed in Jackson's corps, and on my grandsire's staff. Here his real, sterling qualities found birth and he proved to be a brilliant soldier. It was he who charged ahead of the rebel yell and led the advance that scattered Banks. It was he who led again at Cedar Creek, caught the brilliant Sheridan napping, and sent his command reeling back in a retreat which would have meant demoralization for anyone but Sheridan. His fondness for my grandsire was no less than the old man's for him, and after the war Colonel Goff,

being in disgrace, it was said, with his father at home, moved to Tennessee to be near his old commander. He had bought a fine place near ours, and here he had lived the life of an English gentleman, with his hounds, his horses, and his utter disregard of all the local and established ideas of country temperance or morals. He was not a man who asked for things, he took them.

Even before I left home I had secretly rebelled at his admiration for Eloise. In all her masterful ways, her riding, her fox chasing, her hunting with the men, following Goff or the General all day on her pony, and killing quail dead-straight, in the flush of the covey, he had openly admired her. Afterwards I heard him say that she was a duchess born, and the only one he had seen in America. He had humored, petted and helped to spoil her as a child. As a girl, there never was a costly thing she wanted but he gave it to her.

In the dining-room, when supper had been announced, I noticed the flushed pleasure in Eloise's eyes at sight of him. It was half a daring look, as of the hunted defying the hunter, that I saw in her eyes, but I could not rightly decipher it, or tell whether it meant she was conquered or as yet unconquered.

My heart burned with jealousy at the sight of it. The great joy of my home-coming was gone! I knew his way, and that he would stay for supper.

"I had thought," I whispered sourly to Eloise, "that I would at least have this first evening alone with you."

Eloise laughed. "Oh, he comes when he pleases, and I—I send him home when I please."

He had greeted me pleasantly, but during supper he paid little attention to me. Once he laughed at my study of forestry, and added, "And to go to Germany for it, when you might have gone to England!"

After supper, when I had gone with Aunt Lucretia to the barn to help her with a sick colt, I smelt the odor of his cigar coming up from our old seat under the elm. I grew bitter at the thought that anyone but I should sit there with Eloise. My Aunt must have noticed this, for she called: "Come in here—both of you. This isn't fair to Jack."

Aunt Lucretia and Colonel Goff could never meet ten minutes in their lives without a heated argument over American and English horses. She generally worsted him, because she had all the records at her tongue's end, and because in any kind of controversy she was fearless. For an hour to-night, and until he left, she scored him fearlessly. "Take that nick-tailed horse of yours," said Aunt Lucretia, "Colonel Goff, couldn't you do better than that in England?" There were two things which always especially incensed her; one was to cut off a horse's tail and the other to import an animal from England, when a better one might be had here.

Colonel Goff explained that there were no such horses in America. "He is a

four-mile hurdler," said he. "You've nothing of the kind in this blooming country."

"Why, madam, he holds the record jump behind the Quoin hounds at Melton-Mowbry. The kill was in the main driveway of a manor and his rider cleared the picket fence to be in first. That fence measured five and a half feet and to this day it is the record at Melton-Mowbry."

"A four-miler, that means a running horse," said my Aunt. "Of course we have them. And a hurdler—that's only a jumping horse. Now, we've never cared much for jumpers. Why, I've a mule in my barn that can go over a ten rail fence any day. Uncle Ned says she just climbs it; anyway, I've never been able to build one high enough to keep her out of the cornfield on the other side. But there's Eloise's Satan, son of Young Hickory, scion of General Jackson's Truxton. The man his sire is named for used to beat your English at any kind of a game at New Orleans, and I'll wager that Satan would be a mighty hurdler and high jumper if he only had a chawnce," she said, smiling, in funny mimicry of Goff.

"Fawncy!" laughed Goff, twisting his mustache. "Why, he couldn't jump over a chalk line! It's all in the training and pedigree! My Nestor colt holds the record for the Melton-Mowbry meet, and his high jump was five feet six."

My Aunt turned the subject as if it were forgotten. But I knew she never forgot, and that she had something up her sleeve.

I was worried that Goff should linger so on my first night, for I saw plainly that he hoped we would retire and that he wanted to get Eloise off for a *tête-à-tête*. Aunt Lucretia saw this also, and whispered to me when she got the chance, "Freeze him out, Jack; he shan't have her to-night!"

"Why, Major Hawthorn," she said presently, turning and rising abruptly.

The major came in on us silently, in his soft, well-bred way. I rose instantly to greet him.

"Jack, my boy!" said he, throwing one arm around me, and drawing me to him. "How you have grown! I heard you had come home, and I had to see you to-night."

"And you didn't want to see *me*?" said Eloise, coming up, and kissing him; for the Major was her ideal, and she was always his pet. "Now, Major, you always said that you loved me as much as you did Jack," she teased, winding an arm into his.

"Just the same as ever, my dear; you are both my two children always," he laughed. "Why, good evening, Goff—and the General, where is he?" he asked my Aunt Lucretia. "I have news that will please him."

My Aunt went after my grandfather.

"Jack," he turned to me, "what a man you have grown into! I'm hungry for a long talk with you."

The Major sat down, and Colonel Goff offered him a cigar. He struck a

match, but before using it, held it a moment to my face. ”Inspection, Jack,” said he, smiling; ”you know how hard it is to break an old soldier of his habits.”

I saw his finely-cut, sensitive face light up. I noticed the familiar turn of his mustache, his kindly mouth, the correct dress, the straight, martial bearing, and the courtesy, that seemed a gift of his own.

”And it looks as if I might die in harness,” he went on. ”Ah, here’s the General.”

He rose and shook hands with my grandsire. ”I have come over to tell you, General, of a telegram I received this afternoon from the President, and I should so like to have your advice before answering—the advice of all of you,” he said kindly, turning and bowing our way.

”Ah, Hawthorne,” said my grandsire, ”I know what it is—I knew it was coming—I wrote Joe Wheeler—”

”I thought you had something to do with it,” said the Major, ”and I shall abide by your decision, my General,” he added softly.

”McKinley has appointed you Brigadier-General,” went on my grandsire quietly. ”The First Tennessee will be in your brigade. I can’t talk of it, Hawthorne—I want to go to the Philippines with you so bad, and give the damned Yankees—ah, pardon—pardon me—I mean the damned Spaniards another good drubbing!”

There was a burst of laughter from us all. My grandsire sat down confused.

”It is as you said,” Major Hawthorne replied, ”and I am going to do as you say, General. I have taken your orders in Virginia too often to refuse now.”

”Hawthorne, I envy you; by gad, I envy you,” said the old man.

”General, do you know that I never was so happy before? I have so wanted to fight under the old flag. Jack,” he turned to me, his face smiling, ”Jack, I have come to see you for this purpose—I want you on my staff—I know the training you have had, I know the stuff that is in you. I want you, my boy. I’ve ridden ten miles to-night to tell you.”

”Tut—tut—Hawthorne—nonsense!” broke in the General. ”Don’t start out making breaks like that. Jack is a good boy, but he is not a fighter—now, there’s Braxton Bragg—”

”My grandfather is doubtless right, General Hawthorne,” I said quietly. ”I thank you from my heart for your kindness—but—”

Eloise arose flushing, indignant. ”Jack *is* a fighter; a better fighter than some people who strut around in khaki, and make great pretense, but amount to nothing,” she said deliberately and with emphasis.

Then she came over and put one arm affectionately on my shoulder. ”And General Rutherford,” she went on, her voice trembling with anger, ”I mean this for you, and I mean no disrespect; but it is cruel of you the way you have slurred

Jack, and I almost doubt that you ever made the good fighting record you have, when I think how easily you can be fooled into taking a tin soldier for the real thing! I do, and now you know what *I* think."

Colonel Goff laughed, pleased. "You pinked him just right, Eloise. Been thinking I'd tell the General that myself—eh, General?" and he slapped the old man familiarly on the back.

The old General answered testily, "Tut—tut—madam;" and then he laughed. "Gad, but I wish you were a man! Damned if *you* wouldn't fight!"

CHAPTER V
PEDIGREES AND PRINCIPLES

My Aunt Lucretia undoubtedly was the real master of The Home Stretch. She ruled its thousand acres of low, rolling, blue grass land, which bore in pioneer days the canebrake and the poplar, and for a century had been the nursery of thoroughbreds.

My Aunt lived and dreamed in pedigrees. Heaven, according to her, was a blue-grass meadow filled with pedigreed people, and hell—I remember how I had laughed when she said, "Why, Jack, if there is such a place, it's a low jockey-yard filled with scrubs!"

Pedigrees, I am certain, was her gauge of life. She was more man than woman, handsome though she was. She should have been a bewigged, knee-breeched, ruffle-shirted, horse-racing Virginia gentleman of the old school, as many of her ancestors had been. She still clung to a few blooded horses, though her immaculate dairy of Jersey cows was her greatest pride. When my parents died, even before I could remember, she had adopted me. She intended that I should inherit The Home Stretch. Then, true to her ideas, she had planned a proper mate for me. She had been a success in mating everything but herself. Her ribbons won at State Fairs and in Horse Shows proved it; for her Merino sheep she held a great cup from the International Exhibit in Paris. The wool of her Tennessee sheep had gone back across the ocean, and beaten the parent wool on its own soil. This great, heavy, solid silver cup sat on the mantel in the library, and every spring, when I had a cold, she had given me punch cobbler out of it.

She had early paired me off with Eloise Ward, who was an orphan, and a distant relative of her mother. My Aunt had adopted her, as she had me, and

given her every grace of a fashionable education. At ten she had, as she expressed it, engaged us. I remember it was Eloise's tenth birthday and my twelfth. She bought a little turquoise ring and made me give it to Eloise.

"Now, Jack, Eloise is yours! Eloise, you will marry him when you are grown. Now kiss each other as sensibly engaged people do, to seal it. After this no more kissing."

The last advice was unneeded. Up to then we had never kissed, but had fought continually. Knowing Aunt Lucretia, and that if we did not do as she said, something uncomfortable would happen to us, we screwed up our mouths, each trying to outdo the other in mock martyrdom, and complied.

After that Aunt Lucretia was very gracious. I think we showed remarkable horse-sense, young as we were, in carrying out her wishes, inasmuch as we expected some day to own the great farm and house.

To comfort me she used to say—for she knew my love of blooded stock: "She is beautiful, Jack, well built and coupled just right in the back. One link more of vertebræ would have spoiled her, turned her up too sloping between the shoulders, and made her gangling in the hips. If there's too many links in a filly's back, when the pinch of contest comes, you know, Jack, as well as I do, there will be a crumpling—and it is generally in their legs. And Eloise's, Jack—well, you should see it—thoroughbred—taut as a bow string—holding hip and head together. And not too short, either, Jack; the little dicky, short-backed ones, with schooner hips, are a sure sign of several vertebræ being lost by sitting on them for too many generations at the loom or the wheel, or carrying home the week's washing on their heads! It's the scrub sign, my boy. And Eloise is clean-limbed with good flat bones. Jack, as you love me and your God, never marry a woman that can't span her ankle with her thumb and forefinger—that kind of a fetlock is a scrub of the most pronounced type! It came from ancestors before them for a thousand years, who had all their weight on their ankles—just hauling plows like beasts of burden. And Eloise has great style with a fine sweep and action. Look how boldly she steps and clean and true! No loblolling, lazy ambling there—hitting even on the ground—and her hair, Jack—red-chestnut—it is beautiful and not too much. Shun the brood-mare with mane thick and heavy. It is pretty but comes from the scrub Shetlands or Andalusian jennets. Look—look, Jack—isn't she beautiful?"

I watched her myself, tall, her scornful, daring head thrown back, her fine braids of sorrel, silken hair flying out, as in a long-limbed, leaping sweep, she chased the collie across the yard.

The comparison was fitting—as a thoroughbred, Eloise was superb. My Aunt had copied it all by herself, tabulating for me, most elaborately and artistically, on a great sheet of parchment, Eloise's pedigree. It was such a tabulation

as I had seen her work over night after night, often for months, handing down volume after volume of the English and Bruce's Stud Book and the Trotting and Pacing Register. In bold, block, decorated letters, she gradually evolved Eloise's sire and dam, as she grimly called them, and thence on to granddams and g. g. dams (every g. as I learned standing for another generation) until it looked, when finished, like a great river, with a hundred branching streams flowing in, and an endless row of g. g. g. g. g.'s

Under each sire and dam, and in red ink, in contrast to the black of their names, she had written their records, short and pointed, and often with astonishing frankness. I remember that under her grandsire—a Governor of Virginia—the red ink ran: *Died of a wetting, while drunk at a horse race! Watch your children for too much crude liquor!*

Under one of her dams, daughter of a Carolina judge, she had: *She had a streak of common, for she ate onions. If you have daughters, don't plant the things in your garden!*

Another of her great Virginia ancestors was a preacher, noted for his zeal in proselyting; under him was: *Too religious—the reaction may come in your grandson, who is likely to be an infidel, Nature maintaining her balance in morals as in matter.*

Now that I had come home from Germany it was evidently my Aunt's intention that Eloise and I should marry.

"Come, Eloise," said she, after our guests had left, and my grandfather had retired, "we will light Jack to bed in the old way."

Eloise jumped up, slipping her arm into mine. Then she two-stepped with me up the hall, humming "A Hot Time In The Old Town To-night."

Aunt Lucretia looked on, her stern face relaxed into a satisfied smile.

I slipped my arm around Eloise's slim waist, and, bending over, tried to kiss her cheek. But she drew back laughing, and Aunt Lucretia's voice came sternly from behind. "Jack—Eloise!"

We stopped instantly under the chandelier. Aunt Lucretia shut the heavy doors, and came up with all the sternness of a Roman lictor in her face.

"Turn her loose, Jack. Listen, both of you: I had intended to inform you to-morrow finally, but this is as good a time as any."

We stood silent before her. Eloise's pretty mouth drooped in pretended humbleness.

"You know how I love you both, and—well, how you respect each other. You know that I have planned and dreamed for you both, ever since I brought you together here. Now let me see. This is April—well, I am going to marry you to each other in the fall, and until I marry you off," she went on sternly, "I have only one rule—no hugging—no kissing. It is bad before marriage, and after you

are married," she added with becoming stiffness, "you will not want to."

"Don't you think your conditions are awfully severe for engaged people?" asked Eloise demurely.

"And I may seal it with a kiss surely, Aunt Lucretia," I said, "for once."

"No, not for once. That silly performance has caused more trouble in the world than all the sins of Satan combined. We will never have a decent race of people till kissing is cut out," she exclaimed. "There, no more at present—march!"

And she marched us into my room.

"Isn't this fine!" I said, looking around at the old room, glad to be home again.

It was twenty by twenty, the pioneer size, with a great fireplace, built of oak and ash. In a corner was my old mahogany tester bed, big posted and canopy-topped. The little cherry writing desk stood near, and so did the quaint mahogany bureau, resting on dragon claws, with great drawers for a base, and ending pyramid-like in a top of granite finish, set off by a little mirror, and with a tiny shaving drawer for my razors. Big windows looked out on all sides.

After Eloise had left Aunt Lucretia sat quietly thinking, looking now and then at a pedigree of Eloise which she had once made and hung over my mantel. It was framed in walnut and decorated with fancy letters. At last she smiled.

"Isn't she a thoroughbred, Jack?"

"I haven't really got my breath yet, Aunt Lucretia," I answered. "I never dreamed she would grow into a being so beautiful. Don't you really believe you might er—er—hurry up this—er—affair—" and I stopped, blushing.

Aunt Lucretia broke out in her rare, good-humored laugh.

"Poor boy! Jack, you must be careful. You talk as if you had a real case of the silly, unsensible thing."

"Always had it, Aunt Lucretia," I smiled weakly.

"Jack, that would be very unfortunate. I want you to marry on common sense—not love."

"You know how I have always loved her," I went on. Aunt Lucretia glanced sharply at me. "I mean how I've cared for her," I amended. "But do you—do you honestly believe, Aunt Lucretia, that she loves me—cares for me that way?"

"Tut—tut," she said sharply, "what nonsense you talk! What does it matter? This silly love business has spoiled more good pedigrees and brought more fools into the world, I tell you, than anything else under the sun. What a fine breed of folks we'd have had in the world by now if so many idiots had not fallen in love and married without a moment's thought of results. You ought to be grateful to me, Jack," she continued after a while; "you will be grateful, I am sure, some day, that you had me to select a wife for you and didn't just happen to fall in love. That's an accident often as fatal as happening to fall down the steps.

”It is awful, Jack, this haphazard of humanity!” she went on in a moment. ”No wonder only one in a hundred is born who has got any brains in his head. Think of it, Jack, our race is so pig-headed from thoughtless marryings that it took them three hundred years after they invented a saddle before it dawned upon them that they needed stirrups to complete it. Rode three centuries on bare saddles for lack of sense enough to invent stirrups! Some day for the benefit of humanity I am going to open a human Registry. I want to do this because I think it is our duty to try to teach people to take as much interest in their own children’s pedigree as they do in their horses’ or dogs’. Many a man falls in love with and marries a woman whose qualities and character, and pedigree, if she were a horse, he wouldn’t be caught trading a blind mule for! And many a woman, under the same divine influence, marries some vicious brute of a man for no other reason than because she has just fallen in love with him, or maybe wants to reform him, who, if he were turned into a buggy horse she wouldn’t be caught risking her neck behind.

”And this is the way I’d go to registering my people,” she continued. ”In all registration there must be a foundation stock. For man, I’d let Truthfulness, Bravery, Honesty, Manliness, and Ability to Do Things, count as Foundations. This would change the present social system radically and let into good society and life a flood of good blood that is at present badly needed but is shut out, unless it suddenly happens to get rich and comes in under a dress suit. I would make accomplishments, the *Ability to Do Things*, from the Ability to do Poetry, Art, Drama, Music—everything that is worth while—to the ability to make two blades of grass grow, the greatest of them all, count as my classes, and it wouldn’t take me long to straighten out Old Humanity and breed a race of people, who, in a few generations, as old Horace says, would strike the stars with their uplifted heads!”

She laughed. ”Look, Jack, here it is. I have worked it all out, just for fun.” She unrolled a parchment, as immaculately executed in decorated letters as Eloise’s pedigree had been. Then she read, glancing over her glasses now and then to emphasize her remarks.

”*A STANDARD OF HUMAN REGISTRATION.*

When white men and women meet the following requirements and are duly registered, they shall be accepted as standard bred, and shall be permitted to marry:

FIRST: Any white man, who has a home of his own and is honest, industrious, and truthful, and sound in wind, limb and eye.

SECOND: Any white woman, who can cook a good meal, make her own clothes, keep a home clean, lives a pure life, and has some moral standard for herself and children, and will agree to raise them under it.

THIRD: Every man who is the father of a great man or woman.

FOURTH: Every woman who is the mother of a great man or woman.

NON-STANDARD:

The following shall be Non-Standard, and neither they nor their children shall be registered.

FIRST: Fools.

SECOND: Liars.

THIRD: Cranks.

FOURTH: Idiots.

FIFTH: Geniuses. They are freaks merely, and fools in another form.

SIXTH: Sissy men.

SEVENTH: Consumptives, the cancerous, the insane.

EIGHTH: Impure women.

NINTH: Society people wherever found, and their one child.

TENTH: Married men who lead Germans.

ELEVENTH: The children of women who play cards for money and prizes.

TWELFTH: Evangelists who preach slang from the pulpit.

THIRTEENTH: Praying lawyers.

FOURTEENTH: Trading preachers.

FIFTEENTH: Professional politicians.

SIXTEENTH: Bank cashiers who run Sunday Schools.

SEVENTEENTH: Doctors who cut open people quickly, or dope them with much medicine.

LUCRETIA RUTHERFORD, Registrar."

I laughed. "It wouldn't do any harm to try it awhile, Aunt Lucretia; but—referring again to Eloise—"

"We'll not refer again to Eloise," she said, seeing what I was coming to; "this thing is settled. You two will marry this fall, and until then I want no foolishness around me."

"But, suppose she—" I began.

"She is not to suppose anything—nor you. Get her a beautiful ring the next time you go to town. I'll attend to the rest of it."

We talked for an hour or two. I could see how glad she was that I was at home again, for, with all of her stern ways, my Aunt Lucretia was very fond of me.

"And to think of your being the man you are, Jack," she said finally, "and that lameness all gone. Ah, but that is what I'm telling you—the Germans are the greatest thinkers in the world—because—well, because they have been bred to think. Yes, it is good to see you here again, Jack, and sound, and you will earn your oats from now on, young man, remember that."

CHAPTER VI
THE MAKE-BELIEVE

After Aunt Lucretia had gone there was a faint tap at my window, which I knew of old. When I raised the sash Eloise stood outside, smiling at me. On the veranda she slipped her arm through mine, and led the way to our old seat under the hickories.

"Jack," she began, and her serious tone seemed to bode no good, "I just couldn't go to sleep until I had talked with you. Aunt Lucretia thinks I'm in bed; just as she used to think we both were when we weren't, Little Brother." She smiled half tenderly. "I think I ought to speak to you. This thing is getting serious, don't you think?"

"It's been that way with me all the time," I said earnestly, "if I could only get you to look at it seriously—"

For reply she thumped my cheek with her thumb and forefinger. It was a trick Aunt Lucretia had used when I had been naughty as a boy, and Eloise knew that nothing made me madder.

"Now, Jack—no nonsense—listen. We must do something—about—"

"Our marriage this fall?" I interrupted.

Eloise laughed. "Isn't it nonsense?"

"Well, I don't know," I said. "She has always said so, and we have always done as she said. I have always found it was the best thing for me," I added.

Eloise pretended indignation. "Well, now, let me tell you, Jack, this is my funeral as well as yours, and for once this isn't the right idea!"

"Oh," said I, "maybe you've grown big enough since I saw you to defy Aunt Lucretia. Well, *I* haven't; and dear, dear Little Sister," I went on, taking her slim

hand in mine with more warmth than she seemed to like, ”I have learned to hold my own among men, but Aunt Lucretia is a very different thing! I am not going to defy her, or go contrary to her wishes—I've tried it and know better! And you?”

”Of course I am,” she said, moving a little away from me; ”the idea! Why, Jack, it is absurd! Jack—” and instantly she stopped. Her voice dropped with a sad little wilt, and she laid her head upon my shoulder.

I knew that she was brave and never cried, or else I would have believed she was in tears.

”Dear Little Sister,” I said consolingly, ”why, what is it? What has happened since I left? This has been Aunt Lucretia's dream all her life, and mine too,” I said, tenderly kissing her cheek.

Eloise sighed; then after a while she answered. ”Of course, Jack, she has said that always, ever since we were children, and being children, why we couldn't say anything, for our very home and living depended on it. But Jack, I see it all now. I'm ashamed of it—though I couldn't help it—this—this awful buy-and-sell way, this bartering me because I am poor and an orphan, this closing the chance of the great dream of my life for me—that one dream which every woman loves more than life, Jack. It's—why, I've treated you so badly. I wonder that you care for me at all. But—oh, Jack, I had such ideas of love, and now to be mated off like her cattle!”

”I know it,” I said, ”only you were never as mean as you say. Young as we were I felt it, too, and that is why I didn't blame you. But it never made any difference with me, Eloise—I have loved you always, and I'm as proud of you now as anyone can be.”

”Oh, you dear boy,” said she. She laid her head upon my shoulder, then reached up and kissed me on the cheek. She was silent and I was never so happy, with her head lying there, and the perfume of her hair in my face.

At last she laughed. ”Jack, you neglected me shamefully while you were away, studying.”

”I wrote you a love letter every week!” I exclaimed.

”But people in love write to each other every day,” she said. ”You don't really love me, Jack!”

”Eloise, I couldn't write every day, but I thought of you the last thing every night before I went to sleep, and I slept with your picture under my pillow, and I used to play that we were married, and that my dressing gown in the chair was you.”

”O, Jack,” and she clasped my hand in hers, ”you dear boy! And I must say I never dreamed you'd be so big and handsome!”

I seized her hands, holding them in mine: ”And let me tell you, Eloise, you

almost took my breath when I saw you for the first time this morning!"

There was a long silence before Eloise spoke. "Jack, what are we going to do about—about—Aunt Lucretia?"

"Why, I tell you there is nothing to do but to do as she says—marry—you know how she has planned this all her life. It would break her heart; and mine," I added softly.

"Listen now," said Eloise earnestly. "Jack, that is nonsense. I don't love you that way nor you me. I don't care what she says. Love is made from higher, nobler motives, and true marriages should be made in heaven as they say. I," she went on with a sigh, "Jack, I have given up; I was not made for love like that—as you want to love me. I am too selfish, I care too much for the fine world around me, for my own self, for pleasure. I love to will, to conquer, Jack. I don't want to love, to give myself up to any man and his whims unless—"

"Unless what?" I asked eagerly.

"Well, two things," she said. "First; unless I loved him—oh, if I only could! How I would love him! And if not that—well, for—for—it would have to be compensation of another kind, such as great wealth, and all that, to have a great name like that of the Countess of Carfax."

"The Countess of Carfax?" I asked.

She was looking at me very earnestly. I felt her eyes on my face. Something unpleasant began to dawn upon me.

"Jack, I cannot deceive you. I do not, I cannot love anyone that way—that one sweet way. It is not in me. I might have loved you that way, Jack, it is the truth, but Aunt Lucretia has thwarted the chance you had with me, with her blooded stock idea of it. That is why I've treated you so all my life; it was not I, it was Love resenting this profanity of itself."

I could not speak. Eloise, I saw, had much to tell that I did not know.

"Four years is a long time to be away, and after you left I was so lonely, I had no comrade, no Little Brother in my summer vacations. And you were far away, and Colonel Goff—you know how queerly he has always persisted in wanting to marry me some day—not quite as bad as Aunt Lucretia's way, but almost as bad—because, well, I think for no other reason than because I ride well—" she was speaking brokenly. "Aunt Lucretia wants me to marry you because I've got a good pedigree, and Colonel Goff wants me to marry him because I ride well, but I want to marry someone because I love him. You know how grandfather is about Colonel Goff, Jack? Oh, I can't tell it all, but he has made it so unpleasant for me since you left, worrying me about—that I should marry Colonel Goff—that I had nothing, and how great a man Colonel Goff was—and—oh, he has seemed to become childish of late, so irritable and strange, and so he has almost driven me away from home or into marrying Colonel Goff; and you were far away, Jack.

And so when Colonel Goff—well, he was as persistent as grandfather, and so kind always and good to me—Jack, you see how I was placed between them—"

"Well?" I said bitterly, "go on."

"And so when Colonel Goff asked me, I—"

The great trees above me seemed to reel, and my heart to stop, and then thump fiercely in my throat.

"Eloise, please don't," I begged. "Do you—you don't love that man!"

"Of course not," she answered coolly, and very quietly, "but—and this is my secret, Jack. Promise me—it isn't known yet, but it will be before long. You know since he came home from the war with grandfather and lived here he has been at outs with his people in England. You know how he had to leave them. Well, it seems that all of his brothers over there have died but one, and that Colonel Goff is next heir, and that he has received a letter from the physician asking him to come and see his brother before he dies, that he wants to arrange about the estates, for they are large, and the brother is the Earl of Carfax."

I had dropped her hand, and my head was bent. I knew what was coming.

"But you don't love him, Eloise, surely—" I arose, the stars whirling above my head, the great trees soughing as in sorrow. She came up in the starlight and put her arms around my neck. She tried to laugh and pull me back to our seat.

"Jack," she said, "I want you to help me—will you not do something—the last something I shall ever ask you for?"

"I love you enough to give you my life," I said.

"You were always so good to me. It is this, Jack—our secret: Colonel Goff and I will be married as soon as he can arrange to go back to England, in a month or two. I don't want any scene with Aunt Lucretia, and so, and so, Jack, we'll just make-believe—let her believe it is all right—that we are carrying out her plans up to the very day."

"I'll say nothing," I answered; "you and Aunt Lucretia can arrange it."

"You'll have to act as if you loved me, Jack."

"I cannot act any other way," I said.

She laughed, her voice floating up triumphantly. "And you will have to send me that diamond ring, you know—"

"Eloise," I said again, after a moment, "this is desecration! You know you don't love that old man!"

"I like him enough to be the Countess of Carfax. If I've got to be sold to anyone, Jack," she said with bitterness, "got to be traded off like a Jersey, why I'd rather be traded off as the Countess of Carfax than any other way!"

I flushed hot.

"But Jack, think of grandfather. It is that or be turned out."

"Eloise," I cried, "you know I wouldn't stand for that!"

”No,” she whispered softly, ”not if you could help. But Jack, I forgot to tell you, you are already out.”

I could only look my astonishment.

”I wanted to write you,” she went on, ”but I was afraid. I learned it all from Braxton Bragg.”

”What did he have to do with it?”

”You know he has had a silly idea that he was going to marry me himself some day, though you know how I have always despised him. Well, Jack, you’ll never know what he has done; because you don’t know the conditions on The Home Stretch. I, myself, didn’t, till Braxton Bragg showed me the papers the very month you left. You know how grandfather has always kept that secret drawer in his safe locked? But you remember how we children learned all about it?”

”I remember Braxton showed it to me,” I said. ”I never knew how he found it out.”

”Nor I, nor how he stole the parchment from it, the one that grandfather kept from all eyes, even Aunt Lucretia’s, for she knows nothing of it yet. But he did, and he showed it to me, thinking—well, you’ll guess why. Jack, we’re outcasts, you and I, we have nothing.”

She hesitated a moment, then went on. ”It seems that the first John Rutherford, the Old Indian fighter, who was killed at New Orleans, left a secret paper with his will, in which he begged the heir who inherited from him, your great-grandfather, John Rutherford, second, who fought in the Mexican war, you know, to bequeath the estate to that son of his who should be a soldier, and that it should be passed on in that way secretly to each generation. Now John Rutherford the second, had only one son, your grandfather, and his son, Braxton’s father, was killed in the war.

”Oh, I see now,” I said amazed, ”and that was why he wanted me to go to West Point.”

”And why Braxton Bragg, who is a coward,” she cried indignantly, ”did go to West Point, after he stole that parchment and read it. And as proof of it, when grandfather was trying to persuade me to listen to Colonel Goff, he told me he was going to leave The Home Stretch so that it would go to Braxton Bragg after Aunt Lucretia’s death.”

In an instant I saw it all. I understood things that I had given no serious thought to before.

”Yes, I am out,” I agreed.

”Jack, Little Brother, I hope I haven’t made you unhappy on your first night at home.”

I did not speak; she sighed.

”And so I am going to marry Colonel Goff, Jack, and be the Countess of

Carfax, and you'll do as I say—you'll make-believe with me. I'd so hate to have Aunt Lucretia know now."

"I'll go on as if it were I," I said bitterly. "I'd do anything for you, Eloise—and—and I do hope you'll be happy yet."

She shook her head: "Jack, you do not know me—that kind of happiness that I have craved all my life is not for me, and it is so hard that it should be, for I have always had such beautiful dreams of that kind of happiness—I, who could love so if I only might—I who wish it so, to be widowed of it all my life."

"I could make you if you'd only wait—give me a chance to prove mine—to make you love me, Eloise."

"It is too late. O, Jack, you deserve better of me than this; you do not deserve so poor return as this make-believe—a make-belief—only this—a little sisterly kiss," and she held up her face in the starlight to mine.

But I sat silent. My heart—it would not take such a make-believe tribute.

I rose from our seat. "Good night, Eloise, I wish now that I had stayed in Germany," I said as I walked in.

"Jack, come back, don't be angry with me. I've done the best I could."

I saw her turn defiantly, like one who, receiving a hurt, fights back. I left her sitting under the trees.

CHAPTER VII
THE CHIMES OF THE WISTERIA

I was up and out the next morning before Aunt Lucretia or any of the servants. I wanted to get to the dairy in time to see Tammas milk. I longed to see his whitewashed cottage and the clean, stone dairy under the hill, near the spring.

I walked through the lot where the Jersey herd had lain the night before, leaving shimmering shapes of themselves impressed in the hollow mold of blue grass, crushed and shining for lack of dew. Nearby was the brood-mare paddock, sloping downward to the meadow. Beyond, the tree-covered hills.

It was a perfect picture; the sun flushing the green of the hills, the air damp and tainted with the earth-odor of early day. But I had not beaten Tammas nor Marget, his good wife; nobody ever beat them up, not even the cows. He was calling them to the barn in the same way as of old, in the voice that I had heard ever since I could remember. He stood squarely in the barn door, blocky and bowed

of legs, his broad Scotch face split wide across with a big, kindly mouth from which came, like the deep tones of a cathedral's bell down the valley: "Coom, lassies—coom, noo!"

Like children called into supper they obeyed; silver grays, fawns, chocolates, red-fawns and pied, crumpled of horns and slim of tail, marching solemnly down. One, a three-year old heifer, with her first calf, answered him like a school girl, whirling half around in awkward romp and elephantine effort to kick up her stiff heels even as she had seen the standard-bred filly do!

How restful and natural Tammas's cottage looked! I could see Marget bestirring herself for greater cleanliness of an already over-clean cottage. She was humming, and I guessed it was one of her old kirk hymns or maybe Bobbie Burns. For it was Marget who could read Bobbie Burns! How rich and grand the lines came in her broad dialect! I was a child when she had begun to read Bobbie Burns to me; and though I knew not what she said I hung upon her numbers, and a queer, fine feeling swept over me. I was nearly grown before I learned the dialect myself, from hearing them talk to each other, and knew the greatness of Bobbie Burns in the original.

Tammas and Marget were good people, as genuine as the rocksalt they gave the herd to lick, hiding it in the deep grasses of the meadow, where the thirsty cows would come upon it in unexpected places. Once when I found a cube of it, gleaming in the grass for the cows, I thought how much their own lives were like that pure cube of comfort, doing their work in kindliness and obscurity. Then the clamoring tongues of the beagles thrilled me as of old, as the game little fellows came down the slope of the hill. They had followed me from the house and struck the trail of an early stray rabbit. Across the hills they went, their little piping tongues echoing slowly as they nosed along.

For many years Tammas and Marget had run my Aunt's dairy in the hollow where the great stream came tumbling down from the hills. I looked at it there in the valley, and I tasted again in anticipation the cottage cheese, the buttermilk, and the Scotch rye bread.

Now I saw Marget bestirring herself and again up the valley I heard the call, "*Coom, lassies, coom, noo!*"

In changing their home, Tammas and Marget had changed little else. Even after twenty-five years of life at The Home Stretch they still spoke to each other in their native tongue, though to others they often spoke English with their broad brogue. Even then, Scotch words would break in on their English with the suddenness and sweep of a tidal wave flowing in from the firth. Though they could speak English purely, and were well read in their way, their earnestness might

always be gauged by the number of Scotch words which crept into their talk.

Marget had not yet seen me. I went up the path to the little cottage porch, over which wisteria, in full bloom, hung in purple bunches, and whorls of clustering chimes. As I stood there listening, I seemed to hear their chimes, for the odor of the wisteria is a chime of memory. I heard the melody of other days, faint and yet so clear, memories that were almost legendary, of the little boy, motherless, and who had never seen his father, always a nature-worshiper, and a tree-lover; of his Aunt Lucretia; of his adopted sister, Eloise; of his fighting old grandsire, who had been the right hand to Stonewall Jackson when he swept clean the valley of the Shenandoah; and of these two good Scotch people who had taken him to their hearts even as their own. Here had he dreamed and grown up, loving them and the things they loved, and his dreams had been of writing, of poetry, of music; and not of war, as his grandsire had wished. Young as he was he had seen war with clear eyes. How it took the bravest and the best,—and left the weaklings to reproduce themselves. It reversed all the laws of Nature. If Nature had done the same thing for the flowers, not a larkspur purpling the meadows in blossoming ladders, not a wild lupine in whorls of stars, not a nodding head of clover blossom, not a stone-crop of the early spring, nor the flushes of wild hepatica would have survived to-day.

Dog fennel alone would inherit the earth!

Marget, her keen black eyes lighting up with that joy I knew so well, came to meet me. She seized my hands in both of hers, and shouted to Tammas: ”Tammas, whaur are ye, Tammas? Come quick an’ see whit I hae to show ye!”

”Weel, weel, I’m comin’, wumman,” said Tammas, wobbling up in his great awkward way, his broad mouth smiling. He grasped both my hands in his. ”It’s Jack, oor Jack! Whit wey did ye no’ tell me ye were here? Eh, Marget, but jist see whit a man oor Jack is!”

I felt Marget’s keen eyes sweep over me. ”Ay, Tammas, but is na he a wee bit shilpit like? I dinna like to see him sae pale like.”

I laughed. ”Oh, Marget, you and Tammas, come, you make me think of the lecture room and the discipline of the German drill-master. I smell those Scotch scones right there upon the table, and the cottage cheese, I haven’t had any for four years.”

”Oh,” laughed Marget, ”he’s jist like he aye was, oor laddie. His appetite and his heart were aye the biggest pairts o’ him. Eh, but I’m that glad tae see ye laddie, if ever I kissed ony that was o’ the male gender, it’s you I’d be kissing. Come on ben.”

They led me in, Marget holding my hand and beaming up into my face. ”Wha ever wad hae thocht it, oor wee Jack,” she kept saying proudly to Tammas.

”Wheest,” said Tammas, vainly trying to say one thing and mean another,

"Wheest wumman, it's Mr. Jack noo."

For answer I stopped and looked at him with feigned pain, and Marget clapped her hands and laughed.

"Where is Elsie?" I said, suddenly remembering. "Has she grown any?"

I thought Tammas's smile would spread over the rest of him when I asked for his granddaughter.

"Has she grown any? My, my! Why listen, Jack, 'tis four years since you saw her—she was twelve then—our little lassie, and four years make a deal o' difference in a lassie."

"She has jist gane oot to the dairy to get some cream for breakfast," said Marget. "See, yonder she comes. Look an' tell me if she's the same," and Marget pointed with a smile.

I saw a tall girl coming down the little path, carrying a pitcher of cream in one hand and twirling a Scotch sunbonnet in the other. Her dark red-brown hair fell in two school girl braids down her back. Her every line showed gentleness of breeding; and her beauty of face was really wonderful.

"She's jist pat on ane o' her low necked morning gowns, an' she's that thin that they show ower muckle o' her neck," said Marget apologetically.

"She is lovely," I said; "you should have named her Annie Laurie," and I hummed the old song:

"Her cheek is like the snow drift,
Her neck is like the swan."

"Dae ye really think she is that bonnie?" Tammas smiled, pleased that I should have compared her to Annie Laurie.

"It is not exactly beauty so much, Tammas," I said; "it is something like royalty. She looks like some Greek nymph of the woods that has stepped out of a water lily."

Marget was smiling at my praise.

"Ay, but it's jist as ye say, Jack," said Tammas. "Oor lassie looks that way." He stopped and his voice dropped. "An' her bonnie mother, oor daughter,—it is that like her that Elsie is,—aye, the very twin star o' oor ain bairn, Marget."

"Look," said Marget, "dae you ken I canna mak her wear her shoes yet, when there's nobody aboot, and the pools o' the spring sae inviting. Look ye, if ever there was a child," and she laughed, pulling Tammas and me to the door to see better.

Elsie had stopped, and sat down on the grass above the pool, her pitcher beside her, and was splashing her feet in the water.

”She may be grown, Tammas, but she is the same child I’ve known always. I remember the funny little thing when she was two years old.”

”Three,” corrected Marget, ”that was when we took her after the passing of oor bonnie lassie.”

”And how she loved to follow me around like a kitten.”

I had never asked Tammas and Marget for Elsie’s history. I knew it had been sad to them.

”I did not tell you about her. I did not tell you, lad, it was all too sad,” said Marget, as if guessing my thoughts, ”but noo that it is so long ago and you have grown, you and Elsie, I think it only fair that we tell you only a bit of it, so that you may not misjudge her, nor us,” and she looked inquiringly at Tammas.

Tammas nodded.

”She was oor only daughter,” she said, ”we never saw him. He stole oor lassie when she lookit jist as ye see yon ane, and nae aulder, an’ because she wasna’ o’ his station, his graun’ folk scorned her and her bairn. Aye, but he was true, tho’, standing up for oor lassie till—till. Weel, there was a tragedy, an’ he had to flee for his life. He gaed to the war somewhere—we never saw him—an’ we dinna ken. Then she died, and syne we cam’ here wi’ Elsie.”

I saw the tears start into her eyes. ”E-lsie, E-lsie, here’s our Mr. Jack come back,” she called.

Instantly there was a flutter of feet withdrawn from the pool. The pitcher was left on the bank, and the hat also. She came running, her blue eyes smiling at me, quite unembarrassed, and even singularly calm.

She came up, put both her hands into mine, and her blue eyes flashed at me.

”Kiss him,” laughed Marget, ”it’s oor ain Mr. Jack.”

She instantly obeyed, touching me lightly on one cheek. Then in an earnest little voice she said, ”Mr. Jack, I’m so glad you have come home. How I have missed you these four years!”

”If I had dreamed that you had grown to be so beautiful,” I said teasingly, ”I’d have come home sooner.”

She glanced at me quickly and seriously. ”Oh, I’ve forgotten my cream and it’s time for breakfast,” she said hastily, and ran back down the path.

”I should say so, Marget,” I said. ”How hungry I am!”

”It’s good to be here again,” I added, as I sat down to the little table; ”and, Tammas, there is Elsie back with the cream. Put on some of that clotted cream in the pot, cream thick, for it is a long lost brother that I’ve been separated from.”

”Ay, but the cottage cheese. Don’t forget that is your appetizer,” cried Marget authoritatively, as she pushed a great saucer, flaked up to white foaminess, toward me.

For answer I fell to.

"Hold!" cried Tammas, his hand going up and the great fun-loving mouth changing to quick solemnity. Often as a boy I had seen his hand raised most unexpectedly, and never had I failed to obey. My head bent. Then Tammas, his great knotted hand uplifted, prayed in Scotch, as was his wont:

"'Oh, Thou wha kindly dost provide,
For every creature's want!
We bless Thee, God o' Nature wide,
For a' Thy goodness lent:
An' gin it please Thee, heavenly guide,
May never waur be sent;
But whether granted or denied,
Lord, bless us wi' content!'

And to-day thanks be added, greatest of all, that our Jackie is with us again. Amen!"

"Amen," chimed in Marget.

I looked over the table at the Scotch scones, the poached eggs, the funny little cuts of butter, miniature loaves of it pressed and decorated. "I see you've got the same bill of fare, Marget," I said.

"Well," she answered, falling again into English, "we are two old people set in our ways, and it seems to suit us."

"Noo, if you'd only told us you were coming," said Tammas, trying to speak ironically, "I'd 'a had some o' thae auld things ye're sae fond o', Jackie, such as sliced Indian turnips like ye got up in the lodge of the rocks on the hill yon day," and he laughed as he recalled the burning my lips got from the raw turnip.

I laughed. "Tammas, it must not go back to Aunt Lucretia that I ate my first breakfast with you."

"It's a mile to the hoose," said Marget, "an it's only sax o'clock, sae there's a graun' excuse for ye to eat anither breakfast, when ye gang back." She smiled with that funny little smile I had known of old when she wanted one to know that she was meaning the opposite, but was too Scotch to express it.

"Weel, we winna say onything about it," said Tammas. "Jackie, lad, if ye've got onything like ye're auld appetite, ye'll be ready for anither at the hoose when ye get back. Dae ye mind hoo ye used to dae that when ye were jist oor wee laddie, running aboot the dairy an' dipping your fingers on the sly in oor cream pots?"

So I let him launch into his favorite subject, the cows, and the wonderful record they had made since I left. Of Gladys Gaily, who had made her pound of

butter from less than five pounds of milk.

”Aye, lad, ’tis the ould Top Sawyer bluid that’s doing it,” he said proudly. And that I would find it all in the last ”Butter Tests of Jersey Cows.” Several of my old friends had died and one—”Ou, but it hurts me sadly, my boy, to tell it—Gladys Gaily, herself, has passed with that milk fever. Aye, but it takes only the rich ones.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE STONE-CROP

I remember that April day when I first saw the stone-crop in bloom.

Across the valley from the dairy is the blue grass pasture of the cows; and on a hillside studded with dwarf cedars, Nature’s first efforts to cover up her nakedness after man’s ax has passed, runs a streak of bare, brown limestone, winding across the hills an acre wide. Above it the grass and cedars grew down to the bare rocks, and then they stopped short, for no soil was there. Years before, pioneer men, fighting, unthinking, world-conquering, with the primal instinct of the Aryan *wander-lust* in their blood, had stripped that spot of earth of its clothing, leaving the naked ground beneath, lifeless and bare. In all the beautiful blue grass pasture this was the one scar: on this green shield of Nature, the one rent. The birds, which love the deep shade of the cedars, stopped at its borders and flew back from the strip of brown desert.

The rabbits, hiding in the tangled thickets above, and whose spring-water ran in the glen below, made a path around it, through the concealing grass and cedar boughs that brushed their furry coats. None would cross this bare spot, hot to their feet in summer and freezing to them in winter, where they would be stared at by every bird, or hunted by the eyes of men.

Even the crows drew their line there, and would not fly over it; for the crow makes no path in the sky above that does not parallel a path of supplies below. Often had I seen the Jersey herd, brown and gray and chocolate, browsing in a phalanx, following the earliest grass which grew closest to the rocks, come to the very border of this scar in the cheek of the earth and then in sudden anger plunge in and seek the cedars on the hill, anywhere to forget this outrage on Nature!

I remember the spring I first saw the stone-crop. The winter had been long and raw. Even the blue grass had had a struggle to keep green, and the cedars’

stems had become black under the bite of frost. But blacker yet lay the earth's scar beyond them.

Then one day in the spring I went over the hill to Tammas's home. As I came up from the slope and out from the great lindens, and looked across at the other hill for the ugly scar, I stopped thrilled with a strange and nameless beauty. I have no word for the exultation that swept over me.

But I remembered when Elizabeth Browning was dying—she so unbeautiful in face and so star-like in mind,—she uttered a poem which seemed to me to surpass all that great woman ever wrote. For the characters in it were she, her husband, and her God: and the subject was The Beauty of Immortality.

"How do you feel, dearest?" he asked, holding her in his arms and looking into her dying face.

"Oh, I feel beautiful," she said, as she smiled back into his face and died.

Oh, frail little woman, who never wrote a weak line! O, earth-bound and earth-found one, who never created save of heaven! O, little homely one, whose portrait I did not till then even love to recall, so different it seemed from the soul which could write as it wrote: now it hangs the most beautiful thing on my study wall.

I stood there, looking, steeped in the thrill of it. I thought a pink rainbow had fallen across the hills.

Then the nobility of this pink flower went into me, for there is nobleness even among flowers and trees. The blue grass is the aristocrat, who sits only at the richest tables, with cedars to wait on him, refreshed with the waters of a thousand hills. The bermuda runs hither and yon, sending its stolons after the fat things of earth; and the redtop grows only where it can reach the richest granaries. The stone-crop alone clings to this bare brown rock, shielding its poverty.

Seeing this, I gloried in the chance that faced me, the chance to be another type of pioneer, and to undo the wrongs and ravages of my forbears. For this I had sacrificed the love of my grandsire, the General, who had wanted me to be a soldier, and of my Aunt Lucretia, and even of Eloise, it seemed, that one sweet dream of my life. For in the four years I had been gone from her I had lost my chance to win her. What did her talk of the night before mean but that she meant to wed another?

CHAPTER IX

THE TRANSPLANTED PINE

Tradition, that greatest of all historians, had it, that the first settlers on the lands of The Home Stretch had been a young pioneer and his bride from Virginia; and that she, leaving her old home for a new one in the wilderness, yielded to the pretty sentiment of her girl's heart, and brought away with her a young pine from under her own roof tree. Nursed and watered through all the long journey, over mountains, wilderness and river, she planted it among the great oaks and poplars of her western home. Tradition told how, when the young husband had built his double log-cabin from the solid trunks of the black walnut and thatched it with the rich red hearts of the cedar shingles, the little bride cherished the pine. The story was full of pathos; she and her baby had died that first year, and both were buried in the same grave under the little pine. It was a great pine now, but lonely. It had been a great pine since I could remember. It had always appealed to me, standing alone amid the other trees. For miles I could see it, towering above all the others. And always a little tremor of loneliness came, as one who passes a deserted schoolhouse door where once children have played. The great trees around it, oaks, elms, poplars, maples, seemed at home. This was *their soil*, these were their friends and kindred. But the pine was not of them. It had been transplanted. Were trees men, the pine would be a Highlander of the clan McGregor. And away from its clan, in a valley where it belonged not, in soil that made for fatness and richness but not for religion and art, it was lonely. For trees are but men who are dumb.

Often, as a boy, staying with Dr. Gottlieb in his cabin, I would awake at night and hear the pine sighing. Once I remember there had been a fierce storm, and as it swept through the forest it maddened the other trees until they roared in their wrath. But the lonely pine tree had called above the roar of the others. One would not look in the Swiss mountains for the cherries of the valley, nor for the cedars of Lebanon in the rich loam of the rivers. This pine was the Scotch McGregor in an English court. It was Bonaparte on Elba. It was Thomas Carlyle in Gaiety street. It was a tree without a country....

Dr. Gottlieb lived among the trees in a double log-cabin, and had lived there since I could remember. My Aunt Lucretia's heart was as big as her farm, and for many years she and Dr. Gottlieb had been friends. He, being a scholar and a botanist, a very babe in a strange land in spite of all his learning, had been easily parted from what little he had brought to America, and had actually come to sickness and want. Then it was that my Aunt Lucretia took him in and gave him this cabin on her farm. Since then he had grown famous, and was known over two continents as one of the greatest living botanists. In fall and winter he was dean of that department in a noted college, but in spring and summer nothing could keep him from his walnut log-cabin by the great pine in the little valley, where his wild flowers grew in the hills behind him and the trees were his

friends and comrades.

His story was like that of many who claim America as home. In the discontent of the Bavarians in their struggle for a more liberal government, many republican ideas were advanced. Gottlieb, then a student in Munich, with a number of other young men, attempted to celebrate Washington's birthday in the Bavarian capital with speeches so revolutionary that they brought on a riot. In the fighting his roommate and best friend killed a police officer. Gottlieb's family was influential and stood high in royal favor. But the boy who had done the killing was not so fortunate. To be found out meant certain death for him. So Gottlieb pleaded guilty for his friend's sake, and would have been executed, but for the influence of his family. Even they could not save him from banishment, and so he had lived with us, as great a patriot as I ever knew, loving his country so that the thought of it would bring tears to his eyes, loving his Fatherland, and yet himself a man without a country.

Now I stood looking down on the double log-cabin that was his home. All around it was peace and calmness. Here had I learned under Dr. Gottlieb to love the flowers, and the trees, and his books.

What a picture his home made! A great wooded blue grass hill rose gradually, slope on slope, above it, and on a little plateau sat the solid log-cabin. At the foot of the slope and running like a horseshoe around it, was a bubbling stream, coming from the hills to the north, circling around and running into the valley below. Over this, a rustic foot-bridge led to the house. The meadows lay in front of it all. I stood back and wondered how that young pioneer had known so accurately and artistically where to place this cabin? Had it been placed ten yards either way, to right or left, it would have ruined the center of the background of trees beyond, and fifty feet further in front would have placed it too far down the dead level of the center.

In stately distances around stood maples, beeches and poplars, some towering high above the cabin. Lengthwise to the rustic bridge it stood, a beautiful, solid home of walnut, and the red heart of the cedar, its dark, rich logs chinked with the white cement of the lime hills. Clear across the front ran the big porch, solid floored; both ends flanked with purple stars of clematis, hanging overhead, and drooping low over the entrance its great masses of bloom.

The orchard, of apple, peach, plum, and cherry trees, lay off to the right. The old-fashioned flowers were all to the right and the pine tree towered over them all.

I raised the latch and entered. Dr. Gottlieb stood before me, framed by shelves of dried flowers and herbs, a small man with a large head, kind blue eyes. The broad brow wrinkled into its smile as he saw me. I pointed to the stone-crop running across the hill. "Oh, Dr. Gottlieb," I cried, "what is it that in one night

makes the bare spots so beautiful?"

He quit his books and came forward, taking both of my hands in his. "Jack, Jack, my boy, you have come back to us again—and from the Fatherland—the Fatherland! ... Let me hold your hand—it has touched the soil of the Fatherland—let me look into your eyes, they have seen the Rhine!" There were tears in his blue eyes.

"Do you remember how it changes every spring, Dr. Gottlieb?" I asked, pointing to the distant crowned hills, the rainbow of stone-crop beneath, and the level stretches of pasture land.

He smiled as he looked across at the crimson covering of the bare hillside. "Ay; but I've not been idle, Jack, since you left. You remember what I had done before you went away—fifteen hundred species all catalogued in my book." He turned and pointed to the glass shelves around. "Now I have added four hundred more."

We talked long over our pipes. He had saved some rare old German ale in cobwebbed bottles, and these we broke in honor of my return. I had to go over my entire life in Germany, and all the four years' work there. As I dwelt on this, as I told of the old places and scenes, he sat with his head down, and I suspected tears.

I cannot remember when Dr. Gottlieb was not in love with my Aunt Lucretia, though he had never spoken to her on the subject. He spoke only to me, and that always in the same way. So I knew what was coming. I had heard it before, and when I arose to go I could not help but smile as he said, "Ah, Jack, but your Aunt Lucretia! That most beautiful and charming of women! Did you know that each of us has our prototype in a plant or flower; did you know that she resembles the great red wood lily—*lilium Philadelphicum*? Ah, Jack, it has always been my favorite."

CHAPTER X
CONQUERING SATAN

Eloise and I had always enjoyed riding over The Home Stretch with Aunt Lucretia. Since I could remember she had ridden the same horse, a great raw-boned sorrel pacer, full seventeen hands high, and so powerful that he carried my aunt, large woman though she was, as if she had been a child. "His beauty is in his

gait," she used to say; "there is but one saddle gait fit for business, and that is the nodding fox-trot, and Tempest has that perfectly."

It was amusing to watch them in action. With his head down and nodding with every stride, Tempest seemed fairly to butt his way into space, reeling off the miles like a great machine in motion, and Aunt Lucretia, in her great, high-pommeled side saddle, double girthed and double decked, sat him as comfortably as if she were in her rocker.

Her saddle-bags, thrown over the saddle, were in themselves unusual, for they held everything needed in an emergency on the farm. In one pocket were the hatchet and nails, for she never rode by a loose plank but she nailed it on again, and in the other were her medicines, everything needed on the farm from a hypodermic syringe to a package of salts.

The day after I came home I rode over the farm with her. "It's good to ride Little Sister," I said, stroking her crest. "What a beautiful saddle mare she has made."

"Eloise did it," said my Aunt. "Jack, do you know she was always foolish about that mare after you left?"

She squared her big horse up to me. "Jack," she whispered, "I don't believe in the stuff, of course. It is all foolishness and not fit to marry on, but there is a great vein of sentiment in that girl in spite of her make-believe and her indifference. After you left she wouldn't ride anything but that mare and I knew it was because of you, and the clever way you did up those two old braggarts of ours in that race."

"Did she, Aunt Lucretia?"

She looked at me cuttingly and then burst into a laugh. "Jack, what shall I do with you? You are so in love with Eloise that it's positively painful. You must overcome it before you marry her; it's not good policy, not manly nor becoming. The greatest race of men was in the days when a man took his wife by force, conquered her and beat her into submission. He couldn't own her until he proved he was a better man than she. Now, the woman rules in everything. Take your silly weddings; they're a glorification of the bride. To see them one would think the poor devil of a groom was a kind of matrimonial valet, a second fiddler, used chiefly to make a background for the bride to show off on—he is not marrying—oh, no, it is the woman—and it's the same everywhere. The women are writing our novels, our magazines, our poetry, running our conventions, starring in our theatres and churches, and doing everything else worth while except making the money. The men have become unconsciously so enslaved that the few of them who do write novels or poetry write effeminate things because the age is under the influence of woman. There is no man-poetry any longer, that's why I never read it. If we don't get a man-age into the world again," she added vehemently,

"we are all going to the devil, going to be wiped out by some heathen man-race of the Nibelungen woods, not yet born!"

I smiled guiltily, for I saw Eloise coming out of the house and my heart fluttered queerly at sight of her. She came forward and I saw Goff's roses pinned on her breast.

"This is like old times, Jack," she said laughing, "but where is my horse?" She looked around, glancing at the little pony-mare we had saddled for her.

"I thought you'd like to ride the pony-mare again," said Jim, who stood holding the reins, "like you useter ride with Mr. Jack," he added.

Eloise tossed her head. "No, no; now, Jim, you may saddle Satan for me. Why, I've been dreaming of this for months, a chance to show the splendid fellow and his paces to Jack. I wouldn't miss it for anything."

Jim stood scratching his chin thoughtfully. "Dat devil horse, he ain't a good horse, this mohnin', ma'am, 'specially for ladies."

"Jim," she said sternly, "look me in the eye! What have you been doing to Satan?"

Jim grinned apologetically. "I had to ride him las' night for some med'cine for my sick chile."

"And I told you never to ride him, that he hated the very smell of a negro."

Jim still grinned.

"But you tried him?" she went on.

"Yes'um, and he flung me!"

Eloise laughed. "Served you right. You know that horse doesn't like you."

"An' when I went into the stall to saddle him, he remembered it."

"Of course he did. I told him never to let you or anyone else ride him—no one but me."

"That horse," said Aunt Lucretia, as we followed Eloise to the barn, "is dangerous. I have been expecting to hear of him killing her. It's all in his pedigree, Jack; he can't help being mean. His sire was a rattle-headed but game and iron horse—fast, but utterly unreliable. You may remember how fast he was, but would go crazy, and ran away in a race, running into another horse and getting a sulky shaft driven through his heart. All of his colts I ever saw are crazy, fast and game—but cruelly mean when roused. Still I'm to blame for this one. I thought Little Sister's brain and sweet temper might overcome it in the sire."

"Little Sister is his dam, then?" I said, patting the neck of the mare I was riding.

"Yes, he was foaled the year after you left for school, and is now three," she answered.

I heard Satan before I saw him. He was walking the length of his halter, now and then neighing, then whinnying to Eloise softly. It was the sound of her

voice that had softened him. Above the anger which shook his frame, maddened at the sight of the groom who had offended him, he had heard the soothing voice of Eloise, and responded with a gentle whinny.

She smiled. "Just listen to him! Dangerous—he's an angel! Bring him out, Jim." She winked at Aunt Lucretia and me.

Jim grinned sillily. "'Scuse me, Miss 'Leeze; you's jes' sayin' that to guy me. He loves my leetle boy, an' he feeds him an' keers for 'im," he added, "but it looks like he thinks I put an insultment on him. 'Scuse me, Miss Leeze, but I wouldn't go in there for no money."

It was true. At the sound of Jim's voice, Satan's eyes had kindled, and he threw back his head, trying to break his halter to get to him.

"You try him, Jack," said Eloise; "I'm sure he loves you. I never knew one that didn't."

I opened the door. Never had I looked upon so superb a horse: a great star stood out beneath the tangled foretop of his mane, on a great square, broad forehead, so black it was silken. The rest of him, too, was midnight, except one white satin foot. His tail was a heavy hemp of black, shiny silk; his shoulders sloped in the line of strength. His chest was splendid, his muscles, fore and aft, bunched above the cleanest of bony legs. There was great strength, brain, and self-will in his head.

He was watching me keenly, as a wild beast eyes a new keeper. An animal knows friend or foe instantly. Their instinct is unerring and surpasses man's reason. I saw his eyes light up doubtfully, hesitate, and then gleam when I put my hands out and rubbed his cheek. "You splendid fellow; mean? It's not true. Did Jim put an insultment on you, old boy?" I laughed.

Then he rubbed my shoulder with his clean-cut nose.

Eloise laughed behind me. "I knew he'd love you, Jack."

Satan came out playing. Rearing, he stood on two legs like a great boy, showing off before another. Then he came up, rubbing his nose on my shoulder and reaching for the apple Eloise had for him. Meanwhile Aunt Lucretia sat smiling doubtfully.

I saddled him, and when Eloise sprang up they looked superbly splendid, the horse proud of his rider.

"Well, we'll go," said Aunt Lucretia, starting off.

We turned to go to the left. Satan made two quick leaps, playfully, as if to follow, and then, taking the bit he wheeled to the right despite Eloise's protest. He saw Jim holding the gate open for us. He wheeled and refused to go through it; he laid back his ears and quivered with rage at the sight of the negro.

Aunt Lucretia stopped. I pulled up sharply. Eloise sat white with anger on her uncontrollable mount.

”Oh, don’t be angry with him,” said Aunt Lucretia. ”You will have to go as he says.”

Eloise touched him with her whip and he reared, leaping high into the air. I caught my breath when she came down firmly with him. He stood backing his ears at Jim. Again she urged him, again he refused. She brought her whip down sharply.

”Don’t, Eloise,” I cried, ”he’s dangerous.”

Again he leaped high in the air, tossing his head.

Eloise slid down, white with anger. ”Jack, put your saddle on him,” she said quietly.

”I think we’d better,” I said. ”I’ll ride him for you for a while. It’s Jim. He’ll never forget him.”

”You have a sharp knife?” asked Eloise, after I had put my saddle on the horse. She took the reins in her hands. ”No, no, I’ll hold him. Don’t put my saddle on your mare. Wait.”

”What do you mean?” I asked.

”Eloise,” said Aunt Lucretia, ”you shan’t get up on that horse again.”

But Eloise did not notice her; her lips were set; her face white. I knew the meaning of old.

”Jack,” she said quietly, ”grasp my skirt at the hem, petticoat and all, and cut it clean down from above my knees. Don’t listen to Aunt Lucretia. Please, Jack, it is life and death with the horse and me. I’d rather die than have him conquer me.”

I knew from her voice that she meant it.

Grasping her skirts at the hem in an instant I had ripped them through.

”Now behind,” she said; ”it’s my old riding skirt, Jack.”

In an instant it, too, was split.

She smiled, a flash of her old humor behind her sternness. ”Now, turn, Jack.”

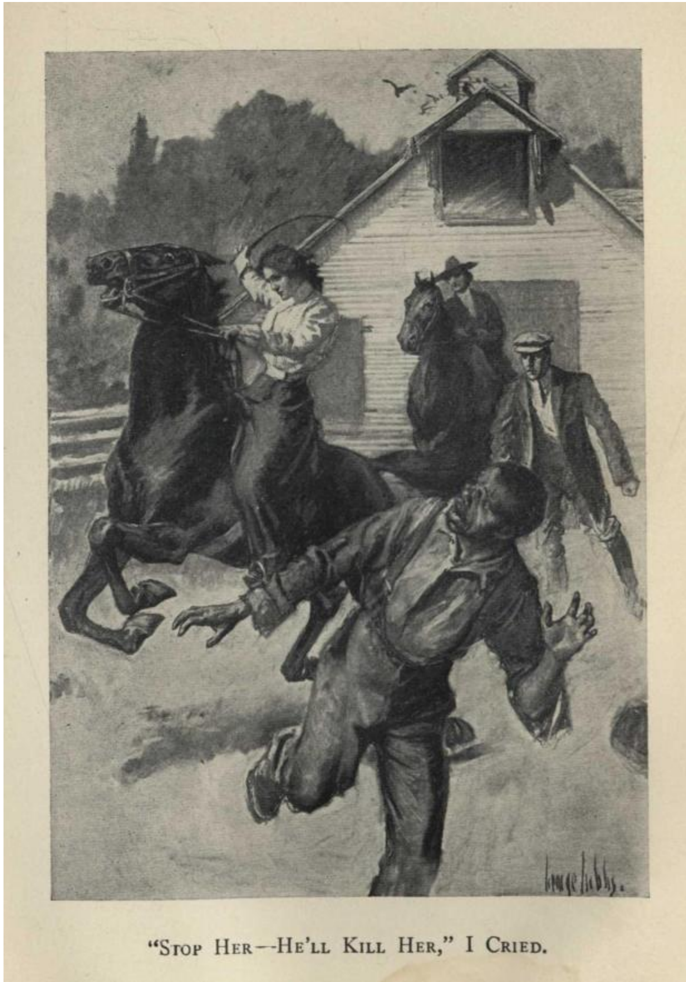
When I turned back again she had slipped both her garters over her divided skirts, so that they were held firmly to her ankles. The next instant she was in my saddle, astride.

”You, dear, sweet, old, stubborn Satan,” she said softly, ”I am sorry I must punish you. Shut the gate, Jim; I am going to make him do his best stunt to pay for this.”

At the first blow from her whip he sprang up in anger, but the whip fell fast and with fury. Her lithe body sat him easily, like a part of him, her two heels buried in his flanks. He made leap after leap, but still she sat him, cutting his sides into whelks. He leaped high to dismount her; he wheeled suddenly, but never caught her off her guard. The whip never let up. Frighted, angry, he bolted

for the plank fence. The gate was shut, but Eloise gave him the whip at every jump.

"Stop her—he'll kill her!" I cried, as I saw him rise for the leap.



"STOP HER—HE'LL KILL HER," I CRIED.

I expected to see him strike the fence midway, and come back on her in a heap. Instead I saw Eloise lift him, with a quick firm hand, straight up towards

the sky and I saw the horse land on the other side clean, and clear, without losing a stride. Then they vanished in a whirl of dust up the pike.

"I'll ride after her," I cried to Aunt Lucretia. "He'll kill her yet."

"Don't worry," she smiled, "she's more apt to kill him. But that jump, Jack, that jump—did you see it?"

My Aunt's eyes were ablaze with a kindled fire. I had seen it often when a race was on. She rode up to the fence. "Five feet six, Jack," she said laughing; "why, the record cross-country is five feet six—that's the record held by Colonel Goff's horse—" and she laughed again meaningly.

It was fifteen minutes before we saw Satan coming back! He came in a gentle canter, his great head held high in pride, because Eloise was laughing and joking with him, patting his mane and calling him sweet names. "You darling Satan," she cried, as she leaped down, "I did so hate to punish you!"

They say horses do not weep, but there were tears in the eyes of Satan as he rubbed his head against her breast, and nibbled the apple she held out to him.

Up the road cantered a horseman in haste, riding an English hunter. Eloise looked up and smiled. "I can't go with you to-day, Jack. Here comes Colonel Goff. I wanted you to see that jump. Isn't he great? He's done it a dozen times, and yet Colonel Goff really thinks he owns the champion." She laughed, her eyes shining. "I must run in and change my habit for the scolding I know is coming."

I turned sullenly in my saddle and rode off. I did not wish to see Goff take her away from us.

I did not enjoy the ride over the farm. The sick brood mare, with the young colt, which nickered so distressingly for Aunt Lucretia, alone excited my sympathy. I was heartsick myself. I did not even enjoy seeing Tammas and Marget.

As we rode away from the dairy we met Elsie coming down the wooded path, a smile on her pretty lips.

"That girl," said my Aunt, "is a fine creature, and do you know, Jack, if I know anything of breeding, she's got rare blood in her. It shows in a hundred ways. Now, watch her."

She was dressed in white, her hair hanging in two plaits down her back. "I am playing at being in Scotland," she said as we came up, "and I have gathered these Scotch wild flowers for Mr. Jack." She handed them up to me, and when my eyes met hers in thanks Aunt Lucretia saw the blush that flushed her face. She looked sharply at me a moment and then smiled. I walked to the barn gate, Elsie going with us, and telling me of the Scotch flowers and trees. "I would be quite happy here," she said, "if we only had the heather on these hills."

Aunt Lucretia turned at the gate. "You must come up to the house some night this week, and we'll have a Bobbie Burns evening," said she.

"Oh, thank you," Elsie answered, smiling at me instead of at Aunt Lucretia.

”Who was that you were talking to before we met you?” I asked. ”The gentleman who rode off when he saw us coming?”

”That was Captain Braxton. He has asked my hand in marriage, but I dinna think I shall,” she added, with a little sigh. ”I dinna like him as I should, but I dinna say yet, for I shall think it over. He’s noo like Mr. Jack.” Her little Scotch words would slip in now and then.

I flushed and looked at Aunt Lucretia, who sat biting her lips as if in anger. Elsie was all frankness. She put her hand in mine trustingly, and instantly I knew why she had told me.

”No brother could love you more than I do,” I said. ”Tammas and Marget raised me, too, so I’m really your brother.” I laughed to hide my anger at Braxton Bragg and the turn affairs had taken.

She had lifted my hand with a loyal little gesture and pressed it to her cheek before I could withdraw it. ”You’ll come to see me, often, won’t you, Mr. Jack? I need you to help me.”

”Jack,” I said, smiling at her, ”just Jack from now on.”

”Oh, but that’s not respectful, and I’d not be wanting in respect for you for the world.”

”I’ll not call you Elsie then, any more,” I answered, ”nor make the request of you I’m going to make.”

”Jack, then,” she said. ”And your request—it is already granted.”

”That you’ll not see Braxton Bragg alone until—well, until I have talked with you,” I said earnestly.

”O—h,” and her eyes opened wide. ”Jack, why, of course. If he writes to me again I’ll send the letter to you before I answer it.”

”Bring it,” I said; ”I want to see it right away.”

We rode back to the house.

”Jack,” said my aunt, ”he is the most contemptible reversion to a scrub that ever came from a good pedigree! But if he tries that game on that child—he has played it recklessly since you left—I’ll kill him myself—damn him!”

I soon forgot Elsie. I caught sight of Eloise entertaining Goff in our old bower, and I could see that as he sat there, smoking and watching her, he already thought she was the Countess of Carfax.

CHAPTER XI

TWO WAYS OF LOVE

I knew that Colonel Goff would not only stay the afternoon but the evening also. He had been doing it ever since the war, for he regarded his General's home as his also. The assurance of the man incensed me. The divine right of his old kings seemed to have been born in him; and now that he had won Eloise, she and The Home Stretch and all that it contained were his whenever he chose to have them.

Eloise would tease him in pure wantonness, and scorn him, and even ridicule him; for all of which he worshipped her, as is apt to be the way with men. Yet I very quickly noticed the little touch of sadness, which, despite her efforts, fell over her so suddenly. To her wit and repartee, her fun and humor, his only answer would be flashes of his fine teeth, and his favorite exclamation, ”Fawncy now, but isn't that a blooming good one?” I was convinced that he loved Eloise and was proud of her; but I thought it was such a feeling as he might have for any beautiful animal, the same worship he might easily have bestowed upon an Arab mare of the desert.

It was not long before Colonel Goff and Aunt Lucretia were in their usual dispute about horses and he was scolding her for letting Eloise ride Satan: ”Ah, that unregistered fool! Really, my dear madam, you should not let her go near him, he'll be the death of her yet. Now, there is my imported Irish hunter; he's got a head as well as legs; say now—suppose I just send him over for her,” and he looked at Eloise to see what she would say.

Eloise threw up her fine head significantly.

”The idea, Colonel Goff! Why, I wouldn't be caught riding him! That big thing better than Satan! Why His Satanic Majesty can gallop rings all around him.”

Colonel Goff laughed. ”Fawncy!”

”Yes, fawncy!” said Eloise, mimicking him, which made him flush again and then look at her admiringly.

Aunt Lucretia broke in. ”He can,” she said very firmly. ”I wonder, Colonel Goff, why you should send to England for a horse when you have better ones at home?”

Colonel Goff laughed loudly.

”Why you even think that bang-tailed son of Nestor can jump,” went on Aunt Lucretia, laying her trap quietly for him.

This was the one strong point of the son of Nestor, and the one thing about him that his owner had published on his arrival.

”Madam,” he said with great seriousness, a bit offended, ”madam, I think I told you before that he held the championship for cross-country at Melton-Mowbry.”

”Oh, so you did,” said my Aunt Lucretia, ever so sweetly, ”and yet I believe Satan can beat him both at the distance and over the hurdles.”

Goff laughed, but not as though pleased. He was too well-bred to reply to Aunt Lucretia in her kind. So he only tapped his boot, and looked at Eloise, who smiled sweetly at him, as if urging him on.

”I was talking the other day to Secretary Roswick of our State Fair,” went on Aunt Lucretia calmly, ”and was entering some of my own things. Now, Roswick, you know, makes me put up about half of his programmes. He has asked me to get up some novelties on the side. We'll just have a hurdle race if you say so.”

”Capital, capital!” said Goff, for the first time showing excitement. Then he quieted down suddenly. ”What am I thinking about? What, in this unregistered country, could go against Nestor, champion hurdler of his class?”

”Satan,” said Aunt Lucretia, smiling sweetly.

”Fawncy!” shouted the Colonel decisively.

”I'll lay you five hundred that he can,” said my Aunt, ”and I don't know a thing in the world about your game.”

”Madam,” said Goff, quietly, ”I have never taken an unfair advantage of a woman.”

”Colonel Goff,” said my Aunt very seriously, ”you know as well as you know anything, that if I know anything it is horses, that I am of age, and that I am good for all my obligations. I'll bet you five hundred dollars that Satan will beat your horse at his own game.”

”Do you know, madam,” said Goff, ”that a jumping horse is born to jump? Not one in a thousand can go over a three-foot hurdle, and this brute of yours—”

”Brute?” said Eloise, icily. ”Brute, Colonel Goff, he is an angel! He can do anything.”

”And you will ride him?” he asked.

”Nobody else can,” said my Aunt. ”Yes, she'll ride him and beat you, too.”

”I'll take your bet,” said he. ”I'd give five hundred dollars to ride once in a race with the only girl in America who is really English. How she ever got into this blooming country I can't see!”

I left my Aunt and the Colonel arranging their new game for the Cumberland meeting. I did not take much interest in Eloise riding against him!

I had ordered my horse, intending to ride over to Ned's; I wanted to see my pets there, Little Sister, and Captain Skipper and the new arrival. Eloise followed me through the wood lot. She came up and slipped her arm through mine, and its very touch carried a sadness, it seemed as if the quick electric pulse was gone. In her eyes there was a weariness, an indefinable longing. It touched me to see her so, my live, light-hearted, foster sister of old.

”Jack,” she sighed, ”I am—I am—” She stopped and looked up into my face.

”What?” I asked. ”I should think you would be happy, so soon to marry an Earl.”

"It is sooner than you suppose," she said seriously. "He does not wish it known yet because the proper notification has not come from his attorneys in England, but—but—Jack—Jack, his brother is already dead and he wants me to marry him. I have already promised to marry him next month."

I knew she saw me pale. I could have cursed myself for the weakness.

She went on. "When I promised him six months ago it was all so vague, so far off, and I was so miserable, Jack—so homeless and badgered, and dependent, it was all so far off, I thought—waiting for his brother to die, and now! You know how these English are, they take these things so seriously, their marriages and promises, they are so matter-of-fact about it, and so consistent: why, Jack, he looks on me already as his bride. He is just as busy planning for our future, arranging how the estate is to be remodeled, what home we are to have, I couldn't get out of it honorably even—Jack, even if—"

"Even if you should happen to love me?" I said, looking very earnestly into her eyes.

She nodded, her head dropped low. For the first time in her life I saw tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Jack, I am miserable! It was all so far off once,—now—only next month,—and you know I'd die before I'd deceive him—big boy that he is, and trusting and worshipping me, Jack. Yes, that is what hurts me—worshipping me as he does—I couldn't. I couldn't, Jack! If I have any one strong thing in me, you know it is—"

"Keeping your faith with your friends," said I. She nodded. "Do you think I am wicked to marry him this way? Won't you come, in after years, to despise me?"

For answer I stooped and kissed her. She put both her arms around my neck. "Please stay with me," she cried, "I do so need you. I just heard it to-day. It was why he came and stayed so long. Please stay and be with me till he leaves. Just stay with me, Little Brother, this time."

"Why," I said, "this time? Surely he will resent it. Any man would want this night of all others to be with you."

"Jack, you don't understand. I am miserable. That is why I rode Satan as I did. When I put him at that fence I hoped—it is wicked I know—but I hoped that he would kill me."

She was sobbing in my arms.

"Eloise, don't," I said; "let me go. Don't you know that it is harder on me than it is on you? Do you think I am made of stone—of wood—to come home expecting sweetness and find it all rue—my dreams about you—"

"Just to-night, Jack. You'll—you'll laugh at me when I say why, but, but, you know how punctilious these Englishmen are, and he thinks I must kiss him

to-night when he goes."

I felt the hot blood rush to my heart. It was instinct, the reversion of a past ancestor who fought another man for kissing his wilderness bride.

"Eloise, you wouldn't?"

"If you'll kiss me again, Jack, as you did just now. I never felt so before—until—but it you'll kiss me again—that way, I'll never kiss him—never!"

I held her in my arms. I kissed her eyes, which were moist. I kissed her mouth, and it seemed as though my soul went into hers; for when, in desperation, in an exhilaration which was all but madness I broke away I heard her cry faintly, "*Jack, Jack!*" ...

I saw her arms around the great fatherly tree, her head against it.

CHAPTER XII

WORK AND MINE ACRE

There is but one balm for a heartache, and that is work.

Nothing in all my life had left me so stranded; had killed so utterly the sweetness of all my dreams as this giving up of Eloise. And with no dream there is no life.

I felt that she was lost to me now: if she were not engaged to Colonel Goff, there was nothing in me now, I thought bitterly, that could awaken in her the real love she had never felt for anyone. Yet with all her spirit, her apparent indifference, and even recklessness, I knew she had a throne in her heart of hearts for love on a higher plane than those who love easily. I knew that only one side of her had ever been revealed, either to herself or to the world; that beautiful as she was there was a yet more beautiful side to her; and that brave as she was there were yet deeper depths of bravery within her, a moral bravery which under the spur of her soul would take another leap, as far greater than that she took on Satan as the brave leap of Pegasus over the clouds. I had known her always. I knew what she did not know: that I was loving an Eloise that was yet, and forever would be, an unseen star in an unknown heaven, above the head of the man who had never yet learned to look up. Should I sit still and let him take her, let him do this irreparable wrong both to himself, and to her and to me? My heart cowered a moment at the thought of its hopelessness. Then—how wonderful is the word of the soul unto the soul, the passed soul to the passing soul, the absent

soul to the present soul,—I thought of the words of Aunt Lucretia: ”What would Andrew Jackson do, Jack?” Into my soul came the steel of Andrew Jackson. With the quickness of the thought came the change. ”*Aye, my unseeing old grandsire,” I said, ”you shall see whether I am a fighter or not! ... For Eloise.*”

From that moment I resolved to fight. God’s blessings on the memory of Andrew Jackson!

But I would fight in my own way. For I knew that Eloise’s idea of love was a love of life and death: she who would ride a mad horse over a five-foot fence for the conquering instinct of a mastering nature, what would she not do for love—*her love*—and she a woman? For let it be writ both of history and life, ’tis woman at last who loves. Man knows not love. Even as his own life came to him the babe of Love and Passion, so only can he give that unto another. But she who gave it being, *her name was Love*! Oh, to win such a love as I knew Eloise would bring to me; which she herself knew not was there.

I lost my bitterness of it all when it came clear to me. Before, I had been maddened to think she would barter this love of hers for title and wealth and the place it bought. But now I saw clearly, now I knew that she was blameless, because never having had that love, she knew not what she was giving away. Like an Indian princess, who owned an island of pearls, but did not know their value, she would give them to the first foreigner, coming down in ships, for the baubles of his forecastle.

But I would show my Princess what her pearls were worth. I would string them in globes of beauty around her neck, and brow, and belt, and I would put my crowning Great Pearl of Sacrifice into the diadem of her hair, and then I would lead her down to the sweet glassy sea of her own unbartered, unbought home, her own sweet kingdom of kindness and content, and by the still waters, in God’s own groves, I would lead her until her feet dipped into the mirroring pools, and, kissing her, bid her look for the first time and behold Love crowned.

Would she barter herself for baubles then? Would she not know the difference between pearls and paste beads? I, yes, happy I, would show it to her; I would introduce Eloise to herself—Eloise loveless to Eloise in love.

I laughed now in the happiness of my little conceit. Very distinctly I could hear my Aunt Lucretia say: ”*Sure, Jack, that is the way Andrew Jackson did—took her from the toad who had deceived her, right out of his arms, and then killed every other toad who croaked about it. Sure!*” ...

There was much for me to do, both of love and duty. My duty was work, and that came first. For I had faith both in God and myself, and if I did my duty and my work, God would give the rest to me.

Work—the glory and sweetness of it! And to find one's work in one's life—that One Work which fits the One Life: this to me has always been the greatest gift of the Giver.

There was so much for me to do. I was the pioneer of a great truth in the world's greatest country. In all great causes it is the pioneer who is the sacrifice, it is he who is held up to contempt and scorn. Strange that it should be so! That he who sees first the Great New Truth, the Blessing that has been withheld because of no one to see it, the Great Invention uplifting through one man all men into a new world, that it is he who must suffer....

The hurt does not matter from those who love us not. I was willing that the herd should think of me as it would, as its own little light permitted, but I had that pride of race which every honest man has, and I wanted the love of my fighting old grandsire. And he openly despised my profession, and he secretly despised me. "What's the use of worrying about making more on an acre of this rich soil?" he would say. "Ain't The Home Stretch rich enough? And fiddling about saving trees—why damn it, ain't there too many of them already? Didn't I have all the hard work of my life clearing some of the land, and my father before me, that it might make us a living!"

He would never understand me, of course. The discoverer is never understood, and the forester falls in the same class, more maligned than any of them. He would never understand that it was not a sentimental dream to save trees because they are trees, but to grow them and harvest them in the right way, even as wheat is harvested: that we did not want to see rich acres, the homes of unborn people, covered only with trees, when the land was needed for bread, but the unfertile hillside, and the heads of our water streams. There, we insisted, trees should remain because that was Nature's own way of protecting the land from droughts and floods. Nor could I hope to make him understand that rich as the land was—even as a man of genius—it should have a chance to bring forth all the fruit that was in it. That our waste was something appalling, our methods crude, and that our people, with all their plenty, were only half fed; that while we were rich and The Home Stretch was a garden, the poor farmers of the hills and less fertile places were living only half lives, they and their families, because there was no one to show them something better.

My Aunt I knew was sorry for me; but I could see she hoped and believed I would yet get over it. And in my own heart I felt that if I had chosen West Point, perhaps Eloise—

I flushed, ashamed. How prone our little weak Self always is to play Arnold with our Soul!

I began at once to work. It is what one does with one's own acre, not what one preaches should be done to the acres of others, that convinces his neighbors

at last, and settles the standard of his life's text among them.

I started it on a gullied hillside of The Home Stretch. These gullies I filled. Young trees were easy to transplant from the over-crowded growth of the woodland. Nature is at last her own greatest doctor. I gave her the soil she had been begging for, and very quickly she studded it with little pioneers of the game black locust, to hold back that which she had, to shadow it with coolness and damp that grass might grow beneath, and mold form, and the blistered soil have yet another chance, and that later the trees might rear their great heads high, stealing from the clouds the moisture for the earth.

My neighbors knew me, had known me from a boy, and it was not difficult to get them to meet me at the little schoolhouse once a week and hear my talk. Now talks all depend upon one's honesty and earnestness, not on one's brightness; in a month they became interested and were one with me. They had always looked upon a forest as a necessary evil, as a great wood put there to be cut down, burnt, destroyed, that man might till the land. Indeed, from their pioneer fathers, whose greatest burden was clearing the land, there had come down to them the instinct of forest hatred, just as had come their instinct of Indian hatred, bear and wolf and panther hatred. But at the same time I knew that they had in the heart of their pedigrees another and sweeter instinct, and that it came from their forest-loving Briton and Saxon and even remote Aryan sires, whose ancestors before them, had long ago gone through the same fight with the primeval forest, but whose children after them for a thousand years, from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, were forced to go back to tree-planting, to forest preservation, or die with their soil. It did not take much to make this forest preserving, land-preserving, life-preserving instinct outcrop again among their children here. It was a revelation to them when I explained that the true forester was he who assisted the farmer and the lumberman in rearing more trees and better trees where they should be, and destroying the worthless ones, even all of them if need were, where they should not be. In their prejudice they thought a forester was a dreamer, an impractical person, who preached forest preservation from sentiment, and would let the trees grow where children ought to grow. I won them all when I explained that a tree, when ripe, should be garnered, just as corn or wheat, or any other product of the soil. But during the years while it ripens for the saw, the young things beneath it, which should take its place, must be protected, and their life preserved in the harvesting of the ripe trees; or if the land was to be cleared for tilling, other places on the farm, especially the unproductive hillside, and the sources of the stream, should be given over to forestry. This would save the hillsides from washing and depositing their flinty soil over the rich valleys below, and guarding the water head, preserve the springs. But when the tree is ripe it should be harvested, unless it stood in some park or yard

or town for a street ornament or shade. If it were in any of these places it should die in the ripeness of beautiful old age, a younger one taking its place. It was not long before I had a class of forestry, and there was much of the German methods I had learned in every branch of farming which I gave them for nothing, that helped me greatly. It is what one gives for nothing that brings in the greatest returns at last.

But my greatest help was in a flood early in May. The headwaters of the Cumberland lie in the Appalachian range, that great wooded mountain strip which mothers the headwaters of the Ohio, the Tennessee, and the Cumberland, and so of all the states they water. That long ridge of wooded slope had been a sponge, the gauge that controlled the flow from half the tillable Union. On the Tennessee, the forest had been brutally butchered, and on the Cumberland as badly treated. The flood came. There was but little to hold, and check it, and we had a deluge such as was never known before. Even my grandsire, seeing it, admitted what I said. The seemingly wasted word had fallen as the drift of the elm tree's shaft had taken root in a corner of the old field.

CHAPTER XIII
THE UNATTAINABLE

My work took me daily to Tammas's cottage. There was nothing so restful to me as these two good people, and their sweetness and cheer, and Elsie held my interest. I had always been fond of her, and now that she had grown into this rare, delicate flower, so sensitively turned, so romantically original, I found the greatest pleasure in studying her, and, in humoring her, as everybody did who came into her sphere. She commanded obedience as readily as she gave it. Every day was a different mood, and always a romance with her. One day she had on a large white apron, and was helping Tammas with the churning.

"I am playing a new game, to-day, Jack," she said, pulling me to a corner of the dairy where the spring water whirled through the stone troughs. "You'll laugh when you hear it," she added, her eyes shining into mine.

"I'll not," I said, "I'll be more apt to play with you. What is the game to-day?"

She laughed merrily. "Well, to-day I am a duke's daughter, who was secretly exchanged in her cradle with the dairyman's baby. Now only three people know

it; the dairyman, who is old, and about to die; and who is so sorry that he ever did it, but he did so want his own daughter to be a lady in the land; and me, whom he has told at the last minute, and the bad, bold knight, very dashing, who has bribed the dairyman to tell him, and who wishes very much to marry me. But I want to marry my own bonny prince, you see."

"I should think he'd be proud and loyally love his dairymaid bride," I laughed, pinching her cheek.

"But, Jack, you are so stupid," she said, pouting. "You don't catch on. I can't play a game by myself. I want you to play the prince."

Tammas stood looking on, his face in its favorite Scotch grin. "Weel, weel, did ye ever hear the like o' that, an' it's no' leap-year either!"

I could see that he was pleased and proud.

"And it is the prince I'll play from now on, my ane braw lassie," I said, dropping into her own dialect. "Isn't that what you call them in Scotch?" I asked.

"An' noo," said Tammas, "a' lasses get unco thrang when their lovers are aboot, to gar them think they are unco worthy."

Elsie laughed and went vigorously to work, molding butter pounds. I stood watching her while I talked to Tammas. She was not all a child. There was a certain queenliness, a quiet dignity about her that was very attractive. In her fine-cut face, deep down in her great blue eyes, in her very poise there was a quiet naturalness, a pretty aloofness which spoke of reserve forces, that seemed to soothe me. God only knew how I needed it!

After an hour with her and Tammas I felt, as I went down the wooded path, under the great trees of the dairy lot, as I had when I heard for the first time, in the deep hours of the night, the chimes of the bells of Munich. I had not cared for the service with all its symbols and, to me, its meaningless metaphors; but I had loved its music, the great bells which calmed my soul.

I wish to join a new church. I am tired of these which preach. I want to join one where there is no preaching, no talking, nothing but music, music which makes you feel God. Why all this preaching anyway? God and talk do not go together. Religion is not a science to be proven, not a thesis to be demonstrated, not a problem to be solved, but a silent Soul-Force to be felt.

Preachers and priests in their vanity to be heard, or their zeal to proselyte, or their over-humanness just to talk, talk, talk, have robbed the church of half its sweetness and power. Will they never learn that God's house was made for God's children and in it they should do as God does,—be silent and worship? And if there be a voice to break it, let it be the Voice of that which is nearest to God on earth—Music.... It was this feeling that Elsie gave me—of calmness, of restfulness, of devotion. There are those who irritate us, and they cannot help it; there are those who provoke us, anger us, madden us by their very presence.

There are others who stir us up for trade and money-making; the sound of whose very voice makes us wish to own land, or buy stock or build houses; and there are those—God help them—whose talk, be it ever so brief, falls over us like an unwholesome thing.

Elsie read much of romance, and her small library was choice; but the love-poems of Burns she knew best of all, and she always read them to me when I was about to leave, as if she would hold me longer. Then I would remember them far into the night and the radiant-faced, spiritual girl with the deep eyes, reading them. I needed the restfulness which Elsie's friendship gave. I needed her sweetness that calmed me, her fresh friendship that was like a great rose at the window of my soul. In her utter unseekingness, her loyal trustfulness, I saw that she did not even suspect that I loved Eloise.

I stayed all day at the cottage and she flitted around with her great white apron on, now and then calling me her bonny prince, especially if Tammas and Marget were not around. I humored her, seeing how much pleasure she took in it.

"If I am your Prince," I said, when I had her alone in the butter room, "I am going to call you my Heart's-Ease."

She looked up quickly and a faint blush came into her face. She did not reply, but busied herself about the house, while Tammas and I talked of the new test of Lass o' Lowrie, one of his cows, which, from five gallons of milk daily was making three pounds of butter.

"Dae ye ken Mr. Jack, whit's daeing it?" said the old man. "It's nae ither than the auld Top Sawyer bluid!"

Elsie, daintily gowned in a pretty white frock and for the first time with her hair up in a comical little Scotch top-knot, walked with me down the wooded path to the parting of our ways. A tiny heart's-ease had just thrust out its fragrant leaves in the rich mold under the trees. She plucked the leaf, and there was the faintest trace of a twinkle in her blue eyes as she came up and pinned it on my lapel.

"Here is your heart's-ease, my Prince," she said slyly.

I felt a flush upon my cheek. She was silent, and then she said slowly, "Do you know Mr. Jack—Jack, that I believe every prince at times has need of a heart's-ease friend, and—and—well, maids need a prince to help them."

I looked at her quickly.

"I am your good Knight always if I can help you, Elsie."

She flushed and turned her face aside that I might not see it.

"And you won't misunderstand?" she asked.

"I don't think I could misunderstand you, Elsie. I don't think anybody could."

She came up closer.

”Well, it’s this, Jack. Sit down here by me. I have no one I can confide in but you. You know how kind you have always been to me. Ever since I was a wee bairn in a strange land. I can’t talk to Tammas about it, but I feel there is something strange between Colonel Goff and me. I feel that there is—”

I started. She was pale, but went on.

”Well, you know, I didn’t come here with them. I didn’t come here with them—with my grandparents; that was so long ago I don’t remember what is back of it. Anyway, soon after I came I remember Colonel Goff. And do you know,” she went on, ”he has been so good to me that—that I cannot understand it at all—only I feel when I am with him that I am drawn to him so! Oh, I have seen so much in him that others don’t see—and when I see him watching me so closely and saying nothing, it hurts me.”

She did not finish, but looked down the path, up which Colonel Goff, himself, was riding towards us.

Elsie paled and then flushed quickly. He was smiling at us, his little eyes twinkling kindly. He gave us a quick military salute.

”My word, a *tête-à-tête*, and a bloomin’ fool it is who’d break in on it. Hello, lassie—Jack!”

He got down from his horse, shaking hands with us gravely. I noticed that he was watching Elsie, and she, knowing it, was reddening.

”You are a good guesser, Colonel,” I said, with feigned lightness, for I felt that he was taking it too seriously, ”and pray tell me who would not like to be with so fine a lassie?”

He looked at me quickly. ”If you mean that, Jack,” he said, in his blunt, unseeing English way, ”here is my hand.”

Elsie broke into a little confused laugh. ”The idea of pinning Mr. Jack down like that,” she said, looking bravely into Goff’s eyes. ”What else could he say? Now give me that box of candy. I see it sticking out of your pocket.”

Goff pulled out the box of candy, and catching her to him, kissed her on the cheek.

”She is my own lassie, Jack,” he said, holding her an instant in his arms. ”I have loved her since she was so high.” He paused. ”Well, perhaps it was because I was an exile in your country, and she is the Scotch flower I found blooming here. Eh, lassie?”

Elsie kissed his cheek.

”You have been mighty good to me, Colonel Goff. But go your way. Tammas said he wanted to see you if you came by and—well—Mr. Jack and I want some candy!”

For a moment he looked at us queerly, trying to smile. He glanced into my

eyes, but I met his squarely and unflinchingly. He was not a man whose mental action was quick. He saw but one side of things at a time. I saw that he was embarrassed in his slow way. Very awkwardly he left us, going up to Tammas's cottage. Elsie walked on with me.

The wind blew her hair around her temples and the reflection of the blue hills of Scotland was in her eyes. "This is such an inconsistent world, Jack," she said after a while. "I can't ever learn it, and I get so lonely up here with only Tammas and Marget, I often wish that they would tell me more of myself. I should so love to know who my father is."

"Did it ever occur to you that it might not be at all pleasant for you to know? They love you and they want you to be happy."

She paled. "I had never thought of that. I had never thought of that—oh, why didn't I think of it!"

"Elsie," I said, taking her hand in mine, and drawing her to me as I had when she was a child, and I her big brother, "you have no better friend than I. Tell me what it is that is troubling you?"

"You would hate me, Jack," she said, looking up quickly into my face with great, earnest eyes.

"Hate you? Nonsense," and I laughed, pinching her ear. "Tell me," I pleaded, smiling.

"Nay, nay, bide a wee—bide a wee," she said abstractedly falling into her childhood's dialect as she so often did when she forgot. "And first," she went on, "why, first I'd have to kind of explain it, Jack; but it is like this now: suppose one was not satisfied with one's lot and had those feelings I have been telling you of."

I nodded.

"And suppose—now this is the worst of it—now suppose one really loved another—one found one's soul dream," she paused, blushing.

"Soul dreams, Elsie, ay, I think I understand," I said. "I too have them—they are the great, unattainable things of our life. Do you know I think that their being unattainable is what makes them great?"

She looked up. "If it is worth so much—this unattainable thing—why then does it hurt so?"

"Ay, ay, that's it. It is the things that hurt which count. 'Our sweetest love is always sweetest pain,'" I said, quoting the line of a poem.

"Oh," she said, clasping my arm. "You have said it, Jack."

I looked at her quickly.

"Elsie," I said, "you once told me—do you remember what you said to me and Aunt Lucretia—about your hand being sought in marriage? Is it the same person you now speak of?"

"It is Captain Rutherford," she said, her face drawn tensely.

I started, angry, flushed.

"Elsie, this will never do. Do you love him at all?"

"No, Jack, not as compared to the other—the unattainable. Well, I should say about as the difference between a—well—say a star and a little firefly."

A dry, fighting anger clinched my throat and I could scarcely speak. I could have throttled Braxton Bragg then!

"Tell me, Elsie," I said, controlling my anger and trying to speak calmly, "tell your big brother all."

But she was silent, her face turned from me; at last she said, "It is all so strange, Jack; those we love, love us not, and those we do not love want to marry us even if they are not fit to."

"Not fit to hold your shoe, let alone your heart," I added angrily.

She put her hand over my mouth.

"Have I done wrong? Have I said too much? Come, I must go. I see the Colonel waiting for me."

I took her by both hands, holding her before me, for I was strangely worried and I wished to know—I looked earnestly into her eyes.

"Do you love me, Elsie?"

She blushed crimson. In an instant her arms were around my neck.

Shamed and stricken with my own thoughtlessness I tore her arms from me.

"Elsie, forgive me, you don't understand!"

In reply she gave me one shamed, hurt look and fled up the path. I saw Goff waiting for her.

CHAPTER XIV
GOD AND A BUTTERFLY

I saw a race for life the other day. It occurred in mid-air in a kingdom not of earth—not of our own; but the air was sweet where the fight was on, and the fields were green, and the woods lay calm and soothing beneath, and the great, kind sun was above.

It was the pursuit of a golden-winged butterfly, one of those filmy creatures that is more of sky than of earth, made of rainbow and a rose, of light and a lily's blossom. It seemed strange to me that this beautiful thing, thrown off from the

rim of a rainbow, living on the nectar of a flower, sleeping on the bosom of a nodding lily and floating on the breath of a zephyr, so spiritual it was, should fall under the cruel laws of life, and be forced to fight for its brief but beautiful existence.

Who were its enemies? Two glorious mocking birds that had sung like spirits from an heavenly choir around the house all spring and summer, that had been permitted to live and rear their young in contentment and happiness and should have held no grudge against any other creature.

Golden-Wings was in the garden, and he was content until that which sustained life gave out—food. Ay, there is the rub! We would all be angels if it were not for food, we would be saints but for our stomachs. He had sucked every flower in his pasture, he must go to pastures fresh or die. The distance was only a few hundred yards of air, but he knew that in that air was death. He thought of it a long time as he hovered from flower to flower; of life, of his mate, of death. Had he been all spirit he would have stayed forever among the flowers, but he was like all of us, half spirit and half flesh, and the flesh of him was rebelling and begging for food. He must go. He rose slowly, and with uncertain wing, frightened, straight up, every sense awake, every nerve keyed, his eyes on the lookout for his enemy. Up, up he rose, quivering, scared, frightened, then he winged his way across the ether in a flight which proved to be for his life.

The mocking bird is a flycatcher, but not an expert one. Compared with the swallow, the martin, the crested flycatcher or the bold king bird he is a poor imitation; but the mocking bird is also a poet and everything is grist that comes to the poet's mill, from the grasshopper on the ground to the butterfly in the air.

The male bird saw Golden-Wings and gave him the first heat for his life; up in the air he darted, circled and swooped. Golden-Wings, terrified, ducked, dived and escaped. The poet dropped to a twig in disgust and his mate took up the fight. Golden-Wings saw her coming and his heart swelled with fear; he stood quivering in the air, he knew not which way to turn. She darted straight and all but caught him; for a moment in mid-air they whirled, twisted and tumbled, Golden-Wings, panting and fluttering for a chance once more for home and love and life, and the poetess for a morsel to eat. It ended in the butterfly getting above the bird, which always seemed to be his tactics, and the latter dropped down in disgust to her mate.

Then, maddened, they both started after Golden-Wings, and it looked as if this flight was to be his last.

It was a terrible chase that the two poets gave him, the tumbling, darting, circling of the birds in maddened earnestness. Their wings were often so close that they fanned him about like a whiff of gold tissue paper in the wind. Twice they got above him, dropped and missed! Then he was lost altogether, and only

by watching the circling of the birds could one guess where he was. When seen again he had got above his enemies, and was steadily pursuing his zigzag, frightened, graceless, paper-fluttering flight for the distant trees and life!

”Luck to you, O Golden-Wings!” I cried. ”For already you have taught me a lesson for Life. Let us keep *above* our enemies if we would be safe, not beneath them—for there we are a prey to their talons, besmirched with dirt; nor on their level, for there we are no better than they; but *above* them where they cannot reach us, and where we may go on to our destiny with only the sunlight around us and the unseen stars above.”

The birds dropped down, baffled, to rest in the top of a sugar-maple tree. Like all poets, in losing their game they had lost their temper, and now between panting and hard breathing they could be heard quarreling. ”It was you,” said the wife, ”you conceited thing; it is all your fault! I had him once if you had let me alone.” ”Oh, you had him, did you,” sneered the mate; ”if your talents only equaled your tongue you would be better off!” They almost spat upon each other; they were beaten and angry and they took it out that way.

Golden-Wings was safe. He was high up in the air. His very flight was now the flight of victory. Twenty yards more and he would drop down into the great splotch of green below where his wife was waiting him on the blossom of a wild cherry.

I was about to cheer him with the silent approval of true applause when I saw a lightning bolt of red drop from the jagged bar of the dead limb of a great oak near by, in the midst of the forest and high above the weary, yet happy Golden-Wings. I paled at the sight, for I knew that no butterfly would ever escape this new-comer. Even Golden-Wings recognized his fate, and, paralyzed with fear, stopped his flight in mid-air in a few yards of his home, and lay quivering in hopeless fear. Well he might, for the red and white bolt was a red-headed woodpecker, a very king in the tribe of the flycatchers. Often I had seen him poise above an air-bound moth, then drop like a dead bird in the air and no moth would be there.

The hand of the world is against the marauder, be he bird or man. But they revere the man who robs by rule.

Straight at Golden-Wings he went. The race was up. He used the same old tactics: above the butterfly he soared, then, gauging the distance from his own great beak to butterfly beneath he folded his wings and dropped like a plummet of lead.

I was out that morning with the twelve gauge, smokeless shells and seven and a half chilled shot. It was thieving crow I had come after, thinking I might get a shot. To the marauder my thought was as lightning, for when I caught the first flash of his crimson head, this went distinctly through my mind: ”*Nature is*

Nature even to tooth and claw, and yet there is that which says even when a butterfly shall fall. He makes our lives and marks out our destiny. Sometimes amid injustice, He calls himself Retribution. And then He has been known to raise up a man, and a gun, invent smokeless powder and deadly chilled shot, give accuracy of aim, and, most wonderful of all, the Voice of a Purpose to say that harm shall not happen to a Butterfly."

There was no smoke from the report, and so I distinctly saw Golden-Wings drop joyfully among the green leaves. But a red marauder lies in the field where he fell.

CHAPTER XV
HICKORIES AND OLD HICKORY

June, and June as it breaks only over the Middle Basin.

There had been great rains, saturating the leaves and grasses until they were almost blackened in their deep greenness. There had followed, flushing the grass on all the hills around the Hermitage, the mauve tints of coming dandelions, followed by the red, white, and blue flags of the clovers, until across deep valleys and on distant slopes there was a pale light much like moonlight.

I had been very busy. There was much for me to do, and I sought it eagerly, for I wished to forget and not to see. It is what we fail to forget that hurts. And so I worked.

Colonel Goff, as was his race, had acted straight-forwardly in the matter of his marriage to Eloise. Over a month ago he had sought out Aunt Lucretia and told her frankly that he sought the hand of her ward in marriage, that he wished to marry her and take her at once to England. He said that his brother, the Earl of Carfax, had died without heirs, and that he inherited the estate. The family name, he told her, was Goff, and he had kept it while in America. In the early fall his attorneys would have every legal provision complete for his return, and for immediate occupation of his estate. And he told her with equal frankness why it could not be done sooner, that in his younger days he had married out of his class, and had been blacklisted by his family for it, especially by his elder brother; that they had had not only hot words but a stand-up fight in which he had all but killed, and had really maimed the older brother for life. "I had to get out," he said brusquely, "and get out quick. As it was they tried to disinherit me, but

England's laws are greater than England's men. My wife was to follow, but she died."

My Aunt was a woman of great sense and said nothing. But I noticed that she thought much, because she was very silent, and that she grew suddenly very tender to me. When Eloise had gone to Washington my Aunt went with her. Two things happened before they left, which I remember quite distinctly.

My Aunt's admiration for the character and achievements of Andrew Jackson bordered on the idolatrous. As a boy she would take me often to the Hermitage, and tell me of the wilderness giant who lived there. She knew more about him than anyone I ever met. She understood the thousand sides of this man's great nature, from his horse-racing to his religion. In the spot where he had lived so long there was, of course, a world of tradition. It came down from lip to lip. Of these stories my Aunt remembered all. A few days after Goff had talked with her as my Aunt and I were going over the grounds she stopped before the log-cabin in the pasture near the great spring where Jackson lived before he built the present Hermitage.

"Jack," said she, "Andrew Jackson was the gamest thing God ever gave to humanity, and the gentlest. It is staggering to think what he had to overcome to do his life's work. The fights, the sicknesses, the suffering, the slander, the insults, the lies, the butcheries they called battles, starvation, mutinies of his own men, all met and overcome by one tall, slim, sallow, pain-wracked man, on one thoroughbred horse, with a gun in his hand, and two in his eyes. Talk of Indian fights—Mills, and Cooks and Custers—they were child's play to the great Creek Nation Jackson had to fight. And England behind them—selfish always and forever wanting that of others."

She looked at me quickly, and went on: "But he waited and then hit them hard. No one, from Hannibal to Cæsar and Bonaparte, would ever have attacked Keane and his troops, just landed and in an open plain with New Orleans at their mercy before them, in the night-time as did Jackson and his ragged, half-armed militia. No one would ever have risked it but Jackson; he was greater than them all! For that seemingly foolhardy night attack saved him. He cut the very vitals out of them in the dark. He hacked them as a game cock does when he sticks his gaffs into the very heart of his foe. That was why on January eighth they could not go over his breastworks, even with the combined force of Packenham and Gibbs and the troops that afterwards won Waterloo. He had gaffed them in the ditch in the dark. He cut them into giblets. It was hell with the lid on. They say it was a useless battle, but they lie, Jack. If Jackson hadn't stopped them, they would never have given up the Louisiana Purchase until we drove them out with another war. There are two kinds of men, Jack—talkers and doers. The talkers are all orators—they are all liars. They began with Aaron, whom God

made a mouthpiece to Moses. Moses was the doer, but he could not talk. Aaron, the orator, talked for him, but it is Moses who lives. Jackson was a Moses, Clay an Aaron, a dead one, Jack, as all Aarons are, and growing deader every year. All orators, being liars, fool people while they live. Dead, they do not even fool themselves.

It was Clay and Crawford who let the British make that treaty of December twenty-fourth in which they said that they would not be bound by Bonaparte's constructions. At that time Lord Castlereagh had every reason to believe that Packenham, sent out November twenty-fourth, with the best army and navy that ever left Portsmouth for a foreign shore, had taken the 'crown colony of Louisiana,' as they called it. And under that treaty they would have held it. It was Jackson who stopped them, just one day before that treaty was signed.

"Yes, Clay is dead," she said laconically; "he ought to be.

"They wanted New Orleans, and they wanted it bad. 'Booty and Beauty' was the word they passed down the line when they landed and started across the Chalmette plain, to take the fair Creole City. They were going to take her and then rape her as they did the cities of Spain, and they would if Jackson had not gaffed their very vitals out in that night attack of December twenty-third."

She turned suddenly on me, her eyes ablaze. "Do you think, Jack, if he had loved a girl and an Englishman wanted her bad enough to take her right out of his arms that he would have given her up?"

I looked up quickly and her face flushed with fighting fire.

"And he was the tenderest, Jack," she went on calmly. "Old Parton tells a pretty story about him. One bitter, sleeting March day, an early lamb had all but died in the field here, and his little adopted grandchild, a tot of four, found the lamb and cried for it; and so Jackson brought them both to the house, and by the fire; and to comfort the child he took them both into his arms and so sat here, before this great hearth, holding them both in his arms.

"He, who had killed bad men as he had dogs, who had cut to death the pick of the army that later won Waterloo, he sat coddling a lamb and a child and thinking of his dead wife, and she,—oh, Jack, I all but shed tears when I think of it! The night she died, and he would not have it so, but lay all night beside her, holding her in his arms, and trying to get her warm again, with the great love of his own great heart."

There were tears in Aunt Lucretia's eyes. Oh, the depths of her stern heart! It is like the mountain capped with snow. But when the snow melts and the flowers come up among the crannied rocks there are no flowers in the valleys below that equal them.

The other recollection was of Eloise. It was the night before she left for Washington. Colonel Goff, who had spent the evening with her, had ridden off.

I, pretending to work, was really listening for her footstep, as she came back to her room up the great steps.

"Jack," she said, standing just outside the window, "come." And she beckoned to me.

We sat down under the wisteria vine, which grew over the porch.

"Jack," she said, "I want you to do me one favor. No one loves Satan here but you and me. Won't you take care of him while I am gone? Ride him whenever you can, the harder the better, for he is made of iron and needs it."

"He and I are good friends," I said. "I have ridden him daily. We understand each other," I added softly; "we both love you."

"And Jack," her hand was instantly in mine in the old way, "in after years you won't think evil of me for selling myself this way, will you?"

"Why, no," I said seriously. "I have been thinking of it, and all life is just a barter and trade."

I saw her face in the starlight.

"I've no right to make you wretched like this, Jack," she said, rising. "I am going in; and when I return do you be gone Jack, somewhere—anywhere." Her voice trembled. She stood quiet, and I by her, dazed and helpless.

"There is one thing I am going to take to England with me, Jack," and she pulled out from beneath her gown yoke, a little token I had forgotten. I recognized the locket and the chain I had given her years ago. "And this little picture in it is you, Jack. You gave them both to me the day I helped you lick Braxton Bragg."

Then she turned quickly and left me.

"Jack," said my Aunt, as we parted the next day at the station, "I am afraid things are all against us. Father, I see, is going to will The Home Stretch to Braxton Bragg. If I were you—"

"I have already done it," I said. "I am going to move to-day to Dr. Gottlieb's; there I shall work out my plans."

My Aunt smiled grimly. "I want you to remember one thing when I am gone. Don't give up—remember Old Hickory."

I looked up at her quickly. I saw something in her eye that gave me heart again. I bade her good-by. I dared not say it to Eloise. I slipped away, but I watched the train of cars die away behind the trail of smoke in the distance as I rode back home, and it seemed as if my whole afterlife lay clouded in that path of smoke. It was hard to give up my home, the old home, every tree I knew, and with them Eloise and my life-dream....

One's dream and one's home—what else is there which grips so the very tendrils of one's soul. To give up one cuts deeply into the roots of the heart, but when the blow is doubled, there is only one thing that can make one stand upright

and not fall, and that is the Spirit Within. People have different ideas of God as their souls reveal. It runs all the way from the pitiable, crude, faint conception which comes to the savage in cloud, a sun, or star or image of stone, to the higher mind which perceives Him in the Great Spirit of the Universe. None of these is my idea of God. I have never been able to dissociate God from my own self. I have never been able to conceive of Him as apart from me.... And not always the same, but always there.... In my meaner self so little of Him is there, so tiny a spot of the divine light ... so faint, so seemingly nothing. And this is the greatest of it—this is the test—the very divinest evidence. *He is always there*; and when a blow comes, humbling the material, the meaner of me, then He claims His own—my nobler self—taking it unto His care, flooding it with His presence. It is then, searching yourself and your own heart that you find Him—that you know that you are a part of God because He is there!

Riding home it all swept over me so. In my innermost soul I knew it: like a flash came the inspiration of it, the old Prophet of Deuteronomy: "*As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.*" Did God mean in this, the wrecking of my nest, that I should fly—even as a young eagle?

"And remember Satan, Jack, to keep him fit," I heard Eloise's voice say.

CHAPTER XVI
HEART'S-EASE

Never was there a quieter, better place to work than at Dr. Gottlieb's, whither I had gone after Aunt Lucretia and Eloise had left. In a short while I had become reconciled, in my hard work, to my lot; for to live with Dr. Gottlieb meant to work, to classify, to probe into things, and this meant to put aside all else, even for awhile one's heart's trouble for the hard mental strain of it. I remember those study nights well and with such pleasure. I can recall the little quiet man with his books, his abstraction, his quaint comments, the learned deductions that fell now and then from his lips as if he were unconscious that he was speaking. From studying the pollen of a flower he would look up abstractedly and drawl, "*Ah, Jack; and Miss Lucretia—that most beautiful and charming of women! Did I ever tell you that each of us has our prototype in a plant? And how much to my mind—ah, Jack, and to my heart, how much she resembles the beautiful red wood lily!*"

He would put down his book, and look longingly out over the hills. It was the only foolish thing he ever did, I thought, and so I forgave him, knowing that each of us has at least one foolish thought within us.

He always had a smile for me; often he would walk around all the evening thinking abstractedly, or puttering among his books and plants and geographical specimens, and then start into real work at midnight. And I would work with him; for, besides studying my forestry, I was carrying on some experiments, testing the various effects of fertilizers on the soil of The Home Stretch. Dr. Gottlieb would say: "It is not the time, it is the inspiration, Jack; catch it when it comes."

Exercising Satan daily as I did, I became as attached to the great game fellow as did he to me. He was a singular horse, of a type entirely his own. The harder the ride, the more difficult the feat, the stubborner, gamer he grew. Not every horse is an individual, in fact few are; they are horses merely. But Satan was one, almost human in his idiosyncrasies. If he had been a man he would have been one of the world's leaders. There was nothing he would not do for me after he learned to love me.

Even in my heartache, in my despair at giving up Eloise, I thought often of Elsie; for, having known her since she was a tot of three years, when she came to live with Tammas and Marget, riding her, a wee girl in front of me on my pony, going with her, a little maid, over the hills to hunt for some Scotch flowers, I had that attachment for her that one has for a little sister. She had developed far more beautifully than I had dreamed of, both spiritually and in body; for the connection between them at last is the same. I had never thought before that there was any mystery about Elsie. Tammas and Marget, with all their apparent frankness, had the greatest inherited trait of their race, a shrewd secretiveness when it was best. Heretofore I had thought of Elsie only as their orphaned grandchild. I supposed her father was some sturdy Scotchman of their own class, who, perhaps, died after his wife, or, if alive, had given her to her grandparents. But now I saw differently; perhaps her beauty, and the romantic turn events had taken; the Juliet outpouring of her own exquisite nature had touched in me some subtle instinct.

It was this affair of Braxton Bragg which worried me most of all. I had not seen him since I returned. I did not want to. There are those born into our lives who seem always to oppose, thwart, counteract what we do. Braxton Bragg had played this part in my life. I could not escape him, try as I would. Even when I was in Germany, with an ocean between us, had he not cheated me of my own birthright? He was with his company in the city of Nashville, where the Tennessee troops were mobilized for the war. They expected orders to sail for the Philippines any day. All his life Braxton Bragg, weak as he was in character and mind, with that conceit which often goes with weakness, had really believed that, after he had acquired The Home Stretch, or a greater military reputation

in the army, he would marry Eloise. All his life he had openly proclaimed it. His mentality was not great, and he had not yet learned that in real love monies, farms, reputation, fame, are the least that count.

Goff had won her. Braxton Bragg now knew that. Goff had always befriended him, and bore with him more than anyone else. Goff had confided in him and trusted him. Braxton Bragg was as immoral as he was weak. Therefore I reasoned this matter lay in one of two ways. Either he was recklessly scheming to deceive and ruin Elsie, or else he had found out something that none of us knew and was scheming to marry her on account of it. Besides deceiving my grandsire, as he had all his life, I now learned that he had further deceived him:—that, graduating from West Point, he had been appointed to the army, but even before he went on duty, he had been caught in an act unbecoming a soldier and gentleman, and to escape courtmartial had resigned. My grandfather's influence had saved him and got him elected captain of a company which my grandsire had himself raised and equipped for the war.

Absorbed in my own affairs, numbed by the wreckage which had come to my soul's dream, I had neglected Elsie of late. When I realized it, and what it meant to a sensitive nature such as hers, I went over at once, fearing that, since our last meeting she might have misunderstood my absence, and brooded over imaginary wrongs to her own hurt. I found it was high time when I learned the real situation.

Tammas met me, his face weary; for the first time in all our greetings with no broad smile.

"Tammas," I said, "where is Elsie? I want to see her."

"Come, Mr. Jack," said he, taking off his big butter apron; "we'll gang ben into Marget's room, for we baith want to talk to you."

I found Marget quite as troubled as Tammas.

"I feel that I've been neglecting you," I said, trying to talk cheerfully, "but—I have—there have been great changes in my life—I have gone to live with—"

"Ay, we ken aboot it," said Marget, "and though we didna understand, we thocht ye'd come ower in your ain guid time to tell us."

"If we can help you, Mr. Jack," began Tammas quietly, "we will be glad to do it."

"Thank you, good friends," I said, taking his hand. "I can't explain it all now; only this," I went on, forcing a smile that I did not feel, "there has been scheming against me all around, everywhere, since I left home, and—well," I smiled, "I've been turned out of home, and—and—everything."

Marget's eyes flashed: "They'll no' turn ye oot o' onything," she cried hotly, "no' as long as we're here, Tammas an' me. Ye'll jist come ower and bide wi' us. Here's your room, Mr. Jack. An' Tammas an' me—we love ye as much as we dae

oor ain bairn. I ken fine wha it is. Tammas, didna I tell ye? It's juist that Braxton Bragg! He's been plotting against ye ever since he was a wee bairn, an' ye're no' the only one that he's mistreating; an' it breaks ma heart to think that ony man in this country whaur we and oor lassie hae lived so correctly, should be sae bold as to write this, an' it's been wanting to see ye we have, an' to show it to ye. Ye are a' we hae to protect her, Jack; we are truthful folks, an' oor lassie is a sweet and pure lass, that has been a' her life here in this valley, like as to ony lily in it, an' we dinna think she should be insulted by the like o' that."

She had taken a note from her bosom and handed it to me.

"Haud on a wee, afore ye read it," said Tammas. "Afore ye cam' hame," he went on, "I didna like his attention to oor lassie, an' the untoward way he had o' trying to meet her secretly gin she but gaed oot o' oor sicht, an' ye ken Mr. Jack, hoo fond she was since a bairn, to hunt flo'ers an' birds on the hills aroun'. Sae very frankly I gaed to him, as I thocht it my duty to do, an I tell't him we had oor ain plans for the lassie, an that he was in anither class frae her, an' any attention he showed her wad be to the hurt o' the lassie, an' it wad be maist unbecoming in him as a gentleman to persist. Eh, but it maddened me to hear him explain and pass it a' aff as a joke, an' the flattery o' him fair scunnert me, it did. But for a' I said till him he didna stop it, but kept dogging the steps o' the lassie an' writing her love notes. Sae I gaed till him again an' maist pintedly I made him understaun', that I wad appeal to his grandfaither for protection. I am a man of peace, but this maitter has reached its leemit, an' noo we're gaun to turn it ower to you. Marget an' masel' hae thocht it a' oot, because if ever Elsie had a brither it's oor Jack," he added. "There's only ae thing mair I'll be asking ye afore ye act, an' it's jist this, that seeing the matter's sae delicate an' talking aboot it micht injure oor lassie, I'll jist ask ye to consult wi' Colonel Goff in the maitter."

"Ay, an' ae day ye'll ken the reason," said Marget very quietly, nodding approval to Tammas's remarks.

I never was so angry as when I read the letter. I was fighting mad, no other word will do.

"Where is Elsie?" I asked, controlling myself. "I must talk with our little lassie."

"Weel, ye see," said Marget, "Jack, I dinna ken. The puir bairn is a' but crushed—she's just like a lily that has grown a' simmer in the valley, an' opens for the first time ae morning to find there's such a thing in God's worl' as rain an' hail."

Tammas came up to me whispering quietly. "We maun tell ye this, Mr. Jack, it's only fair that ye should ken. We hae keepit' oor ain counsel a' these years about oor lassie, an' that which we wad like ye to ken aboot her Colonel Goff will tell ye. But this ye maun ken, there is behind her on her faither's side

that verra intensity of nature so highly keyed for joy or sorrow, that it has sent mony o' her forbears amang the gentle leddies o' her hoose to early deaths, even to taking their ain lives. Ay, Elsie is jist sae like her faither's sister, the bonnie ane that suicided for love. Eh, but oor hearts are wae aboot oor bairn. She's shut hersel' in her room a' day, but jist afore ye cam' she gaed off to the wood ower yonder."

"Ay, ay, if there's ony ane in this worl' that can help us it's you, as I said to Tammas afore ye cam'. The Lord be thankit for your coming!"

"Ay, but the lassie;—Mr. Jack, would you let them that raised you be plain to your face as becomes honest folks with those they love?"

I nodded. "Then Elsie cares na' a bawbee for this bold rascallion—it's you she loves, Mr. Jack, an' wi' a' respect and deference for so delicate a thing, you'll sune ken that ye hae the love o' a lassie wham the highest in England and Scotland wad be prood to mate wi'."

At first I could not find her. She was hidden in her favorite place, a natural arbor of low dogwoods overgrown with a beautiful root of tangled wild-grape.

I was never before more calm, for the seriousness of it all was on me. Not only was her own reputation, her future happiness and life at stake, but that of others also. The hint given me by Marget made things clear. If I ever needed tact I needed it now. I was ready for any concession to save her from the position she was in, even to forget Eloise, if I could.

I decided that it was best that she should not know that I knew anything. My first glance showed me how seriously she was taking her trouble. I had never seen such sorrow in her eyes, eyes which now fought defiantly the gloom that was settling in them, as a child's when it knows for the first time its mother has died.

I sat down beside her, and without speaking drew her to me. "My little Heart's-Ease," I said, "you'll let your prince help you?" I let her cry on my shoulder until she cared to talk—stroking her hair.

"I thought you had forgotten me," she said. "Where have you been so long?"

"Oh, I had much to do—to think about—that needed doing quickly. First I had to move and get settled. I live with Dr. Gottlieb now—well—it is a long story, but I'm—I have no home now, Heart's-Ease."

"You shall live with us if you wish—if you will—Tammas and Marget and me."

I laughed boyishly. "I will if it comes to a rub."

"I am so glad you've come. I have been so troubled, Jack. Just before you came I was sitting here, and I thought I saw Ophelia in that pool down there where the spring branch goes into the deep hole under the willows, like my picture in Shakespeare."

”Nonsense,” I said, drawing her to me. ”Tell me what you ate for supper last night? I believe you are in love.”

She turned white, and her lips were drawn.

”No one loves me,” she said, and she blushed crimson, ”no one in the right way. It is just like Ophelia, and so I was thinking—”

”No one shall love you any other way,” I said, ”unless they first reckon with me, for I love you,” I added tenderly, for I pitied her so much.

She looked up, smiling through her tears.

Then both of her arms were around my neck. ”Jack, Jack!”

Her hands were in mine: her eyes, looking up to mine, had tears in them. I saw that she had misunderstood, but I saw that if I were to save her I must save her through love. I felt the hot blood rush, for very shame, into my face, stinging it red for punishment.

”Forgive me, Elsie,” I began, my throat choked with shame, ”I can't explain, I didn't—”

For answer she kissed me, both arms around my neck, as she said, ”Oh, I am so happy.”

She was silent, her hands in mine. They burned me, yet to turn them loose, to tell her truthfully, and she keyed so to the sensitiveness and unthinking romance—I thought of the pool and Ophelia.... She laughed happily: ”Tell me, Jack, your Elsie, when did you find that you loved me so? Was it because of my thoughts of you in the horror and folly of my flirtation with Braxton Bragg?”

”Never mind,” I said; ”you are never to mention that name to me.”

”Oh, Jack,” she hid her face on my bosom.

”You are not to speak of anything disagreeable. Only we'll just love each other, Elsie.”

”Oh, please, please, just let me tell you a little, so that you will always understand me—your silly Heart's-Ease. It was this way, Jack: suppose now, suppose you were placed this way—that you were very lonely—always had lived in a cabin, and so much you wished to see the world—that in you was a strange, queer longing, a feeling that you had been born for higher things—and—all at once right out of the sky—that which you longed for came—the star of your soul.”

She hid her head on my arm. She was weeping.

”Go on, child,” I said; ”I am listening.

”And he—he would not tell you he was your prince; then you felt that strange feeling again, only worse—to go away—to leave yourself—well, then another comes—I do not know, only he did—I had only seen him twice, and each time he was very kind, but so fulsome and so bold, that well—I would not meet him again and so he wrote....”

She was silent for a moment and then she spoke suddenly. ”Oh, I fear I did

wrong to see the other—to answer his note. I was so unhappy then—so wretched then, for I did not know that—that—you loved me—then!"

"Elsie, promise me—" I began.

"Please don't, Jack, dear Jack, it is all right now. I have written him already. I wrote him I'd never see him again and never to write me."

"And if he does, will you tell me, turn his note over to me?"

She laughed. "Why, Jack, of course I will."

The setting sunlight streamed on her hair till it looked like banked western clouds. The very skies of Heaven were in her eyes, and her dignity and poise were like a queen's.

She took off the heart's-ease she had pinned on my coat.

"You don't need this now, my sweet prince."

"Don't, Elsie," I said; "my God, I can't explain, but, child—I need it now more than I ever did in my life."

For a moment she looked at me with pretended offended eyes.

"Ay, ay, I see; but you shall have me when you will, and you will need it, my bonny prince, until I am there," and she pinned it back between hot flushes and tears. "And you will see me soon, Jack, right here in our sweet trysting place?

"Good-by," she said in time. "You will see me soon, Jack?" Then taking my hand before I could prevent, she pressed it to her bosom, kissing it.

"Elsie, Elsie, don't—I would die to save you pain! I would die to save you pain! Don't!"

"I am so happy. Good-by, Jack."

"Elsie!" I called. "Oh, you misunderstood me—you don't understand."

But she only laughed back gladly as a child would, throwing kisses to me as she ran like the doe of her own heather up the hill.

I saw Marget and Tammas at the door, smiling; and I knew that they saw Elsie's happiness.

CHAPTER XVII
"LADY CARFAX"

I knew that I must save Elsie from the false, unthinking fate her own romantic nature and Braxton Bragg's infamy might thrust upon her. I loved Elsie as my own sister and knew that now I stood in a false position toward her. Once as I

strode home in the gathering darkness I was tempted to turn back. I would right myself. I could not stand my false position even until to-morrow. I had but a few days to act. Elsie had gone home happy—I, miserable—hating myself. Always before me was the glad smile I saw on Tammas' and Marget's faces as Elsie went up the path—the smile of hopes fulfilled, of Elsie safe, of a great wish come to pass.... How they stabbed me now—Elsie's words: "You shall have me when you will, your Heart's-Ease."

And yet if I did? Great God! I might be a murderer! I saw how much Elsie was like Ophelia. I saw it all: the pale, conscience-stricken, helpless little soul, the proud spirit scorned, the unthinking creature, of romance and of hopes destroyed. The deep pool in the valley might hide her in its waters before another day. So I went on, choosing what seemed to be the lesser of two wrongs.

As I rode Satan over to The Manor after supper I thought of all my past life in which Braxton Bragg had figured. I remembered him first as a large, bullying, overgrown boy, three years older and much larger than I. I remembered his small, bullet-shaped head, the fat, heavy jowls, the short neck, and the loud laugh. From the first he had teased and derided me. I did not understand it then, but it was plain now. Young as he was, he had set his plans to work to discredit me with my grandsire; to own The Home Stretch himself, and to win Eloise. The conceit of him! Only one great thing Braxton Bragg had in him, his aim. That was something to his credit: but without brain and heart behind it, of what availed the aim? He was like a wharf-rat, stealing on board a man-of-war, to shoot a thirteen-inch gun at the moon! He had never been a boy, a real playmate to me. He had always been cruel to the little negroes around us, and to dumb animals, and in everything he had been a coward and a bully. I had never taken his designs on Eloise seriously, nor had she. Yet his persistency was notable, even up to now, when her engagement to Colonel Goff had been announced.

Braxton Bragg, I decided, meant to deceive Elsie, to play with her, this little creature of fun and love, this pure little flower that was as much of The Home Stretch as the flowers on the hills, the locust blossoms that perfumed all the air in spring.

He had beaten me out of my birthright by deceit and make-believe. I could stand that. I could make my own Home Stretch, as every man must make his, whether he will it or not, if he and his home shall ever become two halves that make one. And he must make it by work of heart as well as of brain and of body if he hold it truly: for God is inexorable, and His law of possession is: *if you have not earned it, you shall not hold it*! In vain do men subterfuge with that law, by gifts, inheritance, entail, by trustees and trusts; shambling along they may go a generation: then God and His Higher Court decrees, and the little tenants by courtesy pass out. The little mice who have not the love of it, which has been

born of labor, the pride of it begot of sacrifices given, find themselves food in the claws of the great eagles which work and dare.

This last act of Braxton Bragg roused me to an anger I had never felt before in all my life. I had always been for quietness and peace. I did not know it then, but I know now that there are Three of me—Me, Myself, and my Soul—which are almost as distinct one from another as three separate personalities.

In grief and despair, in times of crisis only, do we see them most distinctly; or, after a sweet sleep at night you do not quite waken in the morning, they are then all so plainly distinct: there is Me—the carnal one, selfish one, the animal one: the lowest: and there is Myself, that is part of both, that would be spiritual, would be good, only that not always may it be. And highest and loftiest, and altogether greatest, and incomprehensible, and exclusive, standing alone, and aloof above Me and Myself, the Supreme Judge of the others, and the final arbiter of all their little efforts and aims is I, the Spiritual, God-given small, silent-voiced I.

It governs, controls, is king.

Me—is a man merely: given to eating and drinking, to stomach troubles and pills; to subterfuges and make-believes; to vacillations—changes: to thinking this one day and that another—full of policies and conceits and deceits; of whims and caprices: changeable; consistent only in one thing that it is always animal, deceiving its own self all the time, and Myself half the time, but deceiving *I—never*!

I only smiles, and lets the other two go on till they need the judgment and the whip—then they get them.

ME—a miserable, little animal that came from the fishes, or perhaps what is left of my anthropoid ancestors, full of fun one day and to-morrow a lion full of fight, always an animal, sensual; money-getting, love-getting, land-getting, place-getting, fame-getting—always and forever, with an eye out for ME and My Chance.

ME—a thing with a liver and two legs—Me! And above that is the second Me, Myself—half spirit and half flesh.

It is this that weeps, laughs or curses the acts of the First, yet has no power to change them; it can arrest him somewhat, haul him up a little while before the court—a kind of a police officer for a brief trial—but only the Supreme Judge—only *I* may pass the act that stops him. When the First has groveled in the dust of things, it is This that fights back with the spirit's disgust, giving due notice to the flesh that it is not all supreme, not all in all, that there is really something else, somewhere, somehow, or else we would not have sorrow after sin, penitence after pain, fear after a fall.

MYSELF, my little soul—a half-bred mongrel Compromising Thing it is—a

bird with gills and a bladder, a chrysalis that has yet to burst and be a butterfly; a tadpole with a tail unshed, which one day may be dropped in that metamorphosis to a higher state and yet more likely to die a tadpole!

And then there is I, the still, small, silent I. ME, it talks, and struts and brags; and MYSELF and its little soul is full of whines and little pretenses, of platitudes to Men and Things. But I—it never speaks, never sleeps, never compromises, but always commands.

It exercises its authority as it is needed in great sorrows, or the great crises of the other little lives. And it comes sweetest and clearest (which is proof positive that it exists) before even the others are awake, in the first dawn of day, or in the still night watches of dreams; and it fairly crushes you with the sweetness of its presence, in that quiet kingdom through which you loiter, and then pass through—that Kingdom between the Dawn and the Daylight. Suddenly we awake enough to know that we are there—*It* is there—in another world—painfully, awfully, preciously there. Then we see how truly Me and Myself—my little body of ME may die and pass away, and be as naught—but that *I*, the still, small, silent I of Me has come from Æons to go on to Eternities; and after all the little plans of me, and the braggart, *this I will do and that I will not do of Me, this I will be and that I will not be of Me*, and after all my resolves and final decisions, and my well-laid plans of Me—*I*, the kingly *I of Me* has only to appear, sitting silent as a burning flame in the throne room of my soul, and all My's plans both of doing and being, and all of my soul's resolve of purpose—the great decisions of my very soul—become as slaves to fall down before and crawl to do its bidding! …

Braxton Bragg's perfidy had aroused me to an anger that I had never known before: I had been a quiet boy, I loved not strife, "*Oh, he won't fight, not one of them will,*" I caught myself mimicking my grandsire, and in hot forgetfulness, I struck the big horse I was riding with a quick touch of my heel—I was almost unseated with the leap he made.

"Steady, quiet, forgive me, old boy!" I cried, stroking his crest to calmness—"that only means I see things differently; that in this little world our ethics is one thing, our little religions, laws, our civilization is one thing, and God and His laws are another. One says if he smite you, turn your other cheek; the other says, if he strike you, strike back harder. One says peace—the other says it is war, even in the name of peace; one says Justice and her scales, the other says the Eagle and the Battleship. There is a time in every honest man's life when he must fight or die. Satan, old boy, I am going to fight awhile!"

I was lusty and twenty—ME.

So I pondered as I rode over to see Colonel Goff. I found him in the library of The Manor, and was soon seated with him. I noticed the sterling beauty of the

furniture, the trophies of the chase, both in India and America, and a full portrait of Eloise over the mantel. I had been a boy to Colonel Goff until my return. Now I imagined that my sudden change into a full-grown man had never quite come home to him, remembering me only as he had known me last.

"You have given me an unexpected pleasure, my boy," he said with a touch of cordiality in his voice. "I have been beastly lonely since Eloise left." He eyed me through his half-closed lids as he lighted a cigar and watched me light mine.

I flushed, and I fear he noticed it. Then I broke abruptly into my subject. "It is your help and advice I want to-night, sir. I have come to talk of Elsie."

He looked at me surprised, holding a half-lit match in his finger. Instantly the match was snuffed out with a sudden twist and a smile broke over his face.

"It's all right, Jack," he said warmly; "I think I can guess—I have seen for a month that you have cut me out—all of us—why—"

"I fear you are mistaken, Colonel Goff," I said quietly. "I know how much you think of her, that you are her friend, and I thought the two of us together might help her out of an unfortunate affair."

He turned on me quickly.

"Why, what has happened? I saw her to-day; she was all right."

"Nothing has happened yet," I said; "nor is it likely to now, since I am going to do some acting myself, with your help."

I handed him the note. I had heard my old grandsire say that in critical places Goff was always coolest. He smoked while he read, not a muscle moving.

"This thing is so out of all our English ideas of sense and decency, and so unusual, that I'm lost in it," he said quietly at last. "It seems that he has actually induced my romantic little girl to agree to a secret clandestine marriage with him, and his regiment leaves for the Philippines to-morrow, marry her secretly, and claim her when he comes back!"

Instead of being angry Goff laughed, half ironically but with intent behind it. He rose and walked to the door, calling his butler. "Tell James to saddle my horse at once," I heard him say. Then he closed the door and came up to me. "Jack, this is the damnedest piece of blackguardism I ever had to kick out of my mind; we'll settle it in a jiffy with him,—just as I'd kick a little cur out of my pack of running hounds. You'll ride with me, of course, and witness it."

"I will, Colonel Goff," I said sullenly, "if you'll let me do it in my own way. It is I who want you to witness it."

He slapped me on the shoulder.

"You're all right, Jack, I've always known that: and if it is nothing rash—you see if it were, why, the child would be talked about. Oh, yes, damn him, if it wasn't for her I'd kill him myself."

"Colonel Goff," I said rising, "I'm going to thrash him to-night before I go

to bed. I'm going to do it in my own way."

He laughed outright and grasped my hand. "You must not," he said, "and I will tell you why; you've earned it. This is my great secret. I've seen all along that you have loved her—and, well, it's plain she loves you. But I see through this affair much further than you because you don't know. I'll tell you, you have earned both my friendship and my gratitude. First, there is no insult here, in this note. I've been the scoundrel's friend all his life. He had so few, and I told him in confidence what I've never told anyone—did not intend to tell till the announcement of my marriage next month—Elsie is my daughter—she is Lady Carfax by birthright and by title, and this little scoundrel has taken advantage of my confidence. He has always had a sneaking idea that he would marry Eloise, and now that he can't, he loves me so much he'd like to be my son-in-law, though he ruined my daughter's chances in life to do it, with his fool secret marriage."

He stopped and looked at me, thinking quietly for a moment.

"You'll excuse me, Jack, for plainness, but we've no time for anything else, and I mean it all kindly. But you, yourself, are mostly to blame for this. I have read it in Elsie, but I thought you'd never see it, never tell her of your love. Now, it's this way, my boy; and I'll be frank. I am going to take Lady Carfax home and finish her education, and give her the chance her place demands. You are always welcome to come and be with us at any time as long as you choose, and if, on her majority, she still loves you, and you her, why—" he stopped, smiling kindly.

"Colonel Goff," I said rising, "you certainly misunderstand me. All that I'll talk to you about later. I'm in a mood to-night I've never been in before. Get your horse and go with me. I want you to see that I have a fair fight."

"It won't do, Jack," he said. "I'll not even let you go with me. It's Elsie I'm thinking of, Elsie and you. The quieter this thing is settled, the better for all. I see through it—as I told you. I'll ride over to see him. I'll catch him to-night, and when I have finished with him, he'll never mention Elsie again, let alone try to marry her secretly. I saw her to-night just before you came. Jack, my little girl is happy. It pleases me—let her stay happy, and you shall be, some day, if you will—"

I did not reply. We rose to go. At the parting of the road I galloped home, he to the city.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAST DANCE

It was a night in early June. The Home Stretch was all a-glitter, its porches and the great trees on the lawn lighted with rows of colored lanterns.

My Aunt and Eloise had returned; the Cumberland races, the social event of the year, began the next day, and in accordance with her custom my Aunt was giving her annual ball. This time it was to serve a two-fold purpose; for it was also in honor of Eloise and Colonel Goff and was to be the formal announcement of their coming marriage.

I rode over early. If I was needed I wanted to help as of old; and I had seen neither of them since they had returned a week ago, for I had been away for several weeks, in an adjoining county, earning my first fee in forestry. I had been employed by a corporation to pass upon a large tract of timber, to report its millage and availability, but best of all I was to put my plans into effect in its harvesting, cutting out only the ripe trees, and preserving the young ones beneath from death and mutilation.

I had spent two weeks among them. There were many different kinds, and they had become almost like children to me, and like children, they each had different temperaments—these trees—different forms, dispositions, dreams, and they always talked to me, through their little leaves, but sweetest of all in the night, even as children do, when, full of themselves and of life, they gossip so friendly in the balm of the June moon. They told me like village gossipers, of their every little affair, their little vexes, turmoils, the very little scandals of their wood. And in more stirring moods when the night winds would arise and sweep through them the writers, minstrels and poets, stirred to historic flights, quivered with their greater dreams, sang their tales of tree tragedies, of wars had, of fights for life and of martyr and hero deaths.

And I had lain and listened, and felt my heart grow big with throbbing even as when I first read of the wanderings of Ulysses.

I came from out among them older, braver, better. I came with higher motives for my own life and eyes which saw clearer into the future and read more kindly the lives of others.

And gladly would I have stayed in the wood among them, to go back—rather than to see what I must see—Eloise betrothed to another. No tree tragedy could be more cruel than that which had killed the love of my own life.

In withholdingness and sorrow I left them: "duty" not as someone has said, "is the sublimest word in the English language" because duty is often done in pleasure, but the real sublimity of duty is the duty done in pain. To fail to go were cowardice, and I was no coward even if my grandsire did think so.

But when I went into the great hall of The Home Stretch, filled with chattering guests, the contrast was poignant. It was as if deep in the sleeping and silent forces a cloud of chattering birds had landed suddenly among my trees.

”It is good to see you home again, Jack.”

It was Eloise who spoke. Her eyes told me that she had been waiting, and a brave lingering smile went with her words. There were little tired, hard lines around her sweet mouth. She looked tired but game, as when, in a long day’s hunt after quail and the route home was long, and our luck nil, it needed a good heart to smile.

She stood with Goff in the reception room, as though she were Countess of Carfax already. The hand I held trembled for the first time in mine.

”Glad to see you back, Jack,” said Goff, his face aglow with the pride he felt.

”Where have you been, Jack? I thought you were never coming to see me again?” Eloise asked.

She gradually moved away with me from the crowd in the center of the room until we stood apart in the large bay window.

”Come,” I said teasingly, ”you have got away from your lord; he will miss you.”

It was not fun to her. Her face flushed, then paled. ”Jack, you must dance with me once to-night—our last dance. I have something to tell you then.”

”I don’t think you ought to punish me any more than you have already, Eloise,” I said frankly.

”Maybe I am punishing myself more,” she said softly.

”Eloise, Eloise—”

But she had turned and was receiving the newly arrived and merry crowd behind us.

My Aunt held to some customs which she permitted none of the innovations of society to alter. One was that her balls must open with the Virginia Reel. I saw her coming and understood.

”Jack,” she nodded, commandingly, ”we are ready, you and Eloise open it up.”

Eloise stood behind her smiling. She placed both her hands in mine and together we glided to the head of the line. We stood holding hands and waiting for the music. Coming closer, my Aunt smiled and whispered, ”I wish you two children could see what a fine pair you make. Pedigree counts even in a Virginia Reel, and you two were bred for it.”

We both laughed.

”Look into that mirror across yonder,” she laughed, ”and see how much better I am at pairing off people than they are themselves.”

We glanced across and saw Goff and a fat lady from town.

”They are matched perfectly,” said my Aunt Lucretia, ”both grass-fed.”

”Please don’t, Aunt Lucretia,” said Eloise, ”that isn’t fair. You are trying your best to keep me from being a countess.” Then she added suddenly, ”Oh,

Jack, tell me about Satan. You don't know how I've missed him. Where have you two been?"

"In the wood together. No—n-o—you shall never have him, such a horse—such a comrade."

Eloise pouted. "You'll see. Why Colonel Goff has promised I shall take him to England with me. And Jack—how about his exercise? My heart is set on beating him in that hurdle race, and Aunt Lucretia would have apoplexy if she lost that bet."

"Oh, he's hard enough. I rode him two hundred miles to Obion County and back. I honestly believe he could run across the county to-morrow; and jump! I am glad you mentioned it—-it was wonderful—he is foolish about me. It is because he knows I love you, dear," I said, whispering in her ear.

"Please don't, Jack, you only hurt me."

"I was across a small ravine from him one day, had hitched him and was looking at some timber. He broke his halter and came to me. I heard his calling neigh and I answered him, and he came to me, clearing a ten-foot ravine in a jump."

Eloise clapped her hands, and my Aunt, who had come up and heard it, smiled. Then she said, with her usual red-tape accuracy, "I hope you took the measurements. Was it really ten feet, Jack?"

"I measured it," I said, "and it was nearly bottomless. If one foot had missed—"

My Aunt nodded to Eloise. "That little branch in Cumberland Park is only ten across from bank to bank. Oh, we'll play it on his lordship fine! Come!"

There was a crash of music. With radiant cheeks and eyes that I saw many a night afterwards in my dreams, and a proud smile she went with me down the line.

There was a pretty surprise for us at the supper. We had filed into the dining hall. My grandfather sat alone, his hair white under the candles. On the right of him stood Eloise and Colonel Goff, and the long line of expectant guests stood around down the long table.

My grandfather rapped, and, raising his glass, proposed a toast to the future Earl and Countess of Carfax. There was a burst of applause. The guests lifted their glasses.

"My friends," said Colonel Goff, bravely, when the room became quiet, "I came to you years ago, an exiled Englishman, and I found a home here, following my old commander from the war. I came lonely and alone. I go back with a sorrow in my heart at leaving many friends behind, but instead of going alone, I return taking with me one who will be the peer of any countess of the long line of Carfax."

He turned, bowing grandly to Eloise, who, pale, and with trembling lips listened. I could see her breast faltering with quickened breathing. Her parted lips panted for air, even though she stood beaming graciously to the greeting. "I have another announcement to make," he went on very quietly, "and I think it right that I do it now, that I may be just to myself, to the good people who have reared her, and to my child whom I love. My coming here was not altogether purposeless. You will understand when I introduce to you my daughter, Lady Elsie."

There was a stir at the lower end of the table, and I saw my Aunt Lucretia open the folding doors and Tammas followed by Marget enter. Elsie followed, her face ablaze with that beauty which was always hers when excited. She was more like an angel of light than a girl, and around her neck and in her hair were the jewels of the house of Carfax.

Goff met and kissed her, and very simply and sweetly she advanced and kissed Eloise, graciously, almost unconsciously, a kiss both of love and tribute. She stood between them, bowing and smiling so graciously down the table that her breeding was evident.

All who knew her loved her, and for the next ten minutes they thronged around her with kisses and congratulations.

I did not go, for there were tears in my eyes and a great choking in my throat. When I looked up Tammas and Marget were standing by me, Tammas making a bold effort at winking his tears away and smiling. He mopped his brow vigorously, and said mechanically, "'Tis a bonny night for us, a bonny night and a glorious for our lassie!"

"Ay, weel," said Marget between her sobs, "but dinna she look it—like her ain sweet mother? Oh, but she was that bonny, and 'tis she, our lassie, Tammas, can be looking down on her this blessed minute, her bairn who has come into her own."

Then Elsie saw us and came quietly forward. She clasped me impulsively around the neck and kissed me, whispering, "Oh, it is mine, Jack, that I felt but could not tell. 'Tis the unattainable come true, and now, Jack, dear Jack, that I am Lady Elsie, now that I am worthy of you—" she could not speak. Her lips were deadly white as if with faintness. I held her, stroking her hair.

"You were always worthy of anyone, sweet one. Be brave, be brave, now," I whispered, "and go back to your father's side."

I looked up to find Eloise's eyes upon me, and a strange understanding in their depths.

"I am staying with papa, at The Manor now," said Elsie as she left me and Marget. "You will not let it keep you from coming to see me often, will you, Jack?"

”Ay, weel, to be sure, lassie,” broke in Tammas, and I caught the pleased look that seemed part of his countenance that night as if now his heart’s desire had already come to pass, ”ay, weel, to be sure, for our Mr. Jack will always be our Mr. Jack to us, lassie.” ...

It was the last waltz. Eloise beckoned to me, and when I reached her, she opened her arms and I took her in mine. I could not speak, my heart beating almost strangled me. I held her tight, and into the sweetness of the music and the lure of the waltz came again all the past sweetness from her girlhood up, all blending in memory with the perfume of her hair, the whiteness of her throat, and the firm supple touch of her lithe, strong body against mine. Again she was my Little Sister and comrade of the long past. My life, my love, my all that I dreamed and hoped, danced with her in that last dance....

I felt her heart beating against mine. Her breathing was a sob. I felt her wilt, her limbs give way beneath her, her arms hang limp, her head fall back. I carried her in my arms to the sofa....

”A little ice water,” said my Aunt Lucretia. When I looked up Colonel Goff stood over her bathing her face. ”I should not have let her dance so much—it was all too much for her.” He bent again, stroking the beautiful hair. I could not see more for my anger.

In the cool air outside I came to myself. My anger died, all but my own bitterness. I saw the long line of carriages and the men sleeping on boxes, and then I heard a nicker, a friendly little recalling whinny from Satan’s stall, and the next instant I had swung into his saddle, and touched my heel to his flank.

I saw the grooms on the boxes sit up, and stare into the night, for straight to the banks of a little creek I rode him, not down the old road. He leaped high into the air, enjoying even more than I did the glory of the risk and jump. He swept like a whirlwind through the gate. The mad ride home soothed me.

CHAPTER XIX
THE HIGH JUMP

From the crush of the great crowds around the grand stand at the race-course, lining up far down the in-field, and jamming the betting sheds, I saw my Aunt Lucretia forcing her sorrel horse through the gathering. She had been a familiar figure at every fair and race meeting as far back as I could remember. No secretary

for twenty years had questioned her judgment or her orders; they were too glad to have her help. I was in the judges' stand helping them out. I had ridden over early, leaving Satan to my Aunt's stable boy, who had already worked him out with a stiff gallop of two miles, and rubbed him down for the hurdle race and the high jump.

My Aunt Lucretia rode up close to the little canopied stand and beckoned to me. "Ever see such a crowd?" she said, smiling proudly. "I told Roswick this special high jump and hurdle would draw 'em. I'll bet there are twenty thousand people in that crowd."

"What is the programme?" I asked indifferently, though I knew it as well as she. I had come out under protest with myself as it were; I would rather have been deep in the heart of my wood where I might not see Eloise. I had tossed all night on my bed. If I dozed it was only to awaken, feeling that I held Eloise fainting in my arms. I did not want to see her, for in my heart, since I last danced, there had been such a tempest of conflicting emotions as made me pace the floor all night; and by day I knew not my own mind. Yet somehow it was not all sorrow. For I knew now that Eloise loved me and at thought of it my heart almost burst with gladness. Gladness was mingled so with sorrow that I wondered if both were not sweeter for the mingling.

"Colonel Goff and I have put up a few three-foot hurdles," my Aunt said, sweeping the track with her hand, "and he and Eloise and a few of the younger people are going to gallop over them just for fun. Goff really wants to show off his record-breaking jumper and his *fiancée* at the same time," she said, smiling carelessly at me. "The hurdles will be for any of them who care to go over them, but the high jump," and she pointed to a movable gate of bars, flanked with high panels on each side, "will be put across the wire at the finish for Goff and his hunter only," and she laughed, winking at me slyly. "The record is five feet six; Goff thinks that is what he is going after again; but I've put up another bar for fun. I want to see Goff's imported record-breaking 'lepper,' as he calls him, break his blooming knees on that top bar."

I turned impatiently. "Aunt Lucretia, that's dangerous, six feet—and under the whip, after a mile dash!"

Aunt Lucretia smiled. "None of them is supposed to go after the high jump but the Colonel, and he swears he can do it. H-u-s-h!" she whispered. "Not a word of this. Just let Eloise fix him. I've been twenty years arguing with him about importing these worthless brutes and the superiority of our own horses, now I am going to make him pay for his obstinacy—s-sh! There they come now," and she pointed to the in-field, through which a jolly group of riders came, society people mostly, girls and boys and members of the hunting club who were out for the mile gallop over the short hurdles.

"There are ten couples of them in all," she said, "our smartest boys and girls. Many of them will not even try the low hurdles and none of them the high jump except the Colonel."

"You ought not to try it," I said resolutely. "Don't you know that nothing can keep Eloise and Satan from trying that gate of bars?"

"Of course," said my Aunt, "but Goff doesn't know it, and that is where he will part with his ducats. He has even forgotten the bet, he has been so happy; but I'll remind him. He hasn't the least idea that Satan could jump over his shadow in the road. O-h, no!"

As we talked they rode up. "Now see here," said Colonel Goff to his crowd, as he lined them up, "some of these hurdles are going to take a bit of going, and you boys must give the ladies the front, for your dust might blind the horses to the hurdles and make them rush over them with chances for bad tumbles and broken knees. We'll finish the last quarter flat; but I'll go over the gate and bars here for exhibition. It's a pretty stiff affair and will take a bit of going, so the rest of you will please be so kind as to give me the lead here and an open field; just hack around this last quarter, following me, and dodge the gate. There's plenty of room."

The Colonel sat his horse near me as I stood, watch in hand in the judges' stand. Eloise had not looked my way. She sat her great, steel-limbed mount as unconcernedly as if she were going on a fox chase. The others were laughing and excited, the untried horses nervous and restless, but Satan stood still, looking as if carved out of the black granite of the hills. Eloise glanced up and saw me. I turned my head quickly, but she came over, her face pale, but her eyes smiling kindly into mine. The old fun was in them, the old daring, colt-breaking fun I had not seen there since my return.

"Jack," she said, laughing, "if I could only get you behind the barn to split my skirts again; this side-saddle is too heavy." She was looking me bravely in the eye, laughing as she said it. Then all at once I saw all the make-believe go out of her face and her eyes fall before mine.

Riding up softly she whispered, "Jack, do you remember the Story of Atalanta?"

I nodded.

"If he doesn't beat me this mile, and over that high jump he shall never have me, I have told him so."

There are little things even in big events that count more than the big things themselves. I sat utterly wretched. I heard her calling her horse pet names, and saw her rubbing his neck with her whip. I saw the old daring nervousness that showed in the very shoulders of her, the keen, fine play of her eyes, and the white lines that lay like a rim of moonlight around the red of her lips. The next five

minutes were spent by the starter telling of the record of Goff's horse.

They lined up ready for the word. It was I who gave it. Instantly from Eloise, even in the thunder of the great leap of her horse I saw two fingers fly to her lips in a kiss to me in her old daring, fun-loving way. "Go!" I had cried.

"But I am coming back, Jack. Good-by."

The Colonel's horse, trained as he was, strode easily ahead of the noisy, awkward bunch. I saw Eloise turn Satan loose, and in an instant he had collared the imported one. They went over the first hurdle like a pair, the field behind Nestor and Satan running neck and neck. With my glasses I could see that Goff was smiling in the delight of the race she was giving him. They were not going fast—it was more of a gallop—for the Colonel set the pace to suit the slower field of amateurs behind him. They mounted the last hurdle together, and came into the back stretch for the last quarter of the mile. The six-foot gate sat in the middle of the track. The judges rose and stood with their timers in their hands. I heard the grand stand hum and buzz with expectancy.

"Now, hold back!" shouted Goff to all as he turned his horse loose in the stretch. "Give me the right of way!"

He came the last quarter with great speed, and then I saw the grand stand rise to its feet, and a wild roar followed, for Eloise had passed him as a full-set yacht a tug, headed straight for the bars. I heard Goff shouting to her; he had lost his head in the fear for her safety. They rose for the leap, Eloise two lengths ahead. I saw Satan rise high, true to his stride, high up—straight up, his great form silhouetted against the sky, Eloise smiling, triumphantly, beautifully, splendidly lifting him over.

It was Goff's horse that did it. In the excitement his rider did not hold him true; he wavered a moment, dodged faint-heartedly, ducked, shied the perilous leap before him, and, bolting, struck the nigh post of the movable gate, hurling it forward ten feet, full under the flanks of Satan, who had cleared it. It caught him cruelly as he came down, under the flanks, making him turn a summersault, hurling Eloise into the fence. I heard the grand stand groan.

It was I who held her lifeless form in my arms....

I remember but little of the tent and the surgeons. I heard someone say, "*She'll die, her back is broken!*"

A horse, riderless, had followed us to the tent's very door; he had thrust his head in, whinnying. It broke my heart to feel his cold nose against my cheek.

It was then I led him away, so blinded by tears that I did not see where we went.

III
THE HICKORY'S SON

CHAPTER I
"LOVE IS NOT LOVE THAT ALTERS WHEN IT ALTERATION FINDS"

Three weeks after Eloise was injured and while her life was yet despaired of by the physician, my Aunt Lucretia came to me. I was sitting on the rustic bench beneath the hickories. Night after night I had sat there, watching the light from her window, and the coming and going of the physician and nurses. To-day there had been a consultation. My Aunt had sent for a famous surgeon of Philadelphia, and all afternoon he had been in the sick room. When I saw my Aunt I knew that his decision had been reached, and though I sat still, apparently calm, my heart was smothered within me. She said very distinctly, "It's her spine, Jack, he says she will never walk again."

I found myself an hour afterwards taking the old path to the dairy. I saw the light from Tammas's cottage shining far out into the night. I was wandering around numbed, stunned. As I passed the paddock I heard Satan whinny appealingly to me. From the little window in his stall he had thrust out his great head. This was the horse we had all feared, and had cruelly misnamed. The great vicious horse that had almost killed the groom, that had only been conquered by one woman, had his head on my shoulder and was whinnying softly. I knew that he was begging for news of Eloise, and for sympathy; and, dumb as he was, he knew that I would understand.

"She insists that she must see you to-night," said my Aunt Lucretia, when I reached the house.

She led me up the old, familiar stairs, and down the great hall to Eloise's room. She stopped at the door.

"You will find her very brave," said my Aunt, "very brave, and so must you be," she added, giving me a quick look.

Then she opened the door, and I stood looking at Eloise, with drawn, tied lips, and a great choking in my throat, trying to return the smile she was giving me from among her pillows. I stood still, I could not move, my limbs seemed to have caught the dead numbness of my heart.

"I want you right here by me a moment, Jack," she said calmly. "You'll let him sit on the side of the bed, Miss Rose, just a moment. I'll not exert myself."

She was more beautiful than ever. Her brave body had lost none of its suppleness and grace; her face shone, and over the pillow her hair was massed in great red-gold waves against the white of the linen.

"See," she said, taking my hand, "see, Jack, I can move my head and both my arms. Isn't that fine? And the doctor says I shall always be able to do that, and, well—" she smiled, "he says there is no reason why I should not outlive all of you to be an old woman. A crippled old woman—"

I turned my head quickly. As she had spoken I saw again the brave, beautiful creature, coming in head-long flight at the six-foot bar, and the triumphant smile that lit her face, sky-lined forever in my memory, as she lifted her horse almost straight up towards the sky.

She was speaking now to the nurse. "If you please, just a moment Miss Rose—Aunt Lucretia, I would like to speak to Jack alone. I shall not exert myself." I heard them go out. "There! I have been thinking, Jack, all these weeks—one can think so very much lying in bed, and see so very, very far. I have been thinking and seeing, Jack. It's so easy to think and so hard to see. But—but—I have prayed, too, about it—to help me see. Praying is seeing's eyesight, Jack. I want you to promise me something. It is what I have seen in my prayer—it is the last thing I shall ever ask of you—for you have done me so many favors, dear Jack."

I could not speak.

"The Earl—Colonel Goff—they let me see him to-day. It hurt me more than my own hurt to see the poor man suffer so in the blame he puts upon himself for the accident. He won't see, Jack,—he can't—that it was God's way of settling it—God's way. For He alone knew how foolish I was—how wicked to sell myself as I did—and how my heart, though I did not know it till that day, Jack—has always been yours!"

I took her in my arms, my face pressed against her cheek.

She lay still, patting my face with her hand and saying: "I am—it is—well, it seems also to be one of God's ways:

’We look before and after
And pine for what is not.’”

I heard her try to laugh in her old, brave way. She was looking again into my

eyes, and I sat holding her hand.

”But Colonel Goff,” she went on, ”gentleman that he is, thinks he must settle the account for his blundering ride, and begs me to marry him anyway; I, a cripple for life. He forgets that God balanced it when he stopped me from the sin of selling my heart for—for—his bauble—

”I have sent him away satisfied, Jack. I believe he would love me truly,” and she smiled, ”now that he sees that I cannot ride. Love me for myself and not for my riding; but I shall love only you, Jack, till I die—the old crippled woman.”

She was silent for a moment. ”And the compensation for my admitting it—you know it is costing me something—you don’t know how hard it is for me to say it first, Jack; but the compensation I claim, will you give it to your little lame girl? It is this, and now nod your head, say ’*yes*’ Jack. I’ve seen—Elsie loves you, and you must—you must marry the child. She is everything you want, and you half-way love her already. It will be easy now, Jack, promise it; for your sake—for both your sakes, I’m asking. Promise me, Jack, I want to see you happy.”

She had my hand against her cheek, fondling it. Her eyes had never seemed so beautiful.

”Do you remember the kind of love I said I had for you that first night after I came home?” She pressed my hand against her cheek again. ”And the kind you said you’d never felt, but would give your life to feel?” Again I felt the pressure. ”That kind which I told you of, and which I have had for you all the time, is that kind that Shakespeare told of when he said:

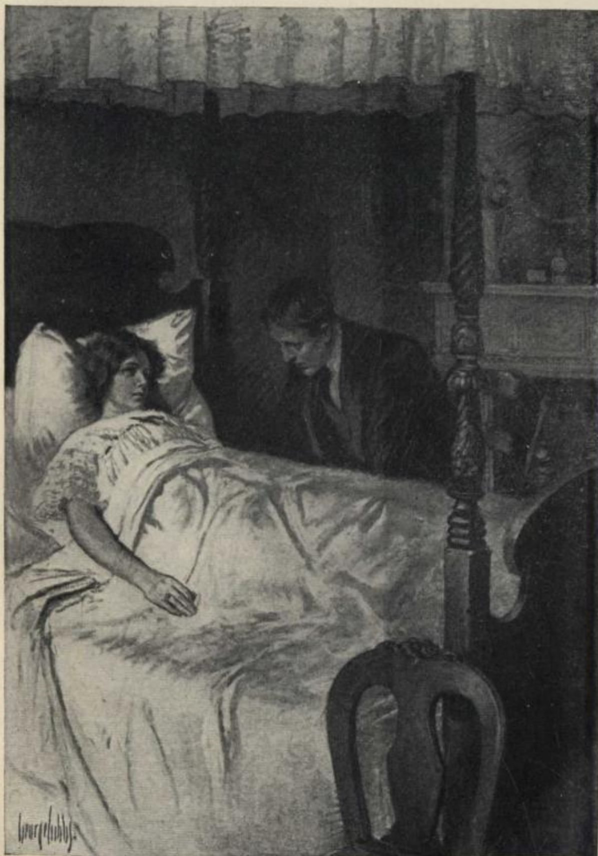
”’Love is not love that alters when it alteration finds.’

”That’s the kind I have for you, Eloise—have always had; and do you remember

the love you said you wanted, you’d give your life for, yourself, your soul and your body. ’*I, who wish it so, to be widowed of it all my life*’—those were your words. How they cut into my heart—that love, Eloise, can’t you see? Don’t you know that it is yours and you are widowed of it no longer?”

She put her arms around my neck and pulled my face down to hers, smothering her mouth in my kisses.

”Oh, Jack, why did you say it—see it? Why did you not let me fool myself—fool you? Why—and—oh, if you had only not seen it—not let me know you saw



“Love is not Love that Alters.”

”LOVE IS NOT LOVE THAT ALTERS.”

it! Love? Don't you know now that the kind I said I'd have is as I said it was? Worth life—worth death—worth all—worth all—then God help me, Jack, if I sin—God forgive me, but I'd rather hold it to my heart a helpless cripple that I am—hold it never to satisfy it—never to know what it means, helpless, bed-ridden cripple that I am than to be the well, strong thing I was without it. Oh, Jack, don't you know now what I mean?"

She kissed me again and again, holding my cheek to hers.

"Good-by, you'll not see me again, Jack, so good-by, Jack, forever. And in time, though you'll never forget me nor cease to love me, you will do as I said; for yours is youth and love and strength, and they must be mated. When you can think of me without tears, without sorrow or pity, but as one who has lived and is gone—only as the memory of a sweet dream that might have been—then, dear, dear Jack, remember the last request I made of you, remember to make Elsie happy; and in time—in time, Jack, oh, what a love-maker he is! be happy yourself. Hold me a moment, just a moment to your heart—then—kiss me again and say with me the little prayer Aunt Lucretia used to make us say, holding hands in the long ago."

Holding her face against mine, and with clasped hands as of old, we said:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take."

Although the words of Eloise came to me again and again as I rode home that night, I was never so happy, nor so hopeful. Yet she had said, "Good-by, good-by, Jack, I shall never see you again."

"I shall see her to-morrow night," my heart kept saying over and over. "I will not give her up; I will marry her, if I have to carry her in my arms through life!"

But the next night when I rode over my grandfather met me at the door. He greeted me with petulant indifference. Both Eloise and Aunt Lucretia had left that morning—where, he did not know. She was a hopeless cripple with a broken spine, and was carried away in a cot to some institution where she might be cared for properly for the balance of her life. I forgave the old man because he was old—the reiterated statement that he had made allowance for her care himself, for although she was no blood kin, and had no claim upon him, she had been with him all her life, and was a ward of his daughter.

I could learn nothing from the servants. Aunt Lucretia, Eloise, and the

nurse had gone. They had carried Eloise in a cot to the train and boarded it. It was Thomas, the driver, who gave me Aunt Lucretia's letter. She wrote, ”I have thought it all over, Jack, and this is the only thing to do. All of them are agreed, that she can never walk again. To keep her at home will only make life a tragedy to you both. It is best that you never see her again, nor she you. Sentiment is one thing, and life another. Sometimes they go together, and it is well. But when they cannot, when sentiment lives and that love of nature which reproduces life is dead, it is folly to quibble, for the loss of being is the loss of life. Be sensible, brave, and manly as you have always been and forget Eloise. Changed conditions change one's life. You must change yours. I have a request to make. I shall be at home in a month, but I do not want you ever to mention Eloise to me, for I shall not tell you where she is. This is hard, but I am doing it for your good, as I have always done, my dear boy. When I return if she is alive you may write to her, since she has begged me so, and this is the only one happiness the poor child will have in her stunted life, and I will see that she gets the letters, though she can never reply. It is best to forget."

The little note Eloise sent brought tears. It was a heart's-ease that Aunt Lucretia had evidently gathered for her, and under it was written, ”*I am widowed of love but I am wedded. Forgive me, forget me, but love me always, Jack, as I shall you—Eloise.*"

CHAPTER II
A DREAM AND ITS ENDING

In my grief at the going of Eloise I remember little of what I did in the next few days. Then I received a note from Colonel Goff asking me to ride over to The Manor, as both he and Elsie wanted to see me.

On the way I stopped to see Tammas and Marget. In their worship of Elsie I believe they thought only of her and her happiness. They had certainly not understood about my relations with Eloise. Their happiness was plain to be seen, the very laughter which at times broke over their honest faces told me clearly their pride and happiness in the turn affairs had taken with Elsie and me.

But despite my efforts not to show what was crushing my heart, they perceived that something was very seriously wrong with me.

”Ay, Jackie, 'tis a hard time you have been having, my lad," said Tammas,

”and it’s unreasonable to think the old General would turn you out of home like this; but the final word in the book of every honest man’s life is the word good, and you’ll not be losing out in the end—na, na.”

”I think you are going now to see our lassie,” said Marget, smiling slyly, ”and sure, Jackie, if ever man had recompense in the sweetness of love ’tis you. Never have I seen anything sae near an angel of light in spirit and sae beautiful in body, since she came up the hill to us that evening with her doubts all gone; ay, it is Tammas and I who are as happy as you, Jackie!”

She sighed. ”I dinna ken that it’s a’ gladness,” she went on; ”for the Earl is preparing to leave soon for his estate in the auld country, and he wants us to gang wi’ him—of course—but—” and she looked at me gravely as if seeking answer.

But I only shook my head sadly. ”I do not know, Marget—I do not know. My plans—you see—Aunt Lucretia and Eloise—that awful accident!”

Marget started to speak, but Tammas stopped her quickly, whispering to her, ”Wheest, wumman, dinna ye see, dinna ye understaun—she was as his ain sister. It’s that that’s saddening him.” And then he added louder, ”Eh, but it was a terrible thing—she that was sae young an’ daring and sae bonnie—to be an invalid a’ her days—the bold beautiful thing that loved life sae weel! An’ it’s a’ but upset the Earl. I hae never kent him to be sae troubled, for he was unco fond o’ her, an’ a grand Countess she wad hae made him. An’ to think it was his ain horse! The puir man is nearly daft!”

I was silent. I could not speak. For once the kindly talk of these two good folks annoyed me. Marget saw this, and with a motherly tenderness that touched me deeply, said, ”Weel—weel, Jackie, dinna take it sae to heart. When you go to her ain land an’ see what you have won in oor lassie, ye’ll be sayin’ with Rabbie Burns that ’tis the only place to live and love in. But awa’ ye gang,” she said, giving me a gentle push; ”it’s near supper time a’ ready an’ fine I ken that she an’ the Earl are wanting ye at The Manor. For three days she has come ower here, wondering whit wey ye had na come; she kens aboot the accident an’ is sorrowfu’, tae, but she’s sae keen to see ye, Jackie, an’ she’ll be a bit o’ comfort till ye if ye will.”

Colonel Goff was already making preparations for his going. I found him more quiet and serious than I had ever seen him. I understood that he would give anything in the world to undo the accident, and that he now found that he cared more for Eloise since she was lost to us than he had himself known, and that, like me, he was in total ignorance as to where Aunt Lucretia had taken her.

”Jack, Jack!” he kept repeating as he walked the floor, ”I can never forgive myself! That beastly, beastly ride! To have loved horses as I have all my life, to have done so much for them and their sport and to have my pride in them all thrown away and the whole of my life changed like that! ... There is Elsie—go

with her, Jack—the child wants you!" he added as he headed towards his stable.

I pitied him, but I pitied myself more. For, looking at him, hearing him talk, I saw that he did not know and would never know. God had not made him to know as Eloise and I knew, not even as Elsie would know. In spite of all that had passed before him, and all that he had seen, he did not know that as he talked of Eloise it was I who was suffering most. He did not even see remotely that it was I who loved her, not he.... There are fish in the deep sea which carry their own electric light.... There are others there which have not even eyes! ...

Elsie was openly happy all the afternoon with me. Such dreams as she had dreamt of our future! Such dreams as had come true even in her own castle!

I let her talk and plan for our future. I did not know what it all meant, whither Fate was hurrying me. I could not see the end, but I knew that the end would be well. For the real architect of our lives is God. The very shadow of our doubt becomes pictures done in beauty.

It takes shadows to make pictures. In the foreground of every shadow already stands the picture from His hand. And as for the sorrows sent of Him, they are not sorrows; rather are they crowns of Great Joy for brows chosen of Martyrdom.... So I let her dream and love and plan, knowing that whatever was coming to me would be good, that behind the Wish of our own little dreams lay the larger Will of the Great Dreamer....

In the afternoon I had slipped away to a place where two great maples threw their shadows across the lawn. I was tired, and my heart was full of conflicts. I wanted to think of Eloise.

It was a quiet, sweet place. Then I heard Elsie coming, full of happiness, to judge from the very tread of her feet on the grass.

I was lying half propped against a tree. Looking up I saw she was kneeling above me, her eyes laughing as she shyly peeped from behind the trunk. There was a sofa pillow in her hands and she was trying to place it under my head. "You must sleep, now," she said softly. "You are so tired and hollow-cheeked, Jack, my bonnie Jack. I am going to begin to learn now to take care of you. I will come to waken you in an hour, then we are going to drive into town, father and you and me!"

She lingered a moment slyly; then stooped to kiss my forehead and was gone.

I had not come to sleep, I had come to think of Eloise, to dream of her once more. I took her note from my pocket; I kissed it and with tears I read it. "*I was widowed of love but I am wedded. Forgive me, forget me, but love me always, Jack, as I shall you,—Eloise.*" How strange it is, this joy-sorrow! There can be but one explanation of it: down the endless chain of our ancestry so much sorrow has come that the taint of it lies sweetly in the pedigree of our own breast.

I kissed the withered heart's-ease. Later I must have fallen asleep...

It was Colonel Goff who wakened me, coming on a run.

"Quick, Jack!" he cried.

I was up in an instant. He stood beside me panting, almost faint. He held a little slip in his hand. His face was white, his lips drawn, but a battle coolness that went like cold steel into my own soul was in his voice.

"Elsie, Jack! Stone's River bridge—you may save her yet! She is drowning herself! Your horse, quick! I'll follow as best I can!"

Instantly I understood. I glanced down. Eloise's note was gone. Elsie's hat lay on the grass instead.

Satan had been saddled for my ride to town and stood at the rack. In two quick leaps I was by his side. The next minute I held the reins.

"If you ever rode in your life," I heard her father saying behind me, "if you ever rode in your life, Jack! You may save her yet—straight down the pike to the bridge!"

The horse seemed to know. He wheeled as the reins went over his head, pivoted, as I'd seen him so often do, on two legs, for quickness, up into the air, wheeling.

I held a good clutch on the pommel and as I rose his own great bound jerked me like a bolt into the saddle. I saw the old butler, bare-headed, running to open the gate, and Colonel Goff panting, helpless, crossing the grass. But even Satan knew we'd lose if we waited. It was only a four-foot rock wall; it was play for him to clear it. He landed squarely and already in a full run.

The bridge was a mile away. It was made of iron and its sides were protected by a railing. It was high where the pike reached it, spanning a gorge cut through the hills.

A rock fence ran along the pike up to the bridge on each side. There the bluff was sheer twenty feet straight down to the river. Satan ran like a tube of quick-silver down the long white pathway of the pike. As we flashed up the slope leading to it, I caught just a glimpse of a white gown going over the bridge from the middle railing. I had to throw all my weight on his left rein to send him over the rock fence at the foot of the bridge and I knew when he felt my heel go into his flank and my pull that shot his great game head into the fence, that he thought I was crazy, was sending us both to death!

But he never faltered. It all depended on how he cleared that four-foot fence and the twenty feet down to the river. I knew when he rose for the leap that he expected firm ground on the other side. Would he balk, falter and fail me when he saw?

I drove my heel into him. I felt him quiver just a moment beneath me. Then I held my breath. A white figure floated midway of the river before me. Up went

his head, the water only flashed beneath him twenty full feet below. I watched the play of his ears for his thoughts. If they fluttered, wavered, showed fright, I knew he would balk and quit. For an instant I saw them flutter back and forth, little tell-tales of surprise, then down they came angrily, glued to his neck as one grits one's teeth in a crisis, and he shot over the wall, balanced squarely, holding himself superbly, down!

I clutched the pommel with both hands, locking my legs under his chest as we struck the stinging, biting waters and went under. It seemed long before we came up and I could see the white gown going down again. I clutched it with one hand, drawing her head clear of the water against my breast. I felt the horse moving easily beneath me. Would he see the great bluffs and understand, or would he strike straight across for them and drown us all, whirling round and round, trying to find a passway up straight walls of rock? It all lay with him. It was correct instinct now or death.

I threw the reins over his head, crying, "*Go out—your way, Satan!*"

It was his good sense that saved us, his instinct rather, that is greater than sense. He lost no strength in useless floundering against steep walls for a landing. He seemed to know instantly. I felt him moving beneath me down stream while I held Elsie safe. Two, three, four hundred feet he swam, the great game chap, till we passed the bluff; then he floundered up and out on the bank like a great dog, shaking himself.

CHAPTER III
THE AWAKENING

It was Colonel Goff who met me at the door of The Manor when I called the next night. Marget and Tammas were both there, silent, and with awed, sorrowful faces. Two doctors were in the house, for Elsie's life and mind lay in the balance, and it seemed that a straw would turn them either way.

It was Marget who spoke first. "Ay, Jackie—Jackie—'tis as I hinted to you, lad," said she, "it was in the blood of the Carfaxes, and but for your ride and leap, lad, our lassie had done what two of her grandames, two of the ladies of Carfax, did before her."

Tammas, tears standing in his eyes, could only hold my hand.

Colonel Goff led me into the library. For a while he was silent, his stolid

face expressionless. Then he said very quietly, ”Jack, the chances are all against her, one way or the other; it looks as if my little lassie is doomed to go the way of her house. If she survives the shock I am afraid her mind will not; that is what is hinging now, that is why we have sent for you again. It is only a chance—one chance in ten—but the doctors thought—as the shock that unminded her came through you, that you might—”

I nodded. ”I understand. I would give my life for her.”

He pressed my hand, his voice choking. ”You proved that, my boy, you proved that. How you escaped, how that horse ever cleared that fence and cliff—

”Jack,” he went on, turning impulsively, ”I am a blunt man, plain and not farseeing in things like all of these, that have come to me so swift and fast. I don't mean these accidents—I'm used to them—life and the whole little game of it is all a blind chance. I have taken mine all my life—and—and—well, they've always been against me, Jack—always, even now. I've lost—always—even as I shall lose now—Elsie. The great hand of Fate that flings the dice for us has always thrown them loaded for me—Jack.”

He was silent. I thought of God and the Butterfly. I pitied him, seeing nothing as he did.

”No, I am not farseeing—not farseeing—in things like the other side of all this—not the blind chance side which has always been mine—but the side you make yourself, someway, somehow, like this.”

He drew a blurred and crumpled note from his pocket. It was Eloise's. I had seen it last when, holding it to my breast, I had fallen asleep that afternoon under the trees.

”This kind of a little thing, Jack,” he said, handing me the little relic. ”I am a blundering fool—and I have to tell you so—to tell you what an unseeing fool I have been. I see it all now—and yet I'd never have seen. I found this clutched in Elsie's hand. This was her shock—this was my folly—my unseeing folly. No, no,” he cried quickly, seeing I was about to say something. ”No, no, Jack, I see it all—don't say a word. You've been a man all through it—a white man, Jack. I am not talking to put you on trial. I'm passing judgment on myself for your sake, my boy; that you may understand what a selfish, unseeing fool I have been.

”Well, it's down to this—it's all past—let it go,” he added. ”But Elsie—she is of the living present. You must help me, help me a little yet awhile Jack—till—till the crisis is past.”

I pressed his hand silently. ”Thank you,” he said simply, ”and now just a word of explanation. This trouble of hers runs in the blood of the Carfaxes. My grandmother, my own sister, went this way. They are keyed high, and if a shock like this comes, it's death or an unbalancing. When she read that,” he said, ”which unseeing one that I have been, was all my fault, when she read it, Jack,

she lost her reason, she was temporarily insane when she made that leap. She is conscious now and stronger; but still she remembers nothing up to that mental shock, the shock of that note, that showed her all, and—oh well, I'm only a blunt kind of a man—I can't tell it—you alone could do that. But it's this now, Jack, you go in and talk to her. You stay with her—till we get her right—and we've a chance to yet—Jack, until we get her right—just let her believe—believe— Oh, you know, Jack!"

The tears were in his eyes as he led me into Elsie's room.

Tammas and Marget were by the bed. Elsie lay amid her pillows, a strange startled look in her eyes.

"You and the old people, Jack," whispered the doctor, rising and taking Goff by the arm, "you all just talk to her, get her back to the dairy and the old ways again, if you can. If she can be quieted and her mind bridged over the shock, she'll be all right again. And to-night will tell," he added quietly, "so be very calm. I have given her all the morphine she'll stand, tried everything, but if she can't be made to sleep she'll lose her mind and if she doesn't sleep to-night her mind is doomed."

I was not certain, but I had always suspected that I possessed the power of suggestion. I had felt it in dealing with dumb animals and weaker people.

I sat by her, talking to her in the old way. "It is Jack, Elsie," I said, "your own Jack. We've met in our old trysting place. We are under our old trees, and Tammas and Marget are here and you are tired and are going to sleep while your head is on my lap. I'll watch you sleep—sleep now," I said softly, stroking her forehead.

There was a deep sigh, then the frightened wild look died out of her eyes and with a smile like her old one she slept.

The doctor beckoned me. "That's good," he said in the hallway. "Just let the nurse and Marget stay with her, let her sleep all night if she will."

"But I will have to waken her," I said.

He smiled. "Oh no; she'll waken herself."

"I'll stay here all night, Colonel Goff," I assured her father.

"Thank you, Jack," he said, his face brightening for the first time. "Of course you will stay with her."

"The crisis will come with her awakening," said the doctor. "She will awaken sound of mind and at death's door, or she will awaken to live, her mind gone. It is all in her sleeping, and to-night will decide it. I will retire, waken me if I am needed."

All night Colonel Goff and I sat up. Every little while we went into her room to see Elsie sleeping, Marget by her side, the nurse asleep on the cot.

Twice the doctor came in. "Her pulse and temperature are normal," he

would say. "That's good. Let her sleep."

But Colonel Goff and I could not sleep. All night he smoked, talked and walked the floor. He told me his life's story, and in the hopefulness of Elsie's sleeping he seemed to have taken a new hold of things. "If the hand that has flung the loaded dice for me all my life will only give me one clean deal now," he cried, as he paced the floor with his steady military stride.

"It will," I said, "Colonel Goff. It gives a clean deal to a clean heart always, and yours is a different heart now. I see it; you are a different man now. Now, I would give my very life for you and my poor little Elsie."

There was deep emotion in the man before me, his eyes were moist. "Great God, Jack, do you mean that, man? Do you know you have said it? It is even so—I see it—have seen it all night—wondering, how—

"God help me," he went on, "and save Elsie as He has saved me—from myself—through it all. I see it now—through all my life—my own fool will, my obstinacy, madness, sin—unseeingness: brought me through it all, back to my own, my family name, my earldom—my own—Great God, think of it—what has been done to unseeing, uncaring me! How much I have received—how little I have earned!"

I left him a strong man pacing the floor, his face aglow with a new life.

Elsie had slept twelve hours.

"We can't awaken her," said the doctor as I went in after a short sleep. "I suspect you possess unconsciously hypnotic power, Jack. It all looks like it. You must awaken her if you can. I don't wish to use heroic means."

"If I have," I said, "I am not aware of it. But let me talk to her. And if you please I would rather only Marget stayed."

"Surely," he said nodding. "If she wakens we want no one with her but you. And you'll just keep her thinking she's at her old place by the dairy."

I sat down by her, taking her hand in the old way. She was smiling in her sleep. Then I said laughingly in her ear, slapping her cheek with the back of my hand, "Wake up, little Heart's Ease; we are going to the spring. It's Jack. I will not go unless you go with me, to gather the Bluebells of Scotland on the hills—come—wake up!"

Instantly she sat up, her blue eyes resting calmly on me.

"Jack," she said, putting her arms about my neck, "I had wondered—I have worried because—for so long a time I seem not to be able to remember—where you were."

I laughed. "Nonsense; you have only dreamed a bad dream last night," said I.

Marget was bustling around the room pretending to clean up. Her voice choked so that she could scarcely speak and yet she said bravely, "Surely, Elsie.

It is as Mr. Jack says. You've been sick a little and had bad dreams."

Elsie clung to me sobbing. "Jack, my bonny Jack," she said, "it's good of you, but I am all right now; I am strong again, so much stronger than you would ever believe."

"You must not let yourself think of anything unpleasant," I said quietly, "for my sake now, Elsie, and daddy's."

"I couldn't, Jack," she said with all her old frank candor, "with you here. It all came because I thought you were gone. Call Daddy in," she said firmly, "I want to talk to you all."

Colonel Goff was already in the room, the smile on his face telling of his great joy. He knelt by the bedside, kissing her. He was laughing boyishly. "Bless me, but my Lady Elsie is feeling fine, isn't she?" said he.

Elsie nodded happily.

"And you and I have been so blind, Daddy," she said, laying her hand on mine. "So blind, both of us. Now, you know what we are going to do? I am going to be very strong and well in a few days and then we are all going to our English home, you and me, Marget and Tammas, and we are going to find Eloise. Find her, Daddy, and make her well—for Jack—if it takes half of all that earldom of yours."

Colonel Goff kissed her again and again, and reaching out, gripped my hand. "Thank God, Jack! Elsie," he added, "you're not to talk now, but sleep again. I'll do as you say."

"Now look here," she said in her old teasing way, "don't you for a moment—don't you try any funny things on me. I'm as well as any of you, and I'm going to get up, right soon. And I don't want ever to hear of that dream I had again," she said, raising a commanding little finger at us.

"We have both been very foolish, Daddy, you and me," she went on, "foolish and unseeing; but now we're both going to be very sensible and brave, so you'll all go out but Marget, and Mr. Jack." She turned to me, her eyes smiling in the old way, "You'll kiss me good-by now till you come to see us at Carfax Hall—you and—and—" She clasped my neck, kissing me quickly, "Good-by, my bonny, bonny Prince! I'll bring her back to you, see if I don't!"

CHAPTER IV

THE CALL OF THE DRUM

The Tennessee troops were to make a last parade before leaving for the war in the Philippines.

All the night before they left a strange, weird feeling had been upon me. For hours I could not sleep, and when I did it seemed as if I were going down a dimly remembered path, hearing a far-off call in far-away mountains, the battle cry of my ancient Aryan people rallying against the Mongrel and the Mongol. Then I awoke with the fire of battle in my heart and the hot sweat of the conflict beaded over my face, to call it a dream. But it was no dream. There are dreams, and there is that which is more than dreams. There is the spirit's walk into wayside lands.

I rose and dressed. I went out for calmness among my trees. They had been my friends, my thousand-voiced leaf-whispering friends. But in this strange feeling, this fighting mood which, despite all my efforts, had overwhelmed me, I cared for them no longer. And they scorned me. Not one leaf whispered to me. I had not one friend among them. They were no longer my brothers in green. They were merely trees. My soul had been torn up to its very roots by the Hand that had planted it and told to grow into another soul or die!

Everything I had held to in life had reversed itself on me. Every star-enthroned truth which I had worshipped had fallen to earth, a clay idol to mock me with its grinning lying lips of dirt! I had been turned out from my home unjustly; the love of my very life was gone, dead, perhaps; and Elsie—

Nothing since the tragedy that had fallen to Eloise had cut into my soul like that nightmare leap over a rock wall into cold air and the stinging whirl of yellow water and the glory of her courage and unselfishness as she had said, "I'll bring her back to you, Jack—see if I don't!"

And there had been the good-by of Tammas and Marget. Tammas could not speak, he could only hold my hand with tears in his eyes. But Marget spoke, kissing me for the first and last time. "Ay, but our Jackie, good-by, 'tis God that stirs up the nest of His eagles. An' so God bide ye, lad. God bless and God guide ye—for 'tis God that leads ye, Jackie!"

At the cabin Dr. Gottlieb had tried to explain to me the great book he was writing, which was called "The Effect of the Insect Pollen-Gatherers on Flower Life."

But I would have none of it. I could not listen. I slipped out, knowing he could read it all night to the big arm chair I had sat in, and not know it was empty.

The drum was calling to me—I who had been for peace, for trees, for love, for poems, I knew I must now fight or my soul would die within me, die like a Chinese foot in its wooden shoe.

I saddled Satan and rode over to the Hermitage. Was it this horse, this brave-souled, unafraid brute that had sent the fighting spirit into me, since my first touch of him? For on him I felt that I could ride over a regiment. I walked

alone in the moonlight over the grounds of the Hermitage.

How bulwarked, restful and yet martial-walled was the old brick mansion! And down the long avenues of cedars which ran from the gate to the home, I met the fighting ghosts of my ancestors.

Was it a dream or not? But what is the difference, since they are the same. What is the difference?

If a child comes into your home, smiling, from out the sunshine, is it any more your child than the one which enters from out the still, dead night, motherless and homeless, a fantastic waif, but your very own?

I had walked through the old-fashioned garden, rose bordered and lined with hollyhocks and rare old pinks that Aunt Rachel loved. And I had stood bareheaded before the tomb of the old warrior and his bride. I had gone across the meadow to the log cabin they had loved best of all....

Then, very plainly I saw the great fireplace light up with the blaze of hickory logs, and the shadows come and go across the smoked rafters above. And before that fire sat the slim, grim, sword-faced fighter and lover, with a child on one knee and a lamb on the other, even as old Parton had told it.

He turned, smiled, and reaching, took his sword from the wall behind him and, beckoning to me, pointed to the west....

I rushed toward him. The solid door met me, knocking me to my knees on the grass. I arose stunned, but thrilled. My doubts had gone, the spirit of Andrew Jackson pointed me the way. On the grass I knelt for a moment before that hut which is a shrine. *A lamb and a child and the sword of the Lord and of Gideon: I thank thee, Lord; for it takes them all to make a man!* ... I had not slept but had ridden into town to see the Tennessee troops go by in their last parade.

They came by in battalions, the old battle flag of Jackson at their head, and beside it rode old Hawthorne, sitting his horse as gallantly as when in younger days he rode with Forrest and Morgan.

He saw me, smiled, and saluted.

I watched Braxton Bragg go by at the head of his company, and I saw him look covetously at the beautiful horse I rode.

Following an old custom, a fife and drum corps followed. I heard them coming and my blood leaped fiercely as they marched by, playing "*The Girl I Left Behind Me.*"

It was their last call for enlistment, and as they passed I stepped in behind the big drum, throwing my silver dollar into its head.

So I enlisted for the war.

The old drummer smiled and nodded, the crowd cheered—I looked up—Old Hawthorne had ridden back and sat his horse smiling down on me. "God bless you, Jack, Jack!" he cried. "Do you know that I rode back to see you do it? I

knew you would do it—'tis the call of the drum—the blood of the men of your tribe who could both pray and fight! Come, you shall be on my staff. Captain Jack Ballington from the home of Old Hickory."

I smiled. "General, you are good to me, too good. But let me prove my own worth, if there is any in me. No soldier was ever made except by merit. Give me a chance to make myself. I am going to the war and I am going with you. But under two conditions: that this horse I am riding goes with us, is yours. This is Eloise's," I added softly, "and I loved her. 'Tis the only horse in Tennessee fit to carry our General. She gave him to me. I give him to you."

He was silent; he understood.

"And the other is that you give me a rifle in the ranks." ...

After I had enlisted I wanted to see the homestead again, the hickories that Eloise and I had loved, and to bid my old grandsire farewell.

He was sitting under his favorite elm tree smoking when I rode up. I did not see who was with him until I had dismounted and stood before him, hat off, holding my horse's reins.

Then I saw that it was Braxton Bragg who was talking excitedly and loudly; and I knew that he had been drinking. He did not speak to me nor see me. The old man did not know me in the gathering darkness.

"I am Jack, Grandfather, Jack Ballington. And I have come to bid you good-by."

"Ah, Jack—Jack—" he repeated—"and you are my grandson—ha-ha. I'd about forgotten it. And you have come to tell me good-by—why I thought you had gone, somewhere—ha-ha."

I heard a short laugh from Braxton Bragg. I saw the sneering smile that was unconcealed in his face. I turned on him with fighting anger, cut to the heart. And then I remembered the first lesson of every soldier is to command himself. Very calmly I said, "I have not gone far, sir; only to Dr. Gottlieb's; but to-morrow I am going to the war. I have enlisted with the First Tennessee, and I felt that it was my duty, sir, to call and tell you good-by."

Instantly he was on his feet, holding to a crutch he now carried.

"Going to the war! Enlisted with the First Tennessee? By God, sir, do you really mean that?"

"I am, sir," I said.

He pulled me to him and clasped me. "Jack, Jack, my boy!"

He turned to Braxton Bragg. "Braxton, now by God, sir, this boy is indeed my grandson; the lost has been found, the prodigal has returned! I knew the old Rutherford blood would redeem him yet!"

He laughed happily, still holding me to him. "Braxton, take him by the hand, for 'by the Eternal,' as Old Hickory would say, he is the same blood kin

as you, and I am going to give him the same chance! Hey there, Thomas! Oh, Thomas!" he called to his old body servant. "Bring me a light, and paper and pencil! I'll drop a line to Hawthorne—to put you on his staff as Captain. And my check book, Thomas! By God, sir—Jack—my grandson, Jack, I'll give you a little ready money, only a thousand dollars to see that you go like a soldier and a Rutherford—ha-ha—damn him, I knew he'd do it!"

"I'm going as a private, Grandfather; General Hawthorne has already offered me the rank you suggest—but—"

"You damned mooning fool, you shall not do it!" he cried. "No Rutherford ever went to any war a private. Tut—tut—I'll fix that. You are now my grandson, Jack."

His voice fell. He spoke through tears. "Your mother, Jack—Emily—ay, my boy—I can see her now with her sweet dreamy eyes of poetry, the finely chiseled half sad face of religion, the heart of romance and of sorrow. I loved her best of them all—Jack—and you are her son—my grandson."

"Grandfather," I said, "I thank you, and I shall try to be worthy of you and of my mother and my father who died a gentleman. But I shall ask only for this horse, for our General to ride, and that he shall be near me, for I promised Eloise I would always care for him. She gave him to me," I added.

Instantly Braxton Bragg was on his feet.

"Eloise never owned him. Why, it's what I have come by for, Grandfather. What you had just promised me I could have when he rode up." He came up to me, catching at the reins. "No sir, you shall never ride him off this place, he is mine."

My grandfather rose and stood between us. "Sit down, Braxton Bragg," he said angrily. "You've been drinking and you've not too much sense when you are sober. Now, I had forgotten—I forget so much of late: come to think of it, it was Eloise's horse, no one else could touch him, and the way that girl could ride him—no—no—if she gave him to Jack he shall have him."

"He has lied," Braxton Bragg cried, pushing the old man angrily aside to shoulder up to me. "He is lying. She didn't give him the horse—"

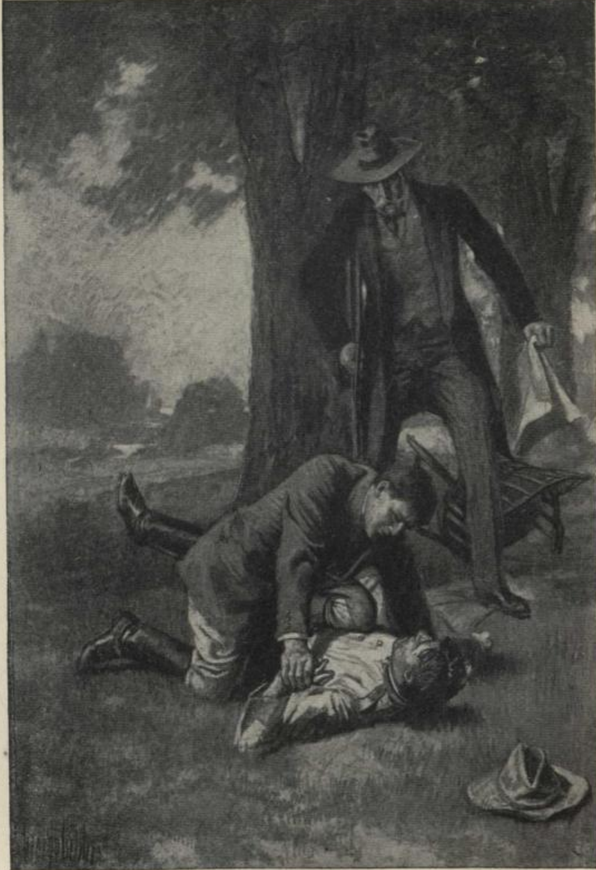
My fist shut the rest of his words in his mouth. I felt the cut of his teeth where my knuckles struck them as I sent him suddenly full length on the ground.

He tried to rise, drawing his Colt's. But my grandfather struck it from his hand with his crutch, knocking the weapon across the road.

Cursing he tried to rise, but I was on him, my knee on his breast, his two arms pinned to the ground.

"Grandfather," I said, "I don't want to hurt him, but you heard him give me the lie."

"I did," said the old man grimly. "I did, and I waited to see if you would



I WAS ON HIM, MY KNEE ON HIS BREAST.

strike. If you had not, I was going to knock you down with my crutch! Mount your horse and go to war, Jack Ballington, my grandson; for by the living God I know now I'll have a fighter in that war worthy the name of Rutherford when this cur turns coward and quits!"

CHAPTER V.
THE FIRST TENNESSEE

I do not know where you are, Eloise. I do not even know that you are alive; but if you are, I have the promise of Aunt Lucretia that this letter shall go to you; and Aunt Lucretia, you know, does not break her promises.

And if you be dead, Dear Heart, as I do deep in my mind fear, for I have not heard from you, nor Aunt Lucretia since that June day was turned into December in a night—that day when I went to the old familiar, sweet places, to find no longer there her who had made them sweet—why, what matters so much? For the passing of the soul of a dear one, when we see that it is passed, is such a natural thing at last, such a little change to make so great a transition! While they lived and life looked full and wholesome, it all seemed so large, their life and ours. But they go in a night, in a breath's draught. And then we see how small it was: a little finger-width zone across the world of things. A little too much heat, a little too much cold, a tiny vein broken, a severed cord, and it is whiffed out. Even in the fullness of strength and brave life a dash at bars on a great game horse....

Forgive me, dear one, if you be alive to read this; for I would not remind you now of a time you were different. 'Tis God's way, and since He has kept in my heart my love of you, and through your accident showed me your love for me, have we not His two greatest gifts for our very own?

And as to that other world, do you know what instinct tells me it is? That there we will have a hundred senses where we now have but five; and there we shall see the Thought as well as the Thing: every thought, every dream, every hope, every love, these we know not as words but as beautiful beings whom we shall meet face to face. And its only law is Balance, Compensation, Recompense, Poise; the Equation of the Universe. We wonder here why there should be such things as sin and sorrow and injustice. But there we shall know that sin is not sin, but the prism which shows us goodness, that sorrow is not sorrow but the

prism of gladness, and that death, as we now know it, is not a stopping, but the prism through which we see another light. Here, on our little earth, with only our five small senses, we see only the prism. There we shall see the rays. It is the difference between the star and its light.

And if we hold the prism of sorrow here, Dear Heart, as I do now, shall I not hold a handful of the joys which stream through it there? For here 'tis a poem written, but there the meaning of it. Here 'tis the sun rising, there the dawn. Here the giving of alms, there the joy of the giving. Here it is the instrument that makes music, there the music. Here 'tis only a picture, there the soul that made it.

And if you be passed, Eloise, if you be passed, even yet will I keep writing to you. For if letters be written with one's heart's blood, I know, in my soul of souls, that our dead will read them. For though I have lived but a little while according to the span of things, and less according to the knowledge of things, yet the little span and the little knowledge have made known to me the greatest of all truths: *that I do not know*: that even with my little knowing I have seen things come to pass which were more wonderful than those which I thought could ever be; that we live on the borderland of a world wonderful, mysterious; that we are clasping hands with eternity, and need only the language that will yet come to spell out the touch for us. And so I shall write to you even though you are dead, write to you, sweetheart, a love letter for your heaven, knowing that not only will you read it, but that I, in the writing, as in all giving, will at last be the one who will get.

It is selfishness in me at last, Eloise, selfishness that I may hold through life and forever this love of you in my heart, now that it has only memory and not your own sweet self to live on. And no greater love and more constant can there be than that which lives on memory. For the living-love, being flesh, must change with the years. But memory-love, being eternal, can never change.

I am at Iloilo; and the gap is great since that long ago June, that June of Tennessee blue grass and roses, and the old home and you, sweetheart.

* * * * *

There is little to tell of my leaving; of my quick decision to fight for my country and for you, Eloise. For, cast from my father's house there was nothing left but my country's, and losing the love of my kindred there was only your own great love left me, yours and my country's. For these I am fighting. But at the last—I know you will want to hear it all—at the last our old grandsire seemed strangely touched, and the memory of it has burned my heart, once strangely amid flying Filipino bullets on the firing line, and once amid the thunders of the

great thirteen-inch guns from the Monadnoc. And right glad I believe he will be when he learns, that though he called me a fool for refusing a soft place as aide to dear old Hawthorne, and a greater fool because I refused a commission which he himself could have got for me for the asking, and took a musket in the ranks instead, that I have risen from a private to the Captaincy of the crack company of the First Tennessee. So say the Regulars of the Bloody Fourth that we backed to a fight to the death against the Filipino trenches. So says old Hawthorne himself—God's blessing on his old white head!—now commanding our brigade, who led us in with the rebel yell in his throat! And riding Satan, Dear Heart; cannot you see the picture, such a man on such a horse! And you should have seen how Satan loves the firing line and how he hates the smell of a Filipino and his pony!

* * * * *

But this story must be told straight even in a love letter to my unseen love in an unknown land.

When I left home I only took my father's sword and Satan. I took him because of my love of you, and that old Hawthorne, our General, might have a horse to ride into battle that should be worthy of his rider. For if you have ever thought of it, sweetheart, you will know that no great soldier ever owned a mean horse.

I joined a company of the First Tennessee. In the company next to me was Braxton Bragg, commanding it by the influence of our old grandsire.

My first promotion came in San Francisco, where we camped for a month before sailing for Manila, via Honolulu. Our Captain was a Tennessee lawyer who knew little of the game. It was I who drilled the company, my German work stood me in good stead, and we won on dress parade drill. We were the best drilled company of the First Tennessee. Then our Captain resigned to practice law in San Francisco, and I was made First Lieutenant.

We dropped anchor off the city of Manila, November 28. It was an inspiring sight as we sailed into the Bay, to see the sunken Spanish ships, and Dewey's flag ship with Old Glory flying, proclaiming Republican Liberty for the first time to the waters of the great Far East.

Our first fight came early in February. We had lain outside of the walled city on the Lunetta Driveway for nearly three months. We knew that Aguinaldo, with eighty thousand men, armed with guns we had given him, and those of the Spanish, was in our front, feeling his way.

It was nine o'clock Saturday night, February 4th, when the attack began. We heard shots from the enemy, then three in rapid succession from our pickets. It meant help. The men, who had been grumbling for three months for fear

they would have to go back home without a scrap, sprang like school boys to a playground. Then the front lit up with a crackle of fire. Our rear was another sheet of it from the fleet in the bay, firing over our heads.

It was a hot fighting front, the First Colorado, Tenth Pennsylvania, Thirteenth Minnesota, Fifty-First Iowa, and First North Dakota standing the brunt. We chafed all night, standing in line down by the beach, away in the rear, the very base of our half-circle battle line. All night we stood hoping that we might go into it before it was over, our blood stirred by the battle and roar in front, and the thunder behind.

At breakfast Sunday morning we still stood in line, expectant, keyed to a fiddle's string, eager. The cook passed our Sunday fare up the line, chicken and hot coffee. How little things stick in excitement! Then we saw a courier come out of the smoke and flame, and old Hawthorne rode Satan to our front.

"Boys," he said quietly, "they have asked us to take the Filipino trenches, and we are going to take them. Attention, regiment! right shoulder arms, fours right, march!"

A Utah battery and the Nebraska boys supported us as we charged over San Juan bridge under fire and across a rice field.

We kept step to the *boom—boom—boom*—of the thirteen-inch shells firing over us from the guns of the Monadnoc. Down the bloody lane we charged, the bullets humming like hornets.

"Listen, boys," said a man in my company, "listen how they hum!"

An old sergeant of the Regulars passed us, going to the rear. He was binding a handkerchief around his arm, from which the blood was squirting. But he laughed and called to us, "Oh, don't worry about those that you hear humming—them you hear won't hurt you!"

Then the trenches grinned in our front, spitting fire. We prepared to charge. Behind us were Regulars, and in the crisis of it all I saw Braxton Bragg. I hate to write this of the blood of a Rutherford. My shame, my sorrow was greater than his. His nerve had simply left him. He had got down from the hissing bullets behind a sandhill. He had quit before his own men. They did not shoot him, they did not have time; they charged with me, backing my own company. It was a quick rush and soon over. The Filipinos left their breakfast of rice in the trenches. But we left some of our bravest there, too.

But battered and tired as we were, the real fight was just on. In sweeping the Filipinos out of their trenches we had hurled them to the left on our own water-works that supplied the city and the army. If these were held by the Filipinos and our supply cut off our fight would be in vain. It is said that twenty thousand of them stood between our water and our line. Luck again was with us. The First Tennessee happened to be nearest to them and it was we who cut

through, and only four hundred, a battalion, at that. In a quick bloody charge we took the works. Old Hawthorne and Satan led us as if on dress parade, a target for twenty thousand Filipino rifles, and not a bullet touched them. With cheers we followed the white hair of the old Confederate on his black horse with the north star on his head. We were holding a perilous place, for we were in the rear of the Filipino army, with our backs against the water-tanks, and foes in front and rear. But we held it for two days until help came. And the first battalion and third battalion had equally as good a record when the fighting was over.

A week afterwards old Hawthorne came to my tent. He was holding a telegram from the Secretary of War. "Jack," he said, "I am a Major General, and you are the Captain of Braxton Bragg's company. The boys of it wired petitions and elected you. They said you led them twice to victory. They want you to lead them always."

Our hardest fight was at Iloilo last week. We took the city, but once out of the water we had to fight down barricaded walls, hemmed in and shot at from walls and house tops. For two hours we were busier than a bull-terrier in a den of cats. They were the best fighters we struck. They were officered, we learned, by the brave and brainy little Japs.

At the Lapaz sugar mill they tried to cut off some of the Regulars. We were nearest. It was merely our luck. Any other regiment would have cut through the enemy to save their comrades. At Naglocan they made a stand and there we finished them.

* * * * *

That was written a month ago. I will finish and let it all go together, finding you if it can; and if not, well my heart has found yours somewhere, sweetheart; in the writing my thoughts have met, somewhere, yours.

We stay and hold Iloilo, but General Hawthorne with a battalion of our boys went a month ago to Cebu to help out the Twenty-third regiment of Regulars who were hemmed up there in the mountains and fighting for their lives.

Would you like to hear how close I came to death yesterday, and not on the firing line at that? It was a nasty close call I had and the horror of it still twangs on my nerves. It is that, and not knowing what the morrow may bring, that has brought me to the writing of this last love letter should either of us pass into the shadow of things.

On the nearby Island of Mindanao live the savage fanatics, the Moros. These people have been a terror to the Spaniards and are the nightmare of our own men. They are Mohammedans, and the fiercest, most treacherous fighters of all the Philippine Islands. They cannot be civilized, they cannot be conquered,

they can only be killed. There is a bloody tradition about them and the Spaniards; how, hemmed up for slaughter, when their warriors have all fallen, the women have been known to rush on the Spanish lines with their babes in their arms, and, as the Spaniards would meet them with their bayonets, hurl their babes onto the steel, blocking both it and the fire behind it, and cut down the soldiers with the deadly *borangs* of their dead husbands. Then there with their babes on the bayonets they would die.

Of these Moros, there is one the soldier dreads more than the firing line of death, more than the panther that springs at night, or the rattlesnake that strikes in the grass. It is the *Juramentado*.

When one of the Moros is adjudged guilty of thieving, impurity or half a hundred other crimes and sentenced to death he becomes a *Juramentado*. Strange, mystic ceremonies are performed over him by the priest in the black wood of the black night. Cruel tortures are inflicted; his head, face, eyebrows, and mustache are shaved clean, his face painted, his body left half naked.

There is but one atonement for him. He must kill as many Christians as he can before dying himself. Dying in the act he is transplanted to Paradise.

They are great sailors and are liable to run amuck and then float out to distant places, to any place where they can find a Christian. Stealthily they creep into a camp, or town, or church, or wherever there is a gathering. Their keen *borang* is sheathed between two bamboo reeds; its blade is a razor, its weight that of lead. With a blow they have cut heads clean from shoulders, or split a soldier from neck to hip.

At a word they will turn in a crowd and kill all those around them. The Spaniards tell how five of these fanatics slipped up to a company of their men peacefully, and then in sudden frenzy killed nineteen soldiers before they could shoot them down.

Our orders are strict concerning them: a soldier must never be out of lines without his side arms. And so nameless a danger is in their very name that it is the unwritten law of the camp to courtmartial any soldier who cries out for a joke, *Juramentado*!

I was visiting the camp of the Regulars and as I went through the gate a file passed out for guard mounting. A *Juramentado* had paddled over from Mindanao, slipped in, and suddenly attacked a soldier of the Eighteenth Regulars, as he was returning on a pony from some duty. The first blow of the *borang* took off the man's arm at the shoulder. Clapping spurs to his pony he rushed for the main entrance just as I passed out, with the file of soldiers behind me. In an instant the frenzied, howling, painted thing was on us.

I heard the officer in charge cry "fire," and a dozen Krags snarled their smokeless call, sending twelve steel-jacketed bullets into the charging demon

whose painted face, and sharp black teeth were grinning like a wolf in my very face, and whose *borang* was at my throat.

The bugler got him with his Colt's 45. Twelve steel bullets had cut twelve clean pin-point holes through him, and not one had stopped him, not being in the brain.

The Krag is a failure. It shoots too clean and hard to kill quick. That old time Colt 45 saved my life. I saw the dead snarling thing all night. When I waked his black painted teeth grinned in my face. I was never un-nerved before.

And so I am writing you, Dear Heart, for I realize now how near to death I have been, how nearer I may yet be. And maybe another thing makes me write to-night. It is such a story as Clarke, our First Lieutenant, has brought back to me to-night. It has set me to dreaming, and made the camp and men and guns sleeping under the mango trees seem like ghosts from another land. Like ghosts, Dear Heart, for in the dream which is always more real than the real, it is you and Old Tennessee that I see to-night, not slumbering guns under mango trees, nor tropical mountain tops, smoking mistily to the moonlighted skies, nor the palm trees, sentineling the ghostly beach.

Clarke has filled my thoughts to overflowing to-night. So I have left him and the sleeping camp. And I lie alone on the beach looking across the ocean toward home.

He told of a girl in Cebu, where our main hospital is, one of the Red Cross nurses from the States. She came over a month ago. Clarke has talked of her till I can see only you. If I did not know you were ill I'd swear it could be only you, peerless, bravest, gamest, most beautiful woman that ever was. She is a trained nurse, but she rode with old Hawthorne, rode Satan, too, to the relief of the Twenty-third Regulars.

Who could have done what she did but you and Satan, clear a ten-foot fissure of a yawning volcanic abyss, outfooting the Filipino ponies when they thought they had cut her off? And her shooting! Again I saw the brown stubble of Tennessee wheatfields, the blue hills circling the sky line, the flush and whir and the crack of the sweet little twenty gauge! If you are not dead or in the hospital it was you—the only one in all the world—there can be no other!

But I shall not see her, for we leave for the States in the fall. They are sending other boys to relieve us, others who want to serve their country.

I shall go home then to my work. I shall take up the life I left, the life of labor and of love, of love, Dear Heart, love of all loves, love of a Memory. And

now good-night and for my pen, good-by, Eloise! ...

CHAPTER VI
THE BATTLE IN THE BACAUE MOUNTAINS

I wrote you last from Iloilo, but no word has come back to me. And toward the late fall, our term of service having expired, and so many others crowding for a chance to serve, we were mustered out and ordered home. The big transport Indiana stood by for our home-taking.

It was good news for the boys, but sad for me. They were going home to wife or sweetheart, but I had no home.

There is one great thing about war, the steel it puts into the heart to stand things, to die smiling and unafraid, to take life as a battle, and fight it out on the firing line. There are many living, but few on the firing line of life. They think they are soldiers, but they are sutlers.

In a short time we sighted Cebu. Our General, Hawthorne, and a battalion of us were there, as I wrote you before, sent to help out the Regulars. We were ordered to pick up this battalion; it completed what was left of the First Tennessee, for some would sleep forever under far-off Pacific skies.

Cebu is a little city on the island of the same name in the center tier of the Archipelago. Bitter and desperate are the inhabitants and savage in the extreme, and to take the place has cost us a hard battle; and to hold it almost cost the life of the Twenty-third, for they had been cut off in the mountains and all but lost when Hawthorne came to their aid, three months before.

It is a long narrow island with a backbone of volcanic mountains, in the recesses of which live a race of savage fighters who do not quibble to rush, half naked, and with bolos and spears, upon lines of steel and Gatlings.

Their mountain fastnesses are all but impregnable. The volcanic mountains run sheer up straight and the level plateaus yawn with the most dangerous and sudden chasms.

Here were the forts and fortifications of the savage Insurgents, and here they had again threatened portions of the Sixth, Nineteenth and Twenty-third Regulars under General Snyder.

It was night when we heard it; we had anchored and prepared to take General Hawthorne and our boys on the homeward journey.

Then like a bolt came the news: portions of the Nineteenth Regulars were surrounded and cut off in the mountains by ten thousand yellow savages. They were doomed.

And Hawthorne and his battalion, instead of being on the beach to embark for home, had already gone back to the mountains to fight.

I drew up our men in line of dress parade on the Indiana's decks. "Men," I said, "we have been mustered out! We are no longer soldiers but citizens of the Republic, homeward bound, with all it means to every man of you who has done his duty as you all have. No man of you may be ordered to go one step from this transport's deck till you reach your own land. But news has come that the enemy has attacked and cut off our comrades. Our General and a small battalion have already gone to their aid. I ask no man to follow me. I am going, and every man who would go with me take two steps forward."

The First Tennessee to a man moved two steps forward on the deck.

At daybreak we were off for the mountains eight miles away. All forenoon we marched under the hot sun, passed mango trees and squalid huts over ashes of dead volcanoes. We established headquarters on Elpado Mountain across the Labanyon Valley. Along the low mountains in our front ran the forts of the Filipinos, a rude fringe to the crest of the hills.

A detachment of the Sixth and Nineteenth Regulars had been over-daring. They had got in behind the enemy, and being a new regiment sent to relieve us, they had not known the true situation. They were surrounded in front and rear. It was for us to cut through to them.

They are peculiar little mountains. Volcanic in origin they have been shaken by earthquakes until often their sides are precipices; on top there are narrow plateaus, and along their whole length bristle the savage fortifications.

There we found old Hawthorne waiting for us. He knew we would come!

At his word we began the ascent. It was a hand over hand climb, from rock to rock, from scrub to scrub, with a spear or a bolo at any time from above or behind any rock. And at unlooked for intervals would come avalanches of rock and volcanic stones, rolled down by the savages above.

It was five hundred feet up, but it took us all the afternoon to reach the first plateau, and half the night to derrick our cannon up with rope and pulley. The tired men had had no sleep for eighteen hours and at daylight they must fight. We camped within three hundred and fifty yards of their fortifications, with all lights out. We made the assault at daylight.

Our guns knocked their forts down around their ears and when we charged they went over the other ridge to the last line of what was left of the forts.

At the bloodiest angle of it when I came back to report to the General our burying squad was already busy:

”This,” said a tough old sergeant to me as he pointed to their dead piled up, ”is a cordwood of good Filipinos.”

Such are the genialities of war.

Our fiercest fighting was before us. Hand over hand and holding to trees we went up to the next fort in an avalanche of stones, arrows, bolos, and spears.

We fought from rock to rock. Often a Krag or a Colt would speak straight up, and a dead Filipino would come vaulting down to our feet.

Again came the derricking of guns. Then we went through a deep aisle where only one man could rush in at a time, with Filipino sharp-shooters above us. But our last fight cut them from our front and we reached the Regulars. They had held their place and escaped death only because they had lain for two days in an old fissure with empty shells beside it and canteens as dry as the old volcano. But weak as they were they charged with us after the Filipinos, scattering them like mountain goats over the hills.

There was a tropic moon that tropic night. The Mango trees circled the farther mountain sides and the bamboos stood in groups in the valley below. The kingly palms towered high over all. The weird tropic night sounds were borne to us on the breeze. The tired battle line of my brave boys lolled by camp fires in one long line of sentinel light with the last wrecked forts of the beaten enemy at their backs. The field guns, rapid of fire, poked their long blue noses out into the night. ”Still smellin' for the varmints loike blood houns for nagurs,” said Moriarty, our fighting Irishman, and the wit of the regiment.

Then he would walk over and pet the blue steel beauties, for they were his. Moriarty it was who had brought them over mountain side and *crevasses* where no man dreamed they could go.

”An' it's aisy it is,” he would laugh and say when I praised him to his face. ”It's aisy, Cap'n; I've done nothin' but pet 'em, an' so they jus' foller me loike dogs.”

Half a mile out a line of pickets faced the way the beaten enemy had fled. Our fighting was over. Cebu's island would no longer be troubled with Insurgents. And the next day would be the Indiana and home!

Our General had thrown off his sword belt and come over to my camp, and together we had smoked and talked of home and the war, of everything but you, sweetheart. But when he left he smiled and said a puzzling thing to me. ”I've a surprise for you to-morrow, at Cebu, Jack, that will knock the war and even the homegoing out of your head.”

Then he twisted his gray mustache and smiled delightedly. Had the old man, as we all loved to call him, received word of another promotion for me, I wondered. For myself I wanted no more war. I wanted only you, Eloise, somewhere, somehow, living; or the memory of you amid my own Tennessee trees.

”General,” I said, ”there are worthier men here than I for any promotion you may have. I will go back to my land and my work; but if you could arrange for Moriarty here—” I added, pointing to the game little Irishman.

”Oh, Pat’s fixed already,” he answered. ”He has brought these guns over hills, through fissures, and the walls of hell. He’ll be First Lieutenant in the regular army as soon as I can wire this day’s work to the President. But you, Jack,—”

I pressed his hand. ”General, dear General, believe me, I want nothing more, nothing but a chance to work and make a home in Tennessee.”

I was serious almost to that old gripping in the throat. But he laughed and pressed my hand.

”To-morrow, Jack, to-morrow! You are tired now; I want you to sleep. You have earned your reward this day, my boy, and it shall be yours to-morrow, a promotion that you will love.”

I followed him to his own tent door. A black horse stood haltered near by, saddled as he had been for two days and nights.

I took the General’s whistle, the one I had used to train Satan to my call in the old days, and which on the firing line the General himself used in calls for his aides and orderlies. I blew softly the three blasts I had taught him to know in the forest. He had not seen me for months. He did not know I was there; but his head went up quickly with the old devil fire in his eyes. The next minute he had thrown his great weight back on the halter, snapping it.

His head was on my shoulder, and he was whinnying.

The General laughed. ”It beats the world, Jack, that horse’s love for you. Take him to your own tent to-night, he’ll rage like a hyena around here all night, now that he knows you are here.”

It was true. But tethered at my own camp he was quiet. The confusion had been so great and my men were so scattered that when I came back I ordered Moriarty to call the roll before taps. He came back quickly with word that Ross and Billings of our company were absent. I was surprised. Investigation among the men, tired and half asleep, showed that they had not stopped when we took the last fort, but had been swept on with a squad of the Regulars after the flying Filipinos, carried away with the excitement of it.

I went quickly to the bivouac of the Regulars. They remembered the two men, but thought they had returned, as they went off toward the right of the little village Colena, two miles in our front and through which the enemy had fled.

”If they aren’t here now,” said an old sergeant, ”no use to look for ’em again; when we come back through that village, there wasn’t a sound, not a kid, nor a chicken, nor a coon, nor a dog; and when you don’t hear nothin’ in a Filipino village, when you go through, look out for hell when you come back.”

I looked at my watch. It had been full three hours since the Regulars had

returned.

”I am going after them,” I said, turning to go.

”Ballington,” it was the swarthy old Captain, of the Nineteenth who spoke, ”you’d be a fool to risk it.” He pointed silently to a faint glow across the valley on the side of the mountain beyond. I had thought it was a rising star. ”Yonder,” he said, ”see that other one on the mountain top, that’s the signal fire of the little yellow hyenas, that means guerrilla bands in them mountains, they go in packs like wolves, and the night is their time. They know every foot of the mountain, every gorge, valley and *crevasse*. Why, two men lost over there ain’t got no more show than a pair of fool goats in a jungle. Why, if them little hyenas couldn’t see ’em, which they can—for they see better by night than by day—they can smell ’em, like all jungle breeds.”

”Boy,” he said again, looking at me kindly and smiling an apology for the title which we both bore, ”I wouldn’t let you go. I’d go to old Hawthorne and have you arrested first. You Tennessee fellows,” he said, laying his big rough hand on my shoulder, ”have done the whitest thing ever done in this war. It ain’t often we old Regulars that never go home and have to serve ’till the last taps, takes much notice of you volunteer fellows that fights awhile for fun and quits when the time is up; but when you biled out of that transport and came over them mountains an’ cut through to us, you done a thing that’ll warm the cockles of our boys till the last tattoo and the taps. Now I ain’t goin’ to let you go out there in no such fool thing. I’m an old soldier, I fought with Miles and Cook on the plains, and I tell you now, Sitting Bull and his Sioux were lambs to them little mountain savages. You go back now,” he said kindly, taking my hand in his own, ”go back and go to sleep. You are a boy yet, though you proved you are full grown to-day, my lad, and ain’t even got up a beard. Of course you have got a sweetheart waiting in Tennessee. Go back to her, and the next year send old Brawley of the Nineteenth a picture of her and the kid. He ain’t never had no time to marry, it’s been fighting all his life with him from hell to breakfast.”

I smiled, saluted, and went back to camp.

Moriarty was waiting for me, and, when Moriarty does not smile, I know what to expect.

”Cap’n,” he said, ”it’s not Moriarty that can sleep peaceful the night till we find them, dead or alive.”

”And I, too, if you please, Cap’n,” said Davis, my corporal, who had been listening.

”There is no need for a call then, men,” I said, ”we three will go down to the village, we will doubtless find them near it. A Krag for rapid firing and two Colts each,” I added, ”and plenty of shells. Don’t let the other men know; we’ll be back by midnight.”

As we slipped out of the lines of camp I saw a thing that touched me. Moriarty had stopped at the long, slim, blue-barreled rapid fire and for a moment, lingering over it, one arm around it, he laid his cheek against its lips. It was Moriarty's farewell kiss to the only bride he had ever known.

CHAPTER VII
THE JURAMENTADOS

There was a mistiness among the mango trees as we went out into the moonlight. It was a mist from the ocean, but it made an uncanny milkiness in the air, which seemed to cling to the long dew-damp leaves of the tropic trees as we descended into the Labanyon Valley; and that queer uncanniness stayed with me. I could not throw it off.

At the picket line I left a note to be carried back with the relief. It was to my First Lieutenant, explaining my absence and stating that, if I were not back by daylight, he was to assume the command. And if, before daylight, he heard any continual rapid fire, he was to send the company to the sound of it, for it would mean that we needed help.

The picket would be relieved at midnight. I asked him not to awaken Lieutenant Clarke until then.

"Captain," said the picket, touching his cap, "excuse me, but if you weren't here I'd arrest Moriarty and Davis and send them back into camp. 'Tis a fool thing they are doing."

"But what about our comrades out there, cut off, doubtless, and surrounded by these savages?"

"Then why not take a company?" he asked respectfully.

"They'd be butchered," said Moriarty. "It's the three of us slippin' around an' nosin' in that can save 'em if we find 'em. And with these rifles and six Colts we'll be all of a company for arrows and bolos."

"Look," said the sentinel, "do you see that?" He pointed to a dim red star, glowing just above the mountain top. "That's a signal fire—and that, and that. Captain," he pleaded earnestly, "go back and let the boys all go with you. It's a fool thing, but if you will go—now listen—when I hear you shoot, if shooting is on, I am going to fire and waken the camp; the boys will want to come to your relief."

Moriarty laughed. ”Now don’t let your old gun go off too suddent loike. We’ll be back without firin’ a shot!”

But I, Eloise, as I went down into that valley, became for a moment all but a weakling when I thought of you! We went quietly out into the moonlight, slipping along from the shadow of one great mango to another. Sometimes these trees made a continuous shadow—so thick they were—and our going was easy. But when we emerged into a moonlit space we stooped and crawled through the high grass, for we were an easy target for their sharpshooters on the peaks above.

We were fully a mile from camp before we crossed a *crevasse*, about twelve feet wide, spanned by a culvert or small bridge. I remember noticing the little bridge and thinking that if it should be burnt by the enemy in our rear, we would never be likely to get back into our camp again.

There was a Filipino village which lay off to the left in a mountain gorge, and, scouting carefully around the side of the mountain, we approached it over the last one-hundred yards, crawling through the grass and under mango and cocoanut trees up to within fifty yards. It lay before us, a dozen shacks on bamboo cane shocked with the coarse straw of the rice stalk. The usual squalor and emptiness was around, but there was not a sound, not a living thing. Moriarty nudged me. ”There’s hell in there somewhere, Cap’n,” he whispered, ”it looks too peaceful loike.”

It was a Filipino cur that gave us the first clue. They are a half wild breed but little beyond the wild things from which they came. As we lay in the grass listening, this dog which had come back for some morsel he knew of, smelt us, and, barking, bolted down a wooded path to the right. We saw him clearly as he ran up a hillside and over into a gorge beyond.

”There’s where we’ll find the family,” said Moriarty. ”We’ll cut around and go into the rear.”

It took us a good hour to do it, crawling through bamboo and cane, under mango and desert palm, through the tall grasses, and over *crevasses.* Often we lay quiet in them, resting.

It was a weird and unexpected sight that we saw. Before us lay a little cup in the mountain gorge, a natural amphitheater, framed by a small grove of palms and cocoanuts. Savage figures were going through queer rites.

We stopped, puzzled. ”That isn’t the village people,” whispered Davis. ”There are no women or children there, they are headmen and warriors, and that is some ceremony they are performing.”

We crawled up within fifty yards, and then I wished I had not come, for Moriarty gripped me quickly, and pointing to two naked men bound and laid out on the ground, whispered, ”Ross and Billings!”

”We’re too late, Captain, they’ve been killed and now they are fixing to

mutilate them, cut off their heads and cut out their hearts and fill their stomachs with stones."

I nodded. It was the savage's way of mutilating all our dead.

We recognized the fighting men easily. There were dozens of them, squatted in a circle, armed with *bolos*, *borangs*, and *spears*. But in the center stood a strange figure in a long black robe, his parted hair hanging down his back. Around him stood six men, fierce savages, with shaved heads, and half naked bodies.

"*Juramentado!*" I whispered. "That's a Mohammedan priest in the center and he is making *Juramentado* of the six—look!"

I heard both Davis and Moriarty slip the bolts of their Krags. To say *Juramentado* to any soldier was like crying wolf to a shepherd and his flock.

We lay still, seeing the mystic savage rite no white man ever saw before. We could hear the words of the priest which, spoken in a mixed Moro-Spanish, we easily interpreted. The six we soon learned were Moros from Mindanao and had sailed over to sacrifice themselves to our army.

It was indeed a weird rite he went through, and strange words he used:—how, if each killed his Christian before dying, it meant first heaven and an *houri*; and if two Christians a second heaven and two *houri*, up to the seventh heaven and a harem if they died within our lines with seven of our dead each to his credit.

"And now behead them," he ordered, pointing to the two American soldiers, "and anoint your bodies with their blood!"

Instantly we saw our error in supposing our friends were dead, for when the bound soldiers saw two of the *Juramentados* seize their *borangs*, each made a violent effort to break his bonds.

"That priest is mine," said Moriarty, "I've always loved 'em."

We fired together. The priest, two *Juramentados*, and five warriors lay dead or dying. The others were instantly an awakened den of wolves.

I flinch, Eloise, in writing you this, for it brings the tears even now as I write. Its ending was in blood and the passing of two I loved as only one man learns to love another who has backed him to death in the last ditch. They rushed us quickly, for their leaders were *Juramentados* and they never retreat, but like a wounded jungle lion charge instantly the men who have wounded them. They were ten to one against us, and fast and furious was their rush, but, though it was only a short distance, we bunched, and shoulder to back shingled the ground with their dead, stopping many of them, who died at our very feet. The others swarmed upon us, led by howling *Juramentados*, until even now I awake at night with their twanging hyena howl in my ears. Our Colts crackled fiercely for an instant in their faces. Then Davis fell and I would have followed him had not Moriarty, shooting quick and shouldering between us, blown out the brute's brains

with the last shell in his revolver....

I was dazed, bloody, and knocked down into the fissure at our backs by the glancing *borang* blow of the last of the *Juramentados*.... When I came fully to myself I crawled for protection under an outcropping rock, and none too soon, for the fanatic above hurled a spear the next instant that quivered in the spot I had just left.

And, emboldened by the frenzied *Juramentado*, and seeking my blood, I saw other heads, peering from over the fissure side and around boulder and rock.

I was protected for a time under the boulder. I was faint, and hearing running water I drank.

*   *   *   *   *

I prayed that I might not faint again. The wound on my head was a clean cut. "If only I do not faint again," I kept saying while I bathed my wound, and, packing my cap with my handkerchief, pulled it tight over my temples to shut off the blood.

Then I became calm and indifferent. I marvel even now to think how undreading of death I was, feeling that I was so soon to die; undreading, for in all the queerness of my head and the dizziness and throbbing and the bitterness of the knowledge of the unequal fight, I thought always of you and of Andrew Jackson, who when shot by Dickinson, clinched his teeth on a bullet to keep from biting his tongue, clinched, stood, and killed his man! ...

Down in that death hole with savages above me waiting for a chance to brain me or bolo me to death, I heard—I'll swear I heard Aunt Lucretia say, "*Would Andrew Jackson faint or fight here, Jack?*"

Yes, Eloise, believe me or not, but then I knew I would not faint again. I crawled further under the rock, lying flat, face up, and drew both my Colts....

My belt still held the shells. The fight I had with myself must have been long, for they found forty-three empty shells at my side next day.... I don't remember distinctly what happened, for my head would spin every now and then and I had to close my eyes.

Then I fired twice, thrice... A fool was starting down to see where I was, a fool, and he met a fool's fate at my feet... So for hours I shot that way and none dared to try to come down again, none but one who suddenly dropped upon me from the left like a tiger from a cliff, the last of the red painted things who sought death in order to gain Paradise.

He died literally on me; and he died quickly. He did not know that having killed his companions with my right, I was on my back with a Colt also in my left. So died the last of the *Juramentados*....

I knew this would end it, and I was glad, for I was beginning to forget, with the fever flame licking amid the fagots of my brain. I had strange deliriums.... Æons passed with me wallowing in the water beneath me, thrusting my burning head into it and not knowing it.... And then came the end of the delirium in the great joy of the volley of shots above me and the cheers of the First Tennessee. I heard our General telling me I was all right, and then the dreams returned, for I saw you on Satan, in *khaki*, riding with the firing line; and then my head was in your lap, and you were crying over me and kissing me, before all the boys. And like one in a nightmare, when strange things happen, I told them it was not real, that I was touched of a *borang* in my head, and was a double weakling for dreaming and then being such a fool as to weep over a dream. But they only cheered me and laughed.

* * * * *

I remember very distinctly when I awoke in the hospital at Cebu. It was night and the tropic moon lay half masted in the sea. I saw the gunboats out in the bay and Old Glory floating from fort and mast head. But I did not see the Indiana. I knew I was feverish and yet so sane, so sane that it hurt as does all great saneness which follows a great sleep. Then a sea-gull cried as it swept past my window, and that lone sea-gull's cry quite overcame me: for then I remembered my first dream, and you, and now I awoke and you were not there.... I turned my face to the wall. Then I felt someone kneeling by me, her arms around me, her kisses on my cheek. I heard someone saying, "Jack, Jack, be still, and be very calm, for it is I, Eloise, your Eloise. I have nursed you a month—I have slept by your side, darling, right here by your side, your own Eloise. And now it is all right and so sweet that—hold my hands—Jack—tight—tight Jack—we are going to say again our little prayer, thanking God together as of old...."

Then the next day when I was stronger and the danger had passed, we spent the morning alone in the little hospital ward holding hands sillily, talking always, and kissing when we could. And you told me how it had all been: how Elsie and her father had found you and taken you home with them to the great English surgeon who had cured you: how, knowing I was here in the Philippines you had come as a trained nurse to be near me: and how it had been fixed between the General and you that we were to meet the very day that came so near being my last. And you told of the strange dream you had that night, of my call that seemed to come to you, and how, mounting a pony and dressed in *khaki* that you might pass the line as a soldier, you rode to our camp alone through the night, following the army's path over the mountain, reaching our last line at daylight, to find the battalion gone since midnight, to our rescue. Taking Satan you followed:

and it was Satan and you who found me: for they had rescued Ross and Billings and found the bodies of poor Davis and Moriarty, but they could not find me. All day they had ridden and searched; and all day, delirious and fever stricken, I had lain in the fissure under the boulder: and in the still of the evening, when the boys had all but despaired, and you, heart-wrung and broken, had rested a moment in the General's fly, suddenly there came a strange whistling up the canyon, and Satan had broken loose going to it, the boys following: and they had found me in wild delirium, but dreaming of home and blowing the call of old for Satan with the whistle I had forgotten was in my pocket. Even as you told me all this, old Hawthorne came in with the familiar twinkle in his eye and bending over me stroked my forehead as my dead sire would have done, saying, "Well, Colonel Ballington, how do you feel to-day?

"Jack," you cried, "he shall not tell you first! I hadn't got to that, General. Please let me tell it all to him, my own self."

The General laughed and nodded, enjoying our happiness as if it were his own.

"It is all too good, Jack," you went on, "but the President himself has appointed you a Colonel in the regular army. And see—we have saved it till you wakened—our dear old General and I—here is the message President McKinley sent when he heard you had led them from the Indiana's deck to the rescue of the Regulars."

Then you read the message yourself, with tremor and tears:

"No more splendid exhibition of patriotism was ever shown than was shown a few days ago in the Philippines. That gallant Tennessee Regiment from our Southern border, that had been absent from home and family and friends for more than a year, and was embarked on the good ship *Indiana* homeward bound—when the enemy attacked our forces remaining near Cebu, these magnificent soldiers disembarked from their ship, joined their comrades on the firing line and achieved a glorious triumph for American arms. That is an example of patriotism that should be an inspiration to duty to all of us in every part of our common country."

"It is good of him," I said, "God bless him—the sweetest, gentlest man who ever sat in that chair. But if I get well I am going home and to my trees."

But still the old General stood smiling, and I knew there was more to come. And, seeing it, you came over, smiling funnily yourself, and with little tears, too; and kneeling, you laid your face against mine. "Jack, forgive us, it was a

mean thing to do, but you have been married a month to-day and don't know it! But when we brought you here, you talked all right—though you were a little flighty—and begged so hard for me to marry you then—and—and—somebody had to sleep right here with you, nursing you day and night, for the surgeon said it would all be in the nursing and a mighty poor little chance at that—Jack—for it was a terrible blow, cutting to your brain—and you begged so—and—I didn't want ever to leave you again while you lived, and after the Chaplain married us holding your hands in mine and kneeling here just as I am now—it looked as if marrying had killed you, Jack—you went down so quickly and deeply into the valley—and now to see you well—"

You were crying in my arms. I could only kiss you, calling you wife.

Then your old fun came back as of old. "It wasn't a square deal, Jack—to take advantage of a sick man like that, and so, well—well, if you are willing we will call it all off and wait till we get back home where we will have a grand wedding at The Home Stretch; for I have been cheated out of my *trousseau*, and my honeymoon, my new shoes and the rice that ought to be in my back."

"I have had make-believe enough," I said, kissing you again. "That marriage holds and is good enough for me."

Then the home going, overtaking the regiment at San Francisco and the thunder of guns and welcoming whistles as we reached our native Tennessee. And there, amid the great hubbub, and the welcoming committee as our train rolled in, stood the old General, my grandsire, holding back the crowd with his crutch that he might get to me first, and rattling around on his wooden leg, shouting to my great embarrassment:—"*By God, there he is—Jack—my grandson, Jack! I raised him—He's my daughter's son—a game cock—the old blue hen's chicken!...*"

We have it framed now, Eloise, that telegram from the President.

"**EXECUTIVE MANSION**, WASHINGTON. NOVEMBER 21, 1899.

On the Nation's roll of honor is the First Tennessee Regiment U.S. Volunteers, and nobly has the distinction been won. Their country's gratitude awaits the homecoming of these brave men.

WILLIAM McKINLEY."

* * * * *

Home again, Eloise, Home and June. Born of the same May mother, but differing so, this and that other June! How un-of-kin they seem to be! That last dance, the death ride over the bars, homeless, the despair of that June a year ago.

And now home again and The Home Stretch mine!

June, and writing this to you as I sit in the old sweet place under the old sweet trees, under the hickories we loved so, and afar off is the flush of old gold above the violet of the western hills.

And the same June sounds come over to me: the call of an ewe to an errant lamb; the neigh of a mare and the answering whinny of her colt; the distant staccato clatter of binders amid the wheat.

And a wood-thrush deep in our laurel thicket rinsing clear the air around with her liquid notes....

Since Christmas I have seen it all, for it was Christmas when the boys came marching home, seen it again and again, never tiring of seeing it, life as it shuttles across the loom of the Middle Basin. If the canvas were a meadow backgrounded in green, this is how the picture would be: a patch of red-bud now and then for early spring; and later, a green sheen creeping like a high-tide over the hills. But later still, after the wheat is harvested it were a stubblefield canvassed to cleanness; there would run a riot of passion flowers and morning glories in brave, bold colors of beauty. And the picture would be June in the Middle Basin.

I have sat this afternoon watching the trees on the round breast of the hill across the way, a shield of green on the round shoulder of the hill; and as I looked I had a strange upliftingness which I knew was of poetry and that it was the melting of my heart because it was June again and home and because of the love of you.

Why should I potter and make excuse of it? If there be love there is a poem.

Take mine as it is—this voice of the trees—as the sweetness of it all came over me, listening, listening and loving you, Eloise.

WHAT SAY THE BEECHES?

What say the beeches, heart of my heart?
(Comrades we three!)
Wise in their canopied gallery of art—
Clear-visioned, true, in their cloisters apart
From the life which dwarfs when the soul is the mart
Of passions set free.
Write it, dear beeches—historian tree—
Write it for me.

My heart, it hath doubted; my soul, it hath slept.
Alone with the trees and the stars it hath wept,
Not knowing the mystery, not seeing the end—

Oh, be to it, beeches—calm beeches—its friend!
For part of the Infinite—you and the stars—
Sing it the Truth with your infinite bars.

The little leaves whisper'd, baby-voiced, low;
The finger-limbs wrote it 'mid starlighted glow:
"*Love and believe, and be kind as you go!*"
(O Heart, it is so!)

Why should you care for me to write of war and that last bloody fight, now that I am at home again, and my heart in the melting? Is it because it takes it all to make life, the melting, the June days, and the fight?

And why have I written all this, here, at The Home Stretch, months after it has happened, with you coming, even as I write it, down the old sweet path to me, in the old sweet way? Coming to see if I have finished my letter to you. And I wrote it because but yesterday you said, "Jack, dear, I want you to finish that letter you wrote me in the Philippines, the one you wrote to *your love that was lost.* Finish it, Jack, this one here at home for me, in our own home, *ours,* and *for your love that was found!*"

And so I have done it, sweetheart.

IV
THE BURGEONING

"Now burgeons every maze of quick
About the flowering squares, and thick
By ashen roots the violets blow."
—Tennyson.

CHAPTER I
TWO OF A KIND

As I said at the beginning, this is my story, and the telling of it must be in my own way. It does not satisfy me to end it with our home-coming, and I hold that no story is complete unless it satisfies, first of all, him who tells it.

Why should love stories end at the altar? For there is that in life which surpasses the altar in sweetness. It is the hearth. And there is that which is greater than love making. It is the home making. And there are those in every marriage that is a marriage, of far greater worth to the world—since only through them may the world's work go on—than the two who joined their lives at the altar, and they are the children who come of the marriage.

If my love for Eloise was great before, it is greater now, for in the sweet years that have passed have I not proved it a thousand times, as hath she, in the little things of life, the knight-errantries of love, the battle and the gauge that tests us all daily? And are not the still, calm depths in the eyes of the wife more satisfying to the soul than the merry frothy shoals that gleam so riotously in the eyes of the sweetheart?

No man has truly loved a woman until she has borne him children; not for the child alone, uplifting as is the first sight of this tiny sweet seed of the blossoming of their doubly growing souls, but as an evidence that there is nothing worth while in the world except love, since not only does it create every great, beautiful, sweet dream that has been given to the world, but even the dreamer himself!

No man has loved until he has seen the child of his love. It is not the row-boat of the calm waters that the sailor loves as his very life, but the good ship of the mid-seas that holds fast and true, even in the throes of the tempest, bringing him to port and to joy in the morning.

And so I have small respect, and a wholesome contempt for those story-tellers who make of married love a marred love; who paint its ending with the coming of children; and who would leave the wife at the last page waiting for a lover's love lost in the husband's love.

I did not know at first what it was that made Eloise change that first year, from the brilliant, riding, hunting, dancing Eloise of old to this thoughtful, beautiful creature who wanted always to slip off and read Keats by herself, and was slyly making what I thought were doll clothes for Little Sister; and when I was most happy with her to see now and then, through the day, little strange, unnatural flashes of sadness come into her deep, thoughtful eyes, and little, queer, unsatisfying doubts that would creep in. Unknowing, I would see her watching me; and it would end at night in our own room with her in my lap in tears and her arms around me.

"Jack! Jack!" she cried. "Oh, I am so foolish; but are you sure that you will never love anybody better than you do me, not even your own child?"

How well I remember that day of my greatest agony and blessing, and the long, long hours in which her life hung in the balance. I remember the good old doctor who came first, and then, as the day wore on, the graveness that settled in his eyes and the hurried sending to the city for another one. I walked sorrowfully among the trees, a coward, a weakling, for the first time in my life.

Aunt Lucretia was my only comforter, and a stern, unflinching, rude comforter she was. "Jack, *Colonel* Ballington, actually wilted, a weakling, ruined by matrimony and too much love, as I always said you'd be, if you didn't look out. Jack, you make me tired; born on this stock farm, seeing my crop of colts and calves, my spring lambs, too, and whatnots; the finest and most high-bred matrons of my paddock, bringing in their first borns and not a fool doctor in ten miles to meddle with them and Nature and her ways! And now Eloise, the gamiest, nerviest, bravest thoroughbred of them all! You make me tired! Come, I want to make a man of you."

She seized my arm and led me into the house. In the library she took down her huge silver goblet, an international trophy won in France, her prize for the best merino wool, and then she led me down into the cellar.

I had never been in it but once before. It was cool and damp, its sleepers lined with cobwebs. She lit a lantern and led me into the farthest, darkest, cobwebbiest corner. She stood before a small ten-gallon cask, and said with some show of grim humor, "Jack, it was fifteen years ago to-day—Did you know this was an anniversary? Well, fifteen years ago to-day I brought Eloise here, adopted her and gave her to you; and that day I told my old friend, Jack Daniel, to send me this ten-gallon cask of pure whiskey, to be put away, and to get good and mellow for just what I knew would one day happen—the first colt! And now we are going to tap it in his honor!"

"*His* honor, Aunt Lucretia?" I said shamedly. "I had set my heart on her being a—a—why, we are going to name her Lucretia," I added timidly and with some confusion.

"Jack, you were always a fool; a bigger one since you married, just as I knew you'd be, all of 'em are. Why, of course he'll be a good lusty chap; and I have already named him *Andrew Jackson*, and that's what he'll be, name and all. I am going to give his daddy a drink; he needs it, weak-kneeing around here like an old run-down selling-plater in the home stretch."

In the dining-room she took down a cut-glass goblet and pottered around in the side-board till she had found her old-time loaf sugar. This she broke into bits, and, putting a piece in the goblet, she held it up to the light and eyed me queerly.

I knew Aunt Lucretia, and that this ceremony was her way of playing for time and a kindly way of diverting my mind from Eloise.

”Very few people, Jack,” she went on, ”know how to make a toddy. Now you pour a little water over this sugar and let it melt; if you crush it with the spoon it spoils the whole thing, and then pour the whiskey in slowly, stirring it all the time. The nutmeg; ah—”

We took one each, and Aunt Lucretia smiled. ”Feel better? Well, you’d better stop at that! Another one might make you see double—directly—and that would be horrible—twins! Why, Jack, I’ve known men to be driving along, single, and after taking two of these to swear they were driving a span! One more makes them think they are holding a four-in-hand! Now, that boy of yours,” she began, ”why, Jack, I wouldn’t have him divided up into twins for anything.”

We stopped and looked quickly up. The old doctor was smiling at us. He had slipped into the room while we were talking.

”You have missed it, Miss Lucretia,” he said, pouring out a half-glass for himself and taking it straight. ”Phew! But I need a bracer myself after all that! It’s a girl, Jack, a most beautiful, bloodlike little girl.”

”Jack!” cried my Aunt, throwing up both hands, ”Jack, get out of my sight! But we’ll drink to her,” she added gamely.

And we did.

”Two of them!” cried the doctor, warmly shaking my hand. ”Two beautiful little girls, Jack! My boy, I congratulate you! And the mother is doing fine, just tickled to death and begging me to let you come in at once!”

”Heaven help us!” cried my Aunt Lucretia, with feigned anger, but real exultation shining in her eyes. ”Twin colts never amount to a hill of beans. We’ll go in directly, Doctor, and drown one of them; it will give the other a chance in life.”

I turned quickly. ”Hand me that glass, Doctor,” I said firmly. ”I am never going to be partial to my little ones. We’ve drunk to the first one, here’s to the second!”

”Yes, even in our disappointment let us be just,” said my Aunt, joining me.

And we drank to the second one, my Aunt laughing, pleased for all her seeming anger.

But my own heart was pounding under me with the same gripping in my throat that I had felt as I stood on the deck of the Indiana and, looking up, beheld Old Glory above me....

They were lying together by their mother, pink and white little creatures, with heads quite hairless, and blue eyes that were already smiling as plain as could be, twinkling, fun-loving eyes, which said, then, as they have always said, ”*It’s a joke on Daddy we’ve played!*”

Eloise, lying smiling by them, was holding out her arms to me. ”I am quite comfortable, and oh, so happy, Jack!” she whispered as I kissed her again and

again. ”You can’t love them both better than you do me! And please don’t inspect them too closely, Daddy,” she went on, ”for you know what old Josh Billings said: ’*There is two things no man is ever prepared for—twins!*’ So we’ve had to dress up one of them in Aunt Lucretia’s old flannel skirt and a crash towel, but she’s just as sweet as the other one and so like her own, sweet daddy!”

”That Jack Daniel whiskey, sweetheart,” I said, choking up sillily,—”but I am so thankful, now that you are safe—and—and—I was so proud and happy that I drank to each of their healths, till, Eloise, really are you sure, but I’ll swear I am seeing four little heads here under the cover—and if there are—of course, if it is, it’s all right with me—and—and—Eloise, aren’t they holding hands already?”

Eloise broke out into her old laugh. ”Of course they are,” she cried happily, ”and there aren’t but two of them, Jack; honest, just two—on my word of honor, none of them have got away; but that’s the funniest part of it all—they clasped hands as soon as they were placed together—just two sweet for anything! Such devotion to each other! Look! And oh, Jack, you must never, never show any partiality, or love one more than the other, or either of them more than me. And don’t take any more of Aunt Lucretia’s Jack Daniel, for it makes me afraid to have you see double this way! Don’t now, for if you took two more of those old drinks you might see triplets—oh,—the thought of it! Now kiss us all goodnight; we want to sleep. And here—your hands, Jack, and our little prayer.”

CHAPTER II
HOW AUNT LUCRETIA RAN AWAY

There never was a fall like Aunt Lucretia’s when she did fall in love. It is historic at The Home Stretch to this day, and the record is as Aunt Lucretia wrote it to me after she had married Dr. Gottlieb.

”Ran away!” exclaimed Eloise, after she had read the letter; ”and everybody on the place has been trying to marry them off to each other for twenty years. But of course Aunt Lucretia had to do something different!”

”Of course, I knew, Jack,” wrote Aunt Lucretia from Dr. Gottlieb’s old home in Germany, where they were spending their honeymoon, ”that old Gott,—bless the dear heart of him!—had been loving me all these years. Women folks have a kind of a dog nose for the man that really loves them—they know it by instinct. There are some men who court women naturally, but there are lots of them every

sensible woman has to court a little herself. Old Gott was one of these. I knew if I ever married him I'd have to court him myself, although he was crazy about me. But I didn't love him then; he was so silly and made me so mad the way he did it—always hinting around that I was that great red flower he was trying to find, and writing me silly letters, begging me to kiss the postage stamp when I replied, so he might kiss it also! Of course I was proud of Gott and awfully fond of him. I knew he had a great mind and an international reputation as a botanist, but as a lover, Jack, he was very poor.

"He courted me every way but the right way. Now there is only one way to court a woman and that is to kiss her. You can get some of them to marry you the other way—that is, by making them think they are little tin goddesses, or stars 'way up above you, and all that, or by writing them poetry and not daring to look at them except through a long-distance telescope!

"After five or six years and an innumerable number of family prayers and pink teas you can get that kind to wed you. But she isn't worth much after you win her; for you get a little pink-tea wife who presents you, in the course of the first ten years, with one little offspring, and devotes the rest of her time to pills and hospital operations for appendicitis. Instead of going in for addition they go in for subtraction, Jack."

"Well, Jack, after you and Eloise married, I began to feel lonesome, and I felt sorry for poor old Gott, pottering around out there among his books and flowers, with nobody to take care of him. I used to ride by to see him every day, thinking maybe he'd have sense enough to court me in a decent way; but every time he would act worse, until it got so that the poor man couldn't talk at all in my presence; he could only fold his hands and sigh.

"I knew the disease was running its course, and I became very uneasy. In this stage the patient, in addition to all the previous symptoms, has a steady rising temperature and becomes mentally unbalanced. This is shown in intense jealousy, a disease of mind produced by nothing else in the world but this malady. This hallucination takes violent possession of the mind, so that he is ready to shoot, kill or stab anyone whom he thinks stands in the way of his one great love; or, failing in that, to kill himself on the slightest provocation. It makes them do all kinds of queer things.

"And he rapidly developed into the last stage, which is complete imbecility.

"There was nothing for me to do, Jack; I must save poor Gott's life and mind. It would be hard on me, I knew, but for thirty years I had taken care of him, even giving him a home; and I could not bear to see the poor man, in his old age, become an imbecile and a suicide for want of a little help from me.

"As he was practically an imbecile already I decided to treat him as such; to cajole him, to entrap him, to lead him into matrimony by making him think it

was something beautiful, and enchanting, ’up a winding stair,’ so to speak; a hot house at the end of a rainbow!

”And this is the way it happened: I first hunted up that old red flower and pinned it over my heart. Then I took a flask of Tennessee whiskey in my saddle-bag and rode over to his house.

”I caught him just right. He had been up all night, writing a thesis for the University of Berlin on the ’Propagation of Pollen by Differentiation,’ and having finished that, he was beginning to tell his pet parrot how much I resembled that great, red flower he was so fond of, and talking about the evening star which he said was just rising. It was ten o’clock in the morning and I knew at once what had happened. He had begun his thesis the afternoon before, and had become so absorbed that he had worked all night without knowing it, and now thought it was tea time!

”I was greatly distressed at the inroads the disease had made in his mind, and I knew I must act with the greatest tact and foresight. He was just telling the parrot all the beautiful things about me and my resemblance to the red flower when I walked in, wearing the flower over my heart.

”He gave one look at me and the flower, and that was almost too much for him. He began to mumble something, and then became speechless in his chair.

”I was almost heartbroken to see the swift inroads the disease had made on him, poor dear.

”’Gott,’ I said gently, sitting down by him, ’you must take a little of this,’ and I made him drink a good stiff toddy.

”He drank it, looking bewilderingly around, like the poor inmates of the insane asylum I have seen, and every now and then looking at the red lily and sighing as if in great pain.

”At last he spoke. ’Er—Miss—Miss—er’—

”’Lucretia,’ I said, smiling encouragingly at him; ’just Lucretia always, dear Gott, between you and me!’

”This would have landed any sensible man, but thirty years of the disease had made Gott abnormal.

”Again I saw the color leave his cheek, and his face turn pale. Another good bracer, and he was better.

”’As I was just going to remark,’ he said, turning pale again, ’Lu—Lu—Lu—ere—’ he stammered.

”’Lucretia,’ I said. ’Of course, Gott, dear heart, dear heart, that is my name—your name for me.’

”He tried to faint again, but the Tennessee whiskey stood staunch. So he threw up his hands with a little happy, pitiful gesture, and again lost his voice!

”After awhile I said to him: ’I am going to scold you, dear Gott; I am going

to take better care of you. You have been sitting up all night writing and you are tired.'

"'Oh, no,' he said; 'oh, no. I began to write a few hours ago. It is now tea time. Won't you take tea with me?'

"Jack, it was pitiful. I thought I'd take him in my arms and kiss him then and there—just make him my own—only I was afraid the shock might kill him! I must do it gradually. So I went on humoring him. 'Sure, Gott, dear, old, precious Gott,' I said. 'Sure, it is just tea time, and I'm going to sit out on the little porch under the wisteria vine and the stars. Won't you come with me, precious?'

"Jack, it proved near being fatal. He tried to speak, but had only a kind of a gurgling spasm of a breath, panted violently, and turned red.

"I let that soak in and got up and got busy. I thought if anything in the world would fetch him, or any man, it would be to see a good-looking woman, in a white apron, with rosy cheeks and eyes full of fun, buzzing around in his old bachelor's den getting him a meal that was worth while.

"Poor old Gott! The disease of thirty years' standing had nearly ruined him!

"I cooked him one of my famous steaks, Jack; you know how. Skillet red hot, a little butter on it, then drop the steak on, and, as quick as it sears on that side, over it goes on the other, and quick again back, and so on, holding the juice in rich and sweet. And the tea, Jack, the rare old china I had brought in my saddle-bags, too; and the omelet; if anything in the world would put heart into a man!

"Eat it? You should have seen the dear old sweetheart. It almost made me cry. God only knows when he'd had a meal before. I found out afterwards that he had been writing two days, Jack, and then thought every day was to-morrow!

"He was so near gone, you may judge of it yourself. After those two toddies and that good meal he—he—well, he didn't seem to catch on yet! His mind didn't seem to be any clearer. But it helped him, for he had courage enough to take my hand in his, and say, 'Lucretia, shall we sit out under the wisteria—and—and—look at the moon?'

"'I said *spoon*,' I replied firmly, for I saw then, Jack, that I must be very gentle and firm with Gott, he was so badly afflicted!

"I felt his hand quiver beneath mine. He tried to faint, but very firmly I led him out into the full daylight under the wisteria vine. And then very gently but firmly I began to woo him; poor dear, he was nearly gone!

"He looked so killing, too, Jack; the little fellow with his gray hair, his handsome, red face, the fine turn of his large, intellectual head! Oh, that horrid disease! For he sat there in broad daylight mistaking the sun for the moon, and the little white jasmine blossoms above us for stars! I thought the best way to

win him would be through the red lily he had worshipped so long. So, after sitting by him and taking his hand in mine, I said, 'Dear heart, do you notice what flower I am wearing to-day?'

"Imagine my exasperation when he stammered, shook all over, and began mechanically, 'Yes, madam, it is the *Lilium Philadelphium*, the red, wood, flame, or Philadelphia Lily. Flowers: erect, tawny, or red-tinted, outside: vermilion or sometimes reddish orange, and spotted with madder brown within; one to five on separate peduncles, borne at the summit. Periant of six distincts, spreading spatulate segments, each narrowing into a claw and with a nectar groove at the base: six stamens: one style; the club-shaped stigma three-lobed. Stem: one to three feet tall, from a bulb composed of narrow jointed fleshy scales. Leaves: in whorls of threes to eights, lance-shaped, sealed at intervals on the stem. Preferred habitat: dry-woods, sandy soil, borders and thickets; flower season, June and July; distribution, Northern border United States and westward to Ontario, south to the Carolinas and Virginia!'

"He said it all like a parrot, looking up at the wisteria vine. Jack, I saw that I must fight hard to save him. 'Dear heart,' I said, holding his hand, 'don't you think you need someone always with you to take care of you, cook your meals, nurse you? I fear you are sick now, darling,' I added, laying my head on his bosom.

"I could feel his heart panting like a trip-hammer. I saw him wince, struggle, grit his teeth, as one who tries to overcome a terrible thing, fighting for mastery of his mind; and then, Jack—I was so mad I could have choked him! That terrible disease!

"'Yes—Lucretia—dear—Miss—er—Miss Lucretia, I mean—do you think I could hire some good old woman who—ah—whom would you suggest?'

"'I could suggest a great many, Gott, I said, my arm around him; 'but I will suggest only one. *I* need a husband for my old age, and *you*,' I said, 'darling,' and I put one arm around his neck.

"He shivered, paled, and I thought he was dying; but I went on, 'Gott—you dear, old Gott—I have loved you a long time, but I've been too busy to tell you so; but now, dear sweetheart, I want to make you my wife—I mean, Gott, my husband, of course, and—and—kiss me, Gott; kiss me, dearie!'

"Oh, Jack, the divinity of it! I am ashamed of all I have said before! Tear down that pedigree from your wall! Forget all I've said about marrying people off like animals—about improving the breed—about anything but love—love—love. For, when my lips touched his, life grew different! I had never felt it before! From that moment I was in love—divinely, gloriously in love!

"He keeled over, of course. It all but killed him. It was the crisis of the disease of thirty years' standing, but I had my nerve with me, and when he came

to he was so bashful and happy, Jack. He said shyly, ’But, darling Lucretia, don’t you think our parents might object; wouldn’t it be romantic if we ran away?’

”And we did, Jack, that very night. I had him put a ladder up to his bed room window, and that night I slipped out, brought him down the ladder, and we ran off to town and were married!

”Oh, it was so romantic, such a sweet dream! And here we are in his old home in Germany and so happy!

”Forgive and forget all that I have ever said about people falling in love, for mine at last was the hardest fall!”

CHAPTER III
A NIGHT WITH CAPTAIN SKIPPER

Blessed is that man who is born with the saving grace of humor! Blessings on the memory of my Celtic sires!

One night when Eloise and the twins were away, I rode over to spend the night with my brother Ned. He had been elected to Congress from the Hermitage District, and together we were to frame a Forestry Bill—the first of that series of acts which have steadily legislated toward the Conservation of our national resources, and which will yet lead on to greater things; first and foremost of which, and most vital, will be the taking over for preservation by the national Government of the entire Appalachian mountain range, the forests of which are at the headwaters of nearly all the Eastern half of our country.

My brother was not home, but the others were, and to my great delight a girl baby as much like her mother as two turquoise shells. Little Sister had grown into a slim, pretty girl, and Captain Skipper, more positive than ever, began early begging his mother, since his father was away, to let him sleep with his Uncle Jack that night.

”Oh, do, Thesis,” I said, after supper. ”Let him have his way.”

”And that’s where you’ll drop your candy,” said Little Sister in her serio-quaint way.

Thesis, who is so good that she says only what she thinks and is so honest that she never suspects others of diplomatic pretenses, took me at my word. Captain Skipper should sleep with his dear Uncle Jack that night!

You who read this, did you ever sleep with a boy? I don’t mean one of those

good boys that you read of in Sunday-school books—the impossible kind—who lives like a saint every day and says his prayers and retires like a gentleman at night: but one of those lusty, growing young devils, born with a spring in his back, who howls out the first year, sleeps out the second, and by the time of the third is ready to chase the cat around and fight brave battles with the hen folks. At four he is ready for the birds' nests and tin cans for the dogs' tails, and a little later he breaks every colt that tries to keep the Sabbath in the meadow by the still waters.

When night comes—ay, there is the rub! He howls away the twilight hours and spends the night kicking, coughing, rolling out of bed or having fits, and yet sleeping through it all like a cub in winter quarters.

The weather that night was warm, one of those hot April nights that lies humid and close. "The dear little fellow will be so proud to sleep with his Uncle Jack," said his fond mother, when she kissed him good night; "and he does sleep so sound and quietly."

Never having owned a boy, I believed all of this. Did you ever try to undress a lad of four that had chased the cat around until he was hot? His clothes stick to him like a plaster. Being a novice, I got everything unbuttoned and then skinned him, peeled them off. To my surprise—and I found later that there were all kinds of surprises in that boy—in fact, that he was made out of surprises—he insisted upon saying his prayers! But I never saw anything go more promptly to sleep at his devotions. I had to derrick him up into the bed.

One of the strange things about a boy is that when he starts to wiggle around over the bed in his sleep he does it diagonally. I pulled him back on his own side of the bed five times within the next hour. Then I would hear him scuffling and flopping about, always ending in a long-drawn, dismal and dreary sigh, that would have made his fortune as Romeo. It always ended in his rounding up against the footboard in the opposite corner, flat on his back, each limb and arm pointing to its own cardinal point of the compass, his nightgown rolled up in a wad under his neck, and his body looking like that of a young bull frog in a Kentucky horse-pond.

If there is anything more absurd than a boy in this attitude I have never seen it. I tried to awaken him and get him back, but he only sighed one of those long sighs, unlimbered and slept on. I went back to my window and began to work on my bill, but my thoughts were soon dispelled with a start. I heard a choking, gasping, frightfully suffocating sound, mingled with a dolorous wheezing: "*O-woo,—oo—oo—wow—O-woo—oo!*"

I was at his side in an instant, this time frightened. He was sitting stolidly up in bed, a strange gaze in his wide-open eyes, his face beaded with a clammy moisture, his face drawn in a spasm. I had seen a boy have a fit before and I went

upstairs after his mother, two jumps at a time.

”Quick,” I cried, ”hurry down! He'll not live until we can get the doctor!”

She was rocking the baby to sleep. She did not become excited, but smiled and whispered, ”He isn't dying, Jack, it is just poor circulation. Don't notice him at all.”

This made me cynical, bitter.

”Poor circulation?” I said in disgust. ”He has the best circulation I ever saw; he has circulated all over that bed three times already. Not notice him? It would take the mental aberration of a stone man to do it.”

I fear I was a bit satirical, for it is not pleasant to be made a laughing stock of by a boy who was not even awake. I was not assured, however, and half expected to find him dead when I got back. But I was disappointed. He had flopped across his pillow on his back, his arms and legs curled up. And sleeping! No ground-hog in mid-winter ever surpassed it.

I spent the next hour planning how I would like to fix him so as to keep him on his side of the bed and let me go to sleep. In fact, I quit everything else and thought. If there is anything I like to do it is to sleep when the time comes. These are some of the stunts that boy did in that hour: Fits, three;—very distinct and prolonged: snorts,—one every ten minutes: choking spells, at intervals: kicked the pitcher off of the table near the bed twice: jumped up and talked perfectly naturally—so naturally that I felt that he was awake,—but he was not. More snorts; and then: ”*Catch him! There he goes in that hole—hooray!*”

I would have sworn then that he was awake, and examined him closely, cuffing and shaking him. But he was not. He sighed and slept on....

The brilliant plan I finally settled on was to put the pillows between us. It was nearly midnight before I had courage enough to retire at all. I pulled him up on his side, straightened him out and put the barrier between us, and then crept gingerly in. I lay still for a while listening. My success was so complete I wanted to stay awake a while and enjoy it. He would start out on his journey across the bed, but would wind up suddenly against my barricade. There he would lie a while, and I could feel his thumps against it.

In my vanity I chuckled.

I had dozed off in this state of self-conceit when I felt something rammed into my mouth. I thought at first that burglars had entered and that I had been chloroformed and gagged. It was not so. That boy had shot his foot through under the pillow and popped me square in the mouth. I had been told that it was not well to sleep with one's mouth open—now I knew it.

When people treat me that way, asleep or awake, I resent it. I fight. I boxed that boy's ears. I pounded his head against the headboard so that I would awaken him. I shook him, kicked him, and used words I should not have wished

his mother to hear. When I had finished, he quietly sighed another of his long, peaceful, happy sighs, and slept on.

Sleep was not for me after that, and I spent the next hour lying awake and cataloguing the different things he would do. These were only a few of them:—Another fit; seeing cats, and wolves and dragons around his bed; chasing rabbits; talking in his sleep; telling of seeing a bear ride a bicycle down the pike; breaking a colt; swimming in the creek; fighting another boy; wheezing and thumping and making strange noises; dreaming he was an infant again and imbibing from an imaginary bottle; smacking his lips so loud that the noise could be heard all over the house.

It was three o'clock before a bright idea entered into my head. I remembered that the only request that his mother had made of me was to see that he did not fall out of bed. I remembered that in all his circulations and maneuverings, this was the one thing that he never did, like a runaway mule he knew how to take care of himself even in his sleep. I began to anticipate him. I determined to humor some of his little whims. I put a pitcher of ice water by the bed. I got a link of the garden hose that felt clammy and looked like a snake. I doubled up my pillow so I could strike hard with it. Then I sat up and waited. I would make him realize all he dreamed.

I did not have long to wait. This time he was falling from a tree or down an endless precipice, for he sat on the edge of the bed, yelling: "Catch me—catch me—I'm falling!"

I let him fall. In fact I helped him along. I put a lot of force into that pillow and it caught him squarely under the ear. He went out of the bed, hitting the floor in a heap. It wakened him. "Where am I, mamma? O, mamma?" he called.

"Come to your mamma," I said softly; "dear little boy, you have fallen out of the bed. Be careful how you roll."

He was asleep before he touched the pillow. But in the next half hour he did not roll any more, and so I learned that a boy may be taught things even in his sleep if only the proper implements are used.

But he was not yet cured of swimming in his sleep, for, just as I began to doze off, thinking that he was properly broken, he began to splash around in the bed, lamming me on the head and stomach, and shouting: "Look out! There's a snake—pull for the shore!"

This gave me my cue. Seizing a water pitcher I turned it over on him, at the same time wrapping the clumsy hose around his leg.

"Snakes," I cried in his ear, "dive for the shore!"

He gave a wide-awake yell that time, and rolled backward out of bed. One jump and he had cleared the room, going up stairs yelling: "Snakes, mamma, s-n-a-k-e-s!"

I let him go. Nay, I locked the door behind him and went to sleep.

The breakfast bell rang twice, but I did not hear it. Little Sister had to come to awaken me. They were all at breakfast when I came down, Thesis, the baby, and the boy.

"How soundly you must have slept!" she said, smiling. "I forgot to tell you that the dear little fellow sometimes walks in his sleep; and do you know, this morning I found him fast asleep on the first stair landing?"

Little Sister, however, was wiser. She looked at me in her quaint way and said, funnily: "Uncle Jack, you look real tired; like you'd dropped your candy last night, sure enough."

CHAPTER IV

MY FIRST AUTOMOBILE

It was one of those beautiful December mornings when the frost had hung his laces everywhere, and a hunting fever fairly burned within me. It comes over me at times, and then—well—I run away and obey it.

As though through mental telepathy my telephone rang. "Hello! Is that you, Jack? This is Horace Raymond, your old neighbor. I'm in town to-day. Ever see such a pretty day? Let's take a quail hunt."

"Glad to hear your voice again, Horace. No, I never did. I am ready for a quail hunt any day except Sunday. Never had any luck on Sunday at all."

"I have just bought a new automobile," he went on, "and I want to try it out to-day. I will be right out in a hurry."

"Oh, say, Horace, now that's another thing. I have never ridden in one of those things; they aren't bred right, don't like their gait; and loving horses as I do, confound them, I've got religious scruples on the subject. Now you come out here in the thing and I will have the little mare and the buggy hooked up, a good lunch and the setters in, and—"

I heard him laugh derisively. "Nonsense! Why, man, we're going way out beyond you on the Lebanon pike—ten miles—and we want to go in a hurry. I'll have you there in thirty minutes. Now the little mare would be fully an hour making it, and then dead tired for a long drive back, with a pointer and two setters crowding us out of the buggy. I'll be at your place in twenty minutes with two dogs—have that champion pointer of yours ready." And he rang off.

I hung up the receiver. ”I guess I’m up against it,” I said, as I went off to put on my hunting clothes, ”but if it gets out on me I can prove I didn’t want to do it. Besides, this new hunting cap I’ve just bought would make Moses look like a Turk in Hades; nobody would recognize me.”

”Jack, I’m ashamed of you,” said Eloise with becoming scorn. ”What would Satan say? But of course, if you are going in that thing, and happen to bag any birds—which I know you’ll never do—please remember the luncheon I am going to give to-morrow, dear. But you’ll never get them, going back on your raising like that—see if you do!”

”No, see if you do,” said one of the twins, now aged four.

And the other added, ”No, see if you do!”

For which I kissed them both, because they were so femininely consistent.

The truth is, I wanted to go hunting. It was in my blood that morning, and these beautiful December days with a hazy glow on the blue hills and that stillness that comes like a dropping nut in a forest would put it into anybody’s blood, anybody who had it. And when the infection hits you there is only one antidote, a dog, a gun, a tramp over the hills, and—whir! bang! bang!

And to-day was ideal. I had felt it all morning; the cool, bracing air with that little frosty aroma of leaves curling to crispness under the first blight of things, and that other delightful odor of pungent woodland damp with frost-biting dew. And the hills blue and beautiful are alone worth going to meet, and the trees crimson in the hectic flush of the dying year.

Dick, my pointer, was jumping all over me and turning dogsprings of delight.

”Down, Dick! Heigh ho, old boy; that machine is against my religion, but I’d go hunting in a negro hearse to-day. Besides,” I said, with a twinge of conscience, ”he’ll get us to the field in forty minutes, and the little mare is getting old and we’ve got a late start.”

I sighed and felt better. I had fought so long and said so much for the horse, and now—now—it was inexorable; they were being driven to their fate; they had to go before the relentless wheel of progress. I was virtually admitting it, I, who had said I’d never—

I shouldered my gun. Somehow it didn’t seem like the old, joyous hunt.

At the front gate the automobile stood, a pretty thing, to be sure. Its owner was smiling, goggle-eyed and all aglow, his hand on the wheel, or whatever you call the steering end of it.

”Jump in, Jack, old man; we must be in a hurry. Slap Dick in there behind with my two setters. Be in a hurry! By George! I know where there are a dozen coveys, and we’ll be there in forty minutes. Hi, Dick! What’s the matter? Get in! Confound him, what’s the matter with that old dog?”

I was lugging Dick and trying to get him in. He was kicking like a half-roped steer. He had always jumped to his place in the little buggy, but now—

I knew what was the matter. Even Dick, dog that he was, had his principles, and he was man enough to say so. While I—

I turned crimson.

"Get in, old boy," I begged. "We'll be there in a jiffy. Dead bird—good doggie."

I got him in, with his head down and his tail between his legs. To all intents he was going to a funeral. I turned quickly away, for I could not stand the scorn and dumb reproach of his eyes. Right then I would have quit and gone back, but I didn't want to hurt my friend's feelings.

"Jump in, jump in, let's be going," he shouted, in his nervous, business way. "Oh, just a minute! There—you're on the ground. Say, here, take this and give that starting crank a turn. I'm not very expert myself," he went on, "and I sometimes forget; but you're on the ground—there—right there!"

I gave her a whirl, several of them. I whirled her like blue blazes. I kept on whirling, while her owner grasped the wheel and his eyes danced nervously, as he expected her to flash into the throb that said steam was on.

But she didn't fire, and I kept cranking.

"Faster, Jack, harder!" he cried.

I whirled and whirled. I began to get warm. The sweat began to pour off.

"Say," I said, gasping for breath, "this beats turning a grindstone. What the devil—"

"Why, I canth—thee," he lisped, "turnth again—quick—a tharp, sthnappy onth!"

I turned her again, quick, sharp and snappy. The thing pulled heavy and felt like an unoiled grindstone, just out of the store. My arms ached, the sweat poured off, and my back was nearly broken.

I gave her a final desperate twist, and—there she was! Dead as a log wagon.

"Confound it," I said, mopping my forehead and staggering up; "I could have curried the mare and hitched her up six times. Why, something's wrong with your old gas wagon," I went on, getting hot. "I'll not turn this crank any more," I said; "I'll be so sore in my arms I couldn't hold my gun straight to-day."

He looked puzzled, annoyed.

"Why, I can't thee—" he began to lisp again.

"What's that you've got in your mouth?" I jerked out. "You don't lisp that way naturally."

A smile broke over his face. He took out a little, black peg, and roared. It was too funny—to him.

"Beg yo' pardon, old boy—beg yo' pardon—ha-ha-ha! Good joke. That's

the switch plug. You take it out when the machine's idle, and I forgot to put it back in the little hole. Here," he said, sticking it in, "it connects the current—ha-ha—good joke—now give her a whirl." I gave the whirl, but in no manner to enjoy the joke. I heard her fire up and begin to throb. We moved off beautifully. We began to fly up the smooth pike, my hand back in Dick's collar, for fear he'd jump out and commit suicide. I dared not turn round to look the honest dog in the eyes.

"Fine, fine—ain't this fine, old man?" cried my friend enthusiastically, as he buzzed up the road. "Look at your watch—nine-twenty. Ah, now we'll be in the field at ten sharp—sharp—two good hours for hunting before we eat our pocket lunch.

"Now your little old mare," he laughed, "would take up those fifteen miles by now? Say, ha! ha!—acknowledge the corn, old man—the decree has gone forth—it's all over with the old pacers."

I growled and said nothing. So did Dick. It was good, though, the way we were eating up space and getting nearer to the birds, those game, nervy, whirring birds that dart like winged flashes of thunder before your gun. We whirled over the bridge at the river at lightning speed. I saw the sign up about the fine for going faster than a walk, but how—

"How can an automobile walk—ha! ha!" he shouted, for he had read it also and divined my thoughts and winked knowingly at me. "That applies to horses and jackasses and such," he laughed—"things that walk. But this don't walk, eh?"

Honk! Honk!

He was blowing for a stray mule to get out of his way.

The mule got, tail up, and settled into a barbed wire fence, which he tried to jump, but only succeeded in cutting up his countenance.

Honk! Honk! "Get out of the way, if that's all the sense, you've got. My! but ain't we buzzing?"

I nodded, beginning to become exhilarated myself.

"This is pretty good," I admitted. "I begin to see how you people soon become speed-crazy. We'll get the birds to-day," I warmed up, "and I thank you for—look out! Stop!"

He stopped, but not in time. It was a nervous-looking, old, fleabitten, gray mare, full of Stackpole, Traveler, Dan Rice and Boston blood. I had seen it so often that I knew the very turn of its tail. In the buckboard she was pulling were three country girls, fat, solid, happy, their lines wabbling around anywhere, and the old mare going where she listeth. They were the kind of girls I knew and loved in my sappy days. I used to commence to kiss 'em about Christmas, knowing they'd wake up and respond about the Fourth of July. Two of them amply filled up the buckboard, but, as usual, a third one had piled on top of the others somewhere,

and—

”Great heaven, Horace!” I shouted. ”Stop—that one there on top is holding a baby!”

I sprang out, for I saw the old mare begin to squat, her old, scared, brown eyes blazing in her white face like holes in a big lard can. I heard her snort like a scared bear and saw her feet pattering jigs all over the pike. Then she whirled, running into a fence, where, between the overturned buckboard, the shafts and the rail fence, she stood wedged upon her hind legs, pawing the air.

But the girls surprised me. Without a change in their fat, immutable, expressionless faces, they simply rolled out on the pike in a bunch, the baby on top, like snow folks tilted over by a boy.

They got up, dusting their frocks. They had taken it for granted. It was all right. There was not a squawk, not even from the baby, as one of them picked it up and I grabbed the bits and straightened out the old mare.

”I hope you ladies aren't hurt,” said my friend from the roadside, in his machine.

”Sally, is you hurt?” asked the fattest one.

”Naw,” she grunted.

”Mamie, is you?”

Mamie merely wiggled.

”Is Tootsy hurt?”

Tootsy was eating an apple, with unblinking eyes fixed on the wonderful machine.

Nothing was hurt but the harness.

That was hurt before they started, but I had to spend the next twenty minutes patching it up. Finally we got them all in, Tootsy on top. No word had they spoken, but I could see they were eyeing me, with that country suspicion that makes every maid of them rate every man she meets in the road as Lothario, Jr., or a prince in disguise.

”Now, ladies, you are all right,” I said, trying to keep cheerful. ”And I am so glad none of you was hurt.”

Then one of them drawled, but looking over toward the distant horizon, ”Ain't you named Mister Jack?”

I turned red and pleaded guilty.

”After all you've writ, I don't think you had oughter done this,” she said, and then they all drove sedately off, still looking toward the horizon.

”Now that's the worst thing about automobiles,” said Horace, after we started again, ”these fool country horses. Why, I waited till this time of day, thinking they'd all be in town by now, for they get up with the chickens. Anyway, we're not likely to meet any more of them.”

”I hope not,” I sighed, pulling out a cigar and a match, as I’d always done in the buggy. It was blown out before the sulphur burned.

”You can’t do that in an automobile,” he yelled, ”we’re going too fast. Like to stop for you, but we’re fairly humming—be there in half an hour, old man.” Honk! Honk!

We had turned a bend in the road.

”Great Cæsar!” I shouted. ”Nobody going to town! Look!”

His jaws dropped. There they were. We could see for half a mile, and so help me heaven, but this was the procession that passed as we pulled out of the narrow pike on the roadside, consumed with impatience to get to the field, the machine throbbing beneath us like a loft over a barn dance:

First an old sorrel mare, a worn-out buggy of the vintage of 1874, and two old ladies.

The whole thing approached gingerly, creeping up like a yellow cat. It was a toss-up as to which of the two’s eyes popped the biggest, or which had her mouth shut tightest. The old mare was game, and sidled up, and just as I saw the wheels begin to form in her head the occupants threw down the lines and began to pop two pairs of country-yarned legs out of the two sides of the buggy, exclaiming, ”Fur ther Lord’s sake thar, Mister, ketch ’er!”

I jumped out and had her by the bits.

One of them relieved herself by spitting snuff over the dashboard, while the other took it out on me, deprecating the day when ”Sech folks an’ things blocks up ther public trail—an’ so help me, ain’t that thar Mister Jack, an’ my old man bred this mar’ by his say so! Jack,—Ananias,” she sniffed, as she drove off.

The next were right on us, two slick, three-year-old sugar-mules, hauling a load of darkies. They came on at a rattling clip, making more noise than a freight train, jollying, laughing and cackling. The men were on plank seats across the wagon, the women in high-back hickory chairs, squatting low and feeling as good as Senegambians usually do in a white man’s country, where he does all the worrying and thinking and they do all the loafing and eating.

They passed us without a wabble. I expected that, for a mule, like a negro, never sees anything until he has passed it. I saw the gate of the wagon had been taken out in the rear to let the damsels in: also the chickens, the coop of ducks, a bundle of coon-skins, pumpkins, a sack of unwashed wool, some spare ribs and a tub of only such nice chitlings as a country mammy can prepare. They passed, and then the scare got into those three-year-old corn feds good by way of their tails. For I saw these straighten out first, then their ears. I saw the big driver fall back on the lines, and—

”Whoa, dar!”

They jumped twenty feet in the first jump, and ran half a mile in spite of

his lugging and sawing. But the first jump was enough. The damage was done then, for everything in it but the driver, who held on to the reins, came boiling out of the rear. Up the road for half a mile was a telegraph line of chitlings, the rest were mixed up. They all rose but one damsel, weighing close to 468 pounds. She sat still. A young buck went to help her up.

"G'way f'm heah, nigger, wait till I see ef my condiments is busted," she cried, feeling her sides and her chest. "'Sides, I wants Brer Simon to hope me up."

Brother Simon helped her and she was all right.

We gave her a dollar and the others a quarter each. It was expensive, but I deemed it just.

The following then passed with more or less hesitancy, shying and plunging: a surrey and team; a boy and his best girl; a log wagon and four mules, the leaders rushing by in terror, pulling the wheelers by the neck, as they were trying to go the other way.

Then came Old 'Squire Jones on his roan Hal pacer. The horse got half-way by before he decided that the goggle eyes on the roadside had him. Well—no goggle eyes had ever caught any of his tribe—not yet! In bucking to wheel, he tapped the old 'Squire in the mouth with his poll. The old man had been raised a Presbyterian, with Baptist propensities, and he made the ozone sulphuric. He brought his horse back to the scratch, spurring and swearing. It was all right this time, till the old horse looked into the back of the machine. True to the fool in his pedigree, he knew what the machine was, because he had never seen one before; but the dogs—they were things he had seen all his life, and he bolted backward again, jamming the old 'Squire's stomach against the pommel and his back against the cantle. It was the time to go, and we shot out, leaving the old horse waltzing into town on his hind legs.

"I didn't hear his last remarks," I said, as we went along. "They seemed to be rather personal."

"Let 'em go," said Horace. "You wouldn't want to put them in your scrapbook."

"I don't think the mare and buggy would have made us all these enemies," I remarked, "and we would have been there by now. Do you know it's eleven o'clock?"

"We've got a fine run, now," he apologized. "We'll be there in thirty minutes."

"We'll be there by night," I snarled. "Say, we'll just call it a possum hunt, eh?"

This made him mad, and he did not speak till he got to the big hill.

Here at the foot we stopped and sat, throbbing.

Horace fumbled with a side brake a moment, touched a pedal and looked

wise.

”What’s all this for?” I said.

”I’m resting for a little headway before taking that steep hill. And say, while we’re at it, you ought to know something about a machine, you might be called on to help me in an emergency.”

I turned pale. Up to this time I had felt secure. Now I understood something of the feelings of that pair of mules that never saw danger until they had passed it.

”Why, I thought you knew all about it,” I began.

”Of course I do, but something might happen to me. You might be thrown on your own resources. Now here,” he went on. ”This little lever on the wheel is the spark-control—it quickens things—the next one is the throttle; that means more power. This is the switch-plug here: this is the clutch, and this the brake. Now, remember, and watch me start.”

He did, the thing starting slowly up the hill and then beginning to go in little jumps, exactly like a horse galloping.

”Pull him down,” I growled, ”he’s broken his gait.” For I felt every moment as if it would soon wabble and quit. But he kept galloping and I settled down and began unconsciously to wabble my body as I would in motion to a galloping horse. I couldn’t help it. I glanced at Horace, he was doing the same, but hitching at the side lever all the time, and we were bobbing like two Muscovy ducks over a mud hole.

It was uncomfortable, it was uncanny.

”Confound you,” I growled, ”I tell you the thing’s galloping—he’s all tangled up; bring him down.”

Snap went something, and Horace breathed easy.

”All right now,” he said, as we began to climb the hill beautifully. Over the top we went, and then—down—down! How she did fly! My heart jumped into my throat! I held my breath and felt that same feeling I used to feel pumping in a swing when I’d soar up to the top and start down again, the same when I started down the elevator from the 19th story of the Masonic Temple and felt my legs give way and threw my arms around the neck of the elevator boy and begged him for heaven’s sake to stop until I got my breath and my legs in speaking distance of each other, and collected the rest of myself.

”Stop her,” I cried, ”down-this-hill-I’m-feeling-queer-Lord-I’m-stop, I tell you!”

”It’s easy,” he laughed. ”Do it yourself—on that brake—there—just to teach you—there!”

Gasping for breath and pale with fright, I kicked up a little pedal.

The thing jumped twenty feet!

”Don’t!” I heard him yell, ”Good Lord, that’s the throttle!”

I saw a big ditch on the other side of us. I saw his hand dart quickly to his side.

Like all man and woman-kind, in emergencies with a horse, I do the fool thing, grab at the reins. This instinct overpowered me. I grabbed the brakes to help him. I over-did it. It stopped too quickly; it actually kicked up behind. It stopped like a twelve-inch ball striking armor plate. I went over clear across the ditch. The three dogs were faithful and they followed.

Horace tried it, but the steering wheel stopped him.

”It was my fault,” I said, as I limped up, after the dogs got off of me. ”I grabbed at your reins, I guess—thought you were running away.”

But the sudden stop had sprung something, and Horace was out fixing it. He had pulled off his cap and got under the machine, and I saw the beaded sweat begin to rise on the crown of his bald head, like bubbles on a mill pond.

This did me a world of good. I lighted a cigar, propped up and began to smoke.

For half an hour he tinkered and tinkered. I smoked and gave him such bits of sarcastic encouragement as happened into my head. I reminded him that Tempus was fugiting, and that it was already quite 9:50 and we were still ten miles from nowhere; that the little mare would have been there by now, and we would still have some friends left on the pike.

”Consider the lilies that ride in automobiles,” I quoted, ”they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that old gray mare, in all her glory, never worked as hard as you are working now.”

It was my time, and Dick and I enjoyed it, sensible dog that he was. After every bit of such talk he’d wink and fairly guffaw.

Horace was working hard. He was groveling in the dirt to do it, too, and that suited me also. I could gauge his efforts by the sweat drops that arose on his bald spot, growing and then bursting like soap bubbles, to roll down his collar.

”Plague it!” he said at last, rising, ”I can’t see very well without my glasses. Say, stop your guying, now, and look under here and see if you can see what’s wrong.”

I got out as leisurely as a lord; all I could see was a small coil of wire, red hot. ”I see it,” I said, solemnly. ”The thing’s appendix is red hot. Give me an axe and I’ll open it up.”

Dick howled with delight. I thought he’d die. Horace smiled grimly, but it was a smile that said, ”I’ll even this up yet.”

”Put in your shells; we’ll hunt around toward that farm house, and up there I’ll ’phone to town and have Smith come out and fix it.”

Thus he spoke, and I agreed. In fact, there was nothing else to do. We

rolled the machine aside, the dogs were let out, and we were soon quartering a field toward a farm house.

"Whose place is this?" I asked, as the dogs began to hunt down the wind.

"Old Bogair's, a French Canadian. He came here three years ago from Canada; ticklish old fellow, but he knows me, and it's all right."

I felt secure, for while the game law is very strict, requiring written permission to hunt on one's premises, intended as a guard against pot hunters, no gentleman ever objected to another hunting on his farm.

We started through a cedar wood in a gladey spot and I saw Dick beginning to nose the wind and to throw up his head for quail. Then I heard my companion calling lustily for me to come. I rushed up, Dick at my heels.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A coon—a big coon—up in that cedar tree. Get on the other side, quick!"

I ran around, and, sure enough, up among the branches, trying to hide, but showing the end of a brindled and streaked tail, was the coon.

In a trice I let him have it, and he came crashing through the branches. Dick ran up and seized it, shaking. I saw yellow eyes, ears laid back, and the coon spitting and fighting for life. It was dying, but struck out, tearing Dick's nose to threads. I ran up and planted the heel of my hunting boot on its neck, while Dick howled with his lacerated nose.

"That's a funny looking coon," I said, as I eyed the thing suspiciously. I heard Horace laugh and saw him turn and make a break for the road. I looked up. Old Bogair had run up, red-faced and breathless.

"By gar," he yelled, as soon as he saw what I'd done, "vut fur you keeled ze house cat fur? Vut fur?"

It was true; but never had I seen a tomcat look more like a coon. On a distant hillside I could see my deserting friend rolling on the grass and shouting.

In vain I apologized. Old Bogair kept dancing around and shouting, "Vut fur you keel ze house cat fur? Vut fur?"

"What are you damaged?" I said at last, with disgust.

"Ah, en passant—dees one from T'ronto, I breeng. Hee's registraire—fife taller, an' fife fur treespaire."

I paid it like a man. Old Bogair smiled and bowed, with his hand on his stomach.

"Eet vus all right now."

I took up the cat by the tail.

"Vut fur? You don't vant heem?" he gasped.

"Yes, I do," I said, hotly. "He's mine. I've paid for him and I want to take him over yonder and rub him under the nose of that villain that induced me to go hunting in an automobile and steered me on the premises of a damned Dago

who keeps registered cats that look exactly like coons when up a tree."

He thought I was complimenting him.

"Voilà—I t'ank you," he said, bowing again, with his hand on his stomach.

I hunted around an hour before I went to the machine. I waited to cool off. Dick found a fine covey, and I missed them right and left. I had lost my nerve and my luck.

When I reached the machine, Horace was in, blinking, and we said not a word. It was my time to freeze. Smith had run out from town and fixed it. A little wire the size of a pencil-point had got an inch out of place, and it had been as dead as a log wagon on us.

It was now exactly 3:30, but we decided we still had a chance to get a covey. We made the next three miles in beautiful time, meeting only one man driving a game, high-headed horse that swept by us without giving us the least notice.

"If they were all bred like that one," I said, "a man in a machine might think he had some rights on the road."

"Glad you are beginning to see the other side," said Horace.

"We'll be there by four," he said; "just the time the birds begin to feed good. Oh, we'll get a few yet. It's a long lane, you know. Our luck is turning."

"This is fun," I said, as we flew along the newly-graveled road parallel with the creek, "fine, give it to her."

The scenery was beautiful; the bluffs were draped in clustering red berries, and the woods old gold and crimson. The water foamed over the lime rocks, glowing iridescent in the sun, and the air was bracing as we buzzed along.

Honk! Honk! "Let her out!" I cried, as a touch of speed mania got into me. "Say, I see how it is," I said, "why a man soon gets the speed mania in him. Horsemen can't blame you, for they have got it, too."

"Oh, we're riding," he cried. "You have an hour yet."

We were indeed riding, along a narrow path of the road rising to a rather abrupt hill. Rising and peeping over, I saw a long procession of creeping things, their ears just shining above the hill we were both ascending.

"Halt! Stop!" I cried.

It was too late, everlastingly too late! We were meeting a negro funeral procession, that of good old Uncle Thomas, as good an old time darky as ever lived. I had known him well, a fellow of infinite jest. But I did not recognize him promptly now.

I hate to write what followed. I felt faint and sick.

Be it known that every negro loves to be buried behind white mules. It is his glory and his religion. This kind was hauling Uncle Thomas. Now, a white mule is an old mule, and the older the mule, the bigger the fool, and when they peeped over the top of that hill, only to butt into a goggle-eyed demon, they did

what mules always do. When I first saw them I was looking at the north end of that negro hearse. The next instant I was looking at the south end. And as the thing turned over once to adjust itself to different direction, a venerable old darkey shot out of the rear end of that hearse, followed by a two-dollar coffin, and everything in that two miles of vehicles turned tail at the same time.

I jumped out, grabbing my hunting coat, which I knew held a flask of whiskey, and rushed pell-mell through the woods for the creek bank. All I wanted was a little water in that whiskey.

After satisfying myself I would not faint, I went back in time to see that everything had been fixed and the procession headed north again.

"No, sah, it didn't hurt Brer Thomas," the preacher was explaining to Horace; "but it did upsot some of the sisterin, an' they fainted when he come outer the back end of that kerridge so nachul an' briefly. No, sah; nobody's hurt, sah; it wuz jes' a sivigerus accerdent."

"How much money have you, Horace? I've spent all mine on dead and registered cats," I said, bitterly.

He had plenty, and tipped the whole two miles of them, as they passed by, singing: "*Jordan is a hard road to travel.*"

Never had that old song seemed so real to me!

"I stop right here," I said, after assuring myself that I would not faint again. "The sun is setting; we've been out all day, and found nothing but a cat and a corpse."

Our experience had taken our nerve, and we waited two hours by the roadside, way after dark, until we'd seen everything we met in the morning go back home.

Then we lit up, and reached home at ten o'clock.

Eloise and the twins met me at the gate, scared to death.

"So glad you're safe," she cried, kissing me. "I know you've got a full bag, you've never failed, and, oh, dearie, I've invited a dozen ladies over to-morrow for lunch, promising quail on toast, so I hope nothing has happened."

By this time one of the twins was climbing over me, shouting, "Daddy, show me old Bob White—show me old Brer Rabbit." And the other echoed, "Daddy, show me old Bob White—show me old Brer Rabbit."

The bitterness of it went into me.

"Quail on toast?" I cried with sarcasm. "Change it now, my dear; write them all a note at once and tell them tomcat is better, for that's all I've killed to-day! Just make it tomcat on toast!"

Eloise looked at me curiously. "Jack, I believe you have taken one of those cheap drinks."

"One?" I said. "I drank a flask of it. I had to or faint when I saw poor old

Uncle Thomas come out of the rear end of that hearse as natural as life."

"Oh!" said Eloise, putting her fingers in her ears. "Come in, dearie, and I'll give you another, poor dear!"

But it was rubbed in on me that night. It was midnight when Eloise came to my room. I heard one of the twins crying. "Come here, Jack," she said laughing. "One of them wants you, has waked up crying for you."

She was sitting up in bed and her lamentations were loud. At sight of me she broke out, "Daddy—you brought sister a dead cat and—and—wouldn't—bring me—me—one!"

To jolly her into good humor, as I often did, I picked her up and turned her a somersault in the bed: I was unfortunate again—that accursed cat and automobile!

Accidentally her head was bumped.

In blazing indignation, she sat up and spat upon me!

I retreated as best I could: "Your mother will spank you for that"—I said.

She quieted—ashamed: but almost instantly the other one sat up in bed, crying lustily.

"What do *you* want?" I said. "I thought you were asleep."

"Tum back here," she wailed heart-brokenly, "*and let me spit on you too!*"

I heard Eloise laugh.

"Hang an automobile and a dead cat," I said, as I went out—"they are two Jonahs that will always smell alike to me hereafter!"

CHAPTER V
THE SICK TREE

The going of my old grandsire was pathetic, for towards the last he lost interest in the living, in everything except the great elm he had always loved because his mother had nursed him under it.

"And it is dying, Jack, just as I am going; but I do so want it to live until I am gone!"

"It shall, Grandfather," I said, "it is sick, but with a little surgery I can save it. It shall live twenty years longer."

The old tree, tall and beautiful even in death, was half rotted as it stood. Any violent wind was likely to snap it off. Any great storm would beat it to the

earth.

Every morning the old man would rise and look first of all to see if his tree was still standing.

He was greatly interested in the way I cured it. I cut away the dead rot up the entire trunk; and when I had finished, little, except a shell, remained. Into this I drove a section of iron railing from a railway track, fully fifteen feet high, driven five feet into the ground, down among the old roots of the tree. Around this and entirely filling the hollow to the top of the iron rail, I poured cement, casing it in to fit the old body that was gone, tucking sheets of zinc under the edges of the bark whose layers carry the sap up and down.

When this was painted and treated to a coating of tar, it looked like the great tree in its youth, and under a strong wind it swayed, supported by the cement and its rod of steel, with all the strength of its younger days.

There one evening, clasping it in the twilight, we found the old General asleep. It was the last sleep of a second childhood, and having no mother for the lullaby, he had slept, his arms around the tree she had loved.

The sun had set; the twilight had come; the great trees shadowed the eternal hills.

The old warrior had died a tree-lover; the young tree-lover had been forced, of God, to fight.

We plan, and, like the rough ashlar, we cut and hew; but the Sculptor is God....

I do not know why Eloise should have risked it, but she did; and though I would not have her try it again for The Home Stretch nor feel again that memory-pang of horror when, for one brief second, I saw what she meant to do, yet when it was done my heart beat fiercely with pride and love for her. How blessed are those children who have a mother both brave and beautiful!

We had ridden to town one day, as we often did when the weather was fit. And for a pretense she had me ride out to the Fair Grounds to see a new colt in training. I suspect she had fixed it all before; for I had seen her practicing Satan on nearly every little ride, at jumps, stone walls, mainly, and old rail fences up to four feet.

"Oh, it's just to see if age and the campaigns of honorable war," she laughed, "have stiffened the old fellow's muscles or softened his heart"; and she would reach over and pat his great neck.

At the track the old bars stood across.

I sickened at the sight of them, remembering. But Eloise, pretending not to notice, glanced quickly at me.

”Who’s put them back there?” I asked, paling with fear of my own suspicion. ”I’ll tear them down now and burn them,” I said, dismounting quickly.

But Eloise was too quick for me. Even Satan knew her thought and at the sound of her bantering laugh and the old sideway flash of the whip above his ears, he flew like a winged horse at the bars.

I did not breathe, when, for one short, awful moment, I saw them mount straight up toward the sky. Then, realizing that age and service had hampered his driving power behind, the game horse threw his front easily over, and like a great see-saw swung across, bringing his rear limbs, not straight, to tap the bars and be tangled, but sidewise and parallel, barely saving his neck!

”Well, I did it!” She rode up laughing, Satan trembling so with excitement and the effort I could see his knees quivering, his flank fluttering wildly. And in Eloise’s face there was the white flag of peril yet lingering before the red of victory.

She rode up close to me, her eyes lit with the tenderness of love’s light, and bedewed with its tears: ”*Kiss me, Jack, dearest—for that is what I had sworn all the time I would do. If—if they had only let me break the world’s record that first time.*”

THE END

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JACK BALLINGTON, FORESTER ***

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