IN BEAVER COVE AND ELSEWHERE

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IN BEAVER COVE

AND ELSEWHERE

BY

MATT CRIM

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TO
Father and Mother.

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IN BEAVER COVE and ELSEWHERE.

IN BEAVER COVE.

They were having a dance over in Beaver Cove, at the Woods'. All the young people of the settlement were there, and many from adjoining settlements. The main room of the cabin had been almost cleared of its meager furniture, and the pine-plank floor creaked under the tread of shuffling feet, while dust and lamp-smoke made the atmosphere thick and close.

But little did the dancers care for that. Bill Eldridge sat by the hearth, playing his fiddle with tireless energy, while a boy added the thumping of two straws to the much-tried fiddle-strings. A party of shy girls huddled in a corner of the room, and the bashful boys hung about the door, and talked loudly.

"Hey, there! git yer partners!" Bill cried to them tauntingly from time to time.

Armindy Hudgins and Elisha Cole were pre-eminently the leaders in the party. They danced together again and again; they sat on the bench in the door-yard; they walked to the spring for a fresh draught of water. Armindy was the coquette of the settlement. In beauty, in spirit, and in daring, no other girl in

Beaver Cove could compare with her. She could plow all day and dance half the night without losing her peachy bloom, and it was generally admitted that she could take her choice of the marriageable young men of the settlement. But she laughed at all of them by turns, until her lovers dwindled down to two—Elisha Cole and Ephraim Hurd. They were both desperately in earnest, and their rivalry had almost broken their lifelong friendship. She favored first one and then the other, but to-night she showed such decided preference for Cole that Hurd felt hatred filling his heart. He did not dance at all, but hung about the door, or walked moodily up and down the yard, savage with jealousy. Armindy cast many mocking glances at him, but seemed to feel no pity for his suffering.

In the middle of the evening, while they were yet fresh, she and Elisha danced the "hoe-down." All the others crowded back against the walls, leaving the middle of the room clear, and she and her partner took their places. They were the best dancers in the settlement, and Beaver Cove could boast of some as good as any in all north Georgia. The music struck up, and the two young people began slowly to shuffle their feet, advancing toward each other, then retreating. They moved at first without enthusiasm, gravely and coolly. The music quickened, and their steps with it. Now together, now separate, up and down the room, face to face, advancing, receding, always in that sliding, shuffling step. The girl's face flushed; her lithe figure, clothed in the most primitively fashioned blue print gown, swayed and curved in a thousand graceful movements; her feet, shod in clumsy brogans, moved so swiftly one could scarcely follow them; her yellow hair slipped from its fastenings and fell about her neck and shoulders; her bosom heaved and palpitated. Panting and breathless, Elisha dropped into a seat, his defeat greeted with jeering laughter by the crowd, while Armindy kept the floor. It was a wild, half-savage dance, and my pen refuses to describe it. Nowhere, except in the mountains of north Georgia, have I ever witnessed such a strange performance.

Armindy would not stop until, half-blind and reeling with exhaustion, she darted toward the door, amid the applause of the crowd. Elisha Cole started up to follow her, but Ephraim Hurd reached her side first, and went out into the yard with her.

"You've nearly killed yourself," he said, half-roughly, half-tenderly.

"No such a thing!" she retorted.

"You're out o' breath now."

"I want some water."

"Better sit down on this bench and rest a minute first," he said, attempting to lead her to a seat placed under an apple-tree; but she broke away from him, running swiftly toward the spring bubbling up from a thicket of laurel just beyond the dooryard fence.

"I ain't no baby, Eph'um Hurd!" she cried, gathering up her hair and winding it about her head again, the breeze fanning her flushed cheeks.

The moon was clear and full over Brandreth's Peak, and Ephraim looked up at it, then down on the girl, softened, etherealized by its magic beams.

"What makes you act so, Armindy?"

She broke a spray of laurel bloom and thrust it through the coil of her hair.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about, Eph'um; but I do know I'm waitin' for you to give me that gourd o' water."

He sighed, stooped, and filled the gourd to the brim, and gave it to her. She drank deeply, then threw the remainder out in a glittering shower, and dropped the gourd into the spring.

"Don't go to the house yet," he pleaded, as she turned away.

"I'm tired."

"An' I—I am—you don't keer anything for 'Lishy, do you? Armindy, do you recollect what you said the last time we went to the singin' at Rock Creek?"

She looked at him from under her lashes, half smiled, then said:

"I don't recollect anything perticular."

"I do," he muttered softly, and stepped across the spring-run to her side. "You said—"

"Oh, don't tell me!—I don't mean anything I say!" she hastily cried.

His face clouded with jealous anger again; he laid his hand on her shoulder.

"You'll—make me do somethin' turrible, Armindy, if you don't mind. I love you; don't—don't—treat me like a dog, flingin' crumbs to me one day, an' whippin' me off the next."

She pushed away his hand, for, with all her coquetries, no man dared take any liberties with her, and stepped beyond his reach.

"I ain't done nuthin' to you, Eph'um Hurd. I—"

"You have!" he cried, stamping his feet; "you've made me love you, tell I don't feel as I could live without you; you let me think that you loved—"

"Law! what's the use o' listenin' to a girl's foolishness? Maybe I love you; an', ag'in, maybe I love 'Lishy Cole an' a dozen others. You're too set on havin' your own way," she exclaimed with a loud laugh.

Somebody called to her from the fence.

"That's 'Lishy, now."

"An' you're goin' to him?" said Ephraim with a pale face.

"Yes, I'm goin' to him. He don't bemean me," with a pretense of being aggrieved, but with mocking laughter in her eyes.

She ran up to the fence, and he heard her talking to Elisha about the flowers in her hair.

The party was over. Ephraim Hurd could scarcely contain the violence of

his rage when Armindy refused his company home to accept Elisha Cole's. And how hurt he felt, as well as angry! The slight cut to his soul. He watched them as they went away with a party of the neighbors; he listened to their conversation and loud laughter, until the maddening sound of it was lost in the distance; then he mounted his mule and rode swiftly through the Cove down toward the town on the banks of the Cartecay River, where revenue-officers were stationed. A fierce, irresistible temptation had assailed—had conquered him. If he could not have love, he could have revenge. The revenue-men would be glad to know where Elisha Cole concealed his distillery; they would be better pleased to get Elisha himself. Just a hint, scrawled and unsigned, would be sufficient for them, and no one need know who had furnished the information.

It was morning, full daylight, with mists and clouds afloat in the upper rays of the yet invisible sun, when Ephraim Hurd forded Rock Creek on his way home. The jaded mule dipped his steaming nostrils in the cool, fast-flowing stream, drank thirstily, then, coming out, stopped to crop the high, tender grass growing by the roadside. Ephraim let the rein fall loosely on the faithful creature's neck, while his dull eyes wandered over the landscape. He looked haggard; and the chilly, invigorating air made him shiver, instead of infusing fresh life into him. He dismounted to tighten the girth, then leaned his arm on the saddle, seemingly forgetting to pursue his way home. He was tall, and held himself unusually erect for a mountaineer. He had a rather fine face, with soft, dark beard on lip and chin, and his eyes were a deep, serene blue. He did not look like a coward or a traitor, and yet he secretly felt that he could be justly called so; for repentance had followed quickly upon his rash betrayal of his friend.

The night would have seemed only like a bad dream—a nightmare, had he not gone on that journey to Buckhorn, stealing like a thief through the sleeping town, to slip that line of information under the door of the court-room, where it would be found by the revenue-officers the first thing in the morning. Viewed in the clear, cold light of the morning, when jealousy and savage anger had spent themselves, the deed appeared base to the last degree. He passed his hand over his face with a sense of deepest shame. According to the mountaineer's code of honor, a man could not do a meaner, more contemptible thing, than to betray a comrade to the revenue-men. He would fare better as a thief or a vagabond. No wonder Ephraim Hurd felt like hiding his face from the clear accusing light! no wonder he groaned in anguish of soul! He had lost his own self-respect; he had forfeited all right to the trust of his neighbors.

He raised his eyes and looked slowly around again, and, with his mental faculties all quickened by the trouble he was in, he seemed to realize the pre-

ciousness of freedom. A perception of the wild, primeval beauty of the world around thrilled him. He looked up at the cloud floating over the deep blue of the sky, tinged with the rose-light of sunrise; at the fog-wreaths curling around the summits of the higher mountains; at the green depths of the forests; at the winding streams, bordered by laurel and rhododendron, rushing in sparkling cascades or lying in clear, silent pools. All the ineffable loveliness and charm of the new world—the new day, penetrated his soul. The deep solitude, broken only by the murmur of the streams, and the liquid, melancholy notes of the hermit thrush, influenced him as it never had before. Think of leaving it all for the court-room, and the prison! Think of languishing within four close walls through sultry days and restless nights!

Pity for the man he had betrayed melted his heart. At this moment how slight seemed the provocation! Elisha Cole had as much right to Armindy's favor as he could claim.

On the upper side of Rock Creek, just under the great cliff rising boldly toward the clouds, a clump of laurel bushes in full bloom hung over the stream, the opening buds a fine delicate pink, the wide-opened flowers faded to dull white. Ephraim's eyes fell on them, and his face contracted with a keen thrill of pain as he remembered Armindy standing by the spring in the moonlight, and fastening a spray of laurel in her hair. Flushed from the dance, radiant with triumph, she had no thought for him—no kind words. Nevertheless, his heart softened toward her; he writhed as he thought of the sorrow he had laid up for her. He had lost account of time in the midst of his bitter reflections, and a sun-ray, striking across his face, startled him. He sprang into the saddle, and rode out of the highway into the settlement road leading through Beaver Cove.

The Hudgins lived on that road, at the foot of Bush Mountain, in an old log-cabin built in the "double-pen" fashion, with an open entry, and in the rear a rude kitchen. Below the house lay a freshly cleared field, the fence skirting the roadside, and as he drew near, Ephraim heard Armindy singing an old baptismal hymn in a high, clear voice, making abrupt little pauses to say "Gee!" or "Haw!" or "Get up there!" to the ox she was driving before the plow.

Last night she danced the "hoe-down" with spirit and grace, the belle of the party; to-day she plowed in her father's corn-field, barefooted, and clothed in a faded homespun gown, singing for the mere joy of existence—of conscious life. She had on a deep sunbonnet, and coarse woolen gloves covered her hands—strong, supple hands, grasping the plow-handles like a man's.

She reached the end of the row just as Ephraim drew near, and looked over the fence at him with a smile and a blush.

"Good mornin', Eph'um," she cried in a conciliatory tone. "You look as if you had been out all night."

"I have."

"Law! what for? At the 'stillery?" Her voice dropped to a softer key.

"No."

She looked attentively at his sad, haggard face, then took off her bonnet and fanned herself.

"Are you mad at me, Eph'um?"

"No; I ain't mad now, Armindy."

"Then what makes you look so—so strange?"

"I was mad last night."

She turned the cool loam of the freshly opened furrow over her naked feet, a faint smile lurking in the corners of her mouth. He saw it, but did not feel angry.

"Good-by, Armindy," he said gently.

"I didn't mean anythin' last night, Eph'um," she said hastily, sobered again by the gravity of his voice and manner.

"I know how it was."

"I don't believe you do. I—" But he rode away while the defensive little speech remained unfinished on her lips.

She looked after him, slowly replacing the bonnet on her head.

"He is mad, or somethin's happened. I never seed him look like he does this mornin'."

She turned the ox into another furrow, but stepped silently behind the plow. She sang no more that morning.

Beaver Cove was really a long, narrow valley, shut in by ranges of high mountains, the serried peaks sharply outlined against the sky on clear days. The mountain-sides were broken into deep ravines, and here and there, near the base, rose sheltered nooks, in which the mountaineers dwelt, cultivating patches and eking out a primitive livelihood with game and fish. It was in one of these retreats that Ephraim Hurd and his mother lived, with all the length and breadth of the valley lying below them, and the mountains overshadowing them above.

As Ephraim turned from the main settlement road into the wilder trail leading up to his house he met met Elisha Cole driving a yoke of oxen. He was whistling a dance-tune, and hailed Ephraim with a cheerful, friendly air, his whole manner betraying a suppressed exultation. Ephraim noticed it quickly, and clenched his hand on the switch he held—that manner said so plainly, "I have won her; I can afford to be friendly with you now."

"Just gittin' home?" he inquired with a jocular air.

"Yes."

"Oh, ho! Which one o' the Wood girls is it, 'Mandy, or Sary Ann?"

Ephraim flushed, but let the rude joke pass.

"Where are you goin'?"

"To the sawmill for a load o' lumber."

"Goin' to build?"

"Yes; in the fall."

"Thinkin' o' marryin', I s'pose?"

"You've hit it plumb on the head, Eph'um. I am thinkin' o' that very thing," he said, with a loud, joyous laugh.

It grated on the miserable Ephraim. He was full of one thought, which he repeated over and over to himself, "To-morrow he'll be in prison, an' Armindy'll be cryin' her eyes out."

"You'll not be at the 'stillery to-night?" he inquired stammeringly.

"Yes, I will. Man alive, what ails you, Eph'um?"

"Nothin'—nothin'. Hadn't you better go to see Armindy?"

Elisha eyed him suspiciously.

"Me an' Armindy understand one another," he said roughly.

Ephraim rode on, his guilty conscience forbidding any more conversation. He longed to give Elisha a hint of approaching danger—to say carelessly, "I hear the raiders'll be out tonight;" but he knew that he could not without betraying the whole truth.

Breakfast awaited him, and his mother sat in the doorway, smoking, when he arrived at home—a homely woman, yellow as saffron, wrinkled as parchment, and without a tooth in her mouth. Her face lighted up at the sight of her son, and she knocked the ashes from her pipe. He had been a good son, a steady boy, and his absence alarmed her.

"Law! but this is a relief!" she cried as he came in after caring for the mule. "I didn't know you 'lowed to stay out all night."

"I didn't, neither, when I left home."

"I was pestered, thinkin' o' the raiders. Anythin' happened to you?"

"Nothin', mother."

"Are you sick?"

"No."

She watched him silently while he ate sparingly of the breakfast. His dull eyes, his haggard face made her anxious. He had no appetite; he plainly did not care to talk. Her suspicions fell on Armindy Hudgins as the cause of his dejection. She began to question him about the party. She mentioned Armindy and Elisha Cole several times, and each time he betrayed some feeling. She felt resentful toward the girl.

"I s'pose Armindy had things her own way las' night?"

"Purty much."

"I don't, for the life o' me, see why you all should be crazy about that girl.

Now 'Mandy or Sary Ann Wood, or Betsey—"

"Ugly as crows, all of 'em."

"Well, they may n't be as purty as pictur's, but they are a sight better than Armindy Hudgins," she retorted, indignantly.

"They certainly ain't smarter, mother."

"No; I s'pose they ain't, for work," said Mrs. Hurd, reluctantly; "but principles count for somethin', Eph'um—you'll 'low that."

"Yes; yes," he cried, and hastily left the table. Who could show less principle than he had?

He went out to work, hoeing and thinning the young corn in a field he had cleared on the mountain-side, but the vigor had gone out of him with hope and courage. The sunlight dazed him, and after a while he stopped and leaned upon his hoe, looking down into the valley, his eyes following the cloud-shadows sweeping silently over the fields, blotting out the silvery gleam of Beaver Creek. It was a day of strange, conflicting thoughts. He had never passed through such an experience in all his simple, primitive life. The impressions of the morning lingered in his memory through the heat of the languid noon and the soft decline of the evening. He had brought upon himself a great question of right and wrong—at least it seemed great to him; so great he could scarcely grapple with it, or settle it with wisdom and justice.

After a supper, partaken almost in silence, he took down his gun and carefully loaded it. Mrs. Hurd watched him until he picked up his hat; then she anxiously inquired:

"Where are you goin', Eph'um?"

"Down to the 'stillery."

"It 'pears to me you'd better take some rest."

"I will, later."

"Well, do be keerful an' keep an eye out for the raiders. I've been so oneasy an' pestered to-day that I feel mighty like somethin's goin' to happen."

He went out, but turned on the doorstep to speak to her:

"If anythin' does happen, mother, you'll be prepared for it."

She sighed, and her wrinkled face quivered with emotion.

"I'm always prepared for the worst, an' expectin' it. To have some sort o' dread on your mind 'pears to me to be a part o' life."

Ephraim shouldered his gun, and disappeared in the darkness. He followed the road for a short distance, then turned out into a trail leading over a ridge. It was not easy walking, but the sure-footedness and agility that are a birthright of the mountaineer made it easy for him.

Out of the deep, clear sky overhead the stars shone softly, but afar in the northwest lay great masses of clouds. Constant flashes of lightning shot over

them, and through the profound silence came the dull mutterings of thunder. It was a good time for the raiders to be abroad, and the thought quickened Ephraim's steps. He felt sure they would come before moonrise. On the other side of the ridge he traversed a wilder region of country. Half an hour's rapid walking brought him to a small clearing, surrounded by a low rail-fence. In the centre of the clearing stood a cabin, a stream of ruddy light pouring from its open door. It was where the Coles lived. Two fierce hounds greeted Ephraim's approach with loud, hostile barking, and when he called out to them a young woman appeared at the door with a child on her breast—Elisha Cole's sister-in-law.

"Any o' the men folks at home, Mis' Cole?" Ephraim inquired, leaning over the fence.

"No; John an' his pap have gone over to Fannin County, an' 'Lishy's just started to the 'stillery."

"Oh!—just started, you say?"

"Yes; he ain't been gone five minutes. Won't you come in, Eph'um?"

"Not to-night, Mis' Cole. I 'lowed I'd see 'Lishy before he got off."

With a brief good-night he turned away, following a trail leading down through a ravine. It was a wild, lonely way, and so dark that one could scarcely see an inch ahead. But the pathway presently took an upward turn, and the gray starlight penetrated the sparse underbush. He heard the snapping of twigs ahead of him, and whistled softly. Then the sound of stealthy footsteps fell upon his alert ears. He ran forward a few paces, not daring to speak; then he stumbled over the prostrate body of a man.

"'Lishy," he whispered, peering into the upturned face.

"Is it you, Eph'um?"

"Yes; what's the matter?"

"The raiders they tied me; they're lookin' for Jed Bishop."

It was the work of an instant for Ephraim to get out his knife and to cut the thongs binding Elisha's hands and feet. But the prostrate man had not scrambled up before the revenue-officers were down upon them again. Ephraim snatched his gun, and leaped between Elisha and his foes.

"Get out of the way if you can!" he cried to his friend, and fired blindly at the officers.

Early the next morning, as Armindy sat on the entry steps engaged in sewing some patchwork together before the out-door occupations of the day began, a neighbor rode up and hailed her father.

"Heard about the raid last night?"

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Hudgins, hastening to the fence. "Who'd they get?"

"Nobody but Eph'um Hurd."

Armindy dropped her work, her face growing white, her lower lip caught between her clenched teeth.

"It seems they'd caught 'Lishy Cole, an' was lookin' for Jed Bishop, when Eph'um come up an' set 'Lishy free again. He hadn't more'n done it when up come the raiders, an' 'Lishy says Eph'um fit like old Satan hisself, shootin' at 'em tell 'Lishy cleared out."

"Well, well! that does beat all! He'd better 'a' looked out for hisself."

"That's what I say, an' he with his ma to look after. He wounded one o' the officers, an' it's bound to go hard with him. You needn't look so skeered, Armindy"—raising his voice and looking over at the girl, "'Lishy's safe."

"Oh, yes; 'Lishy's safe. I'm only thinkin' o' what might 'a' happened to him." She laughed loudly, then gathered up her work and rushed into the house.

With slow, uncertain steps a man walked along the settlement road through Beaver Cove. His clothes hung loosely from his slightly stooping shoulders; he leaned on a stick. All about him were the joyful influences of spring. The mountains were clothed in palest green, and every stream could boast its share of laurel and rhododendron abloom along its banks. The man drew in deep breaths of the fine air; his eyes wandered lingeringly over scenes familiar, yet long unvisited. Once he stooped and drank from a clear, shallow stream purling along the road, and, drawing his sleeve across his mouth, muttered softly:

"Ah, that's good. I ain't drunk nothin' like it in more'n four years."

He sat down on a fallen tree rotting on the roadside, to rest a few minutes. A market-wagon, white-covered and drawn by a yoke of sleek oxen, rumbled down the hill. In the driver the wayfarer recognized an old neighbor.

"Howdy, Mr. Davis?"

Davis stared, then leaped from the wagon.

"Why—why—it's Eph'um Hurd, ain't it?"

"What's left o' him," said Ephraim, rising, and shaking hands with his old friend.

"Well, you do look used up an' peaked."

"I've been sick."

"An' your hair is gray."

"It's the prison life done it."

"You've been through a good deal, I take it," in a tone of compassion.

"I don't want to think o' it any more if I can help it!" Ephraim exclaimed. "They didn't treat me so bad, but—oh, I thought it would take the soul out o' me!"

Davis shook his head sympathetically.

Ephraim's face sank on his breast for a moment. There were some questions he longed, yet dreaded, to ask. At last he plucked up courage.

"How—how is mother?"

"Purty well."

"'Lishy Cole is married, is he?"

"Yes; he married more 'n two years ago."

Of course he had expected that answer, but it caused his thin, worn face to twitch and contract with pain. He hastily picked up his stick.

"I—I'd better be gittin' on."

"Your ma's moved down to the Wood place," his neighbor called after him as he started up the road. "The Woods moved to Fannin County last year, you know."

"Is that so?" said Ephraim, but without halting again.

Married! Yes, why should they not marry? It was for that he had saved Elisha Cole. He had known it from the night of the dance, had clearly foreseen it all, that morning he stopped at Rock Creek—facing the awakening world and his own conscience. He had struggled for resignation during his prison life, but never had he been able to think of Armindy sitting by Elisha Cole's fireside—Elisha Cole's wife—without the fiercest pang of jealous anguish.

He sat down again, trembling with exhaustion, and bared his throbbing head to the cool breeze. He looked at his long, thin hands, stroked his face, feeling the hollows in his cheeks and under his eyes. He would never get back his youth and vigor again. It was well no woman loved him except his mother. She would not criticise his changed appearance, or care less for him on account of it.

It was dusk when he reached the old Wood cabin. The shutters had not been drawn over the small, square window in the chimney-corner, and he crept across the yard to look into the room, himself unseen. A low fire burned on the hearth; he could smell the bread baking before it, and the smoke of frying bacon filled the room. Then he saw his mother sitting at the corner of the hearth knitting, while another woman stooped over the fire. Suddenly she stood erect, and he caught his breath sharply, for it was Armindy Hudgins, Elisha Cole's wife, flushed, handsomer than ever. What did it mean? Had they taken his mother to live with them? He writhed at the thought. He leaned forward, for Armindy was speaking:

"Now I'll step to the spring for a pail o' water; then we'll have supper."

"I wish Eph'um was here to eat it with us. Do you think he'll ever come, Armindy?" she said wistfully.

"I know he will," said Armindy, firmly; but a shadow fell upon her face,

and Ephraim could see that she looked older, more serious, than in former days. But what a fine, elastic step she had! what supple curves in her figure! His eyes dwelt upon her with admiration, with despair. He loved her as deeply as ever. She stepped out of the room and went away to the spring. He followed her, determined to find out the cause of her presence in his mother's house.

He vividly remembered that other night when they stood at the spring together, and raised his eyes to Brandreth's Peak, but the moon hung low in the west, a pale crescent, Armindy knelt by the spring, dipping up the water, when his shadow came between her and the faint moonlight. She glanced up, then sprang to her feet, half-frightened; the next moment she ran to him and fell weeping on his neck.

"Eph'um! Eph'um! I said you'd come! I've always said you'd come!"

He gathered her to him; then tried to push her away.

"Don't—I—where is 'Lishy?" he stammered.

"I don't know. What do you want to think o' him for, now?" she cried, looking at him with wet eyes, drawing his face down to hers.

"Ain't you 'Lishy's wife?"

She fell back a little.

"Did you think I'd marry him? I loved you, Eph'um—you."

"Is that the reason you 're here with my mother?"

"Yes; I've been with her nearly all the time."

"It was my fault the raiders come out to get 'Lishy, that night."

"I knew it when I heard how you saved him from them. Oh, don't hate me for makin' you suffer so! It seemed like fun then, but I've been paid back for it all."

He felt dazed. Armindy free, Armindy faithful, and loving, and humbly entreating him not to hate her! Life thrilled afresh through him.

"Who did 'Lishy Cole marry?" he inquired at last.

"How you keep thinkin' o' him!"

"I can afford to now."

"He married Sary Ann Wood."

They were standing by the laurel thicket. She saw that his eyes were fixed on the flowers, and turned quickly away to take up the pail of water.

"I ain't danced the hoe-down since that night."

He broke off a spray of the flowers and fastened it in her hair.

S'PHIRY ANN.

The Standneges lived in a little sheltered cove upon the mountain-side, their house only a two-roomed cabin, with an entry separating the rooms, and low, ungainly chimneys at each end. Below it the Cartecay River lay like an amber ribbon in the green, fertile valley; above it towered majestic mountain heights, shrouded in silver mists or veiled in a blue haze. The Standneges were bred-and-born mountaineers, and had drifted into the little cove while Indian camp-fires were still glowing like stars in the valley of the Cartecay, and Indian wigwams dotting the river's banks. The house had a weather-beaten look, and the noble chestnut-oaks shading it had covered the roof with a fine green mold.

The kitchen, a heavy-looking, smoke-blackened structure with a puncheon floor, stood just in the rear of the house, and so situated that from the door one could look through the entry to the front gate and the mountain road beyond.

Mrs. Standnege sat in the kitchen door one morning with bottles and bean-bags scattered around her, "sortin'" out seed-beans. She was a woman not much beyond middle age, but lean and yellow, with faded eyes and scant dun-colored hair, time and toil and diet having robbed her of the last remnant of youth, without giving her a lovely old age. She was a good type of the average mountain woman, illiterate but independent, and contented with her scant homespun dress, her house, her beanbags.

A heavy old loom occupied one corner of the kitchen, and Polly, the eldest daughter, sat on the high bench before it, industriously weaving, while S'phiry Ann stood by the smoke-stained mantel, watching the pine she had laid on the fire burst into vivid flame. A bundle of clothes lay at her feet, surmounted by a round flat gourd, filled with brown jelly-like soap.

Polly was the eldest and she the youngest of eight children, but the others all lay safely and peacefully in the little neglected burial-ground at the foot of the mountain. She was unlike mother and sister. She had youth, she was supple and fair, her hair dark and abundant, her eyes gray and clear. She had the soft, drawling voice, but also a full share of the sturdy independence, of her race. The circumstances of her christening, Mrs. Standnege was rather fond of relating.

"Yes, S'phiry Ann is er oncommon name," she would say, not without a

POLLY.

POLLY.

MRS. STANDNEGE.

touch of complacency, "but her pap give it tu her. She was a month old to a day, when that travelin' preacher come through here an' held meetin' fer brother Dan'l on Sunday. He preached mos'ly about them liars droppin' dead at the 'postles' feet, an' Standnege came home all but persessed about it, an' nothin' ed do but he mus' name the baby S'phiry Ann instead er Sary Ann as we had thought. He 'lowed it sarved them onprincipled folks right to die, an' he wanted somethin' ter remin' him o' that sermont. Well, I ain't desputin' but it was right, but I tole Standnege then, an' I say so yit, that ef all the liars in the world war tuk outen it, thar wouldn't be many folks left."

S'phiry Ann had heard of the fate of the Sapphira figuring in sacred history; it had been deeply impressed on her mind in her tenderest years, and might possibly have left a good impression, for she grew up a singularly truthful, up-

right girl. Just now, as she leaned against the mantel and stared at the fire, her face wore an unwontedly grave expression.

"Folks as set themselves up ter be better'n they ekals air mighty apt tu git tuk down, S'phiry Ann," said her mother, evidently resuming a conversation dropped a short time before.

"But I ain't a-settin' up ter be better'n my ekals, ma," said S'phiry Ann, gently but defensively.

"It 'peared like nothin' else yiste'day when you so p'intedly walked away from Gabe Plummer at meetin', an' it the fust time you had seed him since comin' from yer aunt Thomas over in Boondtown settle*mint*. Thar ain't no call ter treat Gabe so."

"But ain't we hearn he's tuk up with them distillers on the mountains?" said the girl in a low tone, a deep flush overspreading her face.

"Yes, we hev hearn it, but what o' that? Many a gal has tuk jes' sech."

"An' glad to get 'em, too," snapped Polly sharply, stopping to tie up a broken thread.

"Gabe Plummer is er oncommon steddy boy. He's er master hand at en'thing he wants ter do, an'—"

But S'phiry Ann did not linger to hear the full enumeration of her lover's virtues. Hastily balancing the bundle of clothes on her head, she took up the blazing torch, and hurried to the spring, a crystal-clear stream, running out of a ledge of rock, and slipping away through a dark ravine to the river. If she imagined she had escaped all reproaches for her reprehensible conduct the day before, it was a sad mistake. Hardly had the fire been kindled and the rusty iron kettle filled with water when a young man came treading heavily through the laurel thicket above the spring, leaped down the crag, and saluted her.

"Mornin', S'phiry Ann."

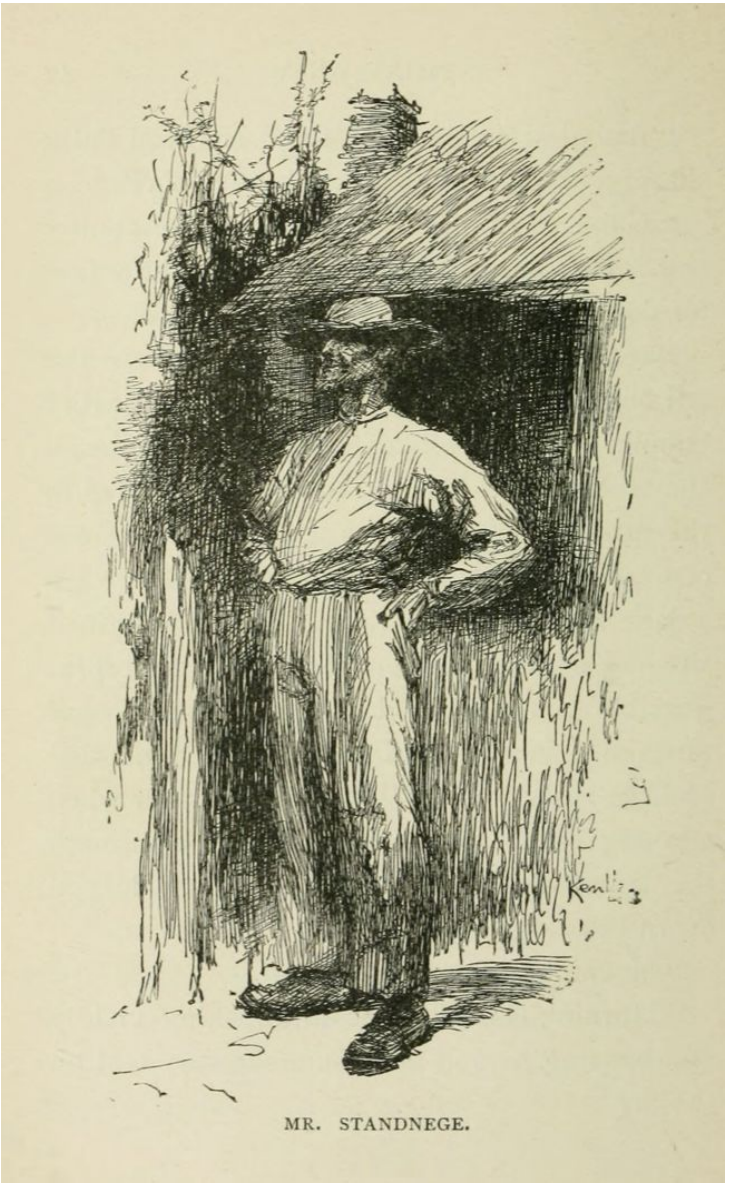
"Mornin', Gabe," she said, blushing vividly and busying herself piling unnecessary fuel on the fire.

He was a fine specimen of the mountaineer, lithe, well-made, toughened to hardy endurance, with tawny hair falling to his collar, and skin bronzed to a deep brown. He wore no coat, and his shirt was homespun, his nether garments of coarse brown jeans. He carried a gun, and a shot-bag and powder-horn were slung carelessly across his shoulders.

"I knowed you had a way er washin' on Monday, so I jest thought bein' as I was out a-huntin' I'd come roun'," he said, sitting down on the wash-bench, and laying the gun across his lap.

"You air welcome," she said, taking a tin pail and stepping to the spring to fill it.

"I wouldn't 'a' lowed so from yiste'day," darting a reproachful glance at her.



MR. STANDNEGE.

She made no reply.

"What made you do it, S'phiry Ann?" he exclaimed, no longer able to restrain himself. "I ain't desarved no sech; but if it was jes' ter tease me, why—"

She arose with the pail of water.

"No, it wasn't that," she said in a low tone, her eyes downcast, the color flickering uncertainly in her face.

"Then you didn't mean what was said that night a-comin' from the Dillin'ham gatherin'," he cried, turning a little pale. "Mebby it's somebody over in Boondtown settlement," a smoldering spark of jealousy flaming up.

"It's the 'stillery, Gabe," she said, and suddenly put down the pail to unburden her trembling hands. "You hadn't ought ter go inter it."

"But the crap last year made a plum' failure," he replied excusingly, his eyes shifting slightly under the light of hers. She was standing by the spring, against a background of dark green, a slanting sunbeam shifting its gold down through the overhanging pine on her dark, uncovered head, lighting up her earnest face, lending lustrous fire to her eyes. The scant cotton skirt and ill-fitting bodice she wore could not destroy the supple grace of her figure, molded for strength as well as beauty.

"The crap wusn't no excuse, an' if you mus' make whiskey up thar on the sly, I ain't no more tu say, an' I ain't no use fer ye."

"Yer mean it, S'phiry Ann?"

"I mean it, Gabe."

"Then you never keered," he cried with rising passion, "an' that half-way promise ter marry me was jest a lie ter fool me—nothin' but a lie, I'll make it if I please," bringing his down on the bench with a fierce blow.

"An' hide in the caves like a wild creetur, when the raiders air out on mountains?" she scornfully exclaimed.

His sunburned face flushed a dull red, he writhed under the cruel question.

"They ain't apt ter git me, that's certain," he muttered.

"You don't know that," more gently. "Think o' Al Hendries an' them Fletcher boys. They thought themselves too smart for the officers, but they wasn't. You know how they was caught arter lyin' out for weeks, a-takin' sleet an' rain an' all but starvin', an' tuk ter Atlanty an' put in jail, an' thar they staid a-pinin'. I staid 'long er Al's wife them days, for she was that skeery she hated ter see night come, an' I ain't forgot how she walked the floor a-wringin' her hands, or settin' bent over the fire a-dippin' snuff or a-smokin'—'twas all the comfort she had—an' the chilluns axin' for their pap, an' she not a-knowin' if he'd ever git back. Oh! 'twas turrible lonesome—-plum' heart-breakin' to the poor creetur. Then one day, 'long in the spring, Al crep' in, all broke down an' no 'count. The life gave outen him, an' for a while he sot roun' an' tried ter pick up, but the cold

GABE AND S'PHIRY ANN.

an' the jail had their way, an' he died."

She poured out the brief but tragic story breathlessly, then paused, looked down, and then up again. "Gabe, I sez ter myself then, 'None o' that in your'n, S'phiry Ann, none o' that in your'n.'"

She raised the bucket and threw its contents into a tub.

Gabe Plummer cast fiery glances at her, the spirit and firmness she displayed commanding his admiration, even while they filled him with rage against her. Yes, he knew Al Hendries's story; he distinctly remembered the fury of resentment his fate roused among his comrades, the threats breathed against the law, but he held himself superior to that unfortunate fellow, gifted with keener wits, a more subtile wariness. The stand S'phiry Ann had taken against him roused bitter resentment in his soul, but the fact that he loved her so strongly made him loath to leave her. A happy dream of one day having her in his home, pervading it with the sweetness of her presence, had been his close and faithful companion for years, comforting his lonely winter nights when the wind tore wildly over the mountains, and the rain beat upon his cabin roof, or giving additional glory to languorous summer noons, when the cloud-shadows seemed to lie motionless on the distant heights, and the sluggish river fed moisture to the heated valley.

What right had she to spoil this dream before it had become a reality? He could not trust himself to argue the matter with her then, but abruptly rose to his feet.

"We'll not say any more this mornin', though I do think a-settin' up Al Hendries's wife ag'in me is an onjestice. Me an' some o' the boys air comin' down ter ole man Whitaker's this evenin,' an' bein' agreeable I might step down to see you ag'in."

"Jest as ye please," she quietly replied; then with a tinge of color added, "Ef you'll go back ter the clearin' I'll do jest what I promised, Gabe."

But without saying whether he would or would not, Gabe shouldered his gun and went away.

S'phiry Ann had been very calm and decided throughout the interview, but the moment her lover had disappeared she sank trembling on the bench, her face hidden in her hands.

"Ef it hadn't 'a' be'n for thinkin' o' Al Hendries's wife I never could 'a' stood up ag'in him," she sighed faintly.

A squirrel springing nimbly from a laurel to a slender chesnut-tree paused on a swaying branch to look at her, and a bird fluttered softly in the sweet-gum above her. The sun slipped under a cloud, and when she rose to go about her work, the spring day had grown gray and dull. It sent a shiver through her, as she stared dejectedly at the overshadowed valley. She had little time, though, for

idle indulgence—she must be at her washing; and presently when the clouds had drifted away, and the sunshine steeped the earth in its warmth again, her spirits rose, a song burst from her lips—an ancient hymn, old almost as the everlasting mountains around her.

The day waxed to full noon, then waned, and S'phiry Ann spread the clothes on the garden-fence and the grass to dry. There were other duties awaiting her. The geese must be driven up, the cows milked, and water brought from the spring for evening use. Then she would put on her clean cotton gown, and smooth the tangles out of her hair, before Gabe came in. It was all accomplished as she had planned, and at dusk she sat on the rear step of the entry taking a few minutes of well-earned rest. The light streamed out from the kitchen, falling across the clean, bare yard and sending shifting gleams up among the young leaves of the trees. On the kitchen step sat Eph, an orphan boy of twelve or thirteen the Standneges had adopted, whittling a hickory stick for a whistle, and at his side crouched a lean, ugly hound. S'phiry could see her father tilted back in a chair against the loom, talking to Jim Wise, a valley farmer who had come up to salt his cattle on the mountains, while her mother and sister passed back and forth, preparing supper. The voices of the men were raised, and presently she heard Wise say:

"The raiders air out ter-night, so I hearn comin' up the mountain. They air expectin' ter ketch up with things this time, bein' as somebody has been a-tellin',—it 'pears so, anyway."

S'phiry Ann pressed her hands together with a little gasp.

"The boys air got they years open," said Mr. Standnege with a slow smile, his half-shut eyes twinkling.

"But this is er onexpected move, an' they mayn't be a-lookin' fer it," persisted the other man.

"They air always a-ready an' a-lookin'. They ain't ter be tuk nappin'."

But the girl, listening with breathless attention, shivered, not sharing her father's easy confidence. She remembered that Gabe Plummer had said they were coming down to old man Whitaker's, and she knew that they were off guard. They would be caught, she thought, with a cold sensation around her heart; Gabe would be put in jail, and locked up, probably for months, and then come back with all the youth and strength gone from him. Even as these thoughts were passing through her mind, a sound fell on her ears, faint, far away, and yet to her, alert, keenly alive to the approach of danger, terribly significant. It was the steady tramp of iron-shod hoofs upon the road, and it approached from the valley. She sat motionless, but with fierce-beating heart, listening and feeling sure it was the enemy drawing near.

The revenue men had always looked upon the Standneges as peaceful, law-

abiding citizens, and though no information had ever been obtained from them, the officers sometimes stopped with them, lounged in the entry, or sat at their board, partakers of their humble fare. Probably they intended stopping for supper. The girl devoutly hoped they would. The steady tramp grew louder, the hound pricked up his long ears, sniffed the air, then dashed around the house with a deep, hostile yelp. The next moment a party of horsemen halted before the gate. Her fears were realized.

The dog barked noisily, the men chaffed each other in a hilarious way, while the horses stamped and breathed loudly, and the quiet place seemed all at once vivified with fresh life. Standnege went out to the gate followed by his guest; Mrs. Standnege and Polly came to the door and peered out, and Eph hurriedly closed his knife and thrust the whistle into his pocket preparatory to following his elders. The officers would not dismount, though hospitably pressed to do so.

"'Light, 'light, an' come in; the wimmen folks air jest a-gettin' supper," said Standnege cordially.

"Business is too urgent. We are bound to capture our men to-night. Why, the whole gang are coming down out of their lair to old man Whitaker's to-night, so we have been informed, and we must be on hand to welcome them."

Eph crossed the yard, but when he would have stepped up to take a short cut through the entry, his hand was caught in another hand so cold it sent a shiver of terror over him.

"My—why, S'phiry Ann!" he sharply exclaimed.

"Hush!" she whispered, drawing him out of the light. "Will you go with me ter ole man Whitaker's, Eph?"

"This time o' night?"

"Yes, now."

"It's more'n a mile."

"We'll take the nigh cut through the woods."

"Dark as all git-out."

"I'm not afeerd; I'll go erlone then," she said with contempt.

"What air you up ter?—Good Lord! S'phiry Ann, do you think that could be done an' they a-ridin'?" suddenly understanding her purpose.

"Nothin' like tryin'," she replied, and glided like a shadow around the corner of the house.

The boy stared for a moment after her.

"Well, *I* never!" he muttered, and followed on.

They ran through the orchard, an ill-kept, weedy place full of stunted apple-trees, across a freshly plowed field to the dense, black woods beyond. It was a clear night, the sky thickly set with stars, and low in the west a pale new moon hanging between two towering sentinel peaks, but the light could not pene-

trate to the narrow pathway S'phiry Ann had selected as the nearest route to Whitaker's. The awful solitude, the intense darkness, did not daunt her. She knew the way, her footing was sure, and she ran swiftly as a deer before the hunters, animated by one desire—to get to Whitaker's before the officers. It was a desperate chance. If her father detained them a few minutes longer—but if they hastened on—she caught her breath and quickened her own steps. Eph stumbled pantingly along behind her, divided between admiration at her fleetness and anger that he had been called on to take part in such a mad race.

In speaking of it afterward, he said:

"I never seed a creetur git over more ground in ez short a time sence that hound o' Mis' Beaseley's got pizened. It's a dispensin' er providence her neck wusn't broke, a-rushin' through them gullies an' up them banks, an' it so dark you mought 'a' fell plum' inter the bottomless pit an' not 'a' knowed it."

But S'phiry Ann had no consideration to spare to personal danger, as she broke through the underbrush and climbed stony, precipitous heights. Once an owl flew across her way, its outspread wings almost brushing her face, and with a terrified hoot sought a new hiding-place. The wind swept whisperingly through the forest, and a loosened stone rolled down and fell with a dull, hollow sound into the black depths of the ravine below them. Eph wished they had brought a torch, wished that he had not come, then struck out in a fresh heat, as he heard a mysterious rustling in the bushes behind him.

At last they emerged from the woods opposite Whitaker's, and S'phiry Ann leaned for a moment against the fence, panting, breathless, but exultant. She had won the race.

The house was only one forlorn old room, built of rough hewn logs, with a rickety shed in the rear. A small garden spot and the meager space inclosed with the house comprised all the open ground. Mountains rose darkly above it, and, below, the mountain road wound and twisted in its tortuous course, to the fair, open valley. At the back of the dwelling the ridge shelved abruptly off into a deep ravine, dark the brightest noonday—an abyss of blackness at night.

From the low, wide, front door ruddy light streamed generously, defying the brooding night, playing fantastic tricks with the thickly growing bushes on the roadside. The girl had a good view of the interior, the men lounging around the fire, the vivid flame of pine-knots bringing out the lines in their tanned, weather-beaten faces, flashing into their lowering eyes, and searching out with cruel distinctness all the rough shabbiness of their coarse homespun and jeans.

There were the Whitaker boys, hardy, middle-aged men; Jeff Ward, a little shriveled fellow with long, tangled, gray beard and sharp, watchful eyes; Bill Fletcher, who had bravely survived the trials which had proved the death of his comrade, poor Al Hendries; Jeems Allen, a smooth-faced boy, and Gabe Plummer.

He sat somewhat aloof from the others, staring gloomily into the fire, instead of giving attention to the lively story Jeff Ward was telling. At one end of the great hearth, laid of rough unhewn rocks, sat old man Whitaker, at the other, his wife—a gray and withered couple; he tremulous with age, she deaf as a stone.

Nobody seemed to be on the lookout for enemies. The wide-flung door, the brilliant light, the careless group, gave an impression of security.

What had become of the revenue officers? No sound of hoofs struck upon the hard road, or murmur of voices betrayed hostile approach. Eph turned and peered down the road, then clutched excitedly at his companion's arm.

"Good Lord, S'phiry Ann! they're right down there a-hitchin' they horses an' a-gittin' ready ter creep up. I'm er-goin' ter leave here."

S'phiry Ann sprang across the fence, and the next moment stood in the door.

"The raiders! the raiders air a-comin'!" she cried, not loudly, but with startling distinctness; her torn dress, wild, loose hair, and brilliant, excited eyes, giving her a strangely unfamiliar aspect. The warning cry thrilled through the room and brought every man to his feet in an instant.

"Whar? which way?" exclaimed young Jeems Allen, staring first up among the smoke-blackened rafters, then at the solid log wall.

"'Tain't the time fer axin' questions, but fer runnin', boys," said Jeff Ward, making a dash toward the back door, closely followed by his comrades. Gabe Plummer had made a step toward S'phiry Ann, but she vanished as she appeared, and he escaped with his friends into the fastnesses of the woods. There was a shout from the raiders, creeping stealthily around the house, a disordered pursuit, and over the cabin the stillness following a sudden whirlwind seemed to fall.

S'phiry Ann crept cautiously out from the chimney-corner, slipped over the fence, and knelt down in the edge of the bushes, to watch and wait. The officers soon returned with torn clothes, scratched hands and faces, but without a prisoner. They were swearing in no measured terms at being baffled of their prey.

Old man Whitaker and his wife had quietly remained in the house, apparently not greatly moved from their usual placidity. Once the old woman dropped the ball of coarse yarn she was winding, and rose to her feet, but the old man motioned her down again. They were questioned by the officers, but what reliable information could be expected from an imbecile old man and a deaf old woman? The girl could overlook the whole scene from a crack in the fence—the officers stamping about the room, the scattered chairs, the old people with their withered yellow faces, dim eyes, and bent, shrunken forms, and the dancing flames leaping up the wide sooty chimney. Satisfied that the distillers were safe, she softly rose and started across the road. One of the men caught a glimpse of her, the merest

shadowy outline, and instantly shouted:

"There goes one of 'em now!"

She heard him—heard the rush of feet over the threshold and the bare yard, and without a backward glance, fled like a wild thing through the woods, home.

One afternoon, a week later, S'phiry Ann drew the wheel out into the middle of the kitchen floor, tightened the band, pulled a strip of yellow corn-husk from a chink in the logs to wrap the spindle, and set herself to finish spinning the "fillin'" for the piece of cloth in the loom. Her mother and sister were out in the garden sowing seeds, Eph was cutting bushes in the new ground, and she could hear the loud, resonant "geehaw" with which her father guided the ox drawing his plow. It was a serenely still day—the heat of mid-summer in its glowing sunshine, with only a fleck of cloud here and there along the horizon, and mountains wrapped in a fine blue haze.

It had been a trying week to S'phiry Ann, but she had no time to mope and brood over her anxieties, no inclination to confide them to her family. She had not shirked daily duties, but went about them silently and without enthusiasm. The revenue officers, disgusted, angered at their disappointment, lingered on the mountains several days, seeking something to lay violent hands on. One still they found and destroyed, but if the earth had opened and swallowed them, their prey could not have disappeared more completely. The law is strong, but it loses its power when carried into the strongholds of the mountains, majestic, clothed in repose, yielding up their secrets only to those bred and born upon them.

S'phiry Ann lifted her eyes to the lofty heights, yearning to know if her lover and his friends had found safe refuge, trembling with terror every time the dog barked or an ox-cart creaked slowly along the road. When the family were made acquainted with her part in that Monday night raid, there were various exclamatory remarks at the inconsistency of her behavior. Mrs. Standnege dropped her pipe, and stared at her in great amazement.

"Well, ef you don't beat all! Last Sunday a-slightin' Gabe Plummer at meetin', an' now mighty nigh a-breakin' yer neck ter git him outen the way o' the raiders."

"Gabe wasn't the only one thar," said the girl in a low tone.

"But it stands ter reason you wouldn't 'a' done it, ef he hadn't 'a' be'n thar. Yer pap may hev ter look out fer a new farm-hand arter all," with a touch of facetious humor, but watching the slow reddening of the girl's throat and face. Standnege came to her aid—

"Let her be, ma, an' work it out in her own mind. Thar ain't no 'countin' fer the doin's o' wimmun folks, no how. They air mighty oncertain creeturs."

"Why, pap!" exclaimed his eldest daughter, a mixture of indignation and reproach in her tone.

”Now, I ain’t a-meanin’ ter throw off on ’em, an’ I don’t say as they ain’t all steddy enough when they settle down, but a gal in love is the oncertainest creetur that ever lived. Now S’phiry Ann ain’t a-lackin’ in common sense an’ grit, if she does belong to me,” he continued, with calm impartiality; ”an’ ef she wants ter marry Gabe Plummer ’fore craps air laid by, she kin do it.”

But it was Monday again, and S’phiry felt that her fortune was still an unsettled thing.

”Ef it hadn’t ’a’ be’n for thinkin’ o’ Al Hendries’s wife,” she said to herself again and again, and the old spinning-wheel flew swiftly beneath strong, young fingers, and the yellow corn-husk on the spindle filled slowly with smooth, even thread. She could look as downcast and troubled as her heart prompted, for no curious eyes were resting on her. Was it true? A shadow suddenly darkened the doorway.

”Howd’y’do, S’phiry Ann?”

The half-twisted thread fell from her fingers, writhed and rolled along the floor, fair sport for the kitten lazily coiled on the hearth, while she turned toward the secretly wished-for, but unexpected, visitor. She trembled, and the color in her face flushed and paled.

”Gabe!” Then quickly, and with a swift searching glance toward the road, ”is it safe for you ter be here?”

”Yes, they air gone—an’ ter the devil, I hope.” He leaned against the wall, jaded, forlorn-looking, the week of hiding out not improving either temper or appearance.

”Take a cheer, an’ set down, Gabe,” she said, a vibration of tenderest pity in her voice.

”I ain’t a-keerin’ tu rest jest yit. That was a good turn you done us t’other night. No tellin’ where we would be now ef it hadn’t ’a’ be’n fer that. I don’t know how to thank you fer it, S’phiry Ann,” he said, with strong emotion in his voice.

”Don’t, Gabe!” she stammered, stooping to snatch the tangled thread from the paws of the kitten.

”Would you ’a’ done it fer me?”

”’Tain’t fair tu be axin’ sech questions,” she said defensively.

”’Cordin’ tu promise you air tu marry me.”

”I saud ut ef you ’ud go back tu the clearin’.”

”Yes, an’ that’s jest what I’m a-goin’ tu do. I’ve had a week o’ thinkin’, an’ now I’m willin’ tu ’low you kin hev your way. Ain’t I b’en tu put my head outen the holler?” he continued in angry disgust; ”afeerd tu tech a leaf fer the noise it made? afeerd tu draw my breath? an’ I tell ye, I ain’t a-hankerin’ arter any more sech days, an’ I told the boys so, an’ I’m a-goin’ back tu the clearin’ ef every crap

fails."

S'phiry Ann stood by the wheel, her face turned from him, silent, motionless. He waited a moment, then strode across the floor, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"We mus' settle it now, S'phiry, I ain't a-blamin' you now, though I don't say as I didn't, back yander a week ergo, fer standin' tu principle."

"Ef it hadn't 'a' be'n fer thinkin' o' Al Hendries's wife," she said gently.

"I've be'n a-lovin' you er long time, an' it's tu settle what we air a-goin' tu do."

"The clearin' settles it, Gabe," she murmured, and turned her head slowly until her eyes, softly radiant, met his eager, ardent ones.

AN "ONFORTUNIT CREETUR."

Mrs. Upchurch sat in the entry of her house knitting, while down on the step—a rough block of Georgia granite—Mr. Upchurch sat resting and smoking an after-dinner pipe. It was on a summer afternoon, and the hot glare of the sun made a shade gratefully welcome. The house had only the space of an ordinary yard between it and the public country road, but it was on a breezy hill and commanded a fine view of the surrounding country.

Far away, above the green, wooded hills and valleys, rose the North Georgia Mountains, veiled in misty blue. Those mountains were the boundary line of Mrs. Upchurch's world. She had never gone to them; she never dreamed of going beyond them. Still, they were old friends, immovable, unchangeable, upon which she could look when perplexed, sorrowful, or glad. She worked slowly, and often glanced away toward those distant peaks, a very grave meditative light in her eyes.

She was a woman above medium height, and rather dignified in appearance and manner, with a kind, homely face, yellowed and hardened by sun and wind, and with honest, steadfast eyes. She had on a stout, plain cotton dress, and an old brown veil was drawn around her head and tied under her chin. Summer and winter she wore it, to ward off that greatest enemy of her peace—neuralgia.

"He always was an onfortunit creetur," she said abruptly, and with a sigh.

"Who now, Peggy?" inquired Mr. Upchurch in some surprise.

"Why, Ab," and laying her knitting down on her knee, she smoothed it out

thoughtfully.

"That brother o' your'n?"

"Yes; I said he always was an onfortunit creetur."

"Yes, onfortunitly lazy," her husband dryly observed.

"He all but died wi' the measles when he was a sucklin' baby not more'n three months old, an' then 'long come the whoopin'-cough on the heels er that, an' liked to 'a' tuk him off. Then you remember ther time he was snake-bit on his big toe, an' how the pizen flew all over him like lightnin', an' he would er died ef we hadn't er happened ter have some dram in the house. Then he tuk cramp once in Punkin Vine Creek, an' would er drownded right on the spot ef Providence hadn't er sent the singin'-school teacher along fer ter fish him out."

The half-forgotten incidents of childhood and youth crowded fresh upon her memory. She leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees—a favorite attitude with many country women when they are smoking their pipes, dipping snuff, or are lost in deep thought—and thrust a knitting-needle through her hair. But her reminiscences did not impress her husband very deeply. He eyed her kindly, and with a slight touch of pity.

"You hain't seen him sence the war, Peggy. What's got inter you that yer mind keeps er runnin' onter him ter-day?"

"I'm shore I don't know, Sam, but it's er fact. I ain't thought as much erbout him these twenty years an' more as I have ter-day. Mebby Ab's a-comin'."

"Mebby he is, but 'tain't likely at this late day, an' I wouldn't be a-botherin' erbout it, Peggy," said the farmer, shaking the ashes out of his pipe before placing it in his pocket.

"I ain't exactly botherin', Sam, but I dreamed erbout him las' night, an' takin' it all tergether it jes' pesters me er little."

Mr. Upchurch got up slowly from his resting-place, and stepping into the west room, took down his gun from over the door.

"B'lieve I'll go a-huntin', Peggy."

"Well," she answered, absently, still thinking of her brother, and wondering if she would ever see him again.

"He's that onfortunit, he might 'a' wandered off an' er died among strangers, with not er soul ter look arter him, or ter put him erway decently," she murmured in a troubled undertone. "I can't fergit the time he stood between me an' old Miss Whitlock's dog, that run mad when me an' him was little fellers. He was always sorter sickly an' quare, but I knowed then he had grit, for there he stood as calm as could be, an' that dog a-comin' straight fer him, or so it 'peared like, jest er-foamin' at the mouth. I thought shore Ab 'ud be bit plum' through, but the critter passed by without techin' him. Them days is all over, but I ain't fergot that, I orter love him, poor feller!" And she looked away to those blue

mountains with eyes grown dim with sudden tears.

It was Saturday afternoon, and therefore a holiday among the farmers. A man must be hard pushed indeed who will not "knock off" Saturday afternoon.

The Upchurch family were thrifty, industrious people, took care of their not too fertile farm, lived honest lives, and kept peace with their neighbors.

"Upchurch is er smart man, ef I do say it," his wife would sometimes proudly remark. "When me an' him married we 'lowed we'd help one ernuther, an' mebby we'd git helped; an' so we did, fer Providence always helps them that helps themselves."

Peggy Upchurch was a good woman, and noted among her neighbors and friends for her readiness to visit the sick and the sorrowful. She was a useful woman in her narrow sphere, a strict member of Ebenezer Baptist Church, and while she did not consider it right "fer wimmin to speak out in meetin'," she did a good deal of missionary work quietly.

She rose and glanced around to see if everything had been put in proper order, then sat down again, with her snuff-box and her knitting on her lap.

The house was a double log-house—that is, two large rooms with a wide, open entry between, and a loft above. In the furnishing of those rooms, the chief consideration seemed to have been beds—high feather beds, with blue and white checked foot-curtains concealing the unpainted pine posts of the bedsteads, and elaborately fringed "double-wove" counterpanes spread over them. Those beds were the pride of Mrs. Upchurch's heart.

"I raised them feathers myself, an' I know they er fresh ernough fer the President ter sleep on."

Doors stood wide open, letting in sunshine and sweet flowers' scents, and George Washington looked down from his rusty frame with a gracious unbending of his dignity.

A few scrubby oaks shaded the clean-swept yard, and a honeysuckle vine had been trained to climb and spread itself over the rough logs of the house. A fine rose-bush bloomed beside the gate, and there were beds of larkspur, pinks, and sweet-williams in the sunnier spots.

It was a home the counterpart of which may be found in almost any portion of Georgia, bare and rather lonely looking, but clean and healthy, and to the householders acceptable as a kingly palace. It appeared a very haven of rest and peace to the tired, dusty tramp toiling up the wide, hot road. His eyes wandered from object to object as though the place was not unfamiliar to him, and a slight quiver of emotion crossed his features when that roving glance fell on Mrs. Upchurch. He carried a small bundle hanging from the end of a knotted hickory stick over his right shoulder, and he walked in a halting, uneven way. He turned from the road and stopped at the gate.

"Good-evenin', ma'am."

"Good-evenin', sir," said Mrs. Upchurch, looking at him with some curiosity.

He opened the gate.

"May I come in an' git er drink er water? Walkin' is pow'ful hot work."

"Ter be shore; jes' walk right in an' take er seat an' rest yerself; you look plum' fagged out," said the hospitable woman, rising and placing a chair out in the entry for him.

He walked across the yard in a footsore and weary way, and dropped feebly down on the edge of the floor, laying his stick and meager bundle beside him. He took off his ragged old hat, and wiped his face on a faded cotton handkerchief. He was a sorry-looking case, shabbily dressed, thin, and stooping, and without the color of blood about his sallow face and hardened hands. His eyes were hollow, and he coughed once or twice a dry hacking cough. So utterly forlorn and friendless did he appear, that deep pity stirred Mrs. Upchurch's heart. He stared hard at her, his face working in an agitated manner. She brought him a gourd of water, and taking it in his trembling hands, he drank slowly from it.

"That's good," he muttered softly.

"Yes, we've got the best well in this country. But won't you take this cheer an' rest? It's better'n the floor," she said compassionately.

"No'm. Is this—where—Sam—Upchurch—lives—that married Peggy Dyer?" he slowly inquired.

"Why, yes; Upchurch bought this place before me an' him was married, an' we've been er-livin' here ever sence," she said, surprised, and striving to recognize him. He had called her name with the ease and familiarity of one well acquainted with it, but not a friend of her youth could she recall who would bear the slightest resemblance to this poor wanderer. Singularly enough, at that moment she had forgotten the brother Ab who had been haunting her memory all day. "You're not er stranger in this settlement, air you?"

"Yes, it 'pears like I am now. You don't seem to know me, Peggy?" he said with a sort of tremble in his voice, his haggard eyes raised to her pleasant, homely face.

She fell to trembling then herself, and her sunburnt face grew pale, for a sudden thought flashed into her mind—a bare possibility, that overcame her. She sat down in her chair, with a searching, eager look at the shabby, stooping figure, and pallid, sickly face.

"I orter know that voice; it 'pears like—" she faltered unsteadily.

"Have you forgot yer brother Ab, Peggy?"

"Lor', Ab! that ain't possible! it's too good ter be true!" she cried, and then burst into joyful tears.

"HAVE YOU FERGOT YER BROTHER AB, PEGGY?"

"Yes, it's me," he said quietly, and wiped his own eyes.

There were no open demonstrations of love. They did not even shake hands.

"Air you glad ter see me, Peggy?" he asked in a sort of sad wonder, but no longer doubtful of his welcome.

"Glad! O Ab, ain't I been a-wantin' ter see you fer nigh on ter twenty years?" she cried, in a voice that might have laid the most subtile doubts at rest. "Come in, brother, and take a cheer, do," wiping her eyes on her knitting, and looking at him tenderly.

"I'm not a-hurtin' here, Peggy. I'm tired enough to rest ennywheres. It's been er hard pull ter git here."

"Praise the Lord that you did git here!" she ejaculated fervently.

She took his hat and stick and bundle and put them away, she brought him more water, and when he declined any further service she drew her chair near him, and sat down.

"You look well an' hearty, Peggy."

"Yes, I ain't got nothin' ter complain erbout; but you—you're dreadful peaked, Ab," she faltered, her heart yearning over him.

He drew his handkerchief across his face again, and coughed that dull, hacking little cough.

"I've been a'mos' dead with my liver. Low-country life didn't agree with me, an' I've been onfortunit, Peggy."

"You always was onfortunit, Ab. Me an' Upchurch have jes' been a-talkin' of the many times you come nigh ter losin' yer life when er boy, let erlone the war an' sence the war. Upchurch is gone a-huntin' now, an' Tempy an' the boys, they er gone over the creek ter town; but as I started ter say, it's cur'us how some folks hev ter live, sorter holdin' on ter life ennyhow. It's er slippery thing at the best, somethin' like er eel that'll slip through yer fingers jest when you're shore you've got it" (ending with a sigh).

"I've had my sheer er bad luck now, shorely," said Dyer wearily.

"Then you must be a-lookin' out for the good," said his sister more cheerfully. The deep dejection, the utter hopelessness of tone and appearance troubled her—took away something from her joy. She grew anxious to see him brighten up, raise his head, and speak with animation. She could not keep her eyes off him. His vagabond appearance, his evident ill health roused all her sisterly love, her womanly compassion. Oh, what a hard life he must have lived to be so changed! He had been a weak and ailing child, and odd, extremely odd, in all his ways. She, being the eldest, had watched over him, and had learned to know him better than any one else did, but she never expected to see him so unkempt, neglected, and broken down.

"Oh, brother, what've you been a-doin' with yourself?" she said abruptly, her eyes filling up again.

"A-roamin' up an' down the world. Lately I've be'n livin' down in southwest Georgia. I married there," he replied.

"Law! you did? Where is your wife?"

"Dead, an' so is my little gal. She was er peart little thing," and he turned his head away, swallowing audibly, as though something choked him. "I wish you could 'a' seed her, Peggy," he continued after a slight pause.

"An' I wish it too, Ab. Can't you tell me erbout her?" she said gently, and with deep sympathy.

"She was the smartest little creetur I ever saw, an' knowed the mos' for her age. She use' ter run an' meet me when I come in, an' the fust thing 'ud be, 'Daddy, I love you; do you love me?' Then she'd put her arms round my neck an' lay her face up close ter mine. Then when she got bigger, she was always a-wantin' ter help me, an' I never axed for better comp'ny than my little Sary Jane. O Lord! if she'd only 'a' lived. It fairly tuk the life outen me to see her—to see her—"

His head dropped on his breast, and again he was silent.

"You er 'bout all the kin I've got, Peggy," he said at last, and there was something in the broken way he uttered the few words that caused her to wipe her eyes again furtively on her knitting.

"You mus' stay with me now, Ab, an' not go wanderin' off enny more. You've be'n keerless erbout your health, I know in reason."

"Mebby I have."

He met his brother-in-law rather shrinkingly at first, but Sam Upchurch gave him such a hearty welcome, he seemed to grow more at ease. About sundown the children returned from their holiday visit to Rockymount, a small town two miles away across Bear Creek. There were four—three sturdy sunburnt boys and one handsome sunburnt girl. She was the eldest, and Mrs. Upchurch presented her to her uncle with motherly pride.

"This is our Tempy, Ab."

He looked at the tall, bright-eyed, rose-faced girl with melancholy surprise. He shook hands with her in an awkward, hesitating way.

"Why, she's grown, Peggy."

"Yes, grown, an' talkin' er gittin' married," said Peggy with a laugh and a sigh.

"Law, now, ma, jes' lis'en at you!" cried Tempy, blushing crimson and retreating to the kitchen.

The young people eyed the new-comer cautiously, and would have little to say to him; but the elders used all their homely arts to entertain him and

make him comfortable. After supper, when they had returned from the kitchen to the entry, he grew more communicative. The boys were off in the thickets bird-thrashing, and Tempy sat in the best room with Jeff Morgan, her sweetheart, who lived in an adjoining settlement, and came on Saturday evening, and remained until Monday morning. So the older people were sitting alone in the entry, and Sam Upchurch smoked his pipe, and Peggy dipped snuff, but Dyer declined joining them in using tobacco.

"Had ter quit that years ergo. I have had ups an' downs sence the war. One time I went down inter the piny woods of Alabama an' j'ined the gopher traders, but it wasn't a payin' business, an' I quit it an' sot up ter teachin' school. If you can spell *baker* you can teach school in them diggin's. Then I tuk it inter my head to settle down an' have er home; but Susan she died, and the little un had ter go too, an' I've jes' be'n knockin' erbout ever sence." His poor thin hands worked nervously, and his head drooped dejectedly again.

How sharply his empty, desolate life contrasted with his sister's busy, useful, happy one! Her husband was beside her; the shouts of her boys floated up from the pine thickets where their torches flashed in and out like the flame of a "Jack-o'-lantern," and occasionally Tempy's full, hearty laugh rang out. The sister thought of it with a sigh, but feeling humbly grateful for her own good fortune. Upchurch, too, vaguely felt the contrast, for he said: "Well, you've got er home here now if you er mind ter take it. Peggy'll be doctorin' you up in no time."

He shook his head with a faint, dry smile.

A screech-owl flew into the yard near the house and began a doleful "shir-r-r-r." The men did not seem to notice it, but Mrs. Upchurch moved uneasily, for neither religion nor common sense could rid her of the superstitious feeling that it meant bad luck. That night her short, simple, but earnest prayers included the poor wanderer, and also an entreaty that no bad luck might come to any of them.

On Sunday morning the wagon was brought around, and all the family came out in their "go-ter-meetin'" clothes.

Ab declined accompanying them, although he had partially recovered from the fatigue of the day before, and he obstinately refused to allow one of the family to remain at home with him, to his sister's distress. She would gladly have remained, for there were still many things she wished to talk over with him, but he would not hear to it.

"I make no pretensions, Peggy, but neither am I goin' ter keep them erway that does," he said more decidedly than she had yet heard him speak.

He was sitting on the fence whittling a stick, and many were the curious glances directed toward the shabby, stooping figure, as the country people passed on their way to Ebenezer.

It was soon known throughout the settlement that Ab Dyer, Peggy Upchurch's brother had come, and the women discovered they owed Peggy a visit, and the men dropped in to see Upchurch, or to borrow some farming tool. Ab did not impress the visitors very favorably. Some regarded him suspiciously, others with more or less contempt.

"He's shore to be crazy," said old Miss Davis confidentially to Sally Gancey.

"You reckon?" in a shocked tone.

"Yes, an' er tramp, too. Won't you take er dip?" producing the little black snuff-box her grandfather had bequeathed to her.

"B'lieve I will. Po' Mis' Upchurch! how she mus' feel!"

"Law, it ain't no new thing. I knowed Ab Dyer when he wasn't much bigger'n er woodpeck, an' he never was right bright. He ain't 'walked fur with Solomon,' I kin tell you," rolling her eyes knowingly.

So the bit of gossip went from house to house, and hints of it reached the Upchurches; but if the poor wanderer ever heard of it, he made no sign. Yet it cut Peggy Upchurch to the heart, and she strove, by additional tenderness and consideration, to make up to him for all he had lost in not gaining the good will of the neighbors.

"I've always noticed that them that's talked erbout is apt ter be better than them that does the talkin'," she said privately to Upchurch.

But once she ventured to gently remonstrate with Ab about the palpable lack of pride in his personal appearance.

"'Tain't no use, Peggy. I wanted ter be somethin' an' I tried, but ever'thing went ag'in' me."

"You mus'n't be mad erbout that, Ab. It was the Almighty's doin's, though I ain't one er them that lays ever'thing ter Providence. Mebby you didn't start right."

"Mebby I didn't," he replied, spiritlessly, and with a fit of coughing. He sat on the door-step in the sunshine, his shoulders bent over, his chin almost touching his knees, as much of a vagabond as the day on which he walked up the road, seeking the last of his kith and kin.

"It pesters me to see you so down in the mouth. I'm all the time a-wantin' ter see you pearten up. Don't that fat light'ood-splinter tea help yer cough?"

"No; but don't you be a-botherin' erbout me, Peggy. 'Tain't no use."

"Ah, that sayin' o' yourn, "'Tain't no use,' has done a sight er harm in this world. Too many folks says it fer their own good," said Mrs. Upchurch solemnly.

"That may be so, but I ain't been no use ter myself nor nobody else."

"Well, I say you have. Don't forgit yer young days an' the time you run between me an' old Miss Whitlock's mad dog. I remember it, an' I'll keep on rememberin' it till I die."

"Lor'! that wasn't nothin'," he said, moving uneasily, a sort of flush passing over his face.

"Yet if you hadn't 'a' done it, I might not 'a' been here now," impressively, and with the feeling that she must ever hold him lovingly and gratefully in her heart, no matter how idle and purposeless his life might be—and one might better have been dead than lazy in that community.

"Mebby if the little un had 'a' lived—" he muttered, but leaving the sentence unfinished, he hastily rose and walked away toward the lot.

He grew rather fond of Tempy, after a cautious, undemonstrative fashion. His eyes would follow her in an absorbed, wistful way, for in her he saw, as it were, a pale vision of his own child grown to womanhood—a pale vision, for no girl could compare with what the reality would have been in his eyes.

Tempy's wedding-day approached, and he astonished her with the gift of ten dollars—all he had.

"Ter help buy yer fixin's," he said, and carefully restored the empty leather purse to his pocket.

The days came and went, and the farmers worked from daylight till dark, but Ab Dyer idled about the house or wandered aimlessly through the woods with a gun. Sometimes he would bring home game, but oftener he would come empty-handed.

"What ails him, Peggy?" Sam Upchurch inquired one evening, after Dyer had gone off to bed. "There ain't nothin' to be got outen him."

"He's give up—that's what ails him, an' it's the worst thing a body could do fer themselves. Ab always was easy to git down in the mouth, an' it 'pears like he ain't a-goin' to git over the loss o' his fambly. Poor fellow! he always was an onfortunit creetur," wiping her eyes on her nightcap and sighing deeply.

The summer drew near its end, and one cloudy morning, late in August, Sam Upchurch pulled out the buggy, harnessed his best horse to it, and invited Ab to go with him over to Rockymount, to buy some things for Tempy's wedding. It had rained torrents the night before, and Bear Creek rushed along turbulent, muddy, and nearly up to the bridge.

"But we'll be all right, if it don't set in to rainin' ag'in," said Upchurch, taking a sweeping glance at the clouds rolling so darkly above them.

"An' ef it does?" Ab dryly inquired.

"Well, I reckon we will, ennyhow; the bridge is new," Sam easily and carelessly replied.

It did rain again, heavy, flooding rains, and they were detained in town until quite late. Indeed, they did not realize how swiftly the day passed, until night was upon them.

"Better lie over in town to-night. Bear Creek ain't er pleasant sight jes'

now," said an acquaintance, who also lived beyond the creek. But Sam Upchurch shook his head.

"No, Peggy'll be a-lookin' fer us, an' the bridge is strong. There ain't no danger, ef the water does run over it."

"You don't know that. My old woman'll be a-lookin' fer me, too, but I ain't a-goin' ter risk my life jes' fer that," muttered the other countryman, shrugging his shoulders.

It was dark when the belated travelers reached the creek—not the gray darkness of twilight, but the pitchy blackness of a clouded, stormy night. They could hear the rush and roar of the stream, and the horse trembled and shrank back from it in fear, but, urged on by his master's voice, he ventured in. For many a day Sam Upchurch reproached himself for that rash and foolhardy act, but he had such faith in the strength of the bridge, that he did not think of danger until with a desperate plunge they were floundering in the creek.

"Good God! the bridge is gone!" he groaned, and the next moment felt the buggy swept away from him by the strong current.

"Ab!" he shouted loudly.

"Here I am. Can you swim, Sam?"

"Not much here," he cried hoarsely, realizing that only a bare chance of life remained. A vision of his home rose up before him, and of his wife and children; life never seemed so precious and desirable a thing as when death stared him in the face. He groaned aloud; then he heard Ab's voice close beside him—

"Ketch onter this limb."

It was a willow bough clipping into the water, a slender, flexible thing, not strong enough to bear the weight of both men; but Upchurch did not know that when he clutched so desperately at the frail chance of salvation.

Ab loosened his grasp.

"What's the matter?" cried his brother-in-law in quick alarm, for the poor fellow brushed against him as the strong, swift current carried him away.

"Nothin'! Git home ter Peggy an' the chillun if you can. I'm goin'"—but there his voice died away, was swallowed up in the confusion of noises around them. Upchurch shouted himself hoarse, but no reply came back to him, and chilled and stiffened he drew himself up out of the water, realizing at last that Ab had given up to him the one chance of life that lay between them.

They laid him down within the shadow of Ebenezer Church, along with the other quiet sleepers who rested there, and no one ever again breathed aught against the luckless vagabond; while in one household his memory was gratefully and tenderly cherished. Never did a stormy night come, but they would draw up

around the flaming pine-knot fire thinking of him, and Mrs. Upchurch would take one of Tempy's children on her knee, to shield her tearful eyes from observation.

Then again she would sit in the entry on calm, clear summer days, with her knitting and her snuff, just as she sat that day he came up the road, footsore, and weary with his tramp, and, recalling all the trials and failures of his life, she would far away toward those misty blue mountains, softly murmuring:

"Poor Ab! He always was an onfortunit creetur."

BET CROW.

A DIALECT STORY OF GEORGIA LIFE.

Mr. Jesse Crow sat on the front fence with his feet comfortably resting on the lower rail, whittling a stick. Crops had been "laid by," and he felt that he could afford to sit on the fence and engage in the pleasing recreation of whittling. But it was not, on this particular occasion, enjoyed as heartily as usual. It seemed to be a mere mechanical occupation to aid him in solving a knotty problem. He was a small, wiry, mild-eyed man, with a deeply tanned complexion and a good-humored expression. He was a prosperous farmer, and highly respected in the settlement, where he had a good reputation for fair, honest dealing and clear judgment, though often permitting his love of mercy to overrule the rigid laws of justice.

"It ain't no use in bein' hard on enny creetur," he would say mildly. "We ain't all been tried erlike, an' thar mought be extinguishin' sarcums-tances ter jedge by if we could see 'em."

But this morning his brows were drawn together in a perplexed frown, and he stared at the slowly sharpening splinter with abstracted eyes. The steady, even fall of hoofs upon the hard, dry road roused him from his reflections, and glancing up he saw Jim Edwards, his neighbor and crony, approaching on his old gray mare. Mr. Jesse Crow hailed him with hearty delight.

"Won't you 'light an' come in?" he asked hospitably.

"No, reckon not this mornin'. Nancy's in er pow'ful hurry fer some truck, but I don't know as I min' a-jinin' you thar a little while."

He dismounted, threw the bridle over a low projecting limb of the great

chestnut-tree standing near the gate, and in a few minutes sat on the fence by the side of his friend.

"You have heard erbout Tom Fannin a-takin' that money from Bill Sanders, down whar they air a-workin' on the new railroad?" he said, fumbling for his knife from mere force of habit, and settling himself for a little gossip.

"Yes," said Mr. Crow, seriously, "an' I don't min' sayin' that I never was more tuk down."

"Well, I thought better o' Tom than that myself, but you know what the scripturs say 'bout Satan allus a-havin' work fer idle hands ter do, an' it's purty well known Tom Fannin's as lazy as his hide kin hold."

"Yes, that's so," assented his companion.

Edwards stole a glance at him, shifted the tobacco around in his mouth, and then—

"How does Bet take it?" he rather diffidently inquired.

"That's what's pesterin' me erbout the matter, Ed'ards," exclaimed Mr. Crow, dropping the last sliver from his whittling, and turning toward his companion. "Bet lows he didn't do it; she knows in reason he didn't, an' ter that point she sticks."

"But, man alive, the money was found in his pocket! It was this way, an' I hearn it from Bill hisself. Him an' Tom has been a-roomin' together since Tom tuk an' started to work down thar, an' Bill one mornin' put twenty dollars in the top er his trunk with nobody seein' it but Tom. At dinner-time it wus gone. The men, black an' white, wus all fer havin' their pockets searched, an' when they come ter Tom's coat a-hangin' on er bush, thar wus the money stacked down in the little pocket. Some er the boys say he turned mighty white, an' 'lowed he didn't know 'twas thar, an' kep' on denyin' it, but the p'int is, how did it come thar then?"

"I've tole Bet that, time an' ag'in, but every time she sez, 'Pa, I know he didn't take it.'"

"How do you know?" says I.

""Cause he sez so—' as if that kin clar up the matter. Thar ain't no reasonin' with wimmen folks, Ed'ards."

"That's so, Jesse. If you ax 'em why they believe sech an' sech, they'll apt ter say 'jes' 'cause,' an' that's all the sense you kin git outen 'em."

"It ain't my fault Bet's been a-keepin' comp'ny long o' Tom Fannin—it's er puzzlin' thing ter me how she kin like him, knowin' he is lazy an' sorter triflin', but Bet's got er head of her own," with a sudden touch of pride, and fumbling along the rail for another loose splinter.

"She's er likely gal, if I do say it ter you, Jesse Crow, an' I'd 'a' been mighty glad if she'd 'a' tuk a likin' ter Pink. She knows how ter work, an' she ain't afeerd

ter put her hand tu it."

"Her ma hain't sp'ilt her, that's a fact," said Mr. Crow, modestly. "Thar she comes now," he continued, raising his head, and glancing across the road.

She had been to the spring, and walked briskly up the path and across the dusty road, her sun-bonnet swinging from one hand, a pail of water poised evenly on her head. Her black hair hung in a thick braid down her back, the sun had tanned her skin to a fine brown, but there was a ruddy glow in her cheeks, and full, firm lips. Her bright, steady eyes were dark gray, and when she smiled two rows of even white teeth were disclosed to view.

"A likely" girl indeed, dressed in a neat, clean cotton gown, its clumsy folds not able to hide the graceful development of her figure. She was Jesse Crow's only child, and he regarded her with a just feeling of pride, and, though it had now taken a perplexing turn, felt secretly pleased at her disposition and ability to have her own way. Edwards nodded to her with a friendly smile.

"Mornin', Bet."

"Mornin' Mr. Ed'ards. How's Mis Ed'ards and the chillun?" she inquired in a pleasant, soft-toned voice, pausing at the gate.

"'Bout as common, Bet."

She looked inquiringly at him. Mr. Edwards cleared his throat.

"Now, Bet, you ain't goin' ter be onreasonable 'bout this Fannin scrape, air ye?"

A sudden flush passed over her face, and she lifted the brimming pail from her head and placed it on the fence.

"Depends on what you mean by that, Mr. Ed'ards, hopin' you'll take no offence a-talkin' so plain."

"I mean you ain't a-goin' ter hold up fer him ag'in everybody else, an' pester yer ma an' pa."

Her lips trembled; she looked at her father.

"Pa knows I ain't a-meanin' ter pester him."

"Yes, honey, we know that," he said, her appealing glance melting his heart to tenderness at once. When had he ever failed to respond to her joy or sorrow?

"Now, that's Pink, an' Sile Jill, an' Bill Sanders, an'—"

"Don't be a-namin' Bill Sanders ter me, Mr. Ed'ards, if yer please," she exclaimed quickly.

"But it ain't fair ter be a-blamin' him fer Tom Fannin's fault, Betsy," shaking his head reprovingly.

"How kin I help it, Mr. Ed'ards, when I feel an' know that in some way or other he's the cause o' it?" she cried, with a passionate tremor in her voice. "It ain't a-hurtin' nobody fer me ter b'lieve in Tom, spite o' everything, an' please don't ax me not to, fer I must; I can't help it."

She opened the gate, and took up the pail of water and went on into the house, and a few minutes later the men heard the steady click-clack of the loom.

All day she sat on the high bench, weaving steadily a stripe of blue and a stripe of brown, counting the threads carefully; but her heart lay heavy in her bosom, and her eyes were grave. She had been deeply shocked at the charge against Tom Fannin, but her faith in his honesty remained unshaken. She understood his faults, his weaknesses, but they only appealed to her womanly tenderness. He was generous, honest, and truthful, and if he was not so good-looking or so prosperous as others—Pink Edwards and Bill Sanders, she loved him. The heart of woman is past finding out. Bet Crow might have had pick and choice among the beaux of the settlement, and instead of favoring the suit of one of her smart, industrious lovers, she chose Tom Fannin, the poorest, least fortunate young man in the county. He had a farm, but it did not prosper, and his stock were neglected and shabby.

"He's shiftless," said his neighbors, and Bet knew it to be true, though too loyal even to acknowledge it to any one but herself.

The shadows were growing long across the yard, and the soft lowing of the cows, wending their way home, could be heard, when a step sounded in the entry, and Tom Fannin himself walked into the room where Bet sat weaving.

"Mis' Crow said 'Jest walk right in,'" he said, stopping near the door, holding his hat awkwardly in his hands.

"Tu be shure, Tom," said the girl, feeling his new embarrassment acutely, and longing to put him at his ease and make him understand that story would not change her regard. "Jes' take er cheer."

She did not stop her work, and he drew a chair up near the bench, laid his hat on the floor, and then for the first time looked straightly and frankly at her. His eyes were clear and honest if not handsome. Bet felt his steady look, and flushed, and the hand holding the shuttle trembled slightly.

"You have heard?" he said at last, with a deep, dejected sigh.

"Yes," suddenly facing him and looking into his eyes. They did not waver, though his sunburnt face flushed.

"It wus in my pocket, Bet, but if it's the las' word I'm ever ter say, I don't know how it got thar," he said, solemnly.

"I know'd you didn't do it," she said with generous faith. "Bill Sanders mus' be at the bottom o' it himself."

"I don't know—I don't know nothin' erbout the matter 't all. I can't seem ter understan' why ennybody'd wanter spile my character, I've been shiftless an' lazy, I'll 'low that," humbly, "an' I don't know as you oughter 'a' put up with me, but I never tuk nothin' that didn't berlong ter me, an' never lifted er finger to harm a human creetur."

His voice shook slightly, and he leaned his head upon the weaving bench, his face hidden in a fold of Bet's dress.

She trembled in a passion of tender sympathy; tears filled her eyes, ran down her face, but she would not let a single sob pass her quivering lips. She laid her hand softly on his ruddy hair, and when she could speak without crying, said:

"It'll never make enny difference with me, I don't care what they say."

"But the whole world'll be turnin' ag'in me now, Bet. I've come over to tell you I won't think hard o' yer fer takin' back yer promises," he said with an effort.

"Promises air promises, an' I never make 'em 'thout wantin' ter keep 'em," she said steadily.

He raised his head, he saw the tears on her face, the trembling of her lips, and starting up threw one arm around her, and pressed her head against him.

"God A'mighty bless yer, Bet, honey, for keerin' fer sech a poor creetur as I, when you mought git the best. Ef I don't make somethin' o' myself now arter this, I'll never ax yer to keep yer word," he whispered, passionately pressing his rough cheek against her smooth, warm one.

For a moment the girl did not move, then she gently removed his arm, and sitting upright began to look confusedly for her shuttle, flushing, paling, not daring to meet her lover's eyes.

"Can't nothin' be done to clear up the matter?" she said finally in a low tone.

Fannin shook his head sadly.

"Nothin'; it wus thar, an' I hain't no way o' provin' I didn't put it thar."

That was true, and gossip was rife throughout the settlement, and the members of Cool Spring Church met in solemn conclave to "deal" with the erring young man, who persisted in denying his guilt, thereby adding the sin of a lie to the sin of stealing. He lost his situation on the railroad, he lost his friends, and seemed to sink to the lowest ebb of fortune. But his trials put a new spirit into him, or else called forth a great deal of latent strength, for he met the slights of his associates and neighbors with quiet dignity and went to work energetically on his farm.

"I 'lowed you 'ud be a-huntin' a new home," said one of his neighbors to him, eying him curiously.

"No, I'm goin' ter stay right t' hum," he replied doggedly.

"He's er turrible sinner," said the gossips on learning his determination to remain at his old home.

Those long summer days were wretched ones to Bet Crow. She devised a thousand plans for clearing her lover, but they all came to naught. She firmly believed Bill Sanders had caused the trouble, though why or how she could not

determine. He had been one of her most ardent admirers, and betrayed as much anger as disappointment when she refused to "keep cump'ny" with him, but she did not connect that with Tom's disgrace. After that one afternoon visit her lover did not come again to see her, and if they met accidentally at church or elsewhere, they only exchanged the briefest and quietest greeting, but eyes may speak as well as lips, and there were glances eloquent and sweet to both.

Bet did not parade her feelings, and people said she had come to her senses at last, and had sent "that triflin' Tom Fannin erdrift."

One day Bill Sanders stepped boldly up and asked permission to walk home from meeting with her. She curtly refused.

"What's the matter, Bet? It's onjest to treat me in sech er way 'thout er cause," he said in wounded tones.

"You know I can't be a-wantin' enny o' yer comp'ny," she said, and before the righteous anger of her eyes he shrank back abashed.

The summer passed slowly—dewy dawns, languid sunlit noons, and dusky evenings. The corn ripened, and the cotton-fields promised a fair yield. Tom Fannin worked steadily, early and late, as though finding in constant occupation a panacea for his troubles.

"He'll soon git tired o' that; min' what I say," said one prophet, "an' go ter idlin' round ag'in."

But he did not, growing thin and brawny with constant toil. But the change had come too late. The charge of theft could neither be forgiven nor forgotten in that community.

Farmer Crow carefully refrained from mentioning Tom Fannin's name to his daughter since the morning he sat on the fence and talked with Mr. Jim Edwards. But his shrewd, kindly eyes observed the young man's demeanor with approval.

"He's got more grit than we calkerlated on," he mused.

At last he broached the subject to Bet.

"It's a pity Tom Fannin sp'ilt his fortune a-takin' that money; he's a-doin' so mighty well now."

Bet looked reproachfully at him. "How do you know he took it, pa?"

"How do we know he didn't, Bet? Honey, don't be a-deceivin' yerself. I'm mighty proud you have dropped his comp'ny."

"I hain't dropped it, pa. We er jest a-waitin'."

He sighed.

"You air pow'fully sot in yer ways, Bet, fer er young creetur."

"Pa, I mought as well give up livin' as ter give up Tom. You know how 'tis," her eyes traveling to the round, placid face of her mother sitting out in the entry, knitting.

Her father's face softened.

"Well, well, honey, don't do nothin' you'll be sorry fer, that's all I ax. Waitin' is sometimes a mighty tryin' thing."

"But it mus' be better'n not havin' anything ter wait fer," she said, solemnly.

But as time passed monotonously, without bringing any vindication of her lover's name, and hope died slowly and painfully, she learned the bitterness of waiting.

It was "fodder-pullin'" time, and the farmers were out from dawn until evening stripping the yellowing blades from the stalk, tying it, and stacking it in the wide hot fields. The new railroad skirted the western bounds of Mr. Jesse Crow's farm, and through the almost breathless stillness could be heard the ring of hammer and steel from the bridge building over Cool Spring Creek. Some of the strange workmen had a reputation for lawlessness quite shocking to the simple, peaceable country people.

It was about the middle of the afternoon, and Bet Crow was spinning listlessly, while her mother carded the rolls for her. They were not dreaming of any danger, when a man, coatless, hatless, covered with dust, and panting heavily, leaped the fence and ran across the yard. It was Bill Sanders.

"Mis' Crow, for the love of God let me hide in here!" he gasped hoarsely, stumbling over the doorstep, and then staggering into the room.

"Bill Sanders! what on the face o' the yeth!" cried the frightened woman, her fresh-colored face growing pale.

"They air arter me! they mean to kill me!" he panted, crouching under the loom, quivering with exhaustion, wild-eyed with fear.

"Bet, Bet! what does it mean?" exclaimed her mother appealingly.

Bet ran to the door, and shading her eyes with her hand, looked out. Four or five men were running along the road toward the house, searching and cursing fiercely. She had no idea what had happened, but she knew they were workmen from the bridge, and a desperate-looking gang they were to her frightened eyes. For a moment her heart quailed. They might murder her and her mother, as well as Bill Sanders. He was incapable of offering any defense just then, and pity filled her heart. Her eyes flashed; her lips were set in a determined line. They should not get him if she could help it.

"Quick, ma! blow the horn for pa!" she said, then sprang up on a chair and took down her father's shot-gun from over the door, a trusty weapon he loved next to his wife and daughter.

"Don't you come enny nigher till you tell what you want," she said clearly, raising the gun in her none too steady hands as they scrambled over the fence.

For a moment they were nonplussed, and stared at her with a mixture of surprise and uncertainty.

"We want the man that's hid in there," said one lowering fellow, fiercely.

"What for?"

"To hang to the nearest tree."

"What's he been a-doin'?"

"Killin' a friend of our'n down on the railroad."

The horror of it almost took her breath, but she maintained her defensive attitude bravely.

"That's er turrible thing," she said, praying that every blast of the horn would bring her father.

"See here, young woman, you'd better get outen that and let us have him. We don't mean no harm to you, but we ain't got time to argue with you."

"I'm plum' sorry for you, but I'm bound ter do what I kin fer the law. We air peaceable folks here, an' like ter be punished 'cordin' ter law. If you'll git the jestice o' the peace an' have Mr. Sanders tuk ter jail, I ain't no objections."

Their wrath was evidently cooling somewhat, and they were forced to a reluctant admiration of her pluck.

If they had known that she was trembling like a leaf, that her arms were feeling nerveless and weak, her eyes dim! She knew that she could not hold out much longer in that threatening attitude. A moment of dead silence fell while the men consulted in whispers, and Bet could hear the deep, hurried breathing of the hidden man, and the horrified moans and ejaculations of her mother with a distinctness absolutely painful to her. But help had come. Her strained eyes wandered despairingly from those dark, angry faces confronting her, and she saw her father and two or three other men coming through the lot.

Matters were at last peaceably adjusted. Mr. Crow argued so mildly and reasonably with the avenging party that they consented—the farmers bearing them company—to take their prisoner and allow the law to deal with him.

"But I'll tell you what, Sanders, you owe your life to that girl. We would 'a' killed you, sure, if she hadn't 'a' stood up in your defense like she did. We didn't want to hurt her," said one of the men grimly, and Sanders groaned heavily. He gave Bet one humbly grateful glance as they led him away.

The whole occurrence occupied but a brief space of time in the bright summer day. The dust settled softly upon the road behind the retreating footsteps of the self-appointed posse and their prisoner, and the crickets shrilling in the grass seemed the only living thing left. Bet sank down on the doorstep, and hid her face in her hands, faint and weak from the strain upon her nerves.

"Drink this, honey, it'll do you good," said her mother, holding a brimming gourd of water to her pale lips, and she drank a little and declared that she felt

better.

"Do you s'pose they'll hang him, Bet?" in a fearful whisper.

"I don't know, ma, if he's tuk human life—" she paused with a shudder.

A new sensation had been furnished the settlement, and a far greater one than the mere theft of a little money. The men met to discuss the crime, and the women spoke of it in low, awestruck tones. Then it was discovered that the man had not been killed, but badly wounded and stunned. A quieter spirit prevailed, and when it came out that the stranger had struck the first blow, and that Sanders had only acted on the defensive, the tide of public sympathy turned in his favor.

It does not belong to this story to go into all the details of the trial held at the September term of the county court. It is enough to say the young man was acquitted and walked out of the court-room free, but subdued and quiet. He went direct to Farmer Crow's, and walked into the room where Bet sat with her patchwork. She greeted him with grave kindness, and asked him to sit down, but he declined, preferring to stand. He twisted the flexible willow switch he carried, nervously around in his hands, and swallowed audibly, as though something choked him.

"They'd 'a' tuk my life shure in their first mad fit if it hadn't 'a' been for you, Bet," he said finally, with an effort. "I don't know what to say; I ain't much fer words, but—"

"Please don't say nothin' 'bout it, Bill," she pleaded in great embarrassment. "Folks air a-puttin' what I done up too high. If I helped you it wasn't nothin' more'n duty, seein' as you was plum' tuckered out with runnin'. I'd 'a' done it fer ennybody."

"Don't I know that better'n you, Bet?" he exclaimed bitterly. "Don't I know you can't bear the sight o' me? but I'm a-goin' to show you that I ain't ungrateful fer what you've done fer me."

He passed his hands over his eyes. "Bet, I done somethin' for you that for yer sake I'm now a-goin' ter undo. Next Sunday is meetin' day at Cool Spring, an' I'm a-goin' ter make public acknowledgments o' my temptations, an' the doin's o' Satan in my heart. I've keered for you mighty nigh to the ruination o' my hopes fer a better world. But if God A'mighty kin fergive me, then you kin tu, Bet. Good-evenin'."

He turned to go. She sprang up, scattering her quilt pieces right and left.

"Bill!" she gasped, but he strode hastily out of the room, mounted his horse, and rode away.

The last song had been sung and the congregation at Cool Spring church were about to rise to receive the benediction when Bill Sanders stood up, and clearing his throat, looked around on the people. As he met the curious expectant eyes fixed upon him, he seemed to waver—to flinch from his purpose.

”Now speak out, Brother Sanders,” said the pastor encouragingly, and the kindly voice of the old man gave him fresh strength.

”Broth’r’n an’ sist’r’n, it becomes my duty ter tell you o’ the temptations I’ve be’n a-fallin’ under this year, an’ ter ax yer forgiveness an’ yer prayers. I’ve be’n a-wanderin’ fur from the right way. I done er turrible thing ter brother Tom Fannin—took away his good name, an’ made him a byword an’ en example o’ evil among you. Fer the sake o’ one who it ain’t becomin’ in me ter name here, an’ who ain’t ter blame any more’n a innocent child, I ’lowed myself ter hate him—ter wanter cast disfavor ’pon him.”

He paused, and a pinfall might have been heard in that church, so intensely quiet, so breathless were the excited people. He looked at Tom Fannin leaning forward eagerly on his seat, then his eyes rested for a moment on Bet Crow’s drooping face, and he could almost feel the quick flutter of the pulse in her round soft throat. His eyes sank to the floor; he drew a long breath.

”Broth’r’n, this is er public acknowledgment, an’ the solemn, bindin’ truth—I put that money in Tom Fannin’s pocket with my own hands.”

He said no more, but sat down and hid his face in his hands, and a stir and murmur seemed to sweep over the church like a wave. The agitation, excitement, seemed about to break dignified Christian bounds, when Mr. Jesse Crow rose and solemnly said:

”Broth’r’n, we have all heard the public acknowledgments o’ Brother Sanders’s wrong-doin’. He has tole it ’thout bein’ axed, an’ o’ his own free will an’ inclernation. In dealin’ with this errin’ brother we mus’ bear in min’ thar air allus extinguishin’ sarcumstances surroundin’ ever’ deed done by weak mortal creeturs, an’ a confession o’ guilt is er long way to’ards complete repentance.”

Well, that public confession was the climax of that year of events in the Cool Spring settlement, if I except the wedding at Mr. Jesse Crow’s, later in the season, when house and yard overflowed with guests, and all united in giving a kindly hand and a hearty word to the bridegroom. Bill Sanders was not present. He had gone out West to seek a new home, and let us hope that he was in time as happy as Tom Fannin and his wife, once the belle of Cool Spring settlement—Bet Crow.

SILURY.

STORY OF A MOONSHINER’S DAUGHTER.

Silury Cole threw a fresh pine-knot on the fire and stepped to the door to peer out into the night, listening intently for the first sound of her father's footsteps on the hard mountain road. For two days the revenue officers had been abroad on the mountains, and the hearts of women and children were heavy with terror and dread.

The rich pine kindled, burnt into vivid flame, throwing its light upon the girl from head to foot, on her smooth hair, black as the night, on the profile of her face, denoting unusual character for a girl of fourteen, and on her primitively fashioned gown of blue checked cotton.

The rioting flames, filling the black cavernous depths of the fireplace, lighted up the low room also, throwing grotesque shadows behind the loom and spinning-wheel, lingering round the flaxen heads of the three children asleep on the low trundle bed, glancing over the basket of corn ready to be shelled for the miller, and over the table and simple preparations for supper.

Mrs. Cole sat in the corner at one end of the flat stone hearth, smoking and silently brooding. She was a small, sickly looking woman with sunken eyes and sharp, delicate features. She leaned forward with her chin resting in one hand, staring into the fire. A stick of wood burned apart and fell softly to the coals underneath. She started and glanced at Silury.

"Is he comin', Silury?"

"Not yet, ma."

She refilled her pipe and laid a glowing coal on it, shaking her head slowly.

"An' not likely to till the revenue men have gone away."

"Ah, but don't you know, ma, pa never stays away mor'n two days at a time? Recollect the time he come a-whistlin' with his gun on his shoulder, an' the raiders just down on the mill road," said Silury, and laughed at the remembrance of his daring. "Pa ain't easily scared."

"That's so, an' I remember that he was mighty hungry, too," murmured her mother, a faint smile, for a moment, lighting up her prematurely wrinkled face.

Silury glanced over her shoulder at the oven of potatoes steaming on the hearth, and the frying-pan filled with fresh-cut rashers of bacon ready to place over the fire. Her preparations were all complete. When he came it would take but a few minutes to place a smoking hot supper, such as he loved, before him.

"Are the children covered up?" her mother inquired, glancing toward the bed. "These October nights are gettin' cold."

Silury stepped across the room and tucked the cover around the young sleepers. No wonder her face had such a mature look—she moved with such a womanly air—the cares of the household nearly all fell upon her. She was the pride of her father's heart, her mother depended on her, and the younger children always looked to her to supply their needs. Mrs Cole relapsed into her former

attitude, for a few minutes, then suddenly raised her head, a look of fear flashing into her dull eyes. "Silury, it 'pears to me I hear somethin'," she whispered quickly.

The girl hurried back to the door, and leaned out again, her head slightly bent, one hand lifted to her ear in a listening attitude. A gust of wind swept down the black serried peaks, so high above the small cabin, so sharply cut against the starlit sky, hurrying on its erratic course to the valley. The cow munched dry corn husks in a corner of the fence, and Kit, the mule, pawed restlessly at the stable door. But none of those sounds had disturbed Mrs. Cole, roused that fear in her. Far away Silury heard the steady beat of hoofs upon the dry, hard road, as of a horse newly shod, and urged to his utmost speed.

"I 'low it's only somebody ridin' fer the doctor," she said soothingly, but a line, drawn by keenest anxiety, appeared between her dark brows. The sound came upward from the valley, not downward from the mountains. It drew nearer each moment, bringing glad or evil tidings to some lone dweller on the heights, for no one ever traveled over the mountains in that way simply for the pleasure of it. How swift, how steady, fell the iron-shod feet upon the earth! now clear and distinct, as they passed along a ridge, now almost lost as they plunged into a ravine. The big liver-colored hound, lying on the doorstep, stood up, sniffed the air, and howled mournfully.

"It may be the raiders," muttered Mrs. Cole restlessly.

"Or somebody's dead, an' they er comin' fer their folks," said Silury in awed tones.

She could hear the heavy panting of the horse, as, with slackened gait, he came up the hollow below the house, and see an outline of the rider as they turned the lot fence; then, as they crossed the narrow path of light projected from the doorway beyond the low yard fence, she recognized a valley neighbor. He scarcely halted, as he excitedly cried:

"Silury, the raiders got yer pa—took him over in Jimson's Brake, along with Peleg White, an' one o' the Davis boys. They'll pass Buckhorn Springs to-night."

And then he went on his way, to carry the sad news to more remote habitations; and great silence seemed to fall upon the mountain-side. Silury and her mother looked speechlessly at one another, then Mrs. Cole passed a trembling hand confusedly over her face.

"What all did he say, Silury? It 'pears to me my understandin' ain't quite clear to-night."

"He said—" she caught her breath in a sob. "Oh, ma! the raiders have took pa; what shall we do, what shall we do? Poor pa! it will kill him to be put in prison!" in a burst of despairing anguish.

Mrs. Cole crouched lower in her chair.

"I knew it would come. I've been a-feelin' it here for a long time—a long

time," one thin hand groping for her heart. "Yes, he'll pine fer his freedom an' the mountings when he's shut up in jail. Oh, I've begged him not to be a moonshiner—not to make whiskey on the sly. They all have to suffer fer it sooner or later." Her wandering, tearful eyes fell on the waiting supper. "How hungry he must be!"

There were no noisy demonstrations, but a grief, pathetic as it was deep. They were mountaineers, patient by nature, and schooled by all the circumstances of life to endure and be strong. The law does not punish the moonshiner alone, but it falls heavily on his wife and children. Silury dried her eyes and touched her mother on the shoulder, speaking in a firmer tone:

"I must go down to Buckhorn Springs to-night, ma."

"Eh?" said the dazed woman.

"I must see pa; I must help him to get away from the raiders."

"You, Silury! How'll you do it?"

"I don't know," her lips trembling again, "but I must do it—I must!"

Mrs. Cole stared at her. She had faith in Silury's courage and ability, but now she caught the girl's hand, fresh terror seizing her.

"Don't you get into trouble, honey. Me an' the children would perish if your pa an' you were both took off."

"Don't you fret, ma; I'll come back to you an' bring pa, too."

"How'll you get to Buckhorn Springs?"

"Ride Kit."

She was already down on her knees before the fire, kindling a torch to take out to the lot with her. She looked up at her mother with brave, tender eyes.

"Now, don't pester yerself any more'n you can help, ma."

Mrs. Cole shook her head with a deep sigh, and instinctively reached for her pipe, but she could only sit and hold it in her hand, unfilled, unlighted, while Silury went away to the lot with the flaring torch and an old saddle thrown on her arm.

Kit was a shabby beast, thin, wiry, and with only one good eye, but he had served the Coles faithfully. He greeted the young girl with a gentle whinny, and she leaned her head against him with another burst of tears. But she quickly wiped them away, and led Kit out to the road. It did not take her long to put bridle and saddle on him, then she ran in, took down her father's rifle from the rack over the front door, and in a few minutes had started on her solitary ride down the mountains. The hound would have followed her, but she ordered him back. "Go back, Bolivar, an' take care o' them that's left behind," and he slunk unwillingly to the doorstep again.

It was a night to live in the child's memory all her life, for with all her fearlessness and hard training she had never before been called upon to traverse

the mountain passes alone after darkness had fallen upon them. Solitude and gloom surrounded her. The valley seemed but a formless gulf of darkness, the multitudinous mountains, black sentinels, towering to the stars. Far away in some remote fastness of the mountains a dog barked, and she could hear the prolonged blast of a hunting horn. A star shot downward from the zenith, leaving a trail of fire across the sky, and was lost behind the far-reaching western ranges. A sense of isolation oppressed her. She seemed the only living human creature in all the vast, silent world. On the saddle in front of her she held the trusty rifle, and that gave her a sense of security from beasts of prey. Her father had taught her how to use the gun, and practice had given her an almost unerring aim. But my young readers will acknowledge that it was a trying situation for even a mountain girl, to ride alone through ravines and over declivities, often only a bridle path to guide her. It required a brave heart and a steady nerve.

Buckhorn Springs are on the public highway leading from a market town in North Georgia to Murphy, North Carolina, and traditions of the wonderful medicinal qualities of the water come down, even from the remote days when the Indian set up the poles of his wigwam near the springs, and slaked his thirst in their cool, healing streams, flowing out from under Buckhorn Mountain. The Indian and his wigwam are mere traditions now themselves, and the white man and his covered market wagon have taken their places. It has been the favorite camping-ground of the mountaineers coming from or going to market since the first white settlers boldly penetrated the wilderness beyond. Campers were there the night the revenue officers were to pass with Amaziah Cole, Peleg White, and young Davis. They were on the roadside, their white covered wagon drawn out under the sparse timber, their sleek red oxen lying unyoked near it. A camp-fire of brushwood and pine-knots blazed up in the open space between the timber and the road, throwing strange eerie shadows against the mountain-side, and in the tree-tops above.

A lean, brown-faced wagoner sat on an inverted feed-box whittling a stick, and a woman occupied a rude camp-stool nearer the fire, the light bringing out the stripes in her brown and yellow homespun skirts, and the melancholy lines in her sharp-featured face. A brown woolen veil was tied around her head, and she rubbed snuff with subdued enjoyment. Silury did not go down to the public road. On the mountain-side, above the springs, a ledge of gray rocks jutted out. Dismounting at a level spot in the pathway, Silury tied Kit's bridle to an overhanging bough, then with the gun grasped in her hands, she crept through the underbrush to the rocks. She trembled with excitement, for a daring thought had come to her—a scheme whereby she might deliver her father from his captors. She crouched down behind the rocks, and waited, praying that she might be calm, that her eye might be true, her hand steady when the time came.

Evidently the campers had heard of the raid, and were intending to sit up until the officers passed with the prisoners, for several times, during that lagging hour of suspense Silury spent behind the boulders, the man walked out into the road to listen for sounds of travel.

"I 'low they are comin' at last," he said, closing his knife with a sharp click, and his wife put up her snuff-box and joined him on the roadside.

Silury's heart gave a great thump, thump, against her side. She started into a more erect position, bringing the barrel of her rifle to a level with the rock. The tramping sound of horses' feet could be distinctly heard on the road, and presently the cavalcade rode up, the prisoners in the middle. The officers were feeling comparatively secure. No rescue had ever been attempted at Buckhorn Springs. Friends of prisoners had sometimes ambushed in the wilder country above, but this raid had been unmolested. They had been riding hard, and so they halted for a few minutes at the springs, and some of them dismounted for a drink.

Silury saw her father astride a powerful mule, his hands tied together, but his lower limbs free. He looked haggard and unkempt, his long, black hair falling to his shoulders, his beard tangled. He bore the marks of his sojourn in Jimson's Brake, and of his resistance to arrest.

"Poor pa!"

Did he hear that trembling, pitying whisper? He threw up his head, his black, deep-set eyes flashing an eager glance around. The officer at his side fell back a little to speak to a comrade. It was the girl's chance. She suddenly rose head and shoulders above the rocks, the camp-fire shining on her white face and bare head.

"Look out, pa! look out!" she screamed in shrill, piercing tones, and fired.

He saw her, read her purpose and, as the animal under him staggered and fell, he leaped from its back like a panther, and disappeared in the underbrush.

It was all so quick, so unexpected! Through the curling wreath of smoke from the rifle, Silury's face appeared for a moment to the amazed eyes of the officers; then they realized what had happened, and fearing a stronger attack, put spurs to their horses and hustled their other prisoners away, leaving the dead mule in the road.

The next morning, as the rising sun gilded the mountain tops with gold, the revenue officers rode through the streets of the market town with two prisoners, telling a thrilling story of the moonshiners' ambush at Buckhorn Springs and the escape of Amaziah Cole.

It was about that same time that Silury stood again on the doorstep of home, her face aglow, her eyes radiant, in spite of the sleepless night spent abroad on the mountains. Bolivar crouched against her feet, or licked her hands in his joy

at her return, but she scarcely noticed him. She was looking at the unfinished supper, cold on the hearth, the gray, fireless ashes in the deep fireplace, and her mother asleep in her chair.

"Wake up, ma! wake up!" she cried, joyously; "pa is here!"

Mrs. Cole started up and rubbed her eyes as she saw her husband and daughter standing in the doorway. "Did I dream it all?" she murmured helplessly. "I thought the raiders were takin' you to jail, Amaziah."

"So they were, an' I'd be there right now ef—" he stopped, choked with emotion, and his hand stroked Silury's head.

"An' he's never goin' to be a moonshiner again, ma, never! Ain't we glad!" and Silury slipped across the floor to wake the younger children. Her father's proud eyes followed her.

"It's all owin' to you, all owin' to you, Silury."

'ZEKI'L.

He lived alone in a weather-beaten log-cabin built on the roadside at the edge of a rocky, sterile field, with a few stunted peach-trees growing around it, and a wild grape-vine half covering the one slender oak shading the front yard. The house consisted of only one room, with a wide, deep fireplace in the north end, and a wide window to the south. The logs had shrunk apart, leaving airy cracks in the walls, and the front door creaked on one hinge, the other having rusted away.

But 'Zeki'l Morgan's ambition seemed satisfied when he came into possession of the house, the unproductive clearing around it, and the narrow strip of woodland bounding the richer farm beyond. From the cabin door could be seen the broken, picturesque hills marking the course of the Etowah River, with the Blue Ridge Mountains far beyond, and the Long Swamp range rising in the foreground.

Very little of 'Zeki'l's past history was known in Zion Hill settlement. He had walked into Mr. Davy Tanner's store one spring day, a dusty, penniless tramp, his clothes hanging loosely from his stooping shoulders, a small bundle in one hand, a rough walking-stick in the other. Mr. Davy Tanner was a soft-hearted old man, and the forlorn, friendless stranger appealed strangely to his sympathy, in spite of his candid statement that he had just finished a five-years'

term in the penitentiary for horse-stealing.

"I tell you this, not because I think it's anything to boast of, but because I don't want to 'pear like I'm deceivin' folks," he said in a dejected, melancholy tone, his face twitching, his eyes cast down. It was a haggard face, bleached to a dull pallor by prison life, every feature worn into deep lines. Evidently he had suffered beyond the punishment of the law, though how far it had eaten into his soul no man would ever learn, for after that simple statement of his crime and his servitude as a convict, he did not again, even remotely, touch upon his past, nor the inner history of his life. No palliative explanations were offered, no attempts made to soften the bare, disgraceful truth.

Mr. Davy Tanner was postmaster as well as merchant, and his store was the general rendezvous for the settlement. The women came to buy snuff, and thread, and such cheap, simple materials as they needed for Sunday clothes; the men to get newspapers and the occasional letters coming for them, besides buying sugar and coffee, and talking over the affairs of the county and of Zion Hill church.

They looked on 'Zeki'l Morgan with distrust and contempt, and held coldly aloof from him. But at last a farmer, sorely in need of help, ventured to hire him, after talking it over with Mr. Davy Tanner.

"I tell you there ain't a mite o' harm in him."

"S'pose he runs away with my horse, Mr. Tanner?"

"I'll stand for him ef he does," said Mr. Davy Tanner, firmly. "I don't know any more th'n you about him, but I'm willin' to trust him."

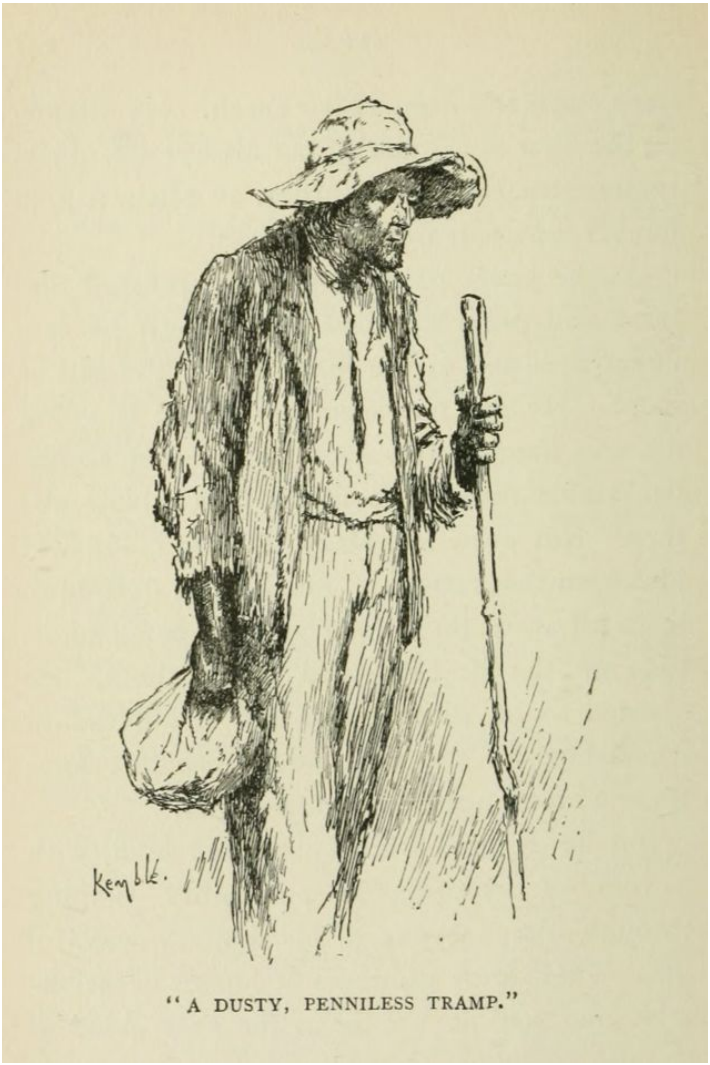
"That's the way you treat most o' the folks that come about you," said his neighbor, smiling.

"Well, I ain't lost anything by it. It puts a man on his mettle to trust him—gives him self-respect, if there's any good in him."

All the year 'Zeki'l filled a hireling's place, working faithfully; but the next year he bought a steer, a few sticks of furniture, and, renting the cabin and rocky hillside from Mr. Davy Tanner, set up housekeeping, a yellow cur and an old violin his companions. Then he managed to buy the place, and settled down. On one side he had the Biggers place, a fine, rich farm, and on the other Mr. Davy Tanner's store and Zion Hill church. He attended the church regularly, but always sat quietly, unobtrusively in a corner, an alien, a man forever set apart from other men.

As the years passed, openly expressed distrust and prejudice died out, though he was never admitted to the inner life of the settlement. He did not seem to expect it, going his way quietly, and ever maintaining an impenetrable reserve about his own private history. Not even Mr. Davy Tanner could win him from that reticence, much as he desired to learn all about those long years of penal servitude and the life concealed behind them. He seemed to be without

any ties of kindred or friendship, for the mail never brought anything to him, not even a newspaper.



"A DUSTY, PENNILESS TRAMP."

But he seemed a kindly natured man, with a vein of irrepressible sociability running through him, in spite of his solitary ways of life. There were glimpses of humor occasionally, and had it not been for that cloud of shame hanging forbiddingly over him, he would have become a favorite with his neighbors.

Across the road, opposite his house, he set up a small blacksmith shop, and much of his idle time he spent in there, mending broken tools, sharpening dull plows, hammering patiently on the ringing red-hot iron. The smallest, simplest piece of work received the most careful attention, and the farmers recognized and appreciated his conscientiousness.

One summer afternoon, as he was plowing in his cotton-field, a neighbor came along the road and, stopping at the fence, hailed him. He plowed to the end of the row, and halted.

"Good evenin', 'Zeki'l," said the man, mounting to the top of the fence, and sitting with his heels thrust through a crack in the lower rails.

"Howdy you do, Marshall? What's the news down your way?" 'Zeki'l inquired, drawing his shirt-sleeve across his face, and leaning on the plow-handles.

"I don't know as there's much to tell. Billy Hutchins an' Sary Ann McNally run away an' got married last night, an' old Mis' Gillis is mighty nigh dead with the ja'nders. A punkin couldn't look yallerer." He opened his knife, and ran his fingers along the rail in search of a splinter to whittle. "Old man Biggers has sold his place at last."

"Has he?"

"Yes; I met him down at the store, an' he said the trade had been made."

"He's bound to go to Texas."

"Yes; so he 'lows."

"Well, old Georgy is good enough for me," 'Zeki'l remarked, with a pleased glance at his sterile fields.

"An' for me," said Marshall, heartily. "Wanderin' 'round don't make folks rich. Biggers owns the best place in this settlement, an' he'd better stay on it. It won't do to believe all the tales they tell about these new States. I had a brother go to Louisiany before the war. Folks said, 'Don't take anything with you; why, money mighty nigh grows on bushes out there.' His wife took the greatest pride in her feather beds, but what would be the use o' haulin' them beds all the way across the Mississippi, when you could rake up feathers by the bushel anywheres? Well, they went, an' for the whole endurin' time they stayed they had to sleep on moss mattresses, an' my brother 'lowed it was about the meanest stuff to kill he ever struck. If you didn't bile it, an' bury it, an' do the Lord only knows what to it, it would grow an' burst out of the beds when you was sleepin' on 'em." 'Zeki'l's attention did not follow those reminiscent remarks. "Who bought the Biggers place?" he inquired, as soon as Marshall ceased speak-

ing.

"A man he met in Atlanta when he went down the last time, a man from one of the lower counties, an' his name—why, yes, to be sure, it's Morgan, same as yours—'Lijy Morgan. May be you know him?" with a sharp, questioning glance.

But the momentary flush of emotion that the stranger's name had called to 'Zeki'l's face was gone.

"I don't know as I do," he slowly replied, staring at a scrubby cotton-stalk the muzzled ox was making ineffectual attempts to eat.

"I 'lowed may be he might be some kin to you," said Marshall, in a baffled tone.

"I don't know as he is," said 'Zeki'l, still in that slow, dry, non-committal tone, his eyes leaving the cotton-stalk to follow the swift, noiseless flight of a cloud-shadow across a distant hillside. "Morgan isn't an uncommon name, you know."

"That's so," reluctantly admitted Marshall.

"When does Mr. Biggers think o' goin' to Texas?"

"Oh, not until after crops are gathered."

"The other family, isn't to come, then, right away?"

"No; not till fall."

After Marshall had whittled, and gossiped, and gone his way, 'Zeki'l stood a long time with his hands resting on the plow-handles, his brows drawn together in deep thought. Some painful struggle seemed to be going on. The crickets shrilled loudly in the brown sedge bordering a dry ditch, and a vulture sailed majestically round and round above the field, his broad black wings outspread on the quivering air. The cloud-shadows on the river-hills assumed new form, shifted, swept away, and others came in their places, and the vulture had become a mere speck, a floating mote in the upper sunlight, before he turned the patient ox into another furrow, murmuring aloud:

"I didn't go to them, an' if they come to me, I can't help it. I am not to blame; the Almighty knows I'm not to blame;" and his overcast face cleared somewhat.

That night when Mr. Davy Tanner closed his store and went home, he said to his wife:

"'Zeki'l Morgan must be lonesome, or pestered about somethin'. You'd think that old fiddle o' his could talk an' cry too, from the way he's playin'."

The season advanced; crops were gathered, and the shorn fields looked brown and bare. A sere, withering frost touched the forests, and the leaves fell in drifts, while the partridge called to his mate from fence and sedgy covert. A light snowfall lay on the distant mountains when the Biggerses started to the West and the new family of Morgans moved into Zion Hill settlement.

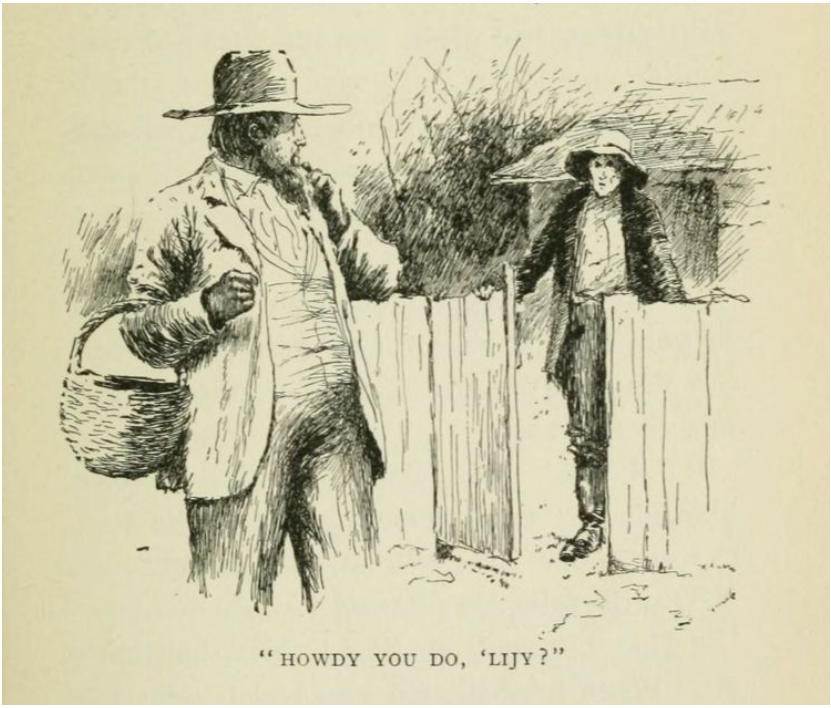
It was the third day after their arrival. 'Zeki'l leaned over the front gate

with an armful of corn, feeding two fat pigs, when 'Lijy Morgan passed along the road on his way to Mr. Davy Tanner's store. He was a strong-looking, well-built man, with rugged features and hair partly gray. He looked curiously at the solitary, stooping figure inside the gate, his steps slackened, then he stopped altogether, a grayish pallor overspreading the healthy, ruddy hue of his face.

"'Zeki'l!"

'Zeki'l dropped the corn, and thrust open the gate.

"Howdy you do, 'Lijy?"



"HOWDY YOU DO, 'LIJY?"

Their hands met in a quick, close grip, then fell apart.

"I like not to have known you, 'Zeki'l, it was so unexpected seein' you here," said 'Lijy, huskily, scanning the worn, deeply lined face before him with glad yet shrinking gaze.

"An' twelve years make a great difference in our looks sometimes, though you are not so much changed," said 'Zeki'l quietly. He had been prepared for

the meeting, and years of self-mastery had given him the power of concealing emotion.

"Twelve years? Yes; but it has seemed like twenty to me since—since it all happened. Why didn't you come home, 'Zeki'l, when your time was out?"

"I 'lowed the sight o' me wouldn't be good for you, 'Lijy; an'—an' the old folks were gone."

"Yes; it killed them, 'Zeki'l, it killed them," in a choked voice.

"I know," said 'Zeki'l, hastily, his face blanching; "an' I thought it would be best to make a new start in a new settlement."

"Do the folks here know?"

"That I served my time? Yes; but that's all. When I heard that you had bought the Biggers place I studied hard about movin' away, but I like it here. It's beginnin' to seem like home."

'Lijy stared at the poor cabin, the stunted, naked peach-trees, so cold and dreary-looking in the wintry dusk.

"Is it yours, 'Zeki'l?"

"Yes; it's mine, all mine. Come in and sit awhile with me, an' warm. It's goin' to be a nippin' cold night."

He turned, and 'Lijy silently followed him across the bare yard and into the house. A flickering fire sent its warm glow throughout the room, touching its meagre furnishing with softening grace, but a chill struck to 'Lijy Morgan's heart as he crossed the threshold—a chill of desolation.

"Do you live here alone?"

"Yes; all alone, except Rover and the fiddle."

The cur rose up from the hearth with a wag of his stumpy tail, and gave the visitor a glance of welcome from his mild, friendly eyes.

There were only two chairs in the room, and 'Zeki'l placed the best one before the fire for his guest, then threw on some fresh pieces of wood. Outside the dusky twilight deepened to night, the orange glow fading from the west, and the stars shining brilliantly through the clear atmosphere. The chill wind whistled around the chimney-corners and through the chinks in the log walls.

Between the men a constrained silence fell. The meeting had been painful beyond the open acknowledgment of either. The dog crept to his master's side and thrust his nose into his hand. The touch roused 'Zeki'l. From the jamb he took a cob pipe and a twist of tobacco.

"Will you smoke, 'Lijy?"

"I believe not; but I'll take a chew."

He cut off a liberal mouthful, and then 'Zeki'l filled and lighted his pipe. It seemed to loosen his tongue somewhat.

"Is Marthy Ann well enough?"

"She's tolerable."

"How many children have you?"

"Three; the girls, Cynthy an' Mary—"

"I remember them."

"An' little Zeke."

'Zeki'l's face flushed.

"Named him for me, 'Lijy?"

"Yes; for you. Cynthy's about grown now, an' a likely girl, I can tell you."

His face softened; his eyes grew bright with pride and tenderness as he spoke of his children. 'Zeki'l watched him, noting the change in his countenance, and perhaps feeling some pain and regret that he had missed such pleasure. 'Lijy reached out his hand and laid it on his knee. "'Zeki'l, you must come live with us now. I'll tell these folks we are brothers, an'—"

"I don't know as I would," said 'Zeki'l, gently. "It would only make talk, an' I'm settled here, you know."

His unimpassioned tone had its effect on his brother. He protested, but rather faintly, finally saying:

"Well, if you'd rather not—"

"That's just it. I'd rather not."

They both rose, and 'Lijy groped uncertainly for his hat.

"Your life ain't worth much to you, 'Zeki'l, I know it ain't," with uncontrollable emotion.

"It's worth more 'n you think, 'Lijy, more 'n you think."

He knocked the ashes from his pipe, and cleared his throat as though to speak again, but his brother had reached the door before he called to him.

"'Lijy."

"Well?"

"What became o' 'Lizabeth?"

"She's still livin' with us."

He peered into the bowl of the pipe.

"She's never married?"

"No. She had a fall about ten years ago which left her a cripple, an' she's grayer than I am. You 're not comin' to see us, 'Zeki'l?"

"I reckon not, 'Lijy." And while 'Lijy stumbled through the darkness home—his errand to the store forgotten—'Zeki'l stood before the fire, one arm resting against the black, cobwebby mantel. "Crippled an' gray! O 'Lizabeth, 'Lizabeth!" he groaned, and put his head down on his arm, the twelve years rolling backward upon him.

"Where have you been, 'Lijy?" exclaimed Mrs. Morgan when her husband returned. "We waited an' waited for you, till the supper was spoiled."

"I met a man I used to know," he said, evasively, casting a wistful, troubled glance toward the corner where 'Lizabeth, his wife's sister, sat knitting, a crutch lying at her side.

Cynthia, a rosy, merry-eyed girl, laughed.

"Pa is always meetin' a man he knows."

Mrs. Morgan began hastily removing the covered dishes from the hearth to the table.

"Well, where is the sugar you went over to the store to get?" she demanded with some irritation.

"I forgot it, Marthy. I'll go for it in the mornin'," in a confused, propitiatory tone.

She stared at him.

"I never! Forgot what you went after! You beat all, 'Lijy Morgan; you certainly do beat all."

"The man must 'a' sent your wits wool-gatherin', pa," cried Cynthia, jocosely.

'Lizabeth leaned forward. Her face was long, thin, and pale, and the smooth hair framing it glinted like silver in the firelight; but her dark eyes were wonderfully soft and beautiful, and her mouth had chastened, tender lines about it.

"Are you sick, 'Lijy?" she inquired, in a gentle, subdued voice, a voice with much underlying, patient sweetness in it.

Morgan gave her a grateful look. "N—no; but I don't think I care for any supper," he said slowly. "I'll step out an' see if the stock has all been fed."

When he returned Mrs. Morgan sat by the fire alone. He looked hastily about the room.

"Where is Cynthy?"

"Gone to bed."

"An' 'Lizabeth?"

"She's off, too."

He drew a sigh of relief, and stirred the fire into a brighter blaze.

"Marthy Ann, it was 'Zeki'l I saw this evenin'."

She dropped the coarse garment she was mending.

"'Zeki'l!"

"Hush! Yes; he lives up on the hill between here an' the store;" and then he went on to tell her about their meeting and conversation. Her hard, sharp-featured face softened a little when he came to 'Zeki'l's refusal to live with them or to have their kinship acknowledged.

"I'm glad to see he's got that much consideration. We left the old place because folks couldn't forget how he'd disgraced himself; an' to come right where he is! I never heard of anything like it. Why didn't he leave the State if he

wanted to save us more trouble?" wiping tears of vexation from her eyes. "You spent nearly all you had to get him out of prison, an' when he had to go to the penitentiary it killed his pa an' ma, an'—"

"Be silent, woman! you don't know what you are talkin' about!" he said sternly, writhing in his chair like a creature in bodily pain. "God A'mighty forgive me!" He paused, smote his knee with his open palm, and turned his face away.

"Well, if I don't know what I'm talkin' about, I'd like to know the reason!" she cried, with the same angry excitement. "You ain't been like the same man you were before that happened, you know you ain't. I'll never be willin' to claim kin with 'Zeki'l Morgan again, never! Folks may find out for themselves; an' they'll do it soon enough—don't you be pestered—soon enough."

But not a suspicion of the truth seemed to occur to Zion Hill settlement. The Morgans were welcomed with great friendliness, and 'Zeki'l alone failed to visit them. Children sat around his brother's fireside, a wife ministered to him; but he had forfeited all claim to such homely joys. The girls had evidently been informed of his relationship to them, for they looked askance at him as they passed along the road, pity and curiosity in their eyes. Once he came out of the blacksmith shop, and, meeting his sister-in-law in the roadway, stopped her, or she would have passed with averted head.

"You needn't be so careful, Marthy Ann," he said, without the slightest touch of bitterness in his calm tone.

"It is for the children's sake, 'Zeki'l," she said, her sallow face flushing with a feeling akin to shame. "I must think o' them."

He gave her a strange glance, then looked to the ground.

"I know; I thought o' them years ago."

"It's a pity you didn't think before—"

"Yes, so it is; but some deeds aren't to be accounted for, nor recalled either, no matter how deeply we repent."

"We sold out for the children's sake, but, Lord! I'm pestered now more than ever."

"Because I'm here?"

"Well, it ain't reasonable to think we can all go right on livin' here, an' folks not find out you an' 'Lijy are brothers."

"What would you like for me to do, Marthy Ann?"

She hesitated a moment, then drew a little nearer to him.

"Couldn't you go away? You've got nobody but yourself to think about, an' I know in reason 'Lijy would be glad to buy your place," with a careless, half-contemptuous glance at the cabin.

A dull flush passed over his face; his mouth twitched.

"Does 'Lijy want me to go?"

"He ain't said so; but—"

"I'll think about it," he said slowly, turning back to the smithy, where a red-hot tool awaited his hammer.

But thinking about it only seemed to bind his heart more closely than ever to the arid spot he called home. He had looked forward to spending all the remaining years of his broken, ruined life there, far from the world and from those who had known him in the past. Then a great desire had risen within him to remain near 'Lizabeth. He shrank from the thought of meeting her, speaking to her, and felt rather glad that she did not appear at church. A few times in passing he had caught a glimpse of her walking about the yard or garden in the winter sunshine, leaning on her crutch, and the sight had sent him on his way with downcast face. He had just sat down before the fire to smoke one evening when there came a timid knock on the door. It was just between daylight and darkness, and he supposed it to be some neighbor on his way to or from the store who wished to drop in to warm himself and gossip a little.

"Come in," he said hospitably, and, reaching out, drew the other chair nearer the fire.

The latch was slowly lifted, the door swung open, and then he started to his feet, pipe and tobacco falling to the floor, while his face flushed and paled, and his breath came in a sharp sigh. It was 'Lizabeth, her bonnet pushed back, her shawl hanging loosely around her shoulders.

"I've be'n to the store for Marthy Ann, I wanted to go to get out away from the house a little while, and I thought I'd step in for a minute, 'Zeki'l, to see you."

"You are tired; come an' sit down," he said huskily, and led her to the chair.

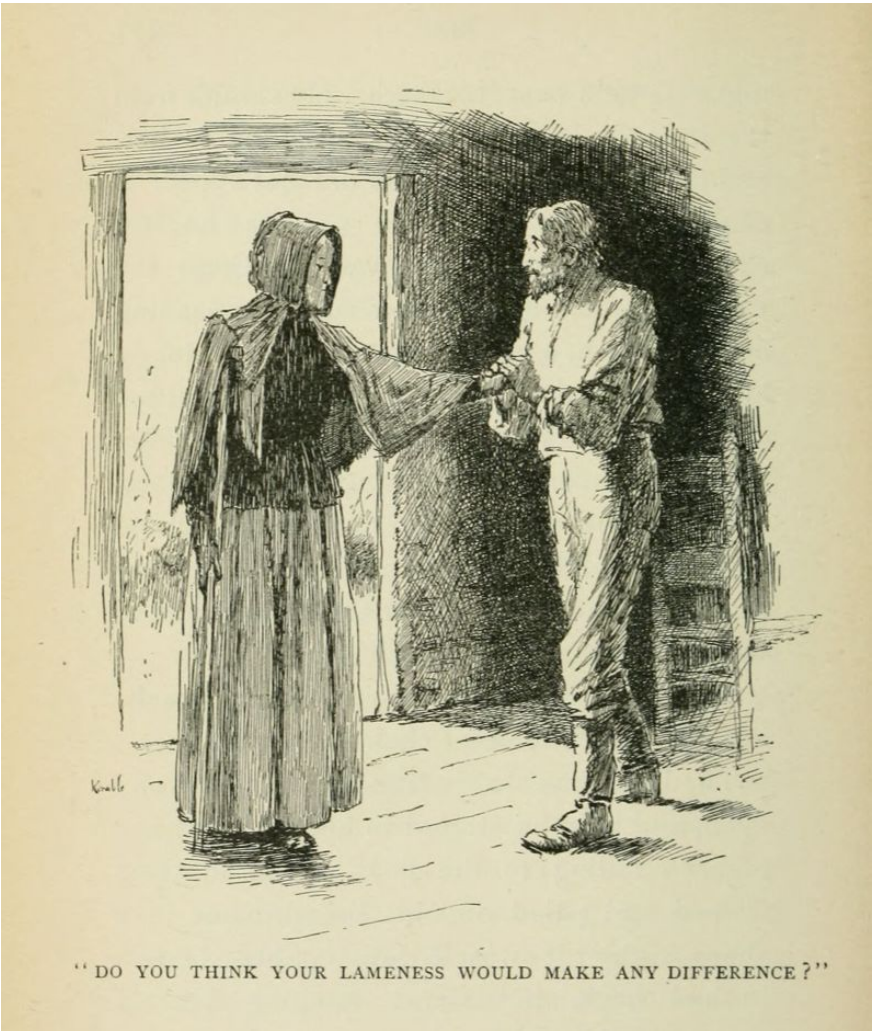
What emotion those simple, commonplace words covered! They looked at each other, silently noting the changes time and sorrow had wrought. They had never been openly declared lovers, but words were not needed for them to understand each other, and they knew that they would marry when she had finished her term as teacher in the county school, and he had built a house on the lot of land his father had given him. But that shameful, undenied accusation of horse-stealing, followed swiftly by trial and conviction, had put an end to all hopes, all plans.

"You see I'm a cripple now, 'Zeki'l," she said, to break the silence.

"An' I've grown old," he replied, and their eyes met again in a long, eloquent, steadfast gaze, and they knew that neither age, nor affliction, nor shame, nor separation had wrought any change in their love. It had only grown stronger and deeper. Her thin face flushed, her trembling fingers gathered up a fold of her gown.

"Why don't you come to see us, 'Zeki'l?"

"I can't, 'Lizabeth; I can't. It wouldn't be right. Don't you know I've been



"DO YOU THINK YOUR LAMENESS WOULD MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE?"

longin' to come, an' hungerin' an' hungerin' to see you?" He flung himself on the floor at her feet, his face hidden against her knees. "You don't know all! you don't know all!" The words were wrung from him by an almost uncontrollable desire to tell her the story of his sufferings. She had not turned against him nor forgotten him. It was almost more than he could bear, to read in her eyes her faith and her pardon. He felt the touch of her hand on his bared head, and tears gushed from his eyes.

"Can't you tell me?" she whispered, her face, her eyes, illumined by a pity and tenderness divine in their beauty.

"No, honey; it's somethin' I must bear alone, I must bear alone."

He rose to his feet again, brushing his sleeve across his eyes, and she stood up also, leaning on her crutch, the transient glow of color fading from her face.

"You shouldn't bear it alone if I didn't have this lameness. You—"

"Hush!" he said, and, taking her hand, pressed it against his breast. "Do you think your lameness would make any difference? Wouldn't I love you all the more, take care o' you all the better, for it? It's the disgrace, the shame, standin' between us. I'll never outlive it—get rid of it—an' I'll never ask any woman to share it. I couldn't."

Her physical infirmity held her silent. She would be a care and a burden to him rather than a help. She drew up her shawl.

"The Almighty comfort you, 'Zeki'l."

"An' take care o' you, 'Lizabeth."

He took her hand in a grasp painful in its closeness, then he turned and leaned against the mantel, and she went softly out of the room.

Winter passed. The frost-bound earth sent up faint scents and sounds of spring in fresh-plowed fields and swelling buds. 'Zeki'l wandered about his fields in idleness, striving to make up his mind to go away. It would be best, yet the sacrifice seemed cruel.

"It is more than I can bear," he cried aloud one night, and strained one of the violin-strings until it snapped asunder. He laid the instrument across his knees and leaned his head upon it. The candle burned dimly, and a bat flew in through the open door, circled around the room, at last extinguishing the feeble light with one of its outspread wings. But the unhappy man did not heed the gloom. Why should he care to have a light for his eyes when his soul was in such darkness? He groped his way to the bed, and fell down upon it. Rover came back from a nightly prowl, barked to let his master know of his presence, then lay down on the doorstep.

The sound of music vibrated through the air, and 'Zeki'l remembered that the young people of the settlement were to have a "singing" at his brother's that evening. He raised his head and listened. They were singing hymns, and many

of them were associated with recollections of his own youth. A line of Tom Moore's "Come, ye disconsolate," once a special favorite when sorrow seemed far from him, was borne to his ears:

Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.

He lay down and slept.

At dusk the next evening, as he was heating a piece of iron in the blacksmith shop, a man stopped at the wide-open door.

"Will you give me a night's lodging? I have walked far to-day, and I'm a stranger in this part of the country."

'Zeki'l wheeled, the light from the forge shining across his face. It brought out the stranger's face and form in bold relief also. "Why, it's Zeke Morgan!" he cried, walking into the shop.

"Yes: I thought I recognized your voice, Miller," said 'Zeki'l, slowly, and without much pleasure at the recognition.

They had been in prison together, and 'Zeki'l had left Miller there. He had never felt any liking for the man, and less now than ever, as he looked at his ragged clothing and dissipated face. He had evidently been steadily sinking in vice, and its repulsiveness was impressed upon his outward being. But a certain pity stirred 'Zeki'l's heart. He remembered his own friendlessness when he entered that settlement. Could he show less mercy than had been shown to him?

"Sit down, won't you?" he said kindly, blowing up the coals in the forge to a glowing heat.

"That I will. I'm footsore, and hungry as a bear. I'm in luck to meet with you, comrade," chuckling.

'Zeki'l winced. The man's familiarity grated upon him.

"Where are you goin'?" he inquired.

"Oh, nowhere in particular. I'm jest out."

"Why, I thought your time would be up in two years after I left."

Miller shrugged his shoulders. "Yes; but I made so many attempts to escape that they kept adding extra time to my term."

He sat down while 'Zeki'l finished his work.

"You seem to be getting on pretty well," he continued, his restless eyes scanning the surroundings.

"Only tolerable."

Two or three of the neighbors dropped in, one to leave a broken plow, another to tell a bit of gossip. They stared curiously at 'Zeki'l's disreputable companion, who jocosely informed them that Morgan had once been his chum.

'Zeki'l felt annoyed, and, closing up the shop, invited his guest into the house. They had supper, then sat down and smoked. Miller talked a good deal, and asked many questions about the neighborhood and the store; but at last he fell asleep, huddled up on the bed, and 'Zeki'l lay down on a bench, recollections of his prison life keeping him awake far into the night. When he awoke the next morning his guest was gone. He was glad of it. The man's presence oppressed him—brought a sense of degradation. But what were his feelings when he heard that Mr. Davy Tanner's store had been robbed, the mail-box rifled, letters torn open, and various articles of wearing apparel taken!

He grew so pale, seemed so agitated and confused, that the man who had come up to tell the news stared wonderingly, half-suspiciously at him. He had brought the plow to the shop the evening before, and he now looked around for the stranger.

"Where is your friend?" he inquired.

"He is no friend of mine."

"But he 'lowed that he knew you."

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In prison," said 'Zeki'l, quietly, though he flushed with shame.

"Aha! I lowed so, I jest 'lowed so, last night."

'Zeki'l tingled all over. He had never felt the degradation of being a convict more keenly than at that moment. He suspected Miller of the theft: this man's tone implied that he suspected them both. It showed how slight a hold he had upon the trust of his neighbors if they could so readily believe that he would rob the best friend he had in the settlement. He went into the house, and sat down by the hearth, his head leaned between his hands.

News of the robbery spread, and men left their work to go over to the store—stirred up, pleasantly excited. It was not often that Zion Hill settlement could boast of having anything so important as this robbery take place within its limits, and it must be made the most of.

'Zeki'l held aloof from the store, where he knew a large crowd had collected, but later in the day a small delegation came up to interview him. He read suspicion in every face, indignation in every eye. His quiet, honest life among them had been forgotten; they remembered only that he had been a convict.

"Once a thief, always a thief, I say!" one man cried loudly.

'Zeki'l clenched his hands, but what could he say in self-defense? He made a clear, straight-forward statement of all he knew about Miller, earnestly denying all knowledge of the robbery, but he felt the slight impression it made on their doubting minds. They did not openly accuse him, but they asked many questions, they exchanged knowing glances, and when they went away he felt that he had

been tried and condemned. The sheriff had gone in pursuit of Miller, and all day groups of men sat or stood about the store whittling sticks, chewing tobacco, and talking. It was a most enjoyable day to them. It afforded excitement, and gave an opportunity to air opinions—to bring forth old prejudices. There was almost universal condemnation of 'Zeki'l. He had entertained the thief, had given him all the information necessary, and the more bitter ones wagged their heads and said that no doubt he had shared in the spoils. Even Mr. Davy Tanner looked sad and doubtful, though he defended the unfortunate man.

"We've no right ever to accuse a person without evidence o' guilt. We don't know even that this other man had anything to do with it—though circumstances do all p'int that way—let alone 'Zeki'l Morgan. It's best to hold our peace till we find out the truth."

"But it looks mighty suspicious ag'in' 'Zeki'l."

"Because he's been in the penitentiary, an' we think he's got a bad name by it."

"Well, ain't that enough to set honest men ag'in' him?"

"Yes; but it ain't best to always judge a man by his misdeeds in the past, but rather by his good deeds in the present, an' what they promise for the future."

"Why not, when it's accordin' to scriptur'?"

So the talk went on, while 'Zeki'l sat by his fireless hearth or walked aimlessly up and down the yard. At dusk his brother called, looking almost as haggard as he did.

"It's a bad thing, 'Zeki'l."

"Yes," said 'Zeki'l, listlessly.

"They are fools to think you had anything to do with it, plumb fools."

"It's natural they should, 'Lijy."

"I can't stand it, 'Zeki'l! Lord! I can't stand it!"

He fell into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Chut, man! what does it matter?" said 'Zeki'l, bracing himself up and forcing a smile. "Don't let 'Lizabeth believe it, that's all I ask."

"She'll never believe it."

"It's all right, then; I'll not care what the rest o' the world thinks."

"But I do," cried 'Lijy, starting up, "an' I'll put an end to it by—"

"You'll not do anything rash, 'Lijy," said 'Zeki'l, firmly, quietly, and laid his hand on the other's shoulder. "Recollect your family."

He looked slight and insignificant by the side of his brother, but his face had a strength and calmness which seemed to give it a power the other lacked. 'Lijy groaned, and turned tremblingly away.

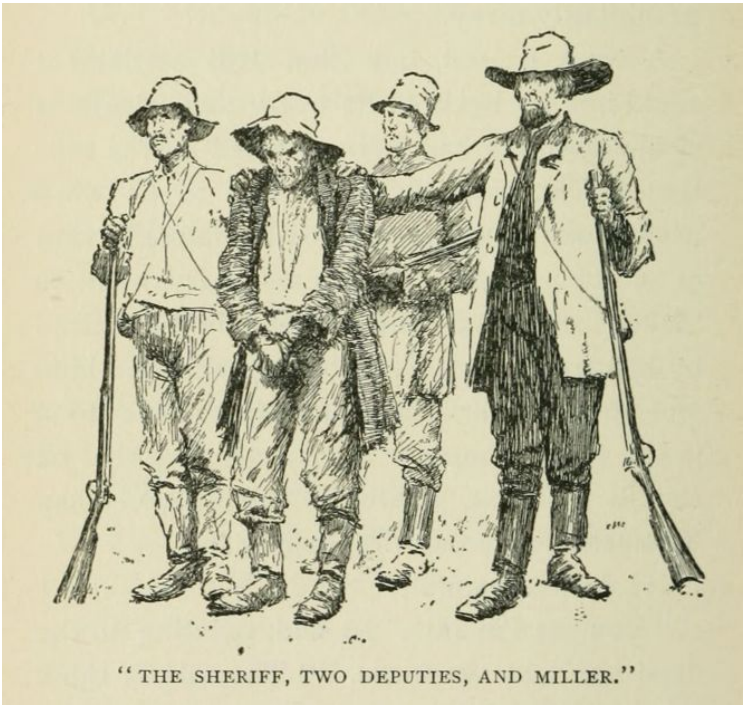
A week passed, but Zion Hill settlement could not go back to its every-day vocations until somebody had been arrested for the robbery. The man Miller

seemed to be wary prey, eluding his pursuers with the crafty skill of an old offender. It was a solitary week to 'Zeki'l. He had been completely ostracized by his neighbors. They openly shunned him, and no more work came to his forge. He stood in the empty shop one day, wondering what he should do next, where he should go, when 'Lizabeth walked slowly, quietly in.

He flushed painfully.

"You see I'm idle," he said, pointing to the dead coals in the forge. "They don't think I'm worthy o' doin' their work any longer."

"I wouldn't mind," she said, tenderly, laying her hand on his arm. "They'll see they are mistaken after a while, and be glad enough to come back to you."



"THE SHERIFF, TWO DEPUTIES, AND MILLER."

"THE SHERIFF, TWO DEPUTIES, AND MILLER."

"I don't know," with a heavy sigh. "It's the injustice that hurts me, an' the lack o' faith in my honesty. The years I've lived here count for nothin' with them."

"I have faith in you, 'Zeki'l."

He laid his hand over hers.

"If I had you, 'Lizabeth, if I only had you to help me bear it!"

"That's what I've come for, 'Zeki'l. I'm crippled. It may be that I'll turn out to be more of a burden than a comfort to you, but I can't sit down there any longer, knowin' you are here slighted and sufferin' all alone. 'Zeki'l, have pity on me, if you've none on yourself, and let me bear this trouble with you."

He trembled before the future her words conjured up.

"Could you, would you, be willin' to bear my disgrace, share it, be shunned like a plague, have no company, no friend, but me?"

"What are friends to the one we love, or company? I'd give up all the world, 'Zeki'l, willin'ly, willin'ly, for you."

He looked into her deep, earnest eyes, realized the full truth of her words, and drew her closer to him.

"It's a great sacrifice, 'Lizabeth, an' I'm wrong to let you make it; but—the Lord forgive me! I can't hold out alone any longer. My will an' my courage are all broke down. I need help; I need you."

After a momentary silence he dusted a bench, and they sat down to talk over their plans for the future. The shop, black with charcoal and iron dust, was a queer place for such a conversation; but they paid little heed to their surroundings.

"Marthy Ann will never get over your marryin' me," said 'Zeki'l.

"Then she can make the best of it."

The next day was Saturday, and the beginning of the regular monthly "meetin'" at Zion Hill church. Everybody in the settlement who could, attended services that day. The Morgans were all there, even 'Lizabeth, and 'Zeki'l sat in his accustomed place, apparently unmindful of the cold, hostile glances and whispers around him. Through open doors and windows shone golden sunlight, floated spicy odors from the woods surrounding all but the front of the church, which faced the public road; and vagrant bees mingled their lazy hum with the champing of bits and the stamping of iron-shod hoofs in the thickets, where the mules and the horses were tied.

It was a quiet but alert congregation. A kind of expectancy—of suspense—filled the air. No telling what might happen before the day was over. The preacher made the robbery the theme of his discourse, and there were nods and approving looks when he referred to the punishment laid up for those who persisted in doing evil. It was a fitting finale that just before the benediction was pronounced a small cavalcade rode up to the church door—the sheriff, two deputies, and Miller. A thrill ran through the church, a rustle, a whisper, and the preacher cried aloud to the sheriff:

"What do you want, Brother Mangum?"

"'Zeki'l Morgan."

"Here he is! here he is!" cried more than one voice, and men rose to their feet and laid eager hands on the unresisting 'Zeki'l.

"What do you want him for?" cried 'Lijy Morgan, rising from his seat in the deacons' corner. "What's he done?"

"Helped to rob the store."

"We've said so, we've said so, ever since it happened!" a chorus of stern but triumphant voices exclaimed.

"Bring up the witness ag'in' him, the man that says he did it," said 'Lijy, advancing to the open space before the pulpit.

"No man has said out an' out that he helped to do it, but Miller—"

"It's a lie," cried 'Lijy, loud enough to be heard beyond the church door.

'Zeki'l's eyes were fixed anxiously, warningly, on his brother, and once he tried to throw off the hands holding him.

"Prove it, then!" a taunting voice cried out.

"I will," said 'Lijy, though he grew pale, and trembled strangely. "A more honest man than 'Zeki'l Morgan never lived."

"What do you know of him?"

Again 'Zeki'l strove to free himself, but failed.

"'Lijy!" he called imploringly, "'Lijy, 'Lijy, mind what you say!"

'Lijy looked across at him.

"I will mind the truth, 'Zeki'l." He turned to the congregation.

"I come here with good recommendations, brethren; I am a deacon o' the church; you have faith in my integrity, my honor." An approving murmur went up. "If a dozen thieves were to stop at my house there'd be no suspicion against me." He paused, passed his hand over his face, then looked up again. "Years ago there were two brothers in this State who grew up together happy and contented. The elder one was always a little wild, and would get drunk sometimes, even after he'd married and had a family to look after, but the younger was the steadiest, best boy in the settlement. One night the elder brother, in a fit of drunken recklessness, stole a horse from the camp of a Kentucky drover, an' nobody found it out but his brother, who undertook to return the horse, an' was arrested. He took the guilt, he stood the trial, an' went to the penitentiary. He lost his good name, the girl he loved, his home, everything in the world an honest man values. He served his time, an' instead o' comin' home to be a reproach to his cowardly brother, he, when free, went away into a strange settlement to live. An' by an' by his brother moved there too, an' his conscience hurt him more an' more as he saw what a sad, lonesome life the convict lived. He was prosperous, he enjoyed the confidence of his fellow-men, while the other was shunned, and regarded with distrust." Emotion checked his utterance for a moment; then he turned and pointed to 'Zeki'l. "Brethren, look at that man; look without prejudice or suspi-

cion, an' you'll not see guilt in his face nor on his conscience. There never lived a truer hero than 'Zeki'l Morgan. Nobody should know it better than I, for I am the brother whose crime he suffered for."

Then he walked across the floor to 'Zeki'l's side in the midst of the deepest silence which had ever fallen upon a congregation in Zion Hill church.

WAS IT AN EXCEPTIONAL CASE?

The Capelles were Louisianians, of French descent, and before the war lived in New Orleans, occasionally visiting their plantations on Red River. But Anthony Capelle was killed in the battle of Vicksburg, and after the surrender Mrs. Anthony Capelle sold the Red River plantations for about half their value, placed her New Orleans property in the hands of a lawyer, gathered up some of her household stuffs, books, and other things she prized, and with her little daughter Madeline, and one old negro who had spent his life in the service of the Capelles, removed to Marietta, Georgia. Those were days of change and great confusion, and she disappeared from New Orleans and the knowledge of old friends without calling forth comment or question, and she was received into the social life of Marietta in the same way. It was not the time to sit in judgment on one's neighbors—to probe for secret motives or purposes. A common woe made all akin. From a merchant and planter who wished to sell out and go west to recuperate his broken fortunes, Agnese Capelle bought a house and lot on the northeast side of the town, and with her small family settled quietly down. It was a picturesque old house, built after the colonial fashion, and set back from the street in the seclusion of an oak grove. In the early spring the graveled walks were bordered with jonquils and mountain pink, and from April to December the roses bloomed along the garden fence and around the piazza.

The tumult following the war died away. People ceased to go about with a helpless, bewildered look as they learned to adjust themselves to the new conditions of life, and realized that the negro could no longer be regarded as a slave, but as a free citizen, with all the rights and privileges of citizenship. The laws of the country made white and black equal, but there was some bitter triumph in the consciousness that unwritten social laws would hold them forever apart, two distinct races, one degraded by color and past servitude. On the surface of life the agitations and thrills of the strong undercurrents ceased to make much

impression; they had sunk too deep. The country at large settled to outward peace, and from politics and social questions attention turned to commerce and manufacture, to the development of rich mineral resources, and to literature. But the years passed quietly enough over the Capelles. They were so strongly fixed in their pride and prejudices against social equality that they pursued their own gentle, even way, untouched by the convulsions and throes of fierce indignation around them. Their servants were treated with kindness and consideration, and when the old man who had clung to them with unbroken faith through slavery and freedom died, they wept over him, and felt that a noble friend had been lost, though also a negro and a servant. And Madeline developed into womanhood, beginning her education at her mother's knee, and finishing it at a college in Virginia.

She was gifted above the average girl in wit and beauty, and possessed not only fascinating, lovely manners, but the tenderest heart and the finest sympathies. She was a girl of ardent temperament, but refined and delicate in all her tastes, and pure in thought and aspiration. She had strong convictions and opinions of her own, read and reflected more than the ordinary Southern girl, and loved music passionately. The simplest strain could make her eyes kindle, her color come and go, in a sort of silent rapture, and the pathos of a negro song moved her heart deeply. In person she was slightly above medium height, and held her head with an imperial grace not at all unsuitable to her youth and her French ancestry. Her hair was burnished brown, with a crisp wave in it, her eyes blue-gray and brilliant. But she lacked the clear, thin, transparent skin usually accompanying such hair and eyes, the blood pulsing through it pink as a rose. Hers was soft as velvet, with an opaque creamy tint, and the faintest suggestion of color, ordinarily. She had scores of friends, and in her own small family circle was looked upon as the most beautiful and lovable girl in the world. In Agnese Capelle's love for this fair daughter there was a passionate protective tenderness, a subtle quality one would have called pity, had not such a thing seemed absurd in connection with Madeline. While not betraying any undue anxiety over her marriage and settlement in life, she studied each suitor that appeared on the scene, and if eligible, gave him a gracious welcome. But Madeline's heart remained in her own possession until she met Roger Everett.

Marietta was just attracting the attention of the Northern invalid and also the Northern capitalist. A few delicate, weak-lunged people had found their way to it, and a company of enterprising men had projected a railroad to pass through the north Georgia mountains, across the Blue Ridge, and into North Carolina and Tennessee. Along the line of this road marble quarries were being opened and gold and talc mines discovered; but Marietta still preserved its provincial ways and appearances, its best houses the old colonial mansions, its churches

overgrown with ivy, Cherokee-rose hedges bounding the pastures and gardens on the outskirts of the town, and inclosing the neglected-looking graveyard. Its picturesque hills were overshadowed by Kennesaw Mountain, with the solitary peak of Lost Mountain rising far to the south, and the dim, broken outline of the Blue Ridge range bounding the northern horizon. The hills and the mountains are still there, but the town has caught the spirit of progress sweeping with electrical effect over the South. Handsome modern residences are springing up, hotels and boarding-houses are being opened, and on the northeast side of the town a beautiful national cemetery has been laid out, where the Union soldiers who fell in the battles around Atlanta lie buried. The public square is still the scene of lively traffic in the fall, when the streets are crowded with wagons heavily loaded with cotton, the farmers, white and black, standing around, clothed in jeans and homespun, while the buyers go about thrusting sampling-hooks into the great bales to test the quality of the cotton and to determine its market value. But these brown, tobacco-chewing countrymen jostle the New Yorker, the Bostonian, and, indeed, people from all parts of the Union, seeking health and fortune.

Roger Everett was one of the first New England men to find his way to Marietta, and to invest in the Pickens County Marble Works. He belonged to *the* Everetts of Massachusetts, a family of strong abolitionists, and possessed his share of the traditional New England reserve and the deeply rooted New England pride. For a year or two he devoted himself almost exclusively to business, making only occasional visits to Marietta; but his circle of acquaintances widened, and, being young and handsome and cultivated, he was at last drawn into the social life of the town, and few parties or picnics were complete without him. He and Madeline met at one of the picnics, danced together once at one of the parties, but their acquaintance really began the day a large party went up the new railroad to the marble works. It fell to Everett to play the part of cicerone, and though Madeline shrieked less and asked fewer questions than the other girls, there was an intelligent comprehension in her eyes when he explained the process of getting out the marble from the quarries, and the machinery used for cutting it into blocks, that made him feel that he was talking directly to her. They lunched on the bank of Long Swamp Creek, with the purple shadows of the mountains falling over them, and mountain laurel in bloom all about them. Then Madeline and the young Northerner strolled away down the stream to look for maidenhair ferns. They talked at first on general topics, and then the girl asked some questions about the North, drawing in her breath with little quivering sighs as he told her of frozen rivers, of snows so deep one could scarcely walk through them, of sleighing and skating.

"And—and is it true what they say about the negroes?" she questioned hesitatingly, curious to hear with her own ears the opinion of one of these rabid

abolitionists—at least she had read in the papers that they were rabid.

He smiled, broke off a bit of laurel, pink and fragrant, and offered it to her.

"What do they say, Miss Capelle?"

"That they are equal—that we should recognize them. Oh, I hardly know how to explain it," breaking off with a little laugh, not caring to tread too boldly on delicate ground for fear he should feel wounded.

"We respect them where they deserve it, just as we do all men," he said calmly.

"Regardless of color?"

"Yes. What has the color of a man's skin to do with the question of his worth?"

"Everything, if he is a negro. Could you—I beg your pardon for asking the question—sit at the table with a *negro?* actually break bread with him as your equal?"

"If he were a gentleman, yes," firmly, his blue eyes meeting hers fearlessly.

"Oh, oh! how could you? I cannot understand it. I am fond of some negroes. I loved Uncle Sam, I like Aunt Dilsey, and I'm sorry for them as a race, but meet them on common ground I could not." And then they drifted away from the dangerous topic.

He walked with her and her mother to the train that evening, and Mrs. Capelle invited him warmly and graciously to call upon them when he came to Marietta again.

"He is interesting," she said to Madeline, with a backward glance through the car window at his tall, slight figure as the train swept them away from the station.

"Do you think so, *chérie* mama?" indifferently, *her* eyes looking down upon her lap.

"He is handsome and well-bred."

"Oh, he is a Yankee," maliciously.

"He is a gentleman."

And then they looked at each other and laughed gently, and Madeline held up a little paper-weight of pale pink marble, veined with threads of white, that he had selected and ordered polished for her as a souvenir of the day.

From that day it was a clear case of strong mutual attraction. What though they had been differently trained, and their opinions clashed on some points? They came out of wordy controversies firmer friends than ever. There was never-ending interest in their combats, and the lightest jest or banter held a fascination keen as the brightest wit. He called Madeline a narrow-minded, illiberal provincial, for holding such fierce prejudices against the colored people, and she retorted that the negro had become a sentiment to the North, and that if they,

the Yankees, would give some of their attention and pity to the poor white people crowding their large cities, the South would solve its own great problem. Sometimes they parted in anger; but it was short-lived, for love drew them with irresistible force, and if they disagreed on a few questions, how many hopes, thoughts, and desires they had in common! what taste and sympathy!

Mrs. Capelle looked on, sighed, and smiled, but waited in silence for Madeline's confidence. And one evening she came in, knelt at her mother's feet, put her arms around her, and pressed her flushed, tremulous, radiant face against her bosom. Mrs. Capelle flushed and trembled herself, and gathered that proud young head closer to her heart.

"You have promised to marry him," she said in a whisper.

"He asked me again this evening. I could not put him off," Madeline confessed, also in a whisper.

"Coquette! Did you want to put him off?"

"N—no."

"Oh, oh! he is a Yankee."

"I love him."

"He may take you away to his hard, his cold New England."

"We are to live here with you."

"Without consulting me? Fie! what aggressive children!"

"You are glad, mama. Why are you so glad I'm to be married?"

"I am longing to see you safe, my darling," dropping her teasing tone, and speaking with sudden agitation.

"Am I not safe with you?" lifting her head, and looking tenderly into the delicate face above her.

"But I am not strong, sweet, and I may be called suddenly from you some day, and it is not good for girls to be alone. It will be comforting to leave you in such hands. He is noble, he is good, and will love you faithfully. Ah, Madeline, he is strong and firm; he will rule my wilful girl."

"I should not love him if I could rule him," said Madeline, proudly.

Mrs. Capelle laughed and kissed her. "Tell me all about it," she said softly. They talked until the hand of the clock pointed to twelve, and only the barking of a dog or two pierced the silence resting upon the town.

"We have no secrets—no secrets from each other, have we, mama?" said Madeline with a happy laugh.

"No secrets, sweet? No, no; there should be no secrets between mother and child," said the elder woman; but her eyes fell; a paleness swept over her face. It was a swift, subtle change, unnoticed by the girl in the delicious absorption of her thoughts.

That was a winter to live in the memory of those lovers as long as they

lived. Every one of the swiftly flying days seemed to have its own special joy, its own sweet experiences. When apart, there were long letters written out of the fullness of their hearts; when together, long talks, or delicious silences in which it seemed enough that they could be together.

And there were letters from his New England home to her, one from his mother, as sweet and gentle as her own mother could have written.

"She must be lovely, Roger," she said to him.

"She is," he replied with proud loyalty. "I am longing for you to see her."

"I shrink from it, for if she should not be pleased with me—"

"She must; she cannot help it, dearest. Ah! you know that you'll charm her," putting his hand under her chin, and turning her face upward to his eyes, its palpitant color, proud, shy eyes, and lovely tremulousness, a tacit confession of his power.

Before she could elude him—for with all her caressing ways and Southern temperament, lending itself so naturally to demonstrativeness, she was very chary of her favors—he drew her into his arms against his heart, and kissed her.

Mrs. Capelle spent those winter days sewing on fine linen, cambric, sheer muslin, and lace, stitching many loving thoughts into the dainty garments intended for Madeline's wardrobe. Imperceptibly, as it were, she had grown very fragile, and the least excitement caused her to palpitate and tremble, with flushed face and hand pressed upon her heart.

She had been a devout Catholic in her youth, and though removed from her church, she still occasionally attended mass in Atlanta, and went to confession. But as the winter passed, her thoughts turned longingly to Father Vincent, her old father confessor, and one day in the early spring she received a letter from him. He would in a short time pass through Marietta on his way to the North. Could he stop for a day with them? It seemed such a direct answer to her secret desire for his counsel that she joyfully hastened to reply, telling him how she needed his advice and his blessing.

She had rejoiced over Madeline's engagement, but as the time set for her marriage drew near, some secret trouble seemed to wear upon her, much to the girl's distress.

"What is it, mama?" she asked, sitting at her feet, and taking her hand and laying it against her cheek.

"What can it be but the loss of you, sweet?" she replied quickly. "You must allow me to be jealous and foolish."

"But you are not going to lose me, dearest mama, and are you sure—I have fancied there must be something else troubling you."

"Indeed you must not think so; I am selfish to—"

"Selfish! You, the best and sweetest woman in the world, selfish! I'll not

believe that." Still she did not feel satisfied, and was greatly relieved when Father Vincent came, and she saw her mother brighten and look like her old self. It was about two weeks before the wedding that he came, and was persuaded to stop with them two days instead of one. He was an old man, small, slender, and ascetic looking, with clear, calm eyes, and a sweet voice.

It was the afternoon of his arrival that Madeline went out to make some calls, but after one visit changed her mind, and returned home. She did not at once go to her mother, knowing that she and Father Vincent would probably have much to say to each other, but turned into the parlor, cool, dusky, and deserted, and went to the little alcove, where she had left her embroidery and the last letter from her lover. It was simply a corner of the big room, furnished with a lounge and a small table, and shut in by soft silk curtains. How long she had been there, re-reading that letter, dreaming over her work, she could not tell, when roused by footsteps and voices in the room—her mother and the priest.

"You hinted at some special cause for trouble in your letter," he said, as they sat down in close proximity to those curtains and Madeline's retreat.

"Yes; it concerns Madeline."

"What of her? I thought her future had been settled. Is she not to be married in a short time?"

"Yes; but, Father, she is not my child, and I am growing doubtful of the honor of my course in regard to this marriage."

"Not your child!" exclaimed Father Vincent in surprise, for he thought that he knew all the Capelle secrets.

"No. I would to God that she were!" she said with deep emotion, "for I love her so well that I'd gladly give my life to know that pure, unmixed blood flowed in her veins."

His chair creaked as he drew it a little nearer her; his voice sank to a low key:

"You do not mean—"

"Yes; her mother was a quadroon," in a trembling whisper.

Did he hear that strange gasping sigh, as of a dumb creature struck by a mortal blow, that he so quickly and abruptly exclaimed:

"Where is she now?"

"Out calling. I did not dare speak of this while she was in the house, for fear the very walls would betray the secret. She must never know it, never! It would ruin her life, kill her, my poor, proud child!"

Her voice broke in tears.

"Tell me the whole story," said the priest gently, but with authority.

"Yes, yes; that is what I am longing to do. The secret has become a burden to me: I want to be assured that I have acted rightly about her marriage. You

remember my husband's brother, Lawrence Capelle?"

"Well, very well; a handsome young fellow, but rather wild."

"And lovable with it all. He died while my husband and I were in France—we were there three years—and before his death he wrote to Anthony, begging him to look after the welfare of a child, a baby, and giving the history of his attachment to a beautiful quadroon in New Orleans. Her mother had been a slave, but this girl had been born free, received a very good education, and grew up superior to her class. She had loved him with rare faith and tenderness, and died at the birth of the child."

"They were not married, of course?"

"Married? Oh, no; but he had really been quite fond of her, and he dwelt at length upon the beauty and intelligence of the child. We came home very quietly, and before going to our own house, or betraying our presence to even intimate friends, we sought her out, and the moment I took her in my arms, looked into her eyes—Lawrence's own beautiful gray eyes, smiling with innocent fearlessness straight into my own—my heart went out to her in such a gush of love, pity, tenderness, I did not feel that I could ever be parted from her. Father, she was the loveliest, most lovable child I ever saw. We adopted her, we made her our very own, and no one knew that she had not really been born to us abroad. Not even to you, Father, did we confess the truth. The war came then, and Anthony died at Vicksburg; but I could not feel utterly alone, utterly bereft, while I had Madeline. I made plans for her; I said that she should never know that she was not truly my own child. Her training, her education, became the absorbing interest of my life. After the close of the war I thought it best for her sake to leave New Orleans, to seek a new and more obscure home, away from old friends, old ties. If we remained there she might in some way learn the truth. We came here, you and my lawyer alone knowing where to find us. I have brought her up most carefully. She is refined, beautiful, accomplished, and innocent as a young girl should be, but you can see for yourself what she is. I instilled the strongest race prejudices into her mind. I impressed it upon her that the negro is an inferior creature, a servant of servants, to be treated with kindness, but never to be considered an equal; for a morbid fear that her mother's blood would betray itself in some coarse or degraded taste, haunted me. But I am no longer afraid for her. Have I acted with wisdom? Have I done well to lift her up?"

"Assuredly; only"—he reflected a moment—"only your extreme course in regard to color prejudice would make the truth a hundredfold harder to bear should she discover it."

"But she shall not discover it. In two weeks she will be married to this young Northerner, her life merged into his, her very name lost. Is it right, is it cheating him?"

"If you cannot tell her, then you must not tell him, for it would only be to raise a barrier of secrecy between them."

"Tell me there is no dishonesty, no sin in it, and my heart will be at rest."

"According to my understanding, Agnese Capelle, there is none, but the highest human understanding is at best but poor authority. You have rescued this child from the common fate of her class, elevated her, thrown around her love, protection, the honor of a good name. You save her from the consequences of her father's sin. Be contented with your work. For marriage will be the crowning of it, and if she is noble, neither origin nor birth can make her less precious to her husband. I only wish there were more women like you in this country."

She drew a long breath of relief, but humbly said:

"Do not credit me with being a humanitarian. It was simply for love of her I did it all, and lately I have craved your blessing on it, Father Vincent, for I have developed the heart-disease hereditary in my family, and look any hour to be called hence."

A little longer they talked, and then went away, Mrs. Capelle to seek some repose after the excitement of the interview, and the priest to stroll about the grounds in prayer or meditation.

When the last sound of their footsteps and voices died away, the curtains were drawn aside, and Madeline came out of her retreat. She looked wan and ghastly, and groped her way across the room and up to her own apartment as though stricken with sudden blindness.

She closed and locked the door, then flung herself prone upon the floor. She felt like writhing and screaming aloud instead of lying there like a senseless log, only her tongue seemed paralyzed, her body numbed. And yet she could think—think with burning, agonizing intensity. Could it be true, or only a hideous nightmare out of which she would presently wake? Her mother a quadroon, her grandmother a slave! She wondered that the very thought of it did not kill her. Her name, her pride, everything that she had cherished, had been torn from her, and she—she had been hurled down into a black abyss where she must grovel and suffer until death set her free. Strange visions seemed to come before her out of the remote past—visions of African jungles, of black, half-naked savages borne across the seas to be bought and sold, to pine and fret in bondage, longing for the freedom which never came to them.

They were her ancestors; their blood, degraded by generations of slavery, flowed in her veins. Her education, her refinement, her prejudices would only be instruments of torture now, with that secret consciousness of shame and degradation underlying them. It was as cruel, as complete, as if it had been planned with Machiavellian art to this ending; and through the confused misery of her thoughts ran a sensation of pity for her mother, that she had so unconsciously

spoiled her work. Presently the stunned feeling passed, and she rose to her feet again, and walked about the room. On the bed and chairs were strewed the pretty things belonging to her wedding outfit. Half unconsciously she folded and put them away. She would not need them now. Once she went to the mirror, and, leaning close to it, looked at herself, seeking for traces of that race she had been taught to regard as the lowest on earth. Did that soft fullness of lip, that crisp wave in her hair, that velvety, opaque skin come from her mother? A momentary savage rage thrilled her. She struck the glass so fierce a blow with her closed hand that it cracked from bottom to top. Then her eyes fell on her lover's picture, placed in an open velvet frame, and she paled and shuddered. She did not touch it, though a hundred times it had been pressed to heart and lip, but gazed at it with that intense parting look we give the dead before they are hidden forever from us; then she leaned over the bureau, her head bowed upon her folded arms.

The afternoon passed; twilight crept into the room. Faint sounds of life came up from the lower part of the house; the tea-bell rang; at last some one came slowly, heavily up the stairs, shuffled across the hall, and knocked on her door.

"Miss Mad'line, Miss Mad'line." She opened the door, and found Aunt Dilsey standing there, a big, coffee-colored mulatto woman, panting from the exertion of mounting the stairs, the wrinkles in her fat neck filled with little streams of perspiration. "Miss Agnese an' de priest man air waitin' fo' yo' to come down to supper, honey, an' Miss Agnese say hurry, de cakes gwine git cold," she said in a full rich voice; but Madeline only caught her by the shoulder, and stared at her thick brown skin, her coarse crinkled hair, her protruding lips, and broad figure. So her grandmother might have looked. "Fo' mercy's sake, honey, what's de matter? Air yo' sick?" cried Aunt Dilsey in a frightened, anxious tone; but the girl only turned from her, and fell upon the bed with a moan of despair.

She heard the old negress hurrying downstairs, and then her mother's light swift steps, and tried to compose herself.

"My darling, what is the matter?" cried Mrs. Capelle, bending tenderly, anxiously over her.

"It is only a—a—headache," said Madeline, glad that the twilight hid her face from those loving, searching eyes.

"Are you sure? Dilsey frightened me so."

"Dilsey is a foolish old creature."

Mrs. Capelle felt of her hands, her face.

"You are feverish. You were in the hot sun too much this afternoon."

"Yes; that was it—the sun. Don't be anxious, mama. It is nothing. Go back to Father Vincent, and I'll sleep, and be well to-morrow."

"But I do not like to leave you."

"You must, *chérie.* Remember your guest."

"Yes, yes; so I must. I will come up again presently."

She stooped to arrange a pillow, and to kiss her, and Madeline raised herself up, threw her arms around her.

"My own good, sweet mama, my dear, lovely one!" she murmured. "You do everything for my comfort and happiness. You would not hurt me for the world, would you?"

"Hurt you, sweet?"

"I know you would not. I—I like to tease you a little. Kiss me good-night, and go. *Poor mama!*" she murmured under her breath, as they held each other, in a love no bond of flesh and blood could have made stronger.

"How can I tell her that I know! How can I!" Madeline moaned when left again alone.

But she did not have that cruel task, for sometime during that night, while she turned wakefully on her bed, or paced softly about the room, Agnese Capelle received the summons she had been so long expecting. Next morning only her fragile body lay between the white sheets of her bed, the life, the spirit gone.

Madeline was strangely calm through all the excitement and confusion following, and went herself to select a sunny open spot in the neglected little cemetery for her mother's grave.

"She loved sunshine," she said to Everett and Father Vincent, "and she wished to be buried here."

She preserved the same stony quiet through the funeral and burial, and friends commented and wondered, and Roger watched her anxiously. He felt an indefinable change in her, but attributed it to the shock of her mother's sudden death. Father Vincent studied him with keen eyes, but could find no fault. He was a manly man, and a tender, considerate lover.

It was the third evening after her mother's burial that Madeline called Father Vincent into the little study adjoining the parlor. The New Orleans lawyer had come up, held a private interview with her, and had gone away again, and she had sent off her wedding trousseau to a young girl in a distant town, and certain things belonging to her mother she had carefully collected and put together. So much Aunt Dilsey, the priest, and a kind old lady who proposed to stay with her a few days knew; but she offered no explanation, and gave no clue to her plans for the future.

"She acts for all the world like she didn't expect to get married, herself," the old lady confided to a friend or two. "I can't understand what she intends to do."

Father Vincent felt some curiosity too, and went into the little room rather

eagerly. She sat before her mother's desk with a lot of papers open before her. It came upon him with the force of surprise that she had changed greatly in a few days. Her features were sharpened, her eyes had purplish hollows under them, and the dull black gown she wore only brought out the intense pallor of her face.

"My child, where did you get those papers? You must let me examine them. There are some your mother wished destroyed," said the priest, hastily.

"I know, Father, I know," she said in a dull tone.

"Have you—"

"Read them? No; but I heard all that she told you that day."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, understanding why she looked so changed, and his eyes rested pityingly upon her. A fiery blush burned her throat and face for a moment, leaving her paler than ever when it receded.

"Yes; I know," she said, and clasped her hands together on her lap. "Father, will you tell Mr. Everett?"

"But—"

"I cannot do it; help me, will you?"

It was a piteous appeal, and his heart melted at the sight of her anguished eyes.

"You think he ought to know it?"

"He must, of course," she said, and he felt satisfied that she had not, for a moment even, been tempted to keep the truth from him. "He is in the parlor," she continued after a slight pause; "tell him all, spare nothing," her tensely drawn lips quivering, her hands tightly clenched.

"My child, you take it too hard," laying his hand on her head. "I am grieved for you, but do not let it spoil your peace."

"How can I help it, Father, with the training I have had? I cannot change my beliefs in a day. Oh, you know how my friends would shrink from me if they knew the truth, and I—I cannot blame them. I should do the same. There is no help, no comfort, for me anywhere."

"There is the comfort of the Church, the help of Heaven."

"Ah, yes; I forget—I forget."

"But hear your lover before you decide your future. He has a right to it, remember."

"Tell him, Father, tell him."

He went away, and, turning the light a little lower, she waited. He made the story short, for in a few minutes the door opened again and her lover entered. She rose to meet him, determined to be brave and self-possessed, but that new, bitter sense of shame again overpowered her. She seemed to shrink and shrivel under his tender eyes, and sank down with bowed head. But he knelt by her chair with his arms around her, and drew that proud, averted face against him.

"Dearest, dearest," he whispered, the very tone of his voice carrying to her his sympathy, his unshaken love.

"I thank God that I learned the truth in time," she said faintly.

"In time for what, Madeline?"

"To save you."

He raised her face, forced her to look at him.

"Do you believe my love has changed?"

"It has an element of pity now."

"But pity for your suffering, and not because I hold you less noble. I can take care of myself and you also, my darling. Father Vincent and I agree that it will be best for you to go North, get away from old associations, old ideas; so we'll be married quietly, and leave here at once." He rose, and she stood up also, facing him, looking straight into his eyes.

"Did Father Vincent tell you *all*? Do you realize just what I am?"

"Yes; you are the woman I love—my promised wife. Can I hold you blamable, dearest, or unlove you simply because—come, Madeline, put all the past behind you, and we will never speak of this again."

"Impossible, Roger. You are generous, and I'm not afraid that you would ever reproach me, but it is not worth while for us to argue the matter. We cannot marry. In my own sight I have been humbled into the dust, and as your wife I should always have a cringing, cowardly feeling of unworthiness. I could not be happy myself, and my misery would only overshadow you. Don't think me unreasonable or lacking in love. Love! It fills all my heart, pervades every atom of my being. I loved you at once—the first moment, I think, that my eyes rested upon you. The prejudices which seemed so foolish, so false, are interwoven, blended with life itself. We, here, call them instincts, holding us apart from the lower order of man, and my education only fostered, developed them to the utmost in me."

"If your mother had only—"

"Don't think hardly of her, my dearest. She is not to blame. She brought me up as she believed best, and implanted the principles and beliefs she thought would be my surest safeguards. As she grew weak and ill the secret burdened her, and for fear that she might be wronging you she sought Father Vincent's advice. How I thanked God that she died without knowing that her work was all undone!" She flung herself again into the chair, and he saw that she was too excited, too overwrought, to be reasoned with.

She looked up at him.

"Had you known my birth, my parentage, from the first, could you have loved me?"

"I do not know," he said candidly; "I only know that I do love you, and that

I will not give you up." His face flushed, his eyes kindled. "You must, you shall, be my wife. But we will not talk of it any more to-night: you need rest, and time to recover from the double shock which has come upon you. To-morrow—every day, I shall come, until you learn to look at this as I do. Good-night, Madeline. Think wisely, reasonably, dear."

"I will try; and you will know my decision to-morrow, Roger."

He bent over her, kissed the bright waves of her hair; but she started up, and clasped her arms about him, drawing his lips down to hers in an abandonment of love she had never shown before. Tears rained from her eyes, the stony curves of her mouth melted, and he felt that it was a tacit surrender.

"To-morrow you will listen to me, Madeline," he said with the certainty of conviction.

"Yes; to-morrow," she replied, and turned, weeping, from him.

But when he came next morning Father Vincent met him at the door, while the old lady and Aunt Dilsey hovered in the hall with frightened, excited faces. Fear, vague, indefinite, but chilling, fell upon him. He had spent half the night in thinking and planning; he had felt assured that it needed only time and change of scene to restore Madeline to her former brightness; but even if a cloud should always hang over her, he wished to share its gloom. He could not fully appreciate her position, because he could not look at it from her standpoint. He could understand that it had been a cruel blow to her, but he could not understand how tragical. He felt very hopeful as he walked over to her home, but the face of the priest, those women in the background, startled him.

"What is the matter?" he cried sharply.

"She is gone," said Father Vincent.

"Gone!" he echoed, paling suddenly, and half reeling.

"Yes."

"Where? In God's name, where?"

"That is what we do not know. She must have gone away on the early train this morning."

The blood came back to the young man's face, a hideous fear lifted from his mind.

"You do not think then—"

"No; a Capelle would never seek self-destruction."

Everett stood still and looked about the hall and through the open doors into the silent rooms, yesterday filled with the sweet influence of her presence, to-day empty, desolate, and a terrible sense of loss swept over him. Her words, "You will know my decision to-morrow," came back to his memory with crushing significance.

"Fool, fool that I have been!" he groaned aloud, and the priest took him by

the arm and led him into the parlor.

"The women think her mind has been upset by her mother's sudden death. It is well; let all her friends think so. But we must find her, Mr. Everett."

"Yes; I will go at once," said Roger, rousing himself. "It is to hide from me that she has gone away; but I shall find her, I shall certainly find her."

He spoke firmly and quietly, but the task before him proved very hard, for she had left no written message, no clue to her plans or destination.

It was a spring day in the year 1886 that Roger Everett turned aside from the beaten track of the tourist in New Orleans to visit a school in the old quarter of the city—a school maintained by a few New England philanthropists for colored children exclusively. He lost his bearings in the narrow streets among the quaint old-fashioned houses, and stopped to make inquiries at a small building opening on the street. He rapped on the half-closed wooden shutter with his stick, his eyes meanwhile wandering up and down the silent, sunny street, absently noting the scant, picturesque attire of some brown-faced children at play on the sidewalk and the pathetic figure of an old negro sitting on a doorstep. His failure to find Madeline Capelle had left its traces upon his face. Five years had elapsed since her disappearance, and though he had not ceased to look into every woman's face he met, he had given up hope of finding her. A serene-eyed woman in a black gown and cap came to the door, and he instantly recognized the dress as the uniform of some religious order or sisterhood.

"Come in," she said in a gentle, subdued tone.

"I beg your pardon. I merely wished to—"

"It will not be an intrusion. Many have already come to-day to see her, for you know many love her. This way, please," she said, and without waiting for him to speak again, she turned and walked through two rather bare, dusky rooms into a small one opening on a green, magnolia-shaded court. He followed her, puzzled, but with a touch of curiosity, wondering how he should explain himself; but the moment he crossed the threshold he understood the mistake that she had made, for in the centre of the room stood a white-draped bier, and through the unfolded linen he could trace the outline of a rigid human form.

"See the flowers," his conductress whispered, pointing to the masses of cape jasmines, roses, and smaller flowers. "Sister Christiana loved them, but she loved all things beautiful and good. They were brought this morning by negroes she has been kind to. To teach, to elevate, and to nurse them has been her mission. No service seemed too humble, no duty too hard for her. She did indeed 'belong to Christ.'"

Her mild eyes kindled, her hand instinctively sought the cross at her side.

"She died calmly and with joy, and knew us until the last moment."

He followed her across the room, treading softly, as we always do in the presence of death. With reverent hand she laid aside the shielding linen, and he leaned forward—the past once more a vivid reality and not a memory, not a dream vanishing from him, for the face he looked down upon was the face of Madeline Capelle.

AN OLD-TIME LOVE STORY.

The Galers lived on the summit of a long hill sloping down to the brink of the Chattahoochee River, and nearly opposite the small town of Roswell. Above the house and below it stretched the fertile acres of a fine plantation worked by many slaves; for old Jabez Galer was rich in land and negroes, besides owning a large interest in a wool factory over the river. Roswell was really the most important manufacturing town in Georgia before the War, though it was scattered so picturesquely over the river hills with no railroad market nearer than Atlanta.

But it does not enter the province of this short sketch to give a history of the old town with its factories scattered along short canals, fed from the river, its traditions reaching back into the early days of the settling of Georgia—its "lover's leap" on the brink of a wide creek, a cliff of gray rocks with lovely maidenhair ferns growing thickly around its base—but of the Galers living across the river from it in the midst of their small kingdom, surrounded by their black retainers, and of an old love story.

The house was big and white and squarely built, with the piazzas—without which no Southern house would have seemed complete—wide halls and large rooms belonging to a certain period of colonial architecture. The lower hall was ornamented with the antlers of a stag or two, some leopard-skin rugs, and with a stuffed owl perched above the door. The rooms wrere sparely furnished after the stiff fashion of the day, but linen closets and clothes-presses were full and overflowing; for there wrere swift spinners and skillful weavers among the negro women on the place, and a careful mistress to look after them. In the rear of the main dwelling were the negro quarters, and off at one side the barns and stables. The grassy lawn was shaded with fine old oaks and mimosa trees. In the back yard the little negroes disported, and a dozen hounds had their kennels; for Mr. Jabez Galer was fond of riding forth over the river hills in the early dawn, with

dogs and gun and hunting-horn. His family consisted of himself, his meek, gentle sister, Miss Jane, and his grand-daughter, fair Pamela.

Mr. Jabez Galer was a character in his day and generation. He was impulsive and could be generous, but had a most tyrannical will and a violent temper. He ruled his household like an autocrat. There was something domineering in his very tread, the roll of his keen eye, the fit of the white linen arraying his portly person. He was a rather fine-looking old man, gray-haired and blue-eyed, and with evidences of good living in every line of his clean-shaven face. No man could be more genial than he when in a good humor, or appreciate a story or a joke more keenly; and he was kind to his negroes. True, they did not dare disobey him without expecting and receiving punishment, and they worked hard; but they were well clothed, housed and fed, and enjoyed their regular holidays and merrymakings.

Mr. Galer's doors were always open to the wandering prospector, the trader, the itinerant preacher, or, indeed, to any one who claimed his hospitality and seemed worthy of it, and his sister and granddaughter were free to entertain or be entertained by the society of Roswell; but his guests sometimes came in contact with his imperious will or his temper. To show what manner of man he was one experience is herein given:

A Kentucky horse-trader stopped at the house one night, and long after the other members of the family had retired he sat in the dining-room with his host drinking wine and telling stories. They both grew somewhat excited as the mellow vintage warmed their fancies. They told adventures of youthful gallantry. Mr. Galer had, in his time, figured prominently in society as a beau, dancing and paying compliments; and the Kentuckian admitted that he had also once felt proud of his nimble-footedness in treading the cotillon. He was invited to give an example of his skill, but declined. His host insisted, but he laughed contemptuously at the idea. Old Jabez Galer's choler rose. He went to the dining-room door and shouted for his own special servant, Elbert.

"Elbert, hey there! Elbert, you rascal, bring down your fiddle!"

An old negro man stumbled down the back stairway and into the room, rubbing open his sleepy eyes, a much abused and battered violin under his arm. He looked older than his master, his woolly head quite white, a complex tracery of wrinkles covering his shrewd black face; but he seemed active and strong, and betrayed not the slightest surprise at the midnight summons.

"Mars Galer up tu some mischief, sho'," he muttered, sitting down, with his feet drawn up under him, and beginning to tune the violin. He gave a few preparatory scrapes across the strings, and then began to play the old inspiring tunes his dusky people had danced to round many a brightly blazing bonfire, or in the light of the full moon. Mr. Galer turned the key in the door, reached down

the gun resting in a rack above it, and deliberately leveled it at his astonished guest.

"Now dance, or I'll put a bullet through your head."

The Kentuckian was not a coward, but he had no weapon—how he longed for the pistols in his saddle-bags!—and realized that his host might do him mischief if not humored.

It was a curious scene, an extremely ludicrous one. The candles, set in tall, brass candlesticks, sputtered and flared, the tallow melting down in a little gutter on one side. They cast only an uncertain, flickering light over the room, and the tall, awkward Kentuckian, in creaking boots, shuffled over the bare floor until the house fairly trembled, and Miss Jane turned on her high feather bed in a chamber above, wondering what unseemly sport could be going on. But the victim of Mr. Galer's whims was a wary man and given to dissimulation when occasion required. He appeared to find such humor in the situation that his host was thrown entirely off guard and allowed the gun to rest negligently on the table in front of him. In a twinkling it was snatched from his loosened grasp, and the Kentuckian stood between him and the door.

"Now you try your skill awhile, Mr. Galer, or you may play best man at the funeral," he said, grimly.

It was a neat revenge, and instead of trying to rouse the household to his protection Mr. Galer promptly began to keep time to the music with slow, old-fashioned steps. But he had lost the lightness and skill of his youth, and, soon exhausted, had to beg for mercy. Elbert's eyes twinkled in secret glee over his master's discomfiture, and he played a livelier strain than ever. Mr. Galer and the trader parted the next morning in the friendliest manner, and he told the story of his defeat with the keenest appreciation.

With such a disposition to override all opposition to his wishes and desires, it is not to be supposed that his family had an easy life of it when wills clashed. It was only by stratagem that they could ever outwit him; and it was by stratagem that Pamela married the man she loved. It happened in this wise:

Adjoining Mr. Galer's plantation was one even larger and richer, belonging to Mr. Josiah Williamson, a man who had abundance of money, and was amply able to take life easy. He went away annually on a trip to the principal Northern cities, and even talked of some time going abroad. He and old Jabez Galer were warm friends, and it had long been understood between them that Pamela should become Mrs. Josiah Williamson when she arrived at a suitable age. At the date of this story she had reached eighteen, and her grandfather's plans for her future began to take active shape. One morning he stamped into the hall, threw his hat and riding-whip on a table, shouting in thundering tones:

"Permely! Per*me*ly! hey, Perme*lee!*"

The little negroes rolling in the sand in the back yard scampered away behind the kitchen, Miss Jane dropped the fine linen she was mending in the dining-room, and Elbert muttered over a half-polished boot: "Mars Jabe in one o' his tantrums 'g'in, ez I live."

"What is it, grandpa?" inquired a youthful voice from the upper hall, and Pamela stepped lightly down the broad, shallow stairs.

"Come here to me," he said, but in a softer tone; for she held the tenderest place in his heart; and she was fair enough to disarm even greater anger than his. She was a tall young person, with a certain charming dignity of carriage, a rather pale but lovely face, fine, pale brown hair, and steel-gray eyes. There was no vivid coloring about her, though plenty of character lay under that soft, subdued beauty. She was gowned in thin muslin befitting the summer day, with a narrow lace collar turned down around her slender neck. Mr. Galer laid his hands heavily on her shoulders, looking sternly into her clear eyes.

"What's this I hear about you and Sim Black?"

She looked down, and the whiteness of her face and throat turned to rose.

"I *would* hang my head," giving her a slight shake. "What do you suppose that young beggar had the impudence to do this morning when I went over to Roswell? to ask me for you—you—old Jabez Galer's grand-daughter; declared that he had always loved you, and that it was with your consent he came to me."

"Yes sir," she said, in a low tone, tracing a seam in the floor with the toe of her neat little shoe.

He stamped the floor. "Well, he'll not get you, do you hear? Do you think I raised you, educated you, to marry a miserable little lawyer without a rood of land or a nigger to his name? No, sirrah!"

"I thought you always intended me to be happy, sir," paling again before his wrath, but firm.

"So I do, but you'll be happy in my way, marry the man I have selected for you, and his name is—Josiah Williamson."

She stared at him in a disconcertingly amazed, shocked way.

"*Why, grandpa!*"

"What's the matter, now?"

"He's as old as you are."

"He is not a year older than your aunt Jane."

"And I love Sim, dear grandpa," she pleaded.

"Don't you dare to think of him again! Williamson—"

"I will certainly not think of *him*," with a flash of her eyes.

"I have forbidden Black ever coming here again, and I'll wear him out with a cowhide if I ever hear of your speaking to him."

"Brother, brother," remonstrated Miss Jane's exasperatingly gentle voice

from the dining-room door, her small person half hidden in an armful of mending.

"Don't 'brother' me! What have you been doing, not to look after this girl? But women are contrary creatures, all of them, and enough to drive a man distracted with their piety and sentimental foolishness!"

He went out upon the piazza, and sat down to let his vexation cool, while Pamela was folded in her grandaunt's comforting little arms, to the detriment of the linen, which received a copious shower of tears. But if she wept she was also determined. As old Elbert had once shrewdly said:

"Miss Pamely's er Galer, too, en got de Galer will, en de Galer temper, en things gwinter fly to pieces when she en ole Mars come tugether."

Mr. Galer sat on the piazza; but he waxed wroth every time he thought of young Black's presumption. Stretching afar before his eyes were his own cotton-fields, girdled on one side by the winding curves of the Chattahoochee, and on the other by deep, green forests, and through the palpitant air of the summer noon floated a field song, chanted by the joyous mellow voices of his slaves. His heart swelled with the pride of riches. Sim Black, indeed! when Pamela could have the pick and choice of the country, by right of her beauty and her dowry. What if the young lawyer did possess a brilliant mind and an eloquent tongue, and culture far beyond the average man in that region? he had sprung from obscure origin, and his future honors were as yet but empty promises, while Josiah Williamson's wealth and position were solid facts.

That afternoon, as Pamela sat in her room bending listlessly over some gay patchwork, Mammy Susannah came in, and from under the kerchief folded across her bosom, drew a little note.

"Honey, Elbert say, fo' de lub o' de Lawd not tu let old Mars know 'e fetch dis."

Pamela sprang up, flushing and trembling, to receive her first love-letter. It was brief:

"*Dearest:*—As your grandfather has forbidden me to enter his house again, I shall walk by the althea hedge in your garden this evening where, I pray you, meet me.

"**Your devoted Lover**, "JOHN SIMPSON BLACK."

Mr. Josiah Williamson came a-wooing that evening just as twilight fell and the whippoorwill began his plaintive serenade. The negroes understood his errand,

from the groom, who put up his horse, to the pickaninny peeping around the corner of the house; and there were nods and winks exchanged as he came nimbly up the piazza steps arrayed in his finest broadcloth and newest, tightest neck-stock.

He and Mr. Galer sat on the piazza and chatted awhile of plantation affairs, of the latest news from Washington, and of a public sale of slaves which had recently occurred in Roswell; and Miss Jane sat in the candle-lit parlor, knitting; but Pamela had disappeared.

"Can I—ahem—speak to Miss Permely, this evening?" Mr. Williamson at last inquired. "Your note led me to hope so."

"Yes; I want that matter settled. I'll see if she's with her aunt."

But Miss Jane mused solitarily over the stocking heel, a great white winged moth circling about her meek head or diving ever and anon toward the flame of the candle.

"Where is Permely?" Mr. Galer inquired, frowning.

She dropped one of the long, shining needles with a clinking sound, and stooped to grope around the edge of her skirts for it.

"Why, Jabez, I don't know; I thought—"

"Leave your thoughts out of the question, Jane, and go call her. She is hiding somewhere about the house."

Miss Jane stood up and faced him, nerved to a fleeting courage.

"Brother, don't try to force the child into a loveless marriage. Think how young she is; think—"

"Do as I tell you, Jane; I know what is best for Permely;" and she silently obeyed.

But Mammy Susannah, hovering in the shadow of the stairway, had already slipped out into the garden. It was a beauty's bower. The rising moon shone on beds of tulip and mignonette, on rows of flaunting hollyhocks, blue larkspur and yellow marigolds, on sweet pinks standing thickly in the border of the walks, and roses bending earthward under the weight of their own rich bloom and fragrance; its silvered light fell on the althea hedge with its white and purple flowers, and on Pamela and her lover slowly pacing the walk beyond.

"Miss Pemely, honey!" Susannah called, low and cautiously.

She hurriedly withdrew her hand from Sim's clasp.

"I must go; grandpa wants me."

But he threw his arms about her to detain her a moment longer, loth to part from her so quickly. Their two young faces were almost on a level; for Black was short and dark, though strongly built, and square-shouldered, with keen black eyes, and a handsome, clean-shaven face. His eyes were alight with love's soft fire as they rested on her face.

"I cannot let you go so soon, beloved," he protested, tenderly.

"Ah, but think of grandpa's anger, should he find you here."

"It would take a stout heart to face it, I acknowledge," he said laughing. Then he took her face between his hands: "You'll not let them take you from me, Pamela?"

"Indeed I will not, Sim."

Her sweet eyes and mouth were kissed, and then Black vaulted over the low garden fence, while she hastened to the house, her light skirts brushing the tell-tale dew from flower and seeded grass, her fine, soft hair hanging damply around her throat and delicate ears.

It is not the purpose of this chronicle to give a minute account of Mr. Josiah Williamson's wooing, nor of its failure. Mr. Galer lived in a state of vexation from morning until night. He was nearly beside himself with baffled rage when he found that with characteristic family spirit Pamela declined to be cajoled or coerced into obedience. All his ambitious plans threatened a total collapse; and that the obstinacy of a slim young girl should be the cause made it all the more aggravating. He thought of a hundred schemes by which he might overcome her contrary spirit, but only one appeared feasible. He chuckled grimly over it, and sent for Mr. Williamson to unfold his plan to him.

"I'll pretend to give my consent to her marriage with Black, set the day, invite the guests, and then contrive to have Sim detained over in Roswell, put in jail if it's necessary, but let Permely think he's changed his mind. Girls are touchy creatures, and Permely is so proud that she would marry you in a minute rather than not have a wedding at all."

It was not a situation to Mr. Williamson's liking. He wanted no unwilling bride; and Pamela had shown her aversion for him so plainly that he was entirely disenchanted. But he dared not sav so. Like all of Mr. Galer's friends, he stood in wholesome fear of that gentleman's temper.

"Well, what do you say?" his friend impatiently demanded.

"It seems a little—er—don't you think—"

"Oh, if you don't wish to marry my grand-daughter, pray say so."

"But I do, I do," said Mr. Williamson, feeling himself a miserable coward for not protesting against deceiving the girl.

When he went away it was with the understanding that the whole matter must be kept a secret between them. But as he rode dejectedly around the corner of the garden, who should step out in front of him but Miss Jane Galer, such a sparkle of indignation in her eyes, such a flush on her delicate face, that she looked positively young and pretty. He stared at her, and she, without so much as a polite good-morning, said:

"I want to know, Josiah Williamson, if you are not ashamed of yourself for

plotting against a young girl's happiness?"

"Blame your brother, Miss Jane—blame your brother," he said, in self-defense, having the grace to look very much ashamed of himself, though.

"You know he'd almost sell his own soul for the privilege of having his way; but you—I think you ought to have more pride than to want to marry Permely through fraud. What peace or pleasure do you think there would be in it?"

"Not much for me, I'll allow," he said, flicking the willow switch he carried at the flies swarming about his horse's head. "Miss Permely hasn't shown her best temper to me lately, and I don't know as I care to marry her at all. I want somebody that'll take life quietly and gently."

He looked down again at Miss Jane. She smoothed out her black silk apron, still trembling with indignation.

"No better-tempered girl lives than Permely Galer; but think of the sore trial of being pestered all the time about marrying one man while she is in love with another. I heard all that brother Jabez said to you, and if you don't give up the idea of this marriage I'll tell Permely and Sim, and, more than that, I'll do all I can to help them if they want to run away."

Mr. Williamson was fascinated by her unexpected fire and spirit.

"I didn't know you were so spunky, Jane," he said, admiringly. "We used to go to school together, do you remember?"

"Why yes," she replied, surprised at the turn of his thoughts.

"You were a gentle little thing, but you had temper enough then. You look, for all the world, as you did the day Eben Sanders gave me such a thrashing."

She smiled faintly at the recollection. There were others hidden deep in her heart. Nobody knew that in those school days she had cherished many romantic fancies about Josiah Williamson, or what a blow it was to her when he went off and married a girl from another settlement. She had been on friendly terms with his wife, and had so far overcome her own feelings as to feel deeply, sincerely grieved when she died. Mr. Williamson dismounted and stood at her side.

"I don't know as I'd tell Jabez I overheard his plans if I were you. Maybe we can fix up the matter without that," he said, persuasively.

"I cannot have Permely cheated out of her happiness," she said.

"She shall not be cheated, I promise you."

But apparently his promise amounted to very little, as Mr. Galer went on maturing his plans, inviting young Black to his house, and sending away to Atlanta for Pamela's wedding outfit. His conscience smote him for his duplicity when the girl rapturously thanked him for his goodness; he wondered what she would say when she discovered the trick played upon her.

"Pshaw! she'll be glad enough for it when she comes to her senses. Women are never sane when they fancy they are in love."

Mr. Williamson behaved in the most discreet and admirable manner, showing only the interest of a familiar, elderly friend in Pamela's approaching marriage; but Miss Jane went about in a nervous, half-terrified way that attracted even her brother's attention.

"Any one would suppose that you were to be married, too!" he exclaimed one day.

"Oh, Jabez!" she gasped, and fled from his presence, while he contemptuously muttered: "What idiots women are!"

The morning of the wedding-day dawned at last; and while the dew still hung heavy upon grass and flowers, Pamela declared that she must run over to Roswell for a piece of white ribbon. Mr. Galer frowned a little as he saw her hasten away in a crisp, white gown and a new calash, fair as the morning itself; and he grumblingly wondered why he could not have attended to the errand himself, unwilling to let her leave the place until she was safely married. Mammy Susannah accompanied her, and the two came back in a short time, Pamela flushed and trembling with an inward glow of happiness. She ran to her grandfather and threw her arms about his neck for a moment, the little package of ribbon unrolling itself over his waistcoat; then she embraced and kissed Miss Jane, who seemed no less agitated than she.

A great feast was spread that evening, and the wedding guests poured in until the crowd overflowed from the parlor into the great wide hall. Mr. Galer was a genial host, and even while he braced himself for the inevitable scene with Pamela when Sim failed to appear—and he had arranged with the town marshal that the young man should be detained—he moved about among the guests talking in his most agreeable manner. It was a little early, but the minister had already placed himself in position for the ceremony. Mr. Galer laughed jovially.

"Plenty of time—plenty of time yet," he exclaimed. "Young folks are never prompt;" but even as he spoke silence fell upon the company, as through the doorway and down the room walked Mr. Josiah Williamson. But who was it leaning upon his arm, her gray silk gown rustling softly, her frightened face alternately flushing and paling like a girl's, her meek eyes cast down? Mr. Galer fell back, fumbling for his glasses, doubting the evidence of his natural vision. Could it be—could it be—yes, it was Miss Jane. Then he saw Sim Black standing boldly in the doorway with Pamela at his side, and the sight restored his speech and motion and he strode across the floor to them, just as the minister concluded the brief ceremony uniting the elderly couple, and laid his hand on the girl's shoulder.

"I can at least have my say about *this* part of the wedding."

But Sim clasped her hand in his, his black eyes, every feature of his handsome, strong young face betraying his joy and triumph.

"You are too late, sir; she is my wife."

"We were married in Roswell this morning. Forgive us, grandpa," said Pamela.

When he realized that he had been the one cheated, outwitted, his anger knew no bounds. He refused to listen to explanation or excuse, but turned everybody out of the house, gave the wedding supper to the negroes, and shut himself into his own room. But he had been fairly beaten at his own game, and in time he came to appreciate it, and to look with pride on Sim Black's career, while he and Josiah Williamson ended their years in brotherly love and peace.

HOW THE QUARREL ENDED.

When old Killus Hurd dismounted from his horse before the Hardings' front gate one spring day, it was not to make a neighborly visit. The flash of his eyes, the set of his mouth, boded no good and mild temper. He was a strong, vigorous-looking man for his years, and larger than the average mountaineer. He walked erect, his brown jeans and homespun clothing fitting loosely, his gray hair falling from under a well-worn broad-brimmed hat to his shoulders.

The Hardings lived on a settlement road at the foot of Bush Mountain, in a weather-beaten old log-house, shaded by a fine chestnut-oak, and a towering spruce pine. The widow Harding sat out on the low piazza shelling seed corn into a small splint basket, and she stared at the approaching visitor with surprise and displeasure. She was a middle-aged woman, but looked older, with dust-colored hair, sallow, sunken features, and faded blue eyes. Mrs. Long, a neighbor who had dropped in to borrow some dye-stuff and to beg a few garden seed, sat near her, rubbing snuff, and retailing the latest gossip circulating through the settlement. At the sight of Mr. Hurd she paused in astonishment.

"Lizy Ann Harding, thar comes Killus Hurd, ez I live!"

"I'm a-seein' him," said Mrs. Harding, her fingers trembling over the yellow corn.

"Good-mornin', Mis' Harding; hope you air well as you wanter be, Mis' Long," he said, walking up to the piazza step.

"Will you come in an' take a cheer?" said Mrs. Harding, the laws of hospitality forcing her to be polite even to her enemy.

"Yes, for a minute or two, Mis' Harding," he replied, and sat down opposite

her, resting his hat on his knees.

Mrs. Long took a fresh dip of snuff, and hitched her chair a little nearer, expectant and curious. A brief silence fell, but it was simply the stillness forerunning a storm. The shrill voices of the boys at work in the field below the house were distinctly audible, and from the kitchen, at the edge of the back yard, sounded the steady click-clack of a loom, plied by a strong, industrious hand.

A bitter feud existed between the Hurds and the Hardings. It dated back to the days when Killus Hurd and Sam Harding were young, and sprang from a dispute over some gold diggings. Unfilled trenches marked the spot where they first quarreled, and as the years seemed to wear the earth away into a deeper chasm, so the break between the two families widened until it passed into history in the settlement. The men were members of the same church, their farms adjoined, their homes were not over a mile apart, but they would not be reconciled. At last death claimed Sam Harding, and a new grave had to be made in the shadow of the "meetin'-house," where the Hurds and the Hardings of a former generation rested side by side in peace.

He had been dead two years, and all outward signs of hostility had ceased; but the elder members of the families had not forgotten. And when Mr. Hurd sat down before Mrs. Harding that morning, her thin cheeks flushed, her faded eyes gathered fire; she had plenty of spirit.

"Mis' Harding, where is that daughter o' your'n?"

The mode of attack confused her for a moment.

"Do you mean Sarah Betsy?"

"Yes, I mean Sarah Betsy."

"She's in the kitchen a-weavin'."

"Yes; but where is she when outen your sight?"

"What's that to you, Mister Hurd?" straightening up, and looking unflinchingly at him.

"Mebby you'll 'low it's a good deal when I tell you she's a-goin' to meetin' with John, an' a-seein' him at singin's an' frolics an' such. It's got to be stopped, Mis' Harding. God-a-mighty knows John's been raised as he orter be, an' he ain't a-goin' to spile it all by keepin' comp'ny with a Harding."

He stamped on the floor in mingled grief and rage, and Mrs. Long moved her chair back a few inches. The widow Harding did not move, but a curious tightness in her throat held her speechless for a moment. Could it indeed be true Sarah Betsy had so deceived her? She would not believe it.

"Mister Hurd, do you s'pose I'd 'low Sarah Betsy to keep comp'ny with John?" she said, clearing her throat as she talked. "Sez Harding to me when he lay a-dyin': 'I'm sorry to leave you, Lizy Ann, but it ain't to be helped, fer it's the Almighty's will. Take keer o' the chillun an' do the best you can for 'em;'

an' now, ruther than see Sarah Betsy a-throwin' herself away on a son o' your'n I'd be willin' to lay her down 'longside her pa." Her voice trembled and softened. "She's always been a good obejent child, an' I ain't afraid o' trustin' her."

"But ain't I been told p'intedly that they are courtin' on the sly, and didn't John 'low to me this mornin' hisself that he'd marry Sarah Betsy if he lived? Call her and we'll hear what she sez."

"To be sure," murmured Mrs. Long, while Mrs. Harding raised her voice in a shrill call:

"Sarah Betsy! Sarah Bet-see!"

She came quickly from the kitchen and across the yard to the narrow entry leading to the piazza, a rift of wind blowing her short dark hair about her brow and white neck. Her face was sunburned and slightly freckled, though smooth and fresh as a nineteen-year-old face should be. Some day age, snuff-dipping and bad diet would probably make her as yellow and shriveled as her mother, but now the potent charm of youth gave her comeliness. Her brown checked homespun dress was neat, and its primitive fashion but served to show the free grace of all her movements.

"Did you call me, Ma?" in a soft, slow voice; then she saw Mr. Hurd and paused.

"Sarah Betsy, Mr. Hurd 'lows John an' you has been a-keepin' comp'ny unbeknownst to us," said her mother, looking seriously at her.

Sarah Betsy cast down her eyes and was silent.

"Jest speak out, Sarah Betsy," said Mr. Hurd, grimly; "your ma don't 'pear to believe me."

"No; for I 'lowed that you had always been a good child an' wouldn't go ag'in' me."

A quiver of strongly repressed emotion passed over the girl's face.

"Oh, Ma, it couldn't be helped!"

Mrs. Harding rose up, then sat down again, scattering the corn right and left in her agitation, while Mrs. Long shook her head compassionately, and old Killus Hurd looked sternly triumphant.

"Do you mean to tell me Sam Harding's daughter has plum' forgot all her pa's teachin's?" the widow demanded, sternly.

"Ma, it ain't that. I didn't 'low to keer fer John, an' he didn't 'low to keer fer me, but it jest gradually crope up on us," said the girl in a faltering tone, her face deeply red. She looked appealingly from Mr. Hurd to her mother. "Don't turn ag'in' us. We lowed it wusn't right not to tell you, but—"

"It ain't no use to be a-palaverin' with your ma, Sarah Betsy Harding," said Killus Hurd, standing up to his full height, and eying her sternly. "It's me you've got to listen to, an' if there is a spark o' pride or feelin' in your heart, it's bound to

be teched. John's the last child, out'n nine, that's been left to me an' his ma; but I'll turn him out o' doors, I'll drive him plum' from the country before he shall marry you, an' the curse o' the Almighty shall foller him."

"It ain't for human creeturs to say who the Almighty's wrath must be turned against," said a mild, rebuking voice; and there at the piazza step stood Sile Ed'ards, the preacher, leaning on his stout stick, his deep-set gray eyes fixed gravely upon the angry neighbors.

A short embarrassed silence followed his unexpected appearance. Sarah Betsy retreated to the doorway, and Mrs. Long laughed awkwardly.

"You must 'a' jes' crope up, Brother Ed'ards," she said, with an attempt at lightness.

"Come in an' take a seat, won't you?" said Mrs. Harding, recovering herself.

"Not to-day, Sister Harding. I'm goin' up on Bush Mount'in, an' I 'low to salt Dave Martin's cattle while there."

Mr. Hurd put on his hat. "I'll jest be goin', Mis' Harding," he said, coldly.

"Won't you stay a minute?" asked the preacher in his mild, slow voice. "If it ain't puttin' nobody out, I'd like to know what's the matter."

The enemies each hastened to give an account of the renewed quarrel, and its cause. Sarah Betsy hung her head, and uttered not a word, though conscious that more than once Sile Ed'ards's deep grave eyes turned toward her. The story seemed to agitate him greatly. He grew pale, and gripped his stick with trembling fingers. He sighed deeply.

"It's a serious question; but it 'pears to me love might solve it. If the Almighty wants to bring you all together ag'in in peace by unitin' John an' Sarah Betsy I don't think you ought to rebel against his will. The Scripters say—"

"It ain't to be argued out on Scripter, Sile," interrupted Mr. Hurd, stubbornly. "I ain't thinkin' hard o' you or blamin' you for feelin' that way; it's nachel, seein' as you've been called to preach; but the Scripters don't fit ever' time."

"They will if we'll only 'low 'm to."

"Mis' Harding an' Sarah Betsy know what I've said."

"I ain't apt to forgit some o' the hard things you've said, Mister Hurd," the widow remarked, in a tone trembling with indignation.

Ed'ards continued to argue and plead with them. The woman he might have softened, but he found himself powerless before hard, stern old Killus Hurd, nursing the concentrated wrath and bitterness of years.

"'Tain't no use, Sile—'tain't no use," he said, moving away to his horse.

"Them that forgives air to be forgiven," said the preacher.

But the old man silently mounted and rode away. Mrs. Long was also ready to depart, being eager to spread the news of the quarrel throughout the

settlement.

Ed'ards leaned against the rough sapling post supporting the piazza, with head dejectedly drooped. Mrs. Harding wiped her eyes, and looked furtively at him. "Wouldn't you like to take a cheer an' rest, Brother Ed'ards?" she said, gently. "I know it's sinful to carry on the way we've been a-doin' this mornin', but them Hurds are that mean an' no 'count—" she paused, then hurriedly changed the subject. "I'm most obleeged to take this corn down to the fields."

"Don't let me hinder you then, for I must soon be gittin' on my way. I must ask wisdom 'fore I say any more to you an' Brother Hurd—and I must git strength for myself," he concluded, half under his breath. When left alone, he sat down on the edge of the piazza a few minutes, then walked slowly around the house to the kitchen-door to speak a few words to Sarah Betsy.

She sat on the bench before the loom, but the shuttles lay idle on the beam, while she leaned forward with her face hidden in her hands. So still and deep seemed her dejection he would not disturb her, but stood gazing on her drooped figure with yearning eyes. He had long secretly loved her, but had scarcely realized that he indulged the hope of winning her until he learned that her heart was given to John Hurd. He had been used to self-denial all his life, and after the first confused sensation of misery and loss, strove to put aside his own feelings, and desire only her happiness. He had sought her to speak some comforting words, but finding her in that attitude of silent grief turned away, and left her alone.

He was a slender, undersized man, not more than thirty years old; but mental and physical suffering had drawn deep lines upon his thin, sallow face, and sprinkled threads of gray in his hair. His features would have looked hard and forbidding had they not been softened by the strong, patient endurance religion had brought to him. Throughout the length and breadth of Laurel Cove he was respected and loved. He belonged to the Cove; the encircling chain of mountains marked the boundaries of his life; for he was a hopeless cripple, walking ever with slow, halting steps, and with a staff to aid him. He had never been a lusty, vigorous youth, but one of unusual intelligence and ambition. It was a grievous blow to all his plans of life when a falling tree lamed him. It was a long time before he could walk, even with a crutch, and years before he laid the crutch aside for a stick. Active labor would never again be possible for him; but not liking to be dependent on his neighbors for charity, he plied the trade of a shoe-mender, and while he worked he read and meditated on the Bible—the only book he possessed, except a Webster's *Speller* and a small arithmetic. It was no wonder that so much reading and solitary thinking on religious themes should inspire him with the desire to preach. His tongue seemed loosened; he rose in "meetin'," and exhorted the people. His eloquence amazed them; his fervor, his deep sincerity impressed even the callous-hearted.

His physical infirmity also appealed to them, and it was not long before he became the pastor of the church in Laurel Cove. He had no more education than his parishioners, so far as text-books were concerned: but his spiritual discernment gave him a power marvelous to them. He did a great deal of good, but one thing he had set his heart on he failed to do; he could not make peace between the Hurds and the Hardings. Both men sat under his teachings in church and listened to his exhortations outside, and both loved him; but they would not be friends with each other. When Sam Harding died Sile tried to influence old Killus Hurd to extend the hand of peace to the widow; but he stubbornly refused, and the preacher gave it up. Now that a fresh quarrel had come he knew not what to say or do, particularly as his own feelings were so deeply involved. He had watched Sarah Betsy bloom into womanhood, delighting in her beauty and even admiring the girlish coquetry of her ways. He had never cherished any definite hopes of marrying her; what woman would like a cripple for a husband? but as long as she did not show any preference among her beaux he was satisfied. Now he knew why she smiled on all alike. It was because she secretly loved John Hurd, and not because she was heart-free. A cruel, jealous pang pierced the heart of the preacher, and a wave of rebellion, savage in its fierceness, swept over him. Why could he not have the love of this girl? It would be only a just compensation for the loss of his physical strength, and with it all he had hoped to be. For a moment he loathed his own body: his spirit panted to rush forth upon the air, freed from all its trammels of flesh. He was not conscious of a temptation to commit suicide; but for an instant the vistas of Heaven seemed to open on his longing eyes, the perplexities and sorrows of life to roll away. Death would be a sweet, a lovely friend to him, not the grisly terror that so many shrank from. He knew every nook and fastness of Bush Mountain, having spent many of the idle days of his boyhood in roaming over it, and now it was a favorite refuge when he wished to think out his sermons, or to wrestle in prayer over some wayward soul gone astray. It was a fair sight to look down on Laurel Cove from the heights, and see its freshly plowed fields and blossoming orchards. The settlers in that fertile region were more industrious and thrifty than their neighbors over the mountains, and they were unusually quiet and law-abiding. Very few moonshiners were to be found in Laurel Cove, and not a distillery. Those were hidden in remote and secret places on the mountains. Let it be said to the enlightenment of Sile Ed'ards, that he was bold enough to preach against the making of illicit whiskey, as against all manner of evil, and many listened and heeded his words. But while he climbed the heights that day, seeking solitude and God, in Laurel Cove things were going very wrong.

It was past the noon hour, and at the Hardings all evidences of the midday meal had been cleaned away. The boys had gone back to the fields, Mrs. Harding

raked the garden beds preparatory to seed sowing, and Sarah Betsy had returned to her weaving. She had been through a trying interview with her mother, listening to scolding and reproaches in silence, and promising only one thing; to wait awhile before seeing John Hurd again.

"I can't promise *never* to see him ag'in," she said, half in tears.

"I don't, fer the life o' me, understan' how you could 'a' tuk such a fancy to him, when there's plenty o' better-lookin', pearter boys for you to 'a' liked," exclaimed Mrs. Harding, despairingly.

"I've never seen the man he couldn't equal," Sarah Betsy murmured; and with a shake of her head Mrs. Harding went away.

Sarah Betsy was thinking it all over as she stood by the loom, putting a quill of thread in the shuttle, when a shadow fell athwart the door and a man's voice, softened and eager, exclaimed:

"Sarah Betsy, Sarah Betsy!"

She turned quickly, troubled joy breaking through the enforced stillness of her face; but she did not speak. The young man boldly entered.

"I 'lowed I must come to see you before I left the Cove," he said, in explanation and apology for his untimely visit.

"Air you goin' away, John?" Sarah Betsy asked, and laid the shuttle down for fear it would slip through her trembling fingers.

"Yes."

"Why? Where do you think o' goin'?"

"Over on Bush Mountain, to work in Aaron Brown's 'stillery," he said, answering her last question first.

"Don't do that!" the girl cried, in dismay. "Oh, please don't do that! Think how the revenue men has watched it; an' once, don't you know? they tuk the Brown boys off to jail."

"I don't keer," he muttered, sullenly. "Pa an' me's had a fallin' out. He lows we'll never marry if he can help it, an' I 'low we will." He crossed the floor and laid his hands gently on her shoulders. "Let 'em do an' say what they will, they can't come between us, honey, can they?" his voice sinking to a softer, tenderer key.

"I didn't 'low they'd keer so much," Sarah Betsy faltered, with downcast eyes, in which hot tears were swimming.

"You er not thinkin' o' goin' back on yer word to me, air you?" Hurd exclaimed, his face darkening.

"We must wait, John—we must wait."

"Yes, tel I can git a start," in a relieved tone.

"Tel my ma an' your pa air willin'," she said, taking up the shuttle.

"I care more for you th'n for what they may say, an' I 'lowed you did the

same, or you wouldn't 'a' promised to marry me. I s'pose you didn't mean it."

"I did mean it; but it's more'n I can do to go ag'in' 'em so p'intedly all at once," she said, and turned from him to lean against the loom, love and duty struggling mightily together in her heart.

"Well, it ain't more'n I can do," he replied, grimly; "an' when I get settled I'm jest bound to keep you to yer promise."

He drew nearer to her, hesitated, then kissed her cheek.

"I love you Sarah Betsy—I love you, honey," he whispered, then turned quickly away.

She followed him to the door, and when he had disappeared from her sight she looked long and gravely at Bush Mountain, a vast pile rising against the sky, its rugged slopes softened by a hazy veil. It had been invested with new interest for her as the temporary home and refuge of her lover.

The outbreak of the old feud between the Hurds and the Hardings was soon known throughout the Cove, and discussed at every fireside. Bitter feelings were engendered between sympathizing friends of the two families, and the peaceful settlement was divided into factions. The Harding boys were too young to take much part in the wordy war, but Mrs. Harding did not lack chivalrous support from some of her neighbors, who loudly declared that no lone woman should be trampled upon. The women, at least the younger women, and those inclined to sentiment, expressed great sympathy for Sarah Betsy and John. It seemed hard that the lovers should be divided by a quarrel between the elder members of the families.

"It's best for 'em if they only knowed it," said one brown, withered old woman, shaking her head grimly and cynically over her pipe. "Neither life nor men air what we 'low they air, when we er young. These young fo'ks air separated while their love is warm an' frush, an' without discoverin' that it ain't goin' to last ferever, an' that no human creetur is without a mighty load o' faults. I can recollect more'n one couple that 'peared lack they'd die broken-hearted if they didn't git married, an' then in a little while, 'peared lack they'd die because they wus married. There ain't no countin' on human natur, I can tell you. It's about the oncertaintest thing in this world 'ceptin' death."

Sile Ed'ards had to learn a new lesson in this uncertain human nature that summer, when those who in former times seemed to care most for his counsel turned impatiently away from his entreaties for peace. His words fell to the ground, and he carried a sorely troubled and heavy heart about with him, and spent more time than ever in the solitude of Bush Mountain, fasting and praying for his erring flock, who seemed to enjoy the excitement of a quarrel far more than they did the peaceable worship of the Lord; who brought sounds of strife to the very altar rails, more than one meeting having ended in bitter words.

The material prosperity of Laurel Cove was not in the least affected by the evil spirit apparently ruling the people. The corn-fields promised an abundant harvest, and the orchards were rich in fruits.

Mrs. Harding was an industrious woman, toiling early and late, and her hours of repose were, in the main, peaceful, though she rose sometimes in the middle of the night and crept softly to Sarah Betsy's bed to see that she also slept; for her heart yearned secretly over this disobedient daughter who had lost her bright, cheerful ways since John Hurd went away from the Cove. She suffered almost as much as the girl, though they said little to each other about it. Once Mrs. Harding did attempt to reason with Sarah Betsy, but she turned and said:

"Didn't you love Pa?"

"Didn't I? There wusn't many men to equal your pa."

"In your eyes, Ma, but maybe not in the eyes o' them what didn't love him. Love makes a mighty difference in the way we look at fo'ks. I 'low ever' woman thinks the man she loves is the best in the world."

Her mother said no more; but she ceased not to muse on the mystery and power of love. One morning she had started to the cow lot with a milk pail on her arm, when she saw a woman coming slowly through the sparse timber in the rear of the barn, a sunbonnet pulled closely over her head and face. It was very early. Deep Cimmerian shadows still obscured the low country, though the crimson light of dawn was spreading upward from the east, and a fading spectral moon sank slowly behind the western mountains. The morning star hung over the crest of Bush Mountain, heralding the day, and fine elusive mists rolled away from the Cove into the hollows and ravines of the guarding ranges.

A ghostly stillness seemed to hang over the world, and Mrs. Harding could hear the dry twigs crackling sharply under the feet of the slowly approaching woman. She went on into the lot and poured some bran and peas into the feeding-trough, and softly called the cow, standing in a distant corner. The stranger walked timidly up to the bars, and pushed back her sunbonnet. She was a small, meek-faced old woman, withered and gray.

"Good-mornin', Mis' Harding."

Mrs. Harding stiffened rigidly, and stared coldly at her, not recognizing her until she had spoken.

"You air out early, Mis' Hurd."

"Yes. I don't know what Hurd would do or say, if he knowed it; but he started to mill 'fore daylight, an' I crope out, 'lowin' it 'ud be a good time fer seein' you." She paused, absently untied her bonnet-strings, passed a trembling hand over her gray hair, then looked wistfully at Mrs. Harding.

"Mis' Harding, has Sarah Betsy heard anything from John lately?"

"Heard from John!" with a flash of indignation. "Didn't I tell Mister Hurd

you needn't be a pest'rin' 'bout Sarah Betsy? It 'pears to me—"

"It's all 'long o' me bein' so troubled about him that I asked," said the old woman, hastily. "One o' the Brown boys wus down in the Cove t'other day an' he 'lowed John was sick, an' yesterday I begged his pa to go over there an' see 'bout him, but he 'lowed it wusn't no use; if John thought he could take keer o' hisself, let him do it. Men fo'ks, Mis' Harding, hain't got the feelin's o' women. There is such a weight here," laying one hard, withered hand on her breast, "that sometimes it 'pears to me I can't git my breath. If he hadn't a-gone off to the 'stillery. Them revenue officers will git him, shore, an' he'll die in jail; for he never could bear to be shut up. Why, he always sleeps with the door o' his room open. I hain't got nothin' ag'in' Sarah Betsy, Mis' Harding. I'd much ruther John an' her would marry th'n fer him to go off."

Her shrunken lips trembled piteously; some large tears rolled down her face. The frigidness of Mrs. Harding's attitude relaxed. She moved nearer the bars.

"I hain't nothin' ag'in' John, either, but Mister Hurd—"

"Is terribly sot in his ways, I know; but he don't mean to do wrong. He jest thinks he knows what is best for ever'body," said Mrs. Hurd, loyally. "John was always the sweetest, lovin'est child," returning to the subject absorbing her, "an' he never wus one to stay away from home much, even when he'd growed up. I never keered fer no better comp'ny than his'n; an' if a good son makes a good husband, then any girl might be proud to git him. It's turrible lonesome 'thout him ever comin' in or goin' out. Hurd says nothin' 'bout it, an' 'pears to sleep like a log; but I'm pestered at all hours o' the night, an' git up to look in John's room, an' when I see the bed all white an' smooth I feel like he's dead."

The cow ate up her food and went browsing along the fence corners again. Mrs. Harding's heart waxed soft within her. What religion failed to do, human sympathy accomplished. By her own experiences of motherhood she could understand the yearning and heartache of this other woman. It created a bond between them far easier of comprehension to her than the spiritual tie the preacher talked about. That seemed a mere cold abstraction—this a warm, living thing.

"I'm real sorry Sarah Betsy hain't heard nothin' from him," she said softly.

"I 'lowed maybe she would. Well, well, I won't pester you any longer."

Involuntarily their hands met through the bars in a quick close grip.

"I'm in hopes there ain't no bad news a-waitin' fer you, Mis' Hurd."

"I hope so; but a scritch owl lit nigh the door last night an' wouldn't hardly be driv' off, an' that's a bad sign, you know," she said mournfully, and turned to retrace her steps along the path through the woods, the dawn shining fair upon her bent gray head and slight figure. Mrs. Harding stood by the bars and watched her with a mingling of perplexity and compassion. She heard the voices of her

own sons at the house, and sighed.

"It 'ud go mighty hard with me if they wus tuk away. I hain't nothin' ag'in' Mis' Hurd nor John, but old Killus would rile the angel Gabr'el hisself." She finally stooped and picked up her milk pail. "It ain't fer me to fergit my pride an' be crowed over by him."

Mrs. Hurd went on her way home. As she passed through a laurel brake, absorbed in her sad thoughts, she came face to face with Sile Ed'ards. He looked worn and hollow-eyed, as though he, too, had passed through sleepless nights and troubled days; but she was too preoccupied to be very observant. A minister must ever be ready to comfort and counsel his flock, no matter what his own feelings may be, so Mrs. Hurd poured out the story of her anxiety, and Ed'ards said what he could to reassure her.

"I'm goin' up to Bush Mountain, an' I'll see if I can hear anything o' John for you," he said kindly.

He did not tell her that he would see the young man and talk with him, but that was what he purposed doing as he slowly climbed the great mountain. He spent the morning in visiting one or two of his parishioners who lived on the mountain, then went on his way to Aaron Brown's house, a low cabin near the summit of the peak. There he learned that John Hurd had returned to work again, but Mrs. Brown shook her head over the state of his health.

"He's peaked, an' ain't got no appetite, an' I tell Brown it's all 'long o' his frettin' 'bout the quarrel with his pa an' the fo'ks in the Cove. He ain't fittin' fer the 'stillery work, nuther. It don't agree with him to al'ays have to be on the watch an' ready to run if a twig snaps, or a breath rustles the leaves." She sighed. "My old man an' the boys don't keer. Brown is as cunnin' as the fox that's had experience hidin' from the hounds, an' he's brought up the boys to be like him. Come back an' spend the night," she called after the preacher when he started on. "You ain't fittin' to be takin' such walks as this, nohow."

He winced, her blunt speech, the pitying glance she gave him, touching his pride. Nevertheless he accepted her invitation, then pressed onward toward the still, following a narrow trail down into a wild ravine. Night had fallen, and the deepest solitude surrounded Ed'ards, but he felt no fear. Now and then a gleam of starlight shone across his way, or rustling leaves betrayed the presence of animals abroad for prey. The distillery was located in an excavation under a ledge of rock, the upper entrance only a hole an ordinary sized man could crawl through, and cunningly concealed by a network of laurel, the lower one away down where a little stream trickled out between the roots of a gnarled old tree. Nature had helped the mountaineer to evade the law in giving him such places of concealment.

Ed'ards approached the spot with that caution inherent in almost all the

people of that region, no matter what their calling may be. He was within a few yards of the opening of the still when he ran into the very arms of a man, and felt himself surrounded by a party, although it was too dark to see anything distinctly. He could not tell whether they were friends or foes in that first moment, but instinct warned him to still be cautious.

"Ha! we have caught one of them," muttered a voice, and then he knew that he was in the hands of the revenue officers.

Who shall say what thoughts passed through his mind in that moment? He could proclaim his vocation, purchase his own release by pointing out the hiding-place of the moonshiners, could send John Hurd away to prison. He stood still and speechless in the midst of the party.

"The 'stillery is not far away," said one.

"Hush," said another, warningly; "perhaps this fellow's friends are lurking near."

"They are," cried Ed'ards, and broke through the group so swiftly, so unexpectedly that he fairly slipped from their hands, free.

He stumbled pantingly over stones and underbrush, lost his stick, and then crawled along the ground, shouting at the top of his voice to those in the underground workroom. The officers Came thrashing through the brush after him, and he felt the sting of a bullet as it entered his side. They had fired several shots, and one had been correctly aimed in spite of the darkness. He fell across the mouth of the cave just as those within fled down the passageway and out into the woods beyond.

Laurel Cove was shaken from center to circumference by the tragical death of the preacher. That he, the most innocent and God-fearing man in the community, should die like a common outlaw, seemed the crudest, unjustest trick of fate. But deep in the consciousness of the sober-minded lurked the thought that he had been sacrificed by his own people; that the revenue officers were less to blame than his parishioners. It was old Killus Hurd who had the courage to acknowledge this feeling the day Sile Ed'ards was buried. It transpired that he had also gone to the 'stillery that day; that he fled with his son and the others when that warning cry, those pistol shots, came. He assumed all the blame, for had he not quarreled with the Hardings and then with his son?—but it was over. Peace should henceforth reign in his own household and in the household of his neighbor. He said this holding out his hand to Mrs. Harding, and weepingly she took it, for she also felt conscience-smitten for what had happened. The younger people were happier, for youth cannot feel as the sober middle-aged, and they were once more together. Sarah Betsy never knew that Ed'ards had loved her,

but secretly cherished his memory with tender gratitude for being the means of giving back her lover to her.

But while they extolled his virtues and grieved for his sad fate, making peace with each other as they heaped the moist earth upon his grave, who shall say that his glad spirit was not soaring away to realms where neither infirmity of body nor sorrow of heart dwells?

THE CRUCIAL TEST.

It was down on the Altamaha. The Dugarres always spent the summers in their large, old-fashioned mansion, on their own plantation, coming out from Savannah in May and returning in November. It was a picturesque house, with its wide halls, its piazzas, and its white columns that a man's arms could not reach more than half around. It had withstood the changes of time, and war, and the passing away of several generations. It was a landmark of the old South, and though the row of cabins in the rear still had a few dusky occupants, they were farm-laborers, hired to work by the day.

The Dugarres were famous for their hospitality, and entertained guests from all parts of the Union. An unusually large party lounged on the shady piazza one hot, languid summer afternoon, representing Charleston, Atlanta, and even New York, not to speak of the fair Savannahians, and of Valentine Dugarre, all the way from Brazil. It was too warm for exertion; all quiet amusements had flagged, and even conversation had become a stupid effort, when Edward Dugarre brought out a dusty old *Century* and read Stedman's poem "Hebe." It roused both the lazy and the meditative to lively comments, all agreeing in their condemnation of Fiorina's revenge, so summary and so terrible. Did I say all? There was one exception—Valentine Dugarre. But some of them looked upon her as half savage, because of her Brazilian birth and her perfectly frank way of speaking out her thoughts and feelings. The Dugarres themselves were half afraid of her and rejoiced when she became engaged to Frank Black, a handsome young Savannahian of good family but of rather weak, unstable nature. She had been sent up to them to have an American finish put to her education and manners; but alien blood flowed in her veins, and she had been worshiped and spoiled in her own home until she had become as imperious and exacting as princesses are supposed to be. She could do the rashest, most unheard-of things when en-

raged, or when in a generous mood—such, for instance, as taking a ring from her finger and giving it to a ragged beggar when he asked her for five cents. When scolded for it by her shocked aunt she impatiently exclaimed:

"Can't you see that he is starving? What real need have I for the thing? Let it go, if it can be the means of bringing him food and clothing. I do not care to be rich, to wear jewels, while others are perishing with hunger."

And that summer afternoon she sat among those people, listening in silence to all their comments, and waiting until the last to have her say about the matter.

She was an imperial-looking girl, dark, but with a faint, delicate bloom on her cheeks, and the color of a rose on her lips. Her eyes were not black but golden-brown, and her hair had the texture of silk. Her very dress seemed to set her apart from the other women, who clothed themselves according to the decrees of fashion. It was fine-woven yellow linen, its full loose folds girdled in about the waist with a broad band of silver, its sleeves open half way up, revealing beautiful rounded arms. She set at open defiance all forms and rules, and laughed contemptuously at the conventionalities of society.

"I quite approve of Fiorina's revenge," she said at last, "only I would have killed the woman also;" then she smiled with scornful contempt to see the blood forsaking Helen Lawrence's face. "Why do you turn pale, Miss Lawrence?" she asked, leaning toward her with a gleam of mockery in her eyes.

"I—because it is horrible to hear you talk so," said Miss Lawrence, quickly recovering herself, for she shrank, if Valentine did not, from a crossing of words, as it was known by all in the house that the young Brazilian was jealous of her.

"Val does not mean it," said Edward, soothingly.

"I do mean it. What right had she to come between them—to use all her smooth little ways and arts to make him faithless? Yes, by all means, Hebe should have feasted upon her first."

She glanced at her lover, but he was looking intently across the sunlit cotton-fields to the shining sweep of the river, apparently not in the least interested in the conversation. Then she looked around on the disapproving faces of the other women.

"You may all look shocked, but I am different from you only in the expression of my thoughts. There is an untamed savage in every heart, no matter how finely the owner of that heart may be civilized, how highly polished."

"There is also a spirit of divinity, Miss Dugarre," said Mark Livingston, the young Charleston lawyer, in his grave, calm voice.

"But in some unguarded moment, some crisis, the savage conquers all. It is easy to be good until one is deceived or thwarted."

"But what cause have you to talk like a disappointed, soured woman of the world, Valentine?" her cousin exclaimed, a little impatiently.

"Oh, none whatever, of course." But a note of bitterness thrilled her sweet voice, and her jealous eyes saw the glance Helen Lawrence exchanged with Frank Black. She bit her full under-lip, until the blood almost started.

"You believe, then, that the evil in human nature is stronger than the good?" said Livingston.

"I do; for is it not true that many a lifetime of noble deeds has been wrecked in a moment of passion, the man stripped of his goodness, as of a garment, leaving the naked savage, fierce, revengeful?"

"But if there are such instances, so we can as easily recall others, where men and women, in moments of supreme sorrow or danger, have so far risen above all personal feeling as to be willing, nay, eager, to help their worst enemies."

She turned to her lover, "What do you think, Frank?"

"That it is too warm for argument, and that Ed might have selected less tragical reading for our amusement."

He laughed a little as he spoke, to give a jesting turn to his words, and, rising, walked away into the hall. Valentine's eyes flashed with anger, but in a moment she rose and followed him into the cool, duskily shadowed library.

"Dearest, did I disgust you with my savage talk?"

"I do not like such sentiments from you, Valentine. It does not sound womanly, and those people criticise you severely enough as it is."

Her eyes darkened again; her lips curled.

"What do I care for their good opinion!"

"It is well for us to care for everybody's good opinion."

"Miss Lawrence has taught you that great and noble truth, has she? You have grown very critical of my speech and manners yourself since she came among us. Frank, Frank! what is it coming between us?" she cried, in sudden, piteous entreaty.

"Your jealous imagination, Valentine. A man does not like to be doubted, frowned upon, every time he speaks to, or looks at, another woman."

"Is that all? Tell me, on your honor."

"Yes," he said; but his eyes shifted under her eager gaze, and a slight flush rose to his face. But she was too anxious to believe him to heed such fine changes of expression.

"I *am* a miserable, jealous creature, all fire and wicked temper," she humbly acknowledged. "I have tormented you, I know; but unfortunately for me I love you with all my heart, instead of just a little bit of it, and it is a great strong heart, dearest, if it is wayward and untamed."

She leaned toward him with luminous eyes, her beauty softened, as sweet and gentle as that of any other woman. What man could resist her in such a mood? He raised her arms to his neck, and kissed her on lips and eyes.

"You love me, you do really love me?" she whispered.

"Love you! How can I help it, my princess?"

They had a little dance at Dugarre that night—a merry, informal party. A large number of young people came out from the neighboring town, the parlors were cleared, and Uncle 'Riah, the old white-haired fiddler, was called in to play for them. It was a moonless night, and to add a little to the picturesqueness of the fine old house and grounds the negroes built a great bonfire on the lawn. It threw its ruddy light afar under the trees, and a rain of glowing sparks fell here and there on the grass, and some even floated away on wreaths of pearly smoke over the roofs.

The ladies of the house were all in evening dress, but it was acknowledged that Valentine Dugarre and Helen Lawrence carried off the palm for beauty. Valentine appeared her loveliest and best. No suggestion of scorn or anger marred her face. Her dress of thin, creamy silk was Greek-like in its flowing lines and its full draperies, and her throat and arms were bare. She wore no jewels, except her engagement ring, and a single diamond star in her hair. She was radiant, yet so sweet and gentle in all her ways, that those who thought they knew her best wondered what new whim possessed her. She even smiled approval when Black led Helen out on the floor and danced with her. If he had stopped at that!—but he asked her after the dance to walk on the piazza with him. She hesitated, cast a hurried glance about the room, saw Valentine in a distant corner talking to Livingston, and consented.

They walked the length of the long piazza, and then Black drew Helen into the deserted library. She took her hand from his arm, her usually pale face burning with color, her calm eyes agitated. It was enough to set his faithless heart aflame—to call forth treasonable words of love. Curiously enough it was on the very spot where a few hours before he had given Valentine such assurance of his love. The remembrance stung him to shame, but it could not silence his tongue. His love for Valentine had been an infatuation, but Helen held his heart. So he told himself, so he had been telling himself for a month, though he had never before confessed as much to Helen. Valentine was not the woman to make him happy, with her jealous, tempestuous moods and passionate temper.

"But you, you are an angel of sweetness and goodness," he said, kissing her hands, even the folds of her pale-blue silken sleeves.

Helen shivered a little as she listened to him, and cast uneasy glances about the room, for there was a good deal of cowardice in her nature, and she feared Valentine.

"What if she should hear you?" she said, trembling, yet leading him on with her soft eyes, her half-yielding manner.

"Why speak of her, think of her, now?" he exclaimed, "My bondage is not

yet hopeless, and I—I cannot help not loving her."

"But you are engaged to her, and it is all wrong to talk so to me," she said, tears starting suddenly to her eyes. What she had deliberately begun as a flirtation had become as serious to her as to him. Her emotion nearly distracted him. Still rasher words trembled on his lips, when—

"Is this tableau for the benefit of the public, or only for your own amusement?" a voice inquired near them, causing them to start guiltily apart, for it was Valentine herself standing there, white as her dress, and with eyes that were terrible in their rage and anguish. "Mr. Black will be perfect in the art of love-making if he continues his present role. You need not tremble and look as if you'd like to run away, Miss Lawrence. There is no Hebe here to crunch your delicate bones, richly as you deserve such a fate, and willingly as I would give you to it."

"Blame me for it all, Valentine, not her," exclaimed Black, feeling like a craven between them.

"So you would protect and defend her! What a chivalrous gentleman! what a man of honor! Do you think I have been blind and deaf to the sighs and glances, to the thousand little arts she has used upon you—she, the example that has been held up to me by my aunt as worthy of imitation? Well, I congratulate her on the conquest she has made. Two months ago you were ready to grovel at my feet, and to-day—yes, only a few hours ago—you assured me that you were true, that you loved me; and I believed you." Her passion rose again to violence. "I would like to kill you both; yes, with my own hands!"

"Hush, for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed Black. "Do you want all those people in here?"

"Oh, no! It doesn't, of course, make any difference if you break my heart, but it would be shocking for the world to know it. I will hush, and leave you to console and reassure Miss Lawrence; but do not expect me to break our engagement. You shall never be free until I die—never!"

And then she left them, disappearing through the open window as swiftly and noiselessly as she had come upon them. Livingston met her on the piazza, and, without questioning his presence there, she allowed him to take her hand and lead her to a seat. He looked almost as pale as she, and far more agitated, and when she turned from him, covering her face with her hands, his self-possession deserted him entirely.

"Don't—don't cry, Valentine. He is not worth a tear, or one pang of that dear heart of yours."

"I know his worth; but that cannot alter my feelings now. I love him."

"And I—I love you, Valentine, even as you love him."

Valentine turned and looked at Livingston.

"Then I pity you," she said, simply, but with such pathos that he himself

felt like dealing out summary punishment to Black. He did not attempt to plead his own cause then, knowing that it would be not only selfish but worse than useless. She had no thought for him or for anybody or anything but her own sorrow and bitterness. "I wonder if animals can have souls, because if they do I must have been a tigress."

She laughed tremulously, crushing up folds of her gown in her hands. "I'd like to kill them, I would indeed!" she exclaimed, her eyes burning through a veil of tears.

"You think so now because you are excited," Livingston said gently, as though speaking to an angry child.

"Excited! I think I must be mad."

"You could not do them any violence, Valentine, were it really in your power. I know your generous, noble nature better than that."

But she turned away again, with hidden face, jealous rage melting into anguish.

Nobody could ever tell just how it happened. The most reasonable theory was that it caught from some of those vagrant sparks flying up from the bonfire, but deep in the darkness and silence of that night, long after the household had all retired, a little tongue of fire shot up from the roof, growing larger and brighter until its light shone across the woods and fields beyond the river.

It was Valentine who, turning on her pillow to look from the window, saw the strange illumination, and, springing up, discovered its cause. One could hear the curl and crackle of the dry boards as the flames devoured them, feel the heat, smell the rolling volumes of smoke. Confusion reigned supreme as Valentine ran through the halls, waking the slumbering people. Nobody attempted to save anything, but all fled for their lives from the old house, which burned like so much tinder. The great trees surrounding it were shriveled in the heat, and falling flakes of fire set barns and stables ablaze. The low clouds caught the lurid reflection, the river shone like a mirror, while along the horizon the darkness was so intense, so thick and inky black, that it seemed as if all the night had been compressed into it.

The Dugarres wept to see the old house falling to ashes before their eyes—all but Valentine. Its walls held no loving associations, no precious memories for her; but the force, the awful destructive fury of the fire fascinated her.

And then, from group to group, ran a cry for Miss Lawrence. She could not be found. Had she been left, forgotten in the terror and confusion? Then, indeed, men and women looked at one another with blanched faces and eyes of horror.

"It would be death to go in there now," said one man.

But, death or not, one had gone, running across the lawn, up the steps, and into the clouds of smoke filling the piazza and wreathing the great white

columns—Valentine Dugarre. Black and Livingston would have followed her, but were forcibly restrained. It was enough, they were told, that two lives should be lost, without throwing their own away. But in a few moments a joyful shout drew all to the side of the house, where they saw Valentine at a second-story window, with Helen Lawrence half-fainting at her side. She helped her through the window, and those below could hear her eager words of encouragement as Helen dropped safely down to the hands outstretched to receive her.

"Now, Valentine! quickly, dear!" cried her cousin, sharply.

"Yes, for God's sake!" Livingston cried. But it was too late. A volume of flame seemed to burst up at her very feet, curling in the folds of her white gown and circling about her head. Ont of that fiery nimbus her face shone for a moment, and then, with a creaking of burning timbers and a great flare of light, the whole building fell in.

THE STORY OF A LILAC GOWN.

It was my grandaunt, Euphemia D'Esterre's gown; and when my mother said that I must wear it to the fancy-dress party, superstitious terror thrilled through me. It lay in an old chest, under a heterogeneous collection of D'Esterre relics, and was a peculiarly soft, sheeny lilac silk, made in a quaint fashion, with a slender, pointed bodice, puffed shoulders, and a full, straight skirt. Frills of fine yellow old lace finished off the low neck and short sleeves, and a faint, exquisite perfume lingered in its delicate, shimmering folds. A portrait of my grandaunt—painted in that very lilac gown by some long-forgotten New Orleans artist—hung over our sitting-room mantel, and many a time I stood before it, brooding over the mystery enshrouding the final fate of the original.

It was a beautiful picture of a beautiful young woman, with radiant blue-gray eyes, golden hair rolled high on her proudly poised head, and lips ready to curve in happy laughter. A cluster of cream-white roses drooped against her bosom, and a string of pearls encircled her full, white throat, A curious sympathy seemed to exist between me and this fair kinswoman, who had lived, loved, and passed from the earth long before my birth. She had been a belle and beauty in the days when the D'Esterres were rich, with plantations on Red River and a winter home in New Orleans. She was the flower of the family, her father's favorite, and he had promised her in marriage to one of the wealthiest planters in Louisiana,

when he discovered that she had fallen deeply in love with a young man he had employed as overseer—a handsome, cultivated, but poor young German. There were scenes and violent words, but Euphemia firmly refused to give up her lover until he was proven guilty of the theft of a large sum of money from her father. It was a terrible blow to her, but more terrible still was an account of his death a few weeks after he sailed away to the West Indies. He had died of yellow fever.

She fell into a state of the deepest melancholy; and, being a devout Catholic, entreated to be allowed to enter a convent and spend the remainder of her life in pious works; but her family refused. They permitted her to convert the dressing-room attached to her bedroom into an oratory, and, wisely or unwisely, left her alone for a season to indulge her grief, to pray for the soul of her departed lover, and to find healing for her own wounded heart. Then they sought to draw her back into the world again; the wealthy suitor reappeared, and, wearied by arguments and entreaties, she promised to marry him.

The wedding was to take place on the plantation, and many guests were bidden, and a great feast prepared.

On her wedding-eve Euphemia came down clothed in the lilac gown, cream-white roses on her breast, and the string of pearls around her fair throat. Her family were puzzled and indignant, for that gown somehow seemed linked with the memory of her sweetheart, who had died in disgrace. It was a strange whim to wear it the night before her marriage. But the evening passed merrily enough, and at eleven o'clock the bedroom candles were lighted, and she went up the stairs to her room with a smile on her lips, the lilac gown felling around her in soft, shimmering folds.

It was the last time family, lover or friends ever looked upon Euphemia D'Esterre. The next morning her room was empty. The pearls lay on the dressing-table with the withered roses, and the lilac gown hung over the back of a chair; but bride, bridal-gown and veil were gone. They looked into the oratory, thinking that she had gone in there to breathe her last virginal prayer before the simple altar, where she had knelt so many times; but the light shining dimly through the narrow, veiled window, revealed the sacred place silent, untenanted. They sought her everywhere; they spent money lavishly, but to no purpose. She had vanished forever.

Time and the fortunes of war had wrought many changes in the D'Esterre family. My mother, a pale, melancholy young widow, and I—another Euphemia D'Esterre—and Uncle Peter were the last of the family. And we had drifted away from Louisiana to an old mansion on the Chattahoochee, in Middle Georgia. Across the river lay the idle, sleepy old town of Magnoliaville, with its shady streets, ivy-covered churches, and inn, rarely visited by a traveler and stranger.

We had some old silver, my grandaunt's picture, the pearls, and the lilac

gown. These were all the real treasures we had gathered from the wreck of family fortunes; and Uncle Peter was the last living link between us and the past. He was a very old man, his black face shriveled into a network of wrinkles, his shoulders bent, his head white, almost, as snow. He possessed great pride and dignity. His long life had been spent in the services of the D'Esterres, and he refused to leave them when freedom was proclaimed.

"Tu late fo' dat now. I praise de Lawd I gwine die a free man, but I b'long dis fambly tu long tu leave 'em now. Let all go dat feels lack dey wanter, ole Peter gwine stay tel 'e dies; yes, tel 'e dies."

And he did stay, and was the favorite playfellow and companion of my childhood.

"Yo's de las', Miss Phemy, honey, de las' o' dem all, and yo's nuff lack Miss Euphemy tu 'a' been 'er twin. Lawd, but dis is er mighty strange worl'—mighty strange," he would often say, shaking his white head. He seemed to feel a certain responsibility and care toward me as the last of the family.

He lived in the little cabin at the foot of the garden, provided for out of our slender income and exempted from all labor; but he insisted on regarding himself as our servant, weeded the garden, or sat in the wide, bare hall, ready to meet chance visitors and usher them into the barer parlor with old-time ceremony.

To me a halo of romance surrounded his venerable head. Such stories as he could tell me of the past! They were highly colored and delightfully exaggerated. My mother, absorbed in melancholy retrospection, left me much to my own devices, and many an evening I spent in Uncle Peter's cabin, listening to his rambling talk, and questioning him about my ill-fated grandaunt. Nearly all that I had ever learned of her history had been gleaned from his conversations. He would sit at the corner of the hearth, bent forward in his chair, his wrinkled old hands folded on the knob of his walking stick, the firelight playing in uncertain, flickering gleams over his black face and kinky white locks. He was a fair type of the old-fashioned plantation negro, simple, superstitious, but shrewd and faithful to his trusts. Of Euphemia D'Esterre he always spoke with reverential pride, but keeping a certain guard over himself as though he possessed some knowledge he did not want to betray.

"She wus mighty proud, oh yes, honey, dey all helt dey heads high; but she neber was hard on de black fo'ks. She al'ays had er smile, or kind word for um, tel bimeby she got in dat trubble, en had no smiles for ennybody. Ole marse had jes done gimme tu be Marse Albert's boy, en I was little; but I seed en hear more'n ennybody things I does. I seed 'er comin' down de stairs dat night in dat laylock gown, en smilin' so strange lack a chill crope down my back. De tables was done spread fo' de weddin', de cakes backed, de silber shinin', en de fo'ks all done come. Hit would 'a' been de bigges' weddin' eber on Red River ef Miss

Euphemy hadn't tuk en vanished as she did. Lawd, Lawd, what did become o' 'er?"

He always came round to that hopeless question, shaking his head with a deep sigh. Then, after a reflective pause, he would cast a glance over his shoulder into the shadowy corners of the room, and, lower his voice to a solemn whisper, say:

"Miss Phemy, honey, I feels lack she gwinter come back—lack she gwinter 'pear tu ole Peter 'fo' 'e dies."

I had listened to the utterance of that superstitious belief countless times, but repetition could not rob it of its impressiveness. I ceased to shiver and feel as though my blood was curdling, but I would cast an awed, half-fearful glance out into the night, almost expecting to see her come floating downward through its solemn gloom, clothed in white raiment, radiant as the stars.

No wonder a thrill of apprehension chilled my young blood, when the lilac gown was suggested as a suitable costume for the first fancy-dress party I had ever known to be given in Magnoliaville.

"It is quaint, and lovely, and with the pearls will be quite charming; and then I have heard that there are visitors—yes, actually three or four visitors in Magnoliaville," said my mother, with a sparkle of animation.

"But I don't want to wear that dress; indeed, I would rather stay at home than put it on!" I faltered, ashamed, yet determined to speak out my fears.

"Why, Phemie!" she exclaimed, in gentle scorn, "what nonsense! You are nineteen years old, and have too few opportunities of going into the world to give up one for a childish whim. I was married at your age," sighing softly; then her eyes strayed from me to the picture. "How strangely you resemble her! It would really be a fine idea to copy the picture as closely as possible."

"Oh, mother!" I shuddered: but she chided me gently, and I had to yield to her wishes. She superintended my toilet that night, and I trembled when I looked at myself in the mirror; for it was not Phemie D'Esterre, the obscure country girl, but Euphemia D'Esterre, the Louisiana belle and beauty, reflected before my startled eyes. The string of pearls around my throat and a cluster of white roses completed the illusion.

Friends were coming over the river for me, and my mother hastened down stairs to be ready to meet them, leaving me to follow more leisurely. A light burned in the lower hall, and Uncle Peter sat in his favorite chair dozing. Did the rustle of my gown disturb him as I stepped softly from stair to stair? He moved uneasily, raised his head, and glancing upward, saw me. For a moment he stared vacantly, his dim old eyes clouded with sleep; but as I drew nearer a dull, ashy hue overspread his face—a convulsive trembling seized him.

"Great land! ef dar ain't Miss Euphemy now, done come at las'!" he mut-

tered, hoarsely. "Honey, I'se been 'spectin' en lookin' fo' yo' menny a day. Dar, dar, don't come tu nigh," raising a shaking hand pleadingly. "I 'spect I know what yo' come fo'. Hit's 'bout dem letters dey tuk, en de way dey treated young marse 'bout dat money dey made lack 'e stole. I knowed dar'd be no res' fo' yo' tel yo' foun' hit all out. Hit wusn't me, honey. I neber done yo' no harum. Hit was ole Dan'l. Yo' 'member Dan'l, what waited on ole marse, en knowed all de comin'-in en goin'-out o' de place? Hit wus Dan'l ole marse gin dem gold dollars tu, tu he'p git young marse in trubble, tu spy on yo', en tu steal de letters what yo' writ 'im. Oh, yes, yes. Peter wus mighty young den, des big ernuff tu wait on Marse Albert; but 'e know all long how dey wus treatin' yo'. 'E watch en listen, but 'e 'feered tu speak, en 'e wouldn't say nuffin arterwards fo' de fambly's sake; 'e des keep hit all tu 'isse'f."

So there had been fraud and dishonor on the part of my family, and Uncle Peter had kept the secret through all his long life. I was too confused and agitated by the mistake he had made in my identity to fully comprehend all his words at the moment, but later they returned clearly to me.

"Uncle Peter," I cried, "don't you know me?"

"Yes, yes, honey, ain't I been tellin' yo' hit wus Dan'l he'ped ole marse break yo' po' heart, en fix dat money tel fo'ks b'lieve young marse stole hit. When dar wus no weddin', kase yo' done gone whar no man could fine yo', Dan'l 'e 'pented o' 'is sin; 'e fine no res' fo' 'is soul; 'e take de money what had been gin tu 'im, in tu ole marse, en lay hit down 'fo' 'im, en sez:

"'I can't keep hit, Marse, hit des burn my hands, des burn my soul. I'm gittin' ole, I gwine die 'fo' menny year, sah, en I can't go tu de jedgment long o' dat money; en den Miss Euphemy she des 'pear tu me, en she say: "Dan'l, Dan'l, what yo' been doin'? 'Pent, Dan'l, 'pent 'fo' de Lawd's wrath be turned ag'in' yo'!" I sees 'er in eber' shadder, hears 'er in eber' win' dat blows. She come in de night-time, en she come in de daytime. Oh, Marse, take hit back, fo' de lub o' Gawd, en let me be de hardes' wuked man on de place, so ez I git ease o' my trubble.'

"En Dan'l, 'e des brake down, en cry out loud, de tears a-rollin' frum 'is eyes, en ole marse groan, en sez:

"'She done gone, Dan'l—she done gone, en all de 'pentin' in de worl' ain't gwine bring 'er back, en dar ain't nuffin' 'ud ease my trubble. De Lawd's wrath be on me, Dan'l—de Lawd's wrath be on me. Go, ef wuk gwine do enny good, but don't come nigh me 'g'in. I ain't blamin' yo', Dan'l, but 'pear lack de sight o' yo' make me feel wus.'

"En Dan'l, 'e tuk en go out, en neber look on ole marse' face agin. Dan'l 'e 'pented o' 'is sin. 'E live by 'isse'f; 'e see ha'nts, en 'e hear sperits talkin', en 'e wuk all de days o' 'is life. En ole marse 'e mus 'a' seed ha'nts tu, fo' 'e fine no res'

tel 'e die."

He sunk to his knees before me, his white head bowed to the floor.

"Trufe what I been tellin' yo', Miss Euphemy, all trufe. Now go 'way, honey, go 'way, en don't ax ole Peter to tell enny more tel 'e come to die."

I have no words in which to describe the effect of his confession on my excited mind, and how I pitied his fear. I tried to draw near to him, to convince him of my identity; but he rose, and retreated before me.

"Honey, I knows yo', I 'member how yo' come down de stairs dat odder night in dat laylock gown."

You can easily fancy that I was in no mood for the party. My friends were charmed with my costume.

"And I have a special reason for desiring you to look your loveliest to-night," said Mrs. Landsdell, as we made our way down to the ferry. "We have a stranger with us."

"A stranger!" I echoed, my thoughts still running on Uncle Peter and his strange hallucination.

"Yes; Mr. Herman Vandala, from New Orleans. He arrived only yesterday, to look after some land an agent had bought for him. My dear, he is a splendid fellow, rich, and a pet of society, but not in the least spoiled. He came across the river with us."

We were at the ferry, and in the light of the boatman's lantern I could see the stranger leaning on the railing guarding the water's edge. He was slender, and not above medium height, and when he threw his cigar into the water, and turned toward us, a curious sensation, conviction—I know not which—came over me, that I had met him before; that his dark, handsome face, and clear, winning eyes were familiar to me, I stammered when introduced, and stumbled so awkwardly when he held out his hand to assist me into the boat, that my cloak dropped to the ground. It was his turn to lose composure. He grew very pale, and stared at me as though I embodied a ghost.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured; my wraps were restored, and I sank tremblingly to the seat.

The remarks addressed to me, while crossing the river, were answered only in monosyllables. A kind of breathless expectation had seized upon me. What would happen next, I wondered? As often as I encountered Mr. Vandala's eyes, I felt the blood rush afresh to my face. When we landed, to my relief, Mrs. Landsdell claimed the stranger as her escort, leaving me to the care of her husband. But the moment an opportunity presented itself, after we entered the ballroom, Mr. Vandala came to me.

"Miss D'Esterre, will you promenade with me?"

I accepted his offered arm, and we passed into the parlor.

"I am anxious to explain my strange behavior when you dropped your cloak at the river," he said, in a low tone, his manner full of repressed excitement. "You are the perfect image of an old miniature in my possession, even to every detail of your dress, and I felt startled at the sight of you."

I trembled, yet did not feel greatly surprised.

"If I could only see the miniature," I murmured, hesitatingly.

From an inner breast-pocket he instantly drew a small faded case, and opened it.

"It is painted on ivory, and belongs to a past generation; but you—I can hardly believe that you did not sit for it."

I bent eagerly over it, and saw an exquisitely painted portrait of my grandaunt, evidently copied from the picture in our possession. The blue-gray eyes smiled into mine, the sweet, curved lips seemed ready to unclose in speech.

"Where did you get this picture?" I exclaimed, eagerly.

"It was found among the private papers of an old man, who died in the West Indies, many years ago," Mr. Vandala quietly replied. "He was overseer on one of her father's plantations—accepted the situation until something better should present itself—for he was a stranger in a strange land. He dared to love her, but her family violently opposed their marriage, and succeeded in separating them. In bitterness of spirit, he left the country with the stigma of dishonor upon him."

"Unmerited, unmerited," I said, in a stifled tone.

"Even the girl he loved believed in his guilt, and in a year or two accepted the suitor her family approved of."

"Believing him dead," I said quietly.

"But on the eve of her wedding-day disappeared," Mr. Vandala continued, apparently not heeding my interruptions. "It was a mystery relatives and friends were unable to solve, for with the picture I found a pile of old newspapers, filled with accounts of her disappearance and the hopeless efforts made to find her. That portrait has been my companion since the days of primary schools and round jackets, going with me through college and over Europe. Can you wonder at my agitation when the original seemed to stand before me?"

He paused a moment, but I could find no words in which to answer him. That odd feeling of a former acquaintance with him seemed to be growing upon me.

"It would be interesting to solve the mystery of her disappearance, even now."

"She died that night," I said firmly.

"Pardon me, how do you know? Could she not have entered a convent, or fled to some large city?"

"She died that night," I repeated; "but where and how I cannot tell you."

"You seem familiar with her story," bending to look keenly into my face.

"She was my grandaunt, Euphemia D'Esterre," returning his glance.

"And he was my uncle, Herman Vandala."

Euphemia D'Esterre, Herman Vandala! What strange trick of fate had brought those two names together again, and under such changed circumstances? I, the last representative of the D'Esterres, dwelt in humble obscurity, apart from the world, while he had wealth, position—everything.

"I will sit down," I murmured, faintly.

My hand was quickly drawn to his arm again, and held closely as he led me to a seat, while in a kind of dream I heard him say: "Forgive me. I knew you must be a descendant of that family the moment I saw you—heard your name."

If I am minute in recording all the occurrences of that evening, it is because every incident was so vividly impressed upon my memory; it was, in reality, the beginning of life for me. I felt that I had simply existed before. I danced and talked, but mechanically. A spell seemed to be upon me, wrought by the lilac gown. At last I slipped away from the crowd to the white-columned piazza. A few people were walking up and down its ample length, and some lovers were sitting in a remote corner, talking softly. Dewy roses brushed my gown as I descended the steps and strolled idly to the shadow of a large mimosa tree. A chair had been placed under it, and I sank down upon it. How calm, how cool the night! A mocking bird trilled drowsily in the tree above me, the river flowed between its low banks with gentle murmur, the stars shone afar in the depths of the sky. In the midst of the silence I heard a clock strike. I counted eleven strokes; and then, without warning, the scene suddenly changed from the starlit lawn to a sleeping-room altogether unfamiliar to me. It was luxurious, but curiously old-fashioned, with delicate blue and white hangings and quaint furniture. On a low couch lay a white satin gown, with a wedding veil thrown over it. An empty jewel case stood carelessly open, and some costly gifts were scattered about. Candles, set in slender silver candlesticks, burned on the dressing-table.

Subdued sounds of life were borne faintly up from the lower part of the house, and through an open window flashed the lights from negro cabins. Then I heard footsteps on the stairs, soft laughter, and a winning voice said:

"Good-night, Euphemia, good-night, and sweet dreams visit thee. We shall pray to the saints for sunshine on the bride to-morrow."

The room door swung partly open.

"Thank you, Melanie," said a low, clear voice in reply, and then the speaker entered, a young, lovely woman, clothed in shimmering lilac silk, with creamy roses on her breast, and pearls encircling her white, uncovered throat.

She clasped her hands with a gesture of passionate, unutterable despair as the door closed, and in her uplifted eyes the anguish of death seemed to be

mirrored.

"Oh, I cannot go through with this mockery, this loathed marriage! Why, why are they all so blind, so blind? Hearts cannot be bought and sold; love is eternal. Oh, Herman, Herman, why could you not be worthy of my love?"

She fell weeping and moaning to the floor, but quickly rose again.

"I will go to father, I will tell him that I cannot be married to-morrow; oh, I will open all my heart to him. Surely he loves me more than his pride."

She opened the door and glided noiselessly into the hall, I an unseen shadow at her side. She made her way unerringly through the darkness to the staircase, and down to the lower passage. The dining-room door stood ajar, and in the dimly lighted interior, tables, spread for the wedding feast, glittered. She turned from the sight with a shudder, even when she passed softly through the room to another door, standing also ajar. She paused before it with her hand pressed upon her heart, looking into the room beyond. A handsome, haughty old man sat by a table with a small box of papers open under his hand, while on the other side of the table, stood a tall negro, black as ebony. The old man took a handful of gold from his pocket, and pushed it across to the servant, saying:

"Here, Daniel, I make you a present of this for your faithfulness. Are the papers all here? Yes, I see. Herman Vandala has an unpleasant way of haunting my thoughts to-night; but I will not regret what has been done—I will not. It was the only sure way to separate them, cruel as it might seem to brand an innocent man with dishonor. Pshaw! it served his presumption right, and some day, when Euphemia is a happy wife, I will make restitution. To-morrow will see the triumph of my hopes and plans," he said, as though to himself, He leaned back in his chair, his fine, proud face softening; but the listener shivered, and trembled like a leaf, her beautiful face ghastly pale. She turned and groped her way across the room, and up-stairs again, and I—I, who felt the agony rending her, could only walk at her side in spirit, not in flesh.

"So they plotted—they deliberately wronged him, and sent him to his death. My God! and I believed him guilty!"

She was calm, but madness shone in her eyes.

"To-morrow," she laughed low and strangely—"to-morrow I'll be the bride of death. Oh, I'll cheat them of their triumph! Black Pond will hide the secret of my disappearance, for not even my father cares to go there, so many superstitions and dark traditions surround it."

She opened a door, and entered an oratory. Wax lights burned on a small altar; the incense of flowers filled the air. A white cross gleamed in the dim light, and the pictured faces of saints looked down from the walls. The influence of the place seemed to soften her.

"Mother of Christ, forgive them, and receive my poor broken spirit. Inter-

cede for me," she prayed, falling to her knees on the cushion before the altar, with clasped hands and head bowed low. "I am friendless—friendless here on earth: death alone can save me. Pitying Christ, have mercy. Thou dost understand."

The light fell around her like a halo. It touched the gold of her hair to luminous brightness, shone on one fair cheek, round uncovered arm and graceful shoulder, and swept downward to the floor, where violet shadows lay in the rich soft folds of her gown. What incomparable loveliness to be given to death, and such a hideous death! but no shrinking, no regret moved her. The knowledge of her father's treachery had decided her. She rose, reverently kissed the crucifix, and, returning to her room, began to make her preparations. She caressed the lilac gown, as she unlaced it to exchange it for the white satin and wedding veil. They should be her shroud, instead of her bridal garments.

"Who knows but some happier, more fortunate Euphemia D'Esterre, may wear this beloved gown? If so, I pray that it may bless her with all that has been denied me."

It rustled softly, fell away from her to the floor in a shimmering heap, and—

When my friends found me I lay in the rustic chair unconscious, with the dew-wet mimosa drooping over me; but when I regained the power of rational thought and speech, it was after a week of delirious illness. The Magnoliaville physician said that it had been, coming on for some time, and was the result of overwrought nerves, aggravated by my exposure on the lawn that night, and his explanation was readily accepted, while my story of the lilac gown and Euphemia D'Esterre's sad death was set aside as a dream, or the ravings of fever. Perhaps it was a dream, but I shall always have doubts, and I shall always believe that old gown imparted to me the secret of her death, and brought back prosperity to the D'Esterres.

I wondered what had become of that box of papers—if it had been destroyed, or if Uncle Peter could have it in his possession. That did not seem probable, still I determined to make sure, and one evening, when my mother left me alone in the sitting-room, I stole away through the garden to Uncle Peter's cabin. My sudden appearance startled him, and without giving him time to recover, I sternly said:

"Uncle Peter, where is that box of papers?"

A cunning gleam shot into his eyes.

"What yo' talkin' 'bout, honey?"

"The papers Euphemia's father left."

"What yo' know 'bout dem, Miss Phemy? Did—did yo' see 'er too?" The thought sending an ashen hue to his face.

"Yes, I saw her," I said, solemnly.

He groaned.

"Honey, hit wus fo' Marse Albert's sake. I tuk en kep' 'em so ez 'e couldn't fine 'em when 'is pa died." He looked at me imploringly. "Let 'em be, honey—let 'em be."

"Give them to me, Uncle Peter," I said gently, but firmly.

Tremblingly he lifted a loose stone from the hearth, and brought up a small black box, the same that I had seen under the hands of old Gaston D'Esterre, in that midnight vision. I did not heed Uncle Peter's moans and ejaculations, but, getting down on my knees, turned the key in the rusty lock. For half a century and more this faithful servant had hidden the evidence of his old master's wrong-doing. But I ruthlessly poured out letters and papers, some of them with seals unbroken—letters written by Euphemia and her lover, and intercepted by the crafty Daniel—papers bearing false witness to Herman Vandala's guilt, and last of all, a brief, remorseful confession from Gaston D'Esterre. They were all yellow and musty, and rustled in my shaking fingers, as I turned them over in the light of the pine-knot fire blazing on the hearth.

"Where did you get these, Uncle Peter?" I asked at last.

"De Lawd forgive me, chile, I *stole* 'em, en tuk en hid 'em while ole marse lay a-dyin' en a-tellin' Marse Albert whar to fine 'em. I 'feered to burn 'em, but I kep' 'em, kase dey might fall inter de wrong han's."

There were footsteps on the garden walk, the doorway framed my mother's black-draped figure and pale, frightened face.

"Phemie, child, what are you doing?"

"Unearthing old secrets," I said.

Beyond her I saw Herman Vandala, and, sweeping the papers together in my hands, rose up. I held them out to him, trembling, burning with shame, yet determined to right that old wrong at any cost.

"Proofs of your uncle's innocence that I have just discovered—I—"

He took them, and, with scarcely a glance, threw them over my shoulder into the fire. They caught like tinder, and for a moment the small room was brilliantly illuminated, then only a charred, blackened heap of ashes remained to tell us of that old romance. I covered my face with my hands, but he drew them away.

"We will not intermeddle with the past. Restitution cannot be made in this world, unless—is it generous to say?—unless you will be my wife. Let this Herman Vandala have the happiness his kinsman was cheated out of. I love you. I have been loving you faithfully for years. Your mother knows and consents. Come to me, Phemie, dearest, come."

My mother smiled tearfully upon us; but Uncle Peter stared at the charred remnants of the secret he had kept so long, muttering:

”Bress de Lawd, dey’s gone! Dey weighed heavy on my soul—heavy. I knowed sumfin ’ud happen when I seed Miss Euphemy t’other night steppin’ soft on de stairs, en in dat laylock gown; yes, dat same laylock gown.”

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