

## SUNLIGHT PATCH



Without warning he sprang like a panther at the offender's throat

*See page 12*



# SUNLIGHT PATCH

BY

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"Motor Rambles in Italy," etc.



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To  
MAUD BLANC HARRIS

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# SUNLIGHT PATCH

## CHAPTER I

### OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

He appeared an odd figure, sitting loosely on an old white mare which held her nose to the ground and cautiously single-footed over the uneven road. Unconcerned, perhaps unconscious that he bestrode a horse, his head was thrown back and his gaze penetrated the lace-work of branches to a sky exquisite blue where a few white, puffy clouds were aimlessly suspended. And, like these clouds, his thoughts hovered between unrealized hopes and the realistic mountains he was leaving; thoughts interwoven with ambitions which had obsessed his waking hours and glorified his dreams — dreams, desires, ambitions, always before his eyes but out of reach. His hair fell to the opened collar of a homespun shirt, and homespun were his trousers, tucked into a pair of homemade boots. His saddle bore an obscure brand of the United States army, for it had carried one of his people through the War of the States fifty years before, and across its pommel balanced a long, ungainly rifle of an earlier period.

It was an afternoon of that month when the spirit of

Kentucky arises from the loamy soil after a recreating sleep of winter. The fragrance of the earth was everywhere. Overhead the trees met in great, silent arches — Nature's Gothic, re-frescoed now in the delicate tints of spring by the brush of Nature's Master — beneath which all life seemed breathlessly poised as though in this dim-lit, sun-dappled cathedral of the forest a mute service were in progress. But the man — he did not seem to see, or feel, or be. Thus, without a sound except for the muffled shuffle of the old mare's unshod hoofs, he rode.

They were coming down the mountain, he and the old white mare; coming down into the valley, into the "settlements"; and to-day marked the last stage of his journey from the center of those wild giants which had bounded the territory of his twenty-two years' existence. To-day he would emerge from the foothills into the open country; into the smiling country of his imagination, from somewhere in whose expanding fields now came the call of a toiling plowboy. It was this which finally brought him from his reverie in the sky, from his lofty dreams to the smell of earth.

Drawing down his gaze, he saw that here, indeed, was the open threshold of a new world, and his eyes distended with a veritable glory of sight. They had seen distance, but not like this. They had ranged from mountain peak to mountain peak, or across the scarred tops of intervening peaks to a skyline untamed even by the coaxing tints of rose and purple sunsets; but before him now lay distance of another kind: hills upon hills, 'twas true, yet low; and whose once rough lines were mellowed by

the patient surgery of a hundred years of plowshares. Gentle slopes, and shallow valleys, and slopes again — not standing like his graven monsters of the Cumberlands, but lolling in peace and lazy unconcern, melting into the azure west so artfully that he could not be definitely sure where earth left off and sky began. And between these softly molded forms was no towering harshness at whose contemplation his eyes would intuitively have narrowed, but a subdued carpet of many fields, with here and there a nestling home. A grand, sweeping canvas, it might have been, whose browns of new-turned soil, whose light green tints of reborn orchards and sprouting wheat, were gracefully interrupted by the deeper tones of clustered trees — those remnants of primeval forest which the unintentional landscape gardeners of pioneer days had chanced to leave standing in this picturesque Kentucky valley.

A welcome seemed to rise from it like soothing fingers laid upon his brow and his frame drooped in extreme contentment; for it portrayed the country he had come to seek from his home back in that wilderness where bridle-paths are boulevards and primitive log cabins the mansions of his people. So he continued to sit spell-bound, held between the satisfaction of lingering and the impulse to ride down into it, and to rest there as everything seemed to be resting in a soft growth of plenty. This was decided by the mare which, of her own accord, turned and started on.

He did not again draw rein for many miles. The needle of his nature urged him forward, straight along

a narrow valley lane that ambled between mildewed fences and their inclosed fields; between untouched walls of wild-grape, red-bud and blossoming dog-wood; and he knew that his intuition was not sending him astray. This sweet-smelling road was now making another turn which ushered him directly upon a frame schoolhouse, set slightly back in a grove of trees. Quickly, he brought the old mare to a stop.

That it was a schoolhouse — the very schoolhouse which had been the reliquary of his dreams — he never doubted, so accurately did it fit the description given by a mountain preacher; and to be actually facing it in the material form filled him with a nameless fascination. Sitting rigid, in an attitude bent forward, his tense stare directed on its partly open door, he suggested a Marathon runner crouched for the start of that great trial; and somewhere in his subconsciousness a voice whispered that this day, this hour, marked the beginning of his mortal race. He comprehended a certain vague significance to which analysis was denied.

Then slowly dismounting he led the mare deep into an opposite thicket. There was no necessity for doing this, no reason, except the latent sense of caution a wild creature feels in strange places; and, having concealed his rifle beneath a fallen log, he turned back to the road. But now he hesitated, putting one hand against a tree for support. A close observer might have seen that his body was swaying slightly from side to side with a curious movement, not unlike the restive motion of a caged beast; and a glance at his face would have confirmed the exist-

ence of some overwhelming emotion. In a deep, drawling voice, he spoke:

“Wall, Ruth, I reckon hyar hit air, 'cause hit looks jest like the preacher said! Now help my arms ter keep hit with me, 'n' pray the Lawd ter make my haid larn all the larnin' hit's got shet up in thar! 'N' tell Him ter give my eyes the fu'st sight of ary danged skunk that'll try ter crowd me outen hit, so's I kin kill 'im till he rots in hell; 'n' I'll be the Christian ye asked me ter!”

A gentle, almost a childish smile of satisfaction played across his mouth, and the next moment he was walking forward, carefully and reverently, as though the little schoolhouse were on holy ground.

The afternoon was waning, and the declining sun cast a genial glow upon the weatherboarded front; gilding, too, the near side of a crooked flag-pole set jauntily in the yard. Except for evidences of recent life the place seemed utterly deserted, and emboldened, even though disappointed by this, he went up to the door. Here again he hesitated, for some one within was speaking. It was a woman's voice, raised in command and fear.



## CHAPTER II

### AN UNEXPECTED RESCUE

“You may go home now,” she was saying. There was a pause which carried no sign or sound of movement. “You may go home, don’t you understand?”

It was a voice that to the listening mountaineer seemed inexpressibly sweet and caressing, in spite of the determination which made it a bit unsteady. Still no answer. The silence was becoming unnatural.

“Tusk,” she said again, “don’t stand before me like this! Go home!”

Not knowing exactly what to do, but in a vague way feeling that he might be needed, the stranger stepped cautiously to the door and peered in.

With her back to the blackboard and her arms rigid against her sides, altogether in an attitude of one at bay, stood a girl. He first noticed that her hands were tightly clenched, and then his look went upward. Streaming through the window the same golden rays that burnished the weatherboards and flag-pole touched the looser strands of her hair. This, against the background of black, framed her upraised face with a halo of lustrous glory, softening the parted lips rather than showing them to be stamped with fear, but not disguising the terror which leapt from her eyes as they stared, fairly hypno-

tized, at an ungainly man who stood leering down at her. His head was set deep between massive, stooping shoulders, and his arms were abnormally long, while the color of his face indicated a diet, at some period of his life, of clay and berries. Two fang-like teeth, curving outward as the tusks of a wild boar — having furnished inspiration for the name by which he was most popularly known — added a last fierce touch to his repulsive features.

“Go home,” the girl repeated, now in a weaker voice.

“It ain’t time to go home,” he growled. “When kids don’t know their lessons you make ’em stay in, don’t you? Well, I’m a-stayin’, too!”

“Let me by this instant,” she commanded, plucking another crumb of courage from the sheer imminence of danger.

“Aw, come off yoh high airs,” he leered. “Ain’t you been standin’ me up afore the school an’ actin’ me like a fool? I ain’t kicked, have I? Well, what you want to go cuttin’ up for now?”

Brains partly numbed, or over-excited by shock, sometimes take queer and irrelevant channels of thought, and now the only thing on which she seemed able to concentrate was a duel she had witnessed on that very school-house window sill but the previous day: a duel between a locust and a wasp. They had fallen there in deadly embrace, the clumsier holding his antagonist by brute strength that ultimately would break its frail body; but the wily wasp, conscious of this danger, sent thrust after thrust of its venomous stinger with lightning stabs up and

down its enemy's armor, trusting to chance that a vulnerable spot might be found between the scales. She had watched this struggle with a breathless pleasure — for at times she could be pagan as of old — and when at last the little point slipped through, she felt no pity for the locust; rather, was she tempted to stroke the victor as it crawled from the suddenly relaxed grip of its stiffening foe, laved its wings, polished its legs, and rose into the air.

Weak with the consciousness of her peril, this mental by-play urged her to the necessity of speed; and, like the stinger, her mind began an hysterical thrusting for a more subtle method of defense.

“Tusk, I'm sorry I stood you up before the class,” she tried, in speaking kindly, to hide her loathing. “But now you must go home at once, or I shall never be able to let you come to school again!”

He laughed outright.

“Won't never let me come, no moh! Well, now jest heah that! Why, sissy, you'd ortent git so mad! Kiss me like a nice gal, an' let's make up!”

“You beast,” she cried, her fear suddenly bursting into an irresistible rage. “You beast,” she cried again, striking him in the face with all her strength. “You'll be killed for this!”

For an instant he was stunned by the surprise of her attack, but then, blind with fury, his gorilla-like arms shot out and caught her just as she was turning to dash toward the door.

During this scene the newcomer had made several determinations to enter, yet each was checked by a con-



sciousness that he did not belong to this country where he had been told strange customs prevailed. He was not at all sure but that an interference would be seriously inapt. Once or twice he had been on the verge of stealing back into the thicket for his rifle, yet the schoolhouse drama held him too firmly chained for this. Adopting now a middle course, he went up the four steps and entered with an innocent air of one having just arrived. Blinking with a pretended effort to make out the interior, he mildly asked:

“Is this Miss Jane’s school?”

Tusk sprang back with a snarl, while the girl, twisting free and frantically recovering her balance, came toward the new voice with hands outstretched, bumping against the desks as one who had suddenly gone blind. She could not speak, she could scarcely think, and only by the sternest force of will would her knees bear up; but somewhere in front of her stood deliverance, and to this she groped.

“Howdy,” the new voice spoke again, as she felt a hand take one of her own and press her toward a seat. “Ye look peak-éd; maybe ye’d better set!”

Her composure was returning in bounds; for this girl, herself born in the mountains, possessed too much innate fortitude to be long dominated by fear.

“Thank you,” her voice still trembled. “I — I must have been frightened.” Then quickly: “Yes, this is Miss Jane’s school, and I am Miss Jane.”

A curious sound rattled in the newcomer’s throat, and his chin dropped with stupid amazement. For a long

moment he stared at her, his pupils dilating and contracting in a strangely fascinating way, and his body beginning slowly to rock from side to side as it had done in the thicket across the road. But just now she was meeting his gaze with a look of excited gladness.

"Yeou! Miss Jane?" he murmured, each syllable vibrating with some deep timbre of admiration and protection. Another moment he stared, then his eyes turned and rested unflinchingly on Tusk. It was a look particularly expressive neither of surprise nor condemnation, hatred nor scorn, yet its very impassivity carried a pulsing sense of danger, as though something terrible were on the verge of happening and the various elements of destruction were being hurriedly assembled. But quietly he turned again to the girl.

"Lucy's outside. Maybe ye'd better let her take ye home!"

"Oh, ask her to come in," she cried, feeling the need of a woman perhaps more than at any time in her life, and now fearful of another sort of tragedy. She was not sure of how much this newcomer had seen, but his look at Tusk was eloquent of one thing: that if these men were left alone the building would receive its first stain of human blood. She wanted to spare her schoolhouse this. It was her boast that no life should go out by violence beneath its roof: for it had long been a recognized custom in wilder regions of this country for men to choose the wayside schools, the scattered churches or crossroads stores as places from which to usher obtrusive neighbors into eternal rest.

“Wall, she can’t do that,” the newcomer thoughtfully replied, “seein’ as how she’s my ole mare. But ye mought take her ’n’ go home. Me ’n’ this feller’ll watch yo’ school!”

Looking from one to the other, weighing the chances of outwitting Tusk, she lightly suggested:

“My own horse is in the shed. You may help me put on the saddle!”

“All right,” he readily answered. “’N’ yeou,” he turned to Tusk, now watching them with growing malignancy, “wait hyar till I git back; then verily, verily, I say unto ye, we’ll cast another devil outen the Lawd’s temple!”

She was alert to acquiesce in this. Her instinct said that unless something tentative were left in view, some further part of the drama held out to be played, the simple-minded Tusk would stop their going. His dwarfed intelligence, gauged to one idea, might be satisfied to wait only if waiting promised a climax. And as for the other’s returning — this new-found deliverer who was so thoroughly of the mountains, yet whose dialect just now had savored of the “circuit-rider” type — she felt able to cope with that exigency after they were outside. So in her eagerness she had arisen, when Tusk stepped roughly to the door and slammed it.

“Nobody’s goin’ home to-night,” he growled, turning and glaring at them.

His eyes, set unusually deep and close together, flashed murder, and the girl sank weakly back into a seat. For she knew Tusk’s strength. She had seen him shoulder

a log under which two men were struggling and walk firmly away with it. The very consciousness alone of this power was oppressive. He could crush this other man with a blow.

“A soft answer turneth away wrath,” a quiet voice whispered down to her, and continued: “Let the gal out; she wants ter go home!”

“If you’re some kind of a preacher,” Tusk snarled at him, having also noticed the Biblical character of speech, “git out yohse’f. But the gal stays right heah till I’m ready fer her to go! An’, young feller, mebbe she’ll be let go home, or mebbe she’ll come ’long with me—I ain’t decided, but I won’t be hindered by no one!” His voice was trembling with increasing passion. “Now’s yoh time to git, Mister Preacher, or, by Gawd—” He drew a long, dirty knife from a hidden sheath, and seemed unable to complete the sentence for his excited breathing.

“I hain’t a preacher,” the other quietly replied to him, “but I’ve jest been sendin’ a message ter the Lawd this very evenin’, ’n’ I reckon He had me come in heah ter look ye over, bein’ as how ye air one of them sorry skunks I’m arter.” And without warning he sprang like a panther at the offender’s throat.

The shock of his body sent Tusk backwards, tripping him over a desk where both men went down in a heap. Almost before they struck the floor the newcomer cried to her:

“Git the critter ’n’ ride, Schoolteacher! Hit’s yo’ only chance!”

He had no more time to warn, for a series of sounds, sickening, bestial sounds, told of a terrific struggle as feet and bodies and elbows dully crashed against the desks on either side. It was a narrow aisle in which to fight.

Yet she was not made of the stuff that would mount a horse and fly. Her early life, when as a slip of a girl she stood many a night with rifle in hand filling the place of lookout for an outlaw father who trafficked in moonshine whisky, had taught her to be careless of physical dangers. The terrors of a different sort of passion she had never known; but now, with this averted, her nature leapt beyond the past eight years of training — eight years spent in fitting herself as teacher for this school — and transported her to those early days of partial savagery. Again she was the little mountain outlaw, and the feeling was good, and her heart bounded with a primeval pleasure of this excitement which was routing every previous qualm of fright. Bent breathlessly forward, her hands clenched into revengeful little fists, her cheeks and eyes aflame and eager, her lips apart, and her nostrils dilated as though in very truth they sought the smell of battle, she was not a picture of one who would mount a horse and fly.

At the first rush Tusk's knife had fallen from his hand and now lay almost at her feet. Stooping impulsively, she seized it, while at the same moment he uttered a low chuckle of satisfaction and started to arise. He did not move as one entirely free, but clinging to a burden, and when his shoulders slowly appeared she saw that he was lifting the other man, who still struck ineffectually at his



face. Handling him with no great exertion, he backed against a desk and forced the body between his knees; then placing one huge, hairy hand behind his victim's ear, and the other beneath his chin, he began calmly to twist.

Jane realized the hellishness of this move which with cruel certainty would break the yielding neck. The mountaineer also knew, and put his remaining strength into the struggle, yet only for a moment did it seem to divert Tusk's purpose.

If the girl had previously looked the beautiful savage, she now became its incarnation. With an agonized cry she screamed at him to stop, but his answer was to pin the man more firmly and recommence the murderous twisting.

It was a matter of seconds now. Any instant she might hear the snap, and see the one who was giving his life for her quiver and become still. No longer hesitating, she flew at them with the blade raised high and poised herself for the stroke. Yet she could not send it. Again she tried, and a sob of rage burst from her throat as the hand refused to obey. Had the creature turned, it might have been less difficult; but the utter revulsion of driving steel into unsuspecting and unresisting flesh was more than she could master. Slowly the head was yielding to those horrible hands, and the newcomer's eyes rested on her own for the merest instant. It was the look of a courageous man sinking beneath waves; but the sweat and whipcord veins were eloquent of his frenzied resistance.

"Someone's coming! Someone's coming!" she suddenly cried, rushing to the door and flinging it wide open.

Tusk looked up with a snarl.

"Quick! Quick!" she cried again. "Here, this way — quick! He's killing a man! Oh, thank God!" She sprang back into the room, rapturously clasping the knife to her breast. "They've come! They've come!"

With an oath Tusk flung his victim heavily to the floor and dashed to a rear window through which he disappeared. She watched only long enough to see that his rout was absolute — that her ruse of approaching help had been successful. Then she turned.

The room seemed dark to her eyes which had just been peering into the sunset's fading glow, and she walked with feeling steps toward the spot where she knew the body lay, asking in a whisper: "Are you alive?" The heavy silence made her shiver. There, at her feet, sprawled the shadowy bulk, twisted and grotesque, and an uncontrollable feeling of loathing crept over her.

With startling suddenness a quail, close by the open door, ripped out his evening call, and she sprang back as though the thing upon the floor had moved. Yet she continued to stare down at it, her cold hands pressed against her burning cheeks — fascinated, horrified. A few little minutes ago he had been a moving, feeling being like herself; and now he had entered the portals of that mysterious eternity — at this very moment he was standing before the calm scrutiny of God Himself! How was he behaving in that great inspection? Trem-

bling with bowed head, like herself? Or smiling with a courage he had shown during his last earthly moments while giving his life for her?

So vivid were these thoughts which raced like fury through her brain that when the body did actually move she gave a piercing shriek of terror. But she had recovered even before the echo of her voice resounded through the little room and, instantly alert, brought the drinking bucket from its shelf to bathe his face.

Kneeling there — or, rather, in an attitude of sitting on her crossed feet — eagerly watching for another sign of life, the tenderness which spoke in mute eloquence from every movement of her ministrations for the stranger who had stood between her and insult, was a boon that might have repaid any man for worse hurts than his. She drew his head upon her lap and began carefully to staunch a trickle of blood flowing from a small cut in his temple.

The sun went down, regretfully backing out of sight, and by its slow retreat seeming loath to leave them to the somber night. She did not notice its decline, but in the afterglow leaned nearer, pushing back his matted hair and searching each of his well-molded features. There was nothing of a personal interest in the look; there was nothing in the contact of their touch that aroused in her the least personal appeal. He was merely a thing hurt, a thing wounded in her defense.

Again from outside the window came a call, the swinging, twilight-erie notes of a whip-poor-will; while, from afar off, somewhere in the black woods, hooted an owl.



Softly, but with a restless spirit, the night-wind began to stir; and a murmur, like the winnowing of many wings, passed tremulously through the branches which swept the schoolhouse roof. But now she was unafraid.

## CHAPTER III

### THE WOUNDED MOUNTAINEER

She was no longer fearful for his life. Saner deductions had recalled how he was fighting up to the moment Tusk threw him off, and this precluded the probability of a broken neck. The small abrasion over his temple, where it must have struck a desk, could alone be responsible for the unconsciousness which, she now felt assured, would soon be passing.

Had Jane been dressed as a nun, the picture she made with the young mountaineer's head upon her lap would have startled the world. None of those discerning critics who stalk the galleries on varnishing day could have passed a canvas such as this without bending their rusty knees at least one creak in humble reverence. For God had carefully blessed her with a Madonna-like loveliness, a matchless purity, which held enthralled all who came suddenly upon that look. Perhaps it was not known in Heaven where she got her smile. It was this, when rippling from eyes to mouth, and lingering about the ovals of her cheeks, that could have swayed Faith upon its base or chained it thrice firmly to the Rock.

She had first acquired a pleasant suspicion of this years before in the convent up the valley, where the good sisters had given her shelter. Early one morning on

mischievous bent, at the very peep of dawn, she had filched the garb of old sister Methune and, supporting its bulky skirt, demurely walked into the Mother Superior's sanctified chamber. What that good woman thought as she raised herself up from her couch is not recorded even in her conscience, but Jane was sent in haste to replace the nun's attire. While passing a glass door in a dimly lit hall she saw, for the first time in her life, her own face. For five, ten minutes she continued to look back into this heretofore undiscovered and sinful reflector, sometimes laughing, sometimes making grimaces. Then for another ten minutes she simply stared. Sister Methune was late getting to her devotions that morning.

But this incident had occurred eight years ago, when she was scarcely thirteen. Until then she had literally grown up like a weed — or a wild rose — a half-savage little creature of the Cumberlands, loving passionately, hating blindly, doing all things with the full intensity of a vivid, whole-souled temperament. She lived in a cabin many miles from the more civilized country where the convent lay, under the questionable protection of a noted feudist father, who was usually making moonshine when not stalking his enemies. Her cherished glimpses of civilization came during one month each year — July — when she picked especially fat and luscious blackberries in remote spots known only to her, and sold them in the valley to Colonel John May, whose white columned house might be seen on clear days from the convent tower.

One of her visits happened upon a day when the place

was enlivened by his daughter's approaching wedding. A distinguished house-party had assembled, among whom a city-bred young fellow had been attracted by her wild beauty. Safe from the eyes of his friends he followed her through the woodland pasture, and talked to her; and it had seemed a very natural thing. Mountain girls mature early, and she was a woman for all her tender years; a twelve and a half year old woman, partly savage, masquerading in the guise of a girl. He was dazzling to her and pleasing. But suddenly he kissed her and, infuriated, she flung the empty bucket in his face and fled. The gods may know where she learned the difference between right and wrong.

In a passion of shame and bitter hatred, she hurled back at him every oath her father, in his most prolific moments, had ever used. It was a wondrous collection. Her only idea was to reach home and return with the rifle, and so insistent was this that she ran most of the twelve intervening miles. Reaching at last the cabin clearing, she panted up its steep side, through burnt stumps and sparsely growing corn, to the door; but there across the sill her father lay face down and motionless. He might have been drunk, and so at first she thought, until her approach revealed a little hole in the back of his head. She stared at him like an image of wood, then sank upon the floor, putting her lips close to his ear.

"Pappy," she said, in a quick whisper, "Pappy, tell me who done hit! I know ye air daid — but can't ye tell me jest that?"

Her first impulse was of revenge, but slowly the love

— unmerited as it may have been — and the sense of loss, of loneliness, came over her like a great wave, and with her face on his still shoulder she wailed her wretched grief to the silent wilderness. When she looked up it was sundown. She realized that whoever had killed him might come back for her — might now, indeed, be “layin’ out” for her; and yet she could not leave him unburied! Her hands grasped his shirt and she frantically tugged, bracing her heels against the roughly hewn log door-step, in a vague way hoping that she might drag him to a spot where the ground would be soft enough to dig. A few minutes of this fruitless effort compelled her to give it up.

“Pappy, can’t ye help me, jest a leetle?” she had whispered in despair. And then the tears would flow again.

She went stealthily to the edge of the corn patch and listened. A lingering afterglow touched the broken rows of skyward-pointing tassels, but the valley below her lay shrouded in gloom. Night was creeping up the mountain side; she could see it, feel it in the horrible silence. All alone in that stark vastness of crags, disregarding those who might be “layin’ out” for her, she put her hands to her mouth and called; then leaned forward, holding her breath and listening. There was not even an echo. So she turned wearily back to the cabin and tenderly covered that which she was leaving with a quilt from her own bed, whispering:

“Gawd, nor nobody, don’t seem ter heah me tonight — ye poh, ole Pappy!”

The only cabin where she might hope for help was three miles away; the home of a partial friend — at least no enemy. Reaching it after a perilous walk through a roadless, bridgeless wilderness, she stood outside the crooked gate and called "Hallo." Again and again she called till, in desperation scoffing at the risk — for it is never wise to approach the Kentucky mountaineer's home nearer than his front gate without an invitation — she walked boldly to the door. It was open, and she peered into the darkness. No fire had been lighted for supper. She kneeled on the sill and felt around with her hand. First she touched an overturned chair, then a piece of broken lamp chimney, then a man's foot; but the man was not standing, the toes were up. Her heart turned to ice, yet the need of help was too imperative to turn away from any hope, so again she reached for the clumsy boot and fearfully moved it to see if he might be merely asleep, or drunk. The leg was stiff, and, with another shudder, she turned and fled.

By early morning she had dragged herself down from the mountains and staggered through the convent gate. Here, at least, in one of those modest retreats, which generations ago slipped into the remoter valleys of young Kentucky for their voluntary exile, she would find help! Many an afternoon when the world was blithe she had been wont to stop and listen to the mellow peal of its bell floating across her mountains on an easterly evening breeze, and in all of this torturing night of wandering she imagined it was calling. The good sisters gathered her in as though she were that more treasured lamb than



the ninety and nine, nor would they hearken to her leaving. The sheriff soon came to their call, and in his honest, gruff voice promised reverently to perform the last services at her cabin. Then she began to find peace.

But after three years here, when she had absorbed all that their patient teaching could impart, her mind grew disturbed with a new restlessness. It may have been that life was becoming monotonous; or that pictures of the great world, of which she had only had a glimpse, whetted her curiosity to go forth and see; or, more than these, it may have been her innate love for those mountains, and those mountain people — after all, her people. For she had come to learn that the blow she suffered had been struck through simple ignorance, and from this knowledge gradually developed a resolution, inspiring her with courage to approach the Mother Superior for permission to go back into the world and teach. She reminded the good woman that she had taken no vows, and horrified her by admitting that she had accepted no creed, save that of help to fellow man. After an hour of tearful, never-to-be-forgotten argument, the Mother gave signs of yielding.

It happened that upon this same afternoon Colonel May arrived, bringing some of his guests to see the convent. He was held in very high esteem by these nuns, although differing from their religious views, and if he did not quite atone for this by the frequent intervals with which the bounties of his farm added to their modest comfort, he did, at least, merit their impersonal affection. So it followed that the good Mother, being perplexed and

sore in mind over her duty to the girl, led him aside.

He was deeply affected by her story, and recalled the child who suggested faint memories of toothsome berries. Conscious of the pressing need for more schools in the rural districts of his State — especially in the neighborhood of his own home — and spontaneously in sympathy with her ambition, he so earnestly espoused her cause with promises to keep her under his protection, that the last doubt vanished from the good woman's eyes.

What the sisters had been unable to do for her, the generous Colonel fully accomplished. She was taken away to a most excellent school and, after five years, returned to him a thoroughly proficient young lady. Graceful, possessing a finish and magnetism which her wild origin made more peculiarly attractive, sympathetic, frank, normal, and exceedingly good to look upon, she excelled even those hopes which he had built during her absence. A fortnight later the quail and whip-poor-wills, near the thicket where the wounded mountaineer's mare now stood, had been startled by the rat-tat of hammers and the song of saws; and that September she found herself, at nearly twenty-one, in possession of a well equipped schoolhouse, whose fame spread far during this, its first year of existence. But while her own years of study and acquiring culture had charmingly toned the surface of her nature, the earlier intensity, the freedom of thought and behavior which are the natural heritage of those born in wild places, still simmered like a resting volcano.

And now, as her handkerchief went mechanically from the pail to the forehead of the wounded man, a shadowy



procession of these thoughts glided by in a fantastic panorama. In the stillness of the place ghosts of the old life reached out and clasped hands with actualities of the new; clasped hands, and danced, and arabesqued before her fancy until it seemed as if her entire life were performing there upon the dusky floor. If only her future could perform! She pressed the handkerchief more firmly to the wound, and waited.

Some distance along the road two men were hurriedly driving. The breeze carried this sound to her quick ears and, gently lowering the mountaineer's head, she went to the door. The whip-poor-wills abruptly hushed, for they, too, had caught the sound; and amidst that strained expectancy of woods life, which grows so tense as daylight fails, she waited.

When the approaching buggy came out of the dusk she saw what she had been expecting, Colonel May driving a powerful chestnut, and, with him, Bob Hart; not so great in stature, but resembling the older man in grace and manner as though he might in fact have been his son, instead of his daughter's husband.

A groan from the room made her hesitate on the point of rushing out to meet them, so she halloed between her hands while they alighted. A smile of extreme relief crossed her face as they came up.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're here," she cried, with pretended lightness.

"And you, my dear," the Colonel panted in his eagerness to reach her, "are more welcome still to us! What has happened that kept you?"

“Don’t be alarmed,” she answered, touched by the anxiety in his voice. “There’s a man hurt in here. He’s been unconscious for an hour — but just groaned!”

“Stabbed or shot?” Bob asked, pushing in and lighting the kerosene ceiling lamp. Its flame rose stupidly, but soon cast a luminous circle that framed the man, the bucket, the sodden handkerchief and splashes of blood-stained water on the floor, in a tragic, still-life picture.

“Stabbed or shot?” the Colonel repeated after Bob.

“Neither,” she murmured. “He fought Tusk Potter, but I’m sure it’s no worse than a blow on the head as he fell.”

“My word! My word!” the old gentleman exploded. “I’ve always been concerned about your permitting that half-witted outlaw to come here! Where is he now?” He glared into the dark corners with the light of battle in his eyes.

The unconscious man mumbled and stirred, moving as one asleep will sometimes shift to a more comfortable position. Bob, already by him on the floor, looked up, saying:

“He’s coming about all right. What shall we do, Colonel?”

“Leave him down the road,” the Colonel snapped. “Tom Hewlet’s house’ll be good enough, and I’ll pay the rascal’s niece to nurse him, if he requires it. Why did they fight?” He turned abruptly to Jane.

“He — he resented something Tusk said.”

“Something Tusk said to *you*?” The old warrior looked more ferocious than ever.

She nodded.

The Colonel's jaws came together with a snap. "By God, sir," he exclaimed to Bob, "we'll take him home, sir! He shall have the best room in Arden, sir, and all the doctors in the county! No gentleman can defend you, my dear," he took her hand, "and be left at run-down hovels on the roadside. The very suggestion, sir," he turned his frowning brows again on Bob, "is unworthy, sir!"

The young planter burst into a spontaneous laugh.

"It was certainly careless of me," he admitted, "and when our friend here perks up I'll apologise. I say, old chap," taking one of the inert wrists, "can't you come to for awhile?"

There was a slight twitching about the mouth, then the eyes opened, wearily at first, but the next moment wide with surprise. The Colonel bent over him.

"You have met with a mishap, sir," he said most gently. "If you've no friends hereabouts I offer you the hospitality of my home, which I trust you will honor me by accepting."

The mountaineer slowly raised himself to a sitting position, passed a hand over his forehead, and asked:

"What's hospitality?"

The question, the drawling quality of his voice which sounded as mellow as though someone had struck a chord upon a harp, surprised them out of an answer. Rousing further, he continued:

"I hain't got no friends 'round hyar — lest, as Ruth says, all things is friends."

“Must be a Shaker,” Bob whispered, and the Colonel, with an indulgent smile, remarked :

“I bow to the charity of Miss Ruth’s opinion, though I should scarcely expect so prompt an indorsement from one in your present position. But come, sir, and we’ll help you to our buggy.”

## CHAPTER IV

### A HUMAN ENIGMA

When the mountaineer had been assisted to his feet, he stood for a moment, with his legs apart, swaying with giddiness; then, aware that they were observing this, he looked at the Colonel and laughed. It was a silent laugh, of the eyes and mouth and a movement in the throat. One could not help thinking that should he let it out it would be deep and musical.

With growing interest, and no slight amusement, they followed him to the door where he gave a low whinnying sound that made Bob's stylish chestnut look up with intelligent expectancy. Then back in the thicket sounded a faint answer, followed by a crackling of brush, as the old mare came obediently forward. Jane's horse, also, spoke inquisitively from the shed where it was stabled, and the night sounds hushed again at this intrusion of noises.

"I am Colonel May, of this county, sir," the old gentleman said, smiling at the man's knack of mimicry. "My home, Arden, is but a few miles off."

"Howdy," replied the mountaineer, taking the proffered hand an instant late and not seeming to realize they might want to be knowing who he was. The Colonel and Bob exchanged glances.

"Perhaps," he ventured again, "you should drive with me and let Mr. Hart here ride your horse. This is Mr. Hart, sir!"

"Howdy," Bob soberly put out his hand. "My whole name is Bob Hart, this county, sir; and my home is known as Flat Rock — also at your service!"

The mountaineer thanked the Colonel with one perfunctory word, said "Howdy" to Bob, then stepped out to Lucy who gave another low whinny of welcome and rubbed her nose fondly into his hand. But something seemed to be weighing heavily on his mind; his brows were contracted, his head inclined in thought; and at last, having apparently worked it out, he turned to them, announcing simply:

"This is Lucy!"

"Howdy," said Bob, still keeping an impassive face.

There came another moment of thought. Then:

"I'm Dale Dawson, of Sunlight Patch, in the mountings, suh." He said this in so clever an imitation of their own introductions that it seemed a caricature.

"*Chapeaux bas!*" the Colonel murmured, throwing Jane into the most unlady-like fit of giggles.

"Where did it come from?" Bob asked later. He was riding with her a hundred yards behind the buggy that held the Colonel and Dale, the old rifle sticking out at the back like a bean pole.

"A heaven-sent deliverer," she quietly answered.

"I appreciate that," he said, in a more serious vein.

Her very reticence told him how deeply she had been shocked, and that it was a subject to be avoided, for the



present, at least. Bob was quick to divine situations. For the moment, then, he drifted into another channel, saying with a laugh that could hardly have been called spontaneous:

“If he’s an example of celestial types I’ll —”

“Lead a different life?” she interrupted, smiling.

“No such plagiarism, thank you,” he retorted. “I was about to say something else!”

“You’ve been giving Bip some most unfatherly theories about that place, by the way,” she observed. “He has confided in me.”

“Bip,” Bob quietly remarked, with an oozing pride in the subject of his six-year-old son, “has reached the age of embarrassing questions.”

“And is being fed unpardonable answers,” she said. “Between old Aunt Timmie’s declaration that it’ll smell like heliotrope and taste like ’possum the year ’round, and Uncle Zack swearing it’s just a big race track where everybody’s horse will win, and doubtless the Colonel’s word for it that it’s a perpetual spring flowing with ice-cold mint juleps, I quite despair of the child’s salvation. How have you been picturing it?”

“I passed that on,” he ruefully admitted. “You and Ann can tackle it.”

“I wasn’t home this afternoon at his lesson time. Did he miss me?”

“Miss you! Ann says he went to your room about five o’clock, and then came running to her saying something had happened to you. She was quite a while getting him settled. And then, much shame to us, we

realized you'd not got back. I drove over to the Colonel's really expecting you had stopped there." After a brief pause he asked: "Was that fellow much unruly? I wouldn't disturb you about it, but think you ought to tell us."

"About five o'clock," the girl mused. "That's most interesting, Bob. I've told you, haven't I, that the child is tremendously psychic?"

"I don't know just what psychic is," he laughed. "It sounds like medicine." And then repeated his other question: "Was Tusk much unruly?"

"Oh, no," she lightly answered. "Has Mr. McElroy been up in the hills today?"

"There's the laziest chap in clothes," he declared. "I don't believe he's done a lick of work since he came — and that's two months ago! Personally, I don't care. He's bully company, and I'm not rabid for that dinky little railroad, anyhow."

"It'll make all the difference to the mountaineers' future," she said.

"Quite right," he agreed, "and cut through my best pasture."

"Not your best pasture, surely!"

"My dear Jane, don't you know that when a railroad kills your cow it's always your best cow? Pastures accordingly! Still," he added with a wry look, "the people's good comes first, doesn't it! That's the proper motto!" And suddenly he began to laugh. "Brent and your new friend up there in the buggy ought to be a com-



ination to keep the Colonel amused for awhile! What do you think?"

She, too, had to laugh. The mental picture of the immaculate, devil-may-care Brent McElroy — sent down in behalf of his father's corporation to develop coal fields, to run a line for the little railroad which Bob had just characterized as "dinky," and otherwise to put into practice college experiences not included in its curriculum — chumming with this new child of nature, threw them again into peals of mirth.

"I wish someone would urge him on faster, anyhow," she said, more seriously now.

"Why don't you try," he suggested.

They had turned into the lane, a mile of cool meanderings that led from the pike to hospitable Arden, and for awhile rode in contemplative silence. Faintly glimmering lights, yellow between the trees, from time to time twinkled a welcome from the classic old house. Through four generations of the Colonel's family this place had stood; occasionally being altered to meet the requirements of comfort, but its stately colonial front and thick brick walls remained intact. And for four generations the neighborhood had looked at it with deep respect.

Valiantly had it held the fortification against encroaching modernism, yet by slow degrees surrendering. A telephone had taken the place of the more picturesque negro on a mule; the rural delivery of mail had made another breach in the walls of seclusion. Only an automobile the Colonel would not essay, declaring himself

too much a lover of horseflesh to offend his thoroughbreds with this; but when a touring car occasionally penetrated as far as Arden, it was noticeable that his horses viewed it with less suspicion than their master. Fortunately for the old gentleman's peace of mind such a form of vehicle remained a novelty in this section of Kentucky. The pike out of Buckville was good for a few miles only, and then came almost impassable stretches of unworked roads before connecting with those beautiful highways which wind and interwind through the creamier centers of the State — a condition that did not invite motorists.

Now as they drew near to the vine and tree entangled yard, the massive white columns stood out through the gloom to meet them. From some of the outlying cabins, former quarters of slaves, came low, minor singing of present day field hands. However many times Bob approached this place, his thoughts reverted to the evenings — half a score of years behind him — when he would ride across from his own farm to court the Colonel's daughter. He was thinking of this, of its sweetness to him then, of its blessings to him now, and quietly said:

“When you marry I hope you will be as happy as I am.”

“Existence is satisfying enough with you and Ann and Bip,” she lightly replied, “unless you want to get rid of me!”

He flushed, and turned almost angrily.

“There, I take it back,” she said in tones as soft as the night. “It was horrid! You've been so splendid in giving me a home — although I do sometimes feel guilty for

not being with the Colonel after all he's done! Yet, were I there, I couldn't give nearly as much time to Bip. Nothing can —"

"I wish you'd chop that," he growled. "You talk like you're under an obligation, when you know darn well —"

"I was saying," she looked up brightly, "that nothing can take its place, not even your suggested slavery; and there isn't a man in the world whom I wouldn't despise for asking me. I just don't feel a bit like it!"

"Lord help us!" he cried. "When will D. Cupid, Esquire, discover this pristine hunting ground? You've a blue ribbon surprise in store for you, that's all!"

"Perhaps Mr. D. Dawson will spring it," she laughed.

"Or the *blasé* B. McElroy," he suggested.

She made a grimace at this.

Lucy whinnied, and they saw the Colonel and Dale waiting at the bottom step.

"Come in for awhile," the old gentleman urged.

"Now, Colonel," Bob said reproachfully, "do you know anything of Ann's temper when under suspense?"

"I see, sir," his eyes wrinkled into a merry smile, "that you're as much of a nigger about the house over there as I was when she honored me by living here. Go home to your tyrant, sir, but come over, all of you, tomorrow for dinner."

Lucy, now free of her burden, crossed to the silent but watchful mountaineer and nestled her nose in his arm. It was an evidence of affection which touched them all.

As Bob and Jane were leaving, in the buggy this time,

they heard the Colonel ask Uncle Zack if Mr. McElroy were home, and that old darky of diminutive stature answered:

“No, sah, Cunnel, he done rid off harf hour ago.”

“Maybe,” Jane presently suggested, when they were well on their way, “he’s gone over to our house!”

“Maybe,” Bob replied, wondering where of late the young engineer had been spending his evenings.

“Do you know,” she said irrelevantly, after a silence of several minutes, “I believe a man in whom animals show implicit faith is to be trusted.”

“In this particular case, perhaps,” he agreed, for it just so happened that he, too, now was thinking of Dale. “Yet old Tom Hewlet has a lot of dogs which fawn all over him!”

“That’s so,” she acquiesced, and both again fell silent.

## CHAPTER V

### AN INTERRUPTED BREAKFAST

About the time that Colonel May was finishing breakfast, consisting this particular morning of strawberries raised in his own greenhouse, calf's brains, omelet, fried apples and bacon, fried sweet potatoes, beaten biscuits, rice cakes, and coffee, Bob Hart was riding across the open country toward Arden. His right arm hung limberly down in a graceful perpendicular, unaffected by the galloping motion of his horse, and his fingers were clasped about the lock of a repeating rifle, pointed muzzle to the ground. On his face was stamped a look of stern absorption that relaxed only as he neared occasional fences, but when these had been hurdled and his mount had again caught its stride, the preoccupation returned. Although his eyes were lowered, he did not see the ground, nor the mild surprise of grazing Jerseys past which he dashed. He saw nothing now beyond a most unpleasant picture which circumstance was holding up to him.

Jumping into an open woodland pasture he reined to a more leisurely canter; for here were the very young colts, now crowding nearer the protection of their dams, which, in one or two instances, with heads and tails high, trotted toward this impertinent horseman as though questioning

his right of entrance. They soon abandoned this, but stood looking after him like watchful sentinels until he had risen to the next fence, and they felt that their foals were free from menace. But he cantered on, hardly mindful of their unrest. Through ancient beeches now he went, trees whose downward sweeping boughs spread out in mute protection above the carpet of spring grass and violets; then he turned into the cedar-bordered avenue, and soon passed between the crumbling brick-and-plaster gate-posts to the tangled yard of Arden.

It was then, glancing across the side terrace, that Colonel May observed him, and laying aside his napkin he went somewhat hastily through the cool, deep hall and out upon the front porch. A tender expression lingered about his strong face as the younger man swung into the circle; a tenderness mingled with approval for the stylish animal that picked up its feet from the odorous tanbark with a precision bespeaking generations of thoroughbred ancestors. The Colonel was a great believer in breeding.

Only when Bob dismounted did the old gentleman see the rifle, and the seriousness in his eyes. He made no move or comment, but waited while a darky led back the horse and Bob was seated.

"Has Brant gone out to work?" were the young man's first words.

"I think he's not yet up," the Colonel's look of anxiety deepened. "You don't want to see him for — for anything?"

"No," Bob smiled. "And Dale — er — Dawson?"



"Left before I came downstairs, sir," the Colonel answered. "What is it, Bob? Tell me!"

Bob's eyes passed the Colonel and rested on the drive up which he had just come. With an attempt at casualness he said:

"That Potter fellow did more yesterday than I guessed."

There was no alteration in the old gentleman's attitude; he did not sit bolt upright in his chair, or grasp its arms until his knuckles showed white, but simply said:

"Tell me!"

"She went straight to her room when we got home," Bob continued in a more excited undertone. "Ann followed, of course, and found her desperately nervous, half crying with rage." He then related practically what had happened at the school, concluding: "Aunt Timmie slept in her room all night, and when Jane asks her to do that you know she's upset."

They heard Uncle Zack moving inside the hall, and the Colonel called him:

"Have Tempest brought up," he said, and to Bob: "I shall be right down, sir."

Uncle Zack came quickly back to the porch, for his eyes had seen things which electrified him. This old darky, shriveled up with his burden of toil and years, who had been the Colonel's servant, adviser, and comforter since both of them were boys, was too truly a member of the family to permit anything to occur without pushing well into its secrets. Until a few years ago, his wife, Aunt Timmie, had divided this welcome office with him; but



after the wedding, and about the time when Bob's household began to walk on tiptoe in fearful and happy expectancy, old Timmie left, bag and baggage, for the younger home, where she had thereafter remained as nurse, comforter, scolder and chief director of the new heir, as well as of the premises in general. The Colonel having lately suggested that Mr. Hart, Jr.,— or Bip, for short — being now six years of age, was too big for her to manage, had called forth an eloquent outburst, which concluded with the terse observation: "If I could handle his Pappy an' Mammy, an' his Gran'pappy an' Gran'mammy befoh him, an' all de Mays an' Harts borned dese las' hund'ed yeahs, how-cum I ain' able to handle him?" And that had settled it, so each household gloried in the possession of one of these rare servants, spoiled by love, mellowed by age, and wise by scores of years of experience.

Old Zack now whispered, looking Bob squarely in the eyes:

"Whar you-all gwine, Marse Bob?"

"Hunting, Uncle Zack."

"Huntin'!" he gave a snort of impatience. "Dat ain' no shot-gun! Hit's man huntin' you'se all arter, dat's what! Dar's been funny doin's 'round heah dis mawnin', 'caze dat gemmen wid de long haih what come las' night done skin out 'foh sun-up, ridin' dat onery white cradle of his'n what he calls a hawse, an' totin' de rustiest, wickedest ole gun I ever seen. He say *he's* gwine huntin', too; arter squir'ls, he say, an' I'se fool 'nuff to believe him. Is a wah done broke out, Marse Bob?"

“I expect he really did go after squirrels, Uncle Zack, sure enough I do. But the Colonel and I won't be long, and it's nothing serious, so you just keep mum about it. Whatever you do, don't let Miss Liz know.”

“She's de ve'y fu'st one I'se gwine tell, lest I git mah brains better sot on dis heah fracas!” He gave a low chuckle, adding: “Lor', chile, Miss Liz ain' gwine know nuthin'. Ole Zack kin keep mum an' fool de smartes' of 'em! Didn' I fetch Marse John's djeulin' pistols one Sunday mawnin' right under de Bible layin' on de cushion we cyarried to chu'ch fer ole Miss to kneel on? An' didn' we-all walk plumb up de aisle, an' fix her nice an' easy in her pew, an' den slip out an' go down on de crick whar de gemmens wuz waitin', an' shoot dat young Mister Green in de lung? 'Deed we did,” he chuckled again, scratching his head as though the reminiscence were ticklesome — then looked up with a sly smile: “Whilst we wuz a-drivin' home dat day, ole Miss she say: ‘You wuz late, son,’ she say; an' I heah him say: ‘Yes mam, a gemmen sont word he'd lak to see me,’ he say. Den ole Miss ax: ‘Did you find 'im, son?’ ‘Yes mam,’ Marse John say, ‘I foun' 'im, all right.’ Ole Miss pat de back of his han', croonin' in dat soft voice of her'n: ‘You'se a great comfo't, an' always so 'siderate of others!’ At dat, I jest bust plumb out a-laughin', but turned it to sich a wicked-soundin' chokin' spell dat dey's 'bleeged to lean over an' beat mah back; an' while Marse John wuz a-puttin' on de licks, an' mighty nigh killin' me, he whisper: ‘You black rascal, ef you don' *behave* I'll shoot *you* nex' Sunday!’ Oh, dem wuz days what *wuz*

days, Marse Bob; dey wuz fer a fac'! Ain' you-all gwine fight no one dis mawnin'?"

"You bloodthirsty old villain," Bob laughed. "Don't you know that gentlemen now go to law in adjusting their differences?"

Uncle Zack stood a moment looking at the rifle, apparently in retrospective reverie. Finally he observed:

"I spec dat's right. Dey may 'just dey diff'ences wid deyse'ves dat-a-way, but dey sholy make 'em 'parrent to de neighbors. In de ole days, a gemmen say to a gemmen: 'Yoh fence is too fur on mah line, sah!' An' de gemmen answer back: ''Tain' no sich a-thing, sah!' So dey frien's come by in de mawnin', an' has a julep, an' slips out de back way; an' dat evenin' de neighbors is all sayin': 'Too bad! Bofe sich fine gemmen!' Nowadays," he concluded, "dey go to cou't wid dey diff'ences, an' when it's all over de neighbors say: 'My! Who'd ever thought dem men wuz sich skallawags!' De cou'ts may be all right in dey way, Marse Bob, but dey suttently do strip a man of his se'f respec'."

The Colonel came out drawing on his gloves. He made a striking figure in his riding togs. Tall, dignified, careful of address and slow of movement — though not the slowness of embonpoint — he would have attracted attention anywhere. Years had added no roundness to his frame. His nose was aquiline, perhaps a trifle too fine in lines; and his mouth might have been too large if uncovered by a silvery white mustache, whose training bespoke a minute, an almost effeminate, care. Now he looked every inch a gentleman going for a morning

canter, except for the compact, high-powered rifle resting easily in the hollow of his arm.

"Zack," he cautioned, "when Miss Liz comes down, merely say that Mr. Robert and I are riding."

"Lor', Marse John, she ain' gwine know nuthin' 'bout it. She's jest lak yoh mammy dat-a-way; never 'spectin' folks to git in no devilment."

"What do you mean, you black rascal," the Colonel thundered.

Zack rolled his eyes from the old gentleman's face to his rifle, and back again. Then his own face disappeared into a multitude of wrinkles while he silently chuckled.

"You-alls jest as pure as de Heaven's blue," he murmured, holding his sides and shaking. "Reckon I'd better git mah coat!"

"Oh, no, Zack," the Colonel stopped him. "You must stay here."

"Marse John," the old darky approached with a troubled look, "you never used to go on dese heah trips widout Zack! Ain' you gwine take 'im 'long? Dar ain' no one else is got de knack of holdin' you up ef you gits stung some, an' you knows it, Marse John!"

He stood in an humble attitude of pleading, looking up at his white master with eyes as brown and soft as a deer's, notwithstanding the opaque circles which age had begun to form about their irises. The Colonel smiled affectionately down at him.

"This is to be nothing of that sort, Zack," he said, "or I would take you, truly I would. We will return shortly, and shall be expecting some of your best juleps."

For the Colonel belonged to that school of Kentucky gentlemen, still existing if not flourishing as of yore, whose daily routine was punctuated into poetic rhythm by fragrant mint and venerable bourbon with a regularity that would have brought confusion to a younger generation. Once in a great while he took too much, and once every year he slipped off to "the springs" as a safeguard against gout. His type was passing, and for this reason he was even more beloved; but his example was present, which brought its measure of regret to those who loved him best. Zack, alone, encouraged the Colonel in whatsoever he desired; at toddy time, or duel, the old darky had always been found ready and proud to assist.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BURNED CABIN

A thoroughbred man, sitting a thoroughbred horse, with an articulation that makes them both seem molded into one piece of flesh, is a magnet for admiration; and when Uncle Zack saw both the Colonel and Bob gallop out through the trees, their heads up, their rifles swinging gracefully down, their mounts bristling with power and intelligence, his eyes sparkled and he took a deep breath of satisfaction.

Passing by the stable way, the riders entered a dirt road and held a course due east. Finally Colonel May broke the silence.

“Do you know where he lives?”

“Near about,” Bob answered. “We won’t have any trouble finding it.”

“It’s a pity the sheriff can’t take this duty from us,” the older man said. “It’s a pity we have no system of law that will spare women from unpleasant notoriety under such conditions. Men of the South would be less quick to take matters into their own hands if they were assured that the occasional women who may suffer would be spared the further suffering of public embarrassment in open court.”



"Yes," Bob assented, "but this is our only way, so far. Shall we kill him?"

"My mind is still in solution as to that," the Colonel gravely answered. "It has not yet crystallized. If he were not the poor half-wit he is, we would by all means. Under the circumstances, I hardly think we have the right. Yet, after all is said, he may be just the sort who should be put out of harm's way. However, the most we will do will be to frighten him out of the country; — unless he stands his ground."

"He'll doubtless do that, and open on us when we come in sight," Bob suggested. "Of course, he'll know what we're after."

"I think it likely," the Colonel replied. "Let me caution you against unnecessary risks."

Some two or three miles from Arden the dirt road sharply began its climb into the Knobs, and through this rough and wooded foothill country of the farther Cumberlands, scarred by cliffs and ravines, they rode in silence. At last Bob spoke.

"We're not far off. His shack is somewhere in here."

They were riding at a quick walk, alert, watching up each ravine for signs of habitation, when suddenly a man, rifle in hand, stepped out two hundred yards ahead of them. A lightning touch of rein and spur, and both horses had sprung instantly apart, while the two repeaters flew with exact precision to the riders' shoulders. To their surprise, however, the man raised his hand.

"What do you make of this?" the Colonel asked in a



cautious tone, when they had recognized Dale advancing, instead of the expected Potter.

“Squirrel hunting,” Bob answered. “He told Zack.”

Dale came with the long stride peculiar to his people, the stride with which they cover thirty miles a day and think it no great walk.

“Good mawnin’,” he called, in a drawling voice. “There’s no game in these parts.”

He advanced with perfect ease—the ease of a wild thing walking at will—and the smile that illumined his face made it almost handsome. Absorbed even as the Colonel and Bob were in their own mission, and surprised by this unexpected interruption, they exchanged glances at his rather correct form of speech. Several times the evening before Colonel May had been impressed by this, and had thought of it after getting into bed, determining then to speak of it in the morning. So, recurring to him now, he said in an undertone:

“That fellow knows how to talk well.”

“He does, and he doesn’t,” Bob replied. “Jane and I were speaking of it last night. If you’ll notice, when he gets excited, or much interested, he’s like a typical mountaineer. Only when careful is it otherwise. He’s a funny cuss, but, gee, Colonel, look at that power! I’ll bet he can run a hundred miles without turning a hair!”

The figure was almost up to them.

“There isn’t anything to shoot,” he said again, with a meaning smile of confidence.

“What are you hunting, sir?” the Colonel asked, after a polite exchange of greetings.

Dale looked at them and chuckled. It was a sign of comradeship, of fellowship; the sort of chuckle in which two boys might indulge if, having entered a jam closet from opposite sides and each unknown to the other, they suddenly meet face to face.

"I'm huntin' the same sort of game you-ail air, I reckon," he remarked, pushing back his hat. "But it's gone."

"Squirrels?"

The mountaineer regarded them with something pathetic in his eyes, and when he spoke his voice was tinged with disappointment.

"Last night," he said, "I thought ye war both my friends—'n' I war a-ready ter be yourn. Why do ye want ter lie ter me?"

A flush of anger spread over their faces, and the Colonel was framing a scorching retort, when Dale continued:

"No, hit hain't squir'ls; hit's that varmint Tusk Potter. I hain't afeerd ter tell. His shack's back thar;" jerking his thumb over his shoulder, "or, I'd ought ter say, what's left of hit's thar. He's gone."

"Did you kiil him?" the Colonel asked, looking squarely into his eyes.

"That hain't jest a question one man ought ter be askin' of another man," he quickly answered. "But as hit turned out, I didn't kill him; 'n' I didn't mean ter. I kind of swore off killin' folks when I war a kid, 'n' hain't done hit much since. But I did mean ter run him outen the

country, 'n' burn his cabin. If he'd ruther've stayed 'n' got kilt, that war his business."

By a common impulse the three started back, Dale leading them some half a mile when they dismounted and threaded their way along an obscure trail. This led up a deep ravine, through which trickled the South Fork of Blacksnake Creek, and eventually brought them out at a small clearing. In the center smouldered the ruins of a cabin, with a few fitful flames still spurting from the ashes and charred log ends.

"You've done well, Dale," the Colonel observed. "Bob, leave a notice for him here. He can read, I suppose?"

"He's been going to school for several months," Bob said, tearing off the back of an envelope and stooping to write.

Dale came close on tiptoe and watched this process over the young man's shoulder. He stood in an attitude of rapt attention and, as the pencil made stroke after stroke of the printed letters, his own finger traced each line in the air, as though he were memorizing their directions and positions. Only after the notice had been pressed on a sharpened stick and placed before the ruined threshold could he leave it. Turning to them he said in an awed voice:

"That's the fu'st writin' I ever seed! What does hit mean?"

While Bob repeated it the mountaineer's lips moved after him, as he tried carefully to fit each sentence to the

pencil strokes. But from his deep breath of uncertainty at the end it appeared to bring him little satisfaction; and he was turning away when suddenly his frame stiffened and his hand touched Bob's shoulder.

To the east of them stood Snarly Knob, so called because of its serrated crest resembling a row of teeth from which the lips had been drawn back in an angry snarl. Half way up its almost perpendicular side a spur jutted into the air, and on this a figure stood. Only the hawk-like eyes of Dale could have seen the clenched fists raised high in a gesture of fury, eloquent of a flow of oaths which he knew were being hurled upon the trespassers in the clearing. The Colonel and Bob, following his steady gaze, saw and understood. Bob's face went white with anger, but the older man's held a troubled look. Dale's face told no story whatsoever.

"I wish he'd fall," Bob gritted his teeth. "He's just above the disappearing stream, Colonel!"

"What's the disappearin' stream?" Dale asked.

"It's a good sized creek that comes tearing down and tumbles into a sort of cave. Nobody knows where it comes out, and if it ever catches a man he's gone. The hole and suction is directly under that spur."

"Couldn't fetch 'im with one of them new-fangled guns of your'n, could ye?"

"Oh, no, Dale; that spur must be easily two miles."

"Come," said the Colonel, "let us go back. Our mission here is done, and now we must see that it remains well done. Dale, how did you find this place?"

"I came from the schoolhouse," he answered.

"You mean," Bob cried, "that you trailed him half a dozen miles?"

"Yep," he answered.

"You damned Indian," the young planter admiringly exclaimed; "that's the smoothest trick I ever saw!"

"'Tain't no trick," Dale simply replied. "I allers find folks that a-way, same as varmints do. Hit's Nature's way."

"Since we have come together this morning," the Colonel observed, smiling a frank compliment at Dale's woodcraft, "we may as well drop the bars, shake hands across the gap, and speak plainly one with the other. First, I want to thank you, sir, for your chivalry yesterday evening to Miss Jane —"

"What's chivalry?" the mountaineer interrupted.

"Chivalry? Why, bless my soul, sir," the old gentleman exclaimed, "chivalry, sir, chivalry is what we all have, sir!" He wiped his brow and stood in the path, planting himself firmly with a glare that defied contradiction.

"Chivalry, Dale," Bob said, not daring to laugh, "is the skeleton, or framework, on which gentlemen are built."

"Bones?" he asked, with a perplexed pucker between his eyes.

"Not bones, exactly," Bob smiled now. "And yet it is a sort of backbone, too, when you come to think of it."

"Bob, your ignorance is colossal, sir," the Colonel sternly looked at him. "Chivalry, Dale, is what we all



have, and what prompted you to tackle that ruffian yesterday. The definition is quite simple, and of course you follow me. As I was saying, sir, we prefer to thank you now in behalf of Miss Jane, since any further reference to the matter will be unnecessary. You appreciate this?"

"What's appreciate?" he asked.

The old gentleman told him and, while his face still held a troubled look, he nodded as though understanding — not only the word, but the delicacy imposed on him.

"I don't want nobody ter thank me," he said. "I didn't do nothin' fer *her!*"

He said this quietly, so simply, that its peculiarity did not at once seem apparent, and before they had time to wonder at it, Dale, who now was leading, turned in the path and glared at them. His eyes were as stern as those of a wrathful god, and his lips as resolute as Thor.

"Do ye reckon I'd hev let that damned hound scare the teacher away, when I've jest now got hyar fer the big larnin'? If I hadn't stepped in, he'd a-tuck her ter his cabin; 'n' if I hadn't burned 'im out, he'd be likely ter stay 'round; 'n' as long as he'd be likely ter stay 'round, she'd be likely ter stay away from school. Then how'd I git my larnin'?" He gritted his teeth, and suddenly yelled at them: "I won't take no chances! I'll git the larnin', I tell ye! 'N' if one, or a hund'ed, tries ter come 'tween me 'n' hit —" He did not finish, but stood swaying from side to side with an overwhelming intensity of feeling.

Bob's inclination was to smile; not at what he said so



much as at the grotesque figure he made while saying it. The long hair that had been flying back from his forehead as a lion might have tossed its shaggy mane, the homespun trousers tucked into wrinkled boots which were planted well apart as foundations for the swaying body, the antiquated rifle on which he leaned, all seemed to be the very antithesis of mental advancement.

The Colonel, on the other hand, had not been impressed by the clothes; or, at any rate, he had been more impressed by something which robbed them of their oddity. His observing eyes were fixed with growing interest on the purposeful face still thrust forward, and for a moment they were startled by something uncanny, something back of a normal human enthusiasm. It was only for a moment, only for a fleeting glimpse through the dilating pupils which shot defiance out at him; but in that moment he would have sworn that he had seen enthusiasm gone mad.

And yet, so brief had been the glimpse, that his conscious feeling was but of charm, inspired by the primal strength of this wild and unconquerable thing before him. The restive swaying of the body brought to the old gentleman's mind an incident he once had seen at a circus, when an elephant, fretted by its ankle chain, rocked from foot to foot in sullen disquiet. He pictured an ankle chain on this well made youth before him now, the ankle chain of ignorance, and a wave of pity made him resolve to be the means of breaking it.

"If that is what you want, Dale," he gently said, "you

shall have it, all that you can store away." And he smiled at the flush of pleasure which followed his words. "I'll talk to you about it this afternoon," he added. "Let us now hurry; we must reach the horses."

## CHAPTER VII

### DALE DAWSON'S PHILOSOPHY

Passing out to the road, the Colonel being somewhat in advance, Bob laid his hand on Dale's shoulder.

"There are lots of things to be learned out of schools, as well as in," he said, falling into step, "and some of them I can teach you better than Miss Jane. You mustn't hesitate to ask me, nor be put out — offended, I mean — if I volunteer things for your own good. Understand?"

"Hit seems thar hain't nuthin' but goodness down hyar," the mountaineer murmured.

"How about that cabin behind us?" the young planter laughed.

"Shucks, he hain't yo' kind," Dale said in a tone of deep disgust. "He belongs moh ter my people, I reckon, than ter yourn."

"Why shouldn't your people and my people be the same?" Bob asked. "We're the same stock, and live in the same State, and speak the same language."

"Three chestnuts come outen the same burr," Dale slowly answered, "but ye hain't never seed all three alike yit! 'N' they're the same stock, too, 'n' live in the same house, 'n' borned of the same tree! Hit don't foller what ye say is right!"

"But they're chestnuts, all the same," Bob laughed, pleased with the simile.

"'N' I never said they warn't," the other replied. "'N' yeou're a man, 'n' I'm a man, 'n' we're white men, too, 'n' borned in Kaintuck; but thar hain't only one thing as kin make us alike. That's the one thing Natur' hain't provided fer — education! Accordin' ter my way of thinkin', education draws the line 'tween a man 'n' a dawg; 'tween a woman 'n' a sow. A man kin git hit, but a dawg can't; 'n' if a man don't, then he's even wuss'n a dawg. I've done a lot of thinkin' 'bout hit," he added in a reverential, wistful voice, "since Ruth come back ter Sunlight Patch."

"You seem to take things pretty seriously, Dale." Bob gave his shoulder a slap. "Don't draw your lines too fine with Nature. It's apt to make you ride over the hounds; it's risky."

"How do ye mean risky?" he quickly asked.

"Lots of ways," Bob laughed, trying to think even of one. "In Nature, for instance, water flows down hill, but man must continually go up hill if he expects to be any account — even though he's mostly all made of water, at that! There's one way for you." And Bob felt proud of this, and glad the Colonel was listening. And the Colonel, still stalking on before them, nodded his head in approval.

"'Doth Nature itself not teach you?'" Dale sternly replied in faultless English. "That's in the Good Book, 'cause Ruth read it out; 'n' that's what fu'st made me look in the woods 'n' mountings fer my larnin'. Natur'

hain't lied ter me yit — but," he added suspiciously, "hit hain't said nuthin' 'bout folks being mostly made of water!"

The Colonel gave an explosive snort, but did not turn around.

"It won't lie to you either," Bob said in good humor, "but neither will it give up all its secrets; and the danger is in thinking you have guessed what isn't there. Who's Ruth?"

"Ruth?" he turned as though the question surprised him. "She's the slocum of Sunlight Patch."

"The — slocum?" Bob again asked.

"Yes, the slocum," he answered simply.

"I don't remember having heard of a slocum. Is that one of Nature's lessons?"

"Bob," the Colonel spoke in a tone of warning, "you astonish me by your ignorance, sir. Everybody knows what a slocum is!"

They had reached the road, and Dale gave a long, low whinny, in so exact an imitation that even before Lucy answered and was heard coming toward him, the other horses, near by, had also whinnied a response. Bob laughed outright, and the Colonel chuckled.

"Upon my word, sir," he said, "I thought there was a horse right at the back of my neck! You do it remarkably well!"

Dale smiled, for compliments, even the simplest, he had not experienced. His people were unversed in many of the gentler ways, and this brought him a pleasant sense of being appreciated.

"Can you imitate other things?" Bob asked.

"All thar is in the mountings," he answered. "I've talked with 'em ever since I war a brat."

"They have a language, then?" Bob winked at the Colonel, who replied with another warning look.

"'Course they hev a language. They talk jest like we-uns do, but 'thout so many words. Lucy, hyar," he continued, after having patted her nose, "'n' all critters, has one kind of whinny fer hunger 'n' thirst, another when somethin's scarin' 'em, another when they're hurt, another when they're callin' a critter, 'n' another when they're answerin'. Most all varmints has those, too; jest the same as a critter — 'cept the hunger call."

"I don't quite follow your distinction between critters, as you call them, and varmints," the Colonel turned curiously.

"Bob-cats, 'n' foxes, 'n' skunks, 'n' coons, 'n' them sech, is varmints. Lucy is a critter," he said simply. "'N' they all have 'bout the same sort of calls — 'ceptin' hunger calls."

"But wild animals get hungry," the Colonel exclaimed, taking a still deeper interest in what this observer was saying.

"Wall, yes," he drawled, "but some don't make no fuss 'bout hit. Take a bob-cat! He'd be a purty thing a-yellin' all through the mountings when he's hungry, now wouldn't he? *He's* got ter move like a grey cloud, 'n' slip up on things! A bob-cat," he added with his peculiar chuckle, "that'd yell when he went a-huntin', wouldn't take long ter starve. 'N' the wilder a thing is,



the moh uncomplainin' hit is, too. Shoot a fox, 'n' he'll pull hisse'f along till he drops daid — jest grittin' his teeth 'n' standin' hit; but a dawg'll holler somethin' awful. Hit's most allers that-a-way with birds, too. Ketch a chicken, 'n' folks'll think ye're killin' her; but ketch a pa'tridge, 'n' she'll jest lay in yo' hand 'n' breathe fast, 'n' hate ye."

"How do you account for that?" the Colonel asked. "The fox and the dog belong to the same family; likewise the chicken and partridge!"

"That's jest why I picked them kind out ter tell ye 'bout," he answered. "I reckon the reason is bein' 'round human folks, Cunnel. When a varmint loses his wildness, he loses his grit, 'n' I may say he's apt ter go down in health. Ruth says that Injuns could stand bein' burned with fyar 'n' not flinch. Thar hain't no white men now-days kin do hit. I've tried," he rolled back his sleeve and showed a long scar on his forearm. "I tried jest ter see, 'n' had ter quit. Hit made me plumb sick. 'N' that's jest the same with varmints."

They mounted their horses and turned down the road. Colonel May and Bob, being for the moment together, the old gentleman whispered:

"Interesting sort of fellow."

Bob nodded. "Nervy to try fire, wasn't he?"

"Dale," the Colonel called, "ride up with us! Is it then your impression," he asked, when the lowly head of Lucy was abreast with the arched necks of the thoroughbreds, "that civilization has a bad influence?"

Dale fairly rose in his stirrups. "I never said that,"

he cried. "I never said no sech a-thing! Hit hain't so! I said that bein' 'round folks makes varmints 'n' critters lose thar grit, 'n' be moh apt ter git sick; bein' brought up in stalls, 'n' stables, 'n' pens, 'n' havin' their victuals fetched ter 'em all the time, 'n' bein' drove 'n' bullied, makes 'em lose thar fightin' sperit; 'n' when a thing loses that hit'll go down. The same way with folks. Why, Cunnel, I knowed a man who laid behind two rocks 'n' fit all day long with nine bullets in him, 'cause his son war in the cabin jest below, 'n' both war a-holdin' off a passel of fellers. But to'ard evenin', when the ole man seed the fellers rush in 'n' drag his boy out, 'n' kill 'im thar afore his eyes, he rolled right over hisse'f 'n' died—'n' he hadn't been hit since dinner. 'N' that jest showed, as long's he had the savage in 'im fightin' fer the boy, he war all right; but when thar warn't no moh use, he quit. That's one big trouble with civilization, as we-uns sees hit from the mountings: hit takes the grit outen folks, 'n' makes 'em want ter quit too soon."

The Colonel sat gazing moodily between his horse's ears, one of which was tilted back and the other forward, as though at the same time listening to the conversation and watching the road. He seemed to have forgotten that an uncouth mountaineer had been talking; he seemed not to have heard the low drawl, or in any way have been affected by its musical crudity, but only by the man's point of view.

"So that's the way you people think of us?" he finally asked.

"Bob, hyar, says you-uns 'n' we-uns hain't no differ-

ent." He had begun calling Bob by his first name with child-like ingenuousness.

"But there is a distinction," the old gentleman insisted. "The mountaineers are more — I might say more intense, as your act this morning gives testimony. Altogether, I should say, as Miss Jane once put it, that your aura is tintured with savagery."

Dale hesitated. "I don't reckon," he said at last, "that what I did this mawnin' war any wuss'n what you-uns war a-goin' ter do. What's aura?"

Bob burst into peals of laughter.

"I think he's got you on number one, Colonel! Now tell him what aura is!"

But this was a knotty undertaking, and when he finished, quite unassisted by Bob, Dale's face held a troubled look.

"If a fine man like yeou, Cunnel," he began, causing the old gentleman to stiffen in his saddle with righteous pride, "don't know no moh'n that 'bout the English language, how, in Gawd's name, am I a-goin' ter larn?"

"Upon my word, sir! Upon my word!" the Colonel sputtered, red to the roots of his silvery hair, "you haven't the capacity to understand, sir; no matter how explicit I may be, sir!" And touching spur he galloped ahead, not deigning to look at them again.

"Dale," Bob implored, trying to control his laughter, "for the love of Mike cut 'aura' from your vocabulary! Honest, my friend, if you ever should walk into the Colonel's drawing room in that costume and announce that

your aura is tintured with savagery, it would be worse than murder!"

Again the mountaineer's face became troubled; indeed, it held an expression of childish helplessness, made so pathetic by a succeeding, shy glance at his awkward costume of homespun, that the young planter winced.

"That's all right," he said, contrite enough now, and giving the broad shoulder another friendly slap. "Before long you'll be turning out classier stuff than any of us. And we like your clothes."

"I'm a-goin' ter larn," Dale murmured through clenched teeth. "I'm a-goin' ter larn all thar is, 'n' a whole lot moh; so help me Gawd I will."

For awhile they rode without speaking until the Colonel was seen waiting at a turn of the road. Then Dale asked:

"Ye reckon he meant that, 'bout me livin' with 'im?"

"'Course he meant it. He'll make you think you own the place in twenty-four hours, and you won't feel the slightest obligation."

"What's obligation?"

Patiently Bob went through the definition, and Dale again asked:

"Who's the feller he calls Brent?"

"He's staying there, too; trying his wings on a survey for a railroad. There's going to be a little road through here some day, and he's looking to it."

"How does he?"

"Heaven pity us," Bob groaned. "I don't know how does he, Dale. Ask him. Come, let's catch up!"

The Colonel was riding slowly ahead, and from the appearance of his back Bob knew him to be sulking. Strong and big and fine as he was in both physique and temperament, his *amour propre* was an easy thing to wound. Such hurts, however, were quickly healed by his blessed sense of humor, and now as he wheeled and watched them, Bob saw that his spirits were returning.

"In the eyes of babes," the old gentleman began, with a humorous twitching about his mouth, "we see the mirror of our age — and, Mr. Dawson, don't ask me what that means for I don't know! But come, gentlemen, it is quite noon, and a cool house is calling us."

"When the mint is in the toddy, and the chair is in the shade," Bob hummed, bringing another twinkle of amusement to the old gentleman's lips.

"I reckon I'll turn off hyar," Dale said, "'n' go on ter school."

"What for?" the Colonel asked. "There's no school today."

"Hain't!" the mountaineer turned in a fury. "Why so?"

"Why so?" Bob answered, not exactly with patience. "For several reasons, Dale; one being that they don't have school on Saturdays, and another, quite sufficient in itself, that Miss Jane has a headache."

"What's Satu'day got ter do with hit?" He asked again, unconscious of the other's growing ill humor.

"You darned boob," Bob laughed, "don't you know that Saturday is a holiday? It always is! They never have school on that day!"



“D’ye mean they lose a whole day a week?” Dale cried, working himself into a rage and giving the Colonel that same unpleasant, startled feeling of witnessing something human out of gear. “That all that time is jest plumb wasted, when I mought be larnin’? Hain’t I come hyar fer her ter teach me? Hain’t I got the right? Hain’t hit her business?”

“When Miss Jane doesn’t feel like teaching,” Bob began, turning a shade pale and becoming unnaturally calm, “Saturday or no Saturday, she isn’t going to teach; and the Colonel and I’ll see anyone in hell first. Remember that, for it’s a right important thing.”

“Lord have pity on our mendacious world,” the old gentleman sighed.

The mountaineer had not intended to give offense. As a matter of fact, he held Jane in too sacred regard to suffer her the slightest inconvenience — but it was a regard for the teacher, for the possessor of that magic wand which would point him along the path of learning. She inspired him with no other personality. To get into school had been for so long the precious beacon of his desire that physical comforts or discomforts were transient incidents to be utterly ignored. He would have ignored his own bodily ailments, elbowed his way through pain of flesh and weariness of mind, in an onward rush for that one thing his soul craved — Learning. It craved, it blindly implored him, abjured him with curses and sweet words, until he had reached a state where obedience became an uncompromisable law. Nothing else came within his mental horizon, and thus it was



that Bob's words perplexed, rather than offended, him.

The Colonel, ever ready to quiet fermenting anger, laid his hand genially on the homespun-covered shoulder.

"You will find, my ambitious young friend," he said, "that it is better in the long run to rest occasionally. Nature requires it, and, as you yourself have said, Nature is the true standard to follow."

"Nature don't rest," he doggedly retorted. "Trees don't rest from growin'!"

"They do, indeed," declared the Colonel, not quite sure of his ground, but willing to venture it. "Every night they rest, and so do all growing things."

Dale thought a moment, for this was a new idea.

"I don't believe it," he finally declared. Then smiling, and dropping into the attractive drawl, he asked: "Cunnel, ye wouldn't go so fur as ter say the trees takes Satu'day off ter quit growin', would ye?"

Bob laughed, but the old gentleman sighed.

"I fear you can't quite catch my meaning, sir," he compromised. "However, you will be learning something this evening, because I want to have a long talk with you. I want to know your ambitions and your plans. I have determined to see you get all the education you can eat, drink, and otherwise stuff into your system. Now, be satisfied for the moment, until we discuss the matter."

Dale's eyes and cheeks showed the grateful effect of the old gentleman's words. He wanted to thank him, but, not knowing quite how, remained silent; and in this way the three entered the overgrown gate of Arden.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE INCONSEQUENT ENGINEER

Uncle Zack's watchful eyes discerned the returning riders and busily he went to prepare juleps, while, at the same time, a company of little darkies dashed past the house eager to lead the horses stableward.

This aroused a man who had been day-dreaming on the deep, cool porch. His feet were comfortably perched on the seat of an opposite chair, and an open book lay face down on his lap. Within convenient reaching distance stood a silver goblet topped with sprigs of mint. He was dressed in immaculate white, a suit which showed the character of expert tailorship when subjected to the arm and leg stretch of the frantic yawn he now deliberately enjoyed. For young Mr. Brent McElroy was as well groomed as he was good to look upon. Although Bod had called him the laziest chap in clothes, and Miss Liz had berated his lack of ambition, and all had sometimes resented his ironies, a very critical glance at his face would have belied these faults. For his chin was cast in a good mould, and his eyes looked at one with steady, honest interest. They were spirited, but tender, and a trained observer would have found in them a deep, lingering hunger for something which seemed not to

have come. He would also have found strength in the mouth, ordinarily too cynical.

Brent managed to get along pretty well with everything but work, and in severing diplomatic relations with this he usually found himself *persona non grata* with Jane and her strongest ally, Miss Liz. For Jane, more than all of them, realized the blessings a railroad would bring to her people in that wild area beyond Snarly Knob. She knew how each artery leading from the virgin heart of those mountains, carrying to the world its stream of warmth, would return twofold riches to the benighted denizens of their antiquity. She knew that through each vein from the distant centers of the world's culture would flow back a broader understanding of life, its responsibilities, ambitions, opportunities. To her, the little road was a savior, to such a degree God-sent, that it seemed a sacrilege to let it halt. Moreover, since Brent came, she felt that the Colonel had been given fresh inspiration to imbibe. It had not occurred to her to reverse this indictment, which might have been done with an equal amount of truth. At any rate, she had lost patience with the good-looking engineer, while the Colonel was finding him more and more attractive.

He arose now as the men dismounted, stretched again, and smiled down at them.

"Ah, sir," the Colonel cried, "I'm glad you are home in time to join us!"

"I've just been joining," he laughed, "but, of course, if you can't get along without me—" he waved a hand toward his empty goblet. Uncle Zack had made pro-

vision for this — Uncle Zack, who believed that a thoroughbred gentleman should always be “jes’ a li’l bit toddied up.”

Dale stood at the bottom step staring with the open curiosity characteristic of his kind, and convinced that he was gazing upon the most elegant gentleman in all creation. No detail of the toilette escaped his minute scrutiny — from the white buckskin shoes to the white cravat, from the immaculate linen to the flashing teeth; and for a second time that day his eyes lowered to pass slowly over the crudeness of his own attire.

The Colonel saw this and smiled, but it was not a mirthful smile. His former interest had become quickened by this helpless and pathetic look, and mentally he strengthened a previous resolution.

“Brent,” he said, “I want you to know Dale Dawson! Mr. McElroy,” he turned to the still staring mountaineer, “is staying with me, and making a survey for the railroad we hope to see running through here before long, sir.”

“I hain’t never seed a train but onct,” Dale exclaimed, shaking hands with more open admiration. “Then hit ’most scared the gizzard outen me! How do ye make ’em?”

“Oh,” Brent laughed, “screws, and nuts, and hammers, and things. But I don’t make trains, old fellow; I’m just making the survey!”

“Good-bye everybody!” Bob gurgled, swinging into the saddle. The Colonel called him sternly back.

“Now, Bob,” he whispered, stepping out to the tan-

bark drive, "you've no right to leave me like this, sir. I can't put up with it, I tell you! Why, God bless my soul, the fellow hasn't a rag except what's on his back! Must I ask him to sleep in the stable, sir? Those mountain people are sensitive to the very core, you know that, and his feelings would be immeasurably hurt if he suspected I complain of his clothes. But, Bob, it's impossible! You're both of a size; help an old man out — there's a good fellow!"

"I'll do anything but stay here and disgrace myself," Bob assured him.

"Tactfully, sir, tactfully," the Colonel warned.

"Trust me to do it tactfully," Bob whispered. "I'm not out to get shot." And turning to the porch he called: "Dale, like to ride over and meet my family? You might get a word with Miss Jane about the school, too!"

There was no reply to this except a quick step toward the old white mare.

"Will hit be all right ter leave my rifle hyar, Cunnel?" he asked, with one foot in the stirrup.

"Certainly, sir," that gentleman gave cheery acquiescence. "But take my horse. Your own seems tired."

"Yourn *air* faster," he nodded, passing unnoticed Lucy's invitation to be caressed and rising into the Colonel's saddle. There was something pathetic in the wistful way she looked after him, whinnying twice or three times in a sudden panic of apprehension. The old gentleman stroked her nose, murmuring:

"I don't think he ought to have done it just that way, old faithful. But if I read the signs correctly you'd



better get used to it now. There'll be plenty more times."

Bob called from the gate: "Send Zack over; I want my hair cut!" And the Colonel, understanding, waved his hand as they again cantered away — Dale in advance, and the young planter evidently cautioning him to spare his horse in the noon hour heat.

"Who's Bob's anthropoid friend?" Brent asked, as he and the Colonel now stretched in their chairs.

"A young man from the mountains, violently in search of an education. He will be asking you every question in the range of thought, Brent, and I hope you will have patience with him. It's such a pity to see one so hungry for knowledge — really starving for it — while the whole wide board before him holds more than enough for all!"

"He's welcome to banquet on my feast of reason, but he'll get mighty tired of it. Do you think he's serious?"

The Colonel smiled at this from Brent.

"It has been my observation that believing in people usually brings out their best," he answered, "and so I think he is serious. I hope you will, also."

"You bet I will," Brent cordially agreed, burying his nose in the mint. "He's all right; — I like him!"

After a moment of affectionate contemplation of his own julep, the Colonel said:

"Bob's household will be over to dinner tonight. I trust you can be with us, sir!"

Before he could reply, Miss Liz appeared in the doorway, and both men arose with courtly bows. When Brent had arranged a place for her — and the Colonel



had slipped into the house holding the telltale goblet under his coat — this severe lady, balancing on the chair with prim nicety, raised her lorgnette and observed:

“ You have come home early ! ”

It was not hospitably done. Indeed, Miss Liz, sister of the Colonel's angelic wife, inherited few of that departed lady's endearments. While both had passed their girlhood in the Shenandoah, this one alone managed to absorb and retain all the stern qualities from the surroundings of her nativity. Now a spinster of perhaps sixty years, this firmness had become imbedded in her nature as unalterably as the Blue Ridge rock; her eyes and hair were as gray, and her voice — unless she were deeply moved — as hard; also was her sense of duty as unyielding. Before her sister's death she regularly visited Arden, and afterwards the Colonel had insisted upon her making it a permanent home.

He paid the price for this, as he knew he would pay; but without a word, and with as few outward signs as possible. For Miss Liz could not have been termed in sympathy with the easy-going Colonel, nor, in her self-righteous moods, sympathetic with any man. From long practice and research she had at her fingers' tips the measurements of every male transgressor from Cain to Judas Iscariot, and could work up about as unhappy an hour for gay Lotharios as might be found this side of the Spanish Inquisition. At any rate, Miss Liz did come to Arden, finding rest and quiet and peace — not imparting them.

The little darkies never tired of twisting pieces of bale-

wire into an imitation of lorgnettes and airily strutting in her wake when she visited the garden — being careful to keep their carousal well away from the danger zone. At the same time, all who had been allowed peeps into her gentler side were gripped with tentacles of affection as firm as was her own relentless adherence to duty. In just one respect might Miss Liz have been rated below par, and this was a hopeless incapacity to see when others were teasing her. She took all in good faith when they looked her straight in the eyes and told the most flagrant absurdities.

Brent now smiled blandly into her face and accepted the implied rebuke a moment in silence.

“Isn’t it extraordinary,” he said at last, “that I guessed you would be having on that becoming gown, and looking just this cool and attractive?”

In spite of her stiffening shoulders and frown of extreme displeasure, an echo of color crept slowly into her cheeks. For it is a curious fact that, while stern and self-denying people may be found who are impregnable to the fiercest attacks of passion, indifferent to the most insidious lures of avarice, unmoved by the most convincing whispers of jealousy, and impartial in every act toward fellowman — all, all will yield an inch to the smile of flattery.

“Fiddlesticks!” she exclaimed. “I am old enough to be your grandmother!”

The lorgnette never faltered, and Brent’s eyes lowered in feigned distress.

“Yes, I suppose so,” he quietly admitted. “The fact

is, when you come out on the porch this way and begin to talk so pleasantly, I'm always forgetting that you're so — so terribly old as you insist. I'll try to remember, Miss Liz."

"I am not inviting old age," she smiled, with a freezing lack of mirth; but yet she may have yielded the inch, for one of her thin hands went timidly up to the iron gray curls which hung before her ears, and her eyes turned to gaze dreamily over the fields as though in search of some long past, golden memory.

His own eyes took this opportunity to cast another sly look at the tell-tale goblet, hoping to light upon some method of spiriting it away.

"Mr. McElroy," she suddenly exclaimed, "I have been talking to brother John, and have told him my views about you!"

Brent's mouth opened a moment in surprise and then he frankly began to laugh.

"I'm glad I wasn't in hearing distance!"

"You might have heard to your advantage. I told him that I considered marriage to some determined girl your only chance of reformation."

"Marriage!" he almost rose out of his chair. "Heavens, Miss Liz! I've got an alarm clock that does that sort of thing!"

"Alarm clock?" she gasped. "Pray, what do you suppose marriage is?"

"I've never tried to suppose! I don't want to suppose!"

She arose with dignity and went toward the door.

There was another minute, while he stood making humble apologies to which she seemed indifferent, and then her voice came like the crackling of dry twigs.

“ I bid you good morning, Mr. McElroy ! ”

## CHAPTER IX

### AT THE UNPAINTED HOUSE

Brent sat down and took a deep breath, as men do when they have narrowly escaped disaster. He saw Zack on a mule, heading for the gate, and called him.

"Uncle Zack," he whispered, when the old darky had come hat in hand up the steps, "rustle me another julep!"

"Lawd, Marse Brent," he cast a suspicious glance toward the front hall, "I'se gotter go clar to Marse Bob's an' cut his haih!" But, translating the look, Brent gave a low laugh, saying:

"She won't be out again for awhile. Hustle, Zack! I've just been frozen to death!"

The old man thrust the empty goblet under his coat and quickly returned with another, invitingly frosted.

"Ain' she turr'ble sometimes, Marse Brent?" he asked in a confidential undertone. "She done tol' me yisterday dat I'se gwine git th'owed clar to de bottom of hell, an' den criss-cross all over de coals, ef I don' stop makin' juleps for Marse John an' you! Do you reckon I'se gwine git all dat misery?"

"Betcher life," Brent answered, taking a few swallows and leaning back with a sigh of satisfaction. "That's all coming to you; but d'you want to know what

the Colonel and I've decided to do if you quit making us juleps, you old devil?"

Zack grinned.

"We'll take you out to the tool house, and press your teeth down on a dry grinding-stone till they get hot and squeak and —"

"Hush, man, hush! In de name of goodness, hush!" Zack covered his wrinkled mouth. "You makes mah jaws feel all scrouged up!"

And after he was again astride the mule, plodding toward Bob's place, his hand continued to stroke with affectionate care those jaws that had been thrown into such spasms of suggested torture, muttering:

"Who ever heerd tell of sech misery as puttin' mah onlies' toof on de grind-stone!"

A mile from Arden stood a house, too near the road to give it the air of being a place of many comforts, even were it in other respects pretentious. But its lightly built porch, precariously nailed to an unpainted frame front, stamped it with poverty.

Here dwelt Tom Hewlet, proprietor of ten acres and a bad name. It was said that his first wife had all but died of neglect, and then burst an artery in her brain while pursuing him with a skillet. The second Mrs. Hewlet still held on. Both, no doubt, possessed virtues, but neighborly sympathy clustered around the present incumbent, because she was the present, and because of a frequently expressed regret that the good Lord had not spared her predecessor until the skillet and Tom had made connection. It was but a whispered wish, for



Tom's second choice came from the meek and lowly. He was taking no more chances.

Besides that exciting memory, however, the first Mrs. Hewlet, previously the widow of a country parson, had left him a daughter by that marriage, and this girl, Nancy, had stayed — for Tom's house was, after all, the only place she had to stay. Arden's people and those of Bob's home had felt in a mild way sorry for this girl, sometimes sending over "things," and in other ways showing a long-distance interest; yet the very fact that she lived beneath the roof of such an old reprobate constituted a barrier which many of the less established neighbors would not venture to cross. Just, or unjust, this had made her shunned — at least, not sought; and as she grew into young womanhood, she also grew into a life of solitude. The native swains did not approach because they were afraid of Tom, and girl friends were denied by a far more unrelenting danger — compromise.

This particular spring, however, two events occurred which were vitally affecting her life. The first, when she stopped Jane in the road and asked if she might come to school. From that time forth the teacher began to see many things which others had not given themselves the opportunity to see, and her previous long-distance interest merged with the girl's spirit of secret envy into a companionship — bounded for the most part by school hours, yet a companionship, nevertheless.

Not until then was there exposed a lovelier side of character, doubtless formed in early childhood with her father, the country parson. Jane learned of the mutual adora-

tion which had existed between these two, and, when he had died, how death seemed also to lay a hand upon her budding hopes of life and future. The mother's background she found more difficult to place, and the only glimpse she could get of it was through Nancy's possession of four books left from that forlorn woman's more forlorn estate: the Bible, Swinburne's poems, "Adam Bede" and "Household Hints." That she had been superior to Tom might be accepted without question, and why she married him was simply one of those anomalies which makes our neighbors interesting.

But the seed implanted by the father, a man of honest impulses, remained somewhere the girl's consciousness — latent, nearly parched by the brutality of subsequent environments; until Jane had begun to moisten it with encouragement, and now it was budding. On the other hand, she had seen in Nancy tendencies of less promise: a physical desire to be away from the frame house by the roadside, and a character — not entirely weak, but irresolute — easing its sense of obligation by the devil's insidious argument of poverty; also, that the recent application to perfect her modest learning was in parallel with an unexpressed hope of independence in the cities. Frequently — and invariably after nights when old Tom was on his sprees — Jane had found her pathetically near the precipice of desperation, and it required some pointed talks to hold her steady.

The second event in her life had been of more recent date: Brent.

As old Zack now neared the ramshackle house, he saw

her leaning over the crooked gate. Not infrequently of late he had carried a note to her, and he rather felt that she might be looking for one today.

She smiled, showing a really exquisite line of teeth between lips full and inviting. Her mouth was large, as though Nature, realizing her possession of one exceptional quality, had made the most of it. Around her neck hung a simple garnet pendant which Zack had noticed only in the last few days; and now, as she stood with chin up-tilted, the sunlight struck this stone sending a soft, crimson gleam of dull fire across the white skin below her throat.

"Mawnin', Miss Nancy," he made a perfunctory bow.

"Good mornin', Uncle Zack."

"How's yoh folks?" the old man asked. It was warm, he was weary of the ride and wanted to talk.

"They're well, thanks." She did not ask after those at Arden.

He folded his hands on the pummel and let his feet slip out of the uncertain rope stirrups. Sitting thus relaxed, for a moment he looked meditatively at the old mule's drooping ears, then reached in his pocket, brought out a red handkerchief of the bandanna type and wiped his brow. He had something to tell her — she knew this! But she knew, too, from experience that when he brought a message he must take his own time about delivering it.

"Dat's a mighty spry gemmen over to our house," he finally remarked.

"Mr. Brent?" she flushed a little.

“No-deedy! He’s s pry, too; but dis’n I’m talkin’ ’bout jes’ come.”

“Yes, I heard about him,” she said. “A sort of hill-billy, isn’t he?”

“Now, how’d you heah dat?” the old fellow looked down at her. “He only got dar las’ night!”

“I don’t remember — somebody came by an’ told Pappy, I reckon.”

“It do beat all how tales travel,” he doubtfully shook his head. “But don’ you put no stock in him bein’ a hill-billy! Long haih an’ s’penders don’ make no greenhorn. Dey never has yit, an’ dey never will — any moh’n a Adam’s Apple do; an’ I got a Adam’s Apple mahse’f, sech as ’tis! I got sumfin else, too!” He slowly closed one eye and looked up at the sky.

“A note?” she laughed.

“Dat ain’ so fur off!”

“A message?”

“You sho’ guessed it dat time!” he chuckled. “Some-un suttently do a lot of thinkin’ ’bout some-un — dat’s all I got to say!”

“Does he?” she blushed. It pleased her to have this old man tease. It was her only outlet; he was the only one who shared the secrets of their trysts.

“He suttently do! I don’ reckon she’s been outen his mind but onct dis spring!”

“When could that have been?” she bantered.

The old fellow’s face disappeared into a network of wrinkles. “Dat wuz when he picked his gloves offen de po’ch an’ got one on befoh knowin’ a hornet had done

crawled in it. He come purty nigh fergittin' his salvation, den! All de same," he added, still chuckling, "he say he's comin' over dis 'way dis evenin', less'n de lightnin' strike 'im. Dar ain' no cloud in de sky now," he looked up musingly.

He felt about for the stirrups with his boots and then took up the old reins, still grinning and bowing his adieux with a gallantry that would have done credit to the Colonel. And, as he rode away, she drew a deep, trembling breath of happy anticipation.

## CHAPTER X

### THE SPIRIT OF SUNLIGHT PATCH

The old darky, after another half hour of plodding, sighed as he turned into the welcome shade of Flat Rock. The pike had been shimmering white and his eyes ached. Yet, as he followed the woodland road, he thought of a garnet shadow on a young throat, and again he sighed. In a vague way it meant a sign to him, and troubled his old heart.

A glimpse of Bob's house and its carefully kept grounds came into view, each detail opening as he approached, until he saw Jane and the mountaineer seated on the lawn. Passing by a side way to the rear, had his eyes been good he might have seen her face flushed with interest in the man whom she was drawing out and graciously dissecting.

For this was one of her own people — one of that very shut-in, restless, hungry type, whom she had hoped by the perfecting of herself to help. Other scholars at the school were not like him. They were, with a single exception, of the valley and foothills, but this one came from primeval grandeur. He alone possessed the absorbing craze to learn which had dominated her own life, and so she felt peculiarly drawn to him.

"I must ask you," she was saying, "where you get



your way of talking. We of the mountains,"— and she noted his look of thanks for this acknowledgment of mutual origin—"come out with our dialect pure; but I find you mixing it up with bits of really correct speech!"

"I can't talk yet like I want to," he answered, carefully choosing his words, "but what I've learned was up in Sunlight Patch. Some of the finest speakin' in the world, I reckon, is up thar!"

"Up there," Jane corrected.

"Up there," he repeated after her, adding: "I knowed that, but forgot."

"What and where is Sunlight Patch? Twice you've spoken of it."

"Hit's a cabin 'n' a clarin'," he answered simply, "back in the mountings. I war borned thar—there; all of we-uns war born there."

"An odd name," she mused, although she knew odd names were typical of the mountains.

"Not when ye know how-cum-hit," he said. "Hit war called that-a-way by a preacher onct. Yeou see, Miss Jane, my sister war born blind—leastways, the fu'st thing they knowed of hit she war blind. Thar war four of us brats in the cabin, two brothers older'n me who got shot, 'n' her. I war the kid, ye mought say, 'n' when I war mighty small some-un took her off ter the blind school in the settlements. She only come back 'bout two year ago, 'n' fetched some blind books they'd give her."

"What were the books?" Jane softly asked, touched by the picture of that poverty she had so well known.

"The New Testament," he answered. "Thar war

five big books of that. Then she had four big-uns of a feller named Dickens — ‘The Tale of Two Cities,’ that war. But what I liked most war the three wrote by a Cooper feller — he warn’t no kin ter our Coopers, Ruth says — called ‘The Last of the Mohigans.’ That Injun, Uncas, war a man, I tell yeou! Thar war some poetry I liked mighty well, too. Ruth says all of ’em wouldn’t take up so much room, if ’twarn’t fer the blind writin’.”

“Do you remember much of those books?” she asked.

“’Member much! Why, I know ’em purty nigh off by heart! That’s how-cum I kin talk so good — when I stop to think. By repeatin’ arter her I know the alphabet, the multiplication table, mental ’rithmetic up ter long derivation, some history, ’n’ some g’ography — but I hain’t never seed a map, nor writin’. Her books is writ in blind.”

“I think you have learned a great deal,” she smiled at him.

“Hit hain’t nuthin’ ter what I’m goin’ ter larn,” he declared. “But moh’n what I’ve told ye, even, I larned from her readin’. Yeou see, Miss Jane, she uster read ter ever’body who’d come, ’n’ hit got so arter ’while — ’specially Sundays — that folks ’d walk or ride ter our place from as fur as twenty mile ter listen, jest like they war comin’ ter a singin’, till the clarin’ ’d be plumb full. They’d listen, ’n’ watch her fingers slip over them raised letters, ’n’ keep a-listenin’ till plumb dark afore thinkin’ ’bout goin’ home. ’N’ arter dark, too; ’cause ter her the darkness didn’t make no diff’ence. ’N’ sometimes, with

jest the stars 'n' black trees 'round us up thar on the mounting side, hit seemed right quar ter see folks a-settin' on the grass, 'n' her voice comin' outen the night like one of them prophets what maybe she war a-readin' 'bout. Yeou see," his voice assumed a mystic, whispery tone, "she never knowed when hit war night, 'n' the people wouldn't tell her, nur make a move till she quit — beant hit even mawnin'. Arter readin', she'd talk awhile; tellin' 'em things they'd orter do, 'n' things they'd orten't. 'N' onct she clean busted up a feud by makin' two ole fellers shake han's. That caught the preacher's eye. When he heern tell of hit, he called our cabin Sunlight Patch, 'n' said she war the slocum — 'n' the name's done stuck."

He paused; absently, almost unconsciously raising his fingers to brush back the long hair. And when she gently encouraged him to continue, he looked at her with another smile of grateful acknowledgment.

"I won't ever fergit that day, I reckon. She war settin' in the doh as usual, 'n' on the step nigh her feet war ole Ben French 'n' Leister Mann — two of the hatin'est fellers in our parts. But they'd wanted ter come so bad that both sides compacted ter leave thar weepens behind. This day she seemed ter be readin' stronger'n afore, 'n' she talked moh like she war a-seein' things — I mean sure 'nough things; 'n' arter 'while the folks begun ter rock 'n' moan. They believe ter this day that the Lawd give her sight back fer a minit then, 'cause she reached down 'n' took ole Ben's hand in one of hern, 'n' ole Leister's in t'other'n, 'n' asked 'em ter shake. They'd been settin' thar a-cryin' afore that, so they shook

friendly, 'n' all the fellers in the clarin' they shook, too; 'n' the wimmin folks on both sides crossed over 'n' made up. That's how-cum-hit."

"I don't remember those men," she murmured. "Leaders of that feud changed so quickly and so often! It lasted a long time, didn't it!"

"Hit did, that! The fu'st I ever knowed thar war sich a thing war when they brought Pappy home daid," he looked down at the ground. "I war only a leetle brat, then, but ole Granny busted out a-wailin', 'n' put his rifle in my han's, 'n' tetched my face with his blood, 'n'—but yeou know how our people takes the oath; 'n' ye know hit hain't no nice oath." She shuddered, but the mountaineer continued: "Wall, she done all that, 'n' made me say arter her the things I wisht 'd strike me daid if I didn't git the fellers what had got him. Then one day, from up in the rocks, she p'inted 'em out, so'd I know 'em. One got drowned takin' a raft down ter Frankfo't — he fell off jest arter I shot. 'N' t'other-un I didn't git fer a long time. I ketched him —"

"Don't tell me any more, Dale," she pleaded. "I know you must have ketched him."

"Wall," he mused, "'twusn't right ter make no leetle feller take a oath like that, Miss Jane —'n' I moughtn't a-done hit, 'cept fer not knowin' no better. I wouldn't be tellin' ye, neither, but Ruth said ye'd want ter know afore takin' me in school. She says folks in the settle-mints is awful tetchy 'bout killin' folks."

"We'll pass the feud. Tell me how you happened to come here?"

“A circuit rider come through our parts one day, 'n' tol' us 'bout yo' school. That war in the winter. Ruth war so set on me ter come, 'n' me the same, I couldn't sleep. She said I'd be like Lincoln, 'n' Clay, 'n' even finer — ef thar is sech a thing as bein' finer'n them! But I knowed I'd be jest as fine, 'n' she did too. But ye see, with all our people daid, 'cept me 'n' her, I couldn't leave. She knowed how 'twar, 'n' one day a woman come from over the mounting ter live with us. I reckon Ruth had the preacher ask her ter come 'n' stay thar whilst I war heah ter school; fer her man had got caught makin' licker 'n' had ter do time down in the settlements.”

“We say ‘her husband’; not ‘her man,’ Dale.”

“Thank-ee. Well, she come, 'n' Ruth says fer me ter light out, 'n' ter tell ye all I know, as 'twon't take so long as tellin' ye all I don't. 'N' she give me the ole mare, 'n' nine dollars — all we had. The mawnin' I left,” his voice slipped back into the whispery accents, “she put her arms 'round my neck, 'n' asked me ter make her one promise.”

“What was that promise? Can you tell me?”

“Hit war jest somethin’,” he hesitated, flushing. “She said she war willin' fer me ter do any other kind of sinnin', ef I jest plain couldn't git outen hit, but she hoped I might die afore doin' *that*. Then she got on her knees 'n' fer most a hour prayed Gawd ter strike me daid afore He'd see me do hit. She said,” he added softly, “hit air on accounten *that* sin as how-cum she's blind.”

Jane shuddered. She could picture the cabin room,



the girl kneeling on the rough board floor, her sightless eyes raised to the wall of logs and mud, her frantic prayer to have this only brother kept safe and sent back to her; but, if he were about to sin a certain sin, to strike him dead.

She was too deeply moved to speak, and indeed she felt that words would be out of place in this pause which seemed so eloquent of a curiously comforting holiness. On his own part, he merely sat there looking down at his awkward boots. Finally, with sincere, trembling regret in his voice, he murmured:

“I’m sorry ye’ve a headache.”

“Thank you, Dale.” Her reply was tenderer than she knew, for now he still further appealed to her. From men in the valley, this solicitation might probably have denoted no more than ordinary politeness, but she knew from experience that the phlegmatic mountaineers must be moved by strong emotion to sympathize with one in pain. “It’s all gone, now,” she added.

“Whoop-ee!” he gave a sudden yell, at the same time springing into the air and striking his heels twice together in a wild dance of joy. “Whoop-ee!” he yelled again. “Git hit, ’n’ let’s begin! Git hit, I say!”

“Dale!” she cried in consternation, drawing back from him. “Are you mad?”

“Bob said ye couldn’t teach ’counten yo’ haid,” he breathlessly continued, his face glowing with excited pleasure. “But now ye kin! Now ye kin git the book ’n’ give me my larnin’, can’t ye?”

He was looking down at her with an expression she



had never beheld in anyone's face — enthusiasm, wildness, even madness; but his eyes were not seeing her. They missed the parted, startled lips, the heightened color of her oval cheeks, the pulsing throat, and the frightened breathing. They watched only for her to produce the key to his religion — a book.

And she read this in his burning eyes as though it were written there in cold, black, selfish letters. A deep smouldering and immoderate anger seized her. That this man who had seemed such a power of softness should so show himself to be a thing of self-centered flint, wounded her; and Jane rebelled at wounds. For the moment they stared, seemingly hypnotized; until at last her voice came as low and expressionless as his had been full of fire.

“Sit down. I'll get a book, but before you look into it you shall learn a lesson that will be more useful.”

He obediently dropped into his chair, but she remained standing and, in the same monotone, said:

“You've told me about your Sunlight Patch, and of a blind sister who reads all day and into the nights to throngs of ignorant people for their improvement; who gave the only horse and the last nine dollars on the place, and left herself nearer helpless than she already was, in order that you might start out to be a great man — a man like Lincoln, or like Clay.” He missed a touch of fine sarcasm here. “Now let us see what you have done, and how far you have emulated the great hearts of those noble patterns you've set out to follow: Yesterday you arrived, and,” here her cheeks turned a deeper pink,

“defended a school teacher against insult. Understand, you did not champion a defenseless girl; it was the school teacher, whom you considered as a necessity to your future. This morning you went out before daylight — I’ve heard about it — to punish, not an offender against society, but a probable menace to your ambition. You are sorry if the school teacher has a headache, not because a human being is suffering, but because your own desire is thwarted. You have no more charity in your soul than a stone!”

He was silent, contrite and humble, but she had not finished with him yet. While the instinct of the teacher had been stirred, more thoroughly had been aroused a girl’s offended pride. So in the same voice she went relentlessly on:

“First learn that your mountain is not the only place which holds a Sunlight Patch! There is one everywhere,” her hand, unconsciously placed against her breast, now pressed as she spoke. “In everyone there must be that same selfless desire to give the last horse and the last nine dollars to whomsoever it may carry to a higher goal, or mankind is a failure. Learn this now. Do not think because you were born in Sunlight Patch that any of its virtues are clinging to you. We carry no virtues but our own — remember that! Don’t forget that other people depend on you just as much as you depend upon them, and that life is a big game of give and take — the giver usually winding up with the largest share of happiness. Now go to the house. Bob has called you twice!”

He rose slowly. There was a tightness in his throat;

his head throbbed and hurt. His capacity for learning, the true offspring of his insatiable desire, had become so like a dry sponge drawing in from every trickle of knowledge which flowed through his remote habitation, that he missed no word of what she said — each had sunk deep into his mind as a marble that is tossed into a limpid pool, gradually settling until it rests on the clear bottom, forever to be undisturbed, but forever in sight.

It suddenly occurred to him that Bob had really called, and he took a step in that direction, but turned once more to look at her. No one could have met that look unmoved, much less this girl who had been the necessary cause of it. It was so haunted, so pleading for another chance, and he seemed so pitifully helpless in his awkwardness and homespun clothes, that in spite of herself two tears welled into her eyes, balanced, and fell. She dashed them quickly away and turned her back to him. Again the tightness seized his throat while wave after wave of something particularly cruel swept through him.

His sister had never cried — or, at least, not in his presence; nor had the few bare-footed girls he knew. They might have bawled their eyes out and he would have calmly walked away. But this one was different, very different, and he could not move; this was the teacher, his teacher, the thing he had set up on a pedestal by the throne of God Himself — yes, higher; or, at any rate, more continuously in his thoughts.

“Have you forgotten Bob wants you?” she finally asked.

“No'm,” he answered. “I war jest 'bout ter go.”

A woodpecker tapping on the dead top of a tree now stopped amidst a breathless stillness. Bees were droning in the air, and softly over the land came the song of a happy field hand. It was all very peaceful and very quiet; too peaceful, too cloyingly quiet for Jane just then, and, as he continued to stand, she fairly screamed at him:

“Are you petrified?”

“What’s petrified?” he asked simply.

Slowly she turned and faced him; her eyes showing no tears, only tolerant surprise and amusement.

“Really, Dale, you are the most extraordinary person! Petrified means having become stone, or stony; sometimes stunned, or dazed. Now run along to Bob!”

While she watched him striding over the lawn, a low, merry laugh made her turn to behold Nancy, a picture of mischief — although with traces of a recent storm in her own eyes. Yet, like so many of the physically mature but mentally undeveloped, sorrows did not rest heavily upon her for any length of time.

“I didn’t mean to laugh,” she apologized, “but it did sound so funny sending that big feller away like that! That’s all I heard,” she added quickly.

“He’s really no more than a boy,” Jane smiled. “You’ll probably see him in school Monday. What’s the matter?”

“Oh, lots;” Nancy flopped, rather than sat, on the grass. “I can’t keep on goin’ to school! I can’t do these sums a-tall! Pappy’s drunk again, an’ throwin’ things around the house just awful. He can’t mortgage the farm for any more, an’ the storekeeper in town says he’s

goin' to sue him for what he owes, an' he's got drunk to forget it, I reckon. I can't work out this old thing in long division, anyway, Miss Jane, let alone when he's throwin' things!"

Most of this story had often before been poured into the teacher's sympathetic ears.

"You must have more grit than that," she said, patting one of the girl's hands. "You know I'll stand by you, and you know you're doing very nicely!"

"I reckon I ought to know," Nancy sighed. "But, honest, Miss Jane, I've used up enough grit for a flock of dominick hens! There isn't any more left on our place!"

Jane laughed. "If I'm not terribly mistaken in the girl, you'll find another supply before getting home."

"I reckon you're awful mistaken, then," she sighed dolefully. "I've just plain got to the end of the pile. It's hard, Miss Jane, honest it is, with Pappy cussin' an' drunk, an' barely enough to eat, an' not decent clothes to wear! His mealy-mouthed wife stands for it, but I don't, an' that makes things all the hotter. I'm tired of it! Why, I could have everything I want if — if —"

"If what?" Jane quickly asked. She looked fixedly at the girl whose face, suddenly crimson with blushes, made an effort to look calmly back.

"Oh, if nothin', I reckon," Nancy stammered.

"Sit over here nearer to me, Nan," Jane said after awhile. "I'm lonely myself today, and I've just heard something I want to tell you."

In no school could she have acquired that faculty for reaching one's confidence, and this artfully expressed feel-



ing of loneliness touched a response in the girl's nature which she now frankly confessed by timidly snuggling against Jane's knees.

"Poor, tired thing," Jane murmured, her fingers touching Nancy's hair. "Do you sometimes fancy everyone unsympathetic?"

"Sort of," came a trembling little sigh.

Again the bees droned their drowsy lullaby. The song of the field hand was hushed, but in its place was the smell of new turned earth that told of a labor finished.

With every detail vividly drawn, she related the story of the blind girl in a remote wilderness which had achieved the name of Sunlight Patch; of what she had accomplished; of all she had given to the lives of those about her. And in a lowered voice told of the promise exacted of her brother, her only brother and support. When she finished, Nancy was looking up with wide open eyes.

"You mean to say she prayed for the only kin she had on earth to be struck dead if he ever went wrong? — an' him a man? Well, that surely is grit!"

"The thing is, Nan," Jane said softly, "that people with two eyes ought to do at least as much!"

Nancy arose and brushed her skirt.

"I reckon," she murmured, "that girl can teach us a heap when it comes to gettin' your teeth in things an' holdin' on. I ain't got a good reason now for not goin' back an' fightin' the ole man; but I wish to Gawd somethin' would strike *him* dead! Much obliged, Miss Jane — I sort of feel more like a Christian now."



## CHAPTER XI

### ON THE THRESHOLD

Toward evening Dale rode back to Arden. His mind was a confusion of happy impressions, the result of having laid its touch upon the throttle of power. From the dusky room where his life had sat wondering, he felt now that a hand had pressed his shoulder, aroused him, and led him to the silver threshold whose outlook was a landscape of golden opportunity. As, twenty-four hours earlier, when his eyes for the first time rapturously feasted on this valley of plenty, so now his mind roamed across a dazzling future — a future which was his, his very own.

Tossing back his head he gave a yell, a wild, joyous yell, that startled the horse and sent scurrying to higher branches an inquisitive squirrel which had been looking down at him with chattering interest.

When he turned into the circle, the Colonel stood up and stretched, welcoming him with an open smile of approval. He could imagine what tact Bob had employed to bring about this new attire, but little did he guess at what sacrifice to personal comfort. For the donation of clothes was not what stamped Bob a philanthropist. He had taken Dale into his room and there prosecuted a strategic system; voluntarily submitting to Uncle Zack's

shears on his hair which required no cutting. Nor was this all. He made the old servant shave him, a thing he despised from any hand but his own. Then he tubbed, and continued this game of follow-the-leader throughout the entire toilette, affably talking all the while, until Dale emerged a different looking, and a much more gratified, man.

“Lawd, Marse Dale,” Uncle Zack had exclaimed, “you suah does look handsome! I’s e gwine to shave you ever’ mawnin’ now, till you ketches on for yohse’f!”

The Colonel’s smile was immeasurably pleasing to his new guest, and when the old gentleman playfully spoke of fine clothes Dale responded like a happy boy.

“Ain’t they fine!” he looked admiringly down at himself. “I reckon I hain’t never had on decent clothes before in all my life! D’ye reckon I’ll get used ter this collar? Bob said so!”

Under his arm were two books — a speller and a simple reader. These Jane had given him as he left, after an afternoon spent in lessons on the lawn. It was the first lesson, of course; a lesson, perhaps, which both would remember all their lives; vivid to Dale because the tentacles of his mind were beginning to stir and stretch in their new awakening; vivid to her for many reasons. As the day had progressed she became more and more astounded by his ability to learn, for in an incredibly short time he had mastered the first four columns of her spelling book with an ease which made her wonder if he had not before been over it.

Enthusiastically now he related this to the Colonel, who

saw that he was trembling — tingling, like a thoroughbred ready for the start in a big race.

“You must use the library for your studies, sir,” the old gentleman declared with warmth. “In there you will find a dictionary — if you know how to use one.”

“Show me how!” the new student eagerly turned to him.

Laying aside his own volume, a treatise on the calorific power of fuels — a brain-rasping subject which had been absorbing him since the coal fields were in prospect — he led the way into that spacious, mellow room, walled from floor to ceiling with shelves upon shelves of books. Dale stood transfixed. His head was thrown back and his hands were clenched, as though in very truth the secrets of this silent store-house were already creeping out to enter his attentive brain. Colonel May opened the clumsy dictionary, explaining it with a word the mountaineer had already learned to spell, and left him in this paradise of fancies.

Some time later Uncle Zack opened the library door, announced dinner, and left unheard. A few minutes after this he returned, but again left unheard, and only when a hand pressed Dale's arm did the young man look up. The Colonel was smiling down at him.

“Come, Sam Johnson, Dr. Jared Sparks, Ben Franklin, Davy Crockett, Abe Lincoln, and more such indomitable shades rolled into one! Man must eat; it is time for dinner!”

“What does that mean?” he asked, leaning back in his chair.

“Oh, Lord,” the Colonel groaned. “I’ll tell you another time. Come! You understand ‘dinner,’ I hope?”

Entering the dining room Dale’s mind was like a country pup walking stiff-legged into a crowd of city dogs, its hair belligerently on end and the tip of its tail wagging a friendly compromise. Not that he was at all defiant, and of course not afraid, but his whole mental attitude had become one of alert watchfulness, ready to spring this way or that, to follow this new custom or that new custom, and not intending to lag if the others made a move. So it was that when the Colonel held a chair back for Miss Liz, and Bob was seating Jane, Dale, who never in his life had seen anything of this sort, made a pretense of imitating them for the convenience of Ann;—and even though she were rudely jolted by the violence with which he shoved her into the table, her appreciative smile made him determine to do this thing forever.

“How will you have your coffee, Mr. Dawson?” Miss Liz presently asked— for dinner at the Colonel’s was of the farm variety which scorned the demitasse.

“A mite of long sweetenin’, please Ma’m,” he answered to that lady’s utter consternation. She laid down the tongs and stared at him.

“He’ll take it as you fix Bob’s, Miss Liz,” Jane interposed readily enough to save the situation, and at the next opportunity she turned in a confidential undertone: “We don’t use ‘long sweetening’ down here, Dale. People in the valleys use sugar exclusively—‘short sweetening,’ as you call it. They don’t have to grind and stew up corn-stalks to get sorghum for their coffee, as

we used to do. But I remember how good that molasses — that 'long sweetening' — was," she added, lying for the benefit of charity. "Don't forget, they use 'short sweetening' all the time here in coffee, but they never call it anything but sugar. While on the subject of customs I want to correct you about something else. Today, over home, you stood in the drive and halloed for Bob till he came out for you. That isn't done in the settlements. Here you can walk right up to anybody's front door and knock, or ring the bell, without the slightest fear of having a rifle poked through a chink because people may take you for an enemy. Of course, your way is the proper and polite thing to do where we come from, but in the valley it isn't good etiquette."

"What's etiquette?" he asked.

She explained it and continued:

"The etiquette of knives and forks and spoons also materially differs between our people and these."

"I never seed one of these little fellers before," he picked up a teaspoon and turned it curiously over.

"I didn't either," she laughed, "until I went to the convent. But now, since I'm to be your teacher, you must let me teach you these things, too."

"I want ye to teach me everything in the world," he whispered.

"Then watch how I use them," she replied, flushing at the way he said this, "and which ones I use. Down here, people who eat with their knives are murdered — I mean socially murdered. Break —" she was about to say: break all the commandments before doing this! but



thought better of it and added: "yourself of that habit the very first — the very first thing you do. And I want to hear more of that good English you say you know," she laughed at him. "You've been talking atrociously all day!"

"What's atrociously?" he asked.

"I don't see Brent," Miss Liz raised her lorgnette. "Is he ill?"

"No, my dear," the Colonel answered, "he is otherwise engaged and cannot be with us."

"John," the good woman stared severely across at him, "I believe that boy is working too hard! You must prevail upon him to take more rest."

A bomb exploding could scarcely have produced more surprise, yet one could never know just at what point Miss Liz would "break out"—as Zack called it. In the midst of their spellbound silence Ann giggled, and Jane managed to say:

"That would be rather difficult, wouldn't it, Miss Liz?—I mean, persuading him to take *more* rest?"

"Well, your father must try," she insisted; for, when very much in earnest, Miss Liz impartially denoted the Colonel as father to whomsoever she might be speaking.

"He's makin' a railroad, ain't he?" Dale turned to Ann. "Do ye reckon he'll show me how?"

"He'll turn it all over to you, no doubt!—he'll have to turn it over to someone if it gets built! It only shows, Daddy," she laughed across to the Colonel, "that one



can't serve a corporation and a goddess both at the same time! Isn't that a natty little epigram?"

"I don't follow the subject of your epigram," the Colonel smiled.

"Why, Brent, and the goddess, and the railroad," she replied.

"Goddess, my dear? What goddess?"

She and Jane exchanged glances.

"He's suspected of having a love somewhere; some mysterious love whom he meets in the moonlit forest of Arden — when it's moonlight; and, maybe, when it isn't."

"What have you to support this?" the old gentleman frowned. He, too, had sometimes wondered what took Brent away so frequently of late. These were uncomfortable thoughts to the Colonel, who allowed suspicions no place in his estimate of people.

"Oh, we just support it for the sake of gossip," she laughed. "Aunt Timmie dreamed it, I believe."

"I thought you were serious," he smiled, yet showing his distaste for the subject, "nor will I permit any gossiping here!"

"But, Heavens, Daddy —"

"My dear," he interrupted her, "I trust you will never learn to gossip. It is purely a trade, carried on by a breed of fawning Judases — of self-satisfied butchers, to deal in the choicest cuts of their unsuspecting friends' characters. The shelter of my roof must also afford protection to the good name of my guest."

“ ‘ Good name ’ in the present instance is hardly a calculable statement,” she murmured, for Ann could be biting, as well as sweet, when her feelings were touched.

“ I quite agree with John,” Miss Liz arose to the occasion. “ It is strange,” she added, turning the lorgnette this time carefully at Jane, “ that he does not find a nice young girl to marry.”

“ Such a cynosure of niceness, too,” Ann added her little dig, and Jane suggested :

“ He might try advertising ! ”

“ What’s advertising ? ” Dale asked.

“ Oh, Lord,” the Colonel exploded into his napkin.

When dinner was over, Jane crossed the porch unnoticed and walked out under the trees. The lorgnette which had said to her “ it is strange he does not find some nice girl to marry,” left a disquieting effect. Ann had only that day suggested the same idea, and Bob had laughed to her about it the previous evening. Even Aunt Timmie, the ebony font of wisdom, had but recently looked slyly at her, remarking: “ ‘ Foh long we’s gwine to have a weddin’ in a private cyar ! ” (Aunt Timmie had never seen a private car, but it typified her idea of grandeur). She now strolled on beneath the trees, beneath giant clinging wild grape and trumpet vines, to a circle of low spreading cedars, wherein lay a carpet of odorous tanbark. It was a favorite spot with her.

Gliding carefully through the meeting branches which hid the path, she dropped into a yielding hammock and gazed for several minutes up at the network of black limbs, watching a star here and there which showed in a

few small patches of visible sky. One arm stretched down at full length until her fingers touched the ground, and in this way she was keeping the hammock gently in motion.

She made a wonderfully graceful shadow, reclining in this dark place, and no judge of the human form could have passed without a quick breath of admiration for its delicate blending of strength and frailty, its stamp of being thoroughbred. And it was along the line of thoroughbreds that her thoughts were wandering.

Having acquired much of the Colonel's reliance in breeding, and in the fitness of appropriately mated things, she was wondering! Her father and mother had been illiterate mountaineers, but did there not exist a time prior to this when their ancestors were people of refinement? This, she felt, must be surely so, because of her early love of refined things — truly refined, to a degree far beyond the ken of mountain life. Without substantiating records, she seemed to know that in early Colonial days her family of gentle blood had floated with the migratory tide across the Appalachian range. That was the origin of all mountaineers! What had held some there, instead of sending them on to the rich, unsurveyed plains? A birth enroute? That sometimes happened. The man of the family died, or was killed, and the woman forced to build a shelter as best she might until the boys grew big enough to help? That, too, had happened. Whatever the reason, some of the best Anglo-Saxon stock had been stranded in the Cumberlands, staying there literally and figuratively while the world advanced.

Perhaps her strain was purer than the Colonel's! Few mountaineers made alien marriages, for the very sufficient reason that they seldom roamed — even though this had meant stagnation in their own environment. Still, the strain was pure! If one occasionally escaped these mountain fastnesses, why should he not — why should she not — with a free rein, dash out to regain lost prestige? Why should she not with one stroke blot out five or six generations of ignorance, and bring the stifled line of her honorable ancestry to the place it had been rightfully demanding for a century? But, in the face of uncertainties, would her blood commingled with the blood of established lineage now be fair? Would she ever feel a rebuke in infant eyes? Would they not burn her soul if she wantonly summoned them to open on a world which might point back with a superior smile? Could she ever kiss the little lips which might some day praise the father and be silent of her?

Thus her sensitive thoughts, bringing a succession of confusions, wandered dreamily on, while the hammock gradually ceased its swinging and hung as a thing asleep.

## CHAPTER XII

### A LIGHT ABOVE THE MOUNTAIN

During the latter part of Jane's reflections Brent McElroy was having a few strange minutes. He had left Arden shortly before sundown and, by following two side roads, reached the rear gate of Tom Hewlet's farm without having to appear on the pike. This was no unusual route for him on evenings when the pike promised hazards such as a chance meeting with the Harts or Jane.

Whenever Nancy, on the lookout, saw a cloud of dust rising above these rambling, tree-lined lanes instead of from the white, direct way, a deep flush of mortification tinged her face. She understood his circumspection, but wisely refrained from showing it.

Tying his horse, he followed a path up to the gnarled orchard where he knew she would be waiting. And there he spied her, idly plaiting dry stems of last year's bluegrass, beneath the distorted old tree which he had named Nirvana. A glow of extreme pleasure warmed him, for this Rosalind with her rustic prettiness made an agreeable diversion from the somewhat monotonous evenings at Arden, and he vastly enjoyed angling about the edges of her rural pool. But he was unaware that she had never left its limpid depths. He did not suspect — because he did not think it possible — that, like a goldfish,



she had only swum about in the limited sphere of her transparent bowl, looking out at the universe with large eyes which seemed, but were not, wise; and ready, if danger came, to scurry back into the little frosted castle that constituted the center of her constricted existence.

No kind words or deeds had reached that frosted little castle during the years she most required them. It had remained cold and uninviting, except as a place of shelter, and her soul had shrunk into a sort of knot — until Brent came. Only at his coming did her hungry nature begin to uncurl; — only at the coming of this polished gentleman from the great world, who knew everything, who was the epitome of kindness, who fed her with confidences and compliments, who inspired her with a sudden sense of meaningfulness, of importance — only since then had she begun to realize that for a long time her heart had craved affection.

He now remained another moment behind the trees to draw a half filled flask from his pocket. Had he not had more than enough to drink that day, he might have possessed the prudence to put this back untouched. Instead, he drained it; then carelessly sent it flying across the fence into an adjoining field rank with old weeds.

He came on after this, and Nancy sprang up, holding lightly to one of the low hanging boughs. Before they spoke, and to her wild dismay, he kissed her; and, as much to her dismay, she yielded, clinging to him in a strange, sweet agony. For if two hearts are hungry, if two natures have been strangled, there is a time when the touch of lips to lips lets loose a sweep of human passion



before which the hosts of heaven and the laws of man draw back in awe.

But suddenly, with a piercing shriek, she sprang away; then, clutching his arm, whirled him about.

"Look!" she whispered, pointing a trembling finger to a pale, mysterious glow which seemed to be arising from the peaks of the distant Cumberlands.

"The moon is coming up," he said, unsteadily.

This was the first time either had spoken, either had moved; but now she commenced to sob in little gasps, backing farther from him as though he were something she dared not touch again — reaching blindly behind her for their old tree, whose strength in having resisted the fury of many storms might be imparted to her now.

"What's the matter?" he asked, still stupidly.

"Oh, Brent," she whispered, "I thought it was that blind girl lookin' down here an' tellin' me she'd rather see me dead! Go home, quick, for the love of Christ!"

He would not ask her to explain. Non-understandable as her words had been, they had given him time to look about and see upon what a perilous brink their feet were standing.

Brent was not a godly man; he had not cultivated Nancy with a grain of godly intention. But he was a manly man; and now as he suddenly realized, with that certainty which has no law, no rule, no answer, that she was good, he would not trust himself to speak. Shutting his teeth hard, he turned abruptly and almost ran toward the horse.

Then it was that she threw herself upon the grass and

sobbed great sobs of thankfulness; and tried to laugh, and tried to pray; holding out her clasped hands to that halo of light above a humble cabin somewhere in the mountains, in whose door a blind face had seemed to look down at her entreating: "I'd ruther see ye die!"

It was in a perturbed but thoroughly sober mind that Brent dragged back the broken gate, whose openings and closings had worn a deep rut in the ground. He was about to untie his horse when the figure of a man appeared walking clumsily along the orchard fence.

"Wait there," the fellow called. "I want to see you!"

The heavy frame of Tom Hewlet came on, and no other word was spoken until he stopped three feet away. Swaying slightly, and looking into Brent's face with a simpering leer, in an undertone he said:

"Come over some evenin' next week."

"What for?"

"I might say it's 'cause you're so purty to look at," he guffawed at this bit of humor. "But, fact is, it's on fam'ly matters."

"You're coming apart, Tom. Go in and get some sleep!"

"I was sleepin', till a empty whiskey bottle come sailin' through the air an' hit me on my hand."

A cold shiver crawled up the engineer's spine, but he turned to unhitch the horse, saying casually:

"You'll have blue mice sailing through the air if you don't sober up."

"Don't be in a hurry," hiccoughed Tom. "Don't leave yoh would-be step-pappy without some kind of reminder."

A fiver 'd go mighty fine jest now, an' you wouldn't never miss it!"

Brent had wheeled on him.

"You're getting in mighty dangerous ground, Tom," he warned sharply.

"'Tain't half as dangerous as that orchard back there, if you didn't come into it honest! — an' if you did come honest, there ain't no reason why I can't borry a fiver — bein' a fam'ly matter, as you might say!"

"I came honest, and I'm leaving honest, you drunken fool," Brent raved at him. "And don't try any blackmail dodges on me or I'll beat your head off!"

"Blackmail!" Tom stepped back, not so much in surprise at the word as at Brent's threatening attitude. "Well, I'll leave it to the Cunnel, an' Miss Jane, an' them folks over there, if this ain't a fair an' squar proposition — all in the fam'ly, as you might say; — bein' as you come honest! For if fine gentlemen like you don't come honest, they'll say Gawd pity the gal!"

They'll say: God pity the girl! It smote his soul like a whip. Why should they not say it anyhow of the half-read country girl whom he slipped around by back roads to meet at night? Heretofore, he had been more the adventurer than criminal, but now he felt the brand of both. Some day, after his work was finished and he had gone, Zack would tell of the messages and notes, and all the sacred oaths of all the creeds would not convince Arden and Flat Rock one little mite of her innocence!

Over in the orchard a girl, walking slowly to the

house, had stopped, terrified; shrinking for him, not for herself, as with the unerring instinct of her sex she realized how his pride would cringe before such an exposure.

“Tom,” he said at last, “you may have the fiver, but not because I’m afraid of anything you can say. Nancy hasn’t a thing in God’s world to be ashamed of, and neither have I. But it’s plain that I can’t come again as long as you’re drunk and seeing things. Here,” handing him a bill. “But it isn’t a loan, or hush money, or anything of the sort; — just hope money.”

“How hope money?” Tom grinned, crumpling it eagerly in his hand.

“Because I hope you’ll drink yourself to death with it. Good night.”

It was late that night, and not until she had made a hurried walk across the country to Arden, when Nancy stole into the house. Her ears told her that Tom was lost in slumber, and she crept to her room, fastening the door with the back of a chair wedged firmly beneath the knob. She was breathing fast — this time from physical exertion. Her skirt showed one or two rents where, in her haste, it had been forced through stiff underbrush, and the knuckles of her hands were stained with fresh earth, as though she might have crouched upon the ground somewhere to escape detection. Only upon her face was there no sign of violence. In it rested a light translatable as a great peace which comes to one who has forgiven nobly, at the sacrifice of toil, an erring friend.

## CHAPTER XIII

### IN THE CIRCLE OF CEDARS

Brent reached Arden behind a sweaty horse. The meeting with Hewlet was filling him more and more with an agonizing unrest. He wanted to be alone, and he wanted not to be alone. He wanted to think, and he wanted not to think. At least, he could not face the Colonel and the others just now, so turning past the house to the most secluded spot the lawn afforded, he brushed through the screen of cedar branches, felt his way across the tanbark to a seat, and sank into it with a low curse.

Jane had heard the quick approaching steps, and now, because her eyes were accustomed to the shadowy gloom, she recognized at once, not only the man but a measure of his agitation by the way he breathed and jammed one fist into the palm of his other hand. Yet, in a spirit of fun, she remained motionless, wondering how soon he would detect her. Then a deep groan burst from his lips. It was a sound of poignant suffering that went to the depths of her nature. Purposeless as seemed his life, she still felt that it could not be altogether bad. The very charm of his presence, which had a way of stamping him a gentleman born even when in his khaki working clothes, stood for some defense; and, in spite of his laziness, she rather guessed that a generous fund of mas-



culine strength lay within that frame — and of mental strength, if directed toward things of his desire. She knew him to be a dreamer, a scoffer; but had not accredited him with a capacity of worry or grief. The evidence of it now perplexed as much as it stirred her. In the stillness of the place it seemed almost as though she could hear his heart crying beneath its breath in the grip of some remorseless sorrow. At once she was all pity, and slowly, with her eyes resting on his bent head, asked:

“What has happened?”

He sprang up, peered at her, and then tried to laugh.

“You must forgive me,” he bowed, “for bringing the dramatic club into your sanctum. I’d no idea anyone was here.”

“I know that,” she said. Then asked again: “What has happened?”

“You’re a bully fellow,” he exclaimed in a tone of sincerity, but not entirely free from the false echo of his laugh, “and I’d love to tell you were you not certain to be bored stiff with it. Let me ask you, instead, what you’re thinking about in this charmed circle?”

“I’m sure you’d be bored stiff,” she drily answered.

He waited a moment. Then:

“It wasn’t very courteous of me, I know; but, as a matter of fact, I was just having something out with myself. I’ve — I haven’t been fair to someone; and I’m sorry. So I can’t tell you lest I betray.”

She sat more erect with a shade of her former sympathy, asking as though it had been a debatable point:



"Then you have a conscience?"

"I have a sense of proportion," he answered. "That's more logical than a conscience."

"Will you ever exercise it for those poor mountain people of mine, who are starving for civilization?"

"I already do — all sorts of ways."

He had himself in hand now, and, crossing over, sat down by her.

"I think you'll be more comfortable on the bench," she suggested, and he returned to the rustic seat.

The pause was rather awkward, and she continued:

"I didn't mean to pry into your — sense of proportion, but thought you might have had bad news. That's why I asked. In a place like this, you know, where people are more or less detached from the usual worldly interests, they sometimes feel as though they might help each other without committing an unpardonable affront. That's all. Have you many more rights of way to secure before the road can go ahead?"

"I should like to think, Miss Jane," he replied, passing the matter of railroads, "that I really could turn to you for help sometimes. If there's a fellow in all the world who needs it, and who abominably hates to let people see he needs it, it's the luckless devil before you."

"If the world is to be kept in ignorance," she smiled, "you mustn't come into dark places and begin swearing unless you know they're uninhabited. It's romantic, but dangerous."

"Romantic things are always dangerous; ever think of that?"

"I haven't, but it isn't true," she answered.

"I can prove it without any trouble, but —" he arose, feeling his pockets, "my — er — cigarettes! Will you wait a few minutes?"

She bowed, and he went out; not for the cigarettes, but to a side window of the house where he beckoned Zack and told him to build, without delay, a toddy. For Brent had been considerably unstrung by the suddenness with which events moved across his stage since sunset, and he turned to this concoction for temporary steadiness. Then he lighted a cigarette and walked back to her in a more composed frame of mind.

"Now," he said, entering the cedars, "with your permission, why are romantic things dangerous?"

"That happened to be your observation, and not interesting," she answered. "You found your cigarettes?"

"You see I'm smoking," he smiled.

"And temporizing," she drily observed. "Really, Mr. McElroy, the truth is not in you!"

"I beg your pardon?" he stiffened slightly.

"I am saying the truth is not in you," she directly answered. "When you first came here tonight, you took a cigarette from your case and lighted it."

"I should never have been so careless if something weren't on my mind," he laughed now. "The truth — the true truth — is that I needed a drink of wicked whiskey. Forgive me?"

"I might not find it so difficult to forgive if, in the fu-

ture, you either stop trying to deceive me or talking to me; I really don't care which!"

"I say!" he looked up in surprise. "That's pretty straight talk! But it may be a worth-while thing for you to remember that a place does exist where men can't answer every question put to them, and I very much doubt your right to assume so much simply because I choose to keep a few of my affairs to myself. When I first came in here you asked what had happened. That was sympathetic, and I appreciated it; but it was something I couldn't answer, and told you so. You may remember that you seemed to resent that. Your manner was an invitation for me to make up some sort of a fairy-tale to appease your curiosity; and if I had, and you'd found it out, you would just as readily have called me a what's-his-name. You're illogical. You don't seem to share my sense of proportion, at any rate. I wanted a drink — I needed a drink; and I had every right in the world to take it, providing I didn't offend anyone. But it would have offended you — so why announce my intention? If I'm put in a position where some sort of explanation is demanded, and the truth can't in fairness be told, I'm thrown back on the resort which your own sex has taught me — that delectable sex of sweet poisons and silent stilettos, versatile in the art of lying; queens of the art, indeed — though innocent in it. And here's another plain truth: I'd love to be frank with you, and tell you everything in the world I can, because I think you are square with lots of things which most women side-step.

I can't just express it, but you're broadminded and charitable, and smash right out from the shoulder at a thing as if you didn't have skirts on. I don't put it very well, but you know what I mean!"

She thought he did not put it very well, but she knew he put it sincerely, and her reply held a vein of banter which he might not have been expecting just then:

"Perhaps you'll begin by telling about your mysterious dryad in the Forest of Arden!"

"Suspicion," he peered through the gloom at her reprovingly, "is the solvent which disintegrates happiness; and happiness, reduced to its component parts, is trash. Withdraw your question!"

"Happiness cannot be reduced to its component parts," she laughed, "because its ingredients have strayed to us from the four corners of the universe, and cannot ever be returned. I insist upon your answer!"

"You are drawing a long bow," he said more soberly. "You employ femininity's imperfect warrant to shoot at random and trust her gods to put something in the way of getting hit. It's a satire on honesty."

"Never mind about honesty," she laughed again. "Did my gods fail me?"

He puffed a few times at his cigarette, finally taking a deep inhalation and blowing it slowly on the lighted end until the outlines of his face became softly visible in the glow. She saw how serious it seemed, and guessed he was purposely making it so.

"Since you insist — !" he began very carefully. "My dryad in this enchanted wood is the most enticing

spirit ever clothed in the graces of woman. That's all."

Again he turned to his cigarette. Again the red glow and the serious face. Again her accurate suspicion.

"If that is all, you're not playing fair. Does she live in a tree?"

"No. She lives in a big white house with big white columns; by night she haunts me, but by day she holds school for mortals in a shady grove."

"I thought you were more original than that," she said, in an expressionless voice. "So we're not to talk any more, are we!"

"But I swear —" he began.

"So do I," she interrupted him, "that you bore me to extinction with things like that, Brent; honestly you do! If you can't be just a little bit sincere, I can't be interested in you."

They had known each other for more than two months; two months of almost daily, unconventional contact, but this was the first time she had called him Brent. It came now as a master-stroke for true understanding, and he threw back his head and laughed.

"My, but you're a corker — beg pardon — I mean a live wire!"

"Overwhelming flattery in either case," she smiled, "and that's the second sincere thing you've said."

"The second! Well, I like that! Perhaps when you begin thinking less about yourself, you'll be able to see more virtues in other people!"

"No one has ever accused me of thinking particularly about myself," she righteously flushed.



"No one has to," he replied, teasingly. "Being a teacher — although a very young and charming one — presupposes egotism."

"Your analysis is shrewd tonight," she coolly observed.

"Not at all," he affably continued. "An egoist, and a woman whose dress is unhooked in the back, are always blissfully unconscious that the world is seeing more of them than they normally would permit."

Her hand stole to the back of her waist. He saw this and again began to laugh, saying:

"I fancy that part is all right. And you know how far I am from meaning the other, too!"

"I'm probably different from most of your friends," she spoke rather quickly, "because I'd rather tell an unpleasant truth than a conventional falsehood. Truth, to me, is the bravest and most beautiful thing in life. And one reason," she added, leaning imperceptibly nearer to see his face, "that women so love it in a man is because it makes of him a sort of restful harbor she can steer to from gathering worries. No man can possibly know how comforting it is for a girl's course to be laid within easy running distance of a safe harbor. He may know of wrecks which occur without them, but seldom considers how easily many of these might have been averted."

"Men sometimes feel that way about girls," he suggested. "Only, in girls, they ask for tenderness."

She took the rebuke, simply adding:

"Girls feel tenderness for shelter, not for a destroying sea."



They were quiet then. The hum of night life was about them, and from the house came faintly the mellow notes of a piano, where the Colonel and Bob were watching out of shadow the enraptured light in Dale's face as Ann introduced him for the first time in his life to that type of instrumental music.

As though this were in some way made known to her, Jane broke the silence.

"A man with an honest purpose in life," she gently said, "with a duty to perform, who sticks to it through thick and thin, admitting no defeat, hammering upon stubborn places, finds in good womankind an ever-ready tenderness. It is the feminine answer to masculine courage."

"There are two kinds of courage," he replied after a polite pause, "just as there are two kinds of duty, and two kinds of pride — each so closely resembling its other self that men, and particularly women, are often misled. When fear tugs at a fellow's heart (and without fear there would be no courage) he is courageous who walks resolutely into every uncertainty if duty chances to be there calling. I think you will agree with me. But what is duty? There's your stumbling block! A false conception of this — a belief that he sees ahead of him what there is not — may cause him to be sacrificed as ignominiously as a bone tossed to a dog; his life would be gobbled up for no better purpose. That's bad business. Humanity would be bankrupt at such a rate. So, if a man of courage be not also a man of foresight —"

"You mean that he would have no excuse for keeping

out of danger," she laughed. "That when he saw a duty, or heard its call, he would not be able to justify himself in sitting calmly down to consider if the sacrifice were worth while! Then, indeed, would the world be a sorry place! Personally, I'd rather see fat dogs stalking over the earth than just bones!"

"I hope you are deliberately misconstruing what I have said," he flushed furiously. "Fear of physical and mental pains are just the same, requiring the same courage to go through." He stopped, as though weighing the wisdom of continuing. "Oh, I don't care," he moved uneasily, "I want to tell you nearer what I mean. Once, a long time ago — maybe three years or four — there was a girl for whom I'd have suffered anything and thanked God for the pain. That's loving some! And there was another chap, a sort of friend of mine, and a right decent sort; steady, always at work, and people said she'd make a great mistake by taking me. They saw him only when he was making money by his own grinding, you know, and saw me only when I was spending my allowance. He wanted her, too; and it was a pretty nice race between us, with a foregone conclusion that she'd take one or the other. She didn't pay any attention to what the people said, but one day I picked up some kind of a self-righteous, courageous microbe, and decided the proper way for her — I stepped aside."

"And?" she asked, when he did not continue.

"My courage was there, but my point of view was warped; I was out of focus on duty," he quietly asserted. "She married the other fellow, and it developed too late

that his life was a shabby muss. Now her eyes are heavy with an endless sorrow. I think that was when I tried — well, when I began drinking some.”

“Wouldn’t you have done that anyway?” she asked.

“Perhaps,” he slowly answered.

“If he had not married her, and she were here now, would you?”

“Not since you are here,” he debonairly smiled.

She might not have heard this from the way she sat, looking down and thinking.

“I suppose,” she said at last, “that all men’s lives are shabby musses. You may think me unkind, but without a shadow of doubt you would have made her unhappy, too. You are that type.”

“I’m very much obliged to you,” he murmured. “It seems that I’ve come to a friend, and found a judge; that my search for sympathy has brought me to a sentence. You’re most encouraging, Jane. Perhaps it would be interesting to know how you’ve found all this out!”

“Oh, I can’t say just how,” she answered, feeling that his rebuke held more than a share of justice. “It comes from so many small things, which, apart, might be immaterial, but, together, speak volumes and make you quite an impossible quantity in the scheme of domesticity. For instance, the other day, when you had someone’s gun in your hands, you deliberately fired at an overflying woodpecker to test your skill. The dead bird was useless. That showed the instinct of a wanton destroyer, and a wanton destroyer, my friend, is not just the safest place for a girl’s happiness.”

“How do you know I wasn't keeping in practice, in order to become a good protector?” he murmured, but she was not in the mood for flippancy, and continued:

“You shirk responsibilities, and have that dear old Colonel drinking more than he has done in years; while your own hedonism is shocking.”

“Well, why not?” he looked up suddenly. “If pleasure's my god, whose business is it?”

“Pride's,” she softly answered. “It's the business of Pride, that makes all male human beings men. Girls know, without having to reason, that a man who is lacking in pride is lacking in self respect, and is unworthy of himself; which means he is unworthy of anyone else. That may not be very clear, but it's what I mean. If Dale, now, had the surveying of your road, we could feel certain of it; or if you had more self control like him — though I suppose he was born with it!”

He frowned, and she saw his teeth press hard upon his lower lip. Perhaps that was why she added:

“See what a dependable man he is going to be! — what strength of character!”

He looked away. Realizing how impossible it would be for her to say this about himself, a feeling of rebellion began to stir against the mountaineer. But he indignantly choked it with a ruthless hand, knowing that her comparison, not Dale, must be held responsible. Then for a moment he took a swift glance into the future, wondering how long it might be before he could come abreast of this mountaineer's supposed dependability — and, perhaps, pass on ahead of it! But Brent was not in the

habit of gazing future-ward, and he could not hold the focus for long at a time. Now, quietly, he spoke to her, though without interest:

"I'm afraid your three little observations are illogical. In the first place, self control is not a proof of dependability; in the second place, Dale has no more self control than a kitten in a fit; and in the third place, people are not born with self control. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?"

She flushed, but looked across at him smilingly:

"I want to talk about that!"

"Then let's get rid of Dale first. If I read the signs, you've got in that chap a creature of limitless self indulgence. He's crazy to learn, and I've no doubt that already he is studying like a steam engine; but when he wants to do other things he'll do 'em with the same zeal. I gather from the Colonel that he doesn't give a rap for anybody or anything just so he gets to a book. Self control? He doesn't know any more about it than water coming down a rain pipe!"

"Don't you think the desire to study is commendable?"

"Certainly, but it requires no self control. He studies just as he would scratch his hand if it itched. I should call it natural, rather than commendable; or fortunate, if you choose. Jane," he now looked her fully and seriously in the eyes, "there are lots of people who go through life with tense lines about their mouths, saying nothing, never getting into devilment, and the world tip-toes behind them whispering: 'What wonderful self



control!’ It’s all rot! Self control is a thing we unconsciously cultivate from the moment our minds begin to coordinate. It’s like building a dam across our hidden river of tendency; and a hit or miss sort of structure it is, too. In one man the current of this tendency may be like a trickling stream, and a handful of materials are enough to keep it in check. In another, it may be a raging torrent, and he may slave night and day, gathering stone and sand, and sealing them with his very blood. But suppose in the end the torrent gets away from him! He fails, you say. Yet is he weaker after that herculean task than the other chap who dammed up his stream of tendency with the side of his boot? He publicly goes under,— yes! But may he not still be finer than his two-by-four brother whose temperament ran only from the ice-box to family prayers and back to the ice-box? I want to tell you,” he concluded in the same low, even voice, “that in the Big Summing Up, the Celestial Clearing House will show many a poor gutter-runner more entitled to wear medals for having made a game fight for respectability than some of his anemic superiors who all their days walked slowly, and were called by their fellows examples of great character. Don’t be too quick to size up a chap’s pace, Lady Jane, until you know how red his blood is, and how much weight he’s carrying. I must go now!”

While he had been speaking, the moon, full and mellow, climbed high above the house and shed a mere suggestion of light — a sort of luminous radiance — into the thickly sheltered circle. He stood up quickly with the



air of one who had said too much, reached for a cigarette, and then for a match which he could not at once find. She saw that his face was very white and drawn in this ghost-like gloaming.

"I wish you wouldn't," she hesitated. "I like to talk to you tonight."

He turned and looked down at her, as she added:

"You're a curious make-up; — and have some really fine things in you!"

"That starts out well," he laughed, lighting the cigarette and sinking back on the bench.

"Do you ever ask women's permission before smoking?" she asked, a shade offended by the persistent way he ignored her in this regard.

"I didn't think it was quite necessary out doors; — and you might say no!"

"Then you haven't the diplomacy of a true Kentucky gentleman. I'll tell you what one of the most true and gallant of them once told me, and he would be an example for you to follow — in more than one particular. He was over ninety years old, and smoking a pipe — a dear old pipe he was seldom without — when I came up to him. Holding it toward me, he said: 'I shall not ask if I may smoke in your presence! A long time ago that request once met with a denial, so thereafter I merely implored the ladies' permission to burn a little incense to their lovely charms. Nor do I recall,' he smiled, 'one single refusal in the seventy-five years which have passed since then!' This," Jane added, her voice tender with the memory, "was General Simon Bolivar Buckner."

“Well, you’ve cut a notch too high for me,” he answered seriously. “Those few ‘fine things’ you just accused me of are nothing more than fireflies flashing in a skull compared to that grand old man. How d’you like the simile, by the way? Pretty good, isn’t it?”

“A striking picture of you, Brent! I would recognize it anywhere!”

A ripple of good humor played about her mouth which made her dangerously attractive, and, oddly enough, this was caused by that look of seriousness she had seen in him — a look which she had not the slightest doubt portrayed some mental suffering. To anyone else she would have held out her hand and said: “Let me help — I know I can!” But now she could only feel somehow glad to find that he was big enough, and fine enough to suffer. She had not suspected it, and it threw a new light about him. It sent, too, a riot of something pleasant tingling through her blood — as she had felt sometimes at the lookout point above her father’s cabin, where she watched for spies while he “mashed” the corn, and the white moonshine dripped, dripped from the rusty worm of his home-made still; when, crouched beneath the stars, her quick ears had caught some faint, suspicious sounds. Ruinous though they might turn out to be, she used to love those tingle-giving sounds. The same sort of thrill now reached past the culture-clothed sentinels around her heart and gave it an honest shake for old time’s sake. Slowly she began to smile, and, seeing this, he moodily asked:

“Why are you smiling?”

"I don't know, Brent. I just want to smile, that's all." Then she arose, murmured good night, and went out.

But the branches were still swaying where she had passed when he heard a quick cry of surprise.

"Brent!"

He was beside her in a second, looking over her outstretched arm that pointed toward the thickest portion of the grounds.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I don't know," she whispered. "Someone must have been here, and ran in there!"

He dashed after whatever it was, plunging through the shrubbery and threshing about for several minutes. Once she thought she heard a low cry, or voice, and for awhile he was so quiet that she grew more uneasy; but again the crackling sounds proclaimed him to be on the search, and finally he emerged.

"It's nothing," he said, coming up. "Maybe a dog."

"It couldn't have been a dog. Let's go to the house — it makes me creepy!"

They turned, crossing the little patches of moonlight filtered through the trees upon the violet sprinkled ground. It was a wonderfully seductive spot on a night like this! The mellow tinkle of the piano, arising from Ann's nimble touch, floated out to them; — they might have been walking in an enchanted fairy-land but for the turmoil about his heart and the unrest in her own. Impulsively she faced him:

"What do you think that could have been?"

He was taken unawares, and had of course no suspicion of her cause for nervousness.

"Brent," she said again, "I must know who was there!"

He stood humbly before her with his head bowed. When he spoke his voice was absolutely sincere.

"I can't tell you, Jane."

This magnified her fears, for she thought he was trying mercifully to spare her.

"You must tell me," she urged, betraying her terror by grasping his arm. In his own preoccupation he did not notice this. "You must tell me," she was pleading. "Oh, Brent, if we are ever to be friends, here, tell me! There's a vital reason why I must know at once!"

"But, Jane, I can't," he earnestly replied to her. "It was someone to see me!"

"You are cruel to try to spare me this way," she gasped, and the tears in her voice turned him to a being of great tenderness. "Can't you see I'm desperate? — that your evasions are torturing me? Who was that man?"

"Man?" he stared at her. "It wasn't a man!"

"Oh," she said, loosing his arm and stepping back with a half earnest, half hysterical little laugh. "Oh," she repeated, "I — you must forgive me! I thought it was someone — I thought it might be someone who touched me very closely, Brent!"

He stood looking down at her. How could he know she had been fearful of Potter?

"It seems," he slowly mused, "that we've nearly

stumbled on each other's secrets. I didn't suspect you were waiting for anyone, or I shouldn't have stayed."

"But I wasn't," she quickly retorted.

"Certainly," he drily agreed with her. "Very stupid of me to suggest it."

She stepped around in front of him, saying frankly:

"I give you my word of honor that I did not dream anyone would come there, nor is there a man —"

"This isn't necessary," he smiled. "I quite agree with you; and it was nothing that could have touched you at all closely."

She flushed, then turned and started slowly on, saying in a tremulous whisper:

"Very well, you needn't believe me." But just before reaching the house she again turned and faced him. "It hurts, Brent," she faltered, "to know you are thinking unkind things of me! Your own worldliness makes you utterly unsparing!"

"I would rather not have you persist in this," he said gently. "It seems to be one of those cases where you can't tell the truth, so why should you go to the other extreme unnecessarily? I'm not asking you 'what is the matter?' or if you found your cigarettes! Please dismiss it! If you want Dale to meet you in that charmed circle, I'm sure it's a harmless pastime."

She wheeled and left him, quickly running up the steps and into the house; but an echo of the pleading in her voice remained, and now gently pushed aside his ill humor which, in turn, was succeeded by a feeling of joyous relief; — because, hidden in the rhododendron thicket, a

girl had whispered for him to have no fear — that Tom Hewlet would not threaten his peace again. In his surprise he had caught her arm and asked why she had come, but she drew back, whispering: “That blind girl! And, Brent, take this!” What had she meant again by the blind girl? And why had she thrust into his hand the little garnet pendant he had given her?

For another minute he pondered over the strange complexity of girls, then sighed and smiled, and by a side door reached his room.



## CHAPTER XIV

### A MEETING OF RASCALS

Sometime after dusk the following Saturday, Tusk Potter walked cautiously toward the home of Tom Hewlet. There was no moon, but a starry glow illumined the pike and he kept well beneath the overhanging trees; for Tusk had learned, through a dim sort of reasoning, that when he walked in life's comfortable shadows he usually walked away from trouble. He now reached the broken gate and for awhile stood regarding the house, listening to see what manner of sounds came from within. Being satisfied, he called:

"Hey, Tom!"

The door opened, and Mrs. Hewlet's whining voice answered:

"What d'you want?"

"Is Tom home?" he asked, in a half whisper.

"What if he is?" she demanded.

"Nuthin'," Tusk answered, shifting his weight and leaning against the fence.

"Oh, is that you, Tusk?" she exclaimed more hospitably. "I've tuck so much quinine a body can't hear their ears! Come in an' set!"

"Naw, I reckon not," he evasively replied. "Tell him to come on out!"

The door closed and, after a wait of several minutes,

Tom glided around the corner of the house. He preferred this to coming the direct way. There were many things in common between Tusk and Tom.

"Hullo, Tusk," he said.

"Hullo, Tom."

They stood for awhile in awkward silence. Finally Tusk got out his knife and began to whittle on the gate. Tom watched this, then reached into his own pocket and produced a twist of long-green tobacco from which he gnawed off a chew.

"Got any lick'er 'bout you?" he asked.

"A mite," Tusk answered, and by mutual consent they moved farther down the road.

After having each tipped the bottle, Tusk announced:

"I'm buhned out!"

"You are?" Tom's voice held a note of alarm. "When?"

"A week ago today."

"How'd it happen?"

"You know that feller over to Cunnel's?"

"Reckon I do! Was it him?"

Tusk nodded. Tom remained deep in thought, wondering how he might proceed without Nancy's knowledge.

"He'll pay for it, all right," he said, at last. "He's been owin' me a little sum for a spell, an' we'll ask him to come across for two!"

"Aw, hell," Tusk turned with an air of disgust, "that ain't him. This here'n ain't got no money what I'm talkin' 'bout. I don't mean the railroad feller!"

“That’s so; I did hear tell as how another feller was over there!”

“Well, I’d sort of reckon,” Tusk growled. “An’ what’s moh, he’s a Dawson! There ain’t no love lost ’tween me an’ you an’ the Dawsons, Tom!”

“Shucks, Tusk, that ole thing’s been fixed up way back at home,” Hewlet evasively replied.

“It ain’t fixed up when he comes down heah an’ buhns me out, I reckon!”

“Naw, I reckon not,” the other had to admit. “What you goin’ to do?”

“What you reckon I’m goin’ to do?” Tusk growled.

“Look-ee-heah,” Tom exclaimed, having a sudden inspiration. “You help me on somethin’ fu’st, an’ then we’ll have money to git moh guns, if yoh’re a mind to start somethin’!”

“How you mean?” Tusk cautiously asked.

“The railroad feller owes me a hund’ed dollars — I wouldn’t be s’prised if it was moh, but a hund’ed’ll do to start on. Now don’t ask no questions! It don’t consarn nobody but him an’ me. You git it for me, an’ I’ll help you with that Dawson bird. You know the McElroy feller, don’t you?”

“I’ve saw him hangin’ ’round; but I can’t go over there,” Tusk grumbled. “Didn’t I jest tell you Dawson buhned me out? Why don’t you go?”

“Tusk, a gentl’man don’t like to be askin’ another gentl’man to pay him back a little friendly loan. You don’t know that, ’cause you ain’t got real good sense, Tusk, but it’s so. ’Sides that, some business dealin’s has

to go through a third party. That's how he done when he made Dawson buhn you out, didn't he?"

"When he what?" Tusk glared.

"Why, durn yoh poh haid, don't you know he wants yoh land for the railroad? Ain't he said time an' time agin he's goin' to have it; an' ain't you said you wouldn't sell? Well, then how's he goin' to git it, you tell me that?"

As though a veil had been drawn from Tusk's face he saw it all in an instant, and the next few minutes he spent in a flow of lurid oaths. Tom watched him, a slow smile flickering about the corners of his mouth. Finally he said:

"'Tain't no use to cuss; that won't build yoh cabin. Jest go like you don't know nuthin' 'bout it, an' say you've come for that hund'ed for me. An' if he says he ain't goin' to send it, jest say all right, that you'll go right on over to Arden an' ax the Cunnel an' his folks if they don't think it's fair an' squar. Jest say that! An' tell him, in case he ain't got it on him, to put it — let's see," Tom thought a moment; "tell him to put it on the school-house steps tomorrer night at nine. See? If you do that, Tusk, an' fetch the coin, I'll give you five dollars an' a new rifle; an' help you git squar', too."

"Where'll I find this heah railroad feller?" Tusk was growing excited.

"He's at the Cunnel's; I done told you that!"

"An' I done told you I dassant go there!"

"Then ketch him out somewhere."

Tusk thought a moment, and hopefully exclaimed:

“I kin ketch 'im at the schoolhouse when he leaves the money!”

Tom looked at his friend in pitying disgust.

“You blamed fool, how's he comin' to the schoolhouse less'n you tell 'im!”

The simple-minded giant was greatly perplexed at this. He drew out his bottle and took another drink, then mechanically passed it to Tom.

“Well,” this schemer said, drawing the back of his hand across his mouth, “if you want the gun, you'll have to make it. Belly-achin' around this a-way won't bring you nothin'. Let me know tomorrer night what you kin do, 'cause there's plenty others'll jump at the chance.” With that he turned and went back to the house, while Tusk, dazed and thinking hard, walked slowly and slouchily down the pike.

Chance succeeded where the ingenuity of Tusk might have failed. He reached a dip in the road where a small stream crossed, and stopped to drink. On his hands and knees, and with the water dripping from his mouth and chin, he suddenly raised his head to listen, then scurried into the bushes to watch, as he recognized the sound of a galloping horse.

Brent, coming from town, felt his mount shy and saw Potter looking out at him. He did not know, of course, the part Tusk had played in the schoolhouse drama, or of the fire, or, indeed, anything about him except that he owned a piece of land which Dulany, Buckville's legal

hope, was trying to buy for the railroad, and that someone else had said his strength was as great as his intellect was lacking. Brent reined up.

"Hello, Potter! What are you doing in there?"

"Hello yohse'f," Tusk emerged. "Hold up a minute!"

"Well?" Brent asked.

There was a pause, and Brent asked again: "Well?"

"Tom says as how you kin git that hund'ed for buhnin' down my cabin!"

"I'll get a monkey-wrench, my friend; you rattle," Brent chuckled. "But you get out of my way! I'm going!"

Tusk regarded him in sullen silence. His face was black with passion and Brent saw the necessity of more affable tactics.

"What's on your mind?" he asked. "Tell me so I can understand!"

"Nothin' ain't on my mind," Potter answered, with more truth than he realized. "Tom says you owe me a hund'ed dollars for buhnin' down my cabin; an' he says to leave that an' the hund'ed you owes him on the school-house steps tomorrer night; an' if you don't hand 'em over now I'm to put it up to the Cunnel!"

It was disconnected, but Brent understood the last part well enough. Also, it had flashed across his mind that if Tusk were really burned out, Tom had done it and concocted a plausible tale in order to gain this fellow as an ally. So he sat for a minute trying to grasp the dangling threads of this surprising situation.



"Tusk," he said, "I didn't know you were burned out, and, of course, I didn't do it; but I will buy your land if you'll come in town Monday and sign — that is, if Dulany finds the title clear. He's getting some other pieces for me, and can put yours in. How much do you own?"

"Acre," Tusk answered. "Th' ain't no trick 'bout this?"

"Certainly not. But land up there where you are isn't worth a hundred dollars an acre! What are you trying to put over on us, Tusk?"

"Don't make no difference," he growled. "I had a cabin, an' a bed, an' blanket; an' stove, too, sech as 'twas!"

"All right," Brent laughed. "I'll give you the hunner if you're at Dulany's office Monday." A hundred was the exact maximum price he and Dulany had decided on offering Potter for that little strip.

"How 'bout Tom's?"

"Tom's?" Brent looked down at him. "Oh, you just tell Tom to go to hell. That's the place for him."

"Will I tell the Cunnel's folks to go there, too?" he asked, with unintentional sagacity.

Brent hesitated; then, leaning over the saddle, put an impressive question.

"Tusk, do you want to go to hell?"

"Shucks," he spat contemptuously, "hell ain't got nothin' on a feller like me!"

"Then do you want to go to the penitentiary?"

"Fer Gawd sake," he sprang back, "what you mean?"

“Just this: You tell Tom that this blackmail has got to stop! Understand the word?—Blackmail! Let it soak in well, Tusk:—Blackmail! It’s a penitentiary offense, and I’ll have him up before the next Circuit Court, sure! Or better still,” he declared, growing more and more angry, “I’ll ride back and tell him myself!”

“Naw you don’t,” Tusk’s hand went quickly to the bridle rein. “You don’t give me the slip that a-way!”

“I’m not trying to give you the slip, you poor fool! You come in town day after tomorrow and get your money. That’s all you want!”

“An’ that’s all you want, too, I reckon. But I ain’t goin’ nigh no town arter this talk ’bout penitentries. Jest come ’crost with that hund’ed now!”

“I won’t do anything to you in town, simpleton!” Brent raged at him.

“That can be settled best by stayin’ right heah, I reckon. Hand out the money!”

“I haven’t it with me, Tusk. Do what I say and you won’t be hurt!”

“That’s all right ’bout bein’ hurt,” the fellow growled. “If you ain’t got that money with you, I’m goin’ to take its wu’th outen yoh hide. You got yoh hide, ain’t you?”

For the first time Brent realized he was about to have trouble. The man’s size impressed him with no particular awe. He did not think of this. He was aroused now and becoming furious, and as willing for a fight as one well could be. He felt that he had been reasonable enough, even while the man’s words were goading him; but, irrespective of this, an act which invariably fires a

horseman's anger had been committed — a restraining hand had been put with violence on his bridle rein.

“Wait till I tie this beast,” he said, “and you can peel off all the hide you're able!”

Tusk clicked his tongue and chuckled in fiendish delight as he watched Brent dismount. Dollars were nothing to him now. He was about to thrash the “railroad feller” — to kill him, maybe — and the world seemed transformed into a whirlwind of happiness.

Brent, coming slowly back, considered that in his recent college days his right punch had been a potent factor. In the gym it had come to be an unanswerable argument, and outside of the gym on one or two occasions — perhaps others might have been recalled — it was respectfully, even though dreamily, remembered.

But now, as he stood on the ground, the abnormally long arms of the antagonist before him precluded any reasonable chance of putting this narcotic into effect — at least, where it had heretofore proved its value. The point of the jaw had been his favorite spot, but the point of this fellow's jaw would be as difficult to reach as Mars. However, he approached warily, taking a close look at the ground to make sure there were no hindrances to footwork, and rather humorously whispering: “Brent, if I didn't actually know better, I'd take you for as big an idiot as this boob who'll probably crack your nut.” He had as whimsical a way of going into dangers as of going into pleasures, and now there was no trace of anger.

Tusk, watching him approach, raised his hand and blinked at a stone he had slyly picked up. But when he,

too, saw his opponent on foot he scorned the need of a weapon, even so primitive. Quite deliberately then he rolled his tattered sleeves up on those powerful, freckled, hairy arms; and grinned, showing the hideous yellow teeth.

## CHAPTER XV

### TRYING TO PLAY FAIR

“Put up your paddles now, Mr. Potter,” Brent said, edging to the left. His arms were working like slowly moving piston-rods of an engine that is capable of great speed. He was on his toes, and his sinuous movements seemed to speak of highly tempered springs and oil. He was indeed a different Brent from any which the countryside had heretofore seen. “Come ahead, old mutton-top,” he laughed. “I’m going to fill your eye!”

To Tusk’s imagination this shy fighter who kept himself at safe distances now became suddenly elongated, and then as suddenly grew normal. In the meanwhile, however,—in that infinitesimal part of a second during which the transformation occurred—a fist as hard as rocks smashed into his mouth. It was the sting of the blow, more than its actual force, which made the big fellow wild with rage; and as this increased in fury Brent kept up a rapid conversation generously punctuated with cool, insulting epithets. It was unbearable to the simple-minded Tusk who struck with a savageness that would have felled an ox. He charged his foe but never found him, he cursed and drooled and charged again, until at last Brent said in a tone of great solicitude:

“ Well, old throw-back, I reckon I’ll have to uncouple you now, and let in the twilight! Hate to do it — Ugh!” The right swing went smashing out — not to the jaw, but at just the proper instant to the pit of Tusk’s stomach. In another fraction of a second Brent was five feet away, wiping the perspiration from his forehead and watching the big fellow crumple up.

For he was clutching, tearing open his shirt and swaying. His eyes stared wildly, his face was drawn and his mouth was open to its fullest capacity in a struggle for breath. Then he went down, all of a heap; tried to regain his feet, but failed, and crawled about on his hands and knees in the dust, still fighting for that first gasp of air which seemed tauntingly to stand between him and eternity. When it came, he rolled over on his back and lay there panting.

“ Get up,” Brent scowled. “ We’ve got to finish this scrap, and I’m in a hurry!”

Tusk blinked at him in sheer perplexity. “ What’s yoh idee of finish?” he asked.

“ I’ll show you in a minute. Get up!”

“ That don’t sound like good sense to me,” Tusk whined. “ Say, how’d you do that, anyhow? I’ve knocked a lot with fellers, but —”

There was a spirit of forgiveness in the voice, a whisper of reconciliation, but Brent wanted his victory to be absolute. He appeared to go into a towering rage, screwing his face into a distorted horror, stamping about like a demon, and disfiguring himself as much as possible — trying, Chinese fashion, the experiment of terri-



ying the enemy into abject submission, and having a great deal of fun throughout.

Growing more and more superstitious about this mysteriously delivered blow from a man of smaller stature, and his apparent confidence to do it again any number of times, Tusk remained in a sitting position and stared. He became gradually impressed with a feeling that here was his master, and the more Brent raved the more he cringed. At last he whined:

“ I don't want no moh! ”

“ Will you come back with me and tell Tom Hewlet what I say? ”

“ Yep. ”

“ And make him believe it? ”

“ He's durn sure to believe it when I tell 'im 'bout this heah! ”

“ All right; get up. You and I can be good friends, or damn bad ones, whichever you please; and it all depends on how you act tonight. Come on, before he goes to bed! ”

As they proceeded toward Tom's house, but a few hundred yards away, Brent, still laughing under his breath, continued:

“ You rub it in well, d'you hear? Tell him the Colonel, Mr. Dulany and I will give the sheriff papers that'll send him to the pen. D'you know how long people have to serve for blackmail? A hundred years; sometimes twice as long! And they can't get pardoned, either, but just break rocks every day, Sundays and Christmases, with their teeth. ”

“With yoh teeth!” Tusk cried.

“Of course, with your teeth,” Brent chuckled. “Ain’t your hands cut off? And sometimes they feed the rocks to you hot, and you never get any water — when you go up for blackmail! It takes — oh, I should say, about fifty years for a man to go sort of crazy and begin to yell; but I showed the keepers how to stop that. Now, they put fish hooks in your tongue, and tie you up —”

“Great Gawd A’mighty!” Tusk screamed, springing away from him. “Don’t tell me no moh — it’s plumb wicked!”

“I haven’t begun to tell you half, yet!”

“Naw, naw, Mister Whatever-yoh-name-is, I won’t listen to no moh!”

Brent carried a small electric torch, and this happened to be in his hand while he was thus amusing himself with Potter. Absently now he pressed the button and watched the light, shining behind his closed fingers, turn them a bright, transparent red. He did not realize that Tusk had been keeping a close eye on him until he heard another exclamation of horror. For the instant he partially suspected mischief and wheeled about, but one look at the half-wit dissipated all doubt. He was standing with his mouth open, a picture of abject fear, trying to speak, stammering, and finally staggered to the fence. Brent was really concerned for him, thinking it might be some sort of a fit; but Tusk had turned and, although cringing, was staring back with enchanted eyes.

“Devil!” he hoarsely whispered. “You’re full of

fire! I jest seen you light up like a lightnin'-bug! You're a devil! I know; a devil!"

"Oh," Brent, more than ever delighted with this adventure, began to understand, "I see what you mean! Yes, sure 'nough, I'm the devil — the very old boy himself, dressed up this way to fool people. Zip!" He let the torch flash again behind his closed fingers, and again Tusk gasped and trembled as they turned magically aglow.

"Shut up," Brent commanded. "You'll scare Tom! And if you tell a soul who I am — well, you can guess what I'll do to you! Now call Tom out, and put it to him strong. I'll stand in the fence here and listen; and if you don't put it to him strong! —" Again the electric torch.

Tusk's wavering call sounded before the broken gate, and the injured voice of Mrs. Hewlet answered. In a few minutes Tom emerged from the side of the house as before; but a moment after him crept another figure, stealing through the shadows in a detour and stopping behind the same bush which sheltered Brent. She was not seen by anyone but him, nor did she know that he was there.

"Tom," the big fellow whined, "I jest seen 'im; — that — that man 'bout yoh hund'ed."

Hewlet gave a sign of satisfaction, while Brent wanted to indulge a chuckle which seemed to arise from all parts of him. He was immeasurably pleased. He thought humorously of Frankenstein, and how he must have felt with the monster in his keeping. It was weird, fascinating, and altogether to his liking.

“He’s just beat the hell out of me down the road,” Tusk whimpered; “an’ now him an’ the Cunnel’s goin’ to town to git you ’rested.”

Tom’s jaw dropped in utter surprise at both of these statements.

“’Rested!” he cried. “What for?”

“That askin’ for money was blackmail — blackmail, Tom! Don’t forgit the word. An’ it’s fifty year in the pen with fishhooks in yoh tongue.”

“Shet up!” Tom cried again. “What you mean? They’re after me?”

He failed to see that his informer was in a dripping perspiration and hardly able to stand from fright. He saw nothing beyond a dawning fear that he had gone too far.

“You mean they’re already started, or talkin’ ’bout startin’?” he asked again.

“Don’t ask me no moh,” Tusk wailed. “It ain’t decent to speak of! An’, oh, my Gawd, I’m a goner if you don’t git this hammered inter you good an’ strong. I’d better do it now!”

Thereupon he made a grab for the luckless Hewlet, who eluded the iron hands in the nick of time and retreated toward the house.

“Go home, Tusk,” he warned. “You’re drunk to-night. I’ll be at yoh cabin in the mawnin’.” And, with this parting promise, he went in.

Tusk was even about to follow, having no intention of incurring the devil’s displeasure; but Brent spoke softly

from his hiding place and his satellite obediently returned.

"You've done very well, this time," the pseudo Mephisto whispered. "Don't tackle him again till I say. Now go home." And to emphasize this he put his teeth over the end of the little torch and flashed it. Again Tusk sprang away with a snarl of fear, and Brent croaked in a sepulchral voice: "Nothing'll hurt you as long as you obey me, Mr. Faust. Now beat it!"

The terrified man did this willingly enough and when he had been swallowed into the night Brent, stepping around the bush, confronted Nancy.

"I didn't know you were heah when I came," she explained, with a shade of uneasiness in her voice and embarrassment in her eyes.

"You heard everything, didn't you," he said regretfully. "I might have spared you this."

"You needn't of," she replied. "Pappy came in boastin' of what Tusk was goin' to do for him, so I slipped out to listen. But I tried to stop him, honest I did; an' I'm awful sorry any of my people 'd treat you that a-way!"

"Great God," he said in a husky voice, taking her hands, "how can you feel sorry when I was all to blame!"

"Oh, Brent," she looked away, "we mustn't ever speak of that!" She had withdrawn her hands and now stood somewhat apart, glancing toward the house and contemplating a dash for it. He read this.



“Not yet,” he said. “You can’t go in yet, for I want to talk to you—I want to be honest with you. Come!”

As though drawn by some invisible force she followed, and together they walked down the pike until the house was shut from view. He turned then, and was about to speak but waited, listening. It was one of those very still nights of heavy atmosphere when sounds carry great distances, and he had detected the leisurely galloping of two horses. Soon he heard them slow down at the stream where he and Tusk had fought; then a wave of laughter, mingled with the splash of water and iron shod hoofs striking upon loose stones, reached him. After this the galloping recommenced.

Had he wanted he might have stepped farther into the shadows and escaped detection; but he waited until they were nearly abreast, then called. Dale pulled up with a jerk, and Jane leaned over her pommel peering into the darkness where they stood. He spoke now, and she answered:

“Hello, Brent! Oh, is it you, Nancy?”

Try as she did, with all of her might, to make this greeting natural, the alert perception of the engineer heard only her surprise—her hurt surprise—that Nancy was there. Had she come unexpectedly upon Nancy in a foreign hospital bed, she might have said it—to Brent’s ears—in identically the same way.

“We didn’t want you to pass without saying howdy,” Brent explained. “Where away in such a hurry?”

“I supped this night with my lord John May,” she had



rallied now, "and Sir Dale is seeing me on the road. Whence lies your way?"

"The way of the penitent," he declared.

"'Tis not so hard as the transgressor's," she warned, galloping on.

"Why did you stop her?" Nancy asked, looking at him in wonder. "She needn't have seen you heah?"

"I wanted her to see — how pretty you are," he answered; but during that pause, slight as it was, she realized he had stubbornly, defiantly, baffled his pride.

"Didn't you say something about bein' honest?" she naïvely asked.

His face grew sober. "I wanted her to see us; I want her to know I think it's a compliment if you talk to me by the roadside. That's all. No, it isn't all," he went on. "I want you to decide something, and now it'll be easier for you to decide, because they did see us. I'm in earnest; I don't want any prudish weights on this conversation. If they think there's something wrong, so much the better. But the very first thing I want to say to you is, that I've been a pup. I want to be a man with you — as much of a man as you were a noble girl by coming over to Arden the other night!" She was staring at him in utter amazement. "You saw through me that night," he was talking more hurriedly. "You know what a scoundrel I was! There's no use mincing words, no use holding up the mask any more. If it hurts you, remember I'm not sparing myself; — I couldn't spare myself, for you've made me feel too unutterably low. But I do want to be honest with you!"

“Brent,” she gave a curious little laugh, “what’s the matter with you tonight?”

“There’s nothing the matter — yes, there is, too! There’s everything the matter. I’m just a curl of smoke from hell when I drink too much. Any draft of desire takes me with it — sucks me up the black flues of intrigue and adventure. I’m making no excuses, for I like it. It’s fascinatingly kaleidoscopic. It’s Life; reflected and re-reflected in Life’s thousand mirrors, with the beauties magnified and the dull places rubbed out. No apology for myself — but I’m accountable to you when you’re drawn into it!”

He was talking blindly, impulsively ahead, carried on a wave of self denunciation, and not considering that she might be wholly perplexed by the metaphors which sprang so rapidly from his tongue.

She merely stood looking up at him; understanding only that he was moved by a tremendous force, and that somehow she — as he had just said — was drawn into it.

“A week ago tonight,” he began, but she gave a quick, inarticulate cry.

“Please don’t say anything about that night,” her voice was trembling. “It burns my soul!”

“Yes, I will. We’ll look at it squarely for this once, and your soul will treat it calmly. Why not? Wasn’t it your victory? Forget you’re a girl, and I a man, and for a minute let’s have honest outspoken words which might come from two people who’ve been through an hour neither one of them will ever forget!”

"No, I won't ever forget," she murmured.

"Nor I. Did you know I was a sneak in pretending to love you then? Did you know it was a lie?"

She could never have realized what it cost him to blurt out these words.

"I knew it when — I had a chance to think," she faltered, not feeling that outspoken thoughts were as simple as he seemed to find them. "When I saw it wasn't you that I loved, but just the things you said, I knew I couldn't love you either. That's made it seem easier, Brent."

"And still you came to Arden to help me?" he looked curiously down at her.

"But I'd forgiven you, an'—an' it wasn't all yoh fault!" Then, looking up at him with hardly a trace of embarrassment, she added: "The blind girl showed me! You'd ought to know her, Brent!"

"Who is that blind girl?"

"Who? Oh, Brent, don't you know a-tall? Listen!"

She turned him about and pointed to the horizon beyond Snarly Knob. There was a subcurrent of excitement in her voice, and the night seemed to grow more still as she went on speaking. The story was dramatic and moving, and frequently her eyes would strain toward the distant sky-line as though the face of some strong presence were gazing out with inscrutable calmness. It was some time again before either of them spoke, and, when he did, she was watching him with a new softness.

"Who'd ever suppose," he murmured, gazing into the blue-black east which drew him with something more

than a curious interest, "there was anything like that up in those God-forsaken mountains!"

"Miss Jane says there are things like that everywhere, Brent."

"Maybe there are," he took a deep breath. "I've just happened to miss 'em. I wish I hadn't."

She could not help laughing just a little at his doleful expression — and, moreover, she was happy, just a little, too.

"You seem to have repentance pasted all over you, Brent! Pappy gets that way when his whiskey runs out. But it's moh becomin' to you! I wish Miss Jane could see it!"

He flushed, and she laughed again.

"Miss Jane has already seen us tonight," he said in a low voice. "I don't know about her, or Dale, but there are others who'll put an entirely false construction on our being together. You know that. Tell me something: would you be willing to marry me and go away tomorrow?"

Just how far Nancy's vision penetrated this speech, perhaps she did not know; but she stood very still, scarcely breathing and holding her hands in a vice-like grip. She tried to make another pretense of laughing, but it failed; and her voice was sad when she turned to him.

"I don't reckon I'm the kind that'll be hurt much by what people say." Coming nearer, her eyes searched his face which was still turned to the ground, and she whis-

pered: "Which 'd be worse, Brent: goin' away married an' without love, or unmarried an' with love?"

He looked up in surprise: "The world wouldn't talk if we were married!"

"Don't you believe it, Brent," she said quietly. "The world 'd talk if you married a girl like me, moh'n it would if you didn't. I've been awake for seven days, Brent, an' I ain't a girl no moh in some ways. An' Brent," her cheeks were flaming now, "I might give you anythin' if we honest loved, an' not be ashamed;—but as we don't, a thousand marriages couldn't keep me from shrivelin' up whenever you looked at me! We'd despise each other in no time," she added, with another forced laugh.

"I don't know," he murmured.

"Well, I do," she now exclaimed with her old time gaiety. "Stand right still, an' shut yoh eyes, an' don't move till I say good night! Promise?"

"What's the game?" he asked.

"Never mind! You do what I say!"

"All right, I promise," he smiled.

The seconds passed and he wondered what she was doing. He knew she could not be very far away. Then there was a slight rustle and her lips touched his cheek.

"This," she whispered, "is because for the first time in yoh life you've got what Miss Jane calls grit. Don't move!" There was another pause, and her lips touched his other cheek. "This," again she whispered, "means the blind eyes over yonder are happy, 'cause you've made

Nancy see. An' this," she tenderly drew down his face and kissed his forehead, "is that we'll be understandin' friends from now on till the day after never."

"Isn't there something else?" he pleaded.

"I reckon not," she whispered.

She must have moved silently, for in a few moments her voice called a good night from the broken gate.

He opened his eyes then, and moved toward his patient horse. He had a feeling that he may not have carried this interview gracefully; but he had done it honestly, and at real personal cost. He began to wonder what it might have cost Nancy — he had given that no thought. Were she a girl of Jane's type, he suspected she would now be hating him. But she was not like Jane; she was Nancy; and, even as his intuition whispered, her cheeks were still flushed with a pleasant warmth of satisfaction. To her it had been romantic and grateful. She seemed to feel that they were honorably at quits.



## CHAPTER XVI

### A SPRINGTIME SANTA CLAUS

As May crept up the calendar the little schoolhouse became the center of increased activity; commencement exercises were under daily rehearsal and the light of excited interest shone in every face.

It was a heterogeneous flock which had answered the call of Jane's horn eight months before: twenty-nine in all, ranging from children of eight to a woman of thirty-five. Nor were their characteristics less diverse. The tobacco-chewing, profane boy was there, with a stolen dirk thrust into his trousers' band, suggesting a turbulent future; and the girl, with the narrow forehead and close, deep-set eyes, was there, pathologically indicating tendencies to kleptomania. But far outweighing these were the straight, courageous bearing and the tender faces of normal promise. Sturdy manhood and womanhood was written across the countenances of many who had answered the call of Jane's horn!

Nancy was not one of this wholesome medley. She was being especially taught aside; — and now, on this mid-May day, Jane sat with her beneath the trees while the room within was wrapped in the unrestful silence of tedious thought. Occasionally the teacher glanced at

her when she happened to sigh and bend more intently over the knotty problem on her lap. Dale might have been here with them, for he had made strides during the past four weeks which put him far in the van, and Jane was satisfying this bewildering pace with extra work for the afternoons at home. For his was, indeed, a bewildering pace, spurred by an insatiable ambition that had become brutal in its determination to absorb every lesson, every fact and figure, every little jot of information which her schoolhouse and the Colonel's library contained. His time, from early morning until late at night, was divided between these places; but he advanced with so much greater speed in the seclusion of Arden that Jane had lately persuaded him to work there, rather than be subjected to the schoolroom noises which were as multitudinous as they were unavoidable. Thus it was that she and Nancy now sat alone beneath the trees.

The morning was warm and without a breath of air. A two weeks' drought, unusual at this season, had parched the country, bringing the wheat prematurely to head and causing anxiety about the hemp. But since tobacco, the most important crop, would not be set out till June, this agricultural unrest permeated little farther than impolite remarks about the weather. True, some of the springs were going dry, and all low verdure beside the pike was bedraggled and bowed beneath a coat of white dust. Out across the meadows of tired grass, and above the yellow fields prepared and waiting in sultry patience for their Lady Nicotiana,—everywhere along the level stretches that eye could sweep — were tormenting, danc-

ing heat waves. Sleepy-eyed cattle spent their inert hours standing in the pasture pools with the water about their knees, or mingling with groups of sweaty brood mares clustered in the shady places. Dogs could not lie quiet; in the coolest corners of the kennel they drooled and panted. Nor were the creatures of the air immune; for directly above the girls a bird listlessly hopped from branch to branch, its wings drooping, and its beak apart. Jane sympathetically raised her eyes to it and began to fan herself with the cover of a book — although it was not unbearably warm in the grove, and the bird might have come from a long flight.

A child appeared in the doorway, hesitated and came out to her. Excusing this approach was the desire for help with a certain sum, but the true reason later became manifest when the little one, with dancing eyes, whispered something to the teacher's inclined ear.

"That is nice," Jane smiled.

Happily, with the noiselessness of unshod creatures, she ran and skipped back to the school room.

"Julia says that she's been promised a pair of shoes for commencement," Jane glanced over at Nancy. "I fear it's a case of sweeter anticipation than realization."

"She'll suffer moh agonies than shoes that night," Nancy laughed. "Hasn't she a piece to recite?"

Jane was about to answer when another youngster standing in the doorway held her attention. He, too, came timidly forth for assistance; but, as with Julia, his true reason was to impart in the same excited way a con-

fidence. When this had been accomplished with much mysterious whispering, and he had again gone indoors, Jane looked at Nancy with a broader smile.

“More agony,” she said. “Jimmy is promised boots, mind you! This is a gratifying proof that rural schools improve the understanding — but what on earth they will do without toes to wiggle is beyond me!”

The girls were still laughing over the thought of Jimmy’s direful future when a third child appeared. It was a word in her reader now that furnished the conventional stumbling block on which to mount to her teacher’s confidence.

“What?” that young woman exclaimed. “More shoes? Mercy! But it’s very nice! And now run back and finish the page before I ring the bell.”

This time, turning to Nancy, Jane sighed: “More shoes! All of this suffering humanity will surely not survive that night. Really, Nan, I think it’s the most extraordinary thing I ever encountered the way these children’s parents are shoeing them for commencement! Mark my words, before the exercises are half over we’ll be hearing shoes drop all over the room. They simply won’t keep them on! It’ll be awful.” She was about to say more, when Mrs. Owsley appeared in the door.

Mrs. Owsley was the thirty-five-year-old scholar; and the only one, until Dale came, who might strictly have been termed of the mountains. She was, moreover, the mother of nine smaller Owsleys — the smallest of whom she brought each day and laid in a box prepared for the purpose near the teacher’s desk. The previous autumn

she had left "Bill an' the other eight brats" back in their remote home, and moved down to Mother Owsley's, four miles from school, to which she walked each day, barefooted, and carrying the infant. It was an enthusiasm for education, characteristic of these mountaineers, which might not be met anywhere else in a country termed civilized.

"Heavens!" gasped Jane. "I thought it was another child coming to tell me about shoes!"

"Did you ever see how Mrs. Owsley does with her shoes?" Nancy asked, being careful not to smile while the impassive woman's eyes were turned in her direction.

"You mean across her shoulder?"

Nancy nodded, giggling a little.

"The poor, poverty stricken dears, all of them," Jane tenderly exclaimed. "But that's a common custom in some parts of the mountains, Nan. I've seen it when a circuit-rider had come through, and was going to hold church somewhere; nearly all who possessed shoes would carry them across their shoulders that way during their long walk to attend, and then sit on the meetinghouse steps and put them on. Shoes have to last a long time up there," she added wistfully. "They mustn't be worn out by walking on them."

"I thought it was awful funny when I saw her do it," Nancy whispered. "You don't look like you ever went barefoot, Miss Jane!"

"I never did," Jane laughed. "I hated it so that I used to pick blackberries and sell them to keep myself supplied. My poor old Dad thought it a wicked ex-



travagance, but I'd rather have gone without clothes than shoes."

"I hated it, too," Nancy quietly replied, "but never thought of makin' money. I wish I had!"

Mrs. Owsley stepped down from the doorway and crossed to them. In approaching her teacher she scorned any subterfuge, and spoke directly to the point.

"What'd ye git, ef yeou wuz me, Miss Jane? I got shoes, a'ready — these here'n; but this ole gingham's the onlies' dress I got, an' hit's a sorry lookin' thing! Mr. Bowser sez ef I don't hanker arter shoes I don't hev ter hev 'em; — he sez his store'll leave me take their wu'th outen sumthin' else. I reckon hit'll be all right ter the trustee!"

"What trustee do you mean?" Jane asked. There was a pucker of mystification between her eyes as she looked up at Mrs. Owsley.

But that countenance did not change. It never changed. The same yellowish face, rather long and horse-like, beneath the same hair plainly brushed back, looked at Jane now as it had looked at the world's multitude of privations and pittance of joys, this last score of years.

"The trustee," she answered, "what sees as how we-uns goin' ter school gits shoes — outen the school fund, I reckon 'twuz he said, or sumthin' that a-way. He's a-stayin' down thar by the Cunnel's, some-un says, so mebbe ye knows 'im. Not as I allow ter be beholden ter no one; — but commencement's commencement!"

"Why, Mrs. Owsley!" an accusing voice cried from



the window. "He made us promise not to tell who he was!"

"'N' I don't kyeer what he done!" the imperturbable one answered. "I want ye-all ter know I don't take nuthin' underhand from nobody, less'n hit's my man, Bill!"

The accuser ducked from sight.

"Do you mean," Jane asked, "a man about twenty-four, or five, or six, or maybe seven — with sort of brown or grayish eyes, and — and rather handsome?"

"I don't know nuthin' 'bout all them colors in his eyes. I don't know nuthin' 'bout that," she repeated, "but I do 'llow he smoked them vile cigarettes till a body couldn't breathe!"

Jane's eyes left the mother of nine, swept past Nancy whom she saw still bending over her work, and finally rested in the shadows of some cool ferns. This somewhat unexpected announcement sent a wave of pleasure — evanescent, perhaps hardly perceptible — sweeping over her. Rather abruptly she said:

"I think your gingham looks very well, but you might get a nice print — if you'll have time to make it!"

"That's jest what I war a-thinkin' t'other day," the impassive face replied. "Red, with white dots on hit, sez I ter Mother Owsley, is jest the nicest thing! 'N' I sez ter Mister Bowser as how I hankered fer a dress like that; but he sez he done quit keepin' hit no moh. He sez he did hev a sight of hit onct, but so many of the wimmin folks come in ter buy hit, 'n' hit war sech a sight of trubble gittin' up 'n' settin' down agin, cuttin' off pieces 'n'

waitin' on 'em, that he jest th'owed out what he had left 'n' allowed he wouldn't buy no moh."

This was all very serious to Mrs. Owsley and Jane replied in the same vein:

"Then a blue polka dot. I know he has that, and maybe I can help you make it up."

"Thank-ee," she turned to go back, "but I reckon Mother Owsley's Cyantha kin help some." She stood a moment, hesitating, then faced around, asking: "Ye hain't got a primer, or sumthin', I kin take ter Mother Owsley, hev ye? She's been hankerin' so ter larn a mite of readin' 'n' writin' since I went thar, 'n' can't git out ter come down hyar!"

"Is she too feeble?" Jane sympathetically asked.

"No, she hain't feeble; but she's got the craps ter look arter. Mother Owsley's right peert, but with sech a sight ter do 'tween sun-up 'n' dark holds her 'round home right tight. Her man's been crippled 'n' pohly fer a spell."

"Could she leave him to come here to a moonlight school?" Jane asked; an idea that had been forming for sometime now suddenly receiving fresh impetus. "Maybe even your Bill could come, and the children, too!"

Mrs. Owsley's hesitation showed her to be on unfamiliar ground, and Jane, who had spoken impulsively, added: "I'll talk to you about it this afternoon," whereupon the mountain woman this time went in.

"Now!" Nancy exclaimed, holding up her paper of long division. "It's come out even!"

"Good! — it's a hard one, too!"

"You bet it's a hard one," Nancy straightened her shoulders.

"We won't work any more today," Jane said and, after a pause, asked: "Did you hear what Mrs. Owsley and I were talking about?"

"I was tryin' to," Nancy laughed. "But this last old thing wouldn't come out even so I had to bring down two moh noughts, an' that sort of mixed me up! Is her husband out of the pen?"

"Mercy! I didn't know he was there!"

"I don't either, but she said somethin' 'bout a trusty, an' I just supposed it was him."

Jane began to laugh, somewhat immoderately for a teacher, and several heads appeared at the window in giggling surprise. She had become quite suddenly and thoroughly happy.

"She said trustee, Nan,—a school officer. But the only trustee for this school is the Colonel. There's a hitch somewhere," her eyes were dancing. "Did Brent tell you to buy something, too?"

Had Nancy not already been sitting on the ground, this unexpected question might have toppled her over. She gasped once, turned furiously red, and sat staring.

"Why, no, Miss Jane!"

"With his usual discretion he left you and Dale out," she mused. "I really think it was downright decent of him — the shoes, I mean!"

"I'm beginnin' to think those shoes have got on yoh brain," Nancy cried, and both again screamed with laughter.

“Nan, I don’t understand how he succeeded, but he’s palmed himself off as a trustee to give authority to the act and, after making arrangements with Mr. Bowser, sent all these children there to buy shoes, or something they’re in need of, for our commencement. Don’t you honestly think that’s splendid? Who would have thought of it?”

“I wouldn’t,” Nancy murmured, looking at the ground. But the subject was becoming a bit perilous, and she asked:

“Are you goin’ to start a moonlight school, Miss Jane?”

“I hadn’t really thought of it seriously until just now. Would you help me with it if I did?”

“Good land, Miss Jane, I’d love that better’n anythin’! I’ll drive ’em in, an’ you stuff ’em with these sums! I bet they’ll know somethin’ then!”

“How many are there around here who can’t read, do you suppose?”

“Well, old Hod Fugit can’t; an’ there’s Willis — I forget his name, but down at the mill, you know! I don’t think the sheriff can, either.”

“Can your father — I mean Torn Hewlet?”

“Well, he sort of pokes along at it, but it ain’t just what you’d call readin’. Sometimes, when he’s right drunk, he gets a piece of old newspaper an’ moves his mouth around. Oh, he did the funniest thing once!” she clapped her hands and bent over merrily. “He was workin’ himself up into an awful spree, but misplaced his demijohn an’ had us lookin’ everywhere for it. I’d hid it, but never let on! He groaned around a lot, an’ I

think sort of suspected me; but after 'while settled down with the Bible. It was upside down, so that's how I don't think he can read!"

"Then what?"

"Just guess!" Nancy went into more convulsions of laughter. "He began, talkin' right loud an' rockin' his chair right fast: 'An' Solomen, the wise man, says to his Democrats that if a step-darter treats her Pappy mean, an' hides things, she'll go down — down — down — down —' an' all this time, Miss Jane, his voice was gettin' lower an' lower till, when it couldn't go no lower, he gurgled: 'ter hell!' Then he'd wait awhile, lookin' sort of sneakin' at me, turn some pages an' do it all over again — only each time he'd begin in a higher pitch so's he could get moh 'downs' in it, an' make it sound scarier. When I wouldn't pay any attention, he threw the Bible at me an' stomped out!"

"Is he back yet?" Jane seemed to lose some of her gaiety when asking this.

"No'm; an' I hope he won't never come back!"

"Have you any idea where he is?"

"Only he said he an' Tusk Potter were goin' in the mountains after ginseng. They go most every yeah. You can't guess the peace there's been at home this last month, Miss Jane!"

"I think I can," she murmured. "Nancy, suppose you were to work hard on those sums, and be more careful in the way you speak, and the school should grow enough for you to be my assistant, and Mr. McElroy should run his railroad through your house — where would Tom

Hewlet and his wife go? Would they stay around here?"

"What a bully fairy-tale," the girl delightedly clasped one of Jane's hands. "No'm, I reckon he'd go out to Missouri an' live with his brother. He's always wantin' to. Why, Miss Jane? Is there any chance of all that?"

"I don't know, Nan. Maybe I was just dreaming."

"Then dream some more," she murmured.

The morning had worn on without a bell for recess. The room had become restive, and now Jane realized that the youngest of the Owsleys was lustily bawling. She glanced at the little watch in her belt, crying: "Heavens!" Then dashed toward the door to rescue her neglected charges; leaving Nancy under the trees to patch up the interrupted dream.



## CHAPTER XVII

### AT TOP SPEED

Brent had at one time promised Dale to take him out on the survey. This promise had been made in an unguarded moment — or, at least, without a suspicion that the mountaineer would keep so tenaciously after him until it was fulfilled. Now, with school closed the day before, he felt that the evil hour could no longer be postponed. He had no objection to Dale, or having him along on the work, if he would only take some recesses in his interminable string of questions. But this impetuous student, whose soul craved the heights of Lincoln and Clay, took no recesses.

Petulantly Brent had carried his woe to the Colonel, but, instead of sympathy, he found the old gentleman radiant; — declaring Dale would become so utterly absorbed in learning the secrets of this science, that the engineer would find himself being led out by the ears each morning at sunrise.

“The road is just as good as built,” he had cried, “if you have along Dale’s example of application!” Which comforted Brent not at all.

So this very morning the Colonel was astir long before breakfast, sharing in a measure the mountaineer’s

excitement. Anything, he had jovially averred, which inspired Brent to work, was worth getting up early to see.

“Don’t stay out too long,” he had counseled. “My Commencement dinner is tonight!”

Standing on the terrace he watched them trudge off toward the knobs, followed by five darkies carrying the lunch, axes, poles and transit. He noted, also — just as upon that day when Bob first took Dale to Flat Rock — that the mountaineer was forging ahead, and that his companion was evidently cautioning less speed.

“A little bit of that will put the road through,” he chuckled.

They were crossing a pasture luxuriant with bluegrass where Lucy had been pensioned to while away in comfort her declining years; and now a more tender light came into the old gentleman’s face. For he saw her head go up while yet a great way off from them, and saw her intently looking. He knew what difficulty, and with what yearning, she was urging her clouded eyes to do their best; and he guessed the exultation gradually creeping through her frame as she began to realize that Dale was near. Suddenly, as fast as age would permit, she broke into an awkward gallop, furiously whinnying, excitedly calling out her delight. Overtaking her master, who had not been once to see her in all these days, she thrust her muzzle across his shoulder to be petted, as of yore — and this deeply affected the Colonel. But the next instant he stiffened as a man of iron, for the mountaineer, furious at the interference, had struck her cruelly across

the face. In utter dejection now she stood, looking after him as he strode away.

“Did you see dat?” Uncle Zack cried, and not till then did the Colonel know he was nearby.

“It wasn’t fair! It wasn’t fair, Zack! Take her out four quarts of oats!”

“I don’ see whar she’s gwine put ’em, wid all dat grass inside her,” he laughed. “If she wuz a man, I’d a-tucken her a toddy ’foh now to cheer her ole heart! But only de likes of me an’ you kin eat ice-cream an’ poh down hot coffee, an’ pickle ’em wid licker an’ not git ourse’ves kilt — ain’ dat right, Marse John? Hawses an’ dawgs an’ cows an’ sich, cyarn’ put de stuff in dey stumicks dat we kin. It takes a suah-nuff man to do dat!”

The old gentleman was not listening. To his surprise he now saw Brent quickly make up the intervening space, grasp Dale by the shoulder and spin him around with every evidence of tremendous anger, then shake his fist in the mountaineer’s face as though he were emphasizing a speech. To the Colonel’s further astonishment he then saw Dale walk meekly back to the mare, put out his hand, and for several moments stroke her nose.

“An’ did you see dat?” Uncle Zack yelled in high glee.

“I wouldn’t have missed it for a million,” the old gentleman cried.

“Mebbe she don’ need no oats now! But I reckon she’d better have ’em, wid yoh com’liments, jest de same!”

"I wish Jane could have seen it," the Colonel murmured, keeping his eyes on them.

"Dar ain' no reason why she cyarn' be tol' 'bout it," Zack winked to himself, starting to the stables for a full measure of oats.

At the Colonel's request she came over early in the afternoon to see to the decorations for his table, and brought a bag with the idea of dressing there. While carrying this into the house Zack graphically made known the drama in the pasture — which may or may not have been the reason why, an hour later as she moved about the flowers, the old gentleman several times wondered why he had never before remarked the beauty of her voice.

This dinner was a new institution at Arden. It came into existence with the opening day of school, when the old gentleman announced his intention of entertaining after each commencement for the girl who had made the greatest progress. When Jane told him a week ago that Nancy was to be his guest of honor, he had received the news as though she were a princess. However he might have flinched inside, no suspicion of it reached as far as his eyes or face. That very night other guests were appropriately selected from the neighborhood, and the invitations sent forthwith.

The sun hung low in the sky when the surveyors returned. Dale, as might have been expected, came leading, and dashed up the steps with scarcely a nod to the Colonel who sat amusedly looking on. He impetuously entered the library, searched feverishly along the shelves

for a text book on surveying that he had previously seen, jerked it out and began to scan its pages. Brent, on the other hand, was dragging himself along, groaning wearily. When he reached the porch he flopped into a chair and again groaned.

“Uncle Zack, you’ll have to bring my dinner up stairs. I can’t dress, or anything!”

“Why, sir,” the Colonel turned in alarm, “what has happened?”

“Everything’s happened,” Brent groaned. “That boob in there walked my legs off, and talked my head off, and I’m all in! Gee! — push my foot out a little farther, Uncle Zack! Oh, Lord! Can’t somebody catch somebody’s eye? The seven-year drought of Egypt’s in my throat!”

The Colonel began to laugh, while Zack, highly elated, said:

“Dat wuz a plague, Marse Brent!”

“Well, don’t I know it?” he looked pitifully up at him.

“Naw, sah,” Zack laughed again. “I mean de ’Gyp-tians didn’ have no drought; dey had de plague dem seben yeahs! I ’member dat story!”

“Zack, this isn’t any time to split hairs over what the Egyptians had. Come out of the ages, and focus your mind on what I’ve got!”

The old fellow disappeared with a chuckle, still audible after reaching the dining-room. The Colonel, too, was chuckling.

“It’s all right to laugh, Colonel, and make everybody



hate you, but I'll bet we walked forty miles! From the very moment that human engine cranked himself up this morning, he's been pressing the accelerator with spark advanced every second of the time. Don't think I'm crazy, but gas engine terms are the only ones to describe him. The next time he and I go on that survey, I go alone — which accounts for the Mac in McElroy," he added with a grin.

"Never mind," the old gentleman said, "you'll feel better in a few minutes."

"That's just the trouble," Brent complained. "If I hadn't lapped up so much of your delectable nose-paint, that hayseed couldn't have walked me to death. I'm as good a man as he is any day — when in condition!"

Jane, standing within the hall, heard this, and at once perceived the great dawning hope which chance had suddenly thrust before her. It was a hope for the railroad, for her people. Passing into the library she looked over Dale's shoulder, took the book from his hand, and smiled at it.

"You can't make anything out of this, yet," she said. "If you want to build railroads yourself some time, what you need now is actual experience; and you can get it if you persist."

"How?" he asked eagerly.

"Make Brent go out every day till the work is done — then I've a plan for you."

"What?" he was growing very much excited.

"Sh," she laughed. "I'll tell you some other time."



Now go up and dress; dinner will be ready in half an hour."

As he sprang to obey, a glance at his determined jaw, the enthusiasm of his stride, told her that Brent might not henceforth have such an idle time of it. His voice came in to her now.

"— and he threw all the lunch away," he was telling the Colonel, "because he said we didn't have time to eat it. I wanted to kill him; and would, if it hadn't struck me as being so darned funny! But I will say that we did more than I've ever seen done in a day — even with a trained party! What's more, we can save three miles. Dale did that, too!"

"This is encouraging, sir!" the old gentleman cried.

"It's more than that, Colonel — it's a find! Entirely disregarding the fact that I'd made a reconnaissance, he dragged me about like a toy, and finally, blest if he didn't scoot into a natural tunnel. I knew it was there, too, but never thought of following it up! We can go through it without turning a shovel of earth or shooting a stone. It not only saves the three miles I spoke of, but a terrible amount of cutting, and doesn't add a fraction to our ruling grade; bringing us out — I'll tell you where it brings us out! You know a place, about three hundred feet under a bold spur sticking to the north face of Snarly? — where a stream boils down into a sort of cave and disappears?"

"Oh, yes. That is our natural freak around this country — that and your tunnel! I know them well!"

“Well, we come out there, about two miles above this disappearing stream. It’s a cinch! By the way, what becomes of that stream?”

“No one knows. Years ago we painted several pieces of wood, and hacked some logs in a certain way for identification, then let them all float down and be sucked into that hole. None ever bobbed up at our end, and, so far as we ever heard, they were never found floating on other streams. I fancy the water rushes into some vast subterranean sea.”

Zack came out with the beverage, Brent bowed to the Colonel, drank it and sighed. It was an atrociously strong toddy, purposely made so by the old servant to compensate for the long day’s absence; and almost at once, especially as he had eaten nothing since breakfast, its strength began to tell.

“Zack, when Doctor Meal comes tonight, I wish you’d send him up to graft a dozen mule legs on me.”

“Mule legs, Marse Brent!” the old negro peered at him.

“I haven’t heard from Meal,” the old gentleman laughed. “But there is a young doctor named Stone who will be here; he might do it.”

There were, indeed, now two doctors in Buckville: the former old man with a soft name, who wore long whiskers which served to hide the missing collar and cravat, who had for forty years ministered to the needs of the surrounding country, who rode a pacing mare and carried medicines in a saddle-bag across her back; — and he of the hard name, who had lately come as graduate

of the University, who visited the sick in a gasoline runabout of uncertain age which steered with a lever and heaved prodigiously, who wrote prescriptions to be filled at the drug-store. If Doctor Meal were not among his bees, or grafting pear buds, he might be found in a tilted chair on the sidewalk, beneath the giant locust trees which shaded the town's one pharmacy. But Doctor Stone's telephone was invariably answered by a trained servant who, if he were away, knew exactly where to find him. Perhaps in no other respects was the changing life of Buckville better illustrated than by these two doctors: the old and the new; the passing and the coming. And because it was the passing, Doctor Meal had not yet gone as far as the post office for his mail; but in less than an hour after the stamp had been cancelled on Stone's invitation, the Colonel received his acceptance by telephone.

"Well," Brent sighed, "I've got to get 'em somewhere!"

"You might gallop up stairs on the four you have," the Colonel suggested. "Our guests will soon be arriving."

"And Dale will beat you down," Jane called from the library.

"Oh, Jane, I'm all in," he groaned. "I can't, honest!"

"Are you so much more tired than Dale?" she asked sweetly.

"Certainly not," he flushed.

He pushed himself slowly out of the chair and went to the French window.

"Where are you?" he began asking before stepping through. "I want some encouragement to climb those stairs!"

She was sitting, balanced lightly on the library table, with her hands clasped about one knee.

"What an old man you've suddenly become," she laughed.

"You'd be an old man, too," he said, "if you'd been paced all day by a camel!"

"I thought engineers were inured to those things; — I thought they could withstand all manner of hardships; — that, really, the elements themselves were playthings in their hands!"

He leaned against the table and looked down at her. That toddy, put into his tired and empty frame, was gripping him with surprising activity.

"No," he slowly replied. "Engineers can't master all the elements; — at least, I know one who can't. I wish he could!"

She may have flushed slightly, but her chin kept its tantalizing tip and her eyes their laughing mischief.

"One never knows what one can do until one tries," she said; and after a dangerous hesitation, added: "I believe this is the first day you've really attempted any serious work since you came."

Now, when a girl balances on the edge of a table in a softly lighted room, with her hands clasped about one of her knees, her chin tipped enticingly up, and a riot of mischief rippling through her eyes and parted lips,

she has no business telling an over-toddied gentleman that he'll never know what he can do until he tries. She may add that she refers to the building of a railroad, to the conquering of a nation, to the playing of a hand of bridge — but he will see nothing beyond the seductive challenge. And Brent looked another instant at that enticing picture, then stooped down and kissed her hair.

There was no tilted chin, no laughing challenge, now as she sprang up and faced him. The change in her was like that of a limpid pool which has suddenly become roiled by a violent splash, and her eyes flashed as though all the vials of hate were about to be broken upon his head.

“I thought you were a gentleman.” Her voice came slowly, with such utter contempt that he winced.

“Your thought is quite correct,” he said. “I am a gentleman, and a man, and therefore vulnerable to such a temptation as you willfully threw at me.”

Her cheeks flamed. “I never dreamed of such a thing!”

“Don't misunderstand me. I didn't say invitation; I said temptation.”

“But you meant invitation,” she hotly retorted.

“I know I did,” he surprised her by admitting, “and you meant invitation, also. If you didn't, you're stupid; — and I'd rather think of you as daring than stupid.”

“You will please not think of me at all, or speak to me, ever again!” she coolly said, and left the room.

Brent looked at the door through which she had disappeared. For several minutes he stood, without any

sign of movement, except that his teeth were pressing rather hard upon his lower lip.

“John Barleycorn, you’re a damned sneak,” he muttered. “I’ve half a notion never to speak to *you* again!”

Then, with a sigh, he went up stairs to dress.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### A DINNER OF SILENCES

The dinner was late, because Uncle Zack, wishing to make an everlasting impression upon these neighbors of more moderate circumstances, had spurred the cook to the limit of her capacity. So family and guests were scattered about the porch, conversationally distraught as people are wont to be while momentarily expecting the servant's announcement.

Nancy, in whose toilette discerning eyes would have seen a generous share of Ann and Jane, was talking to the Colonel; who, in his turn, was making her position of honor guest less trying than she had pictured it during that long day of suspense.

Brent, terribly in the blues, sat at the extreme end of the porch, pretending to read the morning paper which had come in that afternoon's rural mail. Jane and Ann were near by, and Jane was noticeably quiet. Bob, having in mind his tobacco crop, called to the reader:

"What's the weather prediction for this section, old scout?"

The engineer sighed and let his eyes travel to Jane who was gazing in moody silence out at the tangle of trees and vines. Turning again to the paper, and with much rustling of the pages, he made a pretense of reading:

“The high barometric pressure and lovely sunshine generally spreading over central and southeastern Kentucky is showing no disposition to move in the direction of Arden. Forecast for the next twenty-four hours: great humility, and low, angry clouds, accompanied by moisture in the eyes and a crackling drought under the fourth left rib. Here,” he handed the paper to Bob, and sent another questioning glance at Jane, “read it for yourself. I’m going in before the storm bursts!”

Bob looked after him, and then his surprised eyes sought Ann; but that young matron answered with a comprehensive smile, whereupon he sank comfortably behind the pages. Ann might have smiled again had she followed Brent to the dining-room, and there watched him change two place-cards.

Thus it chanced that Jane found herself seated next to him, and, having arranged the place-cards herself, understood exactly how it came about. The situation was decidedly awkward, and she came very near wishing their quarrel might have been postponed a few hours; especially as she realized that her other side was flanked by the Colonel, with Nancy on his right — a condition positively closing any hope of attention from this kind-hearted host. In a few minutes she was driven to seek refuge across the table in Dale; but Ann — having made a shrewd, though by no means accurate, diagnosis of the situation — determinedly held the mountaineer in leash. She then turned to Bob, but he had become engrossed with a neighbor on the subject of crops. Miss Liz was next sounded, but that lady, frivolously entangled with

various occupations, proved hopeless. Finally, she tried eating, but the silence of her plate became utterly intolerable. Brent had been waiting for this.

“It’s no use,” he softly told her. “Suppose we make up!”

She might not have heard him.

“Don’t you think it is inconsiderate to our host, and the others?” he asked. “They’re sure to notice it!”

Silence.

“I didn’t mean to offend you;—I was just bowled over, that’s the simple truth!”

He might have been talking to an empty room.

“You’ve been so much like a sister to me,” he ventured again, “that I didn’t stop to think; and only—only acted on the very same impulse I would if you actually were my sister!” (Oh, Brent, you unconscionable liar!)

Still there was silence.

“Let’s count,” he suggested. “It won’t be talking, and, at least, will deceive the table.”

Silence.

“We might say the Lord’s Prayer! That’s certainly proper, and you can leave out ‘as we forgive others.’”

In spite of herself the faintest shadow of a smile touched her lips, but their silence was absolute.

“Or we might try Mother Goose,” again came the pleading voice. “We needn’t speak after tonight—rather after this dinner. We can’t, in fact, if I’m going home tomorrow! Shouldn’t we make some effort to keep from spoiling the others’ good time?”

Going home tomorrow? She had not heard of that! What would become of the railroad? What would become — but nothing mattered except the railroad! Was he acute enough to reason that he could move her by this threat, she wondered? And if he were, and if she yielded, would he not use it as a weapon for future forgivenesses, when he might again be taking her for his sister — something which he did not possess? This idea sealed her determination. Yet, on second thought she relented — oh, it could scarcely be called relenting — just a wee bit and, still looking steadfastly down at her plate, in a monotonous voice, said:

“Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard.”

“Fine!” he laughed, but she quietly interrupted him:

“Nothing but Mother Goose — and, after this evening, nothing, ever!”

He drew a wry face, murmuring:

“Little Jack Sprite is very contrite, and wants to make up with his lady!”

She puzzled a moment over Little Jack Sprite. It did not seem quite relevant to the nursery classic which, only a few years back, she had read many times to Bip.

“That isn’t Mother Goose,” she finally stated. “I shan’t do this any more.”

“But it is,” he protested, “and I’ll show it to you in the book! They were reading Mother Goose to me long after you lost interest in it.”

There was no rise to this, and he cautiously added:

“My poor brain, while ages older, has never developed up to yours. Do you know any rhymes, at all?”

Silence.

She looked again at Dale and found him listening to Ann. Again the Colonel proved unpromising. One slight remark was entirely lost on someone else, and Miss Liz offered more remote possibilities than before. After the situation recommenced its torture, rather wearily she said to her plate:

“Hey, diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon.”

“I love that one,” he whispered, and, taking up her meter, continued: “The little dog howled, and the pretty girl scowled, but promised to make up soon! That’s the second verse.”

Another silence, but not so prolonged, when her voice reached him:

“Brent, Brent, the rich man’s son, broke his word and away he run!”

“Heart,” he corrected. “‘Broke his heart,’ is the way that goes!”

The silence was desperate now, and, after he had exhausted many forms of pleading, she simply said:

“Hark, hark, the dogs do bark, the beggars are coming to town!”

“I don’t think it’s nice to be so personal in our Mother Goose party,” he reproved her. “However, if you insist —”

“But I don’t insist!”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I was just going to repeat: ‘There was a little boy and a little girl lived in an alley.’ Will you finish it out?”

"I don't remember it," she said, too hurriedly to be convincing. "I'll say this one: 'Birds of a feather flock together, and so will pigs and swine; rats and mice will have their choice, and so will I have mine.'"

"You have a choice collection, at any rate," he grinned.

"Some verses," she explained, "were added to the very recent editions used in my childhood."

His grin became broader. "I hoped you might come across on that before the evening was over. Has your very recent edition the one in it about: 'Jane was saucy, Jane was pert'?"

"You're a bit shocking tonight," she said, turning to the Colonel, whose attention was still on Nancy.

Brent waited a minute, then: "Maybe you don't remember this one in your very recent edition: 'A hard-hearted Queen from Flat Rock, Whose anger came as a great shock, Said: I will not speak, sir, To you for a week, sir, So he went out and —' but I haven't had time to make the last line fit. You ought to laugh now!"

"I wish I could."

"It's original!"

"So I judge."

"Is that open window too cool for you?"

Silence.

"Here's another out of your very recent edition," he began, when she desperately turned to him.

"I wish you'd play fair!"

"Have you played fair?" he asked.

"I might have expected an evasion from you!"



“Don't muddy the water, please. Let's whittle on one stick at a time. Have you played fair?”

“Of course, I have!”

“That's all I want to know.”

But this reply suggested a subtle accusation which she did not like, and she asked:

“What do you mean?”

“Only this,” he leaned so that his words could not be overheard, and his voice was tense with a strange seriousness. “You knew perfectly well that I was hardly to blame — and, blamable as that defense may be, what I did was done reverently. You may not know, though I'll tell you now, that you were the most exquisite thing I have ever beheld! — absolutely the most adorable and exquisite! You literally balanced yourself before my eyes, you literally taunted me with words which were a challenge of unresisting sweetness, you literally drew me, and when I came, you flew into a rage. You call that fair? I call it grossly unfair! Take it from me, Jane, that a girl who willfully fires a man, as Almighty God fires the heavens in a tempest, and then springs behind her propriety to escape, has a serious form of pyromania that'll consume her some day, just as sure as I'm talking to you — but not before it drives a lot of decent fellows to eternal flames!”

“You're talking like a madman!” she gasped.

“Far from it. I'm talking the most rational stuff you ever heard in all your life! In fact, your very presence compels me to be rational.”

“An enigmatic compliment,” she could not help smiling. “What kind of deliriant have you been taking to-night?”

“You!” he whispered. “Just you, who intoxicate and torture me! And as for enigmatic compliments, I swear that you inspire me with only the highest reverence at all times. Don’t think the library episode indicates a lack of respect! It was the very soul of reverence speaking — though,” he slowly added, “it would not have spoken in just that way if Zack’s toddy —”

“I’m beginning to hate the very word of julep and toddy,” she said passionately; and the Colonel, hearing this, turned with an amused expression of surprise.

Ann had let Dale off her leash, and he now was making mental charges across the table to Jane, very much as a playful puppy would physically have done to one it wished to attract. She caught his eye and smiled, and then saw the haunted look in his face which aroused her at once to what was going on.

The table had centered in a general conversation, and Miss Liz, without suspecting the sting it carried, had launched into a tirade against the lawlessness of the mountaineers who killed and were killed with an abandon worthy of Apaches. That he should now be so frantically signalling, as though he knew in her would be found help, touched the girl’s responsive nature. Brent, seeing this — as he saw much that passed about him — whispered to her:

“After all’s said and done, it’s a good feeling — that of being needed, isn’t it?”

“Our mountaineers are not law breakers, Lizzie,” the Colonel was saying with more than ordinary sharpness in defense of his guest — and of his State. “They keep the law extraordinarily well.”

“How can you make such a statement!” the good lady cried. “I constantly hear of men being killed up in that wicked country!”

“It’s very much exaggerated, as Brent would say,” he chuckled. “At any rate,” he cleared his throat, “I refer to the common law.”

Bob and Brent exchanged winks. They knew the old gentleman was getting frightfully tangled, and were curious to see how he would work himself out of it.

“Then I suppose you mean,” her voice rang with the challenge, “that killing people is compatible with the common law?”

“Legal hangings are,” he smiled blandly. “But, what I do seriously mean is this: the common law of a country, and therefore the common law of a place, is merely — and nothing more than — a common custom plus the power to change that custom. This being the case, the mountaineer of Kentucky is within the common law of his section, providing that he kills only within that section where it is a common custom — plus the power to change that custom.”

Miss Liz sighed. “It doesn’t sound like good sense,” she said, “but may be correct. I have always thought that law is law, everywhere.”

“Law is law, my dear,” he gently explained to her, “until it is changed; certainly. But it is not always good

sense. Take our waterways hereabouts! They are every one governed by the same old law of riparian rights which we took from England, whose waterways are no more like those in this country than threads are like ropes. And, moreover, England's law was construed long before the dream of artificial power, having to do merely with streams adapted to navigation. Who cared then for a falls or rapids? Who would have been mad enough to think of bridled electricity? So today, these falls and rapids, which are quite out of the question for navigable purposes, but possess as great a value in other respects to the people at large, are entirely demoralized through the application of an antiquated law framed to deal with streams of a totally different character. Don't you see, my dear, how fallible may be the thing called law if it runs counter to public good? And does it not show you that every common law must be — in order to be sensible — a consensus of public consent? Therefore, do I maintain that the mountaineers of our proud State, who in common consent prosecute their own feuds in their own domain, are within the common law of that domain. Some day, when Brent's and other railroads have poured into them a different civilization, their environment will be changed; — there will arise amongst them a giant to turn things upside down — as Jeremy Bentham threw defiance to the law of diodens."

The Colonel now, having distorted a little knowledge into a great flow of verbal pyrotechnics which hopelessly confused and downed Miss Liz, turned back to Nancy with a satisfied smile.

“Wasn't diodens a sort of old law that confiscated anything which destroyed life?” Brent, in an undertone, asked Jane.

It seemed a safe enough subject, and she nodded: “I think so.”

“I was just wondering,” he whispered, “that if this law prevailed now, which would the State confiscate — yours eyes, your mouth, the tip of your chin, your —”

“If thoughts kill,” she frowned, “my mind would be seized. I've murdered you several times with that.”

“You've murdered me several times with everything about you! I wish I were the State!”

“State of Idiocy? Why carry coals to Newcastle?”

“To heap on your head,” he laughed, “and scorch your uncharitable soul!”

“My poor lost soul,” she murmured.

“Then take notice that, if finders are keepers, I'm heading a search party.”

She looked gaily up at him, for it was hard to remember that she was angry; but quickly her face sobered.

“I forgot, and I must not forget, that you've mortally offended me.”

There was something very serious in the way she said it — something totally beyond the slightest echo of banter — that affected him. She was looking back fearlessly into his face, and he saw the hurt in her eyes — and he saw in her eyes that she was anxious. A certain faint and subtle element of surprise and wonderment had passed across them, like a cloud shadow over a sunlit field of waving grain. It thrilled him to the very depth of his



nature. For the first time in his life he was being driven by an influence, by a storm, or what you will, which contained not one element of self.

“For the love of God, what have you done?” he whispered, almost accusingly in his earnestness.

“Done?” she asked, looking away from him. “You are saying queer things tonight!”

“I am experiencing queer things tonight,” his voice trembled. “May I come tomorrow and apologize properly?”

“Apologies are futile; besides, I am going to church with Bip.”

“Then the next Sunday!” he entreated. “I know you’ve a lot to forgive — but I’m so terribly sorry! It hasn’t murdered our friendship, has it, Jane?”

“I — I don’t know. I’m tired tonight, and maybe can’t see things as I should.”

“I’m coming tomorrow, anyway, and explain,” he whispered.

“No. And please promise you will never refer to this evening again!”

“Very well. And there’s another promise I’ll make you, too —”

But Miss Liz had arisen, and the others were pushing back their chairs, so Jane did not hear this other promise he would have made; for she was moving from the table with Doctor Stone, having pinned that gentleman as they first arose with no intention of letting him leave her. He had made one or two amateurish efforts to wait for Nancy, and now in a bewildered sort of way wondered



why he continued with this other girl against his will. Doctor Stone's university course had not included psychodynamics in the female species. Thus it was that he walked from the dining-room to its carefully trimmed terrace with Jane, and thus it was that Nancy slowly followed with the Colonel, who had filled her arms with a gorgeous bouquet of peonies.

The honor guest's face was flushed, but it had been flushed throughout the dinner. Never had she sat down at so well appointed a table, and never had she openly been shown attention by one of the Colonel's social standing. She was excited and happy; she wanted to run and dance, as a flower-laden child might run and dance along a sun-kissed, wooded path!

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE MERITS OF HORSEFLESH

June hung suspended as ripe fruit. Rains had come. The country was blossoming with a promise of abundant crops. No longer were there breaths of sultry air in shady places. The heavy foliage, fattened by reinvigorated sap and fanned by refreshing breezes, rustled as though it were sprinkling ozone to the ground; and the Colonel complained of exhaustion from the sheer indulgence of joyous deep breathing.

These last two months had brought a settled condition to those at Arden. At first pleasantly aroused by the advent of Dale, they were again comfortably back in their accustomed grooves, while he, also, found a niche which fitted his cosmos with a fair degree of ease. He was at home with them now, and natural; and — when not absorbed with study — talked freely in a slow magnetic way that compelled listeners. The early reticence had given place to the full sway of an enthusiast, and everyone within his orbit felt the influence of a peculiarly strong attraction.

More and more was he surprising them. Merging from obscurity to the light of action, he had developed into a human dynamo, generating power at a high rate

of speed and storing it in the dry cells of his brain. Brent accused him of consuming so much of the atmosphere that nothing remained; he said the air seemed lifeless after this absorbing student had passed. He was perilously near done for, he confided to the Colonel, if Dale's mental instrument corralled all the energetic thought waves of Arden, and Miss Liz captured the peace and independence. And the old gentleman had laughed like a boy, because the mountaineer was so generously surpassing Jane's most sanguine hope.

The happiest laugh of all was from Dale, himself — that low, inaudible movement of the throat wherewith he expressed his gayest moods. He had been turned out in the pasture of his heart's desire, and was gathering a harvest with feverish hands. Since the first Monday morning after his arrival, when he crept to the school-house at break of day and waited in the opposite thicket with his long rifle to see if Tusk would come again, the mantle of civilization wrapped quickly about him.

In the succeeding days, the mysteries of spelling and other problems flew like chaff before his irresistible energy. He had struck a gait which created wonderment in all. Hours bounded in no way his efforts. Late afternoons, evenings, and nights, had been devoted to intense study of which he could not tire. Early mornings, before breakfast, had found him poring over a book, and the day's lessons were recited with unerring accuracy while he dressed.

Since school had closed this zeal did not cease; rather did it grow more ardent as Jane gave him her undivided

time by especially directing studies apace with his rapid advancement. As she fed, he devoured — as a ravenous animal would have torn its food — and fiercely demanded more. From the blind girl he had acquired, with this thirst for knowledge, a tremendous power of concentration; but, to the regret of those about him, had failed utterly to absorb any of her power of self-sacrifice. That spiritual side — that all important lesson of unselfishness — had never reached him. He was as blind to it as she was to the light of day, and in spite of all Jane could do, or the Colonel could do, his nature closed tighter about the one idea of self-advancement.

For a week after his memorable first day upon the survey, he had rushed to Brent's room each morning at dawn to get the party started; and Brent had good-naturedly submitted. But now the engineer suddenly balked, flatly refusing to take him out again. Miss Liz arose in her wrath, but he told her that he would not risk another day of starvation should this fanatic choose to throw the lunch away — and it was too much work going every day, anyhow. But, the fact of the matter was, Dale had become a serious handicap. He was not content to act as pole-man, or carry the chain. He could have done either of these well enough, because Brent had taught two of the brighter negroes whom he regularly took along. No, Dale must be continually at the transit, looking through it, changing its direction, asking a thousand irrelevant questions, and demoralizing the entire force. So after one week of struggle, Brent told him that he should not come any more until he had at least

learned enough to realize how little he knew. It was a disappointment to Jane, but she persuaded Miss Liz not to press the issue, deciding that it might be better in the long run for Dale to proceed more systematically in fundamental things and lay his foundation with greater care.

In the freshness of this June morning he was back again in the library, bent over the pages of a book, and the room seemed quieter for his intensity. Outside, on the shady porch, the Colonel showed indications of reading, but in reality his eyes had slyly turned to the lawn where Zack and Bip were in a heated argument over the respective merits of horseflesh.

An hour before, this sturdy six-year-old heir apparent to the house of Hart, had arrived on his Shetland pony to see Grandfather May — a usual weekly procedure. Along with him, as was also the invariable custom, ponderous Aunt Timmie drove in her buggy — “her” buggy by adoption after it had been discarded by “de white folks.” Whenever she climbed into this moth-eaten vehicle, whose wheels pointed outward and inward all at the same time, she never permitted the child to forget that it was her own sweet willingness thus to risk her life which made these excursions possible. She was in the big house now, inspecting every surface and crevice for a particle of dust, contemptuously sniffing and soliloquizing:

“De place is jest nachelly gwine to rack an’ ruin! Zack ain’ got no moh sense ’bout takin’ cyare of a house den a rag-dawl!”

The Shetland pony, meanwhile, was standing at a safe distance from Uncle Zack's mule, looking very wicked indeed with its long forelock hanging frowsily between its eyes, and seeming to have comprehended some of the slanders which this old darky — making a great pretense of being angry — had uttered. To the side, and ready to champion her little friend, stood Mesmie, daughter of Bradford, the overseer, with one bare foot pressing nervously on the instep of its mate, and her fingers twisting the end of her long, golden plait. This was apprehension, not embarrassment. The old negro's pretended anger invariably deceived this little girl — as it frequently puzzled the boy.

“Dar ain' no use talkin',” Uncle Zack stamped the ground. “I'se been waitin' on de May fam'ly fer upwards of a hund'ed yeahs, an' dis am de fu'st time any of 'em done 'sult me!”

There was a pause while Bip looked at him with wide, serious eyes, and the Colonel from his secluded vantage point silently chuckled.

“I didn't mean to insult you, Uncle Zack,” the little boy explained. “I only said that Daniel, here, couldn't have anything to do with such a mis'erable mule. Daniel's a thoroughbred!”

“Thurerbred!” Zack scornfully repeated. “Jes' heah dat! Why, he ain' big 'nough to be no kind o' bred! He ain' got 'nough blood in 'im to call it real breedin'!”

The boy's face flushed. “He's by Shadeland Wil-



don," he cried, "and out of Hurstbourne Trinket! I'd like to see you find any pony stock better'n that!"

Uncle Zack appeared to ponder over this. As a matter of fact, he had once told Bip this same thing in these very words. Now he temporized by squinting up at the sun.

"An' what's more," the little fellow hotly declared, "they're both registered way back to the war — an' lots before that! Grandfather says if he didn't know Daniel was Daniel, he'd think he was Shadeland Wildon every time I rode him in here — 'cause he's got his sire's chestnut an' white markin's to a dot, an' his size to a hair! Now what you got to say 'bout breedin'!"

"'Pears to me," the old fellow soliloquized, still squinting upward, "'twon't be long 'foh lunch time. Didn' I heah somefin 'bout gwine down whar de Willer-de-Wispies lives at?"

"Oh, yes," Bip cried, his anger passing like a bird shadow. "But, Uncle Zack, you've got to ride a horse! I can't have Daniel learnin' laziness from that old mule!"

"Laziness!" the old man exclaimed. Then, all at once, he seemed to be watching something in the trees. "I 'member onct," he began in a ruminating fashion, "when a li'l boy come up to me an' sez: 'Unc Zack, he sez, 'which is de oldes', ladies or gemmen?'"

He watched the boy with a downward glance from the corner of his eye, but the little fellow maintained a dignified composure. How often did he wish Uncle Zack would forget those questions which now seemed to him a hundred times more infantile by the old man's interpre-

tation! How many times had Uncle Zack prevailed in having his own way by merely referring to them! Now he continued:

“An’ onct, when I wuz settin’ in mah doh, dis same li’l man come pokin’ ’long an’ sez, sez he: ‘Unc Zack, how-cum you kin see yoh knuckles when yoh fist is shet up tight, an’ cyarn’ see ’em when yoh han’s out straight?’”

“That’s one thing you never did tell me,” the boy accusingly cried. “You couldn’t!”

“I couldn’?” he asked in pained surprise. “Does you mean I couldn’? Why, ain’ you ’shamed of yoh-se’f talkin’ dat a-way to ole Zack! I could a-tol’ you, spry’s yoh please, but it warn’t good fer li’l boys jes’ den.”

“Then tell me now!” Bip challenged.

“How ole is you, honey?” came the irrelevant question.

“I’ll be seven next time,” he answered.

“Seven nex’ time!” The wrinkled face became more wrinkled as he looked out over the fields and began to shake with laughter. “Seven nex’ time! What you know ’bout dat!”

“What’s funny, Uncle Zack?”

“Jes’ dat, dat’s all. Come ’long, now, an’ we’ll git de mule ready!”

“Ain’t you going to tell me ’bout my knuckles?” the little boy asked, as they moved to the horse-block where, in deep humility, an old saddle rested.

“Shucks! Dat ain’ no fun!” Zack contemptuously asserted. “Knuckles is cu’ious things, knuckles is; an’

dar ain' no sense gittin' all riled up 'bout 'em, no way. Didn' I never tell you 'bout de bantam hen dat got her knuckles scyared up wid de water snake?"

"No, you didn't! But tell me first 'bout mine!" The little boy was trotting to keep up now, and the old man lengthened his strides.

"An' didn' I never tell you 'bout de chicken hawk as busted his knuckles all up tryin' to fly off wid de weather-vane down on de stable dar?"

"Oh, no, Uncle Zack! But tell me 'bout mine, first!"

The old negro stopped stock still and looked down with a frown.

"You'se de mos' pestiferistes' pusson on dis heah place!" Then, catching an inspiration, he asked: "Why does you swaller when you'se chawin' a piece of cake?"

"I don't know; — just do, I reckon!"

"Dar now, Mesmie, ain' he a smart li'l man?" the old fellow chuckled. "Dat's de ve'y reason — you jes' do! An' dat's 'zackly what de knuckles does — dey jes' do! Now, since we done relieve ourse'ves on dat pint, le's move 'long!"

Both seemed to have forgotten the discussion on thoroughbreds, but the old negro still pretended to be haughty; and now, slowly approaching the mule which narrowly watched from the corner of his eye, he casually observed:

"De ve'y idee of sayin' mah mule's lazy! Why, he kin nacherly out-run de life ouden a li'l sawed-off dumplin' lak one I sees standin' 'round heah!"

This was the touch of spark to powder. The boy thrust his hand deep into his pocket, brought it forth and opened it, then stepped quickly forward:

“ I’ll bet you a nickel — an’ here it is — that Daniel an’ I can beat you to the pike an’ back! ”

“ Keep ’way! Keep ’way, son! ” the old man hastily warned. “ Keep ’way from his heah whirlwind! ”

Bip backed slowly off. He understood the uncertainties of this location, and carefully watched the mule’s anticipative ears which were symbols of treachery.

“ Git on ’way, now, ” Zack again warned. “ I’se gwine heist up de saddle! ”

“ He can’t kick me over here, ” the boy said.

“ Don’ you believe no sich a-thing, ” the negro emphatically exclaimed. “ De op’rations of dis heah telescope extends to jest whar you happen to be standin’ — no moh, an’ no less. All he wants to know is yoh *ad*-dress, an’ he’ll pop you suah! ”

“ Then I’m as safe here as I would be at home, ” came the logical retort.

Zack stopped what he was about to do and stood with a broad grin on his face. Slowly he looked from the sturdy little youngster to the mule, and at last back again.

“ De onlies’ diff’ence is, ” he scratched his head, “ dat ef you cross de road now, mebbe you kin do it lak a li’l gemmen; but ef you keep on foolin’ ’roun’ dis mule’s back-doh, you’se apt to git heisted crost lak a jay-bird. It’s mighty good sense to press yoh luck as fur’s it’ll go, honey, but a oudacious sin to set right out to bust it. An’ ’mem-

ber what ole Zack say 'bout dat, 'caze it mought do you a heap of good some day!"

Zack's saddle was finally tied on with a piece of clothes-line and, putting his foot in a rope stirrup, he mounted.

"Now I'se gwine arter dat nickel," he declared. "Scramble up on yoh dumplin' an' come 'long! Li'l Mesmie," he looked down at the girl, "you stan' right dar an' squint yoh eyes good, an' you'll see de hottes' Kentucky Derby ever run!"

Bip led his pony to the horseblock, and by much squirming managed to wriggle on; then trotted over to Uncle Zack.

"We're ready," he cried, his face alight with excitement. "How much start'll you give me?"

"Staht! I ain' gwine give you *no* staht! You'se wuss'n a gal!"

"Why ain' you gwine give him no staht?" an indignant voice called, and, turning, he beheld Aunt Timmie leaning against the house complacently regarding them.

"Of course you'll give him a start!" the Colonel thundered, thereby showing to what extent he had been reading during the past half hour.

"It wouldn't be sporty not to give him a start, Uncle Zack," came still another voice, this time from the shrubbery where Brent, returning from a dabble at his work, had halted in the keenest amusement.

"Well, 'pon mah word," the old fellow scratched his head. "It looks lak I'se booked to race de whole fam'ly. Marse John, how much you reckon I'd ought to

give 'im? 'Foh you answers, jes' keep in mind dat dis heah keg of dynermite I'se ridin' ain' got no shoes on, an' dese heah ropes is mighty rotten; an', ef we goes our best, de mule ain' gwine be de onlies' one dat'll need a hawse-doctor! I ain' got no nickel, no-way!"

Timmie was shaking with mirth. "I wish you'd git yohse'f kilt," she affectionately laughed at him. "Go on, den, an' find de Willer-de-Wispies. De chile's done been honin' 'bout 'em in his sleep. An' mind, don' let 'im git nigh no pisen-ivy! An' Zack," she called, as they were riding away with Mesmie now up behind Bip, "git 'im back heah by twelve!"

Still chuckling, she waddled around to the front, where only she and Zack, of all the servants, were permitted to tarry, and sat upon the lowest step.



## CHAPTER XX

### A STARTLING CONFESSION

“That ought to have been a fine race, Brent,” the Colonel wiped his forehead and laughed. “But I suspect it would have made Timmie a widow.”

“A widow?” Brent asked, passing her with a cheery nod. “Uncle Zack told me they were twins!”

“So we is twins,” the old woman asserted, “but dat don’ keep me from bein’ a widder, do it?”

“The fact of the matter is, Brent,” Colonel May said with a twinkle about his eyes, “it requires stupendous acumen to understand this situation. Timmie and Zack were born on the same day, at precisely the same hour, and in adjoining cabins. So that makes them twins. I hope you follow me?”

“Like a hound, sir,” Brent assured him.

“Then Timmie has never told you how it all came about, and how they got their names!” The Colonel looked down at her. Occasionally, when he was in a particularly gay mood, he made one or both of these old people amuse his company. It was their boast, their greatest pride, that this story of how they became twins, how they were named, and finally married, had been recited before governors and other dignitaries, each of

whom they delighted to enumerate. She looked up saying with a shade of rebuke in her voice:

“Marse John’s done tol’ you ’bout de twins part an’ de marr’in’—an’ as for de namin’, why, dat won’t take no time. You see, when I wuz ’bout to be borned mah mammy wuz in a turrible state. Most cullud folks is, at dat time, an’ most of ’em gits de ’ligion, ’caze it kinder ease ’em up. Well, sah, whilst mah mammy wuz havin’ de ’ligion an’ me, Zack’s mammy wuz havin’ de ’ligion an’ him. Our cabins set jest lak yoh two han’s togerr—dat a-way—an’ dar warn’t no secrets ’tween dem famblys, dat’s a fac’! Well, when ’twuz all over, mah mammy’s so thankful she say she gwine name me outen de Scriptires. Zack’s mammy heah dat, an’ she lay low an’ study ’bout a name, too. De upshot wuz dat mah mammy settle on de fu’st line of de hymn: ‘Timorous-is-we-poh-mortal-worms.’ Dat stun ’em some, you bet; but towa’ds evenin’ Zack’s mammy raise up an’ shout she’s done foun’ de name, an’ when dey-alls run to her doh she say: ‘Zackly-how-thankful-I-is-dat-dis-heah-trial-an’-tribulachun-am-over-de-Lawd-in-His-goodness-only-knows! An’ dat’s mah son’s name!’ Well, sah, de niggers fer miles ’round wuz jest bustin’ dey jaws tryin’ to say dem gran’ names, but a coolness set in on mah mammy. She got mighty uppish, an’ say it warn’t fayh fer Zack’s mammy to wait an’ go her one better, dat a-way. So dey sent fer ole Aunt Moony Jorden. Ever’body stepped ’round fer Aunt Moony, ’caze she’s bohn wid a cawl on her face an’ could see speer’ts; so she got out a dried buzzard’s foot an’ whispers to it, an’ den says

ever'body mought as well make up, 'caze someday de li'l chillun is gwine git mahr'd, anyway. An' sho' nuff," Aunt Timmie sighed, "we did."

The Colonel gave Brent a wink.

"Well, that was most fortunate," he mused, "for Zack has been a very upright husband."

The old woman bristled. Glaring at him she said in a low voice:

"Upright ain' so diffe'nt from downright! You knows how oudacious he done treat me 'bout dat 'sur-ance!"

"Oh, yes, you mean about that policy!"

She maintained a moody silence, and the Colonel ventured:

"You see, Brent, Timmie thought so much of Zack —"

"Now, Marse John, you's jest pesterin'! De truff is, sah," she turned to Brent, "dat 'long back yonder when Miss Ann's 'bout de size of li'l Bip, a man come down heah an' says ef I takes a policy out on Zack, when de ole nigger's daid, he say, I'll be wu'th somethin'. I turned it over an' over in mah haid, an' reckoned dat, ef Zack had to go, dar warn't no sin in ole Timmie gittin' all de comfo't outen it she could. So de man size Zack up mighty smart, an' say a twenty-yeah policy'll be plenty long 'nough to out-stretch him. De fu'st of eve'y month I sont mah good money up to Loui'ville, an' 'bout a yeah ago de day come fer dat policy to git ripe. All de evenin' befoh I treat Zack mighty gentle. I cook him a scrump-tuous supper, an' dat night go down in mah trunk an' git out mah mournin' clothes an' mah funeral hat, an' cry

mahse'f to sleep. An' what you reckon! From dat ve'y day he's been sprier'n he ever wuz! Jest wait till I ketch some of dem 'surance men 'bout heah agin!"

With a deep sigh she rose laboriously and started back around the house.

"Where's Dale?" Brent asked, more to keep from laughing than from any particular interest in the mountaineer just then.

"In the library, as usual," answered the Colonel, "digging out analects."

Timmie, overhearing this, wheeled about.

"Mah sakes alive," she cried, a look of horror coming into her face. "You never had nuthin' lak dat in yoh house while I 'uz tendin' to it, Marse John! I'll bet dat liberry ain' fit fer a pusson to set in!"

The laughter which greeted this detracted nothing from her indignation, and she turned again toward the rear premises, shaking her head and mumbling direful things.

"That Dale, by the way," the Colonel said at last, "is a curious and remarkable chap. Positively, sir, he gives me a fresh and agreeable surprise each day!"

"I like the way he wears his clothes," Brent replied. "It isn't every fellow who can put on hand-me-downs and still look like they're made for him. Perhaps a small matter," he added, noting a smile of indulgence come into the old gentleman's face, "but you'll admit that it shows up favorably. It's probably an avatism pointing back to royalty; as Aunt Timmie would say, a sure sign of quality."

"You may be right, sir. But in other ways he shows

up more extraordinarily. His mind is so retentive that nothing ever escapes from it. Any date, or fact, or figure that he has ever heard, may be instantly and accurately recalled. Why, sir, I would as soon contradict an encyclopedia! He is truthful to a fault!"

"I wouldn't condemn him for a little thing like that," Brent murmured.

"Condemn! Why, sir, I admire him for it! I was early taught to love the truth and shame the devil!"

Brent laughed softly. He got a great deal of fun out of ragging the old gentleman a bit at times.

"If shaming the devil were all," he said; "but think of your neighbors!"

"I think of no one, sir!" The Colonel was fuming now, and glaring impartially at everything about him.

"Then I wonder you've got a friend left. But, all joking aside, I wouldn't take anything for Dale, and have really grown to like him a whole lot. If he could just get over giving me the creeps! I can't describe what there is about him — his native crudity, doubtless."

"I should forgive crudities in one whose heart is right," the Colonel temporized. "It's in oysters that pearls are found, and surely oysters could not be termed finished."

"Your originality is dazzling," Brent looked across at him, "even though I can't agree with you. I've usually found oysters finished all too soon; — and much easier to swallow than your superannuated moral axioms."

The old gentleman began to laugh. "On my word,



sir, you are hopeless! But, if he meets Jane's expectations, you will see him one of these days with a masterful grasp on the abstruse questions of life, and striding on to undisputed success. Jane has never been so enthusiastic about anything as this rapid development. She's planning wonders with him!"

Brent was silent, gloomily watching the smoke from his cigarette. Pointedly ignoring the personal element, at last he said:

"I was just trying to decide whether success in life depends as much on grasping its abstruse questions, as the faculty of picking out its soft snaps! But he's a poverty stricken beggar, and I wish him luck."

The old gentleman's eyes twinkled as he observed Brent's gloom. It had an effect of pleasing him, and he banteringly advanced another moral axiom:

"There are worse misfortunes than being poor!"

"That may be, Colonel," he sighed. "I'm not familiar with all the tortures. Anyway, I'll bury the issue, along with my nose, in the delectable juleps Timmie is bringing."

"You must have caught her eye," the old gentleman smiled, watching her waddle through the hall with an inviting tray.

"Or Miss Liz is taking a nap," the other suggested, raising one of the frosted goblets. "Here's to the gratification of your merest whim, sir!"

Both drank a swallow, and then sat upright staring at each other in amazement.



“God bless my soul!” the Colonel gasped, “what is this stuff?”

“It tastes like raspberry juice,” Brent answered, warily taking another sip. “But it’s sort of good — it’s real good!”

The old gentleman gingerly sipped it now, and then once more, while his lips made the soft smacking noise of taste on an investigation.

“By Godfry, it *is* good,” he wagged his head convincingly. “It’s mighty good, sir! — er — perhaps Lizzie was not asleep, after all!”

After a few moments of contented silence — when Aunt Timmie had tiptoed back to the kitchen and was relating to Miss Liz the success of their undertaking — the Colonel asked:

“How is the road coming on?”

A month earlier Brent would have evaded this subject, but now his eyes sparkled with pleasure.

“Bully! I’ve been able to make speed by the fortunate possession of a hand map by Thruston — that super-accurate geologist, metallurgist and engineer who tramped every foot of these mountains twenty-five years ago — and it’s making things easy. We’ve nothing to equal it, even today!”

“Do you know,” the Colonel slapped his knee, “I have suspected you were slipping out oftener of late! I’ve been missing my niggers! — and was going to tell Jane about it!”

“Don’t,” Brent said seriously. “I want — I just had

an idea, that maybe it would be nice to finish up for — well, about the time of her birthday this summer. So, if you've noticed any especial activity, you'll have to respect my confidence."

"Why, sir, I call that handsome, sir!" he cried. "Ladies might not object to birthdays if cavaliers laid railroads at their feet! Tell me more!"

"Well," Brent flushed, "the line is short and surprisingly simple: distance from Buckville to the coal, sixteen miles. There was only one choice of locations: the valley line, where the ruling grade is about nominal. I'll come past here half a mile — or more, Colonel, if you desire it — and scoot up the North Fork of Blacksnake, through the natural tunnel, follow alongside the disappearing stream, and there you are! A few rights of way are still unsecured, but I've had Dulany out trying to gather them up. He's known hereabouts, and bargains better than I."

"Well, well, I am charmed! Dulany is a good man! I take it that things will soon begin to show in earnest?"

"It depends on what you mean by earnest," Brent laughed. "If construction work, that doesn't begin till after I've done!"

"Of course, of course! I had forgotten! Where do you cross the pike, sir?"

Brent looked at him a moment, then slowly began to smile.

"I'm going through the front parlor of my friend Tom Hewlet's house."

"Good riddance," the old gentleman chuckled.

“And,” Brent continued, “I fear I’ll have to go through the reception room of one of your friends.”

“Why, this is serious, Brent! Whom do you mean?”

“It might be serious,” the engineer laughed. “It’s a chap named Potter — very much in love with you.”

The Colonel looked grave. “His cabin burned down this spring; I supposed he had moved away!”

“No, he is rebuilding,” Brent casually replied, and glancing slyly across at the serious face, murmured: “He doesn’t think you had a right to burn him out.”

Colonel May sprang to his feet: “The impudence of him, sir!” he wrathfully exclaimed. “The impudence of him! Why, sir, he grossly insulted —” and quickly remembering that this insult to Jane must not be known, added: “insulted me, sir! Of course, I had a right to burn him out!”

“I’m glad you did,” Brent soothingly agreed. “I only knew the facts yesterday, when he happened to be telling about it.”

“Telling about it! What do you mean, sir? What lie could that scoundrel have invented?”

For a moment Brent looked the excited man steadily in the eyes, and the Colonel realized that further dissimulation was useless. After this silent message had passed between them, he said:

“I was resting under a tree yesterday, back from the road. As a matter of fact, I was trying to write a verse. Dale and Bob came by on horseback. Potter, who it seems has returned from his long and mysterious absence with Tom Hewlet, appeared pretty well up the hill on the

other side. Seeing Dale, he yelled at him, and shot his pistol in the air, and — and said a lot of things about the fire. He was too far away for them to get him.”

“This is detestable,” the old gentleman locked his jaws. “It’s positively dangerous for that dear girl to go about! I shall not let her leave Bob’s place without some of the hounds!”

“Hounds wouldn’t amount to anything. If she tried to set them on anyone, they’d think it was a cast and be off!” Then quietly added: “I’ve wired home for an airedale terrier. With him as her friend, she can go anywhere!”

“That is most thoughtful,” the old gentleman murmured. “But, Brent, that damned half-wit will take savage delight in spreading his story —” the Colonel gritted his teeth and could not finish.

“I hardly think so,” Brent reassured him. “It just happens that I’ve placed him in a most superstitious dread of me — through a little encounter we had because of an attempt Tom Hewlet made to blackmail me. Though I mention this in confidence, sir.”

“Blackmail! Why, Brent, what does this mean? I feel as though I were dreaming!” But a deeper anxiety came into his eyes as he recalled some whisperings of two months back.

“Don’t let it worry you. It has been cooked by proper threats of the penitentiary —” He stopped short, becoming for the first time aware of Aunt Timmie’s presence as she was taking up the goblets with more than necessary deliberation. When she left, he added:

“Anyway, what I started out to say is, Tusk will keep his mouth shut forever after I get hold of him. I looked for him in town, and at his half finished cabin, but he wasn't around. So I'll try again today.”

“Do you really think you can stop this?” the Colonel leaned hopefully forward.

“I know it, unless Tom has successfully disillusioned his mind about my being a devil.”

“A matter which would doubtless require more eloquence than Tom possesses,” the old gentleman's eyes twinkled; but he added in the former serious voice: “If you can't, sir, I — I shall have his life! I will, sir! — by God, sir, I will!”

Dale had come quietly to the French window. At his place in the library, where he had been poring over books, the conversation could have been heard, but none of it drew his attention until the Colonel's first outburst of rage. He stood now, looking calmly down at the old gentleman's flushed face, then stepped out and approached them.

“You won't have to do that,” he said. “I killed 'im this mornin'.”

A deadly, sickening hush came over his listeners, and gradually through it the rhythmic strokes of a galloping horse fell upon their ears. Brent turned and saw Jane. In a dry voice he said:

“The hell you did.”

For once the adaptable engineer seemed helpless to rise to the situation. It was the Colonel who pulled himself together, saying hurriedly:



“Here’s Jane! Go out, Brent, and entertain her! I’ll take Dale indoors and see what this means!”

“I haven’t time,” the mountaineer irritably replied. “I’m readin’, and can’t stop!”

“I’ll bet you a cooky you can stop, sir,” the old Colonel snapped. “You come and talk to me! Hurry, Brent!”

Entering the French window to the library he turned nervously to Dale.

“Now, what does this mean?”

“Brent told you,” the mountaineer answered. “He told you how the varmint yelled, an’ what he said. This mornin’ I went ’foh sun an’ laid out near his cabin. That’s all.”

The reproach in the Colonel’s eyes fell upon Dale like a lash, and he angrily continued:

“You said you’d do it, didn’t you? If I hadn’t — or somebody hadn’t — he’d kept on shoutin’ those things, an’ maybe worse, till she wouldn’t have opened school next yeah! Would she? Then what would I do? I tell you, Tusk had to be kilt!”

“I was merely angry, and talking, sir,” the Colonel protested, with not the same regard for truth he had formerly boasted.

“An’ I was angry an’ not talkin’,” Dale sullenly retorted.

The silence that followed was broken by the old gentleman’s brief question:

“Dead?”

“I reckon. He went down.”

“We must go and see. Come!”



“I ain’t got time to fool with ’im,” the mountaineer looked restlessly at the open book and then back at his interrogator. “I’ve got to study. You go, if you think you’d ought, an’ take some niggers.”

The Colonel shuddered: “By God, but you’re a cold one!” then hastily went out to consult the faithful Zack. But the mountaineer reseated himself at the long mahogany table, and plunged furiously into the maze of erudition.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A VOICE AND A TAPER FLAME

Brent, who for some days had not been gracious to the sight of Jane, went out to meet her in a state of mind so dazed that it bordered on the humorous. At heart most things were jests with this devil-may-care young man (it may have been a trait cultivated through sheer necessity) and whether Dale killed or were killed might some weeks ago have passed into his continuous performance of human comedies and tragedies. But there was a new element about this which shocked him to the foundation of his nature, and the revulsion became more acute as he looked up into her face smiling politely down at him.

He had watched her interest in Dale, and now guessed her depth of disappointment when she were told how the mountaineer's career had gone dashing into the black wall of ruin. But he had watched with a twinge of jealousy which, as jealousy has the knack of doing, exaggerated both the extent and kind of interest she may have felt.

Many opportunities had come to Brent, and it was not all his fault that most of them had been neglected. His capacity for achievement was as an arm perpetually carried in a sling; no one's fingers had untied the knot and

massaged the cramped muscles, nor had anyone's lips bidden him strike the right sort of blow. His mother breathed his name when a trained nurse had laid him down beside her on the bed; and that was the only time he might have heard her voice. His father was a man so threaded in the loom of finance that the rearing of a baby boy seemed wasted energy for one of his activities. The governess whom he employed to assume this duty came with recommendations; that was all — came with recommendations. And the boy's days were without intelligent direction of any kind.

The only trait in his character which this governess strongly developed, was a desire to hide from every one his deepest and best impulses. Since one day, when his four-year-old arms had clasped a homeless puppy hurt by a passing wagon, and she had poked her finger and laughed at his tears in order to keep his clothes from becoming worse soiled, his generous side shrank back into itself and froze. Then he began to clasp this newly bruised thing — a little boy's wounded nobility; so jealously guarding it from the cruelty of other laughs, from other curled lips and fingers of scorn, that few might have suspected it lived in him at all.

Later in life there appeared an object he might have cherished — the girl of whom he had told Jane; but this did not leave the regret he tried to make himself believe. He had never been able to rise above a lingering disappointment because her fingers made no effort to untie the knot; — rather, had she drawn it tighter by applauding those things which inherently he realized needed rebuk-

ing. For in his soul lived a voice comparing her to an ideal known only to his dreams — a being, somewhere, who would tear off the sling with brave and loving hands, and not be content to see him drift. His closely guarded better nature was persistently pleading with him to face about, while her pouting lips imperiously demanded his mornings and afternoons for her entertainment. Then, very softly, a consciousness began to dawn upon this little romance, showing its glitter to be the veriest tinsel; and, so it was, in a make-believe fervor of self-righteousness, he pressed the pseudo crown of martyrdom upon his brow and “stepped aside.”

If the truth were known, his soul had many times craved self-sacrifice — a hunger from which true men and women do not long escape. So he hugged the imitation, knowing it to be an imitation, but pretending it was real; before this false altar he “stepped aside,” crying within himself that he had done a noble act, and knowing it was counterfeit. The knowledge, not the sacrifice, was bitter; nevertheless, this false altar sweetly fed his innate hunger — and, to keep the false in an attitude of real, he dreamed more, drank more. In the three years which had passed since then he retained only the love of drifting.

As he now looked seriously up into Jane's face he was swept by one thought: tragedy, cruelty, disappointment were entitled to no place in the atmosphere of her dwelling. With a pang he realized that Dale was bringing them all to her. With a bound, something that was very

far from being false, awoke in his heart, whispering how she might be spared. Then he perceived her still smiling down at him.

"Dreaming?" she asked.

"Fascinated," he murmured.

Without assistance she slipped from the saddle, exclaiming:

"My, but it's a lovely day!"

"Isn't it! Oh, you can't interrupt the Colonel and Dale just now," he warned, seeing her intention. "They're hard at it. Come with me while I tie your horse, and then let's go to your charmed circle and talk. Have you forgiven my — er — shortcomings?"

"I'd forgotten you were so afflicted," she laughed, knowing he had no reference to the dinner — that absolutely closed subject.

"I didn't know I was either, till you told me one day. In fact, you're always enlightening me. How wonderful you must be to discover so many things in a chap!"

"My insight is very clear," she observed, without enthusiasm.

"A vision filtered through such wonderful eyes should transform everything to beauty," he smiled. "In a negative way I might feel complimented."

"It would be so negative. How long will the Colonel and Dale be closeted?"

"Lord knows. They've lots to talk about. Dale has reached a place where the Colonel finds him exciting."

"Isn't he a marvel!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, he's a marvel, all right," Brent grumbled. "But his vanity will surpass his great achievements; — don't delude yourself about that!"

"Well; you're an authority on that condition of life. Do you enjoy it?"

"If you'll give me more reason to be vain, I'll tell you."

She ignored this, and when they were among the cedars he began again; not caring what he talked about as much as to be talking. He felt that if he stopped, she might read through his depression.

"Do you remember the last time we were here? You lectured me for loafing, and shooting woodpeckers. There were other things, but you couldn't recall them at the moment. I've been doing some right stiff thinking since then!"

"Retrospection is good for the soul," she smiled at him.

"On the contrary, retrospection makes for hollow eyes, and introspection is tinged with bitterness. Keep your face to the future if you would have your soul contented."

"And what is your future?" she archly inquired.

"These coming minutes while you are here with me."

"Really," she flashed him a rather bewildering look, "I did think for once you were going to be serious!"

"I am serious," he dug the heel of his boot thoughtfully into the tanbark. "I wish I weren't — or didn't have to be."

"Has something gone wrong — with the road?" There was a slight tinge of irony in the suggestion.

"No, but something's gone wrong with the world.



I wish," he suddenly looked up at her, "that I could be as sure of laying a smooth grade for — for my friends as I am for trains of coal!"

"Your friends might have to wait a long time before traveling about," she laughed, but there was a note of apprehension in her voice which again put him on his guard; — and yet he could not help feeling that a partial preparation was only fair to her.

"It wouldn't be a bad thing if some people never traveled about," he smiled. "I might then succeed in keeping you here, and those hot-headed mountaineers would stay back in their holes and rot forever, as they ought."

"Oh, Brent," she exclaimed, in a hurt voice, "there is such a wealth of splendid human material up there if we can only get hold of it! They're all ambitious — if stirred!"

He waited, asking: "And what else?"

"Nothing else."

"But you didn't say anything nice about Dale!"

She laughed. "I thought you knew about Dale — and me; for I'm of the mountains!"

"You didn't belong to those people," he murmured. "You're a spirit who lived in a deep spring, and you just floated down with the brook. I know, because I've dreamed about you. And I know, too," he shook off the spell, "a little something about stirring the ambition of *real* people up there. I've seen it tried in a mining camp where a railroad has been running for years! I've seen a fair and square company build model cot-

tages, and in every way try to improve conditions. It put in baths, and the tubs were used for vegetable bins. It built a reading room, and the walls were covered with charcoal pictures. Two men used their little front porches for firewood, rather than pick up all they wanted a hundred yards away. One winter coal took a jump. The mine had a bonanza chance, and the men who had been making their two and a half dollars a day, or thereabouts, could with the same hours' work pull down twice that much. Did they? I'll tell you what they did: they laughed at the superintendent and worked half time; they sat about the store and whittled, saying that two and a half was all they needed. But they forgot this quick enough when the union afterwards went in and told them they ought to get twenty cents more! You'd have thought then that they'd been on the verge of starvation for years, and the harrowing tales which went forth about their 'wretched conditions' would have made you laugh — had you known the facts. The union had photographs taken of the two cottages without front porches, and sent them broadcast so the world could see how capital trod upon its hire. Ambition? They don't know the word deeper than its two first letters! And you've got to be ready for many a disappointment here, too — let me tell you that!"

She was looking at him earnestly, and in a few moments said: "I agree with everything you say. I grant it all, every bit. But, Brent, consider! A mother tells her little boy to wash his face, to read his primer, and he doesn't. And the next day she tells him, and he doesn't.

And so on, for days and days, she tells and tells. It seems utterly hopeless, but all the time she is persisting, and gradually bringing him nearer to a sense of obligation. After ten or twelve years you will find him stepping briskly on to admirable manhood; but it is because she has never turned her back on him — she never faltered. See what Dale's sister has done with patient perseverance! Surely, you would not get in a pout and hold back the road simply because a few mountaineers are sometimes obstinate little children!"

He felt the double reproach of this and began to smile, saying:

"I hadn't intended to tell you, but now you force me to it: the line is twice as far along as when you were over here last!"

"Oh, you good-for-nothing — splendid!" she impulsively cried; but more wistfully added: "Why wouldn't you have told me? Why do you try to keep people from seeing when you do good things, and only show the — the not so good?" He did not answer, and she spoke again with a new and delicate caress in her voice: "You haven't deceived me utterly — there are times when I've been tremendously proud of you."

"Jane," he said, and stopped. His eyes were looking deep into her own, and while she gave him back look for look he seemed incapable of continuing. But she turned away, somewhat confused, and slowly he continued: "One time I discovered that in us all there is a secret temple, with a very small but highly prized altar lighted by a tiny taper flame, where we keep just our

own little treasures — our wonderful selves.” She glanced up in some surprise, but this time he was staring at the ground. “In some, its door is studiously, carefully locked; in others, its paths of approach are overgrown with weeds and almost lost; in others still, it is hard to find because it has been starved, or hurt, or laughed at — but always when a certain current of thought or sound sweeps by, that wonderful part of our souls upon this little altar is set a-quivering. Old soldiers feel its pulsing at the booming of a cannon; old women feel it at the laughter of a child; others know it is there while beneath the spell of an orchestra, a breeze in the pines, a bird’s note, the fragrance of certain flowers, the caress of a voice. You will forgive this unintentional preamble,” he looked slowly up at her, “when I say that your voice just now has been all of these things to me — and more!”

“Oh, Brent,” she cried, with a brave pretense at lightness, “if only you weren’t such a trifler! The dangerous thing about you is that you mean this now — almost; enough, anyway, to give it a ring of sincerity. Were I less sophisticated, I might go home believing it, and thinking what a wonderful man you are starting out to be; but in the morning find my ideals shattered, and on the ash heap!”

“You are so worldly, then?” he smiled.

But she had arisen and now stood at the entrance of the path, looking slightly over her shoulder and ignoring his question with another:

“You say things are really hurrying?”

“Dulany is buying the necessary land in record time,” he answered.

“But,” she hesitated, pouting just a little, “that implies no work of your own! Still, I suppose I should be thankful for whatever we receive. And, oh, Brent,” she now turned and looked seriously up at him, “if you would only stop this wretched drinking! Tell me, why do you? What call, or what cause, makes you? Is it to drug the mind into some sort of mock rest, or the body into sleep, or the soul — ah, Brent, what does the soul do when it is stupefied? The pity of it flares up in me like a great scorching flame!”

He opened his lips, but could not speak. The words, their sincerity, sympathy, and wonderfully strange appeal, came like an unfelt air; for a second time setting a-tremble the tiny taper flame in that reliquary of which he had told her. Another moment she looked appealingly up at him, then turned toward the house.

“Jane!” His voice, hoarse and vibrating, held her where she stood. She dared not see the face which her senses said had been driven white by some tremendous feeling. So she waited, listening.

The smell of cedar buds was in the air about them; and wafted out on this, as though it might have been just now brought up from the musty depths of some old cedar chest, they heard the thin voice of Miss Liz scolding one of the servants. Otherwise, the morning seemed to have no life except the lazy drone of insects.

Again she started slowly to the house; but this time he did not speak, and only watched until she disappeared.



## CHAPTER XXII

### TWO PLANS

When Colonel May returned he was tired. He paused at the library door, for a moment watching the bent head of the indomitable student, now oblivious to everything except the page before him, hesitated, and then passed on in search of Brent. He seemed to appreciate the uselessness of calling the mountaineer who was in a realm too remote for human interference. The Colonel was not the first that day to look in, pause, and then pass on.

He found the young engineer out under the trees, deep in the contemplation of the sky. Jerkily pulling off his gloves, he said:

“I want a drink!”

“You must have caught his eye,” Brent smiled, as the tactful Zack was seen following from the house with two frosted, green-tipped goblets of silver hugged close to his stomach. It was obviously an effort to shield them from the windows of Miss Liz’s room and her inquisitorial lorgnette. Colonel May noticed this shameless evidence of stealth, and colored.

“I wish I could drink in my own house like a gentleman, sir,” he raged, “without hurting the sensibilities of super-sensitive ladies! This schoolboy tomfoolery



is sickening, and I'm going to put a stop to it right now, sir!" So when the servant drew near, with a sly smile that did anything but assuage the Colonel's humor, he raged anew: "Zack, you rascal, hereafter when you bring me a julep I want you first to ask Miss Liz if she thinks it looks well enough to be served!"

That black worthy put the juleps quickly down and exploded with uncontrollable laughter. Such a suggestion, he thought, was about the most irresistible bit of humor the Colonel had ever achieved; and now, holding his sides, between guffaws he gasped:

"Marse John, you'se gittin' funnier an' funnier eve'y day you lives!"

But at this moment his eyes wandered to the Colonel's face. The laughter stopped with a dry croak. He saw that his old master and friend was serious, and reaching for one of the goblets he anxiously exclaimed:

"Great day in de mawnin', Marse John! You suttently don' mean dat! Drink dis heah, quick! Ridin' in de sun's done tetched yoh haid!"

"Touched the devil," the old gentleman thundered. "Take it back this instant and ask Miss Liz if she thinks it's pretty enough to serve!"

Uncle Zack was indeed troubled. His hand shook with more than its usual wont, as he looked down at the offending beverage and then pleadingly up.

"She done tol' me twict dis week dat I'se gwine buhn in hell for dis heah julep makin'. De fu'st thing you-alls 'll know ole Zack'll bust out in flames — an' *den* whar'll you git yoh comfo't from?"

But the Colonel's glowering brows said very distinctly that the alternative was an immediate little hell right there beneath the trees and, choosing the more remote, Zack turned slowly to the house. The old gentleman's eyes followed him, and now he turned irritably to Brent:

"I will not drink my juleps in gulps behind trees and shrubs, sir! I like to have them sit before me, and contemplate their merits. I like to Fletcherize them with my mind, and with those senses which my mind can set astir. And so with my cigars, and with my food! Why, sir, much of the pleasure of drinking and smoking and eating — as a gentleman understands these pleasures — is in their peaceful contemplation before the act! Otherwise, we are swine, and degrade our nutriment by coarse handling! What respect can we have for self, sir, if we choke and gurgle, and contemptuously treat those things we put into our bodies! I shall have no more of it, sir!"

Brent waited until this wave of impatience had spent itself upon the chairs, the grass, and everything within reach of the Colonel's wrathful eye; then asked:

"What did you do with him?"

"Potter?" he nervously answered. "Wasn't there. Blood on the ground, but he'd gone. Either wasn't killed, or someone found him. I don't know which, of course, but probably the latter."

"What shall you do?"

"I don't know; I don't know. Telephone to Jess, doubtless."

For a moment they sat looking soberly into each other's faces.

"May I suggest," Brent said, "that you abandon the idea of telephoning the sheriff? Jess isn't wanted quite yet awhile. If Potter is only wounded — maybe just scratched — he's all right. If someone found his body, there are others besides Dale who might have killed him."

"But, sir," sputtered the Colonel, "I can't harbor a murderer!"

"There's a difference between a murderer and one who righteously avenges a wrong. That's worth considering. Besides, it's a serious matter for a gentleman to give over his guest."

This, he knew, was a powerful argument and, feeling content to let it plead its own cause, quietly added: "We don't want to see him go to jail —"

"He wouldn't go to jail, sir," the Colonel quickly interrupted. "I would ask Jess to leave him here until Court convenes. He would be glad to do that for me."

"I know he would," Brent replied with all sincerity. "But we don't need a sheriff yet. Let's wait, and see what turns up!"

An expression of infinite relief came into the old gentleman's face, but his conscience was still aroused and emphatically he declared: "I'll deliver him to the law, sir, the very minute I know to a certainty that Potter is dead!" Then his eyes turned toward the house, from

where by this time he thought his julep should be emerging.

That faithful institution, Uncle Zack, had come perilously near fulfilling his mission. He had walked bravely through the rooms, goblet in hand, at each turn earnestly and fervently praying to his gods that Miss Liz might not be found. Coming into the front hall, and passing "de long room"—that long room which used to ring with the merry laughs of dancers, but was now guarded as a sort of chapel for shrouded portraits—he saw its forbidding doors slightly ajar, and peered in.

Uncle Zack always avoided this room. Its subdued light; its oppressive atmosphere, invariably suggesting the image of "Ole Miss" lying there amidst banks of flowers which matched in purity her calm face; the uniform arrangement of high-backed chairs, suggesting in their white coverings a line of tombstones; the two massive crystal chandeliers, hanging like weights of an old clock which would never again be wound;—were all too much for Zack's heart and imagination. Yet the door was open, and he peered in.

His fading eyes followed the line of chairs, upon one of which stood Miss Liz. She had drawn the musty covering from an overhanging portrait—her dead sister—and to this she was murmuring. Her black silk dress and lace kerchief seemed to make her a part of the gallery; and her thin hand resting on the frame, with its forefinger unconsciously pointing upward, was as frail and wax-like as that other hand into which the old negro had, one twilit evening, long ago, laid a rose—when, unob-

served and shaken by convulsive sobs, he tiptoed in to pray at the side of "Ole Miss'" bier.

Carefully now he stepped back, drawing the door softly to, and leaving the room to its undisturbed communion of whispering spirits.

"What are you crying for?" the Colonel asked, as he finally came up with the julep.

"I isn't cryin', Marse John. Dat bad eye of mine hu'ts me some, dat's all."

"I'll have you see the doctor. Did you find Miss Liz?"

"Yas, sah, I foun' her."

"And what did she say?"

"She never say nuthin' to *me*," Zack answered in his low, musical voice. "An' I never axed her nuthin', neither. She wuz standin' on a cheer in de long room, whisperin' to Ole Miss' pictur, Marse John; an' I couldn' poke no julep up at her den!"

The Colonel bowed his head. After a prolonged silence he drew a deep breath, then drained the goblet thirstily to the very end, taking a piece of ice into his mouth and moodily crunching it. But his eyes were not raised; his thoughts had not been diverted.

Zack tiptoed away and disappeared behind the house. Brent respectfully waited for the spell to pass; and when, at last, the old gentleman did look up, his eyes, like Zack's, were moist.

"The tobacco ought to be good this year," he said.

"Yes," Brent smiled at his courageous nonchalance, "if we don't have the riders."



“Riders, pooh,” he ridiculed. “You mean, if we don’t have any more play of fancy imaginations, and thunderings of overwrought editors, sir!”

For Colonel May was one of those many, many thousands whose love of State stands just above his love of Nation. Any word, or whisper, which scandalized the sweet name of Kentucky spurred him instantly to action. The same unwavering Southern Law whose right hand commands man to strike in defense of a woman’s honor, placed its left upon the Colonel’s shoulder whenever the old Commonwealth happened to be slandered by some impetuous act of a misguided son. Nor would Brent have been any less slow with his defense;—but, among themselves, pretenses were unnecessary. So he laughed at the old gentleman’s fervor, saying:

“That’s all right for the outsiders, Colonel; but I was in the State cavalry, and know. We chased ’em for weeks!”

“And how many were caught, sir?”

“Oh, I don’t remember. My own troop rounded up three or four.”

“Well, sir,” the Colonel said, with a finality intended to close the subject, “that’s a mighty small number to have given us all so bad a name! The injustice of Kentucky being exploited in the press of the United States merely for the misdeeds of three or four rascals! All kinds of deviltry may be perpetrated in other sections of the Union, sir, and the press treats it with indifference; but let just one gentleman in Kentucky shoot another



gentleman, and the papers make it into a dish for the gods, garnished with their blackest type and seasoned with the spiciest titbits of their fertile imaginations! It's disgusting, sir!"

"There may have been a few of those fellows we didn't catch," Brent suggested, wanting very much to laugh.

"Impossible! I tell you it's impossible, sir! When a troop of cavalry, made up of such material as yourself, sir, goes after offenders, I am pretty well satisfied that you bring them every one in!"

"You put it most convincingly," the engineer bowed to him. "By the way," he added, rightly judging where the Colonel's thoughts were dwelling, "I hope you will tell me the day before you decide on telephoning Jess — I mean, of course, if the worst comes to the worst!"

"Certainly," he looked up. "But why do you want to know?"

"Perhaps you don't want to know why I want to know," Brent laughed.

"But I do, sir!"

"That isn't a sufficient reason, Colonel, for it may not be ethical for me to tell you. However, I've two plans. One is to give Dale a twenty-four-hour start, and in that event I'll go along to see him settled."

"I shall forget what you say," the old gentleman, immeasurably pleased, frowned sternly to ease his conscience. "But you can be of no service to him! He knows his country like a book!"

"It isn't to his country I'd advise him to go. No one

would think, for instance, of looking for him in our house at home. He could keep on studying, too; and after awhile this thing would blow over."

The light in Colonel May's face was eloquent of a greater affection than he had at any time felt for Brent, but he simply said:

"Then I should lose you both! What is your other plan?"

"The other plan is something I am not at liberty to tell even you," Brent soberly answered.

After several minutes, during which the older man seemed to be thinking deeply, he struck his fist on the arm of his chair, exclaiming:

"I don't see why it's so damned important to tell Jess, anyhow! Why, sir, the fellow may not be dead, at all! And you mustn't lose sight of the fact, sir, that Dale is my guest, entitled by a higher law to my protection!"

"Now that you mention it, I believe you are right," Brent cried, as though this were sparkingly original. "Let's act on the suggestion!"

Sometime later, after they had gone, Zack came out to gather up the goblets. For several minutes he stood with one of these in his hand, staring with a perplexed and troubled frown at a julep which had not been tasted.

"Dar ain' no fly in it, dat's suah," he mumbled, "but I cyarn' see what de trubble is! An' it ain' Marse John's, 'caze he dranked his'n whilst I wuz heah! De onlies' answer is dat Marse Brent done lef' it fer de ole nigger!"

With a stealthy look toward Miss Liz's windows he

backed into the shrubbery and transferred the julep to a place where it might receive more consideration; then, after doing a few steps of a double-shuffle, he emerged and walked airily to the house.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE SECOND PLAN

Brent's room was across the hall from Dale's. These two, engineer and mountaineer, were the only occupants of the third floor, known since their arrival as Bachelors' Belfry. This floor, however, was far from resembling a belfry. Its high ceilings and spacious rooms were of the type which architects drew in the early nineteenth century, when labor cost but its feed and materials were everywhere at hand. Just as the bricks in the outside walls were laid "every other one a header," so the interior spoke of a style which went out of existence three generations ago. More recently, however, the Colonel had added a furnace and baths, converting for the latter several entire bed-rooms with which Arden was over supplied. Thus Bachelors' Belfry might have been considered the most agreeable, even as the most isolated, portion of the house; and, as its occupants passed a law forbidding women servants to ascend above the second floor between five in the afternoon and nine in the morning, conventions of attire were not by your leave, but as you please.

Tonight Brent had gone up early. At dinner he had been distraught; nor even his poise could quite disguise it.

The Colonel had suggested a smoke and chat out on the porch where the air was soft and still and cool, but Brent could not find it in his heart to stay.

During a portion of the morning, during those few passion-riven seconds while Jane had been held like a carved image by the unfathomable timbre of his voice, a struggle had taken place in the engineer's soul. And when she had again started toward the house she little dreamed how savagely it was raging. So he wanted to be alone tonight; not to face that fight anew, because for once and all it had been settled, but to plan for the fulfillment of its issue. The Colonel, therefore, was smoking alone; just as Miss Liz was reading her Bible alone, and as Dale was poring alone over a book in the silent library.

Brent, his chair back-tilted, his pumps resting on the window sill, his coat off, had been surrounded for an hour by darkness. Only out across the limited space of world framed by his window, and now barely visible in the starlight, was there anywhere to rest his eyes.

He had watched the afterglow fading, fading; he had heard the last sleepy twitter of the birds; he had seen one star, two and three, come out; before his steadfast, brooding stare the trees had slowly lost their green for the somber shade of night. And now it was indeed night; that hushed and awe-inspiring span of gloom when worlds most sin; when men and women do their sobbing; do their yielding; count their cost.

All of this had had a most oppressing effect on him whose thoughts matched the compass, if not the penetra-

tion, of his vision. Another hour he sat. Then he heard the great front door close with a jar. It was the Colonel locking up the house. Shortly afterwards he heard Dale's step, as the mountaineer went to his room. A sigh trembled between the lonely watcher's lips, but he promptly arose and crossed the hall.

"How'd you get along today?" he asked, closing the door softly after him. Not infrequently did they chat together at night.

"Fine," Dale cried, still excited by the labors he adored. "I'm readin' about as fast as I can talk. It seems easy, now that I've got the knack!"

Brent watched the light of ambition, of achievement, flicker across his neighbor's face; he saw the purposeful chin, the knotted muscles in the jaws, the fist, which in emphasis had just come down upon a table, remain clenched as though it might never be off high tension.

"I'm glad to hear it," he said quietly. "But what have you in mind for the future?"

"In mind? Everything! I'm getting my learning (I used to say larnin') like a hungry old sow turned out on corn. Miss Jane says I'm doin' better'n anyone she ever dreamed of; and when I finish, we're going back in the mountains to bring our people out to light!"

"Yes, I've gathered something of that," Brent drily replied. "But, what I mean is, what is your idea about Tusk?"

Dale started: "Good Lord," he slowly exclaimed, "I'd forgot about him!"

"It might be worth while remembering," the other sug-



gested. "I've come in to talk over plans for saving you."

"Savin' me! Me?" the mountaineer sprang to his feet in a burst of rage. "Only you an' the Cunnel know I've done it, an' if you'll keep yoh mouths shut there won't be any reason to save me, as you call it!"

"This isn't your country," Brent held his temper. "Men aren't shot around here and carted off and buried without some sort of legal investigation. If Tusk's body is found, and it will be found if he's dead, someone's got to pay; someone must either stand trial or turn fugitive."

"Great Gawd," Dale cried, slowly rocking his body from side to side. "Great Gawd! Great Gawd!" he repeated over and over. There was a flickering look about the eyes that made Brent catch his breath. It seemed for just a passing second that they had been converted into little balls of trembling red quicksilver; that was the only thing to which he could liken those eyes just then — red quicksilver. But this passed so quickly that it might have been a reflection from the lamp. At any rate, Dale was continuing: "Why, Brent, I can't go to jail! Nor I can't run away! Miss Jane says I'll be chuck full of education by next winter — how can I go to jail? She says every hope she has is in me!" Brent winced. "She says she trusts me more'n any feller she ever saw!" Brent winced again. "How can I go to jail?"

So it was true. The engineer laughed, but it sounded more like the stirring of ice.

“Don't divulge any more of her confidences. You've said enough — too much, I assure you. The thing to talk about now is how to save you. Are you sure you killed him?”

“'Course I did. Do you reckon I miss a man at three rod?”

“Then someone found his body, for it wasn't there when the Colonel went. Sooner or later the trail will lead here. I've thought, perhaps, you might slip away and go home with me. You can study there. Later, when things blow over, you can come back.”

“An' Miss Jane'll go?” he asked, hopefully.

“Certainly not,” Brent flushed.

“I'll see what she says,” Dale dubiously suggested.

“You'll do nothing of the sort! Would you have her know about this mess?”

“It seems like she's pretty apt to know,” he answered.

There was cruel truth in this; she was pretty apt to know beyond a doubt; and Brent pictured what it would mean to a girl who believed and had such implicit trust in one to find him a willful murderer. He thought a moment of the blind sister, the helpless one of patient waiting, of prayerful days; all dark, all dark, except for the hopeful coming of that day when her brother should stand irreproachable before the world and hear the applause of men. Slowly he spoke; it was of the second plan, formed in a white hot crucible of passion as Jane had walked away from him that morning.

“Several times Tusk has threatened to kill me if I persisted in building the road across his patch of land.

He stopped me one night on the pike and laid hold of my bridle rein, and I had to get down and punch his head. Why shouldn't he have tried to fix me early this morning when I might have been up in that country? — and why shouldn't I have shot him in self-defense?"

"I reckon you could," the mountaineer doggedly answered.

"Well, prod up your brains, man, or I'll begin to doubt if you're as scintillating as everybody says! Don't you see what has to be done if the sheriff gets wind of the thing and comes here? If I can probably get off, and you'll probably be hanged — what's the answer?"

"You don't mean —" Dale swung about, resurrected hope lighting his face; but Brent held up a warning hand.

"You're on, and that's enough; so don't open your mouth even in here. If you do, I'll back out. You get that, too, don't you? Now listen: if Jess comes, just tell him you don't know anything about anything; that you've never left the library. I'll fix the Colonel and Zack."

But Dale was scarcely listening. He had begun to cavort about the room in a semi-barbarous dance, clapping his hands and making a purring sort of growl in his throat. A chair fell over; then another.

"Chop that crazy stuff," Brent commanded. "Want to wake the house?"

The big mountaineer looked rather sheepish as he picked up one of the chairs and sat down in it.

"I reckon I was so tickled to get off from the law," he mildly explained.

"I thought you might be mourning over the fate of

whoever takes your place," the engineer murmured, with a sarcasm entirely lost on his listener. "Hell, Dale," he now let his feeling explode. "I've seen lots of fellows from the mountains, but any one of 'em would lose a hand before letting another man take his medicine! You've got to let me do it, you understand! — but I do reserve this opportunity of saying you're damned unappreciative."

"Do you reckon I'm lettin' you do it for me?" he turned savagely. "Do you think it's me — jest me? Then you're a-way off!"

"Well, I supposed it had some little to do with you," Brent suggested, "and — and Miss Jane."

"It hain't!" He was in a fury again, and dropped back into the old dialect. "I hain't thinkin' of Miss Jane, nor nuthin'—'cept jest the place Ruth said I'd git ter fill, the man I'll make 'mongst the big men of the world! I'm the only one on airth as kin be as big as that, hain't I? Yeou hain't amountin' ter nuthin', air ye? Why shouldn't ye take my place afore the law? Hain't hit Natur's way fer the puny ter go down afore the strong?"

The engineer's eyes opened at the curious sensation this gave him; at the utter astonishment of listening. Then he softly began to laugh.

"My friend," he said, "I have raised my hat to one or two colossal freaks in the past, but henceforth I shall come into your exalted presence with bare-headed humility. However, my boy, don't think that I'm flirting with the penitentiary for the sake of your dazzling future, or for any of your pipe dreams. I'm doing it," he arose,

and added softly, "I'm doing it for the fun of the damn thing. Good night, Mr. Genius!"

Long, long afterwards, Brent continued to sit in the back-tilted chair, gloomily staring through the window which framed his dim vision of the world. Later, somewhere on the other side of the house, the moon came up; and far out across the country a dog howled. Yet, by another hour, when that disk of lifeless white had floated higher in the sky, the trees framed by his window dropped their robe of mourning for a more soothing green and silver.

"I don't reckon it's such a somber old world, after all," he stood up, stretching; — then went to bed, and slept.

But, across the hall, Dale had not slept. Excited, boyishly happy to have escaped the consequences of his madness, he had tossed throughout the night; building up castles of greatness equal to those of his beloved Clay and Lincoln.

Now a robin piped its three first waking notes, and the mountaineer's eyes opened wide. The interior of the room was beginning to be touched with gray, and he sprang up, throwing back the eastern shutters and gazing on that first faint flush of dawn which stirs within man's breast a feeling of the Omnipotent. With lips apart, he watched the coming of delicate layers of salmon, and saw them merge to a soft and satiny rose. Vermillion now touched the highlights, as though some unseen brush, wet from a palette below the horizon, had reached up and made a bold stroke across this varying canvas. More slowly followed blue — and then a bluer blue.



His thoughts, coloring with the sky, were whimsically curious. A day was coming! It would come and go, and never in all eternity come again — would this day! It was coming: to some, bringing ungrudging pleasure, sweet happiness; to others, unsparing misery, bitter despair! Before days were, it had been arranged that this one should appear — it had been nicely calculated that this very dawn should glorify the sky at this precise moment; and that e'er the sun of this day set, thousands upon thousands of human beings should raise their smiling lips in rapture, or their bloodshot eyes in pain! How many now, out across this big, beautiful, blushing awakening world, were undreaming of their approaching joy — or unconscious of their creeping doom? Over and over in his mind Dale weighed these thoughts. The universe was becoming a fascinating, tremendous force to him. This day, just now coming over the hill, so weighted with its black and white bounties — what was it bringing to him?

“I know!” he cried, snatching up his clothes. “I get freedom, an’ he,” here his clenched fist shook toward Brent’s room, “gets jail!”

Feverishly dressing, he stamped down to the library — his paradise; regardless of whom he might be disturbing at this hour.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE CALL THAT MEANS SURRENDER

Three days later an airedale terrier was driven to Flat Rock by Uncle Zack. When, with an air of mystery, he presented the leash to Jane, grinned and politely bowed himself away, she had stared at him in utter surprise; then down at the dog which seemed to be gazing up with greater understanding.

“Well, what is the answer?” she kneeled before him, fondly taking him by the ears. The honest, fearless brown eyes spoke, but she slowly shook her head: “I’m not civilized enough to understand!”

But her fingers, now turning his collar about, came upon a little note addressed in Brent’s writing. Untying it in some haste she sat upon the grass and read:

“I, and my life, are yours, Mistress Jane. Please take me, and let me guard you faithfully.

An unnamed dog.”

“An unnamed dog!” she cried in delight, giving him a quick, impulsive hug. “Oh, you wonderful creature!” Then held him off at arms’ length, his head between her palms in a way that wrinkled the tawny fore-

head into an expression of profound wisdom. "How would you like to be named — Mac?" she whispered.

He was wagging his stumpy tail, anyway; but one can always give a dog the benefit of a doubt, and she believed that it began to wag more happily. Thus it was settled between them. All the affection which his nature held, which his rearing in a large kennel of other dogs had not permitted him to bestow upon any one master, now sprang to its most perfect development and centered upon this girl. Wherever she was, he was; watchful, ready for a lark, or equally content to lie quietly at her feet.

That afternoon, in trim boots and riding habit, she crossed the porch to her horse which had just been brought around. Mac, in great pretended fury, was grasping the leash end of her crop and tugging at it with savage growls.

"Drop it," she gave his nose a tap. He licked her glove then, and looked up with his head tilted in roguish inquiry. "We must ride over and thank the other Mister Mac," she explained; and a few minutes later they were going at a spirited pace across the meadows to Arden.

With still no news of Tusk Potter, the Colonel had spent a restless day. Earlier, the doughty son of Shadeland Wildon brought the little boy over to see him, followed by Aunt Timmie in her precarious buggy; but it was now afternoon and they had left. Shadows were lengthening, and the cows were mooing at the pasture gate.

Dale, as usual, had spent the day in study. His ab-

sorption had made him unconscious of intruders who came into the room. Timmie and the little boy had stopped to say good-bye, and she called his name; even emboldened by his silence to murmur: "Don' you know you'se gwine pop yoh brains a-wu'kin' 'em so hard?"

Bip, who regarded Dale with mysterious interest, made farther advances. He went up close, and looked wonderingly into his face; but at last both he and the old woman left unseen and unheard.

All unconscious of his surroundings, this student was living in other days with the dauntless Pompey. By the aid of the huge dictionary, now seldom opened, he laboriously followed this daring friend of the great Cicero. Since morning he had witnessed the capture of a thousand cities, the slaying or subjugation of a million human beings — and more of this was to come. Had lightning snapped about his head he would not have known it for the wilder sounds of battlefields, scattered between Rome and the Euphrates, possessing his brain.

When Jane arrived, Mac was properly introduced to the old gentleman, who made a great fuss over him and directed her attention to his points of unusual excellence. But Brent, he told her, was not about.

"Dale would like to see him," she said enthusiastically.

"Oh, yes," his face clouded, "I suppose so!"

"What's the matter?" she quickly asked.

"Matter?" he looked up. "Why, nothing, my dear! Nothing, of course!"

But it did not satisfy, and she asked again:

"Has anything happened? — Dale, or anything?"

He must have found some difficulty in evading this direct question, and his hesitation, brief though it was, alarmed her.

“No, my dear. I cannot say that anything has happened. I may be growing a little uncertain of him — that is, I may be afraid — oh, bother! It is nothing but an old man’s fancy!”

Nevertheless, when later, calling the mountaineer’s name, she stepped through the library window, an element of uncertainty, quite a different sort from that which the Colonel was congratulating himself upon having so deftly hid, filled her heart with a vague foreboding.

Dale was mumbling aloud as he read, and did not hear her; but a slight pressure on his shoulder brought him slowly back from scenes of carnage, and he looked up into her face, smiling down at him.

“Stop awhile, and speak to Mac! Your eyes seem tired!”

“They’re not. That was a great man — that Pompey!”

“Great,” she agreed, a trifle piqued that he ignored her dog.

“Those fights,” he said tensely, “were the biggest things a feller ever did!”

“He did something bigger than conquering men,” she told him.

“What?” he challenged.

“The battles won over himself,” she answered slowly. “His upright life, his unsullied honor toward all those women whom he made captive. In battles of that kind

there are great generals today. In that respect everyone can be a Pompey. I wish I could feel," she thought again of the Colonel's troubled face, "that you, without any doubt at all, were going to be one!"

"I see what you mean," at last he said, turning back to the book; but instantly pushed it away with a gesture of impatience and gazed moodily into the high polish of the mahogany table, as though somewhere down in its ancient graining an answer might be found to his troubled thoughts.

She watched him, with a curious look of interest.

"I don't understand it," he finally murmured. "By that very teachin', we're branded worse than any kind of beasts. There's somethin' wrong, Miss Jane; there's somethin' wrong!" A soft and peculiar light, which she had often seen when his pupils began to dilate and contract, fitfully crossed and recrossed them.

"I don't think I understand *you*," she replied.

"Then look!" he turned quickly. Again the curious light. She felt herself being charmed by it, and wondered if a quail might feel so while crouching before the point of a bird-dog. In a whisper-haunted voice he began to speak: "It's a summer night. A lazy mist hangs in the valley. I can see it — I've seen it most a thousand times! It hangs from the mountain's waist like a skirt on a half dressed woman, and above is all naked in the starlight. The air is still and clear, up thar," he slipped unconsciously into the familiar dialect as he grew more intense, "'n' the mist below is smooth 'n' white. Ye'd think ye could walk acrost on hit. No sign or sound



of the world kin touch this place, 'n' one might as well be standin' on some crag that overlooks eternity. Back in a cave a wild-cat wakes, 'n' sniffs the air; 'n' then he yawns, 'n' purrs, 'n' gits up 'n' walks with soft, padded feet ter look out on this silence. He sniffs the air, 'n' purrs agin, then lays his ears down flat 'n' sends a cry a-tearin' 'crosst the space. I've seen 'im; I've heerd 'im; I've laid back outen the wind 'n' watched 'im. He crouches 'n' waits. Soft, but nervous-like, his claws dig in 'n' out the airth. Then an answer comes, floatin' like a far-off cry of a child in pain. With ears still tight ag'inst his head, he freezes closter ter the ground, lashin' his stumpy tail from side ter side, 'n' purrin' deeper. Then he cries agin, 'n' waits. Purty soon, from out that mist, the answer comes agin, 'n' like a flash he's gone. Has he done wrong?"

He paused, still looking at her; and she, too strangely fascinated to turn away her eyes, stared back with parted lips.

"When the fu'st red bars of dawn flash up the sky," he went on, in the same mysterious voice, "showin' folks down in the valley that a day has come, a bird pulls his head out from his wing, 'n' blinks. I've seen 'em; I've laid 'n' watched 'em 'most a thousand times. He blinks agin, 'n' finds hisse'f a-lookin' squar in ter a pair of twinklin' eyes that seems ter've been awake all night, jest a-watchin', with sly longin', from 'tween two leaves. Maybe he'd seen those eyes afore, but not jest like this. Maybe only yestidday he passed 'em by—or even drove 'em away from food;—but



somethin' strange is in 'em now, somethin' strange that happened in the night. So he gives a jump at 'em, jest like a spring he didn't know was in his legs had been let loose; 'n' she laughs 'n' flies away. I've seen it happen 'most a thousand times. From tree ter tree, from bush ter bush, he follers. He stops; she stops. But when he tries agin, she flies. The next day they're buildin' a nest. Have they done wrong?"

He paused, but she did not take her eyes from his face. She might not have known his voice had ceased by the way she looked deep into his pupils—deep into the realm of his fancies. When he did speak again his words were scarcely audible:

"Whether I'm in this misty valley, or up in those scarred rocks 'n' crags—wherever I happen ter be—'n' send my call out ter space, I reckon I've got ter go when the answer comes floatin' back ter me;—whenever a dawn brings two eyes that have been watchin' fer no one else but me, I reckon I've got ter follow in jest that very way! We weren't made ter put up a fight when that call comes—fer that call don't mean fight, Miss Jane; it means surrender!"

"Oh, my mountain poet," she murmured, leaning gracefully nearer, "how can you wear a modern harness with such a soul! But we cannot live simply, as the animals and birds! Do you not see that a higher civilization has taught us the greater meaning of these things?"

"No," he answered bluntly. "That call is the greatest meaning. Nothin' don't stand one, two, three to it! If civilization chokes it, then civilization is wrong!"

A feeling of conflict stirred in her. Here was this towering young god whom the Great Chiseller had made so awkward, so uncontrollably selfish, yet otherwise so fine, and he was deliberately leaving the one path of all others which she had believed him most sure to follow. Ruth had sent him to her untarnished, and now, while in her keeping, he was drifting away! How could she ever answer those blind eyes if they questioned her with their calm, sightless stare? Her hand left his chair and rested lightly on his shoulder, and the voice which spoke to him seemed almost hard:

“You are stumbling into a false reasoning! Civilization does not choke the cry; it only directs the way men and women shall answer! You are not forgetting your Sunlight Patch, are you?”

He started to speak, but changed his mind; while, without being noticed, she bent nearer, intently watching.

“Well?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he said with a touch of uncertainty. “I reckon maybe it’s all wrong up at Sunlight Patch, too!”

Tremendously moved, startled, fearful lest he drift entirely from her reach, she slipped still lower and looked up into his face.

“What does this mean?” she asked. “What has happened to you, boy?”

Mac, feeling that something had gone wrong, came over and pushed his head beneath her arm; and with this she held him, while her other hand impulsively caught

Dale's sleeve. A feeling of protectorship, a faint consciousness of motherhood, gave her face an exquisite look of entreaty. What men's lives might be had never taken a definite place in her mind, for she had accepted much and passed over more. But she was not pleading now so much for him, as she was for the trust that had been imposed in her — the knowledge that her honor was answerable to the giver of that trust!

"You will not forget your Sunlight Patch, Dale?" she whispered. "You will promise me this?"

Slowly the answer for which she hoped began to frame itself upon his lips, and would have been spoken, had not Brent at this moment entered in search of the mountaineer, and got well within the room before seeing her.

She arose quietly, entirely free of self-consciousness, and was about to make a sign for him to wait until the promise should be put in words. But he was receiving altogether a different impression of the scene.

Yet, whatever his surprise, or the pain it brought, he was too well bred to be taken unawares, and immediately crossed to the shelves as though his errand were a book. The room was so large, and so deeply shadowed near the door, that he might do this; and, indeed, hoped she would believe herself to have been unobserved.

But the ruse had not deceived her. It had, instead, merely reflected his own thought; and, as this understanding flashed through her mind, she started forward, hurt; — but as quickly halted in confusion.

Rather hastily he took out the first book his fingers

touched and was starting back, when again she made as if to follow; but once more stopped before the humiliation of having considered it even necessary to explain to him. Yet one of her hands was still held out, a picture of desperate protest.

Of course he did not see this, for his eyes had not dared to turn in her direction after their first unforunate glance. Thus he went into the hall, and an instant later she was staring at the vacant door, now rapidly becoming blurred.

She gave one backward glance at Dale, but he had forgotten her existence and was poring over the battles of Pompey. Such indifference did not hurt her now: — it was the emptiness of that door! Still staring, silently beating her hands together in impotent rage, her face burning with mortification, two big tears rolled down her cheeks and fell upon the rug. Mac whined. He did not understand — he only felt.

“Mac,” she sobbed hysterically, “I wish you — could say all — all those things that go — with damn and hell!” then passionately ran from the room, and came up plump into the Colonel’s ample waistcoat.

“My God!” the old gentleman cried.

“Oh!” she gasped.

“Ah, ’tis you!” he said, his arms still about her. “I thought it was a wild-cat!”

“I thought it was a bear,” she sobbed.

“What? Crying? My dear, how is this?” he asked in alarm.

“I can’t tell you,” she murmured to his cravat.

“Can’t tell me! But I say you shall!” he hotly commanded.

“I’ll never do anything — when you say shall,” she retorted brokenly.

“God bless my soul,” he sputtered. “I want you to understand that you’ll do anything whether I say shall or not, when I find you crying!”

“That sounds funny,” she began to laugh, just a little. Then he began to laugh.

She took his hand after this and led him across the hall into the “long room,” and when they emerged ten minutes later there were no signs of tears.

“Never fear,” he chuckled, “I’ll tell him this very night.”

“Oh, but you mustn’t tell him,” she said, aghast. “I only want him to understand!”

“I see, I see,” he pinched her cheek. “You only want him to understand. Well, he shall understand this very night, then.”

“And you’ll thank him for sending me Mac?”

“Yes, yes, I’ll thank him, never fear. Wait now, till I order my horse; I’m going to ride home with you.”

“It isn’t dark yet, and I’m not afraid with Mac,” she demurred.

“It is nearly dark, and I’m very much afraid,” he bowed gallantly, “that I’ll too soon be forgot for this airedale gentleman if you go alone.”



## CHAPTER XXV

### ALMOST A RESOLUTION

Shortly after breakfast next day the Colonel dispatched Uncle Zack and his mule with a note to Jane. He might have telephoned this message, which simply read: "He understands, with an amplitude of grace which ill befits him. Come over this morning and straighten Lizzie out with her preserving. I hear that she is skinning every negro on the place, and I greatly fear for them, or her."

But, no; this must be on a written page and delivered by hand, for the old Colonel averred that no gentleman should assume to shriek his voice by mechanical device into the ear of a gentlewoman. In cases of illness, accident or fire, or perhaps in pressing business needs, the telephone had its uses; but a *faux pas* of the first order was to employ it socially.

So Zack's mule ambled down the pike and home again, bringing a reply which sparkled with merriment between its lines: "You have the maternal instinct of that lady who lived in a shoe! I'll be over to soothe Miss Liz and her poor, flayed darkies."

Arriving some hours later, she and Mac went directly to the shed where bright copper kettles were hanging in



a row above the old fashioned, stone oven fires. Several negro women were moving quickly and silently about, frightened and getting into each other's way. But now, as she drew near, there was a commotion, and she saw Miss Liz actually lay hands upon a girl of about seventeen and roughly draw her away from one of the simmering pots. Unobserved, and in utter amazement, Jane stood and stared at them.

"What were you about to do?" Miss Liz cried excitedly.

"I—I drapped de spoon in," the girl began to whimper.

"And were going to thrust in your hand and get it scalded to the bone?"

"I'se—I'se 'feerd you'd scold," she put her head down in her arm.

"Now, Amanda," Miss Liz looked at her reprovingly, "if you think I've nothing to do but sit up nights making poultices on account of your idiocy, you're very much mistaken! What does a spoon in the preserves amount to compared with your suffering?—and my suffering, when I'll be dead for sleep with nursing you? What do you all mean," she turned angrily upon the others, "by standing there and letting her attempt such a thing?"

"'Deed, I didn' see her, Miss Liz!" several voices were raised in protest.

"Of course, you didn't see her! You never see anything! I must be your eyes as well as your brains, you lazy pieces! Here, Amanda, take this handful of cherries and go out there under the trees and eat them; and don't

swallow the seeds, either, or I'll be sitting up with you yet!"

Jane came on then, and Miss Liz gratefully recited the multitude of grievances which had beset her since early morning. This seemed such a vast relief that she yielded to persuasion and left for a little rest. A few minutes later the shed was animated with a buzz of happy voices. Fingers, more skilled than Miss Liz had given herself the opportunity of realizing, now traveled with twice their former speed, and into the simmering kettles was being cooked a geniality which all preserves must have to be appreciated.

Half an hour later, leaving this crew in splendid working order, she walked slowly around to the front of the house. Out before her, in the shaded group of rustic chairs, sat the Colonel and Brent, somewhat apart from, but facing, Miss Liz, who seemed to be holding them at bay. Had the men been alone Jane might doubtless have gone indoors and sought the commander of the kettles, for she did not care to see Brent just at once. But the human dice had fallen otherwise, and there seemed no alternative but straight ahead.

As she drew near she noticed that Miss Liz's cheeks were flushed with some new excitement, and guessed she was being worried by a process of serious teasing. Her eyes then sought the reason for this and discovered it in two julep goblets, cuddled guiltily behind a nearby tree. For as Miss Liz had come across the lawn to join them half an hour earlier, this refreshment was hurried out of sight — the Colonel's resolution of independence notwith-

standing — and now, before the ice could entirely melt, Brent, by a polite tirade against the prim old lady's pet hobby, trusted her increasing wrath to clarify the situation by routing her housewards. While he and the Colonel knew this would inevitably come, her anger was not yet at sufficient heat, and she held her ground with defiance bristling from every stiff fold of her black silk dress.

Jane gave the men a reproachful look, and Brent's face flushed when he saw her eyes hover about the juleps; but she entered their scheme by asking:

“Why does everyone seem so serious?”

“My dear,” Miss Liz began to fire, “your father had suggested a Fourth of July celebration — a most fitting tribute to our departed heroes — but I regret to say that two not very high minded gentlemen —” The lorgnette, turned first upon the Colonel and then on Brent, completed her indictment.

“I'm sure we are misunderstood,” Brent murmured, but the Colonel maintained a discreet silence.

“Can it be, Mr. McElroy,” she glared at him with straightening lips, “that I misunderstood you to say George Washington was not a paragon of truth?”

“You mean a bird?” he innocently asked.

“A bird, sir?” the black dress gave a startled rustle.

“Excuse me; I thought you said ptarmigan.”

The conventional old Colonel committed a very deplorable breach of etiquette — he snickered; but twisted it into a lusty cough, gutturally explaining:

“Really, my cold!”

“Mr. McElroy,” she turned severely to Jane, “has been blaspheming — blaspheming the traditions of our noble heroes! My dear, it is positively disgusting!”

“The subject is quite a closed book to him,” Jane sweetly replied, and the Colonel was threatened with another coughing spell.

“I didn’t say anything against heroes,” the engineer explained, “except that none of them can measure up to our heroines.”

But from the toss of Miss Liz’s head this had not brought him a grain of grace.

“What hero did I malign?”

“You said,” she snapped, “that Washington was neither truthful nor honest!”

“Oh, now, I couldn’t have!” he protested. “I merely said, in regard to the cherry tree episode, his intention was not only to cut, but to run. You’ve heard the expression ‘cut and run’? Well, we get it from George.”

“Your surmises are intolerable!”

“Miss Liz, it isn’t fair to condemn until you hear me!” It was the tone of a much misunderstood penitent, and she hesitated. “I’ll leave it to the Colonel,” he was continuing, but the old gentleman briskly interrupted:

“You’ll do nothing of the kind, sir!”

“Then I’ll leave it to Jane — she may have some remote idea of history — if I’m scandalizing your hero by saying he never set us the extraordinary example you think. He was just a normal boy, a considerate boy, and had no intention of worrying the family about that tree; but it so happened that before he had time to sweep

up the chips — which shows he was a tidy boy! — his governor swooped right down on top of him, you might say, and the game was up. George had cut, you see, Miss Liz, but he couldn't run — and here's where he showed himself the genius which ultimately resulted in our independence. He knew in a flash that this was a tight place; it was an awful tight place; in fact, you might say it pretty nearly squeezed him all over. There was the prostrate tree, right before the old gentleman's eyes; and there was the old gentleman, mad as hops, with his cane trembling in the air. There wasn't another boy, or even another hatchet, in fifteen miles — and little George's mind analyzed the full significance of that fact. It didn't take him a second to see how the situation had to be handled; so, really, Miss Liz, I think our lesson should be drawn, not from his love of truth, but from his quick and accurate judgment. In all the English language there was just one thing for him to say, and he said it. That's genius, Miss Liz — but not always veracity."

"Some persons may think that way," she compressed her lips, taking care to give the proper emphasis to persons. "There is no accounting for the benighted mind. Thanks be to God that every man, woman and child of intelligence knows otherwise."

Delivering herself of this, she calmly folded her hands and smiled at Jane with an expression of triumph. Brent took a fleeting glance toward the juleps.

But something now smote the Colonel's conscience. She looked so thin and frail! He remembered, too, the suspicious watering of Zack's bad eye, and what his good



eye had seen in the "long room." In a gentle voice he said:

"My dear, I hear that the sisters are asking where good cherries may be had. It seems the convent would put up a certain cordial; and, if you are passing there, would you inquire how many bushels they wish, and say you will send them over with your compliments?"

"Thank you, John," she looked forgivingly across at him. "If Jane would like, we may go now. The cherries are at their primest state. I shall stop a moment," she turned and took Jane's arm, "to see how our preserving goes, my dear. Can we be home for luncheon? And will you remain to have it with us?"

Even before they had quite disappeared, Brent rescued the still palatable juleps, and he and the Colonel were testing them.

"She's a good soul," the old gentleman murmured. "I'm glad for her sake that Zack remained discreet the other day."

"I'm glad for all our sakes," Brent gravely nodded. "Though I suppose he wouldn't have done it under any circumstances."

"He's a perspicacious nigger," the Colonel chuckled. In a moment he spoke more soberly: "I've been in town every day, and have heard no single word about Potter. Do you suppose he's dead somewhere in the hills?"

"Oh, no," Brent evasively answered. "He's all right. A shot at him would scare him away for a month. He has too much on his conscience."



“Well, I shall persist,” the old gentleman sighed.

They were leaning back — just as two contented idlers in the shade; but each with a weight upon his heart to rob it of that needed peace which makes for perfect days. Yet, Brent could hardly now be called an idler. He had worked late the night before plotting his field notes, and the afternoon would be devoted to this same pursuit. Finally he said:

“Suppose I had killed Tusk! Would you stand by me?”

“Yes, sir,” the old gentleman opened his eyes, “I would stand by you with a shot gun until I had the satisfaction of seeing you safely locked up in jail.”

A longer pause.

“Assuming that I’d acted in self defense, would there be much of a stir about it?”

“Hm,” came the noncommittal response, but this time with closed eyes, for the Master of Arden had passed the point of active interest.

It was a morning to invite sleep. No leaf stirred, but the shaded air was fresh and comforting. Great cumulus clouds lazily, ponderously, glided across the sky, prototypes of nomadic wandering. Somewhere back by the stables a mellow farm bell proclaimed across the smiling fields the hour of noon; then negroes straightened up from the rows of young tobacco, stretched their tired backs, and in groups wandered toward a cool spring where their dinner buckets had been left. Yet it was some little while before the Colonel’s midday meal.

Again Brent asked (or perhaps he only thought, for thoughts have a knack of seeming loud to those at the threshold of Nod) :

“ I wonder how it would feel to stop drinking and buckle all the way down? ”

No answer.

“ If she could only care for me — after I’ve wiped the bad spots out! ”

No answer.

“ But I’m such a pup — and what a devilishly sweet miracle she is! ”

Still no answer, so he may have been only thinking, after all. At any rate, the Colonel remained steeped in tranquil apathy.

The messengers to the convent, returning somewhat late, caught sight of the men beneath the trees and went that way in order to bring them in for luncheon. But as they approached, Jane stopped. She saw the immaculately white pleated bosom of the Colonel’s shirt bulging out to support his chin, which rested firmly and comfortably in it. Then her eyes went to Brent, occupying three chairs for himself and his legs, while one arm hung inertly to the ground and his head lolled back in childish abandon. She smiled. But this was not what had stopped her. By the hand of each of these sleeping men, in glaring, accusing sight, stood a julep goblet.

Miss Liz, now wondering at her hesitation, was making ready to raise the terrifying lorgnette, and this would have spelled disaster. Those penetrating lenses would never have missed the dazzling light reflected from that

traitorous silver. Smiling again, though with a dull heart ache as her gaze still lingered on the sprawling Brent, she took Miss Liz's wrist in the nick of time, saying:

"They're asleep. Let's go in first and brush off." She knew the invariable appeal which "brushing off" had for prim Miss Liz.

Soon the dainty chimes, manipulated in the front hall to the enduring joy of Uncle Zack, fell upon the sleeping ears in vain, and the old servant came across the lawn to call them. He also stopped, in dumb amazement, then hastened forward to gather the telltale evidence beneath his jacket. This aroused the Colonel and, after him, Brent, who looked up blinking.

"For de Lawd sake," the old darky frowned on them with all the severity of his five-feet-one, "don' you-all know Miss Liz is done got back! — an' heah you is sleepin' wid dese globuts a-settin' out in plain sight! I never seed sich reckerless doin's since I'se bawnd — an' Marse Brent ain't no moh'n smelt his'n, at dat! Luncheon is sarved, Marse John," he added, with his usual formality.

"By Jove, Colonel," Brent laughed, "they might have caught us nicely!"

"It's God's truth, sir," the old gentleman chuckled, taking his arm and starting toward the house.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### “WHAT EYES HAVE YOU?”

The late azure twilights and early salmon dawns of June merged into July with no more ado than a changed date line on the Colonel's morning paper. Days were of little concern at Arden, other than being days — as the library calendar now gave accusing evidence by pointing at the previous May. Miss Liz, to be sure, was invariably aware when Sundays came; being told by that unnamable pressure of peace which to most women would proclaim the Sabbath even in places of utter solitude. Otherwise, the weeks might be composed of Mondays or Fridays, since school had been out.

Jane, this particular morning playing with Bip and Mac somewhat apart from the Colonel and Brent who were engrossed in a game of chess, had been critically alive to the Sunday habits of these two families which had come to mean so much to her; especially in relation to the little boy. Miss Liz not only supported her, but freely expressed her indignation at the child's parental indifference, and that good lady's tone was one of deepest injury whenever the subject was mentioned. For she had indeed tried to awaken Bip's spiritual mind two days after he was born, by sending him an embroidered bib with a baby blue motto: “I thank the Lord for what I

eat — Soup and mush and bread and meat!” If he grew into an ungrateful man, she, at least, had done her duty! Bob paid small attention to matters of church, and Ann had easily acquired the negative enthusiasm of her father who frankly admitted he could not keep from going to sleep, even during the best of sermons. Yet, although he lived by this benighted declaration, he was known as a Christian gentleman — of the kind whose hands were never so tightly clasped in prayer that they could not reach his pocket.

Jane now looked up as, with a delighted laugh, the Colonel leaned back; while Brent, in pretended irritation, mused the chess men in disorder over the board.

“Fifteen moves, sir!” the old gentleman cried. “That’s a beat you’ll not forget!”

“It’s the worst I ever had,” Brent admitted. “You can’t do it again!”

“I’ll bet you I can, sir,” the old gentleman declared, then whispering, “after a julep!”

“Whew!” Brent gave a long, clear, incredulous whistle, and called over to Jane: “Did you hear this boaster?”

But the whistle had a more subtle intention than emphasis, and within doors Uncle Zack, dozing in a kitchen chair, became at once active. This newly inaugurated signal immeasurably pleased the Colonel, who could not himself whistle.

“Do either of you know it’s Sunday?” she asked.

“By Jove, now, it isn’t, is it?” Brent looked at her in concern.



“And I’m going to church,” she continued. “Would you like to go, Colonel?”

The old gentleman cleared his throat and began searching closely over the table for his glasses, which weren’t there.

“I should say he’s just about crazy to go,” Brent watched him. “Don’t speak for a minute, or he’ll die of joy. How ingenious you are in planning his amusements!”

“More amusement is coming, I should judge, from the dulcetness of your whistle,” she drily observed.

The men exchanged sheepish glances. Brent laughed.

“Admitted,” he said. “But it was not you we were trying to deceive. If you tell us how you knew, I’ll tie the Colonel on a horse and let you lead him to the altar. She must be a witch, sir!”

“She is, indeed. A charming one, who bewitched me the very first moment I laid eyes on her — and there’s been no change in my condition since, madam,” the old gentleman bowed to her with courtly grace.

“Then,” Brent tried to corner him, “until you admit yourself de-charmed, church this morning is your only alternative.”

“It would be a very good place for your soul, young man,” he sternly retorted. “When I was a gay spark, ladies of — of almost the same loveliness,” he bowed again, “were kept busy weeks in advance accepting my invitations to church, sir! The very rocks and rills of our beloved Commonwealth would strike me dead, sir,



if I had permitted so enchanting an opportunity to escape!” And once more he bowed low before her.

“Mistress Jane,” Brent sprang to his feet and bent double with an abandon that the Colonel’s old bones would have resented, “will you adorn my buggy as far as the meetin’-house?”

“You overwhelm me,” she murmured.

“And, will you tell us, O gracious bewitcher, how you knew what I was whistling for?”

“Help me up and I will,” her hands went out to him. “When you whistled, Uncle Zack yelled: ‘I’se fixin’ ’em!’”

“I shall have that nigger shot,” the Colonel cried in delight. “Suppose poor, dear Lizzie had been here!”

“What time shall we start?” she turned to Brent, seeing Zack on his way from the house, and somehow feeling that she could not stay just then. Her aversion for this was increasing. She did not know how firmly, how stubbornly, Brent had begun to shut down on his own indulgences.

“Any time you say,” he agreeably answered. “Is it town?”

“No, the convent chapel.”

“But — er — you’ll forgive my wretched memory if I can’t seem to recall when these things take up?”

“Five o’clock, over there,” she smiled.

“Five! I never heard of such an hour for church, did you, Colonel?”

“Most certainly, sir!” His affirmation suggested a

long personal acquaintance with such matters. "They always begin at five!"

Jane gave him a quick, twinkling glance, but only added:

"I thought the vesper service might be cooler, and a pleasanter drive. We ought to start a little after four, don't you think so? And we'll take Bip, and Dale."

"I wouldn't stop there," Brent moodily suggested.

"I think that will be enough for one day," she laughed. "They're the principal ones whom — not who ought to go, you understand, but whom I want to go."

"But Bip is too young," he protested.

"'Suffer the little children —'" she said prettily.

"He'll go to sleep!"

"Then you may hold him."

"Maybe he'll snore!"

"Then you have my permission to choke him," she laughed.

Yet, he was very much in a pout, and staring gloomily at the ground.

"You'll be awfully crowded," he said at last, "with Dale in the buggy, too!"

"We'll take the surrey."

"And he'll be bored stiff!"

"Not from hearing complimentary things said to me," she gently rebuked him.

"Oh, Jane, be a sport and let's go alone! I'm worth saving, ain't I, Colonel?"

"You can't prove it by me, you rogue," the old gentleman asserted.

“I may think about it,” she compromised, smiling over her shoulder as she turned away.

They drew up to the table and arranged the chess board. Zack stood waiting for the goblets, having no intention to leave these treacherous exhibits again at large should a spirit of fatigue overtake the players. So there was a prolonged pause while the men fortified themselves for the coming fray, and when the Colonel noisily sucked the very last drop through the cooling ice — and took a piece of this in his mouth to crunch — he leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction. Zack, as he walked slowly away, also sighed, but it held a curious mixture of perplexity and anticipation: perplexity, because Brent had scarcely drunk a third of his julep, and anticipation for an obvious reason.

“All the same,” the engineer announced when they were alone, “Bip is too young!”

“Of course, he’s too young,” the Colonel heartily agreed. “Anybody’s too young, or too old, or too something, when it comes to being third person on such a pleasant prospect. I would stand no intrusion, sir!”

“I didn’t mean just that,” Brent flushed.

“Certainly not, you altruistic and good natured liar,” the old gentleman chuckled. “Come, sir: here goes pawn to King four! Now be on your guard!”

“To King four,” Brent replied, leaning over and pushing out his own King’s pawn.

They had not been playing many minutes when the Colonel, pausing to light a cigar, looked up with a start of surprise. Brent wheeled about and there stood Tom

Hewlet, swaying awkwardly and weeping. It was uncanny the way he had approached so near without being heard.

“Well, Tom,” the Colonel asked sharply, “what do you want?”

“I just want to call it quits, Cunnel. I ain’t done nuthin’ to be locked up for!”

“You’re very drunk,” the old gentleman thundered. “I’m surprised you would approach my place in such a condition!”

“There wasn’t no other way, Cunnel. I’m sorry, I am, ’bout what I aimed to do — an’ I won’t no moh, if Mister McElroy’ll let up! I’m a hard workin’ man, an’ got a big fam’ly to keer for!”

“Do you know what he’s talking about?” the old gentleman asked Brent.

“I told you some of it the other day — but I think an approaching delirium tremens is partially responsible for this!”

“Ah, so you did! Tom, you tried to practice blackmail!” The Colonel’s eyes were glowering.

“But I ain’t no moh,” Hewlet turned his back and began anew to weep. “Don’t do nuthin’ to me!”

Brent motioned the Colonel to let him speak.

“Tom,” he said, “Mister Dulany and I have been looking for you, to buy your farm, so you can move to Missouri where your brother is.” He paused so Tom could grasp this. “You don’t have to sell, and we won’t force you against your will.” He paused again. “But if you stay here, and want me to let up on you, you’ll

have to stop drinking; and report to the Colonel every day for a month —”

“For six months,” the Colonel corrected.

“— for six months,” Brent continued, “so he can see if you’re sober. Also, you must plow up your weeds and get the farm in shape. Either of these plans is open for twenty-four hours. Take tonight to think it over, and tell us tomorrow.”

“Gawd, I’ll go to Missouri if I can sell the farm!” he cried.

“That’s better. How much is it worth, Colonel?”

“It’s good land,” the old gentleman answered. “I’ll give a hundred and fifty an acre, because it adjoins me.”

“How much is it mortgaged for?” Brent turned to Hewlet, who seemed surprised at the question.

“Nuthin’,” he doggedly answered.

“You might as well tell the truth; we’re bound to know it!”

“Nuthin’, I said,” he looked shiftily down. ‘N’ I don’t take no hund’ed ’n’ fifty a acre, neither — from no railroad!”

“The same old hold-up,” Brent murmured across the chess board.

But the Colonel, still obsessed by the old aching worry, was just then engrossed with another thought. Clearing his throat, he said — trying to do it casually:

“By the way, Tom, where is Tusk Potter?”

“I don’t know, Cunnel; I ain’t seen ’im for a ’coon’s age.”

“Oh, nothing at all, nothing at all,” the old gentleman



hastily added, as though Tom had asked why he wanted to know.

“ Well, how about our proposition? ” Brent inquired.

“ It’s wu’th three hund’ed a acre, ” he grumbled.

“ One-fifty is our price, Tom. Think it over before we change our minds! ”

“ Aw, hell, ” he sneered, “ you can’t bluff me! ”

“ Get off of my place, you drunken scoundrel! ” the Colonel, towering with rage, sprang up reaching for his cane.

But Tom, panic stricken, had turned and fled.

Sighing, the old gentleman dropped back into his chair.

“ Let me see — where are we! ” he said, looking closely at the board. “ You’d moved your Queen to her Bishop’s second, hadn’t you? Ah, yes! Then my Bishop takes your Bishop’s pawn, and checks. Now, sir, watch out! I’m coming after you in good earnest! ”

As it happened no one intruded upon the drive to church. When four o’clock came around Bip had taken Mac down on the creek with Bob and Mesmie, to hunt under the stones for crawfish.

The Colonel disappeared shortly after dinner for his nap, and Brent sat alone under the trees indulging several rather curious speculations. His eyes were closed, though in no sense was he sleepy. He was thinking of a force; a new, an entirely new force; a perplexing force that each day more determinedly gripped and held him. He had at last taken his character into his hands and was contemplating its remodelling.

There comes a time to the life of every man when he



shall sit in hollow solitude and gaze upon the error of his way. To some this may be at the bud, with every outlook forward; to others, not till they are well along the path of yellow leaves. For it is not man who makes this moment. Circumstance, pure and simple, leads to his sublime communion, and circumstance is of the earth. A man may sin, and keep on sinning with never a qualm, till reality sends in the bill. Then it is as if he had stepped upon a corpse at night, and he is shocked beyond his strength to move. Whether this be the specter of public shame, of physical decay, or the ruin of a fellow, and however far along the highway of his life it may appear, there still must come that hour to each who has unworthily yielded, when he stands appalled; that hour when he raises eyes and arms in mute despair up, up — somewhere. This is God's hour; then is where His mercy conquers. But grim realities are not required to touch all hearts. It does not need the jail, it does not need the fiery lash of a ruined woman's pleading, it does not need the death-bed of one beloved; because the Kingdom of Earth is such that just a pair of eyes, a damask cheek, the murmuring of a name at twilight, may grow beneath some magic dew into a power that holds one hand upon the Throne and with the other meets mankind. Love! — another son of God; sometimes welcomed, sometimes cherished, sometimes flattered, sometimes crucified!

Brent clenched his teeth. In years his own outlook was across the sprouting fields of life, but to his hope of winning Jane he could gaze only back along the path

of yellow leaves. He realized how truly this was of his own doing, and unsparingly laid the blame at its rightful place. With whatever sincerity he might curse his follies, with whatever fierce pleasure he would strangle them for her sake, their abandonment now could not weld that link which would have united the chains of their destinies. Too late! The utter hopelessness of this made him groan aloud, as he had the first night they met in the circle of cedars; then, from a false and poisonous pride; now, from humility and a man's honest grief.

The sound of wheels brought him back to the time and place. He looked up, shaking off the spell; but his hands were tightly shut, as if he might be gripping the last tatters of abandoned hope. With a quick gesture he made as though to wrap them close about him, and then smiled at the realism into which his earnestness was leading.

Jane was standing on the porch, waiting; and a darky had brought around Brent's own horse and buggy. Some time before this, loud calls from the house and faintly returned answers from the creek had apprized him of Bip's shameless truancy; but he was fully expecting the mountaineer to go with them until this very minute when he saw what character of vehicle stood before the house. He arose and crossed to her, casually asking:

"Where's Dale?"

Two lights crossed the lenses of her eyes, but no timer could have caught them.

"Where?" she asked. "Who knows? He's so utterly oblivious to everything, living in an age so long

before the Christian era, that it would be a paradox to take him into a latter-day church.”

While speaking she had come down the steps. He helped her in and settled himself comfortably beside her.

“Did you notice how he flew from the dinner table straight back to his books?” she asked, as they turned out of the gate. “When I looked over his shoulder a while ago he was with Cicero again. He adores Cicero!”

“I’m beginning to like old Cis myself,” Brent forced a grin and let the horse out a step. “Never knew he could be such a good friend till now. Crawfish and Cicero! — henceforth my amulets!”

But he was not happy, and she knew it. To deceive her he was play-acting, and she knew this, too.

The sun lay behind them, and the afternoon was rich with every enticing charm. The chapel, in modest seclusion, stood off in the valley, and was reached from Arden by a typical country lane — as narrow as it was noiseless — rising and dipping through miles and miles of rolling fields and woods. Its sides were thickly woven vines, and younger trees and shrubs, which gave out a woody fragrance; especially in the cooler, damper places sloping down to meet and pass beneath some small, clear stream.

This valley was in its most languid mood. Bluegrass stood ripe in the pastures, each stem tilting wearily beneath a burden of seed. Wheat was in the shock, and its sheaves leaned against each other as though fatigued with having brought so large a yield; while the golden fields of stubble lent a softer tone to the sturdy corn, or

the less mature hemp and tobacco. It was a season when at morning the harvester's call, or at noon the wood-dove's melancholy note, or at evening the low of Jersey herds, were irresistible invitations to poetic drowsiness.

Brent slowly turned and looked at her. Up to this time he had been speaking only of indifferent things.

"I think it is all I can do to keep from making love to you!"

Her heart gave a bound as she recognised, not the bantering, but a very serious, Brent had spoken. Yet she managed, even if a trifle late, to answer frankly:

"You already do so many useless things; — I wouldn't, Brent!"

"I call that a diplomatic master-stroke," he smiled. "But it's insufficient."

"Then appropriate," she added.

"I accept your judgment," he slowly replied, "because your judgment is fair. Insufficient is the very word, and appropriate to everything I've ever done, or have a right to expect from you. I was thinking it out this afternoon before we started. So you've rebuked me, Lady Wonderful, better than you know."

She was not quite following this — rather was she hoping he would stop. The afternoon was too enticing — too charged with a dangerous spell. She saw warning signals being waved at her from all directions. The deep, sincere tone of his voice was one; two little ground squirrels watching them from a mossy ledge of rock — two white butterflies fanning a lace-weed bloom — two majestic birds, with moveless, outstretched wings, weav-

ing graceful aerial figures far up in the sky — made only a part of the afternoon which spoke to her. Everything which rested in the charm of this day, waved to her sweet warnings!

“Do you know what the country is saying?” she asked quickly.

“What the country is saying?” he repeated after her.

“Yes, this country, all about us, everywhere! It’s telling me something, and I just wondered if you could be getting the message, too.”

He pretended to be listening.

“I can hear a brown thrasher warbling to me how much we love you! Is that what you mean?”

“I wish you would be serious,” she said — being, in fact, very far from the wish. “The day is so lovely, so abundant with a nameless something which comes to so few days, that it’s asking if you won’t try not to spoil it with silly misrelations. Can’t you hear it, now?”

“There’s no doubt about my hearing it now,” he gloomily admitted. “I suppose we should have brought Dale, after all!”

“Don’t spoil it in another way,” she laughed. “You’re such a — I was about to say kid, but that’s slangy, and I detest it. You’re slangy — awfully, Brent — aren’t you!”

In spite of himself his face relaxed into a grin. There was no resisting Jane’s appeals, and if she wanted now to be quiet, or talk about anything under the sun, at this admirable day’s request, he was, for the time being, willing. He told her this, and it is one of the anomalies of



human infelicity that she felt a tinge of disappointment at his ready acquiescence.

“I’ve always loved this lane,” she murmured, after not too long a pause. “Isn’t it the soul of peace?”

“Peace? How can you?” he looked down at her. “See the struggle! Honeysuckle, trumpet-vine, poison-ivy, wild-grape, alder — and everything else which I can’t name — crowding and tangling and choking out each other’s lives! You call it peace?”

They had reached a crest of a hill and, down in front of them half a mile on, stood the chapel, so snugly placed that only its little cross could be seen above the tree-tops, summoning the indolent country-side to prayer. With her eyes resting on it, she answered:

“The approach to your devotions seems to have made you pessimistic.”

“My devotions are here, at my side,” he said in a low voice. “And my pessimism is caused by the true glass of my nature being held honestly before my eyes. It started cutting up this way today after you left us, and ever since I’ve not been able to spare myself. I don’t know how to make you understand it — perhaps you don’t want to understand it — but the two sides of this lane seem so peculiarly expressive of my life that I see no peace in them at all.”

“The lane might not be so attractive without a medley of rioting things,” she answered dreamily. “Yet, it could be improved by cutting out the poison-ivy!”

“If that were cut out of the lane I mean, there would



be little left. It seems to have taken possession of— of my lane!”

“Are there not gardeners,” she smiled a wee bit tenderly up at him, “who know how it could be done?”

“But I have no gardener.” The wistfulness in his voice checked her smile.

They were at the chapel now, and he drove beneath the grove of trees, helped her down, and then unchecked and tied the horse near a few others already there. She waited. Slowly they went up to the silent door, but on its threshold he touched her arm.

“May I find a gardener?” He was looking down with a strong appeal in his eyes.

“For your sake, do,” she hurriedly whispered, and went in.

They were early, and the chapel seemed to be dozing in a cool gloom which was softly set in motion as she glided, like a graceful shadow, up the aisle. He followed with more sturdy strides. So very quiet and vault-like was the place, that each worshipper there before them could be heard turning to see who came; and when he finally stretched back in the pew of her selection, the creaking of its heavy walnut joints let loose the echoes of a hundred years.

She had knelt, but he sat back watching her. The slowly westering sun, piercing the outside branches and filtering a gleam of rose through one of the gothic windows, touched her raised face that was in no need of color. And while she gazed upon the crucifix, he looked

tenderly upon her who was typifying the most lovely purity he had to that time known.

A man entered, carrying a babe, and demurely followed by his wife. They sat in the pew across; the woman coughed, and again the nave, the ceiling and the altar were filled with hollow echoes. But other worshippers now came, and their arrival seemed fully to arouse the little chapel for its service, dispelling its ghostly sounds for the rustlings of life.

In the midst of this Brent picked up a book of prayer, and on its first page wrote: "And not for your sake?" — then passed it to her with the pencil.

She read it, closed the place on the tip of her gloved finger, and slowly raised her eyes full again upon the crucifix. The pencil slipped from her lap and rolled beneath the pew, but when he moved to recover it she shook her head; — and whatever the answer might have been remained a secret between herself and the torn Christ.

Someone moved behind the chancel rail, touching with a lighted taper the wick of each holy candle until the altar sparkled with a score of tiny flames. She thought of his altar — his secret altar, and its tiny taper flame.

Now the man across from them laid his sleeping baby in its mother's lap, quietly and awkwardly arose, and tip-toed out. He appeared again in the choir loft, removed his coat and waistcoat, spat upon his hands and grasped the bellows handle. Over this once, twice, thrice he bent, as though bowing before a symbol of the Trinity, and throughout the church fluttered a low, trembling sigh of the organ, as it breathed its first deep breaths of life

since the morning service. It was not a mighty instrument, but the nun who demurely came and sat upon the bench, now touched the keys, and its harmonies held the little chapel in the grove enthralled.

The sun was almost down as they turned homeward. It was the same drive, except that the cool of evening was in the air, and a heavier fragrance came from the tangles on either side.

“Forgive me if I’m quiet,” she said. “I haven’t been to church for so shamefully long, and it so recalls the sweet years spent across there in the convent, that — that I suppose I’m moody.”

“I believe I understand almost how you feel. But do you know what I thought when the light was shining through that window on your face?”

“Oh, please, Brent,” her voice trembled, “I’m not a bit ready for you to tell me anything you think about me — ever!”

He saw a mist in her eyes, and for awhile kept silent.

“I wonder why it is,” he gently asked, “that men stand in such awe of a girl’s tears?”

“It isn’t the tears, I believe,” she tried to laugh, “but intuitively in awe of the mysterious things which cause them. Women must be very silly about it. I know I’m getting to be, for in all my life I’ve never wanted to cry so many times as this summer. Maybe it’s nerves. But sometimes we do feel so helpless that just the sheer weight of sorrow, or the buoyancy of happiness, will sort of press tears from our eyes, in spite of ourselves.”

“Which of those hidden forces has caused these?”

“Neither,” she looked brightly up at him. “There aren’t any tears, you see.”

After they had gone another mile in silence, he drily observed:

“Church hasn’t left a very salubrious effect on us. It’s made me feel as desolate as a haunted house, and the only impression I brought away is that a man must spit on his hands to pump an organ. Funny sort of a stunt, wasn’t it — having him come up out of the audience that way?”

“It didn’t seem strange to me, Brent. You’re probably too literal.”

“There isn’t such a tremendous scope for the poetic, when a rube wiggles out of his clothes right in the pulpit, you might say!”

“Audience and pulpit,” she gaily cried. “What a born churchman you are! But, Brent,” her voice grew wondrously sincere, “there was something more to it: the simplicity with which that farmer, whose boots have been in the soil for six days, could merge so actually into those things which make for ideality! How few of us who cannot play an organ would deign to offer ourselves as pumpers for its prosy bellows! Think of the music we are denying ourselves, and others about us, merely because we lack the kind of spirit to take off our coats and,” she looked whimsically up at him, “spit on our hands before the world!”

She knew that he was listening, but little suspected how much her words had moved him until he spoke. There was a depth of passion in his voice which she had never

heard except upon that one day when he called her as she was going toward the house.

“What eyes have you? To what white heights do you dare climb? You seem literally to push away the clouds and gaze straight through that dome which marks the farthest limit of my imaginings! You seem to tear it with your hands, and look through!—you put your lips to the rift and whisper with the angels!—and you always bring a little something back which does men good! Oh, Jane, Jane! How honestly I wish—”

But he did not finish the wish, and in another few minutes they were at Flat Rock, with Bob welcoming them and helping her to alight.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A QUICK FUSE

Days of restlessness followed that drive to the chapel. Brent said one afternoon in desperation that they were so heavy and oppressive he was actually creaking under them; — and Uncle Zack, after watching him critically as he walked away, shook his head in doubt whether he could hear anything or not. But the work went stubbornly on, in spite of the dull gnawing which made it, and reform — and life, indeed — seem meaningless. With this grew another worry, shared more deeply by the Colonel, as time brought no hint of Tusk's fate. Both men were beginning to believe that he had crawled back in some ravine and died, but neither would voice so dismal a suggestion.

It was the Fourth of July. In order to dispel some of the gloom, the Colonel had issued a proclamation calling both families to assemble there upon the lawn at four of the clock, to celebrate, in a sane or insane manner, the patriotic day. To Dale, Bip and Aunt Timmie this brought much excitement. The feelings of Miss Liz were also stirred, but rather with a solemn thrill of reverence for her departed heroes.

Boy-like, the old gentleman had sat up late the pre-



vious night checking off an assortment of fireworks especially ordered from the city, and not infrequently examining with pleasurable interest some new pyrotechnic fountain or bomb. But these were for the grand evening display. The afternoon was to be given principally to oratory. Bip, however, should fire a few crackers, and Dale had yielded to Brent's request to demonstrate the mountain people's skill at rifle shooting. Tales of their prowess, the engineer had declared, were more wonderful than believable.

The Colonel had just beaten him at another game of chess, and they were now leaning back in their chairs weary from the exertion, for it had been a long and difficult struggle, when gradually the murmur of excited voices floated in to them. One of these was ponderous and irascible, while the other possessed the fire of youth. As the disputants neared the gate both men looked up with understanding smiles. Then presently the rickety buggy creaked into view, with Aunt Timmie giving angry tugs at the reins but in no wise stimulating her old mule. On his pony, Bip rode.

She had awakened that morning in a direful mood on account of being entrusted the evening before with a package of fire crackers, each of which, she indignantly told Bob, would put out the little boy's eyes in no time! All during the drive to Arden she had been shaking her head and murmuring her intention of burying them in the creek;—a calamity which Bip was resisting with every argument in his power. They were too hotly engaged in this to notice the silently amused men, and

wended their way to the stables, the voices becoming fainter but not losing their strident tones.

As the hour of festivities approached, it was more than curiosity which dragged Dale from the library. The proclamation said that he would hear oratory of the good and stirring kind — the kind of which he had read in the days of Lincoln and Clay. There would be something to learn, and, but for this, the lure of his books might have held him fast. Now, tremendously interested, he was sitting on the top porch step, with his long rifle upright between his knees. This was merely for his own part in the celebration when he intended to satisfy the doubting Brent.

A great deal of badinage accompanied the festivity. Bob acted as master of ceremonies, the Colonel and Brent were pledged to orations, while the three ladies and Mac constituted the vast throng of spellbound onlookers. Bip, having for the moment forgotten his fire crackers, was dancing with delighted anticipation. Zack was teeming with mirth — abetted, no doubt, by a heel-tap or two from the Colonel's retiring goblet. Seated in a half circle on the grass were clustered the pickaninnies and their grinning forebears. All was ready, and over the scene Miss Liz smiled with placid contentment. It was fitting, she had more than once this day averred, for them to turn their minds patriotward.

Bob now stepped out and introduced the first great feature: "Bip, the Bouncing Buster of Boozicks and the Fearless Firer of Fireworks, with the admirable assistance of that adaptable and adamant Timorous-are-

ye-poor-mortal-worms, will twist the tail of the tawny lion and break the barbarous bandetta of benighted Britain!" This being announced in one sentence, Bob promptly collapsed amidst cheers from the porch and high squeaks from the darker circle — with the one exception of Aunt Timmie. For Zack had maliciously whispered: "He done call you a-dam-ant"—and, indeed, she had heard it with her own ears. A picture of outraged dignity now, she stalked grandly away. It took ten minutes to get the celebration once more in running order, and Aunt Timmie brought to a better understanding.

The little boy advanced into the circle, placed a fire cracker in the grass, and lit it. But, with the first sputtering of its fuse, the old negress clasped him to her breast and rushed out of harm's way. It was not an exhibition of which a Fearless Firer might have been proud, nor did the screams of laughter greeting it serve to palliate his anger. But it was neither fun nor anger with Aunt Timmie. Her mind was a torment of fear lest he be maimed for life. Since early morning she had employed every art, every diplomatic ruse in which her race is so proficient, to avoid this dangerous pastime. Now suddenly, and without warning, she stopped in a startled attitude of thought until all eyes were turned on her, then sat upon the lowest step and broke into uncontrollable spasms of mirth. Tears ran down her furrowed cheeks, and the oak step, that had not these four generations yielded to the weight of Mays, creaked beneath this onslaught of convulsive *avoirdupois*.

“Lawd,” she finally gasped. “Dis heah fracas jest ’mind me of sumfin ole fool Zack done one time!”

Uncle Zack screwed his face into a network of interrogating wrinkles and furtively watched her. He was not yet sure whether to be amused or offended.

“Marse John,” she looked up, “does you ’member dat time he wuz deacon of de new chu’ch, an’ busted up de niggers’ faith wid Sapry’s weddin’ cake?”

It must have brought something to the Colonel’s mind, for he began to chuckle.

“Sapry wuz a yaller gal of de Cunnel’s, who’s e ’ngaged to mahry a dude nigger on Mister Lige Dudley’s place, turr side of town. Nuthin’ ’ud do but Zack must perform dat cer’mony — him jest bein’ ’lected haid deacon of de new chu’ch what had its meetin’s under a big sycamoh tree down by de crick. Dey called it a Foh Day Baptis’ Chu’ch — dat is, fer foh days you’s e a Baptis’, an’ de rest de week you’s e nuthin’ ’t all. Ole Zack wuz crazy ’bout it; in fac’, he wuz de prime mover, cyarrin’ on most of his op’rations durin’ dem las’ three days. Well, de Cunnel give us one of de out-buildin’s fer dis heah weddin’, an’ I’d done made de cake — I’d done made two cakes, but de second wuz fer Miss Ann’s bu’fday; she bein’ ’bout six, or sich a matter. All de niggers seen how purty ’twuz wid de candles on it what Marse John done got in de city; an’ de dude nigger seen it, too. So what’d he do but slip Zack a piece of money, an’ tell him to git some of dem candles fer *his* cake. Den Zack stole out on a mule, an’ rid to town; — an’ now i’s e gwine tell you how he busted up dat chu’ch!”

She began again to laugh, and the Colonel, wiping tears from his eyes, merrily cried:

“It’s the truth, every word of it!”

“Dem wuz de days when de stoh at Buckville never had nuthin’ less’n a hund’ed yeahs old,” she continued, “— dat is, ’cept when it come down by mistake; an’ it jest happen dat dis heah wuz one of dem mistakes. Ole Zack walked in an’ axed fer red, yaller, green an’ blue candles, an’ all at onct a light come in de stoh-keeper’s face. ‘Why, bress mah soul,’ he say, ‘some of dem come down yisterday wid anurr order,’ he say. ‘Dey’s marked Roman candles,’ he say, ‘an’ de bill says foh colors,’ he say. But, ’course, dat don’ mean nuthin’ to him or Zack.

“Den de weddin’ night come on. Zack wuz so stuck on hisse’f wid a swaller-tail coat what didn’ fit, an’ Bible what he couldn’ read, dar warn’t no gittin’ nigh ’im. He go in whar de tables wuz, an’ fix dese heah candles on de cake, jest lak he seen ’em on li’l Miss Ann’s. ‘How-cum dey’s bigger?’ de dude nigger axed. ‘*You’se bigger, ain’ you?*’ Zack say, an’ he walk ’way. Den ole Zack come out ’gin, bowin’ hisse’f an’ scrapin’ his foots to de gals lak he’s done lost what li’l sense he ever had. De niggers all prance in de doh, an’ stand ’round de table, ’spressin’ deyse’ves so proud of dem candles on sich a purty cake. Ole Zack stand at de haid an’ say: ‘Mah bruddern an’ sistern, dis am a ’mentous ’ccasion! I’s gwine to clasp in de th’oes of matermony dis heah couple, but ’foh I does we’ll pernounce grace, takin’ our tex’ from dat po’tion of de Scripture whar Liza rid out de doh in a charity of fyah! Light de candles, bruddern!’ So



dey all struck matches, jest lak one man, an' lit dem candles!

"Lawd help us!" Aunt Timmie threw her apron over her face. "If Miss Liza done rid out de doh in a charity of fyah, she suttently change her min' an' rid back in agin! Dem candles begin to sizzle an' spit up sparks, an' shoot up balls of terror dat bust 'ginst de ceilin' an' come down — kersplash! all over us! De niggers stood lak a passel of sheep fer a minit — 'twarn't as long as dat — den someun yell 'Witches!' An' dey charge fer de doh, an' when de doh git choked up dey charge fer de winder, an' when de winder git choked up — but I ain' got de heart to recall dat turr'ble night!"

"Did it really happen, Colonel?" Brent cried.

"Every word of it, sir," the old gentleman chuckled. "The rascals burned down my out building, and I believe the groom did not come back, at all."

"Dat's de truff," Aunt Timmie declared. "An' poh Sapry run clar in de crick! Dey foun' her standin' waist deep, yellin' an' fightin' off lightnin'-bugs lak dey's gwine set her on fyah. An' it all come from foolin' wid dese heah pop-cracks! I knows!" Then persuasively she whispered to the little boy: "Come 'long, now, honey — let's me an' you set down heah nice, an' see de ole folks cut up!" This time she accomplished it.

When Bob introduced "the Sharpshooter of Sunlight Patch," another great burst of good natured applause went up; although Brent and the Colonel could not help exchanging glances. It seemed such an impertinence, following upon his other performance with this same rifle;



but he had apparently given this no thought, and now stepped out, flushed and determined. About his shoulders swung a bullet pouch and powder horn. He loaded the piece, carefully cutting a patch for the ball; then from his waistcoat pocket drew forth a small tin box of percussion caps, fitted one of these, and was ready.

Assisted by Bob, who improvised all manner of moving targets, he made hit after hit with a sureness provoking cries of admiration. Quickly challenged, he clipped the tip of a feather from the wing of an over-flying crow; and to show it were no accident he repeated this on another speeding bird. A dime tossed into the air was whirled through space, and a plum sent bounding over the ground was shattered. Brent and the old gentleman exchanged another glance and slowly shook their heads, for it seemed there could be no hope for Tusk before so deadly an aim. The marvel was how he had been able to crawl away.

With this last, and most perfect shot, Bob declared he had fairly won the world's championship, and presented him with a huge bouquet. The mountaineer flushed with a strange gripping pleasure, looking quickly at Jane who smiled proudly back at him. But there was another surprise to come. Uncle Zack stalked forth with a new high-power rifle like the one Dale had so feverishly admired in the Colonel's possession; and Bob, presenting it, said:

"A token, in admiration of your skill, from Goethals the younger: Mr. McElroy!"

If this were a surprise to the porch audience, it almost overcame the blushing Dale, who grasped it, ran his eyes

along its sights, and then looked in a bewildered, happy fashion again at Jane. She was smiling — and with a rarely sweet expression — but not at the Sharpshooter of Sunlight Patch. The direction of her eyes suggested the necessity of politeness, and he started across the circle toward Brent, when the air was rent by a sharp explosion.

Everyone was frozen to an instant silence, alert for that cry which so often follows sounds of violence. True enough, from the direction of the cabins, came a long, plaintive wail of distress.

The Colonel and his friends sprang up with shocked faces and hurried back. But before them were the negroes, now gathered in helpless, awe-struck groups about a small boy lying in the path. It was little Mesmie, and a glance at her arms, the shattered, still smoking fragments of a giant cracker, told the pitiful story of inexperience, a quick fuse, irreparable horror.

As gently as the child's mother would have done, had she been alive to view this pitiable sight, Brent stooped and lifted her. The Colonel motioned toward her father's cabin a few yards off, and there the procession wended its solemn way. Someone went after Bradford, while Jane hurried to telephone for Doctor Stone, and in less than ten minutes his runabout was chugging out the pike at its top speed of fifteen good miles an hour.

It was a curious sight when the noisy little machine dashed between the old classic gate posts, beneath the low swinging wild-grape vines, and around the silent tanbark circle to the Colonel's secluded home. It was the only

thing, indeed, which had been able to check the sobs of Bip for his injured playmate.

To the mutual indignation of the Colonel and Bradford, Doctor Stone sent them quickly from the room, keeping Jane and Timmie to help him with the dressings. Later Jane came out and sat with Ann.

As evening approached, Arden grew deathly still beneath the sadness which had thrust its fangs into the joyous day; the heavy, sickening sadness which comes more poignantly to those whose gaieties have been shocked by tragedy. Silently, and with murmured injunctions to keep them advised, Bob's household took its way homeward, leaving Aunt Timmie to nurse the little sufferer. Miss Liz had offered to do this, and so had Jane and Ann, but the old woman indignantly waved them aside.

"What d' you-all know 'bout nussin'?" she had asked, with a fine degree of scorn.

But the true reason was that Bip loved Mesmie, and this gave Mesmie a claim upon Aunt Timmie's love.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### AUNT TIMMIE HEARS A SECRET

Uncle Zack was sitting, shortly after noon a week later, on the door step of Bradford's cottage. Mesmie was sleeping by the aid of a mild narcotic, and Aunt Timmie, having darkened the windows, had now come quietly out to converse with him. Her seven days of vigilance had been trying to a degree, and, although while in the sick room she was the very soul of tenderness, this opportunity for relaxation came as a grateful relief. Therefore, Zack had been passing through several uncomfortable minutes, during the course of which he heard a great deal about "wu'thless niggers what sponges off dey twin wife," and other caustic observations.

His position was becoming altogether unbearable, yet he knew that if he attempted flight she would bring him back, and if he openly rebelled she would spank him. Only on the Colonel's last birthday she had turned him over her knee in good earnest, because he imbibed too many heel-taps to wait upon the table. So, resorting to diplomacy, he assumed a wise air and hinted that he might not be so untrustworthy as she had been misled to believe — that, indeed, he was the possessor of a startling piece of news.

This mollified Aunt Timmie. If she could get nothing

else out of her gamble on Zack's earthly existence, she might at least know his secrets. As a matter of fact, she would be most righteously hurt if every family secret did not with proper humility walk up and lay its head in her lap. So she began, using a bait which long experience had proven fruitful when angling in Zack's vicinity.

"You don' know nuthin'," she tilted her chin with a grand air of scorn. "You never did know nuthin', an' it hu'ts me mos' presumptuously to say dat you ain' never gwine know nuthin'!"

"Don' make no diff'ence ef I knows nuthin', or not; — I knows sumfin, jest de same!" he retorted.

"Don' strain yohse'f dat a-way, li'l man," she sneered. "You ain' got sense 'nuff to know you ain' got no sense — an' dat's de wu'st fix a body kin be in!"

"Who says so?" Zack was driven to a question.

"Eve'ybody says so! 'Tain' no secret 'tween heah an' town!"

"You don' 'tatch 'nuff 'portance to me," he glared at her, quivering with indignation. "Since you lef' heah de Cunnel don' do nuthin' 'thout fu'st axin' me!"

She laughed, guardedly on Mesmie's account, but it was a taunting, disdainful laugh that cut him to the quick. "Listen to dat!" she sneered. "An' Marse John done said he wouldn' trust you in jail!"

"Den how-cum he taken me wid 'im to find dat man Marse Dale done shoot?" the outraged old man, at last taking the bait, triumphantly dashed off with it.

Aunt Timmie straightened in her chair and her eyes rolled at him in terror.



“ You’s e lyin’,” she said huskily.

The heat of vindicated vanity was in Zack’s blood, and nothing would have kept him from rushing into details; dwelling upon each, and making them swell in all directions as he watched her ponderous frame heave with excitement. Finally she had the whole story, and enough exaggeration to dress up the entire calendar of crime. For several minutes she sat looking at her folded hands.

“ I’s e ’most sorry you tol’ me dat,” she said in a weak, pathetic voice. “ But,” squaring herself around at him with the former, towering strength, “ don’ you tell no one else! Heah me? Come on, now, an’ hitch up mah buggy, whilst I call Miss Liz to look arter dis li’l gal. I’s e gwine home fer awhile!”

In spite of the physical vigor which accompanied this, it was a very much saddened old woman who drove slowly along the pike, squinting her eyes to keep out its glare. Her lips moved as she talked over to herself the events made known by Zack, or the excuses she was building up for Dale. She was passing Hewlet’s house now, when a woman’s voice, high, whiney and querulous, floated out to her.

“ Let the gal alone, Tom! Yer’ve done near bruised her arm off now, as ’tis!”

Aunt Timmie reined in.

“ An’ you kin keep yoh durned mouth shet,” a man yelled, evidently in great excitement. “ She ain’t no moh yourn than she is mine, I reckon; an’ she’s goin’ to git that money from her ’ristocratic friend, or I’ll know



why! Will you git it?" There was a sound of scuffle, as though someone were shaking another.

"No, I won't," a girl's voice came breathlessly.

There followed, then, the unmistakable sound of a blow, and more frantic protestations from the whining Mrs. Hewlet.

Aunt Timmie waited no longer. She climbed laboriously over the rickety wheel, pushed through the tottering gate, waddled up the sunbaked path lined with jimson-weeds which were a-buzz with June-bugs, and hesitated just long enough to judge the carrying capacity of the decaying porch. She well knew the risks invited by going in here. If Tom were drunk enough and infuriated enough to strike his step-daughter, what might an old negress expect? And she reasonably well surmised the circumstances underlying Tom's present demand. She had not forgotten a fragment of Brent's conversation with the Colonel one day while she was gathering up their empty goblets, nor had Zack carried messages without her knowledge. It seemed that Aunt Timmie's overpowering presence had a faculty of drawing the innermost secrets from his small body and storing them in her own big frame, as though they were in need of a safer depository. Zack appreciated this, which was excuse enough for him. And, indeed, if they found their way only to Aunt Timmie's hospitable bosom, all situations were safe. She now knocked at the door and the noises abruptly stopped. Then it was jerked open by Tom who stood glaring at her.

“What d’you want?” he demanded.

“I want dat young step-gal of you-all’s,” she answered with dignity. “Dey’s sent fer her over home.”

“The hell they have,” Tom exclaimed, with a leer.

“Yas, sah,” she replied, secretly frightened, but humble and courteous before him. “I’sse tol’ to fetch her ’foh de trouble lands on you.”

Tom paled. So they had changed their minds! He cursed his drunken folly for having tried to bluff two gentlemen of their stamp, and Mrs. Hewlet set up a wail of lamentation — as she would have done upon any provocation whatsoever, real or fancied. Nancy alone stood apparently unmoved before this blow, but her eyes had closed as though to shut out a horrible, approaching humiliation.

“What d’you mean?” Tom demanded huskily.

He was leaning against the table for support, licking his lips and staring. And in meeting this stare the old negress lost her own fright, for she saw a man thoroughly cowered and conquered.

“What d’you mean?” he again asked.

“I don’ mean nuthin’,” she declared, “’cept dat I knows when dem big jail dohs down dar at Frankfo’t shets, dey’s gwine stay shet a long time, dat’s all. Make haste, chile, an’ git in mah buggy ’foh I busts you one; — an’ Mrs. Hewlet, dat screetchin’ ain’ gwine help none!”

Holding back the door for Nancy to pass, Timmie watched with grim satisfaction Tom’s exit from the kitchen; and after they reached the buggy, both kept their eyes on him as he tramped through the orchard and disap-

peared over the hill. The black frame now began to shake.

"You kin go on back now, ef you wants to," she chuckled.

"Why, I thought something awful was about to happen!"

"So dar wuz sumfin awful 'bout to happen, an' happenin'," the old woman laughed. "But I done put de squee-gee on dat! I hyeerd de fracas, an' hyeerd what he'uz sayin', an' knowed jest 'bout how-cum 'twuz."

"Oh, Aunt Timmie," the girl impulsively cried, "if everyone had your good heart!"

"Mah heart ain' nuthin' to brag on, chile. I jest happen to know dat in dis worl' dey's wicked people dat'll stoop deeper'n sin fer a dime; an' dey's onery people, so mis'ably onery, dat's afeerd to call dey soul dey own; an' dar's still anurr kind what ain' had no trainin', so when a stylish gemman comes 'long dey's mighty apt to go wrong, 'caze dey ain' had a faih show. Now, I reckon, I most named all de fambly;—I ain' sayin' what fambly, but I is sayin' dat ole Timmie knows moh'n most pussons reckons she do. 'Sides dat, she kin find moh'xcuses in her heart den de worl' kin. Run 'long, now! I jest stepped in 'caze a li'l gal warn't gittin' a faih show!"

"Oh, Aunt Timmie," the girl cried, "I ain't bad! But that beast wouldn't care, if he could make them pay more for his farm!"

A strangely beautiful light swept across the wrinkled face.

"Look up at me, chile, an' say dat fu'st agin!"

Nancy raised her flushed cheeks and gazed into the age-marked eyes of her black inquisitor. Then slowly she repeated:

“ I ain’t bad, Aunt Timmie! ”

A deep sigh, like the passing of cave winds, came from the old woman’s throat.

“ Praise de Lawd,” she murmured. “ I see now you’s not, honey; but jest why is too much fer me. Run ’long befoh Aunt Timmie make a fool of herse’f. Dat man’s oudacious wickedness is got to be stopped — but you leave dat to me! Some day I’s gwine send fer you, an’ you’s comin’ widout axin’ why. Heah dat? Run ’long, now; an’ Gawd bress de li’l lamb! ”

There was a riot of confusion in her mind as she climbed back into the buggy and scolded the old mule until he awoke — or pretended to awake. The universe as she had arranged it, as she had fitted it together into a mosaic picture before her cabin hearth-stone, was wrong. The little cubes were all askew. The technique was false. This girl, whom she had put into the pile of relics strewn along Brent’s path, was no relic at all, and did not belong there. Dale, whom she had staged to rival that other gaunt nobleman of Nature — the product of Kentucky who began life not more than half a hundred miles from the very soil over which she now was driving, who had likewise toiled and endured much for an education; who had emancipated her race; whom, with latter day pride, she declared she had seen in his boyhood; — had now ruined his chances of being President by killing a man. She rocked slowly and pitifully to and fro, as the old mule

ambled on, bemoaning the mess of pied cubes that now stood only for destroyed symmetry — a recalcitrant universe. She may have derived some comfort from the anticipation of rearranging Nancy to a nicer part, but this was vastly overshadowed by grief at Dale's untimely act.

She was not guiding the mule, and it turned of its own accord into the winding woodland road to Flat Rock. She probably did not realize home was so near until a gentle voice called her name.

Jane was on the lawn, beneath a low spreading, rambling maple tree whose summer shade had not for years been pierced by a single shaft of sunlight. A rustic table and some rustic chairs were there. It was a spot she chose for the examination of Dale's papers.

Aunt Timmie went on and tied the mule, but tarried not to change her freshly starched calico dress. This was no day whereon to spare clothes. Atop her red bandanna a sunbonnet perched neglected. A small, aggressive tuft of white wool had squeezed below this head-kerchief and was being held in check by ponderous silver-rimmed spectacles, absently pushed up on her forehead. Such an excess of head gear seemed excuse enough for the perspiration trickling down her face as she now looked sorrowfully at the girl.

“Is dem sums?” she asked.

With the pencil end between her teeth, Jane looked up and nodded.

“Well,” Aunt Timmie sighed, “he's done done a sum now dat beats 'em all holler! I got to set down, honey; mah bones is jest cussin' wid misery.”



Aunt Timmie, as may have been mentioned, never betrayed a secret except to the one confidant she implicitly trusted. This was Jane. And Jane would not breathe her trust but to the one person with whom she knew all things were safe. This was Ann. And Ann would have gone smilingly and willingly to the rack rather than whisper a word, except to Bob. And thus it was that, in the last resort, the stream from Uncle Zack's spring of secrets trickled through many silent places to pour itself into Bob's casual reservoirs.

Jane sat, pale and sometimes trembling, as Aunt Timmie unfolded the story of Zack's concoction, colored here and there with promptings of the old woman's own imagination. She heard each detail, and saw with shocking vividness the shot fired into the back of a man's head, and saw him fall across his threshold. Creepy feelings touched her body at this sickening reminder of a day she had stooped to awaken her father, and found that he had fallen in an everlasting, rather than a drunken, sleep. She shivered. The old woman finished, wiped her face and again mournfully rocked her body to and fro.

"When did it happen?" Jane whispered.

"I reckon sometime yistiddy; but it couldn' a-been so ve'y long ago, noway!"

Without another word Jane pushed back the sums and passed swiftly stableward across the lawn. There was no one at the stables, but she took down her bridle and walked past the long row of box-stalls, finally entering when she came to a horse she knew. Understanding something of her need, he took the bit in his mouth before



she had even pressed it — a little act of kindness which, from that time forward, made her his staunch friend.

“Now if you won't swell up when I try to tighten the girth,” she pleaded, on the verge of tears.

She had forgotten to whistle for Mac.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A PARALYSING DISCOVERY

Jane did not go fast to Arden, for the sun was too blistering hot to torture a horse by frantic riding. But her mind was frantic, and tortured, with the uncertainty of what might be before her. Was Dale there? Had he not, indeed, fled into the mountains as any of his people would have done? Had he been arrested? Question after question surged through her brain, finding no answers and passing on.

The Colonel was not in his accustomed place on the honeysuckled end of the porch, nor was Zack about, so she dismounted alone and tied the lathery beast. Perhaps they were at Bradford's cottage, comforting little Mesmie. Perhaps they were — but she tried not to think of that! Never had the world seemed so deserted. Nothing was astir. The edge of a lace curtain, drawn outward by the passing of someone through one of the library French windows, hung over the sill, deadly white and deadly still. The leaves were still, the air was still. Above her head, where recently she had watched two piping orioles flutter about their weaving, hung now the silent, pendant nest. No pipe, no bird, no motion. It seemed as though here were the stage of Perrault's fairy-tale; only 'twas a Prince within who had pricked his

destiny with a leaden bullet, and a Princess rode to wake him.

Alertly, but with a heavy dread at her heart, she crossed the porch and tiptoed to the open window. Dale was there, bent over the mahogany table, reading; as far from the world as he was from his mad act; as far from them both as he was from her. She went quietly in to him.

“Dale!”

He did not stir.

“Dale!” she again cried in a low voice, shaking him by the shoulder. He looked slowly up.

“Dale, what does this mean?” she hurriedly began. “Why have you killed that man?”

He remembered the Colonel’s unpleasant interview, and burned with a deep rage, growling:

“Leave me alone. I’ve got to read.”

“Are you asleep?” she incredulously exclaimed. “Do you realize you’ve killed Tusk Potter, and any moment they may be after you?”

As he again looked up there was a storm of irritation in his face.

“They won’t be after me if people keep their mouths shut! What do I care who I killed? Leave me alone! I’ve got to study!”

Stunned, she stared stupidly down at him, for here was a new trait—or, at least, one he had not shown her. Many times she had been utterly shocked, thoroughly enraged by evidences of his abnormal selfishness, but she was unprepared for this atrocious abandonment. It

aroused her to a quick anger and, snatching the book from the table, she dashed it to the floor.

“Look at me!” she cried.

He was looking at her, as he had never done. The deep-set eyes were deeper, and their pupils venomously bright. She saw the fury being mustered there, but without flinching looked straight back at him.

“Tell me why you killed that man?” she demanded.

His hands were clenched, and for the first time she began to fear her influence might be waning.

“I killed him 'cause he was in the way,” he growled again.

“But are you mad to go about killing people because they're in your way? Don't you know —”

“I know all I want to know,” he almost screamed at her. “I know that time's flyin', 'n' I got to study! Go out 'n' leave me. He was in the way, I tell you! It was natural to get rid of him.”

He picked up the book and began to open it, but instantly she had again flung it away, saying with a degree of ferocity that made him stare in open-mouthed wonderment:

“If you touch that again, *I'll kill you!*”

It had been her only means of stirring him, and for more than a minute they remained, as two wax figures, glaring into each other's faces. Beneath this spell he was rigid, but her young breast rose with quick pulsations. The room was quiet with that oppressive stillness which comes in storms, when the elements seem to draw breathlessly aside in expectation of a crashing bolt of lightning.

Now he took a deep breath and relaxed. She had won, and immediately leaned nearer, never taking her fixed look from his face.

“This is what comes,” she said more calmly, “from imitating Nature. You once said that we differ from it in no way; that our eyes conceive, our minds quicken, and our hands destroy, just as it does; — that we in ourselves are the entire law of the cycles gathered into one piece of temporal clay. And I let you say it uncontradicted, because in a sense it was poetic, and because I never dreamed such a philosophy would lead to this. But I feared all the while that with such theories you were more unalterably becoming a merciless egoist, yet pinned my faith somehow to an unseen force to spare you. Now it has failed me. Wait,” she commanded, thinking he was about to speak. “That Nature-god you copy might have been one of the beautiful influences in your life, had you not chosen his cruel and wicked side — the side that asks no one’s pardon, that lives by the survival of the fittest. Oh, you have seen things so distortedly! — you, whom I had hoped to be proud of, are a shameless sacrifice upon the altar to this god, Nature! Her reward is the brand of outcast; you are catalogued in her museum as a vicious failure, even with all you’ve accomplished! I shall leave you now, and doubt if I ever teach you again.”

He had sat beneath this tirade until she uttered the last sentence, when with a heartrending groan of anguish he sprang up and caught her by the wrists.

“For the love of Christ,” he began in a husky voice, but she passionately interrupted him.



“You dare not speak of Christ! You do not know Him! You have no right to call His name! Let go of me!”

“Oh, hear me, hear me,” he implored her, releasing one of her wrists and taking the other hand in both his own; alternately stroking it and almost crushing it. His body was twisting and writhing as a tree might in a terrific wind storm, and his eyes were glistening and dry—Oh, so dry, she thought. They reminded her of pieces of hot glass. “Hear me,” he was saying.

At the final Judgment, some poor soul will stand and face its Creator with just this sort of cry;—some soul which has grievously sinned will bend, and writhe, and implore with hot, glassy eyes, to be heard. Jane felt this in all its varicolored meaning. Until now she had been speaking as the teacher, as the humanitarian. But with his torture-stricken eyes pouring their prayer into her own, with the storm bending his powerful frame before its fury, she felt the old pity, the old interest, rise up in his defense.

“Hear me, hear me,” he was murmuring, until her softening attitude touched somewhere upon the receiver of his subliminal mind. Then he responded, and bent eagerly over her.

“I’d rather die a thousand times than have you turn your back,” he whispered. It was a magic whisper, made magnetic by that fascinating dilation and contraction of his pupils; but the great body still swayed awkwardly. The storm was still there. “You know what

life is to me," he was saying. "You know how I'm fightin' to get my share of learnin'; an' how much I've got to do! You — just you, Miss Jane, can take me on! If you quit, how will I end? Just drift 'round! I know! Do you want my hand — my left hand? I'll cut it off if that'll show you how I feel! I'd cut off the other, but it can write!" There was just at that instant a glorious pride in his voice. Now it was again mystical as he continued: "Don't blame me too hard! You know how I was raised! You know yourself what a puny price we put on life! And you know how we do whenever someone stands in our way! Didn't I have a better right to sweep my road clear than most of my folks, who don't know half the time what they're killin' about? You know our people, an' you know that when Granny put Pap's gun in my hands, an' smeared his blood on me, an' made me swear to get those fellers, I did right to get 'em — 'cause I was brought up to do those things, an' didn't know anything else! But after you got to teachin' me, I said a thousand times to myself I'd never kill anybody again — an' I wouldn't have, if that varmint Potter hadn't yelled your name in public, an' said what he'd tried to do!"

"I didn't know that," her cheeks were flaming. "I hadn't heard about that!"

"Well, he did. Ask Bob! He yelled it from a field, an' shot his pistol in the air, and said he'd do it yet. Don't you reckon I knew this country warn't big enough for him an' the school?"

Her cheeks burned hotter with this added humiliation that he had intended, not chivalrously to defend her, but only to keep her for his own advancement.

He had never let go her hand, nor stopped the anguished moving of his body.

“I didn’t want over much to kill him,” he was again saying. “As I laid there behind a log, watchin’ him foolin’ around, I almost wanted to creep away. An’ when he turned his back to go in the cabin, my finger’d hardly pull the trigger — it reminded me so much of that time I laid my sights on the back of old Bill Whitly’s head —”

“What?” she screamed, springing back in a perfect agony of horror. “What?”

He stared at her, amazed and even frightened by this new, this terribly new, ring in her voice. She was raising her hands slowly to her throat, and shrinking away — shrinking back against the wall as though he were some loathsome thing upon which she had suddenly and unexpectedly come.

“What’s the matter?” he cried, forgetting his own feelings in this new alarm.

“Did — you — kill — Bill — Whitly?”

“Yes,” he answered, not understanding. “Why?”

The room was sickeningly quiet, except for her breathing. He could have almost sworn her eyes were crackling and snapping as they stared at him.

“Why?” she repeated. “Can you ask any one of my name in the mountains, why?”

“I never thought,” he whispered in a terrified voice,

“you belonged to *those* Whitlys!” And as he looked more closely at her face the truth slowly crept into his brain. Passionately his hands went out to her, as he took a trembling step forward: “My Gawd, my Gawd, Miss Jane! Don’t tell me that I done *that*! Don’t tell me it war *yoh* Pappy!”

The telephone was on the wall of this room. Keeping the long table between them, she crossed quickly and turned the little crank. Recognizing the town operator’s voice she frantically called:

“Miss Gregget, this is Jane Whitly! — well, never mind the name! — this is Colonel May’s house!” She was numb, and fearful of those passionate hands which might any instant drag her from the instrument. “Tell the sheriff to come quick!” she screamed. “Dale Dawson has killed Tusk Potter!”

With this she sprang about, her back to the wall and at bay, to receive the infuriated mountaineer’s charge. But he had not moved. He stood just where she had left him; looking at her, now again swaying his body in that tense, sullen motion. And suddenly she began to laugh, leaning forward in a crouching attitude, her hands clenched close to her knees.

“You didn’t think, when you laid my Pappy across our door sill, that he’d be avenged by a girl, did you!”

He only looked at her, staring in a dull, hopeless sort of way that would have struck pity into the heart of anyone not so blinded by passion.

“You didn’t think, did ye,” she taunted, with direful malice darting from her eyes, and assuming the mountain

dialect so her words would carry a sharper sting, "that Dale Dawson could be headed off, did ye! Yo' sorry life of ignorance never went so fur as ter reckon that poh, ole Bill Whitly, shot down from behind, 'd be so sure in gittin' vengeance, did ye! Ye thought my Pappy war the last of his line, jest as you're the last of yourn!" Her laugh now became quite uncontrollable, but between gasps she still fired taunts at him. "Didn't reckon yo' god Natur' could raise some-un weaker'n ye ter crush ye out! Didn't reckon hit war likely the last Dawson 'd be fetched down by the last Whitly —'n' her a gal!"

As she descended to this, he arose. The next time she looked at him through laughter and blinding tears, he was standing straight and still, gazing calmly back at her. There was no motion to his body now, and his hands were hanging inertly open at his sides. Slowly he crossed to her and, with a dignity that was commanding, said:

"There'll be one left on my side, and that'll just balance your's. It's the one who patched up that truce — that truce what ain't been broke by ary one of us, till now! But she's blind, an' maybe don't count for much!"

Ah, the blind sister! She had forgotten her. The blind sister; that physically helpless one whose spiritual strength had put into motion this big, hulking frame of purpose, with its absorbing brain, to square his shoulders before the world and succeed! A softness, a womanly tenderness, came knocking at the door of Jane's heart, but she would not hear. Dale looked down at her resentful face; but he felt no awe of her now — this was the kind he understood!



“The mountains are so full of Whitlys, that I never thought of placin’ you as Bill’s girl — I don’t remember even knowin’ that he had a girl! Why’d you take me in school?”

“How did I know who killed him!” she answered, in a hard, dry voice.

Intently they stood, staring deep into each other’s eyes; — these two products of a feud whose bitterness had long outlived the cause which gave it birth. His face was not two feet away, and the pupils which clung now eagerly to her own were charged with a force that held her almost hypnotized. Through them she began to see another being, another soul, a transfigured man. Their dilations seemed to be drawing aside and again closing the curtains, letting her peep into the secrets behind his mobile face. Her cheeks were burning more furiously than ever, drying up the recent tears to faint, tell-tale stains; and her lips were parted, showing teeth still set with anger. But her eyes — those eyes which were seeing new things in him — they, by a dewy radiance she did not know was there, contradicted much of the storm and passion.



## CHAPTER XXX

### “I’LL PAY THE DEBT!”

After several minutes the transfigured man before her spoke again:

“I’ll pay the debt,” he said, in a low tone of finality. “I’ll wait here till the sheriff comes. Up to now there hasn’t been a force in all Gawd’s world that could ’ve come ’tween me an’ the things you’re teachin’. I didn’t care about Potter. He was in the way. I’ve got no sorrows about anythin’ since that day I drew sights on yoh Pappy’s head, an’ now. Ruth said she an’ I owed a debt to the State for what they’d done for her, an’ we couldn’t be beholden to it; so I was goin’ to pay all that back by bein’ the biggest man of my time, by goin’ back in those mountains, just as Lincoln would a-done, an’ bringin’ my people out to light — by emancipatin’ all of ’em from the ignorance that’s been makin’ ’em slaves! But I reckon the first payment comes to you. You’ve a right to it, an’ I’ll stay here till you get all the revenge you want!”

“Don’t,” she whispered huskily. “Don’t talk to me! I don’t know what I’ve done!”

“You’ve done,” he answered for her, “just what yoh Pappy’s been callin’ on you to do; — just as I did once

what my Granny called on me to do. I reckon we’re quits, now!”

“Oh, no, Dale!” she suddenly cried, looking up at the clock. “It isn’t right! Go, while you have a chance! Go! Go!” She even tried to push him toward the door. “Go somewhere and begin your lessons again, and make yourself big in spite of things! Go now, before they come after you!”

“I can’t,” he answered simply. “I wish I could. But that feller there,” he pointed to a volume of Plutarch, “wrote that Cato said the soul of a lover lives in the body of another. How can I go?”

A tremor passed over her at his new, this personal attitude. It arose from no feeling of gratification, rather from a subtle repulsion. Yet so frantically was she seeking arguments to make him save himself, that she impulsively answered:

“But did we not also read of Kosciusko, who left his native Poland solely on account of love? And do you not know what a gallant soldier he made for freedom and humanity?”

“He loved just one,” Dale murmured, waving his hand toward the shelves of books, “but my soul is in all of these.”

A blush overspread her face for having momentarily misunderstood, but this was no time for embarrassments. He had not noticed it, and his voice was saying calmly:

“He was lucky enough to die fightin’, for that’s a heap easier’n the thickenin’ of a rope, or the dry rot down in

those stone walls. Still, every man's got to take his medicine, an' I'm goin' to swaller mine a-smilin'!"

"Dear Christ," she cried, pressing her hands to her cheeks and stepping farther back from him, "what have I done? Into what has this man turned?"

Through the silence that followed, from far out on the pike, a sound of galloping horses faintly reached their ears. Each stood for a moment listening, and then suddenly she flew at him.

"Dale, run for it! Out the back way, and I'll help you! Go far, anywhere, Dale, and make good — but escape! When it's safe for you to come back I'll send word — but hurry! Hurry! They're almost at the lane!"

"I can't go," he said, smiling at her, "till you're paid up — drop of blood for drop of blood!"

A cry burst from her lips — a cry exquisite of all her mental agony. He could not resist it, and his hand went quickly to her shoulder.

"Don't — oh, don't touch me!" she implored him. "Listen, only listen! I'm half crazed by everything, and this is the last, the very last time I'll have a chance to speak to you for — who can tell? So listen! I want you to go, at once — fly now! You can take any of the horses — reach the mountains and hide! I'll send you things — anything! Don't make me suffer," she fairly screamed at him, "but go! Oh, what crucifixion I've brought you to! Great God above, what crucifixion — and after you have done so wonderfully well! Spare me, Dale, I can't endure it! Your life must not go out, and

suddenly lose its purpose, because of a human vengeance that is worthless! ”

He spoke more hurriedly, for the horsemen were in the lane and coming fast :

“ Nothing is worthless that calls a man to do his duty like a man! An’ I’d be worse’n a coward to turn back from a duty to the very person who’s taught me what duty is! ”

“ But think — think, ” she urged, “ of the good there is in you to help that great mankind whose voice you say you’ve heard! All of that good will be — choked out, ” she shuddered, “ or rot in those gray walls you dread! ”

He looked toward the gate, through which the sheriff now might dash at any moment. She saw in his face the terrible dread of that alternative and, to help him win the way she wished, grasped his arm. But slowly his eyes turned back, moving affectionately across the rows of books lining the walls, and, as though echoing impressions gathered from their great storehouse, he whispered :

“ What good there is in a man is there to stay. God, Himself, couldn’t take it out. It’s only wickedness that twists it in a different shape, and makes people think it never was! Do you reckon your good’ll go when you die? ”

“ But its opportunities to extend — they will be stopped! ” she cried. “ Yours will be stopped! ” The horses were in the circle now, and she implored even more frantically: “ Run for it — run! ”

"No! The biggest men in those covers," he pointed again to the shelves, "wouldn't be there today if they'd run! Jesus would be a by-word, and the world couldn't raise its head to a single hero." The horses had stopped, and a man was dismounting. "Good-bye," the big mountaineer said quietly.

He put out his hand, but she did not see it. She had slipped into a chair and was burying her sobbing face in her arms. Steps sounded on the porch, and a bell far back in the house jingled. He looked at her another long, breathless moment, then turned and walked out through the French window.

"Good mawnin', sheriff," her tortured brain heard him say.

Old Jess Mason eyed him over high cheek bones and hawk-like nose for the fraction of a second before taking his hand from beneath his coat. Then it came slowly out, empty.

"Good mawnin', yohse'f!" The sheriff was fairly bristling with anger. "Look-ee-heah," he savagely demanded, "what's this funny business about, anyhow? Do you-all reckon you're goin' to poke fun at me an' the law, an' git away with it? Or what?"

"I don't reckon there's been such an awful lot of fun poked around heah, Jess," Dale sullenly answered.

"You don't! Well, there'd better not be, that's all I got to say!" He wiped his forehead and glared. "Then s'pose you explain somethin'! I'm ridin' through town a while back, when the telephone gal sticks her head



outen the winder an’ squeals: ‘ Git to the Cunnel’s a-flyin’, Jess — they say Dale Dawson’s done kilt Tusk Potter! ’ ”

“ That’s all right,” Dale said.

“ Keep yoh ’pinions to yohse’f till I ask for ’em! I put my hawse’s belly to the ground an’ we’ve gone ’bout two mile, when young McElroy comes chargin’ up behind a-yellin’ for me to stop. ‘ What’s the matter?’ I asks, pullin’ ’round an’ facin’ ’im. ‘ You’ve got a blame good hawse, Jess,’ he grins, ‘ I thought I couldn’t ketch you!’ Then he comes up clost an’ says: “ That message come wrong!’ ‘ How d’you know?’ I asks. ‘ I heerd it,’ he says, ‘ an’ Dale ain’t never kilt Tusk!’ ‘ Then who did?’ I asks agin. ‘ Me,’ he says.”

Jane’s nails bit into the palms of her hands as she sprang up, breathlessly listening. The sheriff went on:

“ I looks at ’im an’ seen he was cold sober, but I knowed the other message come straight, too. So I says: ‘ Then you’re under ’rrest; go back an’ set on the cou’t-house steps till I come from the Cunnel’s,’ I says. ‘ If you go out thar I won’t stay,’ he says. ‘ You will if I asks you, Brent,’ I says. ‘ No, Jess, I’ll be damned if I do,’ he says. Wall, we argyed, an’ he was so pig-headed I thought I’d have to shoot ’im right thar; but arter ’while he says he’ll go back an’ set, an’ then I come on. Now I want to know what kind of fun you fellers is tryin’ to git outen me! ”

Little did the sheriff, Dale or Jane know that Brent rode back to town like mad, threw himself from his horse

and dashed up the stair leading to the telephone office above the drug-store. He fairly bounded in upon Miss Gregget, crying:

“Quick! Give me the Colonel’s!”

While she was inserting a plug and turning a crank — for Buckville’s central switchboard was many years behind the times — he unceremoniously lifted the operator’s head-set from her coiled hair and fitted it upon his own head. Several times she spun the little crank, breathlessly repeating:

“I’ve just been trying them, but they must have left the receiver off!”

“Wait!” he whispered.

The receiver was still off the hook at Arden, just as Jane had left it dangling, and now he was listening — listening to interrupted portions of a scene being enacted in that far away library, and illogically hoping one of its actors might pass near enough the instrument for him to yell and attract his or her attention. Only an occasional word could he understand, but once a girl’s voice very distinctly cried: “Dale, run for it! Out the back way, and I’ll help you! — They’re almost at the lane!”

A feeling of pleasure swept through the listener as he realized that she was warning the mountaineer — that there was yet a chance! “They,” must have meant the sheriff and his darky boy attendant, for it was just about time they should have covered the distance to Arden. But this momentary triumph was succeeded by a heavy, sickening dread as he realized that she must now know the truth; that the horrible disappointment he would have

spared her must have fallen — must now be crushing her — since, otherwise, she would not be there warning. Yet, as he leaned forward trying to catch more and not hearing it, he thought how willingly he would change places with the murderer for just those expressions of pleading from her lips!

“Excuse me, Mr. McElroy,” Miss Gregget was saying, rather coolly because of his impertinence in mussing her hair, “there are other calls — I’d better take the board!”

He turned then and went down the stairs. He was stunned, but he was smiling as he stepped out on the street which would bring him in contact with men he knew. Crossing diagonally the shaded green where gray haired “boys” pitched horse shoes at a peg — the “cou’thouse squar,” bounded by the town’s four streets — he deliberately sat upon the whittled steps of that old building, at about the moment Jess was ringing the Colonel’s front door bell.

Dale had stood as still as marble, except to moisten his lips which were becoming very dry. He had been willing enough to accept Brent’s plan of refuge, before a blood equation developed, but now things were different. His honour, as a man of the mountains knows and sustains his honour, would permit him but one course.

“Brent ain’t to be relied on, when it comes to this business,” he said, at last.

“Now, look-ee-heah,” the sheriff bristled again, “I don’t let no man make Brent out a liar; I don’t kyeer who he is!”

“I ain’t makin’ Brent out a liar, Jess; but you don’t

know how this thing is! The night after I killed Tusk, Brent came in my room an' said he's goin' to take the blame. He said he was doin' it for the fun of the thing; but I knew better'n that from somethin' I heard one time. I knew he was doin' it for Miss Jane. I reckon I was so blame thankful I didn't think of it then — not till I went to his room later. But he was sittin' in the dark, lookin' out the window, an', as he didn't hear me, I slipped back."

The sheriff's face was a study, but no one could have described the look on another face pressed close to the folds of the library window curtains. Only the angels knew why her eyes grew wide and wonderingly deep with a new sort of tears that never before had bathed them. The imps of hell may have surmised why her nails again pressed into her palms when Dale added:

"I was afraid he might be sorry for havin' made that promise; an', not wantin' him to change his mind, I never went back. You see, it looked like there might a-been a leetle chance one time of his takin' the teacher away — so jail was the best place for 'im. I wouldn't be tellin' you this, but — but there's other things to be considered."

"Are you drunk?" Jess suddenly asked.

"No, I ain't drunk! Come on; I'll go!"

"Don't be so danged fast, young feller," the sheriff advised. "When did you kill Tusk?"

"Last week. Come on, Jess."

"Say, are you crazy?"

"No, I'm not crazy, neither!"

"Then I am," Jess spat decisively. "Not a mile from this heah gate I seen Tusk no moh'n half hour ago! When I hollered at 'im, he ducked an' run!"

Dale's tongue went again to his lips. He stared at the sheriff with about as much surprise as the sheriff was staring at him. Finally he said:

"I must a-missed 'im. Ruth was lookin' at me, an' maybe that throwed me off. But, anyhow, you want me for killin' Bill Whitly nine year ago!"

The sheriff's jaws dropped.

"Say," he whispered, "what you tryin' to do — commit suicide? or write yohse'f a invite to the pen?"

"I ain't hankerin' for neither," Dale answered in a dejected voice.

"Wall, you're hankerin' for somethin', that's a fac'! You jest shet up with them ghost stories! The Cunnel don't want nothin' like that, scarin' the wimmin-folks! I wa'n't sheriff nine year ago, no-how," he thoughtfully fingered his chin, "an' I reckon if the statters of limintation was looked up we'd find they'd done run out on that old fracas."

Zack, who had come in answer to the bell, was lingering inside the door with his eyes rolling and every nerve a-tingle. At this last expression of relenting from the man of law, he stepped out.

"Mawnin', Marse Jess," he bowed. "Ef you'se'll let me rest yoh hat, I'se gwine fetch sumfin good fer de heat. De Cunnel'd be proud ef you'd 'cept it, an' powerful outraged wid me ef I let you go home 'thout it!"

Jess left the porch to have a word with his man, and



during the minutes he was away Dale watched him with serious interest. There was something more on the mountaineer's mind which had not been said; some further part of his duty lay before him; so, as the sheriff returned, and at the same moment Zack reappeared with refreshments, he announced:

"An' there was Tyse Brislow I killed on the raft goin' down to Frankfo't!"

"Good Lawd, Marse Dale," the negro exclaimed in terror, "is you still tellin' 'bout all dem mens you'se shot up?"

The sheriff poured his libation, swallowed it, and wiped his long mustache on the back of his hand. Then he said: "U-um! A-ah!" Whereupon Zack poured another and passed it to him. Old Zack did not understand the drift of things in the least, but he did know that this thirty-year-old bourbon of the Colonel's was a tremendously potent mollifier in all times of stress. Jess held the glass fondly up to the light, and was more careful now to brush away his mustache. It evidently dawned on him that the flavor of the first "three fingers" had been neglected through haste.

"I don't remember Tyse," he said at length, reaching for one of Zack's store cigars. "When was that?"

"Three years before," Dale answered.

"Three yeahs befoh Tusk?"

"No, three years before Bill."

"Wall, I'll be — heah, Zack, give me another snifter!" Jess nervously drank it, handed back the glass and looked at Dale. "In my jedgment, the statters of limintation is

clean busted on that case, too. But I’ll jest tell you as a friend, that if you go resurrectin’ any moh of them man slaughters — I don’t care if they’re older’n the ’sassination of Garfield — I’ll hang you for bein’ a plain damn fool.” With this he uttered a loud guffaw, but once more grew sober and laid his hand on Dale’s shoulder: “ Don’t you go killin’ no moh fellers ’round heah! I do mean that! Leastwise, don’t do it while you’re stayin’ at the Cunnel’s. It ain’t right to his folks, an’ I won’t stand for it! ”

“ Then Tusk ’d better keep away,” the mountaineer grumbled.

“ Wall, if the Cunnel don’t want him ’round, I can mighty easy give him a tip to vamoose — but you let me ’tend to it, understand? Now,” he chuckled, “ I’d better git back an’ unlock Brent from them steps! ”

So it was that, when he mounted and rode away, his mind was distinctly on Brent and the caressing quality of the Colonel’s thirty-year-old bourbon, and not at all concerned with the mission which had taken him to Arden.

Dale stood looking after him, but not thinking. He stood in a sort of ferment of happy thrills and deepest sorrow. The bars that had momentarily been put up between him and his pasture of learning, now lay again at his feet. He could pass through at will, any time he desired. But what of Jane? Would she be there to welcome, to help him? — to take his hand again and lead him into the cool places, into the mazy shadows, through vista after vista of appealing outlook? He turned back

to the library and, with hesitation, stepped through the low window.

The room was empty. His eyes glanced down at the book which she had torn from his hand and flung away. He saw that it had fallen, sprawled and awkward, and was leaning drunkenly against the legs of the dictionary stand. Across from it, by a deep leather chair, lay, also on the floor, a dainty handkerchief, moist and pressed into a little ball. Each of these held him with an esoteric charm; but his eyes remained upon the tear-moistened, scented linen as though at any moment it might begin to accuse him. He was afraid to touch it, and afraid to touch the book. He felt that he had obtruded an unwelcome presence upon these two mute evidences of passion which seemed now to be drawn momentarily apart for breath before re-engaging in the fray. In this strained expectancy the measured ticking of the old clock in the corner was startlingly loud. One might have counted a hundred, and then, as quietly as he came, he tiptoed out, crossed the porch and passed on through the trees.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### OUT OF THE DYING DAY

When the sheriff turned away, Jane had for an instant closed her eyes in a prayer of happy thankfulness; but then a torture, a tearing and racking mortification because she had proved herself so weak before the mountain man so strong — and in contrast to Brent! (ah, God, what sacrifice would he not make for her!) — thrust its claws into her sensitive nature, and she blindly fled to the long room whose musty silence promised solitude. At the far end of this she threw herself straight out upon a sofa, and for more than an hour buried her face in its linen coverlet. Her brows were drawn into a frown as she wilfully shut out the image of Brent, for something sterner must first be faced.

Something must be done to re-establish Dale's faith in her, or she must forever abandon him to other hands and other influences. Today — now — she must act. And this left her helpless, because she could find no way. His nature had made a complete revolution in that moment of crisis before the sheriff came; his words had carried her beyond her understanding of him! She did not know this new Dale, and how could she re-establish faith with a stranger?

But at any hazard it must be tried. Were she to fail

him, he would be like a compass with no magnetic pole — spinning, vacillating. Suppose he should go spinning off from his now safe orbit? And then suppose he should come rushing back to her for help? — could she ever again enter those former halls of confidence with this new, strange man, as he had grown to be?

This was the price, she told herself, of having been weaker than he; of having behaved more ignobly! The contemplation of it sapped her self-assurance, and as self-assurance vanished there began to enter a new feeling which she unwillingly recognized as fear.

She was not afraid of Dale — not the man! No personal element had ever existed between them. But she was most decidedly afraid of the far-reaching consequences which might be wrought by her failure to hold him steadfast. For if he could rise to a place whose height had dazzled her, why should she not in his eyes have sunk as astonishingly low? By what incentive would he then come again for guidance? How could she have the effrontery to offer it?

Between remorseless reasonings and the stings of wounded pride, she pressed her face still deeper into the old sofa.

It must have been an hour later when she sprang up and looked anxiously at the darkening windows. She had formed no definite plan, but her dominant impulse was to act before he should have a night to analyse, to settle, to censure. Stopping at the first wall mirror she made a few touches to her hair and searched her face for signs of tears; then passed out, closing the heavy door with a



firmness which might have meant all fears were shut within.

At the library she hesitated, experiencing a momentary relief when it was found to be deserted. She went to the porch but it, too, was vacant; and as far as she could see out through the grounds no one stirred. Yet, as her search continued, her self-assurance came bounding back, and when she started across the grass to an old arbor, where he had sometimes been known to go at this hour, she became once more the courageous, dauntless mountain girl.

He was there, just as she suspected. Through the gathering shadows he could be seen leaning heavily against one of the upright posts, his shoulders stooped, and his face set upon the west which was a fiery red. Going softly along the tanbark path, and stopping within a pace of him, she waited to see if he would turn; then asked:

“Were you watching the sunset?”

He answered “Yes,” but it might have come from someone else, so little did he seem to realize her presence.

“Was it beautiful?” she asked again.

“I don’t know; I didn’t see it.”

“It is leaving a wonderful sky,” she ventured, trying to come gracefully to the things she wanted to say.

“Yes,” he murmured, after another pause. “A kind of sky that makes me sad — a sort of sadness very far from tears. I don’t know what I mean; — I don’t reckon anyone knows what I mean!”

Her eyes did not leave their watchful gaze upon his shoulders. It might have been that she expected to see

him change again; to see him begin another transformation back to the old Dale — for surely this was not the schoolboy speaking now! And she wished he might come back, for then she could talk to him. Again she was reminded of the precious minutes passing. It would be easier to open with an attack.

“I shouldn’t think you could be anything else but sad after the way you’ve behaved,” she said slowly, wondering if he would submit.

But he only murmured:

“I did all I could to pay the debt; — I thought I was doing my duty!”

If there were a qualm of conscience in the girl’s heart she ruthlessly murdered it, and evenly replied:

“Yes, I am proud of you for that. It was other things I meant.”

He turned now, and slowly questioned her with his eyes.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I didn’t want you to know about Tusk, and when you took me by surprise that way, I reckon I acted rough! Who’d a-thought we were born enemies! — an’ after all you’ve done to help me! But I tried, Gawd knows I tried, to pay the debt!”

A wave of pity thrilled her, but her voice was proportionately accusing as she said:

“All you’ve tried can not atone for what you did.”

“I know,” he buried his face in his hands. “That was ignorance, an’ I’m payin’ for it by havin’ you turn away an’ snap my future like a fiddle string! Oh, how

could my hand a-struck yoh people — even in black ignorance!”

Her mental claws, which had bared at the approach of this interview, now softly began to find their padded coverings. The anxious anticipation which had armed her against an untested foe, now left but a sympathy straining to take possession; because her instinct said there was to be no resisting force, and the crushed attitude of the man before her plainly told that she was still the unlowered, the unapproachable being in his eyes. With her pride unhurt, her belligerency was unessential. For a moment more she continued to let him suffer. She might have relieved it now — she even wanted to — but the old savage spirit was still unappeased, and a devil of the feud days made her ask:

“Where are you going, and what are you intending to make of your life?”

She might have expected some outburst as a result of this, for she shrank slightly back; but he did not move. He seemed too crushed, and pressed his hands more violently against his face, murmuring from the depths of inordinate suffering:

“Oh, Gawd! That you an’ I should be enemies! — that we were born to be enemies!”

“Yes, I know,” she faltered, looking away; for the sight of his grief had conquered. “It’s hard to believe — wretchedly hard — that you and I should have been born to hate and destroy each other; — and that you, with the hand I’ve so patiently taught to write, killed —

him!" He groaned. "But, Dale," she stepped closer, "I've just been facing facts, and believe that our strong wills can adjust it all; — that through our old feud may come a truer understanding, a surer sympathy, than enters often into this *comédie humaine*. Those are the real things which make life worth while; not inherited hatreds because our ancestors were at war! It may be hard to forgive, furiously hard; but certainly it is wrong to keep such ghastly things alive! The world is such a wide marvel of the beautiful out-of-doors to wander in! — there is so much to do and learn and see and be! — so much to read and think about and live for! — so much of the glories of life — that surely you and I can be given the boon of forgetfulness and the bounty of friendship! Go back to the house, pick up the book I threw away, and look at the last line you read! — then rub your eyes, and pretend you've just awakened from an ugly dream!"

He was slowly drawing his hands down from his face, and looking as though this itself might be a dream. In bewilderment he asked:

"Is this true?"

"Ah, yes, yes," she hurriedly answered. "It is all true. The nobility which made old Ben French and Leister Mann be friends, has reached into the valley and calmed the hatred which by our law should live between you and me. Go back to your book. Tomorrow when I see you, today will not have been. No, don't thank me! You might — thank Ruth!" And quickly she was gone.

But Dale was following. At the end of the arbor he caught her by the shoulders, as he would have caught a

fleeing boy. Springing about, she saw the new light of happiness in his face, and her irritation at being thus stopped changed almost into laughter.

“I will thank you anyhow,” he said, with a silent chuckle of honest fellowship. “This is like givin’ me a new life after I’d been shot to death. Just watch those lessons fly now!”

“But you mustn’t stop ladies roughly that way!”

He stepped back, stammering and visibly embarrassed as she knew he would be; and, believing it well for him to continue so to be, she went toward the horse. But he was again at her side, not to apologize; — just humbly to help her mount.

He watched as she cantered around the circle and passed between the old gate posts; then threw back his head and gazed into the sky, solemnly, earnestly; taking deep, deep breaths, as famished kine will dip their muzzles in a stream and gluttonously swallow. After this he went slowly to the library, took up the book, and reverently opened it at the place where he had begun to dream a dream.



## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE SHERIFF FORGETS HIS PRISONER

Had Jess remained undiverted when he galloped out of Arden, Brent might soon have been honorably and apologetically escorted from the Buckville court house steps; but as he crossed a stream trickling over the pike — the same spot where Tusk gave battle to Mephisto — his eyes rested on a bee, a bee which had settled there to drink from the moist earth. This checked the sheriff, who was ever considerate of his fondness for wild honey — and this was a wild bee. Moreover, when he had looked again, he saw other bees in the act of drinking. So he quietly dismounted, gave his bridle rein to the darky, crouched and crept forward.

There is sometimes found in the realm of man one whom a bee will not sting. Whether this is in respect for the man, or self-respect, may still be pronounced an open question. One is inclined to think this way, or that way, according to the aspect of him who makes the boast. At any rate, Jess was of this select few, and in another minute he was standing erect, chuckling, with five little workers buzzing excitedly between his two palms, held together cup-like.

Now he permitted one to crawl out, and it shot away

as a rifle ball toward a clump of trees some half a mile distant. This was the sheriff's first clue.

Carefully he climbed the worm fence — for it would not do to crush even so lightly his four remaining captives — and strode blithely on. But he was a long time reaching the trees; for a man, holding his two hands out before him, delicately clasped and protecting bees, who must cross fences and scramble through ravines, does not travel with the rapidity of thought.

At the edge of the wood he released a second bee, watching it with the same intentness as it darted off; and, having walked to about the spot where it had disappeared, he let out prisoner number three. Of course, on the same direct line this one went — for wild bees thus captured and set at liberty abandon all desire for further work, and in a panic rush headlong to their hive; in this way the wild hives are found. But the fourth very soon swerved upward into the branches of a hollow black-gum tree. Chuckling now, Jess indifferently freed the remaining captive; for the search was ended, the treasure house was his. He pressed his ear against the bark and listened. A low, incessant buzzing sound was there, as though these five excited wanderers were recounting their adventure to the agitated colony.

Having marked the place, the sheriff pressed on through the wood to a neighboring farm house where he prevailed upon one Hod Fugit, to accompany him with axe and buckets. The prudent Hod would have brought a veil had Jess not laughed him out of it — for Jess, secure within himself, would have the fun go as far as it

could be stretched. An hour later the black-gum tree came ripping, crashing to earth.

The intelligence, or instinct, of the bee has furnished inspiration for many pens. Centuries prior to Maeterlinck, even before Pliny, Virgil, Varro and Aristotle, those warmly constructed little insects, hailed by the ancients as Winged Servants of the Muses, have been immortalized. But, however much has been extolled their intelligence, or instinct, in no page is it transcribed that their heads, or brains, or hearts are the regions where-with they argue; and, when this honey had been gathered, Hod's rotundity of countenance was not all cheer. This, because man's sense of humor is an enigmatical product, afforded Jess many pleasant chuckles as he trudged, now with a full bucket of the golden prize, back to his horse; and, in order to portray Hod's antics more vividly to the several acquaintances he met on his way to town, he not infrequently dismounted. But, entering the Court House square at sunset, his mirth sank miserably into his boots; for there upon the steps sat a young man in smart puttees and riding breeches just finishing his dozenth cigarette.

Thus it came about that a little bee, athirst and momentarily ceasing its frenzied toil to drink beside the way, led a sheriff from his duty, and affected a prisoner's release from voluntary durance at the precise moment for him to meet, three miles out the pike, a happy girl — herself hurrying homeward — in whose heart someone's name was ringing with the beat of her bounding pulses, and in whose cheeks a color flamed as she recognized him coming.

They reined in gently and stopped. The horses touched noses. For the merest instant his eyes hungrily devoured her, then for an instant closed, and after this he smiled politely, asking:

“May I say you’re stunning?”

“Flatterer, comforter,” she laughed. “But I’m dreadfully in need of it. I’ve been — been crying!”

“Yes,” he murmured, “I remember; you must have been. Shall I go back with you as far as Bob’s gate?”

“No; it is almost in sight, and you’re as late as I. Why do you say you remember? — that I must have been?”

“Because you just now told me you had been,” he smiled again.

“Brent,” she leaned over and looked very seriously into his face, “don’t temporize. I’m not in the humor for it! I heard about — something today, and I want to tell you that you’re — that you’re splendid!”

“What about?” There was no feigned surprise in his question.

“Oh,” she clapped her hands as a delighted child might have done, “he doesn’t know that Tusk is alive!” But added gravely: “Suppose he’d been dead, Brent!”

He turned away; afraid, in this surprise and strange giddiness which was enveloping him, to trust himself to speak. There ensued a longer pause, broken by her wistful voice asking: “Why did you, Brent?”

“Oh, I was just having a little fun with Dale,” he answered casually. “Hurry, it’s late! I’ll race you to Bob’s gate — and leave you!”

Turning his horse to put it in motion, he did not know that she sat drooping in the saddle, and staring — pale and staring — with a horrified fear and disappointment in her eyes.

“I’ll not race,” she faltered. “It is so near, so don’t come. Perhaps I might have guessed — that — you — were — but I just — just hoped —. Good night. I didn’t see the Colonel — please say I send my love.”

She was riding away, when he called desperately after her:

“Don’t you want Dale to have a little of it?”

That one taunting, trembling, passionate question, hurled at her with such bitterness of feeling, such hopeless sense of despair, touched a spring which opened the doors of the heretofore inscrutable, and flooded her with light. For an instant the pike danced before her eyes as though it were a road of bejeweled splendor! She wanted to laugh, and she did laugh; and, if he had guessed the reason, she might have had to use both whip and spur in a longer race than just to Bob’s gate. But he did not guess, and she did not turn her head nor slacken pace. Unhappily and sullenly he rode on to Arden.

Several days passed before they met; but in the meanwhile he had spent not a few nights sitting by that window in his darkened room, building castles and tearing them down, planning futures and destroying them; dreaming, dreaming. His attitude had become merely deferential, requiring a studied reticence upon her own part, and precluding a reference to their meeting on the road, or any mention of nobility, the sheriff, Dale or Tusk.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE MYSTIC GARDENER SHOWS HIS WORK

It was sundown about a week later when Brent came up the steps and threw himself in a chair by the Colonel's side. Jane and the faithful Mac had just left — indeed, the sound of her horse's hoofbeats might still be heard through the pulseless evening as the two men gazed in moody silence at the approaching night. The sky had taken on that deep blue velvet softness of Italian beauty, and the low, red west of the dying day might have been reflected from some funeral pyre in distant, mystic India. A murmur of drowsy birds came from the darkening trees — a few hushed, plaintive notes, wistfully calling in tones of twilight.

“Poor little Mesmie is having a bad time of it,” Brent spoke with an effort. “It's been fourteen days, and Stone says he must try to graft skin. I offered mine, but he couldn't consider it.”

“That was very fine of you, Brent,” the old gentleman turned to him. “Why wouldn't he take it?”

“Oh, there wasn't anything fine about it, Colonel,” he answered with a touch of irritation. “He couldn't take it because he saw us with some juleps this morning. He says he has to have healthy skin for grafting.”

The Colonel cleared his throat. He had just been contemplating a signal to Zack, but now the idea seemed somehow inappropriate.

"Why not Bradford?" he asked. "He's her father!"

"He's got poison-ivy, or hives, or something." And, after another moment: "Good night, sir, I think I'll go up stairs and work!"

In the library Dale closed his book and stood up. He had overheard this conversation about skin grafting, and now went softly out through the dining-room way, thence to the overseer's cottage. Pushing open the door, he looked in.

In the uncertain glimmer of light cast by the shaded kerosene lamp, sat the doctor, Bradford and Aunt Timmie, each with eyes on the little sufferer. They did not look up, and he passed through, standing with his hands clasped behind his back, gazing down with the others at the pitiful scene. Nor did they realize he was there until his deep voice drawled:

"Brent says you want healthy skin."

"I do, very much indeed," Stone quickly arose.

"Well, I reckon you can have what you want of mine."

The doctor took up the lamp and held it close to Dale's face.

"Drink?" he asked.

"Never have yet."

Ignoring the presence of Aunt Timmie, he put a few more intimate questions, and a look of gratification crossed his face when the mountaineer had fully answered.

"You'll do," he whispered hopefully. "Don't eat breakfast in the morning, and be here at seven o'clock."

"What's that for?" Dale asked.

"I'll put you under an anæsthetic, and your stomach must be empty."

"What's anæsthetic?"

Doctor Stone explained it.

"And how long will that last?"

"You ought to feel pretty good by noon, maybe sooner."

"But I've got to study in the mornin'!"

"Study, man! Get that notion out of your head. You won't do any studying tomorrow!"

"Then you don't get any skin tomorrow," Dale turned resolutely on his heel. "I've got too much to do, an' too little time to do it, to fool 'round here!"

Stone looked at him in speechless wonder, saying slowly in his surprise:

"I don't understand you!"

Bradford sprang up to entreat, but was pushed roughly aside as the mountaineer started to the door.

"Wait, Mr. Dawson," he implored. "Maybe you kin save her life!"

"I ain't begrudgin' the skin," Dale wheeled on him with savage emphasis, "but time I do begrudge! Get someone else!"

"You miss the importance of this," the doctor was also losing patience. "I'll only keep you —"

"You won't keep me a minute —'cause I won't give

you a minute! There's others who've got skins!" And he passed quickly out.

Stone could do no more than glare after him, and he then said something which is not usually said in sick rooms.

"Won' a li'l cullud skin do?" the old nurse looked timidly up at him.

He shook his head; smiling, but sadly.

She sighed. The windows were getting black now; night was settling over the earth; yet this man in whose hands rested the fate of Mesmie walked softly back and forth across the room, muttering:

"I must have good skin."

"I knows whar you kin git good skin," she whispered excitedly, arising and grasping him by the sleeve. "Git in dar-ar churn of yoh'n an' go dis minit to Tom Hewlet's house, den tell Miss Nancy ole Timmie say we'se countin' on her! She'll come, too! Make haste now, man!"

The noise of his little machine was growing faint, when the door opened and Brent stood on the threshold.

"Where's Stone, Aunt Timmie?"

"He's done gone," she sharply answered, for by now her heart was beating with strong resentment against entire mankind. "What you want 'im fer?"

"Nothing, so long as he isn't here," Brent turned away.

But she was following. After all, he did come to the little girl's relief — even though his intimacy with juleps had spoiled the offer. So she called after him in a kinder voice:

"I never said he warn't comin' back! What you want 'im fer, Marse Brent? Is you sick?"

"No," he gave a short laugh. "It's this way: He couldn't use me on account of my drinking — even little as it now is; and I wanted to ask how long a fellow must be entirely free from it to make his skin a good grafting proposition. If he thinks Mesmie can wait that long, I'll stop to-night and get ready. That's all. Tell him, will you, Aunt Timmie? And let me know? I'll be up stairs pretty soon."

A soft light crept into her face.

"We don' need it now, chile," she murmured. "We'se gwine git some nice, soft lady-like skin. De doctor's done gone arter her!"

"You don't mean Miss Jane!" he turned furiously upon her. "She shan't do it, I tell you!"

"Since when's you had de right to say what she kin do an' what she cyarn' do, I'd lak to know? But," she began to chuckle, "as you 'pears so upsot 'bout it, I'll tell you he ain' gwine arter Miss Jane. Now, better go home, an' not talk so loud!"

Embarrassed, he started toward the house.

"Bress yoh heart," she whispered to herself. "Dar is good in you, arter all — I don' kyeer ef you an' Marse John do toddy too much at times!" Then, quite suddenly, she asked aloud: "Who sont you back heah dis time?" His first visit she might have attributed to Jane, but Jane had now been gone half an hour. She began to think he had not heard, for he continued walking



away; but, at last, his voice came through the gloom:

“The gardener.”

“De gyard’ner!” she tried to reach him with her eyes. “What’s de use of talkin’ dat a-way! De gyard’ner don’ never come nigh de house!”

There was another silence. She knew he had stopped now; she knew he was still close in front of the cottage, but her eyes were too poor to make him out in the gathering darkness.

“That’s just the trouble, Aunt Timmie,” she heard him say. “We don’t often let the gardener come in to keep things trim and decent!”

She followed this thought with perfect understanding, for allegory was a part of her racial inheritance. She was touched, also, by the soft timbre of his voice — a quality which showed him to be deeply moved — and she leaned farther forward, peering out at him. There was something weird, and something fascinating, about these impressive words issuing from an unseen and unexpected source. The night was so still and ghostlike — the atmosphere about the cottage so charged with tragedy — the metonymy this invisible speaker employed so subtle!

“Whar’s yoh gyard’ner?” she asked breathlessly.

“I don’t know,” he gave a short laugh.

“Well, he ain’ so ve’y fur off, honey! Go an’ seek ’im — you needs ’im, Gawd knows you does! — but mebbe he won’ find sich a turr’ble lot of wu’k to do, arter all! Sometimes people’s gyardens is cu’ious dat a-way!”

He left after this, and walked slowly beyond the house to the circle of cedars. As he was pushing aside the

branches, his eyes detected something white, out near the gate, moving through the deep shadows of the trees. He stopped, puzzled. A faint radiance from the stars made the spot where he stood quite discernible and, now seeing him, this white thing, whatever it was, changed its course and approached. As it came he saw that it seemed to be stumbling, or staggering, and he thought that it was moaning. Then suddenly he recognized Jane.

In a bound he was across the intervening space and, as she stumbled again, caught her in his arms, crying hoarsely :

“ For God’s sake, what has happened? ”

She clung to him, drooping, sobbing, and out of breath ; and fiercely he held her closer, as though by the presence of his strength she might feel secure.

“ Mac,” she gasped, convulsively, “ Mac — is dead! ”

“ How? ” He asked it calmly ; with a fearful, avenging calm ; knowing that in the way Mac died would be revealed a tragedy.

She tried, but could not answer, and simply leaned against him sobbing great silent sobs which shook her body and tore his soul with anguish. The love he had felt for her was slight to the passion now demanding utterance ; yet his lips set resolutely to suppress any word of endearment. He knew that she had come only to a friend, a big brother, someone to sustain her, and he knew too well how deadly the suggestion of anything more would be.

“ Can’t you tell me? ” he asked gently.

“ That fiendish man jumped out and caught my horse’s

bridle! Mac sprang at him, and he dropped the bridle, and I tried to ride him down, but he had a club and knocked my poor horse flat; — I jumped up, and Mac was fighting him terribly, but I knew he would kill Mac — and then — and then — I was so frightened I ran as fast as I could back here!”

“Thank God,” he whispered, in a voice which must surely have told her how he, too, was suffering.

She gathered her strength and stood more firmly, while he let his arms quietly fall to his sides.

“Would you like Bob and Ann to come over?”

“You could take me home, couldn’t you?” she wavered. “They thought I was going to stay here for dinner, and it’s no use frightening them with such a telephone message.”

Turning, they went slowly, silently, toward the house, but near the porch he hesitated, listening; then turned her about — for coming toward them across the lawn, limping, panting, with his nose to the ground but his stumpy tail belligerently up, was Mac.

She gave a low cry and knelt upon the grass, her arms out to receive him, and he dashed into them with a yelp of joy. The things she whispered then were exactly those which Brent would have given the riches of the earth to have heard her say to him; and Mac replied with all his doggy eloquence, furiously wiggling his body and making futile attempts to lick her face. Brent stood silently by, and for the first time in his life — at least the first time in his remembrance — something mysteriously hot and wet slipped down his cheek.

An hour later they drove into Flat Rock, leading her horse which was found grazing by the roadside. Back at Arden the Colonel and Dale, each with a high powered rifle, were mounting horses; and in town the sheriff was lifting a bloodhound to his buggy.

With a silent hand-clasp Jane passed into the house, but Brent waited for a word with Bob.

"The fellow must be quite crazy," he told this young planter, "so you ought to stay here with the girls. I'll meet the others, and tell you about it later."

Reaching the pike he drove hurriedly and was the first to arrive at their prearranged meeting-place. This was a hollow, where a little stream crossed — the place Tusk usually turned off after leaving Tom's house, and the scene of an earlier struggle. He got out of the buggy and carefully scanned the ground, flashing the same electric torch which had played a part here once before; smiling, despite his soberness, when he came to a patch of violently torn up sod ten feet from the spot where, evidently, Jane's horse had fallen. Here, he knew, Mac had made his gallant stand, desisting only after his instinct told him Jane had fled to safety.

There was little talking when the others came. The sheriff lifted his bloodhound to the ground, and the mild eyes of this heavy dewlapped creature looked confidently up at them, waiting to be told what human atom of the millions over the earth he must bring to justice. This was all he asked to know; so when Jess held out the handle of Tusk's discarded club, he sniffed it carefully and was satisfied. A low whine assured them that the man-

hunter had now an imperishable record of the scent; that he was ready to follow it across the State, around the world — providing the pursued one used no pepper or other mean artifice, and traveled by foot on land.

The men tied their horses, for this chase must be followed warily — nor could horses go where a hunted man might venture. Jess led, holding the leash strained by the hound's impatience. Silently the others followed into the black wood, and all was quiet save for the occasional snapping of a dead branch; — this hound having been too well taught to allow himself the joy of baying, except in rare situations. He knew the chase, and he knew the value of keeping his quarry unwarned.

But in half an hour the old Colonel was breathing hard. He had not been accustomed to walking through wild places at night, and it was this increasing fatigue, this undertaking of a trial beyond his strength, which seriously handicapped the party. Had he more wisely remained at home, the others might have pressed Tusk before he reached a country offering limitless possibilities for eluding pursuit, or before he was given such ample time to employ them — for Tusk, deficient as he was, possessed a certain type of mentality capable of embarrassing any bloodhound if given half a chance.

Yet even Tusk had been slow in getting started. He had caught Jane's bridle to ask her when Brent was going to give him that hundred dollars. Then Mac had dashed at him, and Jane had ridden at him. He had knocked the horse down, then dropped his club to tear away the dog. Time after time he had torn him from his legs and



slammed him violently to the ground, but each time Mac was back at him with greater fury; and at last, when the airedale, not whipped but wise, dashed off on the trail of his mistress to see that she met no other perils, Tusk sat down cursing savagely. His legs were smarting from their wounds, and one gash, deeper than the others, was bleeding freely; so he tore a strip from his shirt and rudely bound it up. It felt better now and he arose, knowing that both man and beast would soon be coming like a swift pursuing vengeance.

This country at night offered no mysteries for Tusk, who traveled it as confidently as he would have in the day. He even laughed as the thrill of the chase tingled through his powerful frame; then plunged into the wood and for an hour held a course due east.

His first halt was at the entrance of a tunnel-like formation in the rock which opened out to the bank of a rushing stream. Here, on this side, away from the noise of water, he must listen well. No sound, no bay; nothing but the hoot of an owl somewhere in the black forest reached his attentive ears. Yet an enemy would surely follow, and it must be baffled before he could lie down in peace to sleep.

So passing through the natural tunnel he waded across the stream, openly, without artifice, and followed up the opposite shore; purposely leaving a trail so simple that dogs could not miss it, and men would believe him unsuspecting of pursuit. Half a mile on, where it seemed the obvious thing for one to do who might be making all speed to the nearest county line, he recrossed. Several

times he did this in the same simple way, always heading east; but now the stream turned sharply north. He knew that it would, and he had planned to leave it here, continuing straight and boldly through the forest in order to emphasize the idea that he was taking the shortest route to safety; but after another half mile he stopped — then he laughed. Up to this point a puppy could have followed him to every crossing and picked his trail up readily on the other side. So he laughed, and now began the second phase of his cunning.

He doubled back upon that last half mile, entering the water where he had come out, then laid down and began to float with its swift current; touching the bottom with his hands or sometimes swimming the deeper places. Progress was restful and rapid now, and he felt thoroughly elated. Continuing past all his former fording places, past the natural tunnel where he first came in, he went on for another mile and then began watching for a branch that might be low enough for him to reach. This was not difficult to find in a forest so thickly wooded, and soon he had climbed into a tree without once having put his foot to shore. From branch to branch, from tree to tree, he went, feeling his way warily like a 'coon, reaching, swinging, risking much but never slipping, till at last he let himself off on a cliff several hundred feet back from the swirling water. He could indeed laugh now. At no place between the point where he began doubling back upon his trail three miles away, and this very spot on the cliff where he now stood, had he so much as touched dry land. That the sheriff's hound would be

hopelessly baffled was indisputable. The men, of course, might wait for daylight, and by examining each low hanging branch, from the stream's source to the point where it disappeared into the cave, discover the one by which he had climbed out. But this would require time; moreover they would have to possess a knowledge of his trick — and Tusk flattered himself that no one knew his trick. He was immeasurably pleased, and would have tarried here in an enjoyable contemplation of his triumph, but there was another link of safety to be added: a stiff, heartbreaking climb still higher to a spur of rock where he had often before “laid out.” Here, too, was his stock of food, whiskey and tobacco.

When he finally dragged himself up and rolled over on its flat surface, he did not think of these refreshments. He was exhausted and very sleepy. The long contact with cold water had numbed and soothed the wounds in his legs, and, since they had stopped smarting, his sluggish sensibilities caught no message of their existence — gave him no warning that the deeper gash had been partially opened by his climbing in the trees, and that now the red stain upon his ragged trousers was slowly spreading. He knew only that he was sleepy; so he yawned, then slept.

As an ox which snags his hock upon a point of flint and placidly grazes while he bleeds to death, so might Tusk have slept into eternity, were it not for that mysterious spark of something which the most crass of men possess to mark them human. Thus it was that later in the night he awoke with a feeling of terrible fear, of the presence

of some awful catastrophe; and sat up, looking about him through the dark, shivering. He did not comprehend that an alert subconscious mind might be giving the alarm, touching him upon the shoulder and guiding his hand to the bleeding wound; but, once he knew there was a bleeding wound, he acted with promptness and a fair degree of skill.

When the sky was growing light four weary men and a dejected dog passed down the bank of the disappearing stream, three hundred feet below this spur, trudging homeward. But Tusk, though weakened and breathing rapidly, was again asleep.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### A GIRL'S NOBILITY

At half past eight o'clock in the morning Aunt Timmie was tidying up the room, Doctor Stone was removing his white jacket, and, on an adjoining cot to Mesmie, Nancy lay dozing from the effect of an anæsthetic. Her face held a frown, as though even in slumber the memory of the ordeal was following her.

"I'll go now," he whispered, "and be back at twelve. You know what to do."

The old woman nodded, but did not stop the palm-leaf fan being impartially waved over her charges. She sat like a brooding hen with two chicks; very alert, keeping an eye on each.

It was about this time that the hunting party reached the stables at Arden and grimly separated — the sheriff being driven to his waiting buggy by one of the Colonel's men, who would bring home the tethered horses.

Dale looked at the sun, now high above the mountains, and, without a word, left for the library. His all night tramp seemed to have brought no fatigue; but the old gentleman and Brent, turning toward Bradford's cottage, moved slowly.

Timmie saw them coming up the path and, glancing once more at her charges, went to the door. She did not



at once notice that their trousers were frayed and muddy, and their faces scratched. News of Jane's adventure had not reached her. But her countenance was severe. During the night she had done a deal of thinking and her indictment spread over the entire male species — even now including Brent. In a hazy sort of way it was borne in on her that if gentlemen were unable to drink and at the same time keep their skins decent, they were becoming inexcusably degraded. In the circumstances, they could have no pretty gardens — ever! Above all, perhaps, was her intuitive knowledge that Brent had tried to harm this girl who, at the bidding of an old negress, came offering her flesh to help one in whom she felt no particular interest — though Dale, too, had immeasurably shocked her with his selfishness. The sum total of these things went into the long night's vigil, and left her at high tension. So now, when the men arrived, she was facing them, frowning as an indignant, inexpugnable black executioner.

“ Good morning, Timmie,” said the Colonel, starting to enter, but she blocked the doorway, announcing:

“ You-all cyarn' come in! Dar's a lady 'sleep in heah!”

“ How is Mesmie? ” he asked.

“ She's in mighty bad shape, dat's how she is! ”

The Colonel stood a great deal from Timmie and Zack, for much less than a tenth of which he would have sent another negro off his place in double quick.

“ Who is the lady? ” he asked, not over pleased at her humor.

“ Nem'min' who de lady is! But she's a suah-footed,

elegant an' lovely angel, dat's got moh human kindness in her den anyone I sees a-lookin' at *me!*”

“Come, come,” the Colonel frowned, “don't answer me in this childish way! Who is the lady?”

“Well, take a peep — bofe of you — but mind, don't make no fuss!”

She edged to one side, all the while watching Brent as they came near for the promised peep. His face flushed quickly, but the Colonel looked more carefully and, turning, whispered:

“I can't see her! Who is it?”

As she told them how Nancy had come, tears gathered in the old gentleman's eyes and his chin quivered with strong emotion.

“See that she wants for nothin’,” he said gently. “When the doctor is through, bring her right over and have everything comfortable.”

“I'se done planned dat out, Marse John,” she spoke with her more accustomed tenderness. “She's gwine have de room 'crost from Miss Liz, an' fresh *boo-kays* eve'y day. We'se comin' over 'foh long, too; fer de doctor say he ain' gwine take no moh skin offen her.” Then suddenly she exclaimed: “What, in de land sake, is de matter wid you-all's pants?”

But he had turned, and in deep thought started across the grass to the big house, leaving her in open-mouthed amazement.

“One doesn't see much handsomer things than that girl has showed us,” he said to Brent, who was keeping somewhat in advance.

"No," he answered over his shoulder.

Awhile longer the old gentleman walked with bowed head, then asked:

"Why your abstraction, sir?"

Brent wheeled and faced him. He was crimson with shame, and blurted out two short sentences:

"I'm a pup, Colonel! I've no right to walk with you!"

"Eh — wha — what do you mean, sir?"

The old gentleman stood rooted to the spot, one foot in advance as he had just begun his last stride. He had not even raised his head, but was looking up from under frowsy brows with eyes that were grave and startled. Against his will some old whisperings of months ago insistently recurred to him.

Brent now took a few steps back and fearlessly met those accusing eyes.

"One time I tried to hurt that girl," he said squarely. "I got her to meet me at night, because she didn't know any better, and I didn't give a damn. But she showed me what a scoundrel I had intended to be then, and she's just showed me again. She told me about Dale's blind sister then, and now she's telling that all over again, too. It gets next to me, Colonel, and if anybody wants to kick me about your farm till dinner, he can begin when he's ready!"

"All right — er — Gridley," the old gentleman smiled. "In the ratio of your repentance I feel proportionately happy. You've relieved my mind of a cloud that has shut out a lot of sunshine these past months, which other-

wise would have been entirely bright. So I absolve you, sir! Now let the talk die."

"Talk?" Brent flushed a deeper red. "Are they saying anything about it?"

"Emphatically no! — not the girls, at any rate. There may have been some — er — slight mention."

"Oh, I hate that," he cried, feeling his soul cringe for the injustice he had brought upon her.

"So do I, sir," the Colonel quickly declared, not understanding. "But you must let me assure you that the girls have given it little attention. They never gossip, sir! — for gossips, sir, are the most arrant of cowards! No one's character is safe from them, sir! They take a grain of fact," the old gentleman's face was becoming flushed as he thundered forth this pet denunciation, "and plant it in soil manured with the rottenest intentions, sir! And it grows into a bastard of truth, exhaling odors as vitiated as the breath of a toad! The very saints could not be revived from such a poison, much less our poor selves, sir, who strive a lifetime constructing character for those damned polluters to blight with their graveyard whisperings! I detest it, sir! The stench of it is repulsive to honest men and gentle women! But come," he added more genially, "before we spoil our breakfasts."

Miss Liz was waiting at the table and she poured their coffee with more than her usual concern. The Colonel could invariably detect in what humor that dear lady happened to be by the way she rendered him this service. He told her of Mesmie's condition, and portions of the other

news imparted by Aunt Timmie — breathing no word of the man-hunt, or what had led to it. For awhile her usually severe face was softened, and then she arose.

“ You must both get on without me this morning,” she said, with a faint smile. “ I must go to that girl, for she needs someone besides Timmie, and Timmie needs rest.” At the door she hesitated. “ Have I not told you, brother John, that the middle class is our country’s safeguard? — that we would be in a sorry plight without it? ”

Meaning no unkindness toward Nancy, but to vindicate himself in a former argument — and, of course, having kept from her the unpleasant termination of the mountaineer’s visit, he said :

“ Had she not come, we might have had Dale. You know that he offered himself.”

“ Yes, and I am very glad; for Dale is of that great treasure house — the middle class! ”

The Colonel cleared his throat. “ Well, my dear, I gathered from Timmie that Brent, not once but twice, offered the same service most handsomely.”

“ Cut it! ” Brent, flushing, whispered savagely across at him.

“ One may always depend upon a gentleman,” she drew herself up with dignity, “ to meet any situation! ”

“ Then it is not a question of class, but of being a gentleman, that should decide,” the Colonel chuckled.

But Miss Liz swept haughtily from the room and her untenable position, her answer trickling back to them until she reached the porch :

“ There has been too much noble generosity shown upon



your place during these twelve hours for you and me, John, to part with mutual recriminations!"

Straining his ears to catch the last of this, the old gentleman looked resignedly at Brent. "A wonderful institution is woman," he sighed. "By the way, where is Dale?"

Uncle Zack, whose wondering eyes had scarcely left their travel stained clothing, answered that he was in the library. Yet, as breakfast progressed, he did not come, so the Colonel and Brent, having finished, now arose to go after him.

"I want to tell you," the engineer said, as they stepped into the hall, "that I feel a lot better after our talk on the lawn this morning. I did everything I could to apologize, and she has let me stay her staunchest friend."

The old gentleman passed an arm about him. It was eloquent of confidence and extreme affection which words would have belittled.

"She is a noble girl," he murmured; then, gravely shaking his head: "but what I cannot understand is where she gets those sterling qualities. Her breeding must be most inferior!"

"Colonel, you've seen a lot more of the world than I, but it seems to me that pedigree isn't worth half as much as charity and common horse sense."

"Those qualities," he retorted, now glowering at the engineer, "are traits which every man possesses in his own estimation, and in which he regards his neighbors as singularly lacking!"

"I was never more convinced of it, sir," Brent

laughed. "Now, I'm going to bed — what are you going to do?"

"I think," the poor old Colonel sighed wearily, "I'll sleep right here, leaning against these banisters."

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE PRODUCT OF SUNLIGHT PATCH

As the weeks passed, a great relief spread throughout the place when it became known that Mesmie would recover. The grafts had taken hold, and it now seemed as though her days might be long and prosperous. Fair judgment placed this to the credit of the young physician, and Jane had congratulated herself more than once for having transgressed the Colonel's wishes in calling him instead of Doctor Meal. For the slow moving, sympathetic Doctor Meal would have applied linseed oil, patted the child's head and called her a good little girl. Then, carried by his pacing mare, he might have started townward for a bag of candy or a doll; while she, on the speedier wings of deadly tetanus, would in all probability have gone to her ancestors.

This, at least, was the prevailing opinion of everyone except the Colonel, who would tolerate no suggestion of it. Doctor Meal had always cured his ailments, and he knew his skill from long experience. The fact of the matter was, the Colonel possessed a strong constitution and happened to be lucky. His old friend and physician, if called professionally, had a way of beginning his examinations in this wise: "Well, John, what you reckon ails you?" The Colonel would then give a diag-

nosis as suggested to him by a night of discomfort. "Well, well! You must feel right bad, John! What you reckon I'd better give you?" The Colonel would then name some nostrum, also decided upon during the long night. Old Doctor Meal would open his saddle-bags and mix it, along with a toddy to make it palatable; then he would build a toddy for himself, and sit down to talk. Of course, the Colonel swore by him!

Nancy had long since been brought over to the big house, because neither the Colonel nor Aunt Timmie would consent to her going home — both through purely different motives. It meant but one more addition to the Colonel's eleemosynary institution (as Ann had acquired the habit of calling Arden) and gave Doctor Stone an additional reason for making his daily visits: thirty minutes at Mesmie's bedside, and anywhere from one to three hours walking beneath the trees with his older patient.

But in other directions matters were not so hopeful. For a fortnight Jess and his bloodhound had grimly searched the mountains. He felt the necessity of raising a posse, but the Colonel would have none of that; no others besides themselves and the trusted sheriff, he swore, must share the story, lest it be bandied from tongue to tongue and eventually distorted — too many characters, he said, were sacrificed every Saturday night by those gods who whittled upon their thrones in front of the village store to take any chances. So Jess had searched alone and in vain.

Brent, working at the survey with an ardor that might have been inspired by the example of Dale, had each eve-

ning come home by way of the partly rebuilt cabin, hoping — praying — to get a glimpse of the outlaw. Nor had the Colonel remained passive, but his activities progressed on the back of a horse. There had been one other watcher of whom neither of them knew.

This particular morning the engineer was in his room, plotting out an accumulation of field notes. By him, and bending over the large drawing board with as deep, though not as accurate, an interest, the Colonel stood. Not infrequently now did the old gentleman come up to watch this railroad grow upon paper, and talk as the other worked. They had been speculating on the whereabouts of Tusk, and Brent was supporting Jess' theory that he had fled into Virginia; but it was a most unpleasant subject to them both and the Colonel exclaimed:

“I understand Tom has accepted my price!”

“Yes. He sent his wife to Dulany. They're leaving almost at once.”

The old gentleman chuckled. “You've won the neighborhood's everlasting gratitude, sir! And did he promise to brace up in the country of his adoption?”

“By proxy,” Brent mumbled, at the moment carefully drawing a line. “But promises don't amount to a fiddle-de-dee. Men brace up when they want to. Have you seen Jane lately?”

“Not for some days. You know I urged her not to ride alone. Why?”

“I was just wondering if she had spoken to you about Dale. Have you noticed anything strange in him?”

“I've noticed that he is thinner,” a shade of worry



passed over the fine old face, "and his eyes —" he hesitated.

"That's it," Brent looked up. "His eyes have a haunted look. He's sick, Colonel."

"I should have spoken to Stone, Brent, but have been so worried over that dear girl! She seems changed, too. I don't know what is happening to us!"

"Better speak to him today, then. He's leaving for a few days' pilgrimage to distant patients."

The old gentleman went to the door and called down to Uncle Zack, sending him after the doctor whom he knew, since the little motor vehicle was in front, must be somewhere on the grounds.

In silence they waited; the Colonel meditative, Brent leaning above his drawing and making line after line which would weld the mountains with civilization. Still their man did not come, so without further comment the Colonel went slowly down stairs and out to the porch, there gazing sternly at the grouped lawn chairs where the attentive physician was sitting with Nancy. But, as he approached them, a measure of recollection must have returned to the man of science, for he looked hurriedly at his watch and began to stammer:

"Colonel, I am greatly to be excused! I was just — just giving Nancy a few — a few instructions till I come back for her!"

"For her, or to her?" the old gentleman's eyes twinkled.

"He said 'to her,'" she insisted, blushing furiously.

"I really — that is, I said 'for her,'" the doctor smiled

happily, as she gave him a rather bewildering look and precipitately fled.

They watched her go into the house and then turned to each other, one with an accusing smile, the other grinning self-consciously.

“You’ll find her here when you return,” the old gentleman murmured. “I shall never permit her to go back to those who are neither her blood nor breeding, and my home shall be her home until she chooses to leave it; but, sir,” he began to smile again now, “my consent will have to be obtained — I warn you!”

The doctor, still crimson to the roots of his hair, was endeavoring to say something rational about his practice and his prospects, when the Colonel sternly interrupted him.

“Stone, all the worldly goods you may possess or ever expect to possess, if they were greater than these mountains behind us, would not amount to a damn, sir, unless your mind is clean and your body healthy! If you can say before your God that they are no worse than those of any man whom you would have your sister wed, go then and win your bride!”

A silence followed, so prolonged that the Colonel was beginning to feel the sickening weight of dread about his heart, when the other said quietly:

“Then I may as well ask you now!”

“God bless my soul, sir,” the old gentleman cried, “I consent right merrily! Nor shall I keep you another minute from her, after we speak a word of Dale!”

“Miss Jane telephoned me about him this morning.”

“ And what did you tell her? ”

“ That he’s working too hard. ”

“ Nothing more serious? ”

“ That’s plenty serious enough, Colonel, if he sticks at it. I talked to him a little while ago, and he wanted to throw me out the window. Nobody can make him stop that grind! ”

“ Jane can, ” the old gentleman grunted.

“ She’s going to try, anyway, when he takes his lessons to her this afternoon. But she told me he was so impatient now preparing himself to go up in the mountains and be a Lincoln to his people, that she really doubts if she can influence him without help. ”

“ Be a Lincoln to his people, eh? ”

“ Yes, emancipate them from the chains of ignorance, he calls it. ”

“ By Godfry, sir, that isn’t a bad idea! Whose help does she want? ”

“ Oh, I suppose your’s, and Brent’s, and mine, and everybody’s. ”

For awhile the old gentleman appeared to be wrapped in thought. At last he asked :

“ When do you leave to see your distant patients? ”

“ In the morning. ”

“ How far to the east does that duty lead you? ”

“ Pretty well into the next county. ”

“ If you should locate that place called Sunlight Patch, ” the Colonel looked up, “ and bring him word from his sister to rest for a month, he’d do it! ”

Stone slapped himself upon the leg and hopefully an-

nounced: "That's the only way to handle him! I want to go there, anyhow, and get a look at that woman!"

"So do I," the old gentleman murmured. "Some day I want to go up there, and take her back nine dollars and the mare; and tell her what her influence has stood for in this valley — better ideals and ways of living! — who can tell how far it reaches!"

"Yes, who can tell!" the doctor softly answered. "It all seems to stand as a sort of product of Sunlight Patch, which will stay with us long after Dale has gone."

"That is it," the Colonel nodded, his serious gaze upon the ground, "the product of Sunlight Patch, which will remain long after Dale and we have gone. But come," he looked up, "I am keeping you!"

"Well, if you don't mind, I'll go in for a minute and say good-bye — then come out and join you again."

"I'll be damned if I wait here till sundown," the old gentleman chuckled. "Shake hands now, sir, and let me wish you God-speed in this, and all your journeys; then you may take your own good time about saying good-bye, sir! I'm going up to Brent, anyway, and tell him! — about Dale, about Dale," he added hastily, seeing a look of consternation come into the doctor's face. But, a few minutes later when he had climbed to Brent's room, so excited was he with news and fresh plans that his very first words were: "Did you know that that fellow, Stone, is going to marry our Nancy?" He, like Aunt Timmie, put his secrets in safe places.

Being in the third floor is why he failed to see Jess come onto the porch, or Uncle Zack admit him to the library.

Dale did not at first hear the sheriff, even when the old darky had announced him and pushed a chair up to the table. But Jess, possessing less delicacy in matters of this sort, or being more in earnest, laid a hand on the mountaineer's shoulder and gave it a rough shake. This brought him back from Cicero with a glare of fury, though quickly dismissed at sight of his visitor.

"I reckoned I'd find you 'sleep," were the sheriff's first words, when Zack had gone.

"Oh, I sleep some in the evenin's. Sleep's mostly for women, anyhow."

"I wouldn't be s'prised if a leetle wa'n't fer men, now an' then," Jess grinned. "You can't lay out watchin' his cabin till daylight, as you've been doin', an' set around with these heah books all day. Fu'st thing you know you'll be drappin' off in a snooze out thar, an' missin' him!"

"Don't let that worry you," Dale clenched his fists. "I got to be with these books all day, an' I got to watch for him at night — or the books won't do me any good."

"I don't quite foller yoh reasonin'!"

"I didn't think you would," he gave Jess a superior look. "Got any news?"

"Nope; an' I've come to say I'm ready to give up! My hound says thar ain't a smell of 'im 'tween heah an' hell."

"Then your hound lies; for I tell you he's around somewhere, an' not so very far off, either!"

"Look-ee-heah," the sheriff raised half up in his chair, "I don't 'llow no man to call my hound a liar!"



“ Oh, sit down, Jess! Didn't I just tell you I *know* he's around somewhere? ”

“ Then what kind of a dawg might *you* be, Mister Dawson? ”

But Dale either did not hear, or did not want to take this up. All he said was:

“ Let's keep on trying, Jess! ”

“ Oh, all right, if yoh're so dod-gasted suah! Go on, then, an' watch tonight, an' I'll relieve you, same as usual, jest 'foh day! ”

There was nothing more to be said, so the mountaineer turned back to the table, thus curtly dismissing the sheriff whose face flushed as he got up and went out.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### A TIN CYLINDER

The week dragged through to a lifeless close, and the anxiety of those nearest Dale perceptibly increased. Unquestionably he was getting thinner, his eyes were deeper and more haunted. In vain did they urge him to rest but he turned a deaf ear to all entreaty.

The doctor had been expected since noon of the previous day, and every sound on the pike brought the old gentleman to his feet, peering hopefully through the trees. Each hour, from twelve on, had made him more restive. Throughout luncheon and dinner his gaze would repeatedly wander across the terrace to a strip of lane in view from the dining-room window; and he sat up late that night, still listening. So he had slept late this Sunday morning.

But Brent, aroused by an undercurrent of some strange excitement, awakened with the birds. He went softly down the hall for his tub and dressed with more than his usual care; all the while wanting to whistle, but desisting through deference to the sleeping household.

As he stepped out into the fresh early morning one might have remarked a noticeable change in him since the night he crossed twice to Bradford's cottage. His eyes

were clearer, the flesh upon his cheeks was firm and bronzed. He was a few pounds lighter, and this gave his face a clean-cut, chiselled look. His step was buoyant, and one instinctively knew that beneath the well-fitting clothes played a network of splendidly laced muscles. He threw back his head and took a deep, joyous breath of the cool pure air, then went on toward the chairs clustered in inviting comfort beneath the trees. But the grass and they were still wet, so he began strolling around the tanbark circle, following paths and brushing through dew-bathed spider webs stretched like spun glass across his way.

The picturesque old peach orchard was a wealth of blushing fruit, dropping from the over-weighted branches into a carpet of red clover. He went in here, and came out with his teeth buried in a luscious peach — leaning forward and wanting to laugh as its juice trickled over his chin. For not only were his hands occupied with other peaches, but he was pressing tightly beneath one arm a tin cylinder, three feet long and several inches in diameter. This was the thing Zack first noticed when that worthy appeared some half hour later.

“Good mawnin’, Marse Brent,” he bowed. “It sho’ly do look good to see you down so fresh an’ early! What’s dat cu’ious lookin’ thing you got dar?”

“It’s a lay-over-to-catch-meddlers, Uncle Zack.”

“A lay over to do which?” he squinted.

“It has a present in it,” Brent laughed. “Give me a match!”

He lit a cigarette, and the old fellow watched with a

fond expression which gradually drew up into a tangle of wrinkles.

“Doesn’ you want me to fetch you a li’l julep fer a mawnin’-mawnin’? It’ll make yoh breakfas’ set mighty good arter all dem peaches, an’ I ain’ fixed you none for — why, it must be moh’n a month!”

“No, you old sinner, I’m through with your mawnin’-mawnin’s; and if you bring any around I’ll take you to the grindstone!”

Uncle Zack stroked his jaw and grinned.

“Sho! Dat ain’ gwine do me no hahm now, ’caze mah onlies’ toof’s done drapped out.”

“Then I’ll get Miss Liz after you!”

“Lawd, Marse Brent,” the old fellow grew serious, “you knows she ain’ turr’ble no moh! She’s jest as meller as dem peaches, an’ only las’ week give me a dollar ’caze I hadn’ cyarried de Cunnel but one julep dat day!”

“Is the Colonel getting up?”

“Naw, sah, he ain’ budged. He say he sleepin’ better’n he uster.”

“Zack, do you want to ride over to Mister Bob’s for me before breakfast?”

“You knows I do — ‘foh breakfas’, an’ arter breakfas’!”

“Then get your mule — I’ll have something for you to take.”

While Zack was hurrying to the stables, Brent walked excitedly to the garden to pick a bouquet of flowers; but, although there were thousands of blossoms from which

to choose, their selection seemed a most difficult problem. More difficult, however, was a note he tried to write a few minutes later in the library; and Zack was waiting patiently before the third attempt — which happened to be the successful one — was sealed.

This he tied with the flowers to the mysterious cylinder and handed them to the grinning negro.

“Don’t muss things up,” he admonished. “And you know who to give them to!”

“I knows you ain’ sendin’ no flowers to Marse Bob or li’l Bip,” the grin became broader.

Then Brent continued his walk. He felt that he could never be quiet again. The Colonel, when he came down, was too much occupied with his own thoughts to notice this restlessness, but, as a woman appeared to serve breakfast, he asked:

“Where is Zack?”

“I’m to blame,” Brent answered. “I sent him over to Bob’s with a little remembrance. This is Jane’s birthday, you know!”

“Why, so it is!” But then he looked fixedly across at Brent, and began to raise up slowly out of his chair. “You didn’t send the — the railroad?”

Brent nodded, whereupon the old gentleman threw down his napkin and the next instant they were clasped in each other’s arms, dancing about the room, boisterously laughing, kicking, and greatly imperiling the furniture. As they stopped, Miss Liz was standing in the door, her hands up in an attitude of abject horror.

“My dear,” the old gentleman panted, “Brent has



finished the railroad and just this morning sent it over to Jane! We're celebrating!"

"Oh," she sank into her place with a sigh of relief, "I am so thankful it is no worse!"

"Worse! Why, God bless my—" but he checked himself in Miss Liz's presence.

"Did your father say you sent it to Jane?" she asked Brent, now thoroughly mystified, but sharing the happiness which could not be denied anyone in that room just then. "My dear boy, I am so glad!—and Dale will be so glad!"

"Where is Dale?" the men inquired.

Zack being away, and the maid not permitted in Bachelors' Belfry at this hour, Brent was for running up to call him, but the Colonel objected.

"He may be asleep, and that will do him more good than food which he can get at his pleasure!"

Immediately after breakfast Brent eluded the old gentleman and went out beyond the gate to watch for Zack. Up and down the cedar bordered avenue he walked, checking off the eternities which passed before the mule ambled into view.

"I wouldn' a-been so long, Marse Brent," Zack began apologizing and fumbling in his pocket for a note, "but Miss Jane jest nachelly taken a hour writin' dis!"

Now he was as impatient to be away from Zack as he had been for Zack to come. A few minutes later, down in the woodland pasture under a spreading beech, he stretched at full length in the bluegrass and reverently gazed at the little envelope. His own note had not called

for an answer of great — indeed, of any — importance. (The first one had, and the second! — but the last was, he thought, a model of convention.) However, Zack had said she was a long time writing it; — at least, his eyes could lingeringly dwell over line after line, page after page, traced by her hand!

What did meet his eyes was:

“This is the happiest birthday I have ever known!”

He wondered if she, too, had found note writing difficult!

As the morning wore on he saw the family carriage, with Uncle Zack in his beaver hat, move toward the pike, and he surmised that the Colonel, Nancy and Miss Liz were going in state to pay their respects to Jane. Then he went slowly home. It was very quiet with them away. Someone back near the kitchen was turning an ice cream freezer, which produced a rather unpleasant suggestion of Sunday company, and a long and tiresome feast. He saw the upstairs maid.

“Where’s Mister Dale?”

“He’s done gone out, sah.”

“How was he feeling?”

“I don’ know, sah. I didn’ see him!”

All of this was true, but Dale had gone out the previous evening, instead of today as the maid supposed when she found his bed in disorder. The mountaineer had regularly perpetrated this ruse each night before starting on his vigil, so, should he any morning be late getting home, the servant would merely suppose he had risen early. But, once snug in his hiding place near

Tusk's cabin, he would fitfully yield to cat-naps — alternately dozing a few minutes and watching half an hour. That the first of these brief slumbers did not hold him in its soothing clasp throughout the night, was merely proof of his dominant purpose to remove every obstacle which would keep the school from opening in September. Yet he had become wretchedly in need of sleep; his eyes were bloodshot, and his pulse ran fast.

In another two hours Brent, through the library window, saw the carriage returning majestically along the pike. He glanced at the clock, then at the telephone, then softly closed the door and called Jane.

She took a few minutes to thank him again, graciously, conventionally; nor did she mention the present by name, because it was a good-naturedly accepted neighborhood fact that Miss Gregget listened. Then she told him the Colonel had been there, that Miss Liz had been there, that Nancy had been there; that they had stayed awhile, that they had left; she asked about Dale without giving him a chance to answer; she told him something bright Bip had said, something sagacious Mac had done — and all the while the carriage was coming nearer! He had never before known her to talk so volubly, so incessantly; but, instead of translating its reason, as a wise man might have done, he looked furtively at the circle and repeatedly tried to interrupt her. At last, in desperation, he said:

“They're coming up the porch, and I've only thirty seconds to ask you something!”

She was very quiet then.

“ Will you go to the chapel with me this afternoon? Four o'clock? ”

“ Y — yes! I think it will be fun! ”

“ Fun! That's worse than 'audience' and 'pulpit'! Shall we ride or drive? ”

“ Let's ride. ”

“ And Jane! ”

Pause — “ Yes? ”

“ It's my happiest birthday, too! ”

She laughed. “ How old are you, Brent? ”

“ My eyes have been open for a month; — how old does that make? ”

“ A very small infant! ”

Miss Gregget snickered.

“ Oh, ” Jane gasped.

“ Damn, ” Brent growled, as both instruments clicked simultaneously.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### TUSK

Early that same morning as Jess approached the place where Dale was "laying out" near Tusk's cabin, he stopped a moment, listening; then gave the clear call of a quail. After waiting several minutes he whistled again, and as still no answer came he proceeded with extreme caution.

The sun was not yet up, but in the sky were bars of red that reached high above the mountains, and by this light he saw the watcher, face down upon the rocks, asleep. Nature, his god, had commanded, and he obeyed. Jess smiled, then noiselessly sat down to wait.

Noon came. The sheriff ate part of his lunch, lit his pipe, and settled back for a longer wait. He felt an infinite relief to see this strange man sleeping, for in his gruff make-up had grown a concern for the mountaineer approaching affection. Now he swore softly to himself that, even though Potter should come, he would let him pass rather than wake Dale.

But also during the morning his interest had been held by another thing. Idly facing the east, his gaze wandering over the scarred knobs or their wooded crests, he had gradually become aware of an occasional movement on



a spur far up the side of Snarly. Squinting his eyes he could distinctly make out something, but whether it were man or beast he could not be sure. Certainly it moved more as a restless bear whose cub, doubtless unable to master the climb, whined somewhere below. He turned this over in his mind.

It was three o'clock when Dale stirred. The sheriff smiled as he watched Nature gradually remove her bandage from the sleeper, who now, instantly awake, sprang up in dismay.

"Gawd! What time is it?"

Jess held out his watch.

"I must a-slept eighteen hours," the mountaineer gasped, as though such a thing were scarcely in the range of possibility.

"An' real glad I am, too, Dale! We ain't lost nothin' by it, an' it's done you a heap of good. Here's a bite to eat!"

Dale attacked it ravenously, then took a deep breath and stretched.

"I feel like a catamount! Come on, Jess — where'll we hunt?"

"I was jest thinkin'! Whilst you slept, I seen somethin' looked like a bar up on that-ar spur!"

Dale wheeled and watched the place for several minutes.

"I don't see nothin'," he said, at last.

"'Cause it ain't been over to our side yet, that's why! But it's thar, all right — or, leastwise, it was thar!"

"Jess," the mountaineer spoke quickly, "last spring

I saw him there, too. Come on! Maybe — but I don't reckon it could be, if you thought it was a bear!"

"I don't neither; but thar ain't no tellin'! It's 'bout the only place we *ain't* been! I'll tie the dawg heah, so's if it is a b'ar he won't git cut up none!"

After a hard two-hour climb they reached a ledge seeming to run on a level with the spur, followed it a few hundred feet and, cautiously parting the branches, looked out. There was still too much foliage to permit them to see, and they crept nearer; this time coming to the base of the spur itself. But Jess, who was slightly in advance, drew back and silently cocked his rifle — an act which any mountaineer would rightfully interpret as a command for absolute silence. Together, now, they edged forward.

Barefooted, crawling aimlessly about on his hands and knees, wagging his head from side to side and mumbling, was Tusk — in truth, enough like a bear to excuse the sheriff's former uncertainty. He seemed to have no intimation of the watchers who had, in their surprise, advanced far enough to be in full view. Indeed, twice he crawled within ten feet of them, all the while wagging his head in a way that, were he able to see at all, must surely have disclosed them.

"Is he drunk?" Dale whispered, but Jess solemnly shook his head.

"Nope, he ain't drunk — leastways, that ain't the main trouble! He's plumb crazy with a fever, an' damn nigh starved to death! Look at his face an' cracked lips! I

don't know as we'd orter take 'im down to town, Dale; — maybe it's ketchin'!"

"Not take him! Not take him!" Dale cried in an angry voice. "Well, *I* ain't afraid of nothin' ketchin'! He won't get away from me again, I tell you!"

"Who said I was afeerd of ketchin' somethin'?" the sheriff answered, with a black frown. "I was thinkin' of other folks! Didn't you never try thinkin' a leetle bit of other folks, jest to see how it 'ud feel, Dale?"

A deep growl from Tusk made them turn again. He was quite still now, and listening; while his eyes, seeing but not seeing, stared at them, and his brows puckered as though trying to call back some hazy memory.

"Good Lawd," Jess whispered, "look at his foot an' leg! It must be blood-pisen, or gang-green, or somethin' like that, Dale! — that, an' a burnin' fever, an' not any too much sense at best, poh devil! Why, he don't know whar he's at! Tusk," the tender-hearted officer stepped out and called to him, "we've come up to help you some!"

A spasm of terror crossed the unfortunate man's face; but then he gave a curious sort of laugh and began to crawl awkwardly toward the point of the spur.

"Set down thar, Tusk," the sheriff called again, this time making ready to follow. "Set down, now, till I git out to you!"

Tusk laughed. A child crawling over a nursery floor might so have laughed if playfully chased by its nurse. But this misshapen hulk of humanity did not possess even the wisdom of a child. He only laughed and crawled

faster, looking back with an expression of mischievous cunning and extreme delight.

Jess saw the imminent danger of Tusk's direction. With one movement he uncocked his rifle and laid it on the ground, then sprang out upon the spur. He did not ask Dale to follow, for somehow it was borne in on him that the mountaineer, having come expressly to wreak vengeance, was making a concession now in remaining neutral.

"Wait thar!" he yelled. "Wait, you fool, afore you pitch over the side!"

The sheriff was running, as well as one could run on such an uncertain, dizzy place, for Tusk had given another cry of hysterical delight and was crawling with all his speed, looking over his shoulder at this new play-fellow who seemed to enter so readily into a game.

"For Gawd's sake," the sheriff screamed. "Stop, Tusk! — Stop! — Oh, my Lawd!"

He was alone upon the spur, his face averted. Dale came slowly out and joined him; listening, also, in the solitude of this wild place to the deep rumble of water far below them, where it rushed into the earth carrying all things to some mysterious subterranean sea. There had been no cry from Tusk as he fell, for doubtless he had thought the plunge but a continuation of the game.

Without speaking, Jess turned and picked up two old shoes which lay in grotesque attitudes on the rock. These he placed side by side, and with them a few scattered remnants of corn bread, an empty whiskey bottle and an old hat. It was a pathetic attempt to do some-

thing — to leave the disordered man's house in order ; and he smiled quietly when Dale brought a cob pipe, a knife and a twist of "long green" tobacco, which he had found.

Silently, then, they made the descent and trudged homeward ; Jess solemn, Dale excitedly happy. But the mountaineer was not going to Arden just yet ; — first he must tell Jane that henceforth she could come without fear and help him with his lessons.

"Wall," the sheriff said, after another hour of walking, "if you're goin' to Flat Rock I'd better leave you heah, an' make my way to Arden. Our hunt's ended, right enough ; an' Gawd have mercy on his poh, ign'rant soul !"

They shook hands, and once more the mountaineer hurried on.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### A LANE AT TWILIGHT

The elaborate midday dinner at Arden had been dabbled at, or bolted with a rush which did scant justice to the cuisine of that hospitable establishment; for a restiveness obsessed the household which would not be denied. The Colonel was wishing for the return of Doctor Stone — and this happened to be the wish of Nancy. Brent cared little what took place if four o'clock would hurry around. Yet each shared in a vague apprehension for the mountaineer who, Zack told them, had not returned.

“He may have walked over to Bob's,” the Colonel suggested, and the simple hearted servant, seeing his old master's distress of mind, unhesitatingly declared:

“Dat's jest whar he done gwine, Marse John, sho's youse bawnd!”

This had brought relief, if not conviction.

Nevertheless, the old gentleman preferred to abandon his Sunday afternoon nap in favor of watching for Stone. Always, always now since yesterday morning, he found himself listening for hoofbeats — listening for the returning man of science who would bring a message of caution from the fountain head of Sunlight Patch; and, in this humor of expectancy, wandered out to the grouped chairs to be alone.

At half after three o'clock Brent came softly from the house, mounted his horse and started at a very slow walk around the tanbark circle. During this stealthy advance he watched with affectionate care to see that nothing disturbed the old gentleman, whose chin some time before had sunk peacefully to his breast. Still on the lookout for Stone, still vigilant and faithful to the interest of his mountain friend and guest, the Sunday afternoon nap of many years' indulgence had crept into his brain to claim its own.

For the first two or three miles after he and Jane turned out of Flat Rock their spirited animals were allowed to toss their heads and go for the pure joy of going. Mac dashed on in front, using every ounce of his sinew to keep that position. They were following the same lane, the same tangled aisle of rioting vines which he had one day likened to his life — a life in which his gardener had since been conscientiously employed.

She knew how conscientiously. Had Uncle Zack not daily poured it into Aunt Timmie's ears, still would she have known by a more convincing sense. She knew just when the gardener had entered the woods and pastures of his imaginings, cutting out the poison-ivy and pruning good things for greater promise. She had watched this with secret exultation; it hovered near her pillow in the nights, and touched her lips with song at waking time.

They reached the chapel and entered without a word. But on the threshold — where upon that other Sunday he had asked if this miracle might be performed for her sake and she had answered: "for your own!" — his eyes

looked seriously, deeply, down at her. She knew they were speaking for him, and while the service was in progress she wondered over and over if hers had answered.

Neither of these worshippers, who forgot to worship, was in a mood for talking as they came out and rode slowly home along the lane. Its evening peace seemed to be a continuance of the chapel's calm. The sun was low — balancing, as a red ball, on the hazy, distant hilltops. In three and a half minutes it would be down, leaving them in an afterglow of exquisite softness and touching the partially clouded western sky with a wealth of glory.

Plaintively across the fields could be heard the call of sheep, mellowed by the tinkle of their leader's bell. She could see them — little moving mushrooms on the pasture slope — and to her ears came the sound of someone letting down the stable bars. It suggested someone watching for her coming; someone letting down the bars and calling her into a place where she might be for all time safe.

“The days are getting short,” he murmured, watching the last red segment slip from sight. “It won't be so very long before these old oaks are as red as that sky.”

“I don't like to think of winter,” she, too, spoke dreamily. “And see! It's sunset! Don't you think we should be getting home?”

“I suppose we should,” he gloomily answered, though his heart was beating madly. “And in a few days I must think of hurrying home, too — of leaving this, all this,” his hand waved toward the crimson west. “It will be as if I were emerging from a wonderful dream

— from a crystal palace which will fall in little pieces; and I'll search and search for the rest of my life and never find it again! I shall miss my crystal palace!"

For a moment neither dared to speak. It was very still in the fragrant lane and their horses, which all this while had been walking slower, now stopped as though in obedience to some whispered voice. Leaning gently toward her, trembling before a depth of feeling which had never until this time been so stirred, he said hoarsely:

"I won't lose it! I can't lose it, Jane!"

Distantly — yet almost out of the air about them, as if it were the spirit of Kentucky speaking with ineffable gentleness through the gathering twilight — a quintette of negroes, somewhere across the valley, sang in mellow, minor harmonies:

"Weep no moh, mah lady;  
Oh, weep no moh, today!"

He could see that her eyes were swimming in an adorable moisture, and her face, touched by the dying day, seemed to be whispering out to him through a glorified mist.

"I can't live without it — now!" he was pleading desperately.

"Neither can I," she whispered.

Half an hour later, Mac was still sitting in the road, his head tilted inquiringly up at them; while the horses, still shoulder to shoulder, stood patiently champing their bits.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### TRIUMPH

When Dale had parted with Jess the westering sun was still half an hour from setting. As he strode powerfully on, his heart bounded with the thought of reopened opportunity — much as it did after Jane left him one other sunset evening when he had been looking into this same sort of sky.

The little stream he followed soon crossed a narrow, tangled lane, and this he knew would lead out toward Flat Rock; but, as he turned into it, far down its shadowy aisle he saw Mac, tail up, smelling under a ledge of rock for chipmunks.

There was no reason why the mountaineer should have sought a hiding-place, except for the wildness in his being which pointed cautionward; or, perhaps, feeling that Jane, not unattended, would be soon in sight, he may have preferred a more auspicious moment to deliver his gladsome tidings. At any rate, without giving much thought to whys or wherefores, he gained the bank overlooking the road and nestled securely in its foliage. Slowly, then, Mac came on, neither seeing nor suspecting; and slowly after him two riders came into view, at the very instant that the red sun dropped from sight.

When they were almost below him, when he suddenly



realized the indisputable truth that in Brent was an enemy to his ambitions more formidable than poor Tusk had been, a blinding rage swept through his brain which turned all things fiery as the west. Stealthily his hand felt over the ground for a stone large enough to crush this importunate engineer — this thief, who would steal his teacher and leave him stranded in a barren school! One was there, and his fingers, feverishly yet with caution, began to scratch away the loam which held it down. But then he hesitated. Had he not told her that the greatest call of all calls, whether it came from mountain peak or lowland, did not mean fight — it meant surrender? Had he not told her this himself? And so his fingers drew away from the rock. As he peered again through the bushes Brent was saying something about losing a crystal palace — Brent, who had so recently offered to take his place in jail! And then the horses stopped, shoulder to shoulder.

Was it a new glory which illumined the mountaineer's soul at this picture which followed there in the twilight? Was it something that had been reflected from the face and closed eyes of Jane, as Brent drew her into his arms? Had this glimpse of happiness, as he had never dreamed of happiness — this ineffable sweetness of first confessions — this heat of a kiss as pure as God's white crucible which would forever blend them into one being for His service; — had these drawn the scales from the mountaineer's eyes, as Saul's had been blinded at the roadside, and let him see all that had been one-sided, mean and narrow in his life?

It was dusk, and the horses, still shoulder to shoulder, had passed slowly on, when Dale left his place above the road. For a long time he watched where the shadows had closed behind them — now to be always behind them.

Thoughtfully, with steps of meditation, he crossed the fields and came within sight of the twinkling lights at Arden; then for a long while leaned his elbows on a fence and pondered over many things. When he started on there was a great understanding in his soul.

At a pasture near the house he stopped again, and sent a low, trembling call into the night. Listening, he heard the irregular galloping of aged Lucy, whinnying hopefully as she came, and finally rubbing her muzzle against him in unaffected delight. He must have surprised her then, for gently his arms went around her neck and more gently he said:

“ Lucy, d’ye reckon ye kin tote me back ter Sunlight Patch? — me, ’n’ a book ’r two? I got school larnin’ enough ter help ’em for a good long time ter come; but thar’s a new larnin’, Lucy, I jest now larned — the greatest larnin’ of hit all! D’ye reckon ye kin tote me back ter Sunlight Patch? — me, ’n’ a book ’r two? ”

THE END