SYCAMORE BEND

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SYCAMORE BEND

By

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By James Tandy Ellis

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CHAPTER I.

THE village lay basking under the gleaming sun of early June. It was an orderly sort of town, upholding a systematic semblance, from the outlay of its streets, to its resident portion. Old Gustave Samuels originally owned the tract of land, and "laid out" the town, with its broad streets and alleys.

The pride of the town and surrounding country, was the seminary, located upon the hill above the village, this institution lending an atmosphere of culture to the community. Otherwise, Sycamore Bend was just a typical Kentucky village, with all of the elements in keeping with a country town. The business end of it was impregnated with an essence of that easy-going, much-admired motto, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die." The hitching racks were generally filled up, the agricultural conditions in touch with the town were marked by a prosperous element,

the farms coming up to a good standard, the section of plenty—good neighbors and a soil to back all of it up. Here and there you found an old mansion with an old-time country gentleman reigning supreme over his domain.

The farmer came to town for his mail, and to get the news; to argue politics and religion, to trade horses, and in this line of action, the Kentucky farmer holds a special pride, for to get "skinned" in a horse trade is some set back for the average farmer. In such a community the telephone and rural mail delivery would have been a serious hindrance to the much-enjoyed diversion of getting to town.

On this afternoon in June there seemed to be an unusual number of visitors in town. John Fanton had taken over the agency for a new brand of beer, and was exalting the delights of a new drink known as brandy smash. From his barroom came occasional peals of laughter and of song. Old Ben Thompson rode up and hitched his horse to the rack and strode into the bar and called for "red licker." There was a waiting silence and an unspoken acquiescence to join him in the libation, but old Ben deliberately tossed off his tumbler-full, and without a word, walked out.

Cris Jinkins rapped his knuckles on the counter and remarked, "Ben Thompson hain't the man he used to be, 'spesh'ly since he jined the church,—sunthin' has come over him to disorganize him."

"No, sir," said Amos Tarkin, "there ain't no change; he makes a specialty of hogs, an' he's plum fit fer the business. Lige Grayson went out to see him one night; they was a quart of whiskey on the mantel and old Ben never took notice of it all the evenin'. Lige was in a huff when he left, and old Ben meets him the next mornin' an' says, 'Lige, I'm afeered I hurt your feelin's last night.'

"An' Lige says, 'you pintedly did.'

" 'I'm rale sorry,' says Ben.

" 'If you air rale sorry,' says Lige, 'I'll come over tonight and give you a chanst to do better,' and over he went, but Ben brought out some apples and cake, an' Lige got in a wusser huff, an' forgot his over-shoes an' yeer-bobs, an' ole Ben give 'em to his niggers to wear, an' that made Lige brile.

"I tell you, hogs is mighty like men."

Old John Lightfoot came in at this juncture, with a stranger. He introduced his friend to the waiting throng. No invitations were extended, but old John immediately launched forth into a lamentation on the troubles of his life.

"Yes, sir," he said to the stranger, "I'd be glad to show you around here, and help you look at a farm, but I haven't got no heart, nor hain't fitten to 'sociate with anybody that's cheerful. Things has gone to the bad at my place. My wife is broke down with the asthma, puny and about ready to quit. My nephew who is visitin' me, tried to jump the creek, and busted his ankle, and the leg will probably have to come off. My gal, Emily, was keepin' company with a young man, and he lit out and married a woman over in Indiana. My Texas land is croudin' me for taxes, an' I can't give it away. My old farm here at home won't raise blackberries nor hoss-weeds, the soil is gone, but the wust part of it all is that I have busted my big mercha'm pipe."

"Let's all have a drink," said the stranger.

There was an instant shuffling, and old John "took her straight, with four fingers."

"I'm sorry things are not going well with you," said the stranger.

"Well, things might be worse," said old John, as he wiped his mouth on his coat sleeve. "My wife comes from the best strain of these parts,—she's got the grit, and what's a little asthma to a woman that's got the grit? I ain't never seen her yet that she wasn't ready to pull her part. My

nephew has got too much of the Lightfoot speerit in him to ever let 'em take off that leg, and as for Emily, she's the same blood, and can handle her own affairs. The old farm still makes us a livin,' an' that Texas land might do better some day, but I did hate to break that pipe."

"Let's have another drink," said the stranger. Lightfoot called for an old-fashioned toddy, in a big glass. He put very little water and sugar in it, but filled it to the brim with whiskey.

"And things are still pretty bad?" The stranger mildly observed.

"Who said so?" answered Lightfoot. "If anybody says things are goin' wrong out my way, jest send 'em around to me. There ain't a gamer, better woman ever lived than my Agathy. What's a little asthma to her,—she jest laughs at it, and it has give her time to take a little rest and read and talk to me, but there ain't nothin' can slowfoot her. She makes enough off of her chickens and turkeys to pay all the taxes, and there ain't no farm that's rated higher or better in this section; you can throw up a handful of grass seed in the air, and wherever it lights on that farm, it will go to growin'. She hits that church door on Sunday morning before they get it swept out, and there ain't no dust on anything after her eye makes

a sweep; that old farm,—show me a better one. I'm fust at market and fust on prices, there's plenty of hog jowls and old hams in the smoke house, and always plenty of friends to help eat 'em. My gal. To tell you the truth, we run that onery cuss off the place; he didn't know how to make a livin' an' kep' the house smellin' of cigarettes. There was a crack in that mercha'm pipe, an' I wouldn't give a good old seasoned corncob pipe for all the mercha'ms in the world.

" I tell you, you can't keep the blood down, and that reminds me of when I went to the old K. M. I.——"

The crowd fell away, for they knew that when old John began on his school days, it meant an all night session.

"Your wife is calling you, Mr. Lightfoot," said the bar-keeper. Just across the street a woman was seated in a buggy, a very pretty girl sat beside her, something in her smiling eyes and the contour of her face making her almost beautiful.

Old Lightfoot got in the buggy, and as they drove away, his wife said, "And this was to be a sober day."

"Yes," said old John, "but there was a stranger in town, and they put me on the committee to entertain him, and you hain't never see me fail yet in that line."

CHAPTER II

AS OLD Lightfoot went over to join his wife he was followed out of the tavern by two young men, Tom and Hugh Standon. They passed in front of the buggy and gazed upon the young girl who sat by her mother. She recognized them and spoke pleasantly to them as her father drove away.

"She's a beauty, Hugh," said the younger of the brothers. "I took her home from the picnic at Shuler's Grove last week, and I've been with her a number of times, but she is timid and shy, but there is something about her that keeps me thinking about her."

"Yes," said Hugh, "but would mother be pleased? There is some difference according to her social standard."

"I know she is very much interested in the church and Sunday school work," said Tom, "and she is a credit to any community, and since she came from school in Lexington, she has become a most intereting girl. If you could hear her sing, 'The Last Rose of Summer' and Franz Abt's 'O

Ye Tears,' you would wonder at her voice and its cultivation. It is like a flute mingling with a deep-toned harp, and there's something in the soul of that girl that casts a spell over you."

"Yes, but the father and the mother?" said Hugh. "Well" said Tom, "The old man is something of a blatherskite, but the mother is full of good sense, originality and fine humor, and is as warm-hearted and considerate as a woman could be. She will bring them through, that girl will. I am going out there Sunday."

"Let's go back to the bar-room" said Hugh.

"No, we've had enough; mother will be waiting," said the younger brother. They walked slowly down through the avenue of old forest trees,—the yard was almost a park within itself. The house built after the style of colonial architecture, with its great white pillars of the front porch, seemed to rest in stately dignity among the trees. Pacing the front porch was a man of sixty-eight or seventy years of age, swinging his cane and humming the words of an old song. His countenance bore the placid expression of luxurious ease and satisfaction with life.

"Hello, Uncle Prentiss," said Tom.

"Howdy, boys, dag-gone your skins; here I've been waiting for that plug of 'Fruits and Flow-

ers' and thinking you would never come—gimme that tobacco Hugh, befo' I larup you with this cane!"

Hugh drew forth a long plug of black tobacco, and Major Prentiss Houston opened his deer-handle knife and cut off a generous chew.

"Eh, boys, reminds me when I was in prison on Johnson's Island. I got so hungry that I would almost have eaten parsnips, and every night we all laid out in our imaginations the most wonderful bills o' fare, but I tell you, doing without tobacco is the most terrible suffering of all. One day a box came in for Scott Southern, and when he opened it, he called us all up, and there laid a big, sweet looking twist of yellow 'Pryor.' All our eyes were on that twist, and Bud Carver said, 'I ain't been very strong on prayin', but I'm going to ask a blessing on this meal.'—There's old Mace calling us to supper. We've got the finest 'sparagras and new peas you ever saw, and a roast from a young spring lamb, and if you boys will lead the way, your old Uncle Prentiss will follow." With mock ceremony he bowed low and waved his hand toward the dining room.

Upon the walls of the hallway were old family portraits, representing several generations, and old mahogany sofas and chairs at the end of the

hall. Leading from the hall to the upper rooms was a wide stairway of the old colonial style, the big door at the foot of the stairway leading into the library, the best in that section.

At the head of the table in the dining room, sat Mrs. Standon, the mother of Tom and Hugh. The father, a quiet, handsome man of seventy, was carving the lamb. Major Prentiss sat next to his sister, Mrs. Standon, and was gallantly attentive to her every want. There was something wistful and calmly beautiful in the face which lifted from its repose into smiling radiance as her boys came in—her only children. Old Mace brought in the candles in the tall brass holders, and after arranging them he took his stand behind the chair of Mrs. Standon. Mace could not even attempt to do anything unless it was accompanied with the most stately dignity, and, besides his attachment to the family as a servant, he also sustained the more striking side-vocation of a Baptist preacher. He did not have any regular "call," but preached at random, or "on the wing," as the saying goes.

"Who is the stranger I noticed with old man Lightfoot?" asked Mr. Standon.

"He is a man from Montana, who claims to be

an expert in mining, and says that he is part owner of a copper mine out there. He has plenty of money and fine clothes," said Hugh.

"Yes, he has the clothes of a cheap gambler," said Mr. Standon, "and his swagger and his countenance show his stripe."

"But," said Hugh, "he has letters of recommendation from the very best men."

"Did you read them?" asked the father.

"No, sir, but I saw them."

"Possibly so; every faker who is alive to his business, goes well-armed, but letters are easy to get, and sometimes easier to forge but some letters bear, in too strict a sense, possibly upon the material recommendation. Jasper Williams asked John Hatter for a letter of recommendation after he had worked for John a month, and John merely wrote, 'The bearer of this letter has worked for me one month, and I am satisfied.' Jasper said he couldn't understand why everybody laughed when he showed them that letter. I would want to keep an eye on your stranger. What did you say his name was?"

"Molansing."

"Sounds like molasses."

A broad, irresistible smile overspread the features of old Mace.

Tom gave his mother his arm after the meal, and she led him toward the piano. He began playing Schumann's "Traumerei." There was something he brought out from the keys that was inexpressibly sweet; it was the soul of a musician; the execution of an interpreter without the professional standard.

Hugh came over to the piano and joined in with his flute. He swung the instrument gently to his lips, and it seemed to breathe forth the dreamy, drowsy tones with a tenderness that brought back many happy memories to those who lingered near.

Tom and his brother left the music room, leaving their father and mother and Major Prentiss.

"I wish that Tom did not play the piano and dabble in poetry," said Mr. Standon.

"I cannot see that it is a fault," said the mother, "the music has given me so many hours of comfort, and the poets interpret our thoughts for us in a language we cannot express. We are all poets, to some extent. The poet sees the beautiful in nature and hears strange music in the

winds, God gives them a heart to vibrate and send melodies into the world."

"But they are not practical" said Mr. Standon.

"You spake a parable," chimed in the Major.

"There are enough for the practical things of life," said the mother, "but what would the business and exacting conditions of constant application to this life amount to without the outlying strains of poetical song and cheer, of literature and musical cultivation?"

"Exactly so,—you are right," said the Major.

"There is no money in poetry," said Mr. Standon.

"You called her hand that time!" said the Major.

"Probably not, but the true poetic life is a realm of love,—free meditation,—his imagination gives him a constant hope."

"Yes, for something to eat," said Mr. Standon.

"Too true; too true," said the Major.

"Do you recall what Bailey said in regard to poetry?" asked Mrs. Standon. " 'Poetry is itself a thing of God, He made his prophets poets, and the more we feel the poesy, the more do we become like God in love and power.' "

"Splendid! Splendid!" said the Major.

"But," said Mr. Standon, "Plato said, 'Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand'."

"Dod shot! if it ain't so!" said the Major.

This brought the discussion to a close, but not until the Major had incidently observed, "Poetry ain't a goin' to do much harm, at least if it ain't on a comic valentine, like as the one I got."

CHAPTER III

WHEN John Lightfoot arrived home with his wife and daughter, the wife was not in a cheerful mood, for he had informed her that the stranger, Molansing, was coming out to stay a few days with them. "He has got the biggest proposition you ever heard of, and if there was ever a chance to get rich, it is before me now," said John.

"Maybe, it won't look so big in the morning," quietly said his wife.

The daughter, Emily, seemed to have but little concern in the conversation; however, she glanced toward her father when he said that "Molansing was a single man and a gentleman."

The mother and daughter busied themselves with the supper as John filled up his pipe and went out to give some orders to his hired man.

The farm consisted of three hundred acres, running to the bend of the river. The fences and out-houses were badly in need of repair, and the land was needing grass and seed. From the outside, the old frame dwelling was unattractive, the

paint wearing off and the shingles of the roof in a condition of decay, but the yard bespoke a woman's care, for old-fashioned flowers were scattered here and there, and the inside of the house displayed a rambling sort of comfort with the big sitting room; the open fire-place with its huge stone mantel. Over one of the windows of the upstairs rooms, the remnant of a shutter flapped in the breeze, and the pillars of the porch fronting the river seemed to groan under the weight which they supported. There were books on the shelves in the sitting room, but they consisted mostly of Congressional Reports, with a scattering set of Rollin's History of the World, which old John had never read, but in the daughter's room, which she had furnished with much dainty care, were many good books, selected for her by her teachers, and with these books she found much companionship and pleasure. Over the mantel in the sitting room, hung an enlarged crayon of John's father. There was something strange in the expression of the face, and the eyes, somewhat sleepy in their repose, as shown in the portrait, belied the expression of life, for under the crayon hung a scabbard holding a bowie knife, and that knife represented more than any treasure to John, for at a barbecue at Sycamore Bend

years ago, old Dave Lightfoot had brought to earth with that knife, a man who had called him a liar, and in all of the succeeding years there was never a word of regret from his lips, but after his death the two families seemed to entirely forget the tragedy, so far as neighborly relations were concerned.

"I'm going to fix this old place up," said John. "People have been making fun of my stock and my way of farmin' long enough, and I intend to give 'em a glimpse of high life!"

"Fix up your own life first," said his wife.

The next morning about ten o'clock, Molansing drove up. He had the best team of horses from the town livery stable. A negro boy took the horses as John welcomed the stranger to his home. Molansing walked leisurely in, gazing calmly upon everything about him. There was an odor of perfumery upon his clothes, a suspicion of pomatum on his hair, his long Prince Albert coat of fawn color, hung with a sort of reckless abandon over his stalwart form, the heavy black silk cravat around his neck, giving him the touch of the old-time western gambler.

When Emily came in, clad in a soft white dress with a red rose fastened upon its bosom folds, Molansing's eyes flashed as he gazed upon her

innocent beauty, but when his glance met her own, the eyes of the young girl met him with a steady and searching gaze, but just for the moment.

He looked her over, from her dainty feet to the crown of her head covered with its glory of golden russet hair. He made a mental survey of her such as a horse fancier makes of a racer.

"Emily, play 'The Brook' for Mr. Molansing," said old John. The keys of the old square piano were yellow with age, but notwithstanding this drawback, the young girl played many of the old-time tunes, which her mother and father loved so well.

"Do you play 'Bonapart Crossin' the Alps?'" asked Molansing.

"No, but my mother used to play that," answered Emily.

"Yes," said Mrs. Lightfoot, "I played some, till my fingers got crooked up from poundin' butter and swingin' skillets. I done a right smart playin' with my right hand, but never could get the left to trail right, but Lawse! when I get right hungry for music, I feed the niggers up and set 'em out in the moonlight, with Filmore Triggor with his banjo, and get my fill!"

John called on Molansing to ask the blessing over the noon meal. He responded, but John

could not exactly make out what he had said. After dinner John took him over the farm.

Molansing noted the shabby horses and run-down condition of the farm, but he knew beyond that; he knew that Lightfoot had plenty of ready money in the bank and was the holder of a good many interests outside of his farm, and he knew further that Emily was the only child, and represented something more than her own mere beauty.

"I intend to work fast within the next few days," he said to Lightfoot, "I only intend to let a few in on this proposition; it matters little whether I sell or not here; the property and its present development is sufficient for a twenty per cent. dividend right now. I am really going against the wishes of the directors in letting any more of the stock go, and within the next ten days I expect to be called in and the books closed."

"That soon?" said John.

"Yes," said Molansing, "I'm tired of this part of the game. I am making money fast at it, but I have business interests of far more importance, and were it not for the honesty and straightforwardness of my friends at the head of it, and their purpose to distribute this stock in different sections of the country, thereby securing influence for other investments under consideration, I would

leave off at once. In fact, I am not a bit anxious to sell another dollar's worth of it."

"Well, go a little slow on that line," said John, "from what you told me yesterday it's a powerful certainty, and I just want a little more powder. I am goin' to take you over to see Emmett Dorrin, and if we could git him in, him and me would have somethin' to talk about anyhow."

"What sort of a man is he?" asked Mo.lansing.

"He's all right," said John, "but maybe a leetle keerless in handlin' the truth."

They found Dorrin at the barn. He invited them to the house and got out a decanter and glasses. Lightfoot didn't wait for any ceremony, but helped himself generously, and as he raised his glass said "here's hopin'."

He did not take his drink immediately, but waited for the toast which he had heard Dorrin deliver so many times. Dorrin had run across it on a trip to New Orleans, and held it as his own private property, and no one dared molest him in this claim.

Dorrin held out his glass and with his deep voice exclaimed, "Here's hopin' that the roses of contentment may ever bloom in the garden of your destiny."

Molansing sat quietly, and with scholarly dignity he said "I will say in the words of Dickens, 'Here's hopin' as you climb the hill of prosperity, you may never meet a friend'."

The point of the toast was lost on Dorrin and Lightfoot, but Molansing lost none of the liquor.

For the next hour Molansing poured into the ears of Dorrin a golden, honied story of sudden wealth; of affluence; of power and every comfort and pleasure that wealth could buy. It was an aureole of magic light that he suffused in that old room. Lightfoot walked the floor, hanging on the words and beaming in anticipation of the next outflow of iridescent gas.

At this point Dorrin groaned and rubbed his leg. "It's the old rheumatiz, John; I can't make up my mind to take the treatment."

"You'll have money enough to visit the great watering places of Europe," said Molansing, "if you follow me. The vein of copper through our properties is about solid, with a little sprinkling of iron; no slag to amount to anything, the specific gravity when cast shows about 8.78. We have thousands of inquiries for this copper from telegraph companies who are wanting new wire coatings, and the Government would take over our

full supply for various purposes, are you ready to go in?"

"I might think it over after I take the treatment," said Dorrin.

"What treatment?"

"The bee treatment" said Dorrin.

"What do you mean?"

"Old Manlius Derrick has got a speshul treatment for rheumatiz, an' a good many ov 'em say it never fails, he says the sting of a bee will cure it. Manlius claims that bees has got a language of their own, and have generals and officers jist like in the army. His lead bee is named Pharoah, and he is some bee.

"One day old Fanch Sprang cum a ridin' by Derrick's, an' he was drunk, an' jist fur pure devilment, he got down off'n his hoss and heaved a big stone over into Derrick's hives. Pharoah was settin' out sunnin' hisself and got a good look at old Fanch. Pharoah had a stinger like a dirk knife and Derrick selected him for the wust cases, an' when he lit on anything, spesh'ly when he wuz irritated, he left his mark.

"Derrick charged one dollar a treatment for rheumatiz, and he helt Pharoah back, givin' him days off to get in trim. Old Fanch Sprang got wind of the new-fangled treatment, and seen old

men hoppin' by that had done throwed away their crutches. His knee was fairly busted with the rheumatiz, and one day he went over an' made a engagement with Derrick for a treatment

"Derrick gave Pharoah three days off to get him in good shape. Old Fanch came in a puffin' his pipe an' sot down and rolled up his britches leg. His knee looked like a peeled cotton-wood log.

"'Do you believe in this hyar thing Derrick?' he asked.

" 'I don't believe in it,' said Derrick; 'I know it'."

"'Let her roll,' said Fanch.

"Pharoah was brought in, an' recognized old Fanch the minute he laid eyes on him, an' if you ever see a bee look pizen, you see it then in Pharoah. He let out a sort of queer hummin' that they ain't ever heered afore, he'd sputter a little, an' then hum again, it wuz the war cry. He lit kinder gentle-like on old Fanch's knee, then kinder humped hisself an' strotch his leg and let drive.

" 'Helferloogins,' yelled old Fanch.

"Pharoah was still hummin,' an' about that time sumthin' seemed to darken the room, an' afore Derrick could get Pharoah back, a thousand bees wuz in that room. Nary a one touched Derrick, but they climbed on old Fanch. Old Fanch's

yeller mare was hitched to the fence, an' she busted and tore out a panel o' fence an' went through the red rambler vines an' went down the road with a wreath of roses about her neck. They was havoc and desolation in Derrick's room. Ever' piece of furnitur' was busted, an' the old family clock that stood in the corner, was split into kindlin' wood. Ever' bee had his order an' old Pharoah settin' on the bed-post givin' commands.

"Well, it's too sorrowful to relate."

"Did the stings cure his rheumatiz?" asked Molansing.

"They never heered no more complaint frum him," said Dorrin.

"Then it must have cured him for keeps."

"It did; they drug him out dead!"

"Well, what do you say about going in with us on the proposition I have made you?" said Molansing.

Dorrin smiled, and looking Molansing squarely in the eye, said:

"I never fish where I can't see my cork!"

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Lightfoot and Molansing returned home, Molansing seemed to be in a very disgruntled mood. Dorrin had thrown cold water over his enthusiastic ebullition and Lightfoot did not appear as much interested as formerly. They entered the sitting room and found Emily seated near the window, with a very handsome looking young man near her side. He arose and bowed with old-fashioned grace and courtesy, but gave a rather cool recognition of Molansing. It was Tom Standon, and there was something about his erect figure, the white forehead, the open and frank blue eyes which bespoke a long line of gentility, and was in striking contrast to the man who stood opposite him. There was upon his countenance the freshness of youth and the unmistakable light of intellect.

After a few minutes conversation, Tom and Emily arose and leaving the house, took the path which led to the river.

"What's his business?" asked Molansing.

"He is studying law, and getting ready to go away to law school," said Lightfoot.

"He looks like a bunch of nothing to me," said Molansing.

"It would be best for you not to let him hear you say that," said Lightfoot. "I take no particular stock in him but I know the blood."

"He is a drunkard and a loafer," said Molansing.

"Mebbe so; mebbe so," said old John.

Tom and Emily went down to the river to the boat landing. Emily took her seat in the rear end of one of the boats, and Tom began to row up stream.

"We'll run up to the mouth of the creek and see what Lon Scudder is doing in the fishing line. How does your father take to Molansing?" he asked.

"He seems to be very much wrapped up in him, and his proposition in regard to some copper mine," said Emily, "but mother is very much opposed to it and does not admire the man."

"Does he intend to stay with you?"

"That I do not know."

The pussy-willows were hanging in simple beauty about and overlapping the stream, and the tall sycamores seemed to stand out as silent sentinels

on the shore. The bloom of the haw tree was fading, but the moth-mullen with its flowers of yellow and white, was dancing in the light breeze. The river seemed as a great mirror under the golden sun as they went along, and the day was joyous in its quiet beauty and charm, for love was there, lingering near two hearts, only waiting in the mystic silence but conscious of its presence.

Scudder's shanty boat was at the mouth of the creek, and Scudder, in a ragged old suit was drawing a big cat-fish on the shore.

"Come over," he called, and Tom landed the boat nearby, and gave Emily his hand, and something in the touch of her soft fingers sent a thrill into his heart. His gaze met her own as she stepped upon the shore, and a current, such as some indefinable power runs out, passed rapidly then and there.

"I've been up nearly all night," said Scudder, "I run out of craw-fish yesterday, and had to bait with liver, and it takes a mighty stupid fish to bite at old liver, but this one fell for it. It's funny to me how some fish will bite at certain kinds of bait, and others go 'round it, but I reckon there's fish sense as well as human sense. I got kethed the same way. A woman at Ironton helt out the bait to me. She was a good cook and

a good looker and made the best fried apple pies I ever saw. She got me fed up and then went a fishin' fer me right. I bit, and she landed me high and dry fer I took line, hook and sinker, and when she got my little house and the money I had in the bank, she lit out, and I took to the river."

"Did you love her?" asked Emily.

"Love her? There ain't no such thing. You git your mind in a stew, thinkin' that what ain't real. Did you ever see a purty doll, one of them sort all dressed and painted up, and did you ever pull it apart and find the saw dust and cheap fillin'? That's love. She went off with a show man but they say she faded out in health. No I love that dog down there better than human love. He knows I am his friend; he talks to me in his looks. If women couldn't talk maybe we'd get along with 'em better."

"Don't you think kindness breeds affection and love?" said Emily.

"With some people and some animals, but a good board split over both of them sometimes would go a long ways toward simmerin' them down."

"But we must learn to bear with one another; to give and take, and to make sacrifices," said Emily, "and to help lift up the heart and life that

we love. God does not intend that any great love that He has sent shall be a garden of roses that will blossom without cultivation, and we must water it with our patience and care."

Scudder looked at the pure and sweet-faced girl steadily and said, "You ain't been along that road yet, but I reckon God leaves all of them things to the general run. If He makes a good man to love a good woman, it's jest got to be, but if He makes a woman to wreck a man, He don't leave nothin' out as to her powers."

"Then you don't think that the influence of the Evil One has much to do with it?"

"You mean the devil?" said Scudder.

"Perhaps."

"I don't know, but as the one I had was the devil herself, there wasn't any furder argiment in that line."

"Was that your only experience?" asked Tom.

A twinkle came in Scudder's eye as he answered, "No, I found a egg in the river once, with writin' on it that said, 'Write to Sophie Willers, Thompson, Pa.' I wrote and got a letter that said, 'Too late; married and got four children'."

"Scudder, you are lying," said Tom.

Scudder gave a loud laugh and said, "Whoever heard of a fisherman lyin'!"

The boat floated lazily homeward. The white gulls hung calmly above the water. A steamer rounded the bend, and the paddles of her wheels made soft music upon the water.

"Emily, I am going away with Hugh to law school next week," said Tom, "and I would like for you to write to me—it will be hard work and lonesome there."

She glanced up with a slight flush on her cheek and said, "Yes."

The boat was on the home shore again. He took both of her hands as she stepped from the boat, and gazing into her eyes, said:

"Emily, I know I am not worthy of you, but I cannot help it, something keeps you in my heart, and something sings your name there all the while." He was drawing her close to him, and almost before she knew it, her head was resting against his breast, and she was sobbing gently.

"Oh Tom, live for me and help me live; it has been my light and hope."

He kissed her on the lips, and turning her wet face up toward his own, softly said "It is the golden day of life!"

They stopped by the old tree. Tom took out his pocket knife and carved their names, and taking her hand, he pressed it with his own

against the letters, "May they live there until that name is changed into my own," and looking upward into his eyes, she said with a new-born love, such as shines and beams in its trust and hope, "God be with us."

CHAPTER V

WHEN they arrived home they found Lightfoot and Molansing playing checkers in the sitting room. Molansing did not rise, but when he observed the glad beam in the eyes of the young girl, and noted the joyous flush on her face, his countenance darkened, and he merely remarked: "The river must be very attractitve to day."

Tom Standon fixed his gaze upon the man and quietly said: "Yes, more so than I have ever before found it."

Standon left, but he did not fail to note the fact that both Lightfoot and Molansing were very much under the influence of liquor. To one observing such a condition in others and feeling within himself the triumph of an affection, deeper motives and determinations to make himself worthy should have been uppermost; but to many possessing flexible wills, and the artistic temperament, such an event excites the sensibilities to a wider range of vagrant thought. So when he met his brother, the inward impulse of a new-found joy brought forth the desire for a celebration, and

they spent the greater part of the night at the saloon, only to emerge staggering and surging along the street the fine classical lines of the face obliterated by drink, Tom imparting to his brother in a maudlin way, the scene of the day, but something was there underneath it all, that was yet to spring into a newer plane.

Emily went to her room and opened wide the windows, and the breeze came up from the hills, bearing to her the deepest fragrance from heaven. The whipporwill calling from the distant shore, seemed pouring out golden notes of joy. Emily stood long, gazing out upon the moon-glazed night. Strange visions seemed to come, the bridal veil, the happy journey, the making of the home, and piercing through the mystic haze of the picture came the clinging arms of children and the prattle of innocent voices.

Oh wondrous hour of fixed and conscious love, of a dream where angels seem to whisper in the rapture of its fullness.

CHAPTER VI

MOLANSING sat near the window in the sitting room turning the pages of the old family album. Mrs. Lightfoot stood near, acting as a sort of guide to the story of family connections and friends. "That's Uncle Bob Hafton" she said. Molansing gazed at the picture of a man of middle age. What a luxuriant growth of curly hair! The tall collar and black silk tie, the broad lapels of the coat, bespeaking an atmosphere of prosperity.

"That's Uncle Bob," said Mrs. Lightfoot. "You know he wore a wig, in fact, he wore two wigs, a black one for Sunday and a red one for week days. Sometimes his forehead was high and sometimes low, as in the plcture. Uncle Bob was a bachelor, and I know of but one attempt he made at courtin', and that was when he went down to go a courtin' Lena Simms, who lived below town. Uncle Bob wore his red velvet vest and black wig. Lena was out in her new ridin' skirt, and was spruced up for Uncle Bob. They rode away in grand style, and things were progressin' fine till

the river wind heisted Uncle Bob's hat and took his black wig with it. A little dog ran out from a cabin, grabbed up the wig and made off with it. Uncle Bob drove his spurs home and left Lena to ride back alone.

"The next picture is Cousin Sahra Wintry." It was a kindly face that Molansing gazed upon. Cousin Sahra wore a dress of the old-time period that hung full at the sleeves and sprang out voluminously from the hips, to widen further over a set of rattan hoops. A small white kerchief was drawn about her neck and fastened with an old pin of plaited hair.

"Cousin Sahra had a tragedy in her life, and it sorter cast a spell over her for a time at least. She was gettin' along in years, when a stove drummer come through here, and he could spout more fancy words through his lips than any man who ever visited these parts. He smoked some, drank a little more and used musk, and when he heard that Cousin Sahra had about four thousand laid up in the bank, he laid the serpent's trail toward her door.

"There's no use in goin' over the details. Cousin Sahra married him and started for the state of Oregon, a long trip for a woman who had never

been any further than Louisville in her life and there only once.

"She come back four months later lookin' like a cyclone had swep' over her speerits. It was a long time before she spoke, but a woman can't hold in forever, and one day she comes over here, and I knowed by the way she was shiftin' and twistin' her knittin' needles that she was desirous to unpack her mind. I saw she needed a little start, and I give her a gentle openin' sech as you know women know how to do.

"'That man was the meanest man that ever growed,' said Cousin Sahra. 'He purred over me and petted me till he got me to agree to go with him to the west and took my money in charge. He got drunk on the train and was in a seat in the next car with some young owdashious wimmen, and when I went in to look for him, one of them said, 'Grandma, let your little boy stay awhile longer.' He come back to where I was and said that they was his cousins and that he didn't want me to interfere in his family affairs.

"'Cheese it,' he said.

"'I remember the words and the way he said it,—he hissed it out, 'Cheese it!'

"'Well he led me a dog's life and he got so he'd throw anything that come handy at me. He

took me to live at Puget Sound and one day a man come in and says 'Here's a railroad ticket to Kentucky old lady, your husband has been drowned in the Sound and his body will never be rekivered, here's ten dollars for your feed on the way home, it was his life insurance money.'

" 'I knowed the man was lyin' but I hoped it might be so. I never shed no tears. I was cured.

" 'Somehow, I believe the Lord takes keer of all such scoundrels, and I sometimes think that in the next world I would jest like to take a litttle trip over hell in a flyin' machine and git one good look at him, for I'd look for him and find him in the lowest section of that place.'

"The next picture is Willie Trombell." Willie was a small, squirrel-headed young man. There was a made-to-order smile on his face. His hair was pompadour, and Mrs. Lightfoot said it was "raddish red." He wore a high collar, breaking away into a sort of stair-steps front.

"Willie married Cora Smiley and took to drinkin' before they got hardly started, and tried to see how quick he could drink up his property. Cora done her best an' forgive him every time. He used to go away for several weeks at a time, an' when he'd break down, he'd always write her a postal card that he was comin' back, an' she'd

always meet him. I recall what he writ her once from St. Louis on a postal card. It read, 'Dear Cora, I am sick and coming home, meet me at the train yesterday.'

"They went along this way, till that woman got mad, and one night she whupped him. They fit a good deal, an' finelly got a divorce. They come together agin an' got married and went to keepin' house on the old Budridge place as happy as two larks.

"Willie overtook Jim Solder's wife trampin' home through the snow one evenin' and took her in his buggy, an' Cora see 'em passin' an' when Willie come in, shakin' the snow off, she busted him wide open with a fire-shovel.

"He went over in Indiana, but come back. Cora wus jist sick an' high tempered, an' Willie jest wild an' weak, but nobody had a kinder heart than her, and when Willie was took down sick in that long spell, she never complained, ner hit him while he was down, at least till he got strong on his pins.

"Her sister come up there while he was sick, an' told Cora to leave the wuthless cuss. Her sister had married rich an' had her head stuck up in the air an' told Cora she would give her a home, but Cora went in an' took a look at poor Willie,

breathin' hard, an' she come back, an' said, 'I wouldn't give him as he is fer your bandy-legged husband.

" 'You might be rich, but you air the same selfish hog that you always was, ignerant and the laffin' stock of all good people who know you. No, if he goes to hell, I'll go with him.'

"It seemed to stick mighty hard in Willie, what she had said an' done. They give up the place they was on, and went back to a little cabin. Willie never took another drink, but pulled his hardest, and they are both happy and prosperous now, with two sweet children, an' he is a director in the bank!"

"Just one more, I want to tell you about. That picture there is Jeff Owen, he looks like a Senator in that picture, but he never was. If you could see him settin' on the corner smokin' his pipe an' knockin' the ashes an' droppin' burnt matches, you'd think it looked like where a passel of tramps had camped on the creek. He's dressed up in the picture, I reckon the only time in his life. He was too stingy to buy any clothes, loved whiskey better than anybody that ever lived but too stingy to buy it. Whiskey has been the ruin of lots of men and maybe some wimmen, but it shows up a lot of them when they git it in 'em.

"They ain't many cases where there is justification for drinkin' an' few wives would favor it in their husbands, but Jeff Owen's wife said she always loved to see him git drunk, because it opened up his heart an' made him sort o' reckless an' generous fer a spell, but when he come to soberin' up on pot-licker, an' kinder down in speerits, there wasn't nothin', this side of skinnin' somebody in a hoss trade, that could revive him.

"He don't drink now, an' I'll tell you why. He used to hang around in town and take a drink every time he was invited; that weakness sorter runs in families, an' many a man reforms in a community because people git tired of treatin' him. Some people will git down on it hard if it ever comes to the matter of havin' to buy it for themselves.

"The boys went after Jeff one night in town. He had thirty-five dollars in his pocket. They fixed up to souse him good, and as Jeff never backed off from free doin's, he come ever' time he was called. He was certainly game in that respect. They loaded him so full that he finelly reached to ketch holt of the bar and it wuzzen't there, an' they put him to sleep on a table an' took his thirty-five dollars an' spent it for champagn' an' everything they had in the bar. They put some

fine seegars an' a quart of whiskey in Jeff's pockets, an' when he woke up an' found the things, he lit out fer home, but when he discovered the loss of is money, he come back, and told the boys that he had been robbed 'Ah no' they says, 'Jeff, after you got to drinkin' last night, an' got under full breeze, you said that you had been spongin' all your life, an' that you had determined to sorter even things up, and you spent the thirty-five.'

"Jeff looked mighty sick, a look of awful pain come over his face and he said: 'If it has come to me spendin' my own money fer whiskey, I'm done for keeps,' an' he kept his word."

CHAPTER VII

"HOW long do you count on this Mr. Molansing staying?" asked Mrs. Lightfoot of her husband. "I don't 'low to hurry him off as long as things look as likely as they do," said John. "An' more than that, he is a first class checker player, an' that helps some, I've already won twenty-three dollars from him."

"Mind you he don't make you pay it back a thousand times," said the wife.

When Emily came down late for her breakfast, Molansing was walking in the yard, and when she came out on the porch, he approached her, and bowing low, said, "Won't you be kind enough to show me the river and the joy of a boat ride? I can't row a boat, but I am some on a cordelle,"—you understand, that is pulling a boat by a chain and holding it out from the bank with an oar."

Unconsciously, she found herself strolling aimlessly toward the river, with Molansing following near She wanted to be alone, but something seemed to deny her the power to separate herself from the presence of this man.

"As I said, I am not a sailor, but I am a horseman; I learned it on the plains. I can master a horse. I may not possess this power over people, but can tame your most dangerous horse, and have tamed some people."

"In what way do you mean?" she asked.

"I have had many dealings with humanity. I have been up against the roughest situations of life. I have had to stake my mentality against brute force and power, but by a process of applied control, have found my superiority."

"And has it never failed?"

"No, not when I have set my determination on a certain thing"

He turned suddenly and said, "Get in the boat."

"No" she said, "I do not care to ride." There was something almost sacred to her about that boat, something placing it now as a fairy ship that had borne her to a matchless Eden.

"The women of the south seem to dwell in a peculiar realm of sentiment," Molansing observed, "They weave around themselves a sort of dream of fondness for certain things of lesser importance, and magnify that importance into a condition of real worth."

"Where does that apply?" she asked.

"I was merely thinking that your personality

deserved a higher cultivation, you should enter the higher walks of life, you should live and reign as a queen."

She looked toward him quietly and said: "I hope to attain to the higher walks of life by effort, by loyalty to every good impulse, and through the love of God, but not in the sense which you evidently mean as to the higher walks. I do not crave fashion nor social power, but the beauty and peace of a Christian life."

Molansing laughed heartily, "Then you want to remain an old-fashioned woman, and believe that the Lord will keep you and watch over you. He lets some mighty good folks suffer, and some mighty bad ones prosper, but the best part of it all is that we don't worry much about Him as long as we can pay our way, and get the good things."

"The good things as I regard them are a part of God's love," she said.

"Listen, my little girl," said Molansing.

She drew back, startled by his familiarity of speech. "Listen, I know the world;—poverty and shambling position are worse than death. We must take what we can in the race, you must throw off the simple satisfaction of being an ordinary, come-and-go-woman. Your beauty is enough to dazzle any set, if rounded out, and you can shine,

but it takes grooming under proper hands, this thing of simple faith and religion is all right in remote life, when there is no other diversion, but once in the glad merry world, it is a back number."

They had returned to the house, and entered the big room. Lightfoot and his wife were out by the road gate. A ringlet of hair fell over Emily's face, he brushed it back with his hand, and she turned hastily to leave.

"Wait a minute," he said, "I am older than you; I have your interest at heart, why do you want to throw your life away on a jelly fish, a piano-playing, useless snipe?"

"A what?"

"A useless snipe, I said."

She glanced quickly at the shield which held her grandfather's knife, her eyes flashed for the instant, as she said with deadly calmness: "You are a liar!"

CHAPTER VIII

TOM and Hugh were leaving for Cincinnati for school, Tom to study law and Hugh to attend medical lectures. Uncle Mace had their baggage at the station, and was adjuring Hugh "to keep out uv wickedness, en teck keer uv yousef."

The father and mother sat with Uncle Prentiss in the old family carriage, the mother's face touched with a shade of sadness as she gazed fondly at her two sons. As Tom paced up and down the platform he was approached by a haggard, dissolute looking man, who said, "Tom let me have three dollars; I'm up against it good and hard, and losin' one of my best friends when you are gone."

"What's the trouble, Benjie?"

"Wel, I ain't blamin' my wife for leavin' me, I know I have done her wrong, but Tom, she didn't better things when she married that sneakin' little postmaster. They've got my boy up there, and I hear he calls him Daddie, but if I ever hear of him layin' the weight of his finger on that boy in anger, I'll get him some way. If I was dead and he

hurt that boy, I would bust through the sod on my grave to get to him. He is little and mean, but he hides it from his wife, I'm a better man at heart, if I have gone to the bad."

"I believe that," said Tom handing him the money.

"I'm goin' to keep you in mind, Tom. I know what you have done for me, and maybe I can pay it back some day. There's a woman I know who thinks the world of you. Don't forget her for she is the kind that would walk through fire for the man she loves and she would walk through with a smile on her lips."

The train pulled away from the station. Uncle Mace waved his red handkerchief as long as he could see the vanishing car. It was a silent group that returned to the old homestead. The dogs missed their masters, and lingered long in expectancy for their coming. The first shadow seemed to lie across the threshold.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Tom and Hugh arrived in the city, they went to a boarding house kept by Mrs. John Winters, a woman who had formerly lived at Sycamore Bend. She had lived on a farm there, and had been in the city some four or five years. She gave them a cordial welcome, and had them seated in the hallway until their rooms could be arranged, and instantly besieged them with questions relating to people and affairs back home.

There was an absence of the fresh and tidy effect which the boys recalled in her country home at the Bend. The old hall rack had a broken mirror in its center. A large picture of "Henry Clay's Farewell to the Senate," hung upon the wall, the Great Commoner's magnetic countenance was bedimmed by the mildew and dust of passing years, and the distinguished statesmen about him, appeared as some phantom figures peering through a ghostly veil.

The old "Valley Gem" piano in the parlor had a leg split, and was propped up with some hymn books and a brick. Over the mantel hung an en-

larged portrait of Mrs. Winters' husband. It could be recognized by those who knew him in life, but glaring red hair never shows up in a photograph, and the mustache, which stood out like the tail of a red fox in life, had lost its individuality. Just to the right of Mr. Winters' picture was a photograph of their little girl, whose body was sleeping beside that of John among the wild flowers at the old home.

"That's the reason I had to get away from there, boys. I just couldn't stand it there without them. I wanted to go to some place where they had never been, just to lose myself, but I can't do it.

"It's bad enough here. I can't get used to it, the ways of city folks might be all right, but I can't fall in with them. Why they don't even set up with their dead, but just put them away in a room to themselves and go to sleep. It might be an old-fashioned custom, but it seems like as we ought to stay near them and hold watch by them until the last. Look out for that hole in the carpet, Tom; I intended to patch it, but don't get time between watching boarders who are trying to slip away and getting new ones in.

"Only last week a couple come here; they was hard up and promisin' to pay. They had a big

trunk and I was holdin' it for my pay, not exactly holdin' it, but keeping my eye on it. I'd drop in when they was out, and give it a lift to see that it was still full, and one morning they was gone. I give the trunk a lift; it was too heavy to budge. I decided to have it opened after a time, and when it was opened, what do you reckon? There wasn't a blessed thing inside of it; they had took everything out and had nailed it to the floor. No, it's a bad business. Get your things fixed, boys and come down to dinner."

The boys went to their rooms. Mrs. Winters had made her best effort for them, but compared with the comfort of their own quarters at home, it was dingy and cramped, but they smilingly accepted conditions as they were.

When they went into the little dining room, they found Mrs. Winters in her best dress to welcome them. She had evidently spent a good while at her toilet, but on her way down stairs, she had come into possession of a streak of soot across her chin that gave a very grotesque effect to her make-up.

The napkins were a little damp and flabby, and the table cloth had a hole in one corner. The boys were somewhat aghast at the boiled roast, the canned corn and the baker's bread, the pale

looking butter and the dish of prunes in the center of the table. There was an old-fashioned castor holding the different condiments,—you could spin it around and put on the brakes when you found the seasoning you desired. The dessert consisted of three small halves of canned peaches, with a thin slice of cake.

"Try to make out your dinner, boys, it ain't like you get at home, and it ain't like that dinner you set down to that day when you stopped at my house near the Bend, when you was up there bird-huntin'. I remember that day, boys,—I had just finished makin' my sausage, and I remember that Hugh said it was the best he had ever tasted."

"And you had pumpkin pies," said Hugh, "with maple syrup over them."

"Bless your heart, honey, you haven't forgot them."

"No," said Hugh, "we'll get along all right, and will have them send us some of those things from home."

"Lawse! I can taste them now; I'd like to go back there to one good dinner again, and slice a turkey, brown and juicy from the oven,—and the golden sweet potatoes, all roasted and butter from the spring-house, and boys, listen, I ain't never had the knack no more of bringin' a corn muffin to

perfection,—somethin' in the lard or the meal or somethin'; maybe it's because I can't get a wood fire to cook 'em over, and a turkey wing to fan the coals with. I don't know, but they used to kinder melt in your mouth, and sorter lay up to your very soul. Maybe I'll go back some day and live it over again. Anyhow, I somehow ask the Good Lord to grant me this when I say my prayers to Him, and He is mighty good to us, after all."

CHAPTER X

THE winter months slipped away, with Tom and Hugh pursuing their studies, but the postmaster at the Bend gave out the information that both of the Standon boys were drinking and carousing, and had gotten mixed up in a number of disgraceful affairs. These reports were circulated until they were brought to the attention of Mr. Standon. He immediately sent for Major Prentiss and told him that he wanted him to make a trip to the city and see about the boys, and to keep any information in regard to them from the mother.

The Major arrayed himself in his broad-cloth coat and big slouch hat; his special gold-headed cane was brought forth. He appeared at the boarding house unannounced. Mrs. Winters gave him a glad welcome and directed him to the rooms occupied by the boys. When he entered, they rushed forward and embraced him and overwhelmed him with questions regarding affairs at home. He failed to note any signs of dissipation in their faces.

"We have a young friend who is a minister," said Tom, "and we are going to get him tonight and take you around to see some of the brethren."

"Capital!" said the Major.

They found the young man at home after supper. He was very pleasing and jovial in his manner, and Major Prentiss evidenced some surprise that such a combination of conversation and racy language, was a wearer of the cloth. He was introduced as "the Rev. Manfred Whitworth."

"Now parson," said Hugh, "lay your religion aside for one evening and help us to entertain our dear uncle."

"I can't refuse such a good friend," said Whitworth, as he gave a knowing wink.

"Where shall it be, Tom?"

"Over the Rhine." said Tom.

The old Major held some fears as they ushered him into a beer hall, where strains of music and wild laughter came over the night air.

"See here, Tom," said the Major.

"Now wait, Uncle Prentiss; it's just a little innocent fun; you ought to be willing to put up for it if the minister can."

"I reckon I kin if you put it that way," said Major Prentiss.

A fat and painted woman was singing on the stage; the voice was cracked and freaked, but her cheap sallies were met with outbursts of applause. Another comedian came out and regaled the audience with a number of cheap jokes. Loud laughter followed, and more beer was ordered. When a heavy-jawed woman placed a glass of whiskey before Major Prentiss, he arose and made a profound bow. It was the height of comic acting to her, but the boys knew it was the genuine courtliness of the old days.

Whitworth was consuming large quantities of beer, and set in an occasional glass of wine.

"Tom, it don't look right to me," said the Major,——"I want to do the right thing, but,—"

"That's all right, Uncle Prent," said Tom, as he pushed a glass of sparkling Burgundy toward his Uncle, "It's just for tonight."

"Well boys, you must steady down and learn yo' lessons. I ain't goin' to interfere the fust night, but yo' must steady down."

"What about something to eat?" said Whitworth, "I'm damned hungry."

"I don't understand the cussin'," said the Major, "but when he called for somethin' to eat, he had the preacher's sign."

They went to another place, and put up the order to Major Prentiss. The Major, glowing under a glass of champagne, unbuttoned his vest, and ran his fingers through his long hair, "Well, boys the last time I was in the city, I had a steak about the size of a saddle skirt, briled over the coals, with roasted potatoes and trimmins,—by 'trimmins' I mean somethin' to wash it down and aid digestion. No sir, there's many a good man who is fadin' away in health that could be set on his feet if he could get one bustin' good meal with the trimmins."

A little orchestra broke forth from a stage in the rear of the hall, and some dancers appeared on the floor. Major Prentiss arose and said, "Boys, I'm goin' to jine a set."

"No" said Tom, as he held his arm, "You are not allowed, they are professionals."

"Then I'll be one too," said the Major, but they dissuaded him and decided that it was about time to go home. The Major gave a most pressing invitation to one of the waitresses to make a visit to the Standon family.

The girl said, "Yes, I will come and bring my French maid, and fourteen trunks."

The minister arose and placing his arm about the waist of the girl, boldly kissed her. Major

Prentiss grabbed his cane and said, "Take me out boys,—the church and society is about gone!"

It was necessary to get a carriage to transport the Major home, and along the way his deep voice pealed forth in the old song,

> Whar now air the Hebrew children?
> Whar now air the Hebrew children?
> Whar now air the Hebrew children?
> Safe, safe in the Promise Land.

The next morning he took the train for home. His head was aching, and his heart was sore. His conscience smote him for not upholding the confidence placed in him by Mr. Standon. Someone had made a drawing on his shirt-front of a dancing girl. He buttoned his coat closely over the obnoxious pencil marks and gazed out of the window.

He went immediately to his room when he reached home, and was changing his shirt when Mr. Standon came in.

"How about the boys, Major?"

Major Prentiss put a match to his big brown pipe and said, "They was with a young preacher all the time mostly I was with them, and if that don't speak well for them, then there's nothin' more to say."

"Why didn't you remain longer?"

"Well, one day was enough to satisfy me, and I'm a little too old to tramp around with young bucks, especially young preachers."

As he turned away and Mr. Standon left the room, the old Major sat on the side of the bed, and gazing out to where the river flowed placidly between the hills, muttered to himself,

"To play that preacher game on old Uncle Prentiss!"

CHAPTER XI

MOLANSING and Lightfoot had returned from the West. Lightfoot had taken the trip to satisfy himself in regard to the investments and other interests. He had put in a good part of his money, and Molansing was making every effort to get him to place a mortgage on his farm, and go half interest with him on other deals. Molansing had taken up his quarters at the Lightfoot home. Mrs. Lightfoot was weary and disturbed, and frequently took her daughter into her confidence, but although feeling a marked repugnance to Molansing, she treated him with courtesy, feeling that in a strict sense, it was her duty as long as he was under her roof.

Emily could not rid herself of the sense of insecurity in the presence of the man. She was unhappy, and more so, by reason of the fact that Tom's letters had suddenly ceased. She drove into town each day and asked for the mail, but the expected letter did not come, and it seemed that all the beauty of the landscape faded away as she drove homeward. She walked again upon

the river and stopped by the old tree where the supremest golden hour of her life had come, and as she lay awake in the night, she heard again the tones of a voice that had stirred her soul to gladness and love.

Over in Cincinnati Tom wondered what had brought about the sudden discontinuance of Emily's letters, but one day he received a letter, without the writer's signature, informing him that Emily and Molansing were constantly together, and that Lightfoot and Molansing were partners in business, and that an early marriage was expected between Emily and Molansing. He laid the letter aside, while the prospect for his profession seemed to suddenly lose all interest and purpose. Hugh could give him but little consolation or comfort. Hugh was absent from the boarding house a great part of the time and neglecting his studies and the lectures. Tom needed him now, and sought him among his boon companions and the resorts which he frequented most. He had not seen his brother for four days. At last he went to the rooms of the young medical student, who had gone under the name of Whitworth, the night of Major Prentiss' visit.

"Have you seen Hugh?" he asked.

"Yes, he is on a terrible spree, and is up the river with a camping party."

"Come with me," said Tom.

They proceeded to the camp, and found an old ragged tent. Three or four men were lying near in a state of intoxication. A pot of soup was cooking on a wood fire, a coarse and filthy-looking woman stirring it with a rusty dipper. She was staggering under the influence of liquor; her eyes were red and heavy, and the bleached hair was standing out in tangles over her head. Tin cans were scattered about the place and a few decaying fish heads lent a nauseating odor to the spot. The drunken men slept on. A little wooly dog, himself a disreputable looking waif, ran out and barked, then disappeared with a frightened look.

Tom found his brother sleeping upon a ragged and greasy quilt. His face was swollen and one of his hands was bleeding. He took out his handkerchief and bound it around his brother's hand. Every softened memory of their association seemed to come again. He saw again in that bloated and soiled face the beautiful outlines of another day. He heard again the merry peals of laughter and the golden tones of his brother's beloved

flute. Memory draws with a rapid brush when the first great shadows come across the heart.

He went outside the tent. A black jug stood on a cottonwood stump, and by it stood a cracked jelly glass. Tom gazed at the jug a moment and said, "There stands a black mile post on the road to hell."

A little spring dug in the sand, gave forth a tiny stream and trickled its way to the river. How cool and sweet the water appeared, crystal and pure, catching the sunlight and changing colors of the sky. A mocking bird poured out its changing cadences from a water maple, and beyond, the goldenrod swung out upon the breeze. Nature sang on and shone on above the dreary scene.

The flapping of the ragged tent was met by the slumbrous music of the waves upon the shore, the mass of dead iron weeds, serving as a bed in the tent, had its counterpart in the changing hues of the autumn foliage.

A small boat was secured and Hugh was lifted in, still unconscious of the presence of his brother. They made their way to the city, but were compelled to secure a carriage in which to reach the boarding house. Something was wrong, out of the ordinary in such cases, and after awhile a re-

action from the deep slumber came on, incoherent mutterings; breaking forth into loud cursings. The skin of his face was parched and dry, and great beads of perspiration stood out on his brow. The arms and legs drew up in writhing convulsions and he called for his mother.

He was in the fields again with his dogs. "Steady there, Don," he called. His fever became more pronounced and a thin white froth came on his lips. "Get a doctor, Mrs. Winters," said Tom. The doctor came. He sat by the bed for a short time and shook his head. "It's too late," he said.

Tom sat by his brother's side, the tears streaming down his face. Sundown came and with its flickering, fading rays the spirit of Hugh went out. His features resumed their old-time placid expression to some degree, after death, and about the lips there hovered the semblance of a smile, almost childish in its innocence and beauty.

CHAPTER XII

THE body of Hugh was taken back to the old home, and in the old church where he had sat beside his mother the last tribute of respect was paid to him. The old minister sent a prayer to God, full of deep and fervent earnestness, and delivered a short discourse for the occasion. At the close of his remarks a rather unusual thing occurred. Old Mace, his head bowed in sorrow, came forward and stood before the congregation.

"I jes' got to say somethin'," he said. "I can't let my boy go away lessen I say somethin'." His voice trembled with emotion as he began, "De Lawd God is mussiful an' good, en his mussy ondureth forever,—give dy servant power to speak in de fulness uv his heart, an' when de night am' heah, an' de shadders lay eroun' de toomb uv dis pore boy, let de guardin' angel bar his speerit to de Blessed Lan'. I'm gwine back to de scenes uv happier times, when de sun dun chased de shadders erway; de days when de heaven seem to smile on de haid uv my pore little Hugh. His heart wuz so kine, an' is dere enny

one hyar who kin say dat dey ever know him to do a unkine ack? His han' wuz ever ready to holp de needy. But somebody say, 'He drink!' Did dat drink put de canker in hi' heart? No. Did dat drink make him mistreat de pore? Didn't he swim wid his clo'es on to save de li'l black chile? Wuzzen' he allus ready to go when trouble cum? Dese hyar Christians what sarve God kase dey's afeer'd er hell, en doan' drink 'cept when dey got de ailment, en manges to have de ailment 'bout half de time, let 'em shet dey moufs. Dey's too much meanness in de wurl to 'preciate de goodness uv a pusson who hez one fault. God hain' gwine fergit de fren er de pore, but he gwine to sot a steel-trap in de pathway uv de hippercrit.

"Say what yo' will erbout dis pore boy, but doan' yo' say his heart wuzzent right. He wuzzent back-bitin' an' sayin' lies erbout de folks erbout him; he wuzzent no snake in de grass, an' dis hyar kine dat plays jes' fer demselves, dey ain't a goin' ter git in. Dar hain't gwine be no sayin', what yo' wuth?' up dar. De po' en de rich goin' bresh erlong de same way; yo' good duds an' fine jewlry will be rustin' but yo' good deeds will be shinin' still. Some day I'm gwine ter hear dat angel chorus, 'Bring fo'th de royal diadem en'

crown him!' Yes I'm gwine hear it, en ma boy, Hugh, hain't gwine be fur away.

"Dar he lays; his han's folded on hi' breas,' de same han's I use ter hole when dey wuz little en chubby. De lips is closed, de same lips dat use ter call me when he wuz er chile, en de same li'l feet what use ter follor me eroun' in de snow. All gone! But when I tread de streets up yonder, an' when I see de glory uv God, I'm gwine say, Whar's Hugh?' an' Hugh'll be thar, jes' smilin' like ez when I roll him on de lawn in his li'l white dress, an' he gwine ter hol' my ole black han' an' say 'Unk Mace, hit's all right now.' An' I'm gwine tu'n to de blessed Marster an' say, 'Thankee fer lettin' my boy in!' an' de Blessed Marster gwine say, 'Yes, Unk Mace we jes' had ter let him in.' "

As the bereaved family filed out of the church, Tom's gaze indirectly met that of Emily. The lovelight was gleaming through the tears of those tender blue eyes,—something that came to him in this hour of sorrow, so reassuring and sacred in its sympathetic appeal.

Love finds its smouldering fires rekindling into old flames when the heart chords find a responsive sympathy in the hour of deepest sorrow.

CHAPTER XIII

LIGHTFOOT was very much involved in his affairs with Molansing. The so-called western capitalist was becoming rather irksome in his dealings with Lightfoot and his association in the family. Mrs. Lightfoot was worrying over the condition of affairs, and had many long talks with her husband, but he seemed completely under the influence of Molansing.

One afternoon as Emily returned from a visit to a little sick child in the neighborhood, she was met by Molansing at the turn of the road near the river. He was evidently carrying a larger supply of liquor than usual, and over his countenance was an expression between a leer and a smile.

With a sweeping bow, he said, "Fair lady, methinks I would a word with thee." She paused but a moment and passed on, and as she passed within ear shot, he said, "There are many ways to tame a colt."

She turned toward him; she believed he now held her father's future and happiness. "Yes," he said, "Many of them rebel at first, but some of

them have to love the very men they dislike, when they find in them the escape from grinding poverty."

Her eyes had a strange look; sometimes an explanation of conditions is unnecessary; a sort of sound wave transmits it from mind to mind. Emily went to her room and did not come down for the evening meal. The hills across on the distant shore, with their heavy garb of changing green, seemed to lend a restful comfort to her eyes. She moved the bed nearer the window, and lay looking out upon the bosom of the beloved stream. A gentle breeze came wafting a sweetness from the fields, and as the twilight faded into the deeper shadows, she fell asleep, to dream of fairy lands and hills that touched into the mystic realms beyond.

It was in the dead hour of the night when she awakened. It was as though from a strange and troubled nightmare. She arose to a sitting position, and there beside the bed stood Molansing, his arms folded and a sinister smile upon his face, well outlined in the full light of the new moon. Without a word, he caught her in his arms. He had studied the innocent beauty of her face as she lay asleep, but the purity of her countenance only intensified his desire for the possession of her. The

expression on her face changed instantly into contempt and scorn as she tore herself from him.

"You she-wolf, I'll tame you," he said.

"Leave me," she said, "I do not want a tragedy under my father's roof, leave before I call him." There came a deadly gleam in her yes as she approachd him and said, "If you touch me, I will kill you myself!"

> 'Tis said that a lion will turn and flee
> From a maid in the pride of her purity.

She now stood before him in the majestic triumph of a queen. She opened the door and pointed toward the stairway, "You are to leave this house," she said.

The next morning, without any word of explanation, he drove to town with his baggage, and left for the west.

Emily's mother saw that there was something wrong. The superior mind of the daughter withheld her from making known to her mother the incident of the preceding night, but as the day wore along, she found her father and quietly told him of what had occurred. Old John leaned against the corner post of his pasture fence. He took off the broad-brimmed hat and fanned his face. Somewhere back in the generations there

must have been a cross of tiger in the blood,—the eyelids closed with a cunning sort of gleam and opened above two glowing coals of fire. He began humming an old song,

> We'll wait till Jesus comes,
> We'll wait till Jesus comes,
> We'll wait till Jesus comes,
> And then we'll all go home.

She had heard him softly sing that song many times before. He sang it the morning when he went up to the store to meet a man who had threatened to take his life that day. He sang it when his little boy was thrown from a wild horse and killed. In some way, it was the letter-call to the keyboard of his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIGHTFOOT had left his home. He made no statement as to his destination nor the purpose of his journey. With an old-fashioned carpet sack he boarded the train, and through the long miles he gazed silently out upon the spreading fields and vanishing landscape, now and then humming:

> We'll wait till Jesus comes,
> And then we'll all go home.

It was about 10:40 in the morning when the train drew into a little Montana city. Molansing was sitting in his office, his feet upon the table, looking over some letters. He held a long cigar between his fingers, flecking the ashes against the desk in a careless way. The door suddenly opened. He turned in his chair and saw John Lightfoot facing him. It was not the same John Lightfoot that he had known; some strange transformation had come over him. There was a cold and determined expression about the eyes and mouth, he had never observed before; a grim sort of silent exterior, foreboding in its stillness.

Lightfoot turned the key in the door, and drew a sheath knife from its scabbard. Molansing knew the knife and his jaw dropped and a yellowish paleness came over his features. His hands trembled violently, and there was a sudden twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"What is it, Lightfoot?" he almost whispered.

"The settlement for keeps," said John as he drew near, "You laid the leper's finger on my child; I'm here to wipe the insult away,—'We'll wait 'till Jesus comes, and then we'll all go home.'"

There was some awful mocking in the words as he heard them fall from Lightfoot's lips. Was he in the presence of a madman? There upon his knees he begged for his life. He told of a wife and children still living in Dakota. He pled to be spared just to try to live for them again.

At last old John said "Git up, you mangy cur; I'll spare you on one condition,—you go with me and produce every cent I have placed with you; you are not to get a foot away from me, and if you get out of range of this knife, I have another messenger close by to stop you." Together they filed out and went over to the bank. It took but an hour for Molansing to get the money, and it was in cash.

"I want to know now," said John, "Why those letters from Tom Standon stopped comin' to my gal."

"It was the postmaster," said Molansing.

"That's enough," said Lightfoot.

The journey homeward was uneventful, and when John came up the yard at home, his wife and daughter perceived at once that a great change had come into his being. He had stopped over in the city and fitted himself out with a new suit of clothes and carried bundles containing presents for his wife and daughter, and as he folded them to his breast, he said "Everything's all right now; there'll be no more dark clouds hanging above the old homestead."

He didn't talk much, but simply said that he had gotten all of his money and something besides.

CHAPTER XV

THE next morning, Lightfoot drove up to the little home occupied by Benjie Foree. Benjie was nailing the hoops on a barrel. Lightfoot hitched his horse and went into the yard.

"Benjie," said Lightfoot, "the man that took your wife away, stopped the letters that passed between Tom Standon and my gal."

"How do you know?" asked Benjie.

"I had it from the man who paid him to do it, and I just want you to go along with me."

They entered the postoffice. It served both as a postoffice and grocery. Ricketts, the postmaster, was emptying coffee from a sack into a bin when Lightfoot touched him on the shoulder. He turned quickly.

"So you are the man Molansing hired to stop the letters between Tom Standon and my gal?"

"Who, me?"

"Yes, you,"—but before another word was spoken, Benjie had sprung upon him, the long, pent-up hatred overcoming all self-control. Lightfoot marveled at the strength of Benjie as he held

the postmaster against the wall and pounded him unmercifully.

"Talk fast," said Benjie, "Did you do it?"

"Yes," said Ricketts, "I don't know what made me do it."

Lightfoot took Benjie off of him and he dragged himself to his home. Lightfoot followed him. "Tell that woman what you done, if you want to live," and between his sobs, he confessed to her his complicity in the malicious affair.

She looked at him as one looks at a sheep-killing dog. She moved to the other end of the room and placed her arms about her boy.

CHAPTER XVI

TOM stood for a moment before the gate in front of the old minister's house, as if trying to decide whether or not he would enter the house of this kind man who had been associated with his family for so many years. He iifted the latch and went up the flower-decked walk. The lilacs were out and filling the air with their delicious fragrance. Yellow tulips smiled and seemed waving a farewell to the multi-colored pansies, and above the window of the minister's study, clung a cluster of white roses.

The white-haired old man met him at the door, and led him into the library, saying: "Get that big arm-chair over there, Tom, and draw it up close to the window."

In the center of the room was an old mahogany table, piled high with books, books everywhere, looking down from high shelves, and glancing up to you from thea floor. Here and there a curious old etching or water color peeping forth from the background of books.

"Doctor Preston, I suppose you are still happy in the simple faith?"

"Yes, Tom, and I trust the same happiness is yours."

"No," said Tom, "for, while I was brought up, as you know in the atmosphere of the church yet as I have gone further and further into life and its conditions, miserable and complicated as they are, have taken me away from the old-time idea and thought of religion. Somehow, it does not fit the conditions any more, and if man is created in the image of God, then God is a failure, for the greater per cent of His creation is a failure, and I am inclined to think with Victor Hugo, 'God has vouchsafed two gifts to man; one hope and the other ignorance, and ignorance is the better of the two'."

"Then you feel, Tom, that your reading of skeptical books, and seeking light among scientific investigation has led you away from God, and the belief in His Holy Word?"

"Not altogether," said Tom, "but I have lost interest, to a great extent, and after trying to find something to help me, I seem to have found more darkness than light."

"Thank God," said the old minister, "that that is not a prevailing condition, for even though

Christian men and women are following boldly scientific investigation as related to the Bible and creation, yet their belief is not giving way to despair, but the research is lifting them into a clearer conception as to the wonderful power of God and His love for the world."

"And you take the Bible as the inspired Word of God?" said Tom.

"Yes, of course, and while I find many things there which have troubled me at times, yet I look upon it as the old fisherman, who when asked how he reconciled himself to many passages of the Scripture, answered, 'Well, I eat fish, but I don't eat the bones; there is plenty of good meat without the bones, and I throw the bones away.' "

"There is much allowance that must be made for writings of thousands of years ago, and you must take into consideration the crudeness of that long ago time, and the final collection of these fragmentary writings, which were to find their last great nucleus in Christ, but through each book there flows God's promise of mercy and love, and the tone and intention of it all is to elevate mankind and sustain and advance the better condition of the world, and what a wonderful world He has made it, revealing Himself in all of it's beauties and joys.

"Everything points to God and a Higher Power. Sometimes I find myself thinking of the geographical relation of nations; the mystery of a slow developing survey establishing the national lines, the marvelous types and resemblances depicting a nation as impact and one; the distinct languages and customs, cementing these nations into a co-operative purpose, even unto death.. It is God, Tom.

"That Bible has swung on down through the ages, buffetted by strong winds and tempests, but it has ridden out the storm. We turn to it; we go to it for peace, and the lessons which it has taught, have reared the countless thousands of churches, where prayer and song and the glory of His Word go forth."

"Yet," said Tom, "it deals with His wrath and vengeance,—it is a threat; it speaks of mercy; of His love for His children; of the sparrow that does not fall without His watchful eye. Why does the poor abandoned woman stagger along the streets, on down to woe? Why does her child bear the inherent instincts of evil, and even though provided with better environments and secluded training is furnished, the evil type, in most cases, returns? His creations! Why does He curse succeeding generations?

"And the churches, you speak of them. They are not representing a genuine charity when the test comes, for it is the same selfish change of front; the thin veneer that rubs off in the face of stern reality and misfortune. Why did the women in your church turn their backs upon the mother of a girl who had fallen into disgrace, and why did that mother refuse to enter the church again? She had come there for peace and comfort; she asked for bread and they gave her a stone."

"Unfortunately, a part of that was true," said the old minister, "but it did not represent the heart of the women of that church. It did represent a few to whom the words of Hood might have applied, 'Oh, for the rarity of Christian charity.' But you did not know of the good women who sought her in her own home, who ministered to her soul's agony, and helped her. You did not know of the old preacher who knelt in prayer in that little home, and of the effort to beat back to the better way.

"You speak of the fallen women as His creation, neglected and sent deeper into sin, of His cursing succeeding generations. Now let me ask you one question, Tom. Why have you been dissipated? Why have you been addicted to the many

evils which you have openly confessed to me? Was it a curse upon your race? Was your father dissipated? Was he a gambler? Was it through dissipation and gambling that he builded the beautiful home where you have been blessed with every comfort, that home which has been a landmark of culture to this community?

"What has drinking meant to your life? It has at times, erased the fine classical lines of your face, taken away the better thoughts of your mind, giving way to a reckless and coarser expression of higher ideals supplanted by a lower conception of life's obligations and duties. It means time and opportunity lost, Tom, it is health and self-respect sacrificed, money wasted and heaven risked.

"And that mother who has walked with God,—was there in her blood the taint to sustain a curse upon her children? No, Tom, you must admit that in you alone has rested the taint and the weakness. You have always had the warning before you fell to temptation; you have always known the penalty of sin, the sense of shame and the inwardness of a troubled conscience.

"And in the lives of those who are in the lowest sin, as Emerson puts it:

'Tis not in the bright stars alone,
'Tis not in the cup of budding flowers,
'Tis not in the redbreast's mellow tone,
'Tis not in the bow that smiles in showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There always, always, something sings.

"And God is ever present in the mystery of His love to watch the creatures of this earth to point them to the better way."

"Then you do not believe in eternal damnation, the hell of never-ending agony; the horribleness of suffering throughout endless time for our failures here through a short span of years?" Tom asked.

"Pretty much of our hell is here, following our own lives," said the minister, "but we have the power, if we but knew it, to fight and struggle for the peace which comes in conquering evil. It may be hard to reconcile ourselves to the wrath and vengeance of a God, who consigns us to an immortality of suffering, but 'I will repay, saith the Lord,' means that the aftermath of sin must find its mete punishment and atonement. God is a just God, and His mercy endureth forever. He gives us a choice, but we must help God, Tom."

The old minister arose and walked over to where Tom was standing by the mantel board, and placed his hands tenderly upon his shoulders. The evening sun seemed to press its way suddenly

through the west window and mould around the kind and placid face a frame of gold. The softened breath of old-fashioned roses stole gently into the room, pervading its quiet assemblage with a tender touch of love.

"Tom, listen to that thrush in the apple tree; listen to those liquid notes; the voice of unsurpassing beauty, pouring itself out in rapturous strains; filling the evening air with sweetness, bringing to some weary heart an uplifting joy. The heart of that bird is happy and free from care.

"The heart is like some great stringed instrument, keep it in tune and the music will grow sweeter with advancing years. Love and unselfishness are its two greatest songs, without them the strings will slacken. You strike them as the years dip into the falling leaf, and the tone is dead, but with love, the harmonious chords will ever sound. Keep your heart in tune, Tom. God bless you, my boy, let us kneel down here and pray together."

The sun's last beam had gone, and a new moon was touching the hills as they knelt together, the hand of the old minister resting upon Tom's head, as he sent a prayer to God. The voice quivered and trembled with emotion, but the words became

wonderfully sweet and uplifting in their earnestness and power.

At the close of the prayer, Tom silently arose and passed out without a word and slowly walked down the pathway. The moon was up and flooding the valley with mellow light under the magic of the jewelled stars. The song of the thrush had long since closed, the cool and refreshing breeze lilted up from the river, and it seemed to carry a lingering fragrance of the clover bloom and wild honeysuckle. He turned in at the home gate. His dog ran to meet him, and he stooped and affectionately stroked his head. Benjie was walking the street in front of the gate waiting for him.

"Tom, she is coming back to me, and Lightfoot is going to back me for another start."

Tom entered the house and paused at the foot of the stairway, then turned and passed into his mother's room. She seemed waiting there for something; she seemed to have been placed there with her folded hands and the spiritual look on her face. No words came from her lips; the eyes did not turn, but when he kissed her cheek, he felt the thrill of some unspeakable love, and when she placed her hand within his own and said, "Good night," he knew that something was behind that

love and as he lay awake during the long hours of the night, it seemed that upon the wandering wind came a whispering voice, "God is love."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE moon was up, riding in a star-gemmed sky. Tom was in his boat rowing up the stream. It was such a night when voices of angels seem to drift from out the assembled beauties of the heavens.

He landed his boat near the old tree on the Lightfoot shore and walked through the sifting moonbeams and leaned against the tree that bore their names.

Does love know? Do the eyes of love see? Do the ears of love hear? I do not know, but from her window, Emily saw, and her heart knew. There was a fluttering of the wings of love, and fairy feet seemed rushing to the river's side. And that's about all. Her head was sobbing on his breast, and as he stroked her waving hair, he softly said: "God is love."

The river rolled along as it has rolled through all the changing cycles of time, and love beamed forth, as it will always beam until time shall be no more.