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THE STARBUCKS

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"SHE WAS THE ONLY MOTHER I KNOWED."

The Starbucks

A New Novel by Opie Read

Author of
"The Jucklins," "Old Ebenezer,"
"My Young Master," "A Tennessee
Judge," "A Kentucky Colonel,"
"Len Gansett," "On the Suwanee
River," "Emmett Bonlore," Etc.

Character Illustration, True to Life, Reproduced in Colors

Laird & Lee, Chicago

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"THE STARBUCKS."

[From the Drama of the Same Name.]

CHAPTER I.

THE PEOPLE OF THE HILLS.

In every age of the world people who live close to nature have, by the more cultivated, been classed as peculiar. An ignorant nation is brutal, but an uneducated community in the midst of an enlightened nation is quaint, unconsciously softened by the cultivation and refinement of institutions that lie far away. In such communities live poets with lyres attuned to drollery. Moved by the grandeurs of nature, the sunrise, the sunset, the storm among the mountains, the tiller of the gullied hill-side field is half dumb, but with those apt "few words which are seldom spent in vain," he caricatures his own sense of beauty, mingling rude metaphor with the language of "manage" to a horse.

I find that I am speaking of a certain community in Tennessee. And perhaps no deductions drawn from a general view of civilization would apply to these people. Some of their feuds, it is said, may be traced back to the highlands of Scotland, and it is true that many of their expressions seem to come from old books which they surely have never read, but they do not eat oats, nor do they stand in sour awe of Sunday. What religion they have is a pleasure to them. In the log meeting-house they pray and sing, sometimes with a half-open eye on a fellow to be "thrashed" on the following day for not having voted as he agreed; "Amen" comes fervently from a corner made warm by the ardor of the repentant sinner; "Hallelujah!" is shouted from the mourner's bench, and a woman in nervous ecstasy pops her streaming hair; but the average man has come to talk horse beneath the trees, and the young fellow with sun-burnt down on his lip is there slyly to hold the hand of a maid frightened with happiness and boastingly to whisper shy words of love.

[10]

"Do you like Sam Bracken?" he inquires.

"Not much."

"If you like him much, I bet I can whup him. Like Steve Smith?"

[11]

"Not so powerful well."

"I can whup him."

"Bet you can't."

"You wait."

And the chances are that unless she modifies her statement the Smith boy will be compelled to answer for the crime of her compliment.

In this community, in the edge of what is known as East Tennessee, the memory of Andrew Jackson is held in deepest reverence. To those people he was as a god-like hero of antiquity. Single-handed he defeated the British at New Orleans. Nicholas Biddle, a great banker somewhere away off yonder, had gathered all the money in the land, and it was Jackson who compelled him to disgorge, thus not only establishing himself as the master of war, but as the crusher of men who oppress the poor.

Prominent in the neighborhood of Smithfield, a town of three or four hundred inhabitants, was Jasper Starbuck. Earlier in his life he had whipped every man who stood in need of that kind of training. Usually of a blythesome nature, he was subject to fits of melancholy, only to be relieved by some sort of physical entanglement with an enemy. Then, his "spell" having passed, he would betake himself to genial affairs, help a neighbor with his work, lend his chattels to shiftless farmers, cut wood and haul it for widows, and gathering children about him entertain them with stories of the great war.

[12]

And how dearly that war had cost him. East Tennessee did not tear itself loose from the Union; Andrew Johnson and Parson Brownlow, one a statesman and the other a fanatic, strangled the edicts of the lordly lowlanders and sent regiment after regiment to the Federal army. Among the first to enlist were old Jasper Starbuck and his twin boys. The boys did not come back. In the meantime their heart-broken mother died, and when the father returned to his desolate home, there was a grave beneath the tree where he had heard a sweet voice in the evening.

Years passed and he married again, a poor girl in need of a home; and at the time which serves as the threshold of this history, he was sobered down from his former disposition to go out upon a "pilgrimage" of revenge. His "spells" had been cured by grief, but nothing could kill his humor. Drawling and peculiar, never boisterous, it was stronger than his passion and more enduring than the memory of a wrong. He was not a large man. A neighbor said that he was built after the manner of a wild-cat. He was of iron sinew and steel nerve. His eyes were black with a glint of their youthful devilishness. His thick hair was turning gray.

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Margaret, his wife, was a tender scold. She was almost a foundling, but a believer in heredity could trace in her the evidences of good blood. From some old mansion, long years in ruin, a grace had escaped and come to her. An Englishman, traveling homeward from the defunct colony of Rugby, declared that she was an uncultivated duchess.

"This union was blessed,"—say the newspapers and story-books, speaking of a marriage,— "with a beautiful girl," or a "manly boy." Often this phrase is flattery, but sometimes, as in this instance, it is the truth. Lou Starbuck was beautiful. In her earlier youth she was a delicious little riot of joy. As she grew older, she was sometimes serious with the thought that her father and mother had suffered. She loved the truth and believed that bravery was not only akin to godliness, but the right hand of godliness.

[14]

In Starbuck's household, or at least attached to his log-house establishment, there were two other persons, an old black mammy who had nursed Jasper, and a trifling negro named Kintchin.

One day in summer there came two notable visitors, Mrs. Mayfield, and her nephew Tom Elliott, both from Nashville, sister and son of a United States Judge. When they came to Jasper's house, they decided to go no further.

"Tom," said the woman, "this is the place we are looking for."

Tom caught sight of Lou Starbuck, standing in the doorway, and replied: "Auntie, I guess you are right."

The mere suggestion of taking boarders threw the household into a flurry, but Mrs. Mayfield, tall, graceful, handsome, threw her charm upon opposition and it faded away. Old Jasper was not over cordial to "store clothes," at least he was not confidential, and with the keen whip of his eye he lashed Tom Elliott, but the boy appeared to be frank and manly.

[15]

"Of course you can stay as long as you want to," said Jasper, "but I reckon you'll have to put on some homespun and a checked hickory shirt or two, befo' you kin put up with our fare."

"Now, please, don't worry about that," Mrs. Mayfield spoke up. "We can eat parched corn if necessary. We have come from the city to rest, and—"

"Rest," Jasper broke in, looking at the young fellow. "Why, he don't look like he ever done anythin'. Never plowed a day in your life, did you?"

"I must confess that I haven't," Tom replied.

"Thar, I knowed it." And then speaking to Mrs. Mayfield, he added: "All right, mam, we'll do the best we kin fur you. Got the same names here that you had down whar you come from?"

Tom laughed. His aunt reproved him with a look. "Why, of course. What object would we have in changing them?"

[16]

"Don't ask me, mam. I never know what object nobody has—ain't my business. Here, Kintchin," he called to the negro, "take them trunks outen the wagin and then you may go to sleep ag'in."

Kintchin came round a corner of the house, rubbing his eyes. "Talkin' ter me, suh?"

"You hearn me."

"Said suthin' erbout gwine ter sleep. I jest wanter tell you dat I ain't slep' none fur er week, an' ef you 'sinate at me—"

"Go on there. Now mam, ef you'll jest step in we'll do the best we kin."

"Oh, thank you. How courteous you are."

"How what? I reckon you better git along without much o' that. Don't want nobody put on a strain. Margaret, here are some folks," he continued as his wife made her appearance. "Jest tell 'em howdy and let 'em alone."

She bowed to Tom and to Mrs. Mayfield. "And befo' you make yo'selves at home," she said, "I hope you'll l'arn not to pay no attention to Jasper. Lou, haven't you spoke to the folks?"

"No'm, but I can. Howdy."

[17]

CHAPTER II.

JIM, THE PREACHER.

During the rest of the day the visitors were permitted to amuse themselves. Lou was shy, Margaret was distantly respectful and the old man went about in leisurely attendance upon his affairs, not yet wholly unsuspecting. A week before the arrival of the "folks from off yander," as the strangers were termed, there had come to Jasper's house a nephew, Jim Starbuck, a mountain-side preacher. His air bespoke that gentleness resultant of passion bound and gagged. At eighteen he had been known as the terror of the creek. Without avail old Jasper had argued with him, with fresh scalps dangling at his own belt. One night Jim turned a revival meeting into a fight with bench legs, beat a hard-hearted money lender until he was taken home almost a mass of pulp. At nineteen he turned a hapless school teacher out of the school house, nailed up the door, and because the teacher muttered against it, threw the pedagogue into the creek. At twenty he seemed to hear a voice coming from afar. A man going to mill said that he saw Jim beside a log on his knees in the woods, praying; he was called a liar, knocked down his insulter and went on with his grist. He had spoken the truth, for on the night following, Jim arose in the congregation, renounced his reckless ways, and with a defiance of the world that among the righteous awaked applause, he came forward and knelt at the mourners' bench. His religion "took," they said, as if speaking of vaccination, and before long he entered the pulpit, ready gently to crack the irreligious heads of former companions still stubborn in the ways of iniquity. From behind a plum bush, in the corner of the fence, he had seen Mrs. Mayfield and had blinked, as if dazzled by a great light. Nor was it till the close of day that he had the courage to come into her presence, and then for a moment he gazed—and vanished. Old Jasper found him mumbling beneath the moon.

[18]

"Lost anythin', Jim?"

"Nothing that I ever thought I had, Uncle Jasper."

[19]

"Look like a man that is huntin' fur his terbacker."

"I've quit tobacco long ago, Uncle Jasper."

"Huh, give that up, too? Then you have been hit hard. But atter all, my boy, a lick that ain't hard don't count fur much. Understand I believe in yo' Book all right, but not as the most of 'em reads it. The most of 'em reads it so as to make you do the things you don't want to do, and what they want you to do. A good many of 'em think it was writ fur them ag'in you. Findin' new picturs on the moon, Jim? I don't see nuthin' new; same old feller a burnin' of his bresh, allus a puttin' 'em on the fire an' never gittin' through."

"I'm thinking, that's all, Uncle Jasper."

"Comes from readin' them books up on the hill-top, I reckon. They make me think, too, when I git a holt of 'em, 'specially them about the war—looks like it's a mighty hard matter for a man to tell the truth the minit he grabs holt of a pen. Don't see why a pen is such a liar, but it is. And yit, the biggest liar I ever seed couldn't more than write his name. What do you think of them folks in thar, Jim?"

[20]

Jim strode off, came back and standing with one hand resting on the rail fence that surrounded the old man's door yard, hung his head and replied: "Old Satan sometimes puts good clothes on his temptations, Uncle Jasper."

"Why, you don't think that young feller's a nosin' round to—"

"I don't see anything mysterious in him, Uncle Jasper. It's the woman that—that strikes so hard."

"Huh. I didn't think you cared anythin' about women, Jim."

"Oh, I don't and you musn't think I do. Did you ever have a feller catch a spear out of the sun with a lookin' glass and shoot it through yo' eyes? That's the way she done me, as she was a standing there at the door."

"Wall, as game a feller as you are ain't afeared of a woman."

"I don't know about that. The gamer a feller is among men the fearder he is among women, it seems like. But what am I talking about? She won't take any notice of me and in fact it won't make any difference if she does. I tell you, though, I don't like to be treated that way by a woman."

[21]

"Why, how did she treat you?"

"Looked something at me that made me dissatisfied with myself. I reckon I must be a good deal of a fool, Uncle Jasper."

"Wall, I don't reckon you are as smart as old Henry Clay was. Still you ain't no slouch. Come on in and I'll give you a knockin' down to her. She can't no mo' than hit you with somethin'."

When introduced Jim shied off into a corner and there during the evening he remained, gazing

at the woman from "off yander," with scarcely courage enough to utter a word. Mrs. Mayfield inquired as to his church among the hills, and his countenance flared with a silly light and old Jasper ducked his head and snorted in the sleeve of his home-spun shirt. But the next morning Jim had the courage to appear at the breakfast table, still gazing; and later when Tom and his aunt went out for a walk, he followed along like a dog waiting to be scolded.

[22]

Several days later, while old black mammy was ironing in the sitting room, Kintchin came in at the door which always stood open, and looking about, slowly went up to the old woman and inquired if she needed any more wood.

"No," she answered, not looking at him, "I's nearly done."

Kintchin scratched his head. "Wall, I jest come ter tell you dat ef you does need any mo' I knows er man dat'll git it fur you. Me. An' w'en er man fetches er lady de sort o' wood I'd fetch you, w'y she kin tell right dar whut he think o' her. Does you hyarken ter me?"

Mammy, slowly moving her iron, looked at him. "Whut de matter wid you, man? Ain't habin' spells, is you?"

"I's in lub, lady, dat's whut de matter wid me."

"In lub? In lub wid who?"

He leaned toward her. "Wid you."

"W'y you couldn't lub me," she said. "I's eighty odd an' you ain't but sixty. I's too old fur you. I doan want ter fool wid no chile."

Kintchin came closer and made an attempt to take her hand, shrewdly watching the hot iron slowly moving over the bosom of a shirt. "I'll burn da black hide ef you doan git erway. You boddors me."

[23]

The old rascal assumed an air of great astonishment. "Whut, er man bodder er lady dat he lubs?"

"Didn't I tole you you couldn't lub me?"

"Couldn't lub you? Ain't you been er savin' yo' money all deze years, an' ef er man kain't lub er lady dat's been er savin' her money, who kin he lub?"

She gave him a look of contempt. "Oh, I knowd dar wuz er bug in de milk pan. It's my little bit o' money you's atter, but you ain't gwine ter git it. Dat money's ter bury me wid." And in a self-satisfied way she nodded at him and resumed her work.

Kintchin stepped back, the word 'bury' having thrown a temporary pall upon his cupidity, but soon he rallied and renewed his attack. "Funny dat er lady will save all her life long jest ter be buried. I doan blebe in deze yere 'spensive funuls nohow. Huh, an' you oughter hab ernuff by dis time ter bury bof o' us. An' ef you says de word I'll be buried side o' you ter keep you comp'ny."

[24]

She ceased her work and looked at him. "I won't need no comp'ny. I'll be busy tellin' de Lawd 'bout de folks down yere. An, I gwine tell him, w'in I goes home."

She gathered up the clothes basket and went into an adjoining room, leaving Kintchin to muse alone. He heard the low whistle of a backwoodsman's improvised tune, and looking up, saw a man leaning against the door-facing. To the old negro the new comer was not a stranger. Once that big foot had kicked him out of the road, and lying in his straw bed the poor wretch had burned with resentment, cowed, helpless; and sleeping, had dreamed of killing the brute and awoke with a tune on his black lips. He knew Lije Peters, neighborhood bully without being a coward, a born black-mailer, a ruffian with the touch of humor, ignorant with sometimes an allegorical cast of speech. As he entered the room he looked about and seeing no one else, spoke to Kintchin:

"Whar's Jasper Starbuck?"

[25]

"I seed Miss Margaret an' Miss Lou out yander jest now," Kintchin answered, backing off as Peters advanced toward him.

"I didn't ask about them. Whew, what you got sich a hot fire in here for?"

"Mammy's been ironin'."

"Yes. Been a meltin iron I should think. Is Starbuck at home? Answer me, you scoundrel." He made a threatening gesture and Kintchin, backing further off, cried out, "Doan rush me, suh. Ef I'se er scoundul you hatter give me time. Er scoundul hatter be keerful whut he say. I seed Mr. Starbuck dis mawnin', suh."

Peters turned as if to go out, but halted and looked at Kintchin. The old negro nodded. "Say, is that young feller and that woman here yit?"

"Gimmy time—gimmy time. I's er scoundul, you know."

"Do you want me to mash your head?"

Kintchin put his hand to his head. "Whut, dis one right yere? No, suh, I doan blebe I does."

"Well, then answer me. That woman and young chap here yet?"

"Yas, suh, da's yere."

"She's his aunt, I understand."

"Yas, suh, dat's whut you un'erstand."

"Why did they come here? What are they doin'?"

"Gimmy time. Da come caze da wanter ter, an' now dat da's yere, da's jest er bo'din'; dat's all."

"You are an old fool."

"Yas, suh," replied Kintchin, "dat's whut I yere."

Mammy came in and said to Kintchin, "De steers broke down de fence an' is eatin' up de co'n. See, through de winder?"

"Dat won't do," Kintchin exclaimed with hurry in his voice but with passive feet. "No, it won't do. Steer ain't got no right ter come roun' er eatin' up de co'n."

"But w'y doan you go on, man? Mars Jasper'll git arter you."

"I's gwine. Allus suthin' ter make er man work his j'int's," he moved off toward the door, and turning just before going out, said to Peters: "Yere come Miss Lou now."

The girl came in singing, but seeing Peters, hushed, and turned to go out. [27]

"One minute, Miss Lou," said Peters, bowing awkwardly.

She halted, looked at him and said, "Well?"

"Won't you sit down," said Peters, making a great show of politeness.

"I'm not tired," Lou replied.

Peters smiled. "I've got suthin' I want to say to you."

"Then I may be tired," she said, sitting down. "Well?"

Peters stood for a moment, looking at her and then inquired: "Did yo' father tell you suthin' I said to him?"

Slowly rocking she looked up at him. "He always has enough talk of his own without repeatin' what other folks say."

"But what I told him was about you."

"Well, if what you said wasn't good you wouldn't be here to tell about it, so it don't concern me."

He attempted to smile, but failed. "I don't know about that."

"You don't know about anything—much."

"Enough to know what I think of you." [28]

"Hope you know what I think of you."

"Ah," said Peters, "I don't reckon you think of me very often."

Lou got up and went to him, looked straight into his eyes and said: "Think of you! Why, I never know you are on earth till you come where I am and then I spend my time tryin' to forget you are there."

"Well, now," replied Peters, "that ain't very polite."

She stepped back and looked at him in pretended astonishment. "Was anybody ever polite to you?"

"Well, not many of the Starbucks, that's a fact—none, come to think of it 'cept yo' cousin Jim, the preacher, and he believes that the Lord made all things for a purpose."

"Yes, he believes that God made the devil."

Peters laughed as if he really enjoyed her contempt of him. He pulled at his whiskers, cleared his throat, took a turn about the room and looking at her again, he appeared as if he had attempted to soften his countenance with a sentiment urgently summoned. "Yes, that is all true, I reckon. And now let me tell you. I mout not look like it—like I'm hard to please, but I am. Thar ain't one woman out of a hundred that can make me wake up when I'm sleepy and think about her, but you can. And ever sense you was a child I've said I'd never marry till I could git you." He saw the anger in her eyes and hesitated. "Ah, you may not think very much of me now," he continued, "but that can all be changed. A woman's like a mornin' glory flower—always a changing; an' I know you could learn to love me." [29]

"Oh, you do. Well, what you know and what's the truth won't never know each other well

enough to shake hands."

Peters smiled upon her, "Wall, if nuthin' else did, that of itself would prove you air old Jasper's daughter."

Margaret Starbuck came in, with a pan of turnips. Peters bowed to her. "Er good mornin', ma'm."

She put the pan on the table and giving him an unconscious grace bade him good morning. "Is mammy done ironin'?" she asked, speaking to Lou. [30]

"Yes'm, I reckon so." Then she added, speaking to Peters, "Is there anythin' else you wanted?"

"Why, Lou," Margaret spoke up, "is that the way to talk?"

"Yes'm, sometimes," and nodding at Peters she added: "And this is one of them." She laughed, turned away and sat down with her elbows resting on a battered old melodeon.

"Oh, she's jest a jokin' with me ma'm," said Peters. "I wanted to see yo' husband. Reckon he's out some whar on the place."

"I think so," Margaret replied, peeling the turnips. "I heard him calling the hogs just now."

Lou looked at Peters and said: "Then why don't you go?"

"Why, daughter," exclaimed Margaret, "you musn't talk that way. Mr. Peters is in yo' house."

She came forward and to the visitor bowed with mock humility. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Peters _"

"Oh, that's all right, Miss Lou."

"For bein' honest with you."

Peters cleared his throat. She returned to the melodeon and sat down with her back toward him. Peters started out but halted and spoke to Margaret. "Suthin' I have been workin' fur a long time is about to come—an app'intment I've been tryin' to git, and when I git it there air folks that ought to be skeered." [31]

Lou glanced round at him and replied, "And then again, there are folks that won't be."

"Ah," said Peters, "an' them that won't be air them that ought to be." And then to Margaret he added: "If I don't find Jasper I'll be back. When he comes tell him I want to see him. Good day."

When he had gone out into the road Margaret inquired of her daughter what he had said to give such offense.

"He said I could learn to love him. And I as much as told him he was a liar."

"But, daughter, you musn't talk like that. You'll have to be more careful with him, for in some way he's got the upper hand of yo' father."

"Well, I don't envy him his job."

"Hush," said Margaret. "Here come the folks." [32]

CHAPTER III.

GETTING ACQUAINTED.

In came Mrs. Mayfield and her nephew, with Jim, the preacher, following them. Margaret began industriously to dust a rocking chair. She bade them come in, if it were not too warm, "Mammy has been ironing but the fire's dyin' down. And I do hope she irons yo' clothes to suit you, Miz Mayfield," she added.

"Oh, yes," replied Mrs. Mayfield, glancing round at the preacher who with hat in hand sat on the melodeon stool, gazing at her. "I am not hard to please," she continued, speaking to Margaret. "I have passed that stage."

Margaret bowed to her. "Well, I'm mighty glad to hear it. So many folks are hard to please. There come a woman from away off yander sometime ago and took up over at Fetterson's and they couldn't do a thing to please her—grumbled all the time; the water wasn't even good, when heaven knows we've got the best water on the yeth. So I am glad you ain't hard to please." [33]

"Oh, I should indeed be finical to find fault with anything in this delicious air," said Mrs. Mayfield, smiling at Lou, "this new life, among these God-worshipping hills, these—"

"Oh, auntie brought her romance with her," Tom broke in, and Lou gave him a look of tender reproof.

"Oh, let her talk, please. I like to hear her." And standing beside Mrs. Mayfield's chair she said:

"You told me you were something. What was it?"

"An echo from the world," the city woman answered.

Lou looked at her mother who in turn gave her a look in which the girl read an ignorance as profound as her own. "Well, is sounds mighty putty," she said, "but what do you mean by it. I don't understand."

"Why Lou!" exclaimed her mother. "You musn't talk that way."

"Oh, let her go ahead," Tom spoke up. "The fact is auntie says a good many things I'd like to have explained to me."

[34]

"Tom," she said, "please don't be any more wayward than you can help."

At this moment old Jasper's voice was heard without. "Git down from here. Got less sense than any dog I ever seed, come a jumpin' on me with yo' muddy feet. Howdy everybody, howdy," he greeted them as he entered, with a set of harness on his arm. Every one spoke to him and after surveying the party he drew a chair out from the table, sat down and began to tug at the harness, pulling hard against the resistance of a rusty buckle. "Whar's that luther string?" he inquired of his wife.

"What luther string?"

"The one I told you to put away for me some time last fall—mebby fall a year ago. Whar is it?"

"Gracious alive Jasper, I don't know. What did you bring that gear in here for? Can't you fix it at the stable?"

"Yes, could. Could also sleep and eat out thar, but I don't want to."

"Now what on the yeth do you want to talk that way fur?"

Jasper chuckled. "Wall, a man ain't hardly responsible for what he says when he's talkin' to a woman."

[35]

"Then you don't believe, Mr. Starbuck, that woman inspires truth," said Mrs. Mayfield, and Jim leaned forward, still gazing at her.

"Oh, yes, all the putty truths," Jasper replied, and Tom who, with Lou, was standing over near the fire-place, sang out: "There, auntie, he is meeting you on your own ground."

Jim's countenance flared and he struck in: "Yes, in the shade where the soft air is stirring."

Mrs. Mayfield turned to him. "Oh, thank you Mr.—I shall have to call you Mr. Reverend."

He gave her a smile and then as if afraid of too much light shut it off; but he had the courage to reply: "Anything you call me, ma'm, will be music."

"Oh, I tell you," said Jasper, tugging at the buckle, "Jim ain't been preachin' ten years fur nothin'. Wall, mighty fur nothin', too; for I ricolleck that one winter all he got was a pa'r of blue jeans britches an' fo' pa'r of wool socks. And if I don't cuss this thing in a minit more I'll be about fitten to preach."

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"Mr. Starbuck," Mrs. Mayfield inquired, "was that you shooting so early this morning?"

"Yes'm, killin' them squirrels we had fur breakfus'."

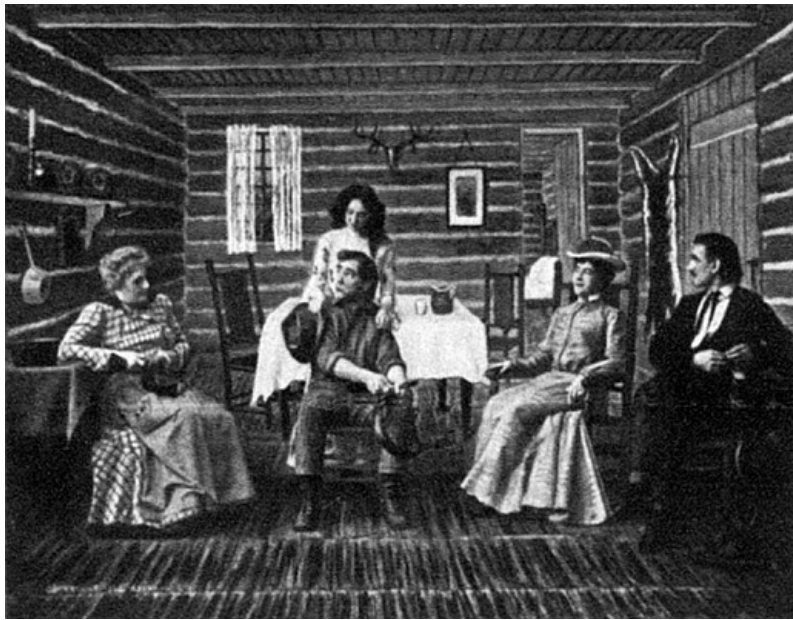
"And you saw the sun rise?"

He left off working with his gear and looked at her. "Ah, hah. Ever see the sun rise?"

"I have seen the moon set," she said, half musing.

"And so have I," said Jasper. "I have seen the moon set and hatch out the stars."

And still musing, Mrs. Mayfield replied: "Yes, and they peeped at one another in their heavenly nest until the sun, man-like, came and spoiled it all."



**"THEM WHAT HAIN'T HAD TROUBLE 'AIN'T HAD NO
CAUSE TO LOOK FUR THE LORD."**

Jasper and his wife looked at each other, knowingly in the eye; and then the old man said: "I beg yo' pardon, ma'm, but you must have had trouble. But don't let it bother you any mo' than you kin help, fur my experience teaches me that them what hain't had trouble ain't had no cause to look fur the Lord."

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"Why, Jasper Starbuck," Margaret spoke up, "ain't you ashamed of yo'se'f to talk about the Lord thatter way?"

"I ain't said a word ag'in Him. Leave it to the preacher thar. Have I, Jim?"

"No, Uncle Jasper."

"Much obleeged to you, Jim; and instead of stayin' five weeks with us as you said you 'lowed to, I wush you'd stay longer. I need you to prove things by. Couldn't make it five months, could you, Jim?"

"No, Uncle Jasper, I must get back to my mountain-side flock. There's many a poor old man tottering along that needs me to help him walk."

"That's a fact," said Starbuck, and turning to Mrs. Mayfield he continued: "He settles nearly all their troubles, ma'm; he's not only their church but their cou't house. I've seed him preach the gospel with one hand and with the other one tear up a lawsuit."

Lou, standing on a chair, had taken down an old gun which rested upon deer horns above the fire place, and was exhibiting it to Tom. "My great grandfather carried it at the battle of New Orleans," she said; and reverently the young man took the gun and pressed the butt to his shoulder, taking aim. "No wonder our country has a spirit that can't be crushed," he remarked, lowering the ancient war hound and looking into its black mouth.

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"When we've got such guns?" she said, smiling down upon him, still standing on the chair.

"No, not such guns but men who do such deeds and women who are proud of them."

Jasper looked round and saw that the young man in his carelessness had the gun pointed at him. "Here," he called, "turn that thing tuther way."

"Why it isn't loaded, is it?" Tom asked, returning the gun to Lou.

"No, but them's the sort that usually goes off and kills folks. Thar's an old sayin', ma'm," he said to Mrs. Mayfield, "that thar's danger in a gun without lock, stock, or barrel—you kin w'ar a feller out with the ram-rod."

Lou replaced the gun and sat down. Tom stood over her, sllily showing her some verses. Mrs. Mayfield, glancing round, understood that it was a "poetic situation," and remarked to Jasper. "Just now we were speaking of trouble. Heart-hunger is the real poetry of life—heart-hunger and heart-ache; our pleasures are but jingling rhymes."

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Jasper and his wife exchanged glances, and the old man said: "Husband dead, ma'm?"

"Worse than that, Mr. Starbuck."

"Why, ain't that awful," Margaret declared.

Jasper studied for a few moments and then inquired: "Wan't hung, was he?"

She shook her head, sighed and made answer: "We were divorced."

Then the old man thought to be consoling. "Well, let us hope that you won't marry him over

ag'in."

"No, his heart is black."

"There is a fountain where it may be made white," said the preacher.

Sadly she smiled at him and replied: "To that fountain he would never go."

Old Jasper jingled and clanked the iron of his harness. "I don't know much about fountains," said he, "but I know a good deal about men, and I never seed one with a black heart that ever had it washed out clean. I never knowd a scoundrel that wan't allus a scoundrel, and the Book don't say that the Savior died for scoundrels—died for sinners. A sinner kin be a fust-rate feller, full o' that weakness that helps a wretch outen trouble. The Savior knowed that and died for him."

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Margaret slammed her pan of turnips down upon the table. "Oh, sometimes I'm so put out with you."

"Yes," drawled the old man, "and old Miz Eve was put out with Adam, too, but atter all the best thing she could do, was to stick to him and go whar he went."

"Oh, of course," said Margaret. "The only use a man ever has for the Bible is to hit a woman with it." She went over to a safe, looking back at her husband who stood watching her, his droll countenance lighted with a humorous grin; she began to mix meal in a pan, stirring vigorously to make up corn pone, throwing in water with a dash. Tom and Lou were still engaged with the verses.

"What is this line?" she asked.

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"Her eye a star of heart's most gleaming hope," he read, and she purred like a kitten.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"Why, er—it means all sorts of things."

"It sounds like things you find in a book, but this is in writin', isn't it? And—and it smells like a violet in the woods."

"What have they got thar, a mortgage?" Jasper inquired of Mrs. Mayfield.

"The beginning of many a mortgage, Mr. Starbuck; some verses."

"Huh," grunted the old man, "I don't reckon they are like some verses I had not long ago. Had a lawsuit befo' a jestic of the peace and they called it Starbuck verses Brown."

Margaret ceased her work of mixing corn pone and looked round at him. "Jasper, anybody to hear you talk would think you don't know nuthin'."

"Well," Starbuck replied, "that's the way to find out that a man don't know nuthin'—by hearin' him talk. Feller over the mountains had a son that was deaf and dumb for twenty-odd year. Everybody lowed he was the smartest one of the fam'ly. But finally a doctor teachd him how to talk and then they found out that he wan't nuthin' but a damned fool."

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The profane twist of the old man's defense amused Mrs. Mayfield. And Jim smiled. It was not only in keeping with the old man's half innocent character—it was the honest spurt of sinful Adam, remaining with the most of us—which the devout preacher may deplore for the sake of example and yet inwardly accept because he is human. I am told that there are languages that hold no profanity and we know that there are tongues too delicate for philosophy and too gentle for blank verse.

"Now what do you want to pester a body thatter way for?" Margaret rejoined, thankful that Mrs. Mayfield had not been shocked. "I never seed a body that could be so aggrivatin'. Miz Mayfield, don't pay no 'tention to him when he talks thatter way, fur when he wants to he kin be right bright.

"Oh, I understand him, Mrs. Starbuck," and then of Jasper she inquired: "How far is it to the post office?"

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"A little the rise of three mile. As soon as I git this gear in shape I'll have Kintchin hitch up and drive a passel of you over thar. I reckon we've got one of the smartest post-masters in the country. I've seed him rip open many a man's letter an' read it off just like print. Here, Kintchin! Kintchin! That nigger's asleep somewhar. One of these days somebody will fill him so full of lead you couldn't turn him over with a hand spike." Kintchin appeared at the door, stretching himself and rubbing his eyes. "What have you been doin'?"

"Who, me?"

"Yes, you."

"Wall, suh, I ain't been ersleep ef dat whut you means."

"Then why didn't you answer me?"

"W'y, suh, I had my min' flung down on er 'ligious subjeck an' it wuz all I coul' do ter t'ar it off."

"Ah, thought I hearn suthin' rip like a piece of tent cloth," and giving Kintchin the harness he

continued: "Here, hitch up old Dick and drive these folks over to the post office."

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"Yas, suh."

"And when you come back you can break that young steer."

"Yas, suh, break de steer."

"And when you get the steer broke," said Margaret, "I want you to make me an ash hopper."

"Yas'm," replied the old negro, looking at her and then at Starbuck.

"And then," said Jasper, "I want you to hive the bees."

"And then," Margaret spoke up, "you may fix the loom."

"Yas'm, fix de loom."

"When that is done," said Starbuck, "you may rive some clap-boards to cover the spring house."

"Yas, suh, ter kiver de spring house;" and scratching his head he stood for a moment as if in deep thought. "An' look yere, Mr. Starbuck, while I'se gone to the pos' office don't you reckon you kin think up suthin' fur me ter do?"

"How willing he is to work," Mrs. Mayfield sympathetically remarked.

Kintchin ducked his head at her. "W'y, Lawd bless yo' life, honey, I doan know nuthin' else. One time not long ergo I foun' o' er mawnin' dat I wuz monst'us tired, an' den I come ter fin' out dat I been er gittin' up an' er workin' in my sleep. Yas'm."

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He looked at Jasper, expecting something, and it came: "Was that the time they found the ham under yo' bed?"

"Mr. Starbuck, whut you all de time come er talkin' datter way fur? Ain't dar nuthin' in dis life ter talk erbout 'cept politics? Doan you know you got er soul ter save? Doan you know dat de Lawd frown on slander? I doan care fur myse'f but I hate ter see er good man fling erway his chances o' de salvation. An' suthin' gwine happen ter you ef you keeps on 'sposin' yo'se'f."

Starbuck good naturedly drove him out, clucking at him as if he were a horse. Lou slowly folded the paper which she had been gazing at during all this time and said: "Oh, you must let me keep this."

"It amounts to nothing," replied Tom, making a pretense of taking the paper but permitting her to retain it. "I will write you something prettier."

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"No, I want this."

"She is beginning early to mistrust promises," remarked Mrs. Mayfield.

"Oh, she knows the world," said Mrs. Starbuck. "She went to school for two years over at Dry Fork. That's where she l'arned to play that melogian."

"Yes," Jasper spoke up, "and the fust time I hearn it I thought a tree had fell on one of the calves. Why, helloa, mammy, come in. Lookin' fur suthin'?"

"I must er lef' my old pipe yere summers," said the old negro woman, coming into the room.

"Here it is," said Jasper taking a cob pipe from the mantle-piece and giving it to her. "Won't you sit down, mammy? You look so tired."

"No, Mars Jasper, I hain't hardly got time." She looked at the company, bade every one good morning, with a heart-felt "God bless you;" and looking at Mrs. Mayfield, slowly advanced toward her, gazing at her hand. "W'y, honey, I neber seed de like o' putty rings you's got on. Da's like de speret o' light er wrappin' round yo' fingers."

"Mammy, they are but glittering memories."

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"Yas'm, da do shine might'ly ef dat whut you means."

Tom and Lou were going out. "Don't stray off," said Mrs. Mayfield. "We are going to the post office, you know."

"Yes, if that fetch-taked nigger ever gits the hoss hitched up," Margaret spoke up.

Jasper snatched up his hat. "Oh, he'd hitch up a hoss to the fou'th of July jest about in time to drive up to the front door of Christmas. I'll go and see about it myse'f. Slowest nigger I ever seed," and muttering he went out. Old mammy, still looking at the city woman's rings, began softly to croon: "I neber seed er po' ole nigger dat didn't like rings. I had er whole lot o' 'em once, but da turned green, an' da'd pizen me ef I teched 'em wid my mouf. But one time Mars Jasper gib me one dat didn't turn green, an' I lost it. You allus loses de best, you know. Honey, Mars Jasper is allus doin' suthin' fur me. I nussed him w'en he wuz er chile an' he dun paid me back mo' den er hunnud times; an' w'en I got ole an' wuz down wid de rheumatiz, an' couldn't sleep in de night w'en de lonesome cow er lowin' on de hill-side, he sot up wid me an' spell out de words o' de Lawd, fur he kain't read right quick. He couldn't been mo' tender wid his mudder, an' I gwine ter tell de Lawd w'en I goes home, an' it won't be long—no'm it won't. An' on de wall by my

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bed I dun made chalk marks o' de things I gwine tell de Lawd, an' dar ain't hardly no mo' room fur new marks, da all been so good ter me; but I gwine make one fur you, honey, caze you looked kind at me. Yas'm, I is. But I must be gwine. Lawd bless you all; an' you too, strange lady." And as this old creature walked out she still muttered blessings upon them; this endeared old link, tenderly binding some of us to one of the sweetest memories of the past. She is passing over the threshold into the "big house" of eternity, this mother of love and charity, who sang the little children to sleep, whose ebon fingers bound the wounds of youth. She knew enough of God to be all love—of Christ to forgive all wrongs.

"The wagon's ready," Jasper called, and Mrs. Mayfield turned to Jim. "Won't you come too?"

He scrambled up, as if stung into action, grabbed his hat, went boldly close to her and said: "If I thought yo' wish was in yo' invitation, Satan couldn't hold me back, and the Lord wouldn't." [49]

"What a strange compliment."

"Ma'm, I don't know how to speak compliments."

"Come on, please." [50]

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE POST OFFICE.

Beneath the blooming boughs overhanging the mountain road the old carryall was slowly pulled along by a horse into whose joints had crept the dreamy laziness of early summer. Lou, bound about with flowering vines, captive May-queen in purple chains, sat on the rear seat with Tom; and she was shy in this close touch with the mysterious world from afar off; and her timidity made him timid, this youth whose earliest recollection was the booming of cannon, as he played upon a cavalryman's blanket, waiting for his father to return from the charge. Motherless, the pet of the battalion, his playthings the accoutrements of war, his "stick horse," a sabre, his confidential companion a brass field piece. Old soldiers, devoted to their colonel, carried him about on their shoulders, and handsome women made him vain and bold with their kisses; but in the presence of this mountain girl he was subdued. Jim and Mrs. Mayfield sat together—that is, he sat out on the end of a board, as far away from her as he could get, and once when the wheel ran over a stone he fell off. [51]

"Oh," she cried, "you must be hurt."

He got up, with his jack-o'-lantern smile, dusted himself and said:

"I—I would fall for you any time, ma'm."

"But," she laughed, "I didn't want you to fall."

"Didn't you? Well, I beg yo' pardon, I thought you did."

Kintchin, who sat in front, ducked his head and chuckled.

"Oh, de folks up yere is de 'commerdatinist you eber seed. Da'll stand up fur you ur fall down fur you ur do anythin' you pleases. Sorry I come off an' furgot suthin'. Allus de way—man furgits whut he needs de mos."

"Did you forget something, Kintchin?" Mrs. Mayfield inquired.

"Yas'm, come off an' furgot twenty-fi' cents dat I wanted to fetch wid me. I owes er quarter ter er crap-shootin' nigger ober dar, an' when I kain't pay him he gwine retch his han' up atter my wool. I doan want no big nigger retchin' atter me, caze I ain't right well dis mawin'. Co'se ef I wuz well I wouldn' mine it so much, but ez it is, it boddors me might'ly. You neber had no trouble wid er crap-shootin' nigger, ef you had you'd be mo' consarned. Anybody gwine gib me er quarter." [52]

"I'll give you a testament," said Jim, looking back and smiling at Tom.

"Testament! Ointment you better say," replied Kintchin. "Testament ain't gwine be no mo' fo'ce wid dem niggers den de Lawd's pra'r would wid er wild haug. Huh, I'se er dreadin' eber step o' de way ober dar."

"Here's a quarter," said Mrs. Mayfield, handing him a piece of silver.

"Thankee, ma'm. Oh, you's whut da calls er missiunary, an' I gwine he'p ole black mammy pray fur you."

"Oh, how beautiful—nature sleeps and dreams of paradise," mused the romantic woman and the preacher clasped his hands.

"Down off there is where the foxes live," said Lou. "One night I went with pa to run them, and we galloped all round here, and when we got home, just about day, my clothes were torn nearly all to pieces; but it was such fun; and when old Bob got close to the fox and bellowed, it seemed like he was beatin' his paw on my heart. And away off yander, the hill-side opened and music [53]

poured out, and father reached over and put his hand on my head and we listened."

"It is music," said Jim, "but the horn blowed by old Satan may be made outen silver."

"But, Mr. Reverend," Mrs. Mayfield spoke up, "you surely don't object to the enjoyment of a harmless adventure."

"No, ma'm. The Lord wants us to enjoy ourselves, but we should not jump on the hoss of pleasure and gallop too fur away from the gospel of truth."

Kintchin ducked his woolly head. "Keep on foolin' roun' an' dis yere white man call up mourners," he declared. "De gospel it all right, bof in de dark an' de light o' de moon; but you keep on foolin' wid it an' follerin' it an' you gwine lose yo' min'. I knows whut I talkin' erbout. You got ter come ter de 'clusion dat de Lawd knows best an' not pry too fur inter his erfairs. De Book say suthin' 'bout eat all you want an' take er drink once in er while fur ter-morrer you ain't gwine be yere."

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"Does the Book say anything about shooting craps?" Tom inquired.

"Now, Mr. Tom, whut put dat inter yo' head? Book doan come out p'intedly an' say you shan't."

"They cast lots for His garments," the preacher spoke, and Kintchin replied:

"Oh, w'en you fling de Book down on me too hard, I jest hatter squirm, dat's all. Ef I had ernudder quarter I could open up er 'skussion dat—"

"You'll not get it," said Jim.

"Dat ends it. Oh, I likes preachers—likes ter yere 'em talk, but I ain't nebber got no money outen one yit. Da all time talk erbout gib whut you got ter de po' an' foller on, an' da follers all right; but I ain't seen 'em gibbin' nuthin'."

"They give to the spirit, Kintchin," remarked Mrs. Mayfield.

"Yas'm. But sometimes I'd leetle ruther da give ter de pocket. Howsomedever, I mustn't go too fur wid dis man. He's er preacher, but he er Starbuck an' he w'ar me out ef I push him too fur."

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"Now, Kintchin," said the preacher, "you know you couldn't provoke me into strikin' you. Don't you?"

"Yas, suh, I feels it; still I's er little skeered o' you. An' whut you gwine gimme caze I skeered? Ain't it wuth er quarter ter be skeered like I is? Huh?"

"Here," replied Jim, giving him a piece of money. "It's worth a quarter to see Satan play his pranks."

A turn in the road, and there was a river, narrow, deep and as blue as the sky. Wild spice bushes, shedding a sweet perfume, grew upon the steep banks, and far below they saw a black bass leap to gulp a mouthful of the sun. The hills stretched away, purple, blue, green; and through the air shot a red bird, lightening from a cloud of flowers. A gaudy, wild dragon, zouave-arrayed, stood guard over a violet nodding beside a rock, and the milk-maidish white clover trembled in fear of the lust-looking strawberry. Bold upon a high rock, with a fish in his claw, sat a defiant eagle, and straight down the river flew a sand-hill crane, like a fragment of gray mist.

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They met a young fellow, carrying a tea-cup in his hand, with hair that looked like hackled flax and with a grin that invited the confidence of all mankind. It was Mose Blake, known to neighborhood fame as the stutterer. He halted and attempted to say something, but Kintchin drove on, muttering that he had no time for words that a fellow chewed all to pieces. The boy tried to shout his defiance, but "you are a—a—a f—f—f—" was all he could utter and even this was forestalled by Kintchin, who called back at him: "Oh, we knows all erbout dat."

The road dipped down, turned, and they drove upon a ferry-boat, a mere platform of rude plank and propelled by two gaunt men. On the other shore they drove along still keeping close to the river. A country boy hailed them, but without heeding him Kintchin remarked: "Dat's Laz Spencer, an' he takin' dat meal bag home somewhar ter borry suthin' else. Ef he wuz ter go ter heben an' foun' dat he couldn't borry some angel's harp, he wouldn't stay dar. I 'spize ter see er pusson all de time wantin' suthin'."

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"You don't borrow, do you?" Tom asked, and he answered:

"Who, me? No, suh. I earns all I gits—ef not befo', afterwards. Jest ez sho ez er pusson gibs me suthin' I gwine earn it."

Turning off from the river and entering upon a piece of level ground, they came to the post-office, an old log house with gable end toward the road. In an inclosure a number of tow-headed boys were trying to ride a calf. In the road a child, not more than able to toddle, was throwing stones at a blowing old goose.

Kintchin tied his horse to a "swinging limb," and the ladies were assisted to the ground. Tom conducted them into the post-office, a store wherein the merchant had for sale snuff, red calico, brown jeans, plug tobacco, cast iron plow points, nails and cove oysters. The post-master came forward dragging after him two splint-bottom chairs.

"Set down," he said. "Never seed you befo', but I'm glad to see you now."

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Tom inquired if there were anything in the office for Mrs. Mary Mayfield or himself, calling his name; and the post-master looked at him closely and asked: "Any kin to old Zeb Elliot that used to sell mink skins?"

"No, I have no relatives in this part of the country."

"Wall, old Zeb was a good deal of a man."

"That may be, but he was no relation of mine."

"Had long red whiskers and his hair stood up straight—seed him climb a tree one night and shake a coon out as slick as a whistle. Had a dog named Tige—feller pizened him. Where you frum?"

"Nashville. I wish you'd look—"

"Yes, that's what I'm goin' to do. And ain't this Jasper Starbuck's daughter? I thought so," he added when Lou nodded at him. "I've knowed Jasper a long time, but folks don't git round a visitin' now like they uster. Never seed yo' father drunk in my life—swear it's a fact; never did. I'll bet he kin whup a ground-hog as big as he is. And I'll sw'ar, ain't this little Jimmie Starbuck?"

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"My name is Jim and I am a Starbuck," the preacher answered.

"Thought I know'd you. Ah, hah, and they tell me you air preachin' the gospel now. Which one o' the gospels air you preachin', Luke or John? Wall, no diffunce, either of 'em is good enough, I reckon. I never tried to preach."

"I wish you'd try to look over your stock of mail matter," said Tom.

"I'll do that, too. What was the other name. Mayfield? Well, that's a familiar name to me. My grandmother was a Mayfield—no, Mayhew. Putty nigh the same anyhow. You air expectin' a letter, I reckon."

"Yes, if you please."

"From yo' husband? No, you ain't married, of co'se. And I want to tell you that you may have any letter in this shop, don't make no odds who it's writ to. I'm allus glad to have folks come. I set here day after day, by myself a good deal of the time, and I like comp'ny, too; uster be a mighty hand to go round, but sorter give it up atter I got busy. Now, let me see whar I put them letters." He scratched his head. "I had 'em yistidy, I'm certain of that." He went behind his counter, shook a barrel, looked into it—looked into a cracker box, into a crock jar, and brought out a handful of letters. "Oh, I know'd they was here somewhar," he said. "Elliott, Mayfield," he repeated, looking at the letters. "Here's one for Endiott—'bout as near as I can come to you, young feller. Will that do?"

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"Of course not," Tom answered. "It isn't for me."

"Near enough, ain't it. Oughtn't to blame a man when he's doin' the best he can. I can't hit at you at all, Mrs. Mayfield. Ain't nuthin' here that sounds like you."

"Really," she said, "this is a remarkable post-office."

"One of the best, ma'm," replied the post-master. "Come in, Squire," he called as a man, leading a hound, appeared at the door.

"I want a pint," said the Squire.

"All right—let me look at yo' dog." He examined the hound's teeth, punched him in the side to catch his tone, pronounced his yelp of good note, and gave the Squire a pint of liquor.

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"About as peculiar case of barter as I ever saw," said Tom when the Squire withdrew with his purchase.

"Yas, mout seem so, but a good artickle of hound is a currency at this sto'."

"I heard that I might find peculiar people in this part of the country," said Mrs. Mayfield, "and I have not been disappointed."

The store-keeper smiled upon her, playing with the hound's ears. "Oh, we never disapp'int folks," he replied. "But we ain't peculiar. Higher up the mountains you might find folks that are right queer in their ways. Up thar they ain't got no money at all 'cept coon skins. Well, do you want to buy anythin'?"

"No," said Mrs. Mayfield, "not to-day."

"Got some right good snuff here if you want it."

"I don't use snuff."

"You don't? An' come round talkin' 'bout peculiar folks, too? Little one," he said to Lou, "tell yo' daddy I may drap over to see him as soon as my present rush is over. Trade is suthin' that don't wait fur no man, Mrs. Mayflower."

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"Auntie, you'll have to buy something after that," said Tom. "I don't see how you can get away from it."

"Then I will show you. I wish you would tell Kintchin that we are ready to go."

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CHAPTER V.

COULDN'T QUARREL IN PEACE.

When Jim and Mrs. Mayfield were near the door, just before starting for the post-office, she with graceful ceremony and he with the simple grin of devout worship, Old Jasper had stood looking at them, with an expression of mock seriousness; and when they went out, Starbuck slapped his leg and snorted with laughter. Margaret reproved him with her ever industrious eye.

"Blamed if I didn't think they was goin' to dance right thar," said the old man.

"Jasper, what makes you wanter talk thatter way?"

"Didn't see how they could keep from it, Margaret. Couldn't see no way to hold 'em back. Jest as ready to dance as the b'ar and the monkey that the feller come along the road with last year, mebbe year befo' last. I tell you, Jim ain't been a readin' them books on the hill-top fur nothin'. I gad, every time he looks at her he flips a star." He walked about the room, shaking his head. "The po' feller's hit. I gad, when you flutter fine calico the preachers come a runnin' with the rest of 'em. She's caught him, but he'll suffer an' say nuthin'. It's mighty hard work to wring a squeal outen a Starbuck. In that respeck we air sorter like wild hogs. I've seed a dog chaw a wild pig all to pieces an' he tuck it with never a squeal—mout have grunted a little, but he didn't squeal. Puffeckly nat'ral to grunt under sich circumstances, ain't it?"

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"Oh, what do I care for yo' nonsense?"

"Nonsense! The affairs of the human fam'ly ain't nonsense, is they? Heigho, but she's a mighty good woman."

"Of course," said Margaret, crossing the room and sitting down in a rocking-chair. "Of course. A man thinks every woman's good—but his wife."

"Had to break out, didn't you? Have I said you wan't good?"

"Might as well say it as to act it."

"How am I actin' it?"

"By not lovin' me, that's how."

"Not lovin' you. Have you got any postal-kyard or tillygram to that effeck? I ain't sent you no sich news. Look here, did you ever notice that when a woman's daughter gits up about grown—when the young fellers begin to cut scollops about her—did you ever notice that about that time she begins to complain that her husband don't love her? Hah? Did you?"

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"Oh, it's no sich of a thing," she replied, slowly rocking. "You know you don't love me as much as you did yo' fust wife."

For a time the old fellow gazed at her, saying nothing; and then came slow, deep-rumbling words: "Margaret, air you jealous o' that po' little grave down yander under the hill? You never seed her, the mother o' my two sons that went with me to pour out their blood fur their country; and when she hearn that they wan't a comin' back, she pined away and died and was buried under the tree whar we seed her standin' jest befo' we went down beyant the hill. You ain't jealous o' that weak little woman, air you?"

Slowly rocking, and reflecting for a few moments, she replied: "Jasper, it's the weak little women that air so strong with the men."

[66]

"Yes," he declared, "and it's the weak little women that have sons that air so ready to march to the tap of the drum. But I give you and our daughter all the love thar is in this old heart o' mine, and that ought to be enough."

"But you don't appear to want to talk to me," she whimpered.

"Talkin' to you now, ain't I?"

"Yes," she admitted, "sich talk as it is."

"Well, what do you want me to do? Stand like that young feller Elliott and read stuff writ in short lines?"

Margaret flounced out of the chair. "Oh, I never seed a man that could be as big a fool when he tried. I do know that—" Here she was interrupted by the unheralded entrance of Mose Blake, the stuttering boy with the tea-cup. He nodded at Starbuck and began to stutter. "Mother sent me atter—atter a c—c—c—cup o' v—v—v—"

"How's all the folks, Mose?" Margaret broke in.

"W—w—w—w—w—"

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"Glad to know it," said Starbuck. Mose looked at him with a dry grin, sat down in the rocking-chair and began to rock himself.

"What did yo' mother send you after, Mose?" Margaret inquired.

"Cup o' v—v—v—v—v—"

"Can't you write it down?" Jasper inquired.

"Kik—kik—kik—ki—kan'—can't write."

"Don't you think you mout go off somewhar an' l'arn?"

"Ain't got—got tity—tity—t—t—time."

"Wall," said Jasper, "it appears to me like you've got all the time thar is. Wall. All right, jest set thar till it comes to you and then let us know what you want." He went over to a table where his wife was standing, drew out a stool, sat down and said to her: "So, you think I can be a bigger fool when I try than—"

"Hush," she cautioned, pointing to Mose, "he's a hearin' you."

Starbuck slowly turned his head, looked at Mose and then said to his wife: "Wall, whar's the difference, he can't tell about it."

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"Come atter a c—c—c—cup o' v—v—v—v—"

"Jest hold her down, Mose," Jasper encouragingly remarked, "and mebbly she'll come right side up atter a while."

"Jasper," said Margaret, "don't distress him."

"I ain't distressin' him half as much as he is me. 'Bout ready to give her another trial, Mose?"

"Want a cup o' vin—vin—vin—"

"Oh, you air gettin' thar."

"Cup o' v—v—vinegar."

"Thank goodness," Margaret exclaimed.

"Thar you go distressin' him," said Jasper.

Margaret took the cup and went into the kitchen and Mose, looking at Starbuck, grinned in self-celebration of his victory.

"Ain't as h—h—hot as it was when it was h—h—h—hotter, is it?"

"Come to think of it, don't believe it is."

"M—m—m—might r—r—r—rain, soon."

"Yes, and it looks like we mout have snow some time next winter."

"Thank y—y—y—you," said Mose; and as Margaret entered and handed him the cup of vinegar he thanked her, rewarded her with a grin, and departed. For some time after his exit nothing was said, but finally Margaret, standing near the window, began to look for the ends of the broken thread of discourse.

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"Now, let me see."

To help her out Starbuck volunteered his services. "We had got to whar I was the biggest fool when I tried. Don't you ricolleck?"

"Oh, you want to git back to whar you was tryin' to pick a quarrel with me, do you?"

"No, jest thought I'd help you out."

"It's no sich of a thing. You know you don't love me an' you jest want a chance to tell me so."

"Did it ever hit you, Margaret, that a woman ought to put herself in a condition to be loved? Scoldin' don't fetch out love no mo' than b'ilin' water would fetch out blossoms."

"I don't scold, and I don't see why you always keep a hintin' that I do. Scold! I never scolded in my life. You know you git mad every mornin' at breakfust. Man's always mad till he gits suthin' to eat. Scold indeed. And if I was to scold, which I don't, I'd have a cause."

[70]

"Cause! Did you ever know a woman to look fur a cause an' not find one? Jest make a cause of the needle in the hay-stack an' the woman will find it. And I want to tell you that the mo' causes a woman has the mo' disagreeable she is."

"Oh, it's no sich of a thing. A woman may slave an' slave an' never go off the place and—"

"Go off the place! Didn't you go to the barbecue over at the cross-roads last year?"

"Last year," she repeated; "it was year befo' last. Yes, an' look how you acted on that day—eat till I was ashamed o' you—acted like you never got anythin' at home. I never was so mortified in my life. Saw you standin' thar with the leg of a shote in yo' hand, a makin' of a speech."

"I was askin' a blessin' over the meat. I admit that I was hungry on that occasion; I'd been savin' myse'f up. Thar ain't no use in goin' to a barbecue unless you take yo' appetite with you."

"But thar's no sense in eatin' till everybody talks about it, goodness knows."

[71]

"Who talked about it?"

"Everybody, that's who. Oh, you wouldn't love me if I was a dyin'."

"I'd much ruther have you livin'."

"No you wouldn't. If I was a dyin' it would tickle you mighty nigh to death, you—"

In came Laz Spencer, the boy with the meal-bag on his arm.

"Glad to see you," Starbuck exclaimed, catching him by the hand; and Laz, astonished at the warmth of the welcome, stood mute, as if expecting for something to happen. "You got here jest in time, Laz."

"Howdy, Laz," Margaret greeted him, smoothing her countenance.

"Wall," said he, "ain't a standin' on my head," and speaking to Jasper he added: "Come to fetch yo' meal-bag home."

"About when did you borry it, Laz," Jasper inquired, taking the bag and throwing it upon the table.

"Last fall, some time."

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"Well, how did you happen to fetch it back so soon?"

"Oh, jest got to thinkin' about it last month."

"Well, no tellin' what's goin' to happen when a feller gits to thinkin'. What's the matter with yo' coat-tail?"

"Was a settin' on a stump, drapped off to sleep an' the calf chawed it."

"I do wish you two would hush yo' foolishness," said Margaret. "How's yo' mother, Laz."

"Give her some interestin' news, Laz," said Starbuck. "Tell her the old lady ain't expected to live."

"Now did anybody ever hear the like o' that," Margaret retorted. "I never seed sich a man."

"Mother ain't so powerful well," said Laz. "She ain't bed sick, but she's a chillin' a good deal. Got the shakes when she went down to the creek bottoms. Can't eat nuthin' but spoon vittuls."

Margaret, dismissing the visitor from further attention, took up a coffee-mill and sat down near the fire-place. Starbuck asked Laz how his brother Bill was getting along since the fellow cut him with a knife, an affair of no particular consequence, but serving as an incidental topic for thoughtless talk.

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"Sorter slow," said Laz, never changing a line of his countenance. His face was as fixed as a mask, stupid and expressionless. Whenever he smiled it was a neighborhood event.

"Wall, how did it happen, any way?" Starbuck inquired, biting an apple.

"Wall, Bill he war settin' thar on a log, lookin' out over the new ground, not a thinkin' about bein' stobbed nur nuthin', an' this feller jest slipped up an' stobbed him."

There came a hoarse cry from without.

"Somebody's a hollerin' helloa," said Margaret, grinding her coffee by the fire-place.

Jasper went to the door.

"Helloa, that you, Gabe?"

"What's left of me," a voice replied.

"Won't you light an' look at yo' saddle?"

"No, don't believe I got time. Was goin' down to town an' didn't know but you mout want to send fur suthin'."

[74]

"No, don't believe I'm pinched for anythin' at present."

"You might tell him to fetch me a newspaper," said Margaret.

"Wife 'lows you might fetch her a newspaper, Gabe."

"What sorter one?"

"Oh, one o' last year or year befo' last."

"Last year," Margaret repeated contemptuously. "If I can't get this month's paper, I won't have none."

"Wife's mighty particular about her paper, Gabe," Jasper shouted. "Say, fetch her one o' them farmer papers and then it won't make no diffunce how old it is."

"All right. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Gabe," and then thinking of something important Starbuck hastened to cry out: "Say, Gabe, you might fetch me a can of cove oysters and about a straw hat full o' crackers." The last request was shouted through the window, on the sill of which there was a tin cup and near by, in a corner, was a jug. Taking up the jug and the cup Starbuck, approaching his visitor, inquired: "Have a sneeze, Laz?"

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The young fellow did not look round; he saw neither the jug nor the cup, but he knew what was meant, and with a slight change of countenance as he arose, he replied: "Ain't snoze ter-day."

Jasper gave him the cup, raised the jug and said: "Shout when you've got enough."

Instantly Laz became animated, but without a change of countenance: "Say, ricolleck that feller lived over our way, had a white hoss—one day come along and—" The cup ran over.

"You ain't very good at shoutin', air you?"

"Whoa," said Laz.

Jasper tilted the jug to his own lips and Laz drained the cup. Starbuck made a motion with the jug toward Margaret and she shook her head with a shudder.

"Tastes like the milk of human kindness," said Laz, and Jasper replied:

"Yes, till you git too much an' then it's like the juice b'iled outen the hoof of old Satan. Say," he added, as he put the jug in its accustomed place, "have you hearn the new preacher over at Ebenezer?"

[76]

"Went over to hear," Laz replied, "but a passel of us fellers got to swoppin' saddles down at the spring an' didn't. They say Jim Starbuck kin preach all round him."

"Bet Jim kin whup him," said Jasper.

"Now, Jasper," his wife spoke up, "why do you allus want to talk about fightin', an' among preachers at that?"

"I ain't allus doin' that, Margaret. I happened to mention Jim because fightin' was about the hardest temptation he had to give up, bein' a Starbuck. But, Laz, the preacher over thar is good."

"How do you know?" Margaret struck in. "You went to sleep."

"Yes," said Jasper, "but he woke me up a time or two, and it takes a putty good one to do that. The last feller they had over thar didn't; he jest let me sleep an' dream—one day I dreamed I was a killin' of a wild cat an' I come mighty nigh a breakin' up the meetin'. But this new man is a high flyer, Laz. He chaws flat terbacker an' spits right out over the dash-board." He took out his watch, shook it, held it to his ear, and glancing at the clock on the mantle-piece, declared: "Either that clock is a liar or this here watch can't tell the truth. I reckon I have mo' trouble with time than anybody in the neighborhood. None of my time-pieces can't git along with one another."

[77]

"What diffunce do that make?" Laz drawled. "The sun rises an' sets jest like thar wan't no watches nur clocks. Wouldn't make no diffunce to me ef thar wan't none. Shore ter git a feller inter trouble ef he pays much attention to 'em. The only way for a man to live is jest to let time take care of itse'f. It always did and I reckon it always will." He went over to the table, took up the bag and looking at it as if studying a problem, remarked to Jasper: "I'd like to borry this meal bag ag'in ef you ain't got no particular use for it."

"All right, Laz, but I mout need it by year after next."

"Ah, hah. Wall, I'll try to have it back by then." He started off slowly toward the door, halted and looked about.

[78]

"Don't see nuthin' else you want to borry, do you, Laz?"

"Nuthin' I can use. Good-day."

Margaret stood near the window, meditating. "Now, let me see."

"Want to know whar we was when he broke in?" Jasper asked, and she gave him a pathetic look.

"I wan't a thinkin' about that."

"Glad to hear it. Look here, it's a gittin' so a man can't set down and quarrel with his wife in peace. We air gittin' too crowded in this neighborhood. Man moved in five miles from here day

befo' yistidy."

"Then let's don't quarrel," said Margaret, holding out her hands.

He put his arms about her. "No, we won't. An' don't be jealous of that po' little grave."

"No, Jasper, for she was the mother of soldiers."

Lije Peters came in, clearing his throat. Starbuck looked round at him and said: "An' Satan come also."

"Starbuck," Peters began, "I want to see you a minit, by yo'se'f."

[79]

"I don't know that I've got anythin' to say to you, Lije, but that door thar allus stands open, and I ain't in the habit of orderin' folks out of my house. Margaret, will you please go in thar?" he added, motioning with his head.

"But you won't have no trouble, will you, Jasper?"

"Trouble mostly comes to them that looks for it. I ain't lookin'."

Margaret went to the door, halted, looked back and then passed into the adjoining room. Starbuck sat on a corner of the table. Peters stood looking at him. Peters was much the larger man, and lifting at a handspike, in the clearing at a log-rolling, would have been stronger; but the bully, the half-coward, in combat, is rarely as strong as the brave man. The blood of courage case-hardens a muscle.

They looked at each other, these two men whose relationship, never agreeable, was nearing a crisis. Starbuck's voice was never softer than when he said: "Won't you sit down, Lije?"

"Hardly wuth while. Did the folks tell you that I was over here earlier in the day?"

[80]

"Nobody said anythin' about it, Lije. Couldn't have been very important—what you said to 'em on that occasion."

Peters cleared his rasp-like throat. "Mo' important than some folks mout think."

"Some folks don't think," Starbuck replied.

"And then ag'in," said Peters, "thar air others that does."

"Ah, hah, an' ef you air one of 'em, out with what you air thinkin'. Up in the hills one time a dog bit an old feller, and his son's cotch the dog an' put a rope around his neck to hang him. But they kept on a standin' thar till finally the old feller 'low: 'Say, boys, when you've got to hang a dog, do it as quick as you kin. Do you see whut I am a drivin' at?"

Peters gave a gurgling, mirthless chuckle; and loose-jointed, shifted his weight from one leg to the other. "Well, nobody ain't never accused me of not understandin' things—yit."

"Mebbe it's because nobody ain't never paid you that much attention."

"Oh, you know how to talk. Ain't nobody ever denied that, but talk that don't lead up don't amount to nuthin'. Starbuck, our families wan't right good friends in the past."

[81]

"Wan't in love," Old Jasper agreed, and Peters coughed.

"Yes, that's a fact. An' I've got an old-fashioned, single-barrel, cap-and-ball pistol that uster belong to a Starbuck."

"Yes, and a way back yander it killed a Peters, I've hearn."

"Yes, Starbuck, with a three-inch slug. But that's nuther here nur thar, jest now. I'm willin' to furgit the past."

Starbuck gave him a knife-thrust glance, and replied: "When a Peters says he is, it's ten to one he ain't."

"You air still talkin' fust rate. But come to think of it, you an' me ain't been very much at outs."

"That's so, Lije. I've slept all night many a time without dreamin' of you."

"Yes. But I reckon I've been doin' a leetle mo' dreamin' than you have. Yo' daughter—"

"Only a dream so fur as you air consarned."

[82]

"Do you mean to say she won't marry me if you tell her to?"

Starbuck left the table upon which he had been sitting, and moved over closer to his visitor. "Look here: you know she can't love you, an' don't you want her because you think I've got a little money? Hah, ain't that it?" And slowly the old man went over to the fire-place, took down his pipe, filled it and stood twisting a piece of paper. "When you git right down to it, Lije, ain't that the reason—money?"

"Well," said Peters, shifting about, "if thar is money, I reckon I know how you come by some of it." He put his foot on a chair and pulled at his beard. "Yes, I reckon I know how you got a good deal of it. Starbuck, I know an old feller about yo' size an' with gray ha'r that has made a good

deal o' licker when the sun wan't shinin'. And that fetches me down to the p'int. I have applied fur appointment as Deputy United States Marshal. Do you know what that means—if I git it?"

Starbuck leaned over and thrust the piece of paper into the fire, turned about with it blazing in his hand and applied it to his pipe. [83]

"Do you know what that means, Starbuck?"

The old man puffed at his pipe, drew the blazing paper through his hand, put out the fire, removed his pipe, studied a moment and said: "Yes. It means that I may have to kill you." [84]

CHAPTER VI.

HADN'T LISTENED.

Not another word was spoken, and Peters went out, turning with a sullen look as he reached the road. For a moment he stood there and then skulked on away, met a dog in the road and kicked at him. When Margaret re-entered the room Jasper was walking up and down with his hands behind him. The old man began to tell a story: "Feller down in the bottoms owned a calf that had wool on him like a sheep; uster ter shear him every spring, and one time he—"

"Jasper, didn't Peters say he was a comin' after you?"

"Margaret, is it possible that you've been listenin' to two men talkin' business? Now, business is a sort of a sacred thing. A feller in the Bible says, 'I'd like might'ly to go to yo' little dinner, but I've got to break a yoke of steers an' you must 'skuze me.' So, Margaret, you must never interfere with bisiness." [85]

"But didn't you say suthin' about that you might have to kill him? Didn't you?"

"Huh. We must have been talkin' about a sheep that broke his leg. When a sheep breaks his leg, you know, he's about gone. Mighty hard thing to cure a sheep, makes no diffunce what's the matter with him. Feller over near Smithfield had a sheep once that—"

"Didn't he say he was a goin' to be app'inted deputy marshal?"

"Who, the sheep? Now, I don't believe a sheep would make a very good deputy marshal. Strikes me that the wolf would be a trifle better."

"Jasper, I didn't say a word about a sheep, and you know it."

"That's a fact. I was the one that was a talkin' about a sheep. I know'd it was one of us, but I sorter forgot which one."

"Didn't he say that you made a good deal o' licker when the sun wan't shinin'? Didn't he?"

"Margaret, ef you keep on, I'll be fo'ced to believe you have been listenin'; an' I'd hate to think that. Thar ain't nuthin' much wus than listenin' to other folks when they talk business. Now the fust woman on the earth listened when her husband he was a talkin' to an angel that was out in the garden a sunnin' hisse'f, and they called her a Eve drapper." [86]

"Wall, you wan't a talkin' to no angel, I'll tell you that."

"Talkin' to one now, ain't I?"

"Jasper, I didn't come in here to be made fun of. I'd rather quarrel than to be made fun of."

"I don't know but that's a fact."

"Now why don't you tell me all about it?"

"I don't see the use in my repeatin' suthin' you've already hearn."

"Already hearn? I ain't hearn a word, and you know it. But suppose he do git the app'intment—won't it mean trouble?"

"Wall, I don't know but it will. They do say that it's a sorter troublesome job. Know'd a feller that was app'inted once, and he was shot between the eyes—puttiest shot you ever saw. Man said, 'You couldn't do that ag'in in ten years,' and putty soon thar come along another deputy, an' blamed if he didn't do it ag'in." [87]

"I wish you wouldn't pester me so—when I've already got trouble on my mind."

"What's troublin' you, Margaret?"

"Why, dinner's about ready to take up, and them folks ain't come back. Why, I never did see Lou as skittish as she is now. I reckon it's because he's the son of a United States jedge."

"Oh, you've found out all about him, have you? Wall, he's sorter skittish, too. And when his aunt talks it puts me in mind of a bird a singin' up summers among the green leaves."

"Oh, any woman could talk thatter way if you'd put fine clothes on her. Trouble is when a woman ain't dressed fitten to kill, nobody won't listen to her. Common calico can't talk any better than that Mose Blake; but silk—law me! Sings like a bird up among the green leaves. I despise to hear a man go on thatter way—jest as if a woman ain't respectable unless she covers herself with finery. But I want to tell you that Lou can talk with the rest of 'em when she wants to—and so can I, for that matter."

"Oh, you can talk, Margaret—thar ain't no doubt about that. Well, I'll go out now and see if the hogs air gittin' along all right, and when dinner's ready jest blow yo' ho'n."

[88]

Off from the road, not far from the house, a gulch ran zig-zag up among the rugged hills. It was no mere ragged and unsightly drain for water from the higher land. Flower-brightened and vine-hung, it was deliciously cool, and gorgeous at every turn. At the bottom babbled a rivulet, a bit of summer sky melted and poured among the green-tipped rocks. Blooming shrubs in the giant's garden, the saplings seemed; and hither came the birds to make their nests and to nod with half-shut eyes in the drowsy afternoon. But after passing through this elbow corridor, there were bare rocks, standing bold in the sun or bleak in the wind, and here was a log hut almost hidden by bushes. It was called the mill, and corn was ground there, but the meal was boiled in a great iron kettle. It was Old Jasper's distillery. After leaving the house he went up to this place, and in front of his picturesque though illegitimate establishment, he sat down upon a stone to muse over his coming danger.

[89]

In Jasper Starbuck there was a force which, directed by education, would have made of him a leader of men. Once a neighbor had threatened to report him to the government, and in the night Jasper went to the house of his enemy, called him to the door, showed him a rope, and without saying a word went away. The neighbor knew what the rope meant. Years before a miscreant who had assaulted a woman, was seized by Starbuck, thrown upon his back, tied hand and foot, and hanged to a tree; and it was only the timely arrival of officers of the law that saved him for the deliberations of the established gallows. But with all his quickness to act he was sometimes made slow by a touch of sentiment, and thus it was that he permitted Peters to bully him. Between the two families there had ever existed bad blood, and some of it had been spilled. In the neighborhood it was a standing prediction that Jasper would one day cut the throat of the blustering Lije, and the old fellow, especially as time began to whiten his hair, constantly mused to himself: "I don't want 'em to throw it up to my girl that she is the daughter of a butcher, but if the time must come—" Here he always broke off, summoning his humor with the whistle of a droll tune. "Thar may be some way to weather it out," he now mused as he sat upon the stone, "I have been in many a close place and I always weathered it out."

[90]

Suddenly he looked up, attracted by the bleating of a lamb; and up higher among the crags he went, found the little thing caught between two rocks, almost starved. "You don't belong to me," he said, taking the lamb in his arms, "but yo' life belongs to you an' in the sight o' the Lord mebby it amounts to as much as mine." He took the lamb down to the house, gave it milk, and then took it back upon the hill-side, and, putting it on the ground, said: "Thar, I reckon you'd better run along home. Yo' mammy mout be distressed about you."

Upon returning to the house he found that his visitors had come back from the post-office. Jim was gazing at Mrs. Mayfield, Tom was shyly striving to dispel Lou's shyness, Mrs. Mayfield was talking romance.

"Oh, I could not have believed that such a place existed," she said to Starbuck. "I was warned not to come here, that the people were ungentle and that the report of the gun was oftener heard than the strains of the song; but I find that your life here is almost uneventful music."

[91]

"I don't know what sort of music that is, ma'm, but if you say so, I'd be willin' to bet on it. Wouldn't you, Jim?"

"I don't bet, Uncle Jasper,—but—but if she wanted me to I would."

"Of course you would, or any other preacher, if he's a man."

Mrs. Mayfield was looking at Jim and he sat illumined beneath her gaze. "Your compliments are all so new and strange to me," she said. "And in them I can find no flattery."

"Ma'm, I have never tried to flatter any one. Judas was a flatterer."

"That's right, ma'm," the old man declared, laughing and slapping his leg; "an' I'd ruther a man would tell me a flat-footed lie than to pour molasses on me. Young feller," he asked of Tom, "did you like yo' ride?"

[92]

"Charmed with it, I assure you. Auntie called it a continuous panorama."

"Wall, I never thought about it in that way, but I reckon that's about what it is."

"Oh, such visions are not to be forgotten," Mrs. Mayfield spoke up, and at the sound of her voice Jim dodged. "And such air, Mr. Starbuck—ethereal liquor of the gods."

At the word liquor Jasper's jaw dropped with a "hah?"

"Yes," she said, "wine from the press of Paradise. How free from the taint of the world was every shrub and flower! I thought that a poet had laid him down and dreamed, and awaking and stealing away, had left his dream behind."

"That so? And right up on the hill from whar you crossed the river thar lives the old feller they tell the tale about. Many years ago when thar come along a gover'nment surveyor, a changein' the line between North Carolina an' Tennessee, he dragged his chain through the old feller's house, putting one room in one state an' lettin' the other room stay in the state it was. 'Wall,' says the old feller, beginnin' to move his bed over into the tuther room, 'reckon I'll sleep over here as North Carolina ain't very healthy nohow,' an' he did till years atterwards another chain proved that he was mo' than fifty miles over in Tennessee an' then his health improved might'ly. I'm glad you like our part o' the country, ma'm."

[93]

"Anyone to know the dark side of life as I do, Mr. Starbuck, must revel here. There are no sneers among the trees, and the tears that fall from the flowers are tears of joy and not of sorrow. It does not seem that the great explorer, Trouble, has ever penetrated this region."

"Ma'm," said the old man, standing in front of her with his hands behind him, "no matter whar we go trouble is thar jest in advance of us. Trouble was in the garden of Eden, waitin' for man. The coward may say that it come with the woman, but it was thar in the shape of a snake befo' man trod the path. A house may be away off among the hills; it may be kivered all over with vines an' the flowers may sweeten the roof, and yit inside thar may be a heart that is a smotherin'."

[94]

"It is mighty warm in here," said Margaret, entering the room. "Come to dinner."

Jim, in a constant tremble, as if he expected some dire accident to befall him, sat beside Mrs. Mayfield. Once he dropped a dish, and later leaning back in his chair, the hind legs of which were too short, tipped over and came near upsetting the table. Tom and Lou tittered; Jasper roared till the tears ran down his brown cheeks; Margaret reproved him and all was in confusion till Mrs. Mayfield's gentle words pattered musically among them like rain in the dust. She did not take notice of the ludicrous mishap, and when Jim had scrambled to his feet and was standing there ridiculous with a dry grin, she said to him: "I know you must be fond of books, and when I return home I will send you some—books that I have read and marked when the hours were long."

The preacher recovered himself. "Ma'm," said he, "in a book yo' pencil would make a high price mark, and from one man that I know of there could be no purchase."

"I gad," snorted Old Jasper, "dinged if he didn't git right up and stand higher than he was befo'."

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"Jasper," Margaret protested, "I wouldn't make fun of the way a man stands. It don't sound right."

"My dear," Mrs. Mayfield replied to Margaret, motherly, though young, "he paid Mr. Reverend a pretty compliment."

"Now did he?" Margaret rejoined. "Wall, if he did I'm mighty glad of it, but the truth is, Miz Mayfield, Jasper is so full of his pranks you never can tell how to take him. Lou, why don't you pass the butter to Mr. Elliott; and the bread? Can't you see nothin' at all? I hope you will excuse her, Mr. Elliott, fur she sometimes furgits though she did go to school for two years over at Dry Fork."

Tom begged her not to worry about him. He was nearing that stage when physical appetite is forgotten, when our entire nature, faults, virtues, all littlenesses and greater qualities, are thrown into a heap to feed the bonfire of love. An old man may love like a fool, but the boy loves like a hero. The old man who believes that he is loved by a girl is a reveler in the debauchery of his own vanity. With an egotism unknown to youth, he believes. The "sweet thing" tells him with an air of wisdom that she could not love youth, that it is but an animated folly, and he believes her. But the boy is uncertain and doubts himself. His love, instead of inspiring confidence within his own breast, inhabits his heart with the ghost of fear. The old man talks platitudes and knows that he is convincing. The boy stammers his devotion and feels that he has failed.

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"You ain't eatin' a thing," said Lou, and this bold boy in the city, but timid now, dropped a piece of bread, burnt himself with coffee and spluttered that never in all his life had he eaten so much. A bird lighted on the window sill, and whispering to Lou, he said that it had come to hear her talk, and to carry her music to the other birds to make them envious; and she spoke no word, but her cheeks replied to him. The old man was musing and saw nothing, but Margaret heard the words and saw the blush, and sitting back in her chair she compressed her lips and fanned herself in satisfied determination. Jim had become calm, though watchful and still on the dodge. Sometimes he started as if a bold thought with a sudden knock upon the prison door demanded liberation, but frightened at the sound of the struggling voice within he would seem to clap his hand over the key-hole, that no accent might escape. The old man was aware of these trials and they amused him and often he would duck his head and laugh over his plate. Margaret would clear her throat at him.

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"Now, Jasper, what on top of yeth has tickled you so? A body to see you would think that thar wan't nuthin' serious nowhar. Oh, I like to see a man enjoy hisse'f, but—"

"But you don't," Jasper filled in, winking at Jim, who dodged as if an acorn had been flipped at his eye. "Ma'm," he added, "blamed if I believe a woman ever has a right good laugh after she's past thirty. About that time nature turns down the lamp for her and she begins to see shadows. If she does laugh much atter this it is at an enemy. She won't laugh with you—she laughs at you. You've got to look funny to her—you've got to have on suthin' that looks odd."

"Oh, I don't think so, Mr. Starbuck," Mrs. Mayfield replied. "It has often been denied, but a woman has the true sense of humor, but—"

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"Humor!" exclaimed the old fellow. "Why, she's got mo' than a day in April."

"You misunderstand me. I mean that she has a true sense of fun. Being more sensitive than man, some things that a man wouldn't notice, strike her as ridiculous. To say that she has no fun would be to rob her of sorrow, for the keenest sorrow comes after we have had our fun."

"Ma'm, you air settin' in a boat, paddlin' at ease and I am a rollin' up my britches higher an' higher, a tryin' to wade atter you; but you air a gittin' out whar it is too deep fur me to foller you."

"A compliment charmingly expressed, Mr. Starbuck. But if I row away from you, it was you who placed me in the boat."

"Ma'm, I allus thought it would be hard to talk to an educated woman. I 'lowed she would talk a finery that I couldn't understand, but you sorter make me change my mind."

"Jasper, you do fret a body so," Margaret put in. "You would lead us to think you never met a woman befo'. Why, thar air lots o' women up here—can't talk silk and braid and plush, but they know how to say what they mean."

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Mrs. Mayfield bowed to her. "I quite agree with you, Mrs. Starbuck. Women everywhere are pretty much the same."

"So glad to hear you say that, Miz Mayfield," Margaret replied. "It ain't often that anybody agrees with me—Jasper never do. If I'd say a crow's black, he'd 'low it was white."

"Yes," drawled the old man, "ef you was to say so; but you never would say a crow was black. You'd say he was yaller. No, I don't allers dispute what you say. Tuther day when I flung a rock at a steer, it struck a tree, bounced back and hit me and you said, 'Thar, you've hurt yo'se'f,' and I didn't dispute it. Jest give me the truth and you won't here no complaint. Am I right, Jim?"

Jim did not relish his position as "prover." The umpire of household argument "hath but a losing office." In the opinion of one side or the other his decision is unjust. "You are nearly always right when you think you are, Uncle Jasper, and you don't often think you are right unless you are; and I can say the same of Aunt Margaret."

"Oh, I tell you," the old man declared, shaking his head, "Jim will keep out of trouble as long as he kin; an' I want to say he is givin' me a mighty useful lesson right along now about this time."

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"Gracious! Look thar!" Margaret exclaimed.

"Hold on!" Jasper commanded, "don't nobody move. Keep right still and don't say a word."

In the door stood a dog, gazing with glassy stare. Any one could see that it was mad. A tiger leaping forth from a jungle and standing with his eyes ablaze, must be a terrible sight. But the tiger, red tongue out, crouching, eyes like fire, could not inspire more of terror than the dead eye of a mad dog. We know that its tooth, its claw, its very foam means death, lingering, horrible.

"Don't move," commanded Jasper, slowly getting up from the table. There was no weapon within reach. "I'll have to choke him," said the old man. "If any of you moves a muscle I'll hold you responsible." Gazing into the eyes of the dog, he slowly moved toward the door. Then, making a sudden motion forward, he sprang to one side; and the dog was in the air, and when he came down the old man was upon his back, with hands grasped around his throat. The women shrieked. Jim and Tom sprang forward. "Look out, boys, don't let him scratch you. Here, Jim, grab his hind legs. Mr. Elliott, fetch that handspike from over thar in the corner."

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Jim seized the dog's legs and Tom brought the big stick. "Shall I mash his head with it, sir?"

"No. Put it across his neck and then I'll b'ar down on one end an' you on the other an' with a twist Jim kin break his neck. Thar, we air gittin' him." At the proper moment Jim gave the dog an upward twist and there was a snap. They heard his neck break.

"It's all right," said Old Jasper. "Why, you women folks mustn't take on now. Thar are two times when you mustn't take on—when thar's danger and when thar ain't."

"I know he's pizened!" Margaret cried.

"Well, now, don't bet no money on that fur you'll lose it. He didn't tech me."

"Let us thank the Lord," said Jim.

"All right," Jasper replied; "but thar ain't no hurry; the dog's dead."

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CHAPTER VII.

NOT SO FAR OUT OF THE WORLD.

Men with guns came down the road, shouting "mad dog." The cry was taken up and it echoed among the hills. In barbaric Europe, when every village was a principality unto itself, the cry at midnight, summoning men from their beds to butcher or be butchered, could not have been more startling than the noon-tide cry of "mad dog" in rural Tennessee. Mothers seized their children, fathers caught up guns and axes. The cross-roads merchant slammed his door and locked it. Oxen, catching the alarm, bellowed in the fields.

Starbuck went out into the road to meet the men. "Say," he said, in answer to their shout, "if you air lookin' for a mad dog I kin let you have one cheap. He's round thar."

The dog was dragged away and the community returned to the allegiance which it owed to quietude and laziness; the shiftless lout loitered along the road, and the old woman, on the gray mare, followed by the fuzzy mule colt, carried down to the "commercial emporium," "a settin' o' goose aigs" to be swopped for a handful of coffee and a lump of brown sugar. [103]

"Ma'm," said Starbuck to Mrs. Mayfield, as he went back into the house, "you see that we don't live so fur outen the world atter all. Of co'se thar air places that have got mo' l'arnin' than we have, but we kin skeer up a mad dog an' git rid o' him as quick as the best of 'em. An' I reckon by this time you find that our affairs ain't so uneventful as you put it. Young feller," he went on, speaking to Tom, "I like the way you acted under fire. Thar was a time when I believed that a feller with store clothes on was easy skeered, and I laughed when I seed 'em j'inin' the army—'lowed they would w'ar out in a day or two; but they outmarched us fellers that follered the plow an' when the time come they tuck their red medicine an' never whimpered. Ricolleck one little chap that didn't look like he was strong enough to pull up a handful o' white clover—snatched up a flag, butted his way to the front and put his colors on the breastworks o' the inimy." [104]

"I thank you," Tom replied. "But you don't seem to be astonished that the preacher wasn't scared."

"Who, Jim? Oh, no. Jim's a Starbuck."

"Don't make me out any worse than I naturally am, Uncle Jasper," said Jim, smiling in that mild consciousness of humor sometimes necessary and always appropriate to the pulpit.

Mrs. Mayfield smiled upon him, and bade him come with her to the place where the short shade of noon-time was napping on the hill-top. He clutched his hat and followed her and old Jasper snorted. "Follers her like a pet lamb," said the old man to his wife when Tom and Lou also had strolled off. "I mean Jim do. But to tell you the truth she'll never marry him; don't know that he wants her, you understand, but if he do he's in a bad fix. She's good and as putty as a red-bird, but I don't reckon that she'd like to be the wife of a mountain preacher. And come to think about it, I don't see why a woman would want to be the wife of any preacher—much. Not that the preacher wouldn't be good to her, but because she'd be a settin' herse'f up as a mark fur all the other women in the neighborhood. Ef a preacher's wife laugh they say she ain't a takin' no intrust in church work, an' ef she is sorrowful they say it's all put on." [105]

"Jasper, you don't know what you're a talkin' about, but you air puffedekly nat'ral as long as you're a sayin' suthin' ag'in women. You don't understand 'em at all."

"And ef I did I'd be smarter than old Solomon. He had fo' or five hundred of 'em about him and he didn't understand even the most foolish one of 'em. How air you goin' to understand a critter that don't understand herse'f? But I tell you this here Miz Mayfield is smart—talks like a new book that's got picturs in it."

"Oh! Then I reckon I can't talk at all."

"Have you hearn anybody hint that you can't talk? Did you ever notice that when a man begins to talk about a woman, makes no diffunce who, his wife puts it up that he's a talkin' about her? Did you?"

"No, nor you nuther. Gracious above!—book with picturs in it! But if Jim wants to marry her, why don't he say so? What do he want allus to be a steppin' round her skirts like a frost-bit chicken?" [106]

"Wall, he ain't had time to ax her yit. It took the gospel mo' than a thousand years to reach America, an' we oughtn't to expect preachers to be in a rush."

She scowled at him and he went away, laughing, and she stood in the door, shading her eyes with her hand, watching Tom and Lou as slowly they walked down the road. Over to the right, in the dazzle of the sun, Jim and Mrs. Mayfield were climbing a hill; and reaching the top, she sat down on a rock and bade him sit near her, but he shook his head and said that he preferred to stand where he was, and then, realizing that his remark was abrupt, sat down by her and was silent. At her feet the violets were blooming. There came a breeze, and the blossom of a poplar sapling brushed her face and shed its perfume in her hair.

"In the city all is struggle and plot," she said, and musing for a time in silence, she continued: "But here all seems to be innocence and beauty." [107]

"Not all innocence, ma'm," the preacher replied. "The poisonous insect sometimes lives where the air is sweet. There is no land that is not in need of the doctrine of gentleness. To the lovely

eye almost all things may look lovely—"

"Thank you," she broke in.

"Oh, not at all," he replied, unable to remember his ease of a moment ago. "The fact is I don't believe we are goin' to have any rain for some time yet. Needin' it a little, now, too."

"You were talking in a different strain just now and I interrupted you. I am sorry. Let me lead you back."

"I don't hardly know where I was, ma'm. The fact is, I'm always about half lost when I'm with you."

"Mr. Reverend, don't embarrass me."

"Embarrass you? Ma'm, I haven't had a fight in a good while, but if a feller was to come along and embarrass you, why he'd soon have reason to think that scarlet fever had broke out in the neighborhood."

"Now, please don't talk that way. Let us get back to where we were. You were saying that all lands were in need of the doctrine of gentleness. I suppose it is true, but this land needs only the doctrine while there are others that are in need of the lash—I might say, the sword. I am not as high in the social world as you may suppose, but what I know of society leads me to believe that we polish a barbarism and call it a brilliant grace. Politeness is charming to look at and to hear, but it is the art of telling and acting a lie. Among these hills we hear a laugh and we know that some one is amused. In society we see a smile and we feel that some one is a hypocrite."

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"I hope it ain't that bad, ma'm."

"But it is that bad."

"When Uncle Jasper asked you if yo' husband was dead, you said worse than that—divorced. Was he very mean to you, ma'am?"

"He was a brute, Mr. Reverend."

"Did anybody knock him down for you?"

"Oh, no."

"Is he livin'?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

[109]

"Do you want him knocked down?"

"Why, Mr. Reverend! Just now you were talking of the doctrine of gentleness, and now you speak of knocking some one down. How can you be so changeable."

"I'm not changeable, ma'm. The doctrine of gentleness don't apply to a snake, and if that man didn't treat you right he is a snake. And I'm a preacher; I go out among them that needs prayer and I pray; in the night when it seems that everybody else in the world is asleep, I have gone out and knelt down in the dirt and prayed that the pain and the bitterness might be taken from the troubled hearts of my neighbors. I've gone to see many a young feller and begged him to give up fightin'—I've done all that, but if you was to tell me where I could find that man—man that was a brute to you, I'd hunt him and with my fist I would mash the teeth out of his mouth. Where does he live?"

"We must not think of him, Mr. Reverend. And besides, when I speak of him, how do you know that I tell the truth?"

[110]

"Ma'm, if a man should inspire you with a lie, it would be proof enough that he is a brute."

She clapped her hands and laughed. "Oh, Troubadour, recite your soul to me!"

"What did you say, ma'm?"

"Oh, nothing." She pointed and Jim saw Tom and Lou enter the vine-hung gulch leading to the place where corn had been ground at night.

[111]

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPIRIT THAT PLAYED WITH HER.

"This looks like the scenery in a theatre," said Tom, as slowly they walked up the gulch. She asked him what he meant and he explained as best he could the nature of a play-house, where to sweet music and amid flowers the hero told the heroine that he would die for her. She replied that it must be pretty, but that a book which she had read told her that it was wrong to go to such a place. In this book there was a girl, and one night she went with a young man to a theatre and when she came back her mother was dead. Tom suggested that possibly the old lady might have

died anyway, but Lou shook her wavy hair till all sorts of witcheries fell out of it.

"No, she died because the girl went, and I have thought I'd be afraid to go as long as my mother was alive."

He helped her across the rivulet, though it was not more than a foot wide at this place, and a little further on, helped her across again when there was no necessity for it. "It didn't seem to have any influence on the old man, did it?" he remarked. [112]

"The girl goin' to the theatre? Oh, no; it takes more than that to kill a man. Cousin Jim says when he went down to Memphis while the yeller fever was there, he saw the theatre house. He went inside, and the seats were red and soft—softer than the seats in a church, but there wasn't anybody there for all the people that went there were dead with the fever. But I have often wondered if there was so much music and so many flowers how it could be so bad. They say that the angels have harps and that in heaven there is music, but I haven't heard that there is any music at the other place. Oh, did you see that bird almost light on me?"

"Thought you were a flower," Tom replied, helping her across the rivulet again.

"Oh, it didn't. What makes you wanter talk that way for? Look, here is where I used to make my play-house, and here are pieces of the broken dishes yet, and that broken bottle was my bureau. Wait a minute and let me think. There was a little boy played with me and his name was Bud—not a sure enough little boy, but one that I pretended like; and I could hear him talk and he'd say the prettiest things. He lived up there under that big rock and would always come when I called him, but one time a woman come along and she heard me talkin' to him and she couldn't see him with her sort of eyes; and she went down to the house and told mother that I must be crazy, and after this Bud wouldn't come when I called him. That was a long time ago—a year and a half befo' year befo' last. We will go on now." [113]

When they came to the log hut, Tom cried out: "Oh, here is another play-house. Is it yours?"

"No, this is where they grind corn."

He looked in at the low door and marveled at the strangeness of the place, and after a long silence she asked him what he was thinking about and he replied:

"About that little boy. He must have been happy."

"Yes, till that hateful woman came along and killed him. Wasn't she mean? I wonder if hundreds of spirits haven't been killed that way. How beautiful everything is sometimes when we shut our eyes. It is then that we see spirits, but I was sick once and the spirits all got to be old and wrinkled and they'd come up and grin at me; and after that for a long time I was afraid to see things with my eyes shut. Isn't it nice to be as brave as you are?" [114]

He looked at her and his eyes were aglow with softened fire, and his hand was near her own, resting on the log door-way, but he was not brave now for he trembled and when he spoke his voice wavered. "Don't mock me by calling me brave. There never was a bigger coward."

"Why, you are trembling now. Is it because I told you of the spirits? But you ain't a coward. My father says you are brave and he knows, for you wan't afraid of that mad dog, and there's nothin' as bad as that. Oh, down yonder where the branch is bigger there is a water fall; and after a rain it roars and I used to go there with little Bud and we called it a scolding giant. Shall we go down there?"

"Yes, but you mustn't—mustn't think of that boy Bud so much."

"Oh, he was only a spirit." [115]

"Yes, but so is everything that is anything. Take the spirit away and we'd all be cattle. And I know exactly what species of cattle I'd be—I'd be a calf—just a red calf with horns about an inch long, and in nosing around I'd get a basket on my head, be frightened and make myself ridiculous. I never knew it before, but I know now that I'd be a calf."

"Oh, no you wouldn't, no such of a thing. What makes you talk about yourself that way? Come on, now."

Over a bluff of rock fifty feet high the rivulet poured and in the spray they saw a rainbow. Down below where they stood ferns were rank and the rocks were soft with moss. Here they sat and chatted of nothing but themselves, he discovering faults in himself and she denying them, calling him prettily to task for his slander, and thrilled him from one indecision to another. The sun, emblazoning for a moment a distant mountain top, purpled the lower world and then all was in shade. For a long time they had been silent and when she spoke he started out of his reverie and rubbed his eyes as if he had been asleep; but he had not, for as a spirit, a little boy Bud, he had played with her in the gulch, coming out from beneath the rock when she called him. [116]

"Let us go back to the house," she said. "They will wonder what has become of us."

Jim and Mrs. Mayfield were coming down the hill. The preacher, too, had for the most part been silent, though not in reverie, but in a constant struggle. Once he said to her: "Ma'm, I can't get it out of my head that you are makin' fun of me."

"I make fun of you, Mr. Reverend? I admit that in the past my heart was gayer than wise, but

there never was a time when I could have made fun of you."

Slowly they walked down the hill and he pondered over what she had said, but a simple heart is often a suspicious heart; rustic faith is afraid of itself, and he did not believe her. He was not wise enough to see that in her eye he was a moral Hercules. He did not know that in his great strength, in his very awkwardness, there was a fascination for this woman who had drunk wine from a golden goblet and found it bitter. On every creed there are dark spots, and in his devotion to his calling he was afraid that she had come to him as a temptation, to lead him away from the work of saving souls. Sometimes he caught himself foolishly wishing that suddenly she might develop into a man, the evil one himself, that he might defy him; and then the softness of her words would bring shame upon him and he would mutter imprecations against himself.

[117]

"The sun is no longer shining upon it, but in my mind that hill-top will always glow," she said when they had reached the road. "It must ever remain a gold-tipped promontory of the past."

"Ma'm, I don't know what you mean."

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CHAPTER IX.

AT DRY FORK.

The next day was Sunday, and immediately after breakfast Jasper announced that he was going "to haul a passel of them" over to church, the place of worship and of gossip being about five miles distant. And when everything was made ready, Mrs. Mayfield was delighted to find upon going out to the gate that they were to be drawn by two enormous oxen. But Margaret objected. "Thar air two hosses out yander at the stable, and it is jest one of Jasper's pranks to take these steers," she said. "And I jest know he's a doin' it to humiliate me." The old man, pretending to fix the yoke, ducked his head to hide his grinning countenance. "Hosses out thar, but here we go like niggers to a camp-meetin'," she went on. "I'm not goin'."

"Oh, do go, Mrs. Starbuck," Mrs. Mayfield pleaded.

"No, I won't go a step. I won't be shamed in this way."

[119]

"Sorry, Margaret," said Jasper. "I 'lowed you'd enjoy yo'se'f, still if you don't want to go thar's no way of compellin' you. Wall, climb up, everybody."

Mrs. Mayfield and Lou were helped into the wagon, Jasper climbed up and had begun to swing his long lash when Margaret cried out: "You haven't fixed any place for me."

"For you?" Jasper replied. "Didn't know you was a goin'."

"Oh, you think you kin make me stay at home all day by myse'f, do you? All the time studyin' how you kin go away an' leave me. Well, I'll show you wuther I'm goin' or not."

The old man laughed. "Oh, pleased to have you come along, as the hawk said to the chicken." She climbed up and sat down beside him and he dodged as if she had struck at him. "Now stop yo' foolishness an' drive on, Jasper. An' I'll jest bet anythin' that these steers run right off'n the bluff inter the creek. I jest know it."

"Oh, not with a preacher an' all these good-lookin' women," replied Jasper. "Whoa hawr, come here, Buck. Come here, Bright."

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The old wagon creaked, groaned, shuddered and away they went down the hill. Lou and Mrs. Mayfield "bursting into song," Jim and Tom laughing. The dawn had been red and the early morning was still pink, with here and there a mist-veil floating up from the creek. In the air were sudden joys, the indescribable and indefinable glees of a lightsome day, the very childhood of time; and back to the north the migratory bird was singing his way, mimicked and laughed at by the native mocking songster, jongleur of the feathered world. In all this blythe land it did not seem that there was an ache or a pain, of the body or of the heart; the light, the air, the music, all combined to form a wordless sermon on the mount.

"Mr. Reverend, you are silent again," said Mrs. Mayfield, and the preacher replied: "I didn't know that, ma'm. I thought I was singing."

"I'm not singin'," Margaret spoke up, grasping Jasper's arm. "I haven't been so jolted since the mules ran away with me."

"Margaret," said Jasper, "you'd be jolted in the garden of Eden. Jolted out, I gad," he roared.

"I wouldn't, no sich of a thing, an' you know it. Lou, air you shore you put everything in the basket."

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"Yes'm."

"The pickels, and the chickens? I jest know you forgot the coffee, as if I could go all day without it. I never seed the like. Folks air gittin' mo' an' mo' keerless every day. Of co'se you could put in the pickels—had to do that to leave the coffee out. Now what prompted you to do

that?"

"Do what, mother?"

"Why, leave that coffee out?"

"It's in the basket."

"Then why did you tell me you didn't fetch it? What do you want to torment a body fur? Now, Jasper, whut air you a settin' up here fur, a shakin' like a lump o' calf-foot jelly? You give me the fidgits."

"Wall, thar won't be nobody a laughin' now putty soon," said Jasper. "I kin see right now that these steers air goin' to run off inter the creek."

"They ain't a goin' to do no sich of a thing, an' you know it. Miz Mayfield, did you ever see sich carryin's-on?"

[122]

"I have never experienced a more delightful drive, Mrs. Starbuck. We read of the beautiful past, and it seems to me that to-day I have been permitted to live a hundred years ago. A hundred! Five hundred, and should not be surprised to see a troop of knights come galloping down the glen, with armor flashing and with poetic war-cries on their lips. Were you thinking of that, Mr. Reverend?"

"No, ma'm. I was thinking of the men, clothed in skins and with shepherd's crooks in their hands, carrying the gospel to the barbarians of old."

"And I was thinking," said Tom, "of old Daniel Boone, with his flint-lock rifle, going to Kentucky. And what were your thoughts, Miss Lou?"

"I wasn't thinkin'—I was just a livin', that's all. Sometimes what a blessin' it is jest to breathe. I reckon we are the happiest when we don't have to think, when we jest set still and let things drift along like the leaf that's a floatin' down the river."

"Very pretty, my dear," Mrs. Mayfield replied. "Thought is not happiness, though bliss may not lie wholly in ignorance. I should think that the happiness most nearly perfect is the half-unconscious rest of a thoughtful mind—the sound sleep of the strong."

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"That's all very well," said Old Jasper, waving his long lash over the steers. "But you can't gauge happiness, and half the time you can't tell what fetches it about. Some days you find yo'se'f miserable when thar ain't nuthin' happened, an' the next day, when still nuthin' has tuck place to change things, you find yo'se'f happy. If you kin do a little suthin' to help a po' body along—an' do it, mind you, without thinkin' that you air doin' it fur a purpose, then the chances air that you'll be happy all day. But ef you help a feller with the idee of it a makin' you happy, it won't, somehow. It's like the card player a givin' a man money becaze he thinks it will fetch him good luck. I ricolleck one time I seed a big feller a bullyin' a po' little devil, an' I told him to quit an' he wouldn't, an' I whaled him. Didn't think nuthin' about it till I got nearly home an' I foun' myse'f a whistlin' like a bird, an' all that day I was as happy as a lark."

"Of co'se, ef you had a fight," Margaret spoke up. "To you it was like eatin' a piece o' June apple pie. Ah, don't I ricolleck once when we went to a political speakin'? I reckon I do. A settin' thar jest as quiet as could be, a listin' to a man that was makin' the puttiest speech, a talkin' like a preacher, an' all at once you hopped up an' made at him an' I never seed such a fight—an' you come a walkin' back to me with yo' hands full of his hair. Laws a massy, don't I ricolleck it?"

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"Talkin' putty! W'y, Margaret, the feller was a tellin' of a lie. I didn't want to fight him an' break up the meetin', an' I was showin' that by settin' thar so quiet. But when he begun to lie, it was my duty to remind him of it."

"Wall," she replied, after a moment's silence, "if that preacher out thar at Dry Fork' to-day begins to say things that you think ain't true, jest set thar an' say nuthin', fur it ain't none o' yo' business."

"That's right, Margaret. I don't kere what a man says when he's a preachin', jest so he don't p'int at me. He kin say that Moses drunk up the Red Sea ef he wants to—but he mustn't p'int as if he could prove it by me."

"Oh, it would do you a world of good ef he did p'int at you. Nuthin' on the yeth would please you so much."

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Down into the lowlands lying along a blue river the wagon rolled. Here the vegetation was rank, and the tops of the hickory trees were dim in the dazzling blue above. Great birds with long legs stretched out far behind, flew past, ancient war-bolts they seemed; and a flying squirrel looped his flight from one tree to another. The tall rattle weed, in bloom, nodded a yellow salute as they passed.

"We are the guests of honor," said Mrs. Mayfield. "They have marshalled a gay army of soldiers to meet us."

"The roots of them weeds is pizen," Jasper spoke up, cutting off a yellow plume with his whip. "They look suthin' like the stalk of angelica an' sometimes they air dug up by mistake fur sich. See that squirrel. Look how he rattles up that hickory bark. Wall, down yan we turn to the right

an' go up a little rise, dip down ag'in, then go up an' keep on a goin' up fur about a mile an' thar's the church. Who preaches to-day, Margaret?"

"Brother Fetterson."

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"Ah, hah, good man; an' I want to say that he's got mighty fine jedgment when it comes to a hoss. He fust rid in here on a hoss that had about fo' j'int's to the squar foot. Some of our fellers told him he was so thin he oughtn't be rid in the day—ought to keep him fur the dark; called him a sort of night mare. But he tuck it good natured an' jest kep' on a chawin' o' his tobacker. Then atter a while he lows that mebbly some good brother mout like to swap with him, an' ever'body laughed fitten to kill. Then he said mebbly they mout like to swop saddles. Wall, they done that an' right thar was the rise of that preacher in the good opinion of this here community, fur it wan't long till he swopped off his hoss, a givin' the saddle to boot, an' he kept on a swoppin' till the fust thing we knowed he had the finest hoss in the whole neighborhood, an' the fust feller he swopped with was a walkin' an' a totin' his saddle. That's the sort of a preacher the folks likes to hear, fur they've got confidence in his jedgment."

The log meeting-house was on a hill in the midst of a walnut grove. Its roof was green with moss and its sides gray and yellow. Many a storm had swept over this old pile of wood. In it the ordinance of secession had been read. Knives flashed, pistols barked, and blood was poured out upon the floor. Old Oliver's horses ate their oats at the marble altar of an ancient cathedral; and within these log walls, and at this long slab, this mourners' bench, tear-stained by a generation long since in the grave, the horses of the guerrillas ate their corn. Descendants of the same men, carrying on what might have seemed a continuation of the same family quarrel, first one side and then another occupied Dry Fork as a fort; and when the rain was pouring as if to wash away the blood, Buell slept on a bench in this old house, and two days later Bragg's orders were issued from its pulpit.

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Numerous horses were tied about and the mule colt was blowing his treble horn. Maidens in their finery and young fellows rigged out from the pack of the nomadic Hebrew walked about, glancing shyly at one another. On the grass beneath the trees, lying, squatting, sitting, old men talked of early frosts and late snows, of strange and wonderful things that had happened away back in the days of misty tradition; one man's father had seen a ghost, and another man's grandfather, while leading to the altar a beautiful girl, was suddenly horrified to see her turn into a hideous witch. When Jasper's "haul" had got out of the wagon, and while the women were shaking out their skirts, Laz Spencer came along in jacket and shrunken trousers.

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"Laz," said Jasper, "you ought to sue that peddler. Yo' britches hain't shrunken the same. One leg's shorter than tuther."

"So I hearn," Laz replied, looking first at one leg and then at the other. "But britches ain't whut's a troublin' me at the present writin'. Miss lady's duds is whut's a ailin' of me. Mag Bailey 'lowed she'd meet me over here, but she didn't come. I'd ruther be deceived by ten men than one woman. You kin whup a man, but it won't do to whup a woman till you marry her, an' even then it's sorter dangersome."

"She's your fiance, I suppose," Tom remarked, winking at his aunt.

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"I don't know whut you mean, but she ain't my nuthin' it don't seem like."

"I mean you are engaged to her."

"Don't look much like it. Told her ef she'd meet me over here we mout be. Reckon her not comin' is a hint that she ain't agreeable to the p'int. How air you an' Lou a gittin' along?"

Margaret began to cough and Jasper ducked down behind the wagon. Lou blushed until her cheeks were as red as the ribbon on her hat. "I git along well with ever'body," she said.

"You embarrass us, Mr. Spencer," Tom spoke up, red as the breast of a robin.

"That so?" replied Laz. "Wall, Mister, ef you don't want to be jolted don't try to jolt me."

"I beg your pardon, sir, if—"

"Oh, no harm done, Mister. Wait a minit," he added, squatting and peering down the hill among the trees. "I'm a billy goat with only one ho'n ef yander don't come Mag with Sim Mason. Him an' her as sho's I'm a foot high. Say, Jasper, they calls the sakermint the blood o' the lamb, don't they? Wall, ef they want it to-day they kin have the blood of a calf."

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"Oh, Mr. Spencer," cried Mrs. Mayfield, going to him in alarm, "I do hope you'll have no trouble."

"Hope so, too, ma'm, but I ain't a signin' no notes of hand. Look, he's a hitchin' her hoss fur her an' you see ef he don't walk with her up to the church do'. An' ef he do, thar's—whut did I tell you?"

Sim walked to the church door with Mag, and then in observance of established customs, sauntered off, happening to stroll in the direction of Laz. Margaret appealed to Jasper. "Don't you let 'em have no trouble here. If you do, I won't let you have no peace fur a month."

"Don't expect to have none nohow," the old man drawled.

Sim came along and Laz stepped forth to meet him. The newcomer advanced, holding out his hand. "Laz," he said, "I'm glad to be of some service to you. Mag was a comin' to church an' as her sister couldn't come I rode along with her. Me an' her sister air goin' to be married befo' long."

Laz took hold of his hand. "Sim," he said, and his voice wavered and tears gathered in the sympathetic eyes of Mrs. Mayfield—"Sim, I done you wrong. I 'lowed you was a tryin' to cut me out an' I done you a injustice, an' ef thar's any sort of punishment you want to put on me, put it thar an' I'll take it an' won't say a word."

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"Laz, old hoss, I've already put the punishment on you—I've tuck her sister Ella, the flower an' the perfume of the family."

"They tell us," said Mrs. Mayfield, turning to her nephew, "that once the sun went down and never more arose to illumine a day of gallantry. They did not tell us the truth."

"No, auntie. These people are the unconscious survivors of the floral contest at the poetic court of love."

"Ah, and they have even touched you, wayward boy. But come, shall we not go into the house?"

"You folks go on an' I'll be there atter a while," replied Jasper. "Thar's a feller over yander that's got a bay nag I want an' I mout strike up a swop with him by the time the preacher gits to his second an'—der—rer."

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"You ain't goin' to do no sich of a thing," said Margaret. "I didn't come all the way over here to be humiliated. You'll go right in thar an' set down by me. Folks have said you don't love me an' I don't intend that you shall prove it to 'em."

Jasper grinned, took her arm, and led the way into the house. It was a long sermon, with many excursions, devious hog-paths running criss-cross through a wilderness. But it was ardent and hammering. Old Satan was defied, dared to come forth and show himself to this assembly, true soldiers of the cross. Children nodding and held upright by their mothers, hands hanging limp, looked like rag dolls; and many a strong man and devil-hating dame felt themselves slipping off into drowsiness. Jasper snored. Margaret pinched him, determinedly awake in order to inflict punishment; and when at last the welcome benediction fell upon nodding heads and weary shoulders, there was a scramble for the doors and a rush for the baskets. Jasper swore that he never was as hungry in all his life, and upon his arm Margaret put a restraining hand.

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"Now don't eat like you never got nothin' at home. Miz Mayfield, it's all put on with him."

A table cloth was spread on the ground and before the old man had tasted a morsel, he went about looking for someone, astray at the feast, who might not have brought a basket or received an invitation. He returned with Laz, Sim and Mag. The girl minced, nibbling at a chicken wing, and the boys pretended to be dainty, but when the girls were not looking, grabbed like a hired hand at a barbecue. After a time, when the sun had moved far around, Old Jasper wiped his knife on his trousers and remarked: "Wall, I don't know how the rest of you feel, but as for me I'm goin' off down thar summers in the holler an' take a nap."

Margaret protested, but a word from Mrs. Mayfield assured him that privilege, and he strode away, humming as he went. Laz and Mag "santered" off, Sim sprawled out to sleep, Tom and Lou bird-peeped at each other and Jim and Mrs. Mayfield sat on a log in a lace-work of sun and shade.

"This has been one of the happiest days of my life," she said. "I didn't know that there could be so much pleasure without incident. Ah, a quaint and plotless people, Mr. Reverend."

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"There may be more plot than you think, ma'm. These folks all have their troubles. And on the hill-side where you see the white flower, blood runs sometimes. Uncle Jasper and I are about the last of our race—last of the men folks. Most of us have been killed."

"I don't see how that could be, Mr. Reverend. Such gentleness—"

"Don't be fooled in us, ma'm. We ain't been always blameless. Through our house old Satan has walked, leaving his tracks."

"Satan tempted the Son of Man, Mr. Reverend."

"Yes, ma'm; but didn't walk through His house, leaving of his tracks."

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CHAPTER X.

TIED TO A TREE.

The sun was down and the stars were abroad and the young moon looked like a silver bear-claw in the sky when Jasper turned his steers homeward; and all the party broke out in song as down the hill they rattled. The shallows in the river sang too, and high in a tree, a bird too riotous to leave off with the coming of night, was carolling the tired end of his spree. Suddenly all singing stopped. There was a flutter in the bushes and birds flew away and a rabbit scampered

over a log. It was a loud cry of distress and all nature heeds the cry of pain. Laugh and the bird listens; shriek and it flies away.

"Whoa!" shouted Jasper. "What was that yell?"

"Someone in distress," Tom answered. "Seems to be over to the left."

They listened. The cry came again, and upon it was borne the words, distinct now in the stillness: "Fur de Lawd's sake doan kill me."

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"Come on!" Jasper shouted, as he leaped out of the wagon; and everyone followed him. "Hold on thar!" the old man cried. "Don't tetch him whoever you air. Do you hear me? It's Jasper Starbuck that's a talkin' to you."

Down a slant and in an open space there was a fire of twigs, and in its light were four men, one a negro bound hand and foot, the others an oldish man and evidently his two sons.

"What's the matter here?" Jasper demanded.

"Wall," replied the oldish man, "whatever it is, it ain't no affair of yourn. Tie him across the log, boys."

The negro implored mercy. "Marster, ez de Lawd is my jedge, I ain't guilty. I ain't been er good man—I 'knowledges dat, but dis time I ain't guilty."

"Hold on," Jasper demanded, and the women, standing behind him, murmured commendation of his course. Tom and Jim stood apart, in positions of advantage in the event that there should be a fight. "Hold on," Starbuck repeated, speaking to the father of the two young men. "You must be a newcomer in these here parts, or you would have held on at the first command. Don't reckon you know me."

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"I don't know you, but I know my own business. My name is Sanderson, and I am from North Caroliny, and we air goin' to whup this nigger within a inch of his life or know the reason why."

"All right," said Jasper, taking off his hat and scratching his head. "That is, if I don't give you the reason why. Thar happens to be a reason. But befo' I git down to it, let me ask what this po' devil's done."

The negro broke out with fresh imploration. "Ole marster, save me. I ain't nuthin' on dis big yearth—dar ain't no way fur me ter be no count. De Lawd ain't gib me whut he has you folks. He has put me yeah ter run like er rabbit whenever I sees er white man er comin', an' I do hopes you take my part. I'll tell you whut he 'cuze me erbout. I wuz er comin' laung de road, an' I yeard a dog yelp, an' I come ter de dog er minit later an' he lay dar in de road wid his head mashed. I wuz er lookin' at de po' thing when up come deze men an' 'cuzed me er killin' him; but old marster, let me tell you suthin': dar's mighty few niggers dat eber kills er dog, caze de dog an' de nigger so close ter de yearth da's friends. I didn't kill de dog."

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"Mister," said Sanderson, "I mout come yo' way a thousand times and I never would interfere with you, and my advice to you now is, don't interfere with me. You spoke of me not knowin' you. Wall, you don't know me, nuther."

"Jasper," Margaret exclaimed, "that's a threat, an' don't you let the fack that us women folks air here stand in yo' way."

"No," cried Mrs. Mayfield, "we will all fight to protect this poor creature."

Something gleamed in Lou's hand. It was a penknife. She said nothing, but she stepped forward, the spirit of vengeance come out of the night; but the old man touched her on the arm and said: "Little sweetheart, you can't find no wild vines to dig up here with yo' knife."

"No," said Tom, "let me take it," and whispering, he added, "One word from you and I will cut his throat. But you must be still."

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She smiled at him and replied: "I will, because you say so," and again the shy girl, trembling in the presence of one who loved her, she shrank back and was a graceful shadow in the dusk.

"Mr. Stranger," said Jasper, "I am waitin' fur you ter untie that po' old nigger."

"Thank you, Mr. Stranger," said the North Carolina man, "and I will when we git through with him. He wanted to kill my dog so as he could steal suthin', and a thief ought to be punished. That's a law I take with me wherever I go."

"Good law," Jasper replied. "And thar's a law that's allus in force whar I live and it's this here: when a thief is accused there must be some proof befo' he is punished."

Jim spoke for the first time. He had stood with folded arms, and sometimes his lips moved as if he were muttering a prayer. And now his voice was as solemn as a benediction: "The poor Ethiopian was lead down into the waters of forgiveness and baptized. In the sight of the Savior the color of his skin had not made him a sinner. About the weak and the wretched the gospel threw its protecting arm, and to-night it is here to do the same. I represent the gospel, and as the gospel, I ask you to liberate that man."

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"Hah, preacher," replied Sanderson. "And what if I don't pay no attention to the gospel?"

And Jim's voice was deep and solemn when he answered: "Then Jim Starbuck, the man, will mash your head and throw you out into the road where your dog is lying."

Old Jasper slapped himself and laughed, but there were tears in his eyes. "Thar won't be no necessity for that, Jim. You know my appetite ain't been right good lately—I've needed exercise, and the sort of exercise I need, this here man is goin' to help me to take. Mister, once mo' I ask you to untie that po' nigger, and then we will git at the evidence. You hearn what the preacher said, and—"

Through the bushes a man came stalking. He was rugged and brusque, but he bowed to the women and offered to shake hands with the men; but Jasper inquired as to his business upon the scene, and put him back upon formality until this point should be settled. [141]

"Why, it's jest this," said he, looking round at the negro. "I was a drivin' down the hill jest now, and a drivin' peart, when out run a dog and bit at my hosses' feet. One of the hosses knocked him down and befo' he could git up the wheel run over him. It made me mad, come a bitin' at my hosses, an' I driv on, but I got to thinkin' that somebody mout be accused of killin' him, so I come back, an' shore enough here you'd got a nigger tied up. The killin' was a accident."

"All right, gentlemen," said Sanderson. "I'll turn him loose, and it will be a good lesson fur him—it will l'arn him not to kill no dog of mine. Cut the rope, Bob," he added, speaking to one of the boys.

The negro dropped down upon his knees to thank Jasper, but the old man bade him arise and go about his business. "I would have done the same for a dog," said he. "Wait a minit. You don't look like you've had anythin' to eat lately. Here, boys, let's give him a few dimes."

Contributions were quicker and more spontaneous than the pennies that fall in the twilight upon the outstretched banner of the Salvation armyist; the newcomer took a piece of smooth silver out of a yarn sack and handed it over, following the pace which Jasper had set. Tom gave a dollar and Jim contributed enough to buy a hymn-book. [142]

"Gentlemen," said Sanderson, "when I think a man's done wrong I want blood, and sometimes I reckon I'm a little hot-headed about it—my jestic is sorter blind—but when I find he hain't done wrong, w'y I don't love money. Here, nigger, here's fifty cents, and I want you to understand you mustn't kill a dog of mine."

With a broad grin, catching the reflection of the silver in his hand, the negro bowed low. "No, sah, I ain't gwine kill no dog o' yo'n. Ef I wuz ter meet yo' dog, I'd say, 'come yeah,' an' I'd hug him right dar. Huh, I neber seed sich putty women folks in my life, an' I knows da's de cause o' deze white folks gibbin' me all dis money. Huh, I wouldn't mine bein' tied up dar ag'in. Mr. Sanderson, I blebe dat yo' name, I'll go an' bury yo' dog fur you. Ladies an' gennermen, under de moon an' yeah 'neath de trees, I wish you good-night." [143]

"Poetic duck," said Tom, as the darkey turned away.

"Charming in his pleading and in his gallantry," his aunt replied.

"Must have been brought up in the white folks' house," Sanderson remarked, and then, bowing to the company, marshalled his boys and marched off.

"Margaret," said Jasper, when again they were seated in the wagon, "I am proud of you."

"No, you ain't, no sich of a thing, an' you only want a chance to tell me so." He had slipped one arm about her and her head was on his shoulder.

"Beautiful," Mrs. Mayfield whispered to Jim. "Ah, what a day this has been to me. And, Mr. Reverend, I have begun to think that there is something good about nearly every one. Even that man whom we thought was such a brute became gentle."

"That's true, ma'm, but I think that there's one man that is absolutely depraved. Not the murderer, for he might feed the hungry. Not the wife-beater, for afterward he might beg her forgiveness and kiss her. Not the man that would rob the dead, for he might give a penny to a little child. But the man whose soul is in love with money. I don't mean his soul, for he has none, but the man whose every thought is money, money. He is a murderer, a wife-beater, a robber of the dead. He can sleep at night when he knows that by his shrewdness, which has won him friends among the rich, he has stretched out upon the bare floor a starving child. Christ did not die for that man." [144]

"No, Mr. Reverend," she replied, her head hung low; and something dropped upon his hand—a tear.

Like two birds Lou and Tom were twittering. He asked her if she had been happy that day because she did not think, and she answered that she had been happy because she had thought.

Suddenly someone ran out of the woods in front of the steers. The wagon stopped and Jasper shouted: "Whut's the matter here?"

A voice replied: "Wy, sah, atter buryin' de dog I tuck a sho't cut ter head you off. I's de nigger, an' my heart wuz heavy, an' I had ter come an' tell you suthin'. You'se Mr. Starbuck, ain't you?"

"Yes, but what about it?"

"Wall, sah, atter I tell you, w'y you kin tie me ter er tree an' whup me ef you wants ter, but I got ter tell you. Not laung ergo, I stole er chicken from yo' roost. An' now you may punish me."

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"Hah? What sort of a chicken?"

"Er rooster, sah."

"What, that old dominecker?"

"Yas, sah, de dominecker."

"Did yon eat him?"

"Yas, sah, I eat him."

"Wall, that was punishment enough. Git up here, boys."

It was the first time that Mrs. Mayfield had ever heard Jim laugh. He roared and he whooped as the wagon rattled along, and she was afraid that he was going to fall off. She asked him a question and he answered with a snort.

When they reached home a man was standing at the gate. Jasper inquired who it was, for in the dark he could not distinguish his visitor, and a voice replied:

"It's me, Gabe Wells—hollered helloa, and you wanted me to fetch you a newspaper an' a can of cove oysters an' about a straw hat full of crackers."

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"Why, yes, Gabe, come in. Wondered why you hadn't fotch them oysters over. Next to chitterlin's I reckon they air the best things in the world."

When they were at supper, with Gabe eating as if he had not eaten at home, Jasper related their adventure in the woods, and Gabe declared that he would like to take a hand in such an affair. He swore roundly that Sanderson was a brute, but when he heard that with the rest he had contributed money, he wiped his mouth and said: "You can't allus tell. That feller's a gentleman, an' some time a passel of us must hitch up an' drive over to see him. We can't afford to neglect such neighbors as him."

"What sort of a newspaper did you fetch, Gabe?" Margaret inquired, and he handed her "The Fire-Side Companion."

"Full of news from beginnin' to end," he said. "None of yo' tame stuff about Uncle Billy a comin' to town with a load of wood or Aunt Sally a renewin' of her per-scription."

"Any discussion a goin' on down at town?" Jasper asked, and Gabe began to rack his memory.

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"Wall, no, I b'lieve not. Hearn one feller call one man a liar."

"Whut come of it?"

"Oh, nuthin' much. Hauled him home in a wagin. Say, it was the puttiest wagin I ever seen—yaller stripes on the wheels, an' it clucked like a hen with her fust drove of chickens. But I tell you I come mighty nigh a gittin' some money down thar. A feller had three shells an' bet me I couldn't guess which one of 'em he put a pea under. I seed him put it under one—seed him jest as cl'ar as I see you, an' I would have bet him five dollars, but—"

"But what?"

"Didn't have the money. Allus my luck. Ever' time I've come across a chance fur a good speckerlation I ain't got no money. But I must be goin'—I don't know, howsomedever, fur wife must have fed the stock by this time. Lemme see. I reckon I better go."

That night when the romantic woman from the city was asleep, she did not dream that the preacher was on his knees, with clasped hands, gazing up at her window.

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CHAPTER XI.

READING THE NEWS.

The next morning Old Jasper took up the story-paper and for a long time sat at the table, bending over it, reading laboriously. Not far away his wife sat, knitting and slowly rocking. Sometimes the old man's face would light up and then it would darken.

"Shot fo' an' stobbed three," he read. "Hold on, he's about to git another one. Got him! Oh, you bet he's got him foul. Wait a minit." Then, gripping the table with one hand and with the other one grasping the paper, he continued to read: "'Then the Captain findin' himself again surrounded by the'"—he halted and began to spell out the word—"by the—b-a-n-d-i-t-s—threw down his empty pistol, drew his dirk and—' Who tore this off?" he got up excitedly and demanded. "Here, fetch me what the Captain done. Never in all my life was I left in sich a lurch. Why, thar's no tellin' how many mo' he killed. Didn't think that feller Gabe was sich a good judge

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of a paper, but blamed if he didn't fetch me one with news a oozin' out at every pore. And now somebody has come along an' grabbed the works outen it. Margaret, don't you see whut a fix I'm in? Can't you help me?"

Without looking up from her knitting, she replied: "Why, Jasper, that ain't news. It's only a story-paper."

He staggered back as if she had thrown over him a pail of cold water. His hair looked limp, and dew-beads of emotion stood out upon his brow. He took a step forward and limped as if he had lost a part of his strength.

"What, Margaret, ain't news when a man shoots fo' an' stobs three? Now you air a woman of fine sense. I've allus said that, and for mercy sake don't come a tellin' me that you don't know what news is. Scold me whenever you feel like it, but don't come a tellin' me that."

She didn't look up. "But Jasper, it ain't true."

"Ain't true? Here it is, right here. Look." He shuffled over to her and spreading out the paper put his finger at the place whence the vital spark had fled. "Look, spelled out jest like in a almanic. See fur yo'se'f."

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Then came her voice, cold and cutting to his hopes: "Oh, I know it's thar well enough. What I mean is it's all made up—it's a tale."

"A tale? What's that? What do you mean by a tale? Do you mean that it didn't happen?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean. Of course it didn't happen."

He gazed at her, wondering whether or not to accept her wisdom. Then upon the floor he flung the paper and trampled upon it. "If that's the case, I don't want nuthin' mo' to do with it. Come a foolin' with a man's affections thatter way. Ought to have been out yander at work half a hour ago. Been a settin' here a thinkin' I was a gittin' facts. Man ought to be whapped fur printin' a lie jest like fur tellin' one."

Margaret showed signs of sympathy. "Jasper, I wouldn't let it bother me so."

He started. "Wouldn't let it bother you when you been a stuffin' yo'se'f with a lie? Wouldn't let it bother you when a man gains yo' confidence an' then deceives you?"

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"Oh," she said, rocking herself and plying her needles, "it don't amount to nuthin'. I wouldn't pay no attention to it."

"Look here, Margaret. Now—now, don't make light of my trouble."

Into her lap she let her knitting fall and earnestly she looked at him. "I never make light of a real trouble, Jasper, but it seems that you do. A real trouble is a comin' down the road, but you don't appear to mind it. Have you seed Lije Peters sense he was here the other day?"

"No, I ain't been lookin' fur him."

"But he mout look for you."

"He won't have to look under the bed," the old man replied, slowly walking up and down the room.

"Jasper, do you think he'll git that app'intment as deputy marshal?"

He halted and stood with his hands behind him. "I don't know, but if he do, it means shore enough trouble." He took his hands from behind him and looked at them. "Red on yo' hands don't make a good glove. The mo' I talk to Jim, the preacher, the wus I hate red. Blood may be thicker than water all right enough, but it ain't as smilin' when the sun hits it. I don't want to fight, but—"

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"Oh, yes you do," she broke in. "You'd ruther fight than eat."

A smile illumined his bronze countenance. "Wall, I ain't always hungry." The smile passed and with countenance grave and with voice deep he said: "Every whar you see a home, you may know that somebody has fit fur it. Every privilege in this here life has cost blood. If a man wants to be treated as a lamb, he must prove himself a tiger. He must conquer befo' he's allowed to set down an' love. I don't want to kill that feller, but—"

Laz Spencer appeared at the door. "Come in, Laz."

He came in and took off his slouch hat, standing there as if he had something on his mind. Suddenly he exclaimed as if discharging a great diplomatic mission: "Mornin', mornin'."

Margaret bade him good morning, and then asked concerning the health of the "folks."

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He sat down and twisted his hat round and round. "The folks air jest tolerable, ma'm. How's all with you?"

"Tolerable," Margaret answered.

"Yo' brother Bill a gittin' better?" Jasper inquired.

Round and round Laz twisted his hat. "Pearter than he war yistidy, but not as peart as he war

the day befo'."

"Yo' mother still a eatin' of spoon vidults, Laz?"

"No, doc' he 'lows she kin eat knife an' fork stuff now."

"Any news over yo' way?"

"Nuthin' wuth dividin'. Doc' he sewed Patterson up an' 'lows he may git well."

"Why, what's the matter with Patterson?"

"Sam Perdue cut him with a knife."

"Fur pity's sake," Margaret exclaimed.

"I ain't hearn about it," said Jasper.

"Yes, they had a right sharp time," Laz drawled. "Andy, he died."

"What Andy?"

"Andy Horn."

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"Did you ever?" Margaret declared.

"What ailed him?" Jasper asked, showing increased interest.

"Got cotched in a saw mill. Ma'm," he added, looking at Margaret without turning his head, "I reckon you hearn about old Aunt Sis Garrett?"

"Not a word."

"Fell down day befo' yistidy an' broke her hip."

"Why," said Margaret, "you didn't tell us yistidy at meetin'."

"Wall, I had suthin' else on my mind at the time. When things git to pushin' around in my mind, I jest let one thing crowd out another."

"Fell down and broke her hip," Margaret mused aloud.

"Yes'm. Runnin' fitten to kill herse'f at the time. Can't run so mighty brisk, you know, bein' old an' sorter rheumatic, but she done the best she could. I seed a old feller a runnin' once, an' I says _"

"But here," Jasper broke in, "ain't she old enough to know better'n to run fitten to kill herse'f?"

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"Yes, suh, but she had to run on this here occasion. She was a gittin' outen the way."

"Outen the way of what?"

"The crazy man that was atter her with a knife. Reckon you ricolleck Bud Thomas," he went on without a change of countenance. "He made a fiddle outen a gourd an' could play on it a right sharp. Went along by the sto' one day an' he war a settin' on a box with this here gourd riddle, an _"

"Well, but what about him?" Jasper broke in.

"He war the crazy man. Reckon you ricollect that black ash tree down by the creek at Baker's ford. Come along thar one time when the white suckers war a runnin' an' I had a pair of grab hooks, an'—"

"Well, what about Baker's ford?" Jasper asked, coming closer to him, and Margaret leaned forward expectantly.

"That's whar he hung hisse'f."

"What are we all a comin' to?" Margaret sighed, sitting back in her chair.

Laz continued: "Didn't have no rope, so he hung hisse'f with a grape vine."

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Starbuck shook his head. "Oh, you kin put a grape vine to mo' uses than one."

Margaret turned upon him. "Jasper, I wouldn't make light of it."

"I ain't a makin' light of it—can't make nuthin' of it. Laz, kin you think of any other little thing that's happened to fret yo' neighborhood?"

"Believe not, nothin' wuth dividin'. Did hear that Tobe Walsh war kicked to death by a mule. Didn't put much faith in it, though."

"But was it true?"

"Yes. The mule got him. Buried ter-day."

"Oh, isn't that sad," Margaret wailed. "And he leaves a young wife, too."

"Better than to leave an old one," said Jasper. "The young widder, you know, kin smile through

her grief."

"Had to tote her from the grave," Laz went on. "But she picked up a right smart chance when Steve Moore came along. Had her bonnet set fur him befo' she married Tobe, but he broke the strings an' got away."

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"Don't want to borry nothin', do you, Laz?" Jasper inquired.

"Wall, yes," he answered, his countenance for the first time showing signs of animation. "I come over to borry a hoss fur a week or two. Our old nag fell offen the bluff an' killed hisse'f."

"That was ruther accommodatin', Laz. You would a been compelled to haul him away in a day or two longer. But you want to borry a hoss for a week or two? Don't you think you mout keep him a leetle longer?"

"Yes, mout on a pinch."

"Got any corn to feed him on?"

Laz began to scratch his head. "Wall, that is whut I was a goin' to talk to you about. Our co'n crib war down on the branch. Branch riz an' washed all the co'n away, an' I'd like fur you to let me have enough to feed on fur a month or so."

Jasper was standing near Margaret. She reached over and plucked his sleeve. "You can't do it, you jest can't. It would be a robbin' of yo'se'f."

"Wall," drawled the old man, with a countryman's philosophical resignation in the face of a difficulty that cannot be avoided, "when a man robs hisse'f he generally knows about how fur the work has gone on. I've been a lettin' putty nigh every man have what he wants an' it's most too late to stop now. Laz, tell Kintchin to haul you over a load of co'n an' you kin ride Old Roan home."

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The borrower nodded his head, arose and started toward the door, but halted and turned back. Starbuck inquired if there were anything else on his mind. He scratched his head as if he would harrow up his sleeping faculties and managed to say that he believed not.

"Laz, wush you'd try to keep my hoss away from that bluff."

"Oh, I'll take as good kere of him as if he belonged to me."

"What!—as if he belonged to you? Then I reckon I better not let you have him. You must do better than that, Laz. An' say, don't furgit to fetch him back."

"Oh, I never furgit nuthin'. Good-day."

Margaret hastened to the window and called after him: "Oh, Laz. We air goin' to kill a sheep to-morrer. Tell yo' mother we'll send her over a hindquarter."

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"Yes'm," he answered, without looking back, and slouched off down the road.

Up and down the room the old man walked, deep in thought. With his eyes half-closed, sometimes he looked like a lion dozing in the sun. They say that a game-cock is the bravest thing in the world. That is not true. Nothing can be gamer than a game man. He is willing to die for a principle. And never is he thrice armed unless his quarrel is just.

Laz came back to the window and spoke and the old man started and looked toward him. "Jasper, I have hearn that Lije Peters is about to be app'inted deputy marshal."

"Yes, Laz, that's the news a stirrin'."

Behind the lout's countenance a light was gradually turned up. "We all knows whut that means, Jasper, an' ef you need me, all you've got to do is to git out on the hill-top an' holler. Layin' in bed one night, an' I hearn a feller holler. I went to him. They had him tied across a log an' his shirt was off. I asked the cap'n of the gang whut it meant, an' he 'lowed that the feller had been in the habit o' whippin' his wife, an' then I 'lows, I does—'Old chap, I reckon you'll hatter swallow yo' salts. Good night.' An' I hearn him a swollerin' 'em. But if I hear you holler, Jasper, I'll—"

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"Don't talk about it, Laz."

"All right. Good-day."

When he was gone the old man resumed his walk, musing: "Don't want to see nuthin' red on the ground."

He took out his knife, put his foot on a chair, and began to cut his shoe-strings. As he was cutting the string from the other shoe his wife, peeping round at him, inquired:

"Whut you do that fur?"

"I don't want to die with them on if I kin help it." And shutting his knife with a snap he resumed his walk up and down the room. "And I am a fixin' 'em so I kin kick 'em off."

"For mercy sake, Jasper, don't talk thatter way."

His sense of humor came back to him. "Oh, I may not have to kick 'em off. It wouldn't surprise

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me if somebody else done the kickin'. But it's better to be prepared. The good Book says—"

"Oh, now, the good Book don't say no sich of a thing, and you know it. What makes you allus want to fetch in the good Book? Don't you know it say, 'Thou shan't kill?' Don't you?"

"Yes, but I ain't found whar it say, 'Thou shall let a feller kill you.'"

"Oh, there ought to be some way a smoothin' of it over."

"Yes, Margaret, a smoothin' of it over an' a pattin' it down with a shovel."

"Oh, fur goodness sake, don't talk thatter way. It distresses me so."

"Why, jest a while ago you was fretted because I didn't treat it serious. Wush you'd sorter draw off in writin' what you want me to do."

"Don't talk thatter way. I am so anxious, an' 'specially at this time when—"

"When what?"

"When these folks air here—when that young feller is a payin' so much attention to Lou."

"Don't worry about her, Margaret. If she has to take bitter medicine, she'll do it an' smack her mouth." [162]

"But, Jasper, he's the son of a United States Jedge."

"Wall, but thar ain't no objection to that, is there?"

"Oh, how tormentin' a man kin be when he tries."

"Oh, how tormentin' a woman kin be when she don't try."

"Did anybody ever hear the like? Jasper, don't you see how much Lou is a thinkin' of him? Air you so blind that you can't see that? An' you know that the app'intment of Peters mout spile it all."

The old man shrugged. "Yes, mout spile it all fur Peters. Let me tell you suthin'. I ain't a stairrin' round to see how much one pusson thinks of another, an' I don't know how much she keers fur that young feller, but I do know that she is worthy of any man that ever trod shoe luther. We give her all the freedom a girl wants, an' that man ain't a livin' that could turn that freedom into shame. If she falls in love with him, she will love him like a Starbuck—with all her soul. An' if he don't love her, she'll be silent like a Starbuck. One day when we was a goin' down the creek in canoe you saw a fish come up an' strike at the paddle. Margaret, that was a Starbuck among fish." [163]

There came a loud cry of "halloa," and Jasper went to the window.

"Helloa yo'se'f."

"My wagon's stalled down here," a man shouted, "and I'd like for you to fetch your steers and give me a lift up the hill."

"What air you loaded with?"

"Hoop poles."

"All right, I'll send a nigger down an'—" Just then he caught sight of Kintchin. "Here, you scoundrel, I thought I told you to haul a load of corn over to Spencer's."

The negro came up to the window. "Yas, suh, but you didn't tell me. I heard you tell dat man Laz, but he sich a liar you kain't blebe nuthin' dat's said ter him."

Jasper turned away to laugh and Kintchin came round into the house. [164]

"But you heard me tell him, you scoundrel," said the old man.

"Yas, suh, I wuz er standin' dar at de cornder o' de house at de time, an' I yered you tell him, an' I would er blebed it, ez I tell you, but dat man is sich er monst'us twister o' de fack dat nuthin' said ter him soun's like de truf. I blebed it when you told him, but de minit he told me it sounded like er lie."

"Kintchin, that's putty good sense, anyhow."

"Yas, suh, an' ain't all dat sense wuth er quarter?"

Jasper began to grabble into his pocket, when Margaret spoke up: "Jasper, don't give that nigger no money. He won't do a thing I tell him to."

Starbuck gave him a piece of silver, and with a look of deep injury the darkey turned to Margaret. "Now, Miss Mar'get, whut you all time come er flatter me datter way fur? You knows I's allus a braikin' my naik fur you. I don't kere ef you is er 'oman, you's got er soul ter save, an' you oughter be a lookin' out fur it."

He ambled slowly toward the door, muttering as he went, and Jasper's sharp command did not serve to enliven him overmuch. [165]

"Come, move on a little faster, and yoke up the steers and haul that man's wagon up the hill. Never saw as slow a nigger in my life. Come on, and I'll go with you."

He hastened out, passing Kintchin and commanding him to come on. Margaret busied herself with picking up scraps of paper, among them doubtless being an account of what the captain did, and threw them out into the yard. Standing at the door, and glancing down the road, she spied Mrs. Mayfield, Jim, Tom and Lou coming from a stroll among the hills. Back into the house she ran, snatched down a turkey-wing fan from a nail in the wall, dusted a rocking-chair, smoothed herself, and was rocking placidly as any lady of leisure when the hill-side romancers entered the room.

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CHAPTER XII.

DIDN'T DO ANYTHING HEROIC.

During all the morning Jim had been silent. Standing on a purple knob, arms folded, gazing far away toward the rugged scenes of his life's work, he had reminded the world-woman of some discoverer, a Cortez viewing the Pacific; and when to break the spell of his attitude she asked him why he gazed so fixedly, he replied: "I am looking away off yander at the duty I am neglecting, ma'm."

"Why, you couldn't neglect a duty, Mr. Reverend."

"I didn't think so, but I am. I put myself in mind of the old feller that stood all day a smelling of a rose bush when the weeds were choking his corn. In my wheat field the tares are coming up, now that I am away, and I ought to be there to pull them up by the roots."

"But you need a vacation. Ail preachers take vacations. Why, in the cities, they—"

"Yes, ma'm," he broke in. "Sometimes they shut up their churches, I know, and they go away from their desks and their pulpits; but they are learned men, bristling with sharp points against the man who attacks their creed. I am not armed that way. I can't argue; I can't defend the church against the smart men that Satan has hired. All I can do is to preach in my rough way and go about and beg men to do as near right as they can."

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"And St. Paul could not have done more, Mr. Reverend."

"Ah," he said, bowing low, and then looking up at her. "I am afraid of St. Paul. He was a great scholar and in his hands the gospel was a dazzling thing. But with poor, ignorant Peter it was simple; and I choose Peter for my master because I am not afraid of him."

Below them Tom and Lou sat on a rock. The game young fellow was still shy. Sometimes he looked as if he despaired of ever recovering his wonted nerve, for in this girl, so modest and so shrinking, he knew that there lay asleep the wildcat's fearful spirit. Bold by nature he longed at times to see this spirit blaze, but her soft eyes pleaded with him and gentleness made him afraid.

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"Come right in," said Margaret as they appeared at the door. "Have this cheer, Miz Mayfield?"

"No, thank you I'll sit over here." She sat down near the table, and Jim took a seat opposite to her and resumed his silent gaze. "We have had a delightful stroll," said Mrs. Mayfield, taking off her gloves; and Lou who stood behind her peeped around lovingly into her eyes.

"Stroll," cried Tom. "I call it a chase. And you could catch a deer almost as easily as to keep up with Miss Lou."

"Why, Mr. Tom, I didn't walk fast."

"Oh," he rejoined, "you didn't walk at all. You flitted."

His aunt looked at him. "Tom, dear, don't be extravagant."

"Extravagant! That's the reason father let me come up here. So I couldn't be extravagant."

"He is determined to be literal," she said with a sigh.

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Lou gathered up a handful of flowers that lay in Mrs. Mayfield's lap. "Let me have these," and she began to weave them into the city woman's hair.

"Why, daughter," cried Margaret, "don't do that. She mout not like it."

"Oh, don't stop her, please," Mrs. Mayfield replied, and then to Jim she added: "Did you ever have a fawn touch you with its velvety lip? The thrill of innocence, the—"

"Auntie, don't be extravagant," Tom broke in, and Lou gave him a look of tender reproof. "I wish you'd hush, Mr. Tom. I like to hear her talk."

"Why—why don't you like to hear me talk?"

"I do except when you interrupt her."

He hung his head. "Thank you. Wishes should be sacred when set to music."

"A very pretty speech," said Mrs. Mayfield, nodding Tom a compliment, and Margaret, not to be left behind, declared: "Oh, he couldn't be pearter if he tried."

"There," exclaimed the girl, patting Mrs. Mayfield's head, "you are in bloom."

"She was the moment you said so," Tom replied.

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"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I know it. She burst into bloom the moment you spoke."

"Then I'm glad I said it. Some how you always make me feel glad when I've said somethin'. You are the only—only people that ever did that."

Jim had not spoken. Mrs. Mayfield asked him why he was so silent. "A man is sometimes most silent when he is afraid of saying too much," he answered, looking down.

"Mysterious wisdom," she mused, and this gave Tom his opportunity.

"Well, that's what you like, Auntie. You never did care for anything you could understand."

"I don't care for impertinence, sir," and Lou laughed at him: "There, you got it that time."

"Ma'm, I have no desire to be mysterious," said Jim. "A hay stack in an open field couldn't be plainer than my life up to now, but there comes a time even in the most honest man's life when he feels that he must hide something, and that something is the fact that he does feel."

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"There, auntie," cried Tom, "he has given you enough mystery to last you—fifteen minutes."

"Is it too warm in here?" Margaret inquired, getting up and going toward the door. They told her that it was "very pleasant," and she looked around at them as if in her opinion it was getting fairly warm but not quite warm enough.

"Mr. Reverend," said Mrs. Mayfield, "I have never known a man like you. And did you ever have a fight, being a Starbuck?"

"I have seen men fall down."

"But you never killed anybody, did you—still being a Starbuck?"

"Kill anybody!" Tom cried. "Why, he's a D. D. not an M. D."

"Oh, hush, you stock joker. But Mr. Reverend, don't you think it is awfully wrong to fight?"

And gazing into her eyes he said: "At times, ma'm, it is just as essential as prayer. Now, Peter drew his sword and cut off a man's ear, and Peter stood right up next to Christ."

"But the Savior told him to put up his sword."

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"Very true, ma'm, but not until after the feller had lost his ear."

"Law, me!" exclaimed Margaret, standing at the door, "but you folks air cuttin' up scollops."

"Mr. Reverend," Mrs. Mayfield continued, determined to pursue a subject so interesting to herself, "someone told me of a very heroic thing you did."

"Why, ma'm, I can't look back an' see that I ever did anything heroic. I have helped many an old woman across the creek; I have helped a man set out his tobacco plants, and I want to tell you that settin' out tobacco is the most fetching work I ever did."

"But this was something you can't make light of. I am told that when Memphis was stricken with yellow fever you went down there and nursed the sick."

For a moment he was silent and then he said: "They needed strong arms down there then. The hospitals were full and the churches empty. It seemed to me like the gospel had got scared and was running to the mountains. The Lord may not have called upon me to preach, but I do believe he called on me to go down there."

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Leaning upon the table she gazed into his face as if she were for the first time in her life contemplating a human mystery. "You are a noble man, Mr. Reverend. My faith in man gasped and died, but into it you have blown the sweet breath of a new life. Don't misunderstand me, I—"

"No, ma'm, I won't do that. It is not for me to place an estimation upon you. I don't know much about—"

"Come right in," Margaret called to Mose Blake, hesitating at the door. She led him into the room and began to introduce him to the company. "Mose, this is Miz Mayfield—" Mose shook hands with Jim. "No, this is Miz Mayfield." Mose shook hands with Lou, then with Mrs. Mayfield, and turning to Tom, to whom he was now presented, shook the stool which Tom held in his hand and upon which he was about to sit, took it from him and sat down. "All h—h—h—hands w—w

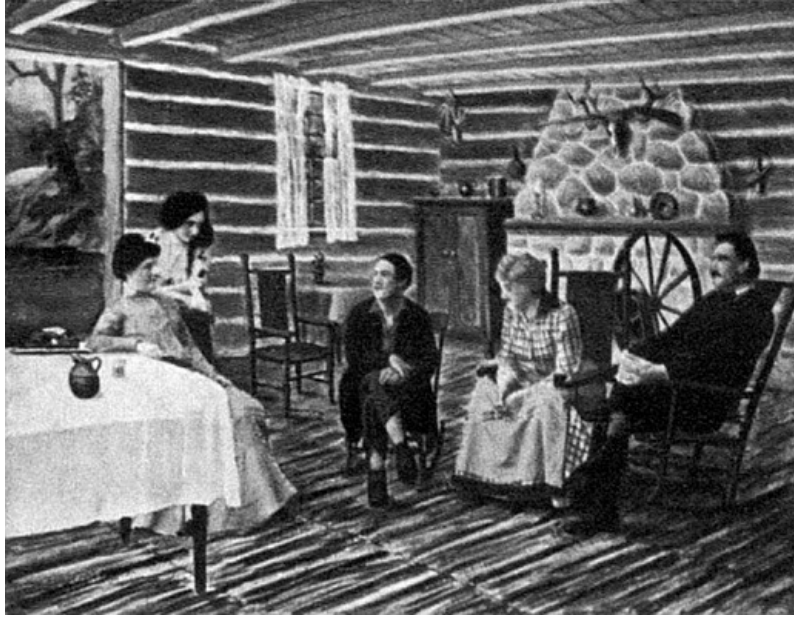
—well, I h—h—hope."

"Well as usual," Margaret answered, sitting down in the rocker. "Why ain't you folks been over?"

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"Been a t—t—tryin' t—t—t—to git off. Granny sot t—t—t—the feather b—b—b—bed a—f—f—fire night afore l—l—l—last an' come mighty n—n—n—nigh b—b—b—burnin' up."

"Why, you don't say so?" Margaret exclaimed.



"YES, I D-D-D-DO SAY SO, A-A-A-ATTER A F-F-F-FASHION."

"Yes I d—d—d—do say so a—a—a—atter a f—f—f—fashion."

"How far do you live from here Mr. Blake?" Tom inquired.

"Oh, 'bout t—t—t—three sights and a g—g—g—good long w—w—w—walk."

"Charmingly indefinite," said Mrs. Mayfield and Jim, his eyes set, nodded to her. Tom declared himself willing to bet that Mose was a good fellow, "and I don't want to be impertinent," he ventured to remark, "but do you know they can cure stammering now? They can."

"Y—y—y—yes, I kik—kik—kik—know. I tuck—tuck some l—l—l—lessons once a—a—a—and was kik—kik—kik—cured. Got along all r—r—r—right till I t—t—t—tried to talk—long as I di—d—d—din didn't say nuthin'. Lou, air you g—g—g—goin' to church Sunday?"

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"I don't know."

"Lowed I'd g—g—g—go with you. Mother said I ought to go up to the m—m—m—m—mourner's b—b—b—bench, but p—p—p—p—pap he 'lowed if I did git 'ligion I couldn't s—s—s—shout. But I'm in a hurry this m—m—m—m—mornin'. Granny's sick and wants some m—m—m—med—hison."

"What's the matter with her?" Margaret inquired.

"Don't know. She didn't s—s—s—say."

"But what sort of medicine did they send you after?"

"Oh, a—a—a—any sort you ain't g—g—g—got no use fur."

"Why, that won't do," Mrs. Mayfield spoke up. "Why don't you send for a physician?"

"Oh, that's a—a—a—all right. It never makes any d—d—dif—difference with granny what s—s—sort of medicine she t—t—t—take—takes. If you go to church Sunday, L—L—L—Lou, I may see you there. G—g—g—got somethin' to s—s—s—say to you."

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"How are you going to manage to say it?" Lou asked and he began to make signs.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Mayfield, "what he has to say could be conveyed by signs."

"Yes," Tom declared, "signs are very impressive. Fellow made a few at me once and when he got through I found he'd knocked me down."

"Knocked you down!" cried Lou. "Oh, how could anybody knock you down?"

Mrs. Mayfield looked at Jim. "How charming to be a hero in the sight of a beautiful eye."

Jim drooped and said: "Yes'm."

Mose who had been screwing up his face began again: "Feller knock me down have me to w—

w—w—w—whup."

The voice of Kintchin, driving the steers, came up the hill: "Whoa, hor, Buck, come yere. Come yere Bright." Mose remarked after a serious effort that the steers must have about all they could pull, and then added that he must be going. Tom asked if he found it difficult to pull himself loose, and his aunt cried out! "Why Thomas." Kintchin's voice was heard again, further off and Mose said he "reckoned" he'd have to be pulled out by the steers. Margaret who had been searching the safe and the "cubbo'd", bade him wait a moment, that she had some medicine for him. "Here," she said, giving him two small packages, "'is some quinine and some calomy. Tell yo' granny not to take too much of the calomy. Mout salavater her."

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"Yes'm. But it won't m—m—m—m—make any diffunce with granny w—w—w—wuther she's s—s—s—salivated or not. She ain't got no teeth. And b—b—b—besides, she likes the quinine better. She's d—d—d—deef and the q—q—q—quinine makes her head r—r—r—r—roar and she thinks she's hearin' suthin'. Well, er g—g—g—g—good day."

"Miz Mayfield," said Margaret, when Mose was gone, "I reckon these folks air mighty queer to you."

"Oh, no, they are close to nature in her most whimsical mood, and a mother of fun is better than a step-mother to scandal."

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"I don't know what you mean, auntie" said Tom, "and I don't guess you do, but I'll bet they are game and that is enough to make them all right with me."

"Why," Lou replied, "the man that won't fight is a Judas."

"Good," cried Tom, taking her hands. "I'd rather hear a girl say that than to hear her play a symphony. Before my father was a judge he was a soldier. Now they call him a learned jurist but I am prouder of the fact that he was a distinguished colonel of cavalry."

"Gracious me!" exclaimed Margaret, "I must see about dinner."

"I'll help you mother," said Lou.

"No you won't," Margaret replied. "You jest stay right whar you air."

"You won't object to my helping," said Mrs. Mayfield, arising.

"Oh, no, that is you may come an' look on."

Jim snatched his hat off the floor and followed, leaving Tom and Lou alone in the room. The girl stood leaning on the table looking at the young fellow, and though often of late had they strolled alone in the woods, yet he seemed to feel that this was the first time he stood facing so confidential a privilege.

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"And you lived away off in Maine," said Lou.

"Yes, until father received the appointment to come down here."

"Is yo' mother livin'?"

"No, I can just remember her."

She mused for a few moments as if struggling with a thought. "I read of them findin' a new star," she said, "and I wondered if it wan't the speret of some good man or woman that hed passed away from down here an' gone up there."

"If that were true," he replied, coming forward and putting his hands on the table, gazing into her eyes—"if that were true and I should find a new star brighter than all the rest, I would call it—Lou."

She straightened up. "You must be careful how you talk to me because I might not know how to act. When folks would hide things they must talk like in a book, and I can't do that. But do you think if I was to read books I could be smart?"

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"I have begun to think that books don't make so much difference after all. It's the soul that makes people great."

"There's hardly any way for a woman to be great," she said. "All I can hope for is not to be foolish."

"You couldn't be foolish. You might make a man foolish, but you—"

"Oh, how could I make anybody foolish?" she cried, and leaving the table she stood leaning upon the back of a rocking chair.

"How long have you known Mr. Peters?" he inquired and he appeared to be embarrassed.

"All my life."

"Is he game?"

"Game enough, I reckon. Why do you ask?"

"I met him in the road and without cause he insulted me. And I could have killed him!"

"He insulted you?" and she came closer to him. "Insulted you? Then why didn't you kill him?" [181]

"Because—because—I can't tell you now and you musn't ask."

Away from him she turned her head. "All right, I won't ask."

Margaret came to the door. "Lou, go down to the spring house and fetch me that jar of butter," and coming into the room as Lou started, she added, just as Jasper came in. "It's a mighty heavy jar, Mr. Elliott. You mout go an' help her."

"Oh, may I?" Tom asked of Lou.

"Yes, you may, but—"

"But what?"

"I won't ask you to."

"Oh, you won't have to ask me."

"Well, then, come on."

Jasper looked knowingly at Margaret, who, laughing, went back into the kitchen and the old man, shaking his head, humorously mused: "Blamed if I don't wish I could fix up things thatter way." He sat down, took up a lap-board, and upon it began to cut a piece of leather; but leaving off the work, gave himself up to deep thought. "Shot fo' and stobbed three," he said, his mind on the story paper. "Ah, it may not be true, but it sounds mighty natchul. I wonder how it all is goin' to end. Don't want to think about it; wush I could think of somethin' else. Margaret's got her heart set. And I wonder if my little girl has too. If she has it's the first time, an' if his heart don't come when hers calls it, it will never call ag'in." And for a long time he sat there, immovable, gazing; and in his old eyes there was a dream. [182] [183]

CHAPTER XIII.

MIGHT WIPE HER FEET ON HIM.

Old Jasper's meditations were disturbed by Kintchin who thrust his head through the window and inquired: "Doan want me to take dat co'n ober ter Spencer's 'fo' dinner, does you?"

"No, any time this evenin' will do."

The negro came into the house and as he entered Starbuck said to him: "And while you are resting you mout grind the axes."

"Yas, suh; grind de axes while I's er restin'. Look yere, Mr. Starbuck, ain't you got some work fur me ter do while I's er eatin'?"

"Let me see. I reckon I can rig up a thing so you can churn with yo' foot."

"Yas, suh. But whut's de use in stoppin' dar? You mout ez well scuffle roun' an' fin' suthin fur me ter do wid de udder foot. Look yere, Mr. Starbuck, ef it's jest de same ter you, I blebe I'd like ter quit dis place."

"Why do you want to quit? Don't I give you plenty to do?" [184]

"Oh, yas, suh; dat is on er pinch. But de truf is it 'pear ter me like things er gittin' sort er squawly roun' yere. Dat man Peters he's threatenin' ter knock er nail kag in de head an' ring er dish rag an' I doan want ter git in no row. You Starbuck folks may not mind it, but I ain't uster bein' shot. He say he gwine be 'p'inted deputy marshal, an' w'en he sees me er grindin' de co'n he gwine put er lot o' holes th'u' me. I doan want ter look like no sifter."

Jasper arose, put down his lapboard, shut his knife and with a serious air said to the old darkey. "I'm here to protect, you, Kintchin."

"Yas, suh, but you mout do de most o' yo' pertectin' atter I'se dun dead."

"Wall, atter you're dead it won't make any difference."

"N—n—no, suh, dat's er fack. I hadn't thought o' dat. Funny how sich er 'po'tent p'int will come ter er man w'en he neber did think o' it befo', ain't it?"

"Don't you worry. You air safe enough."

"Safe ernuff? I doan know whut you calls safe ernuff. You mout feel like you's safe ernuff ez long ez you ain't lost bof laigs an' er arm or two, but dat sort er safe doan suit me." [185]

"I give you my word, an' you know whut that means."

"Yas, suh, I knows all 'bout dat, but er word kain't stop er bullet."

Over to the old negro he slowly walked and gently put his hand on his shoulder: "My word can, old man—mine has, an' I will protect you with my life."

"Yas, suh, an' I'll stay, but ef I gits killed I gwine hol' you 'sponsible. Mark whut I tells you." He turned to go and at that moment Peters entered the room. The negro quickly shambled to get out of his way, and halted in the door.

"Starbuck," said the visitor, "thought I'd drap over to see you ag'in. And whut's that nigger always hangin' round fur when I want to talk to you?"

"Lives here, don't he?"

"That ourt ter settle it but, I lay it won't," muttered the negro, standing in the door. Peters turned toward him with the remark: [186]

"That vote they give you don't count for much."

"No, suh, not till da counts it."

"Shut up."

"Yas, suh, dat's whut I's er doin' jest ez fast ez I kin."

"Peters," said Starbuck, "I don't like to ask a man his business when he's in my house."

"I reckon business is the right word, Starbuck," and moving closer to Kintchin he demanded: "Somebody got a mortgage on yo' feet so you can't move 'em?"

"Wha'fo'?" replied the negro, ducking his head.

"You keep on a standin' thar when you see I want to talk to Starbuck."

"W'y, bless yo' life, you's so entertainin' I kain't hardly t'ar myse'f loose. Wheneber you talks it puts me in de min' o' er fiddle."

"But it don't make you move yo' feet, you scoundrel."

"No, suh, ef I moved my feet when de fiddle wuz gwine folks would think I wuz er dancin' an' da'd turn me outen de church, an' I doan want 'em ter do dat. Hurts er man's business w'en he's turned outen de church." [187]

Peters addressed himself to Jasper. "Well, you have teached that nigger nearly enough impudence to break his neck."

"Didn't know I was sich a good teacher, Lije. Don't you want a few lessons? Go on, Kintchin." The negro slowly went away, looking back and shaking his head, and Starbuck added: "Peters, I'm afraid I'll have to furgit my raisin' an' ask you what you want."

"I want to give you the opportunity to have some sense."

"Well, now, Lije, it's mighty kind of you to be givin' out that sort of artickle. Puts me in mind of the old feller that give away his shirts when he didn't have none to spare."

"Good natchul talk, Starbuck—natchul as the squawk of a duck. But I didn't come here to swop the perlitenesses of the season."

"No?" said Starbuck. [188]

"You know I have been out of the neighborhood an' ain't had a chance to talk business until lately."

"That's so."

"And you ought to know what that business is."

"Yes, I know."

"Even if a man is gittin' old, Starbuck, thar ain't no reason why he should be a fool."

"That's a fact, Lije."

"And the biggest fool in the world, Starbuck, is the man that won't keep out of trouble when he kin."

"That's true."

"Starbuck, ain't yo' eyes wide enough open to see that I kin ruin you?"

"Yes, Lije, with his eyes half shet a man kin see a rattlesnake."

"Then with both of 'em wide open he ought to see a panther."

"I'm a lookin' at you."

"That's all right, Starbuck. But we've passed the time fur beatin' about the bush."

"I ain't a beatin', Lije."

"Starbuck, do you want to be ruined?"

"Stop!"

"Do you want to see yo' wife with her head bowed down on the table?"

"Stop!"

"Do you want to hear yo' daughter cryin' down thar in the valley?"

"I tell you to stop!"

"Do you want to know that the little grave down yander—"

"Stop, Peters, stop!" the old man cried, and then held forth his hands. "You don't see nuthin' red on my hands, do you? Look, they are jest as nature made 'em. Peters, fur God's sake don't turn 'em red."

"That's good talk, Starbuck, an' it mout belong to the pulpit but not to business, an' I'm a business man."

"Yes, you look like it."

"And I'll act like it, too; I'll tell you that fur yo' own infermation. An' thar ain't a man in the country that likes to give out infermation better'n I do—when I see that it's goin' to be of use to somebody. But I don't like to waste my wisdom, Starbuck. Look, here, don't you know the right to ruin you has come down to me from my folks, like er old spinnin' wheel? It's a fact, and you know it. But I don't want to do it if I can help it. I know I would make yo' daughter a good husband, but frum what I kin gether she wouldn't wipe her feet on me."

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"Oh, yes, Peters, she mout if she had been walkin' in the mud."

"Yes, ah, hah. So I've got another plan."

"Oh, I don't reckon you're slow, Lije, when it comes to gittin' up plans."

"That's true. An' I'm jest a little slow about askin' favors, but I want to borry a thousand dollars, an' I don't want no time sot when it must be paid back, nuther. I want that understood."

"Why, that's what they call blackmail, ain't it?"

"Oh, I don't care whut they call it, but I want you to git it fur me. That p'int is settled. You've got to git it, an' git it quick."

"Why, Peters, I'd have to sell my land."

"Better do that than to throw away yo' liberty. You know that it means ruin for you an' yo' wife an' a broken heart fur yo' girl. All I've got to do is to act, an' you go to the penitentiary."

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Upon Starbuck's face there was an expression of keen suffering. Pleadingly he put up his hands, looking toward the door leading into the kitchen and exclaimed. "Hold on. Somebody mout hear you."

"Oh, got you to thinkin', have I?"

"Yes, an' a man thinks better when he's by hisse'f."

Peters moved off toward the door and halting, remarked: "Yes, may think better when he's by hisse'f, but not as fast. When he's got thinkin' to do that he don't want to do he mout shirk it if left by hisse'f. Well, I'll give you a leetle mo' time, but not much. My plan is that when you've got a bad piece of work on hand, git through with it as soon as possible. I'm goin' down the road a piece an' will drap in on my way back," and as he passed out he looked back and added: "Thinkin' ought to make a man wise."

The old man stood looking through the window, at Peters as he ambled along the road, and turning away he muttered, "Shot fo' an' stobbed three," his mind flying back to the story paper.

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Mrs. Mayfield, followed by Jim, came in from the kitchen, remarking, "we have been helping your wife but she has expelled us."

"I don't reckon thar was very much help needed." He waited until she had sat down, and then coming slowly toward her he inquired: "Ma'm, air all the deputy marshals in the state under yo' brother, the Jedge?"

"All in this district, I should think, are under the jurisdiction of his court."

"I reckon the Jedge is putty hard on folks that makes what they call wild-cat liquor."

"Extremely so, Mr. Starbuck. He sends them all to the penitentiary."

"I don't reckon he knows that a man may make liquor and yit have some little jestice on his side."

"My brother can see no justice in a violation of the law."

The old man was silent for a few moments and then he asked: "Do he have the app'intment of

the deputy marshals?"

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"I don't know as to that. I suppose, however, that the Marshal appoints his own deputies. Do you want someone appointed?"

"Me? Oh, no," and walking off he added to himself: "It's someone I don't want app'inted. That's the question with me." Margaret came in and he inquired if dinner were nearly ready.

"As soon as the co'n pone's done," she answered, and he swore that he was as hungry as a bear in the spring of the year. The old negro mammy came to the door and with a peculiar softness which ever characterized his voice when speaking to her, he bade her come in. "Set down," he said, bringing a chair for her. "You look monst'us tired. Now, jest rock yo'se'f thar an' putty soon you'll git rested."

"Thank you, Mars Jasper. An' I hopes you's all well, bof in de flesh an' in de sight o' de Lawd."

"Ah, mammy," said the old man, "you never forgit the Lawd, do you?"

"How kin I, Mars Jasper, w'en I so close ter Him. An' Marster, dis is my birfday."

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"Is that so? And how old air you to-day, mammy?"

"I doan hardly know, but I's eider eighty-fo' ur eighty-six."

"An' nobody's life could have been given mo' away in love to others."

"I hopes dat my soul is white, Mars Jasper."

"As white as a lamb, washed in the dew."

"Thank you, Mars Jasper, fur I ain't gwine be yere much longer, fur I's er gwine home. De road has been long an' I's almos' wore out, but I'll git home atter while, an' when I does, I gwine tell de Lawd erbout de folks down yere."

Tom and Lou came from the spring house, carrying a small jar, and the old man exclaimed: "Why, it must be heavy." His wife knew that he was charicaturing her and she stood contemptuous, with arms folded, as he sprang forward to assist the two "youngsters." "Let me help you," and pretending to stagger under a great weight, he took the jar and with great apparent difficulty put it on the table.

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"Jasper," said his wife, "I wouldn't make light of it."

"Light of it! Why, I couldn't make light of anything so heavy."

"Father," said Lou, "the bees have swarmed and settled on the peach tree."

"That so? Why, I thought thar was honey in the air. Come on Jim an' help me hive 'em. Won't take but a minit." Jim began to roll up his sleeves. "Oh," protested the old man, "I don't want you to preach to 'em. Ma'm," he continued, addressing Mrs. Mayfield, "he always goes at 'em with his sleeves rolled up, and, I gad, he fetches 'em."

Jim strove to explain to Mrs. Mayfield, but Jasper pulled at him. "That's all right, Jim, she understands. Come on, or them bees might fly away. Come on, I tell you. Ma'm take yo' eye offen him so he kin come on. Thar, I thank you," he said, bowing, when Mrs. Mayfield looked in another direction. "Thankee, ma'm an' ef I had a eye as fetchin' as your'n I could haul wood with it. Come on, Jim." He drew the preacher out of the house, and Margaret said to Mrs. Mayfield: "Don't let Jasper fret you, ma'm."

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"Oh, no, Mrs. Starbuck, to me he is an old time story book, illustrated."

"My father fret anybody?" cried Lou. "How could he?"

"Why don't you say I couldn't fret anybody," Tom broke in, and looking sweetly at him she innocently inquired, "Could you?"

At the corner of the fence Jasper and Jim halted. They had just seen Peters enter the house. "Howdy," said the ruffian, entering the room. "I 'lowed I mout find Starbuck here."

"It would be safer for you to meet him where other folks are," Lou spoke up and Peters bowed mockingly.

"Mars Peters," said Mammy, "please don't bother Mars Jasper, he's er gittin' old."

And toward the poor old creature the ruffian turned with a scowl. "Shut up, you old fool."

"Why, Mr. Peters," they all of them cried, and at that moment Jasper and Jim came into the room. "Peters," said the old man, "this woman nursed me. My mammy died an' left me to her, an' as a little baby she was the only mother I knowed. My granddaddy built this house, an' that door was opened by him an' never has been shut, an' anybody comin' along that road was always welcome to come in. But thar is one man that must never darken it ag'in." He took out his watch and looking at it, continued: "I'll give you jest one minit, Peters."

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The ruffian looked at a gun standing in the corner; looked at Jasper holding the watch; looked at the women, who in disgust turned their faces from him; looked at the door, and clearing his throat, walked out.

"Sometimes, ma'm" said Jasper speaking to Mrs. Mayfield, "the laziest man ain't got no time to stay no longer."

"Well, I wouldn't make light of it," remarked Margaret.

"No lighter than I can help. I reckon we'd better eat a snack an' then Jim, you may preach to them bees."

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CHAPTER XIV.

AN OLD MAN PREACHED.

Several days passed and Peters was seen no more about the Starbuck place, but the old man knew that the scoundrel had not surrendered his scheme, but merely was lying low, waiting for his appointment as deputy marshall. Such an office was not hard to get. The danger attending it often made material scarce, for higher among the hills where the rebellious spirit of man had never failed to gaze with defiant contempt into the eye of the law, the distiller's blood smeared the rock and the deputy, if not taken away by friends, was left to the buzzard. So, whether or not trouble was on the road to meet old Jasper, depended upon a piece of paper, to be written and stamped in the capital of the State. But something else soon arose to claim the sympathetic attention of the household.

One morning Lou came running into the house almost breathless, with the excited words that old mammy was dying in her cabin. They all of them hastened to her bedside, and when she saw the old man kneeling upon the floor, she put forth her mummied hand and left it rest upon his head.

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"I's gwine tell de Lawd erbout de folks down yere," were her last words, and from the woods they brought wild flowers and among them she slept, black sentiment of a hallowed past—a past of slavery, but of love. More than treasured heirlooms, of rusty swords which, once bright, had flashed in gallant hands; more than tress of hair, tipped with gold and ribbon-bound; more than old love-letters, books or fading picture of serenest face—more than all else does the old black mother bind us to the sunny days of yore. Beneath a tree, where at evening when the sun was low often had she sat watching the cows as home they came from the cane-breaks in the bottoms, they dug her grave; and from all about, from fern-fringed coves and knobs where the scrub oak grew, the people came, old men and women to pay their respects to this bit of another age, going home—and the children, came wonderingly, curious, with pictures of witches in their fertile minds. The sermon was preached by an old negro nearing ninety. At the head of the grave he stood and cast his whitish eyes about, but nothing was there for him to see, for during many years he had groped about in darkness. Once the property and playmate of a favored child, he had been taught to read, and as the years passed on, stubborn learning yielded to him, and along the hill-sides he walked with the old prophets, with their poetic words burning in his mind.

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"Friends, close to me but somewhere off in the darkness," he said, "we have come here to put this poor old piece of human clay in the cradle that won't be rocked until the last day. In the years gone by, many a time have we seen her, at the break of day, coming home from a bedside where she had watched and nursed all night. When our spirits were low for want of hope, she has sung us back into faith. When our blood leaped to throw aside lowly ways and take up with the ways of sin, she told us that she was going home to tell the Lord. No letter in the great Book fastened itself on her poor mind, but in her soul the spirit of that Book always had a home. My friends, here was a poor old creature who never in all her long life had anything to hope for except a word of gratitude for a kindness done. Many a time I read the Bible to her, and though I made it the study of my long life, yet from what might seem the darkness of her mind, there would sometimes flash a new light and fall with bright explanation upon its pages." The old negro halted to wipe his brow and Jim whispered to Jasper: "Is that learning or ignorance inspired? I never heard many white men talk that way."

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"I don't know what it is," Jasper replied. "But that old man, I have hearn tell, went through a great school along with his young marster."

"It should not be in sorrow that we place her here," the preacher continued. "With the simple minded and therefore the virtuous, she accepted the gospel as a reality and not as a theory, and a gleaner in the harvest field of promise, she takes to the Master her old hands full of the wheat of faith, and her soul will enter upon its glorious reward. Let us pray."

As they were returning from the grave a negro came up to Jasper and said that he wished for a moment to speak to him. "Doan you reccernize me?" he inquired, and Starbuck replied that he did not.

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"W'y, sah, I's de generman whut de white man had tied ter de tree."

"Oh, yes, and also the gentleman that fell in love with my old rooster."

"Yas, sah, de se'f same."

"And now what can I do for you—put another chicken in yo' way?"

"No, sah, dat ain't whut I want. I wuz er cuttin' some wood dis mawnin' ober at de Peters' place, an' I yere some talk dat don't soun' like er flute. 'Pear like dat white man has got some trouble in his head fur you."

"Yes, I know."

"An, frum whut I coul' gather he gwine gib it ter you; an' ef you wants me ter I'll he'p you tie him ter er tree an' w'ar him out."

"No, that won't do. But do you know whether or not he has got a app'intment from off yander at Nashville? Did you hear?"

"I doan think it quite got yere yit, but he keep on er lookin' down de road 'spectin' it to come erlaung at any minit. Ef you want me ter, suh, I'll keep er lookout while I's er workin' roun' de place, an' knock him in de head de minit it do come." [203]

"No, you musn't do that. Is he expectin' some help?"

"He wuz er talkin' erbout some men, sah. You ain't got no cullud ladies ober at yo' house now, is you?"

"No, an' I don't want any mo' for none could take the place of old mammy."

"No, sah, I reckons not, but I wuz jest er thinkin' dat ef you had any dar I would drap ober a visitin'. I's allus sorter s'ciety struck atter I goes ter er funul. It's den dat I kin fetch 'em wid my talk. It's easy ter out-talk er lady atter er funul. I's had 'em take down er ole glove an' empty dar money in my han'."

"What's your name?"

"Da calls me Ham, suh."

"Well, Ham, I reckon thar's a good deal of the scoundrel about you."

"Ain't it funny suh, dat I's yered dat befo'? Yas, suh; but scounnul or not, I'll keep er sharp lookout on dat man Peters an' come an' tell you ef suthin' happen." [204]

Lou was tearful and depressed over the death of the old woman, whom she had loved, who indeed was as a gentle grandmother to her, and going home from the burial had but little to say; and Tom, respecting what to him was a strange grief, walked along in silence. And for the most part Jim was silent, too, but Mrs. Mayfield was aroused by what she had seen and heard. "Every day this rugged world up here presents something new, Mr. Reverend. Instead of becoming more able to compare it with other places I have known, it is further and further removed as time passes. Of course I had read books and heard songs, but never before coming here did I believe that in real slavery had there existed poetry."

"They tell me, ma'm, that the greatest poetry has come out of the dark," he replied, walking with his eyes cast down.

"Then even as a Southerner you don't believe that slavery was right." [205]

"No, ma'm, for slavery must dwarf the soul and the Book teaches that the Ethiopian had a soul to save."

"But some of the slaves must have been kindly treated."

"Yes, ma'm, but the true way to be kind to ignorance is to enlighten it."

"The old man who preached had known enlightenment and yet he holds no bitterness against the people who kept his race in the dark."

"Ma'm, as a general thing the negro is not revengeful. Sometimes he is a beast and he commits terrible crimes, but he is often like an animal—a dog. Kindness makes him forget an injury. With his strong animal nature his affection is warm, and sometimes when he forgets revenge he has also forgotten gratitude."

He fell into silence and they walked slowly along, now far behind the others. She strove to lead him back into a discussion, but he would not talk, and when they reached the house, she sat down alone, and he stood out at the fence, looking up and down the road. A man came along and asked him how much longer he expected to remain in the neighborhood, and glancing round at the house, at the woman who sat near the door, he replied: "Don't think I'm going to stay much longer. Have you had any news from over my way?" [206]

"None except they are anxious for you to come on back."

"Well, you may tell them that they may expect me soon."

That night the household went early to bed, with the exception of Old Jasper who, with a candle, sat at his table, not reading the story paper, but attempting to write. [207]

CHAPTER XV.

THE GIRL AND THE CHURN.

The next morning Lou was churning out in the yard and near her Mrs. Mayfield sat, sewing. The scene was inspiring. Off to the right flowed the blue creek, and everywhere were the hills, softly purple in the distance.

"Things look so lonesome since poor mammy died," said the girl.

"But her passing away was beautiful," the city woman made reply, sewing, thinking, glancing up with a sigh and then permitting her gaze to wander off among the hills. "You were very fond of her, weren't you?"

"Yes. Her black face was one of the first I ever saw. She nursed father and me, too; and she was like a mother. I—I wish you would stay here a long time, Mrs. Mayfield."

"I don't like to think of returning to what people almost senselessly call the world. This is the world as God made it. And amid these heart-throbs of genuine nature I am beginning to live anew."

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"But you'd get tired of it if you had to milk a cow that can pop her tail like a whip," and after churning vigorously for a time, she inquired: "Did you have trouble away off yonder where so many folks live?"

"Yes, my married life ended in misery."

Lou ceased to churn and for a time stood musing. "Did you' husband tell you a lie?"

"He lived a lie, my dear."

"Lived a lie? I don't understand how anybody can do that. Didn't he love you?"

"Once, perhaps, but the love of some men is as variable as the wind, blowing in many directions."

"But how could he tell you he loved you if he didn't?"

"My dear, men tell women many things that aren't true."

"I don't like to know that." She ceased churning again and thoughtfully leaned upon the dasher. Suddenly she looked up and then came the question: "And did they put yo' husband in jail?"

"Oh, no."

"What did they do with him?"

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"His friends shrugged their shoulders, laughed and—forgave him."

"And didn't yo' friends try to kill him?"

"Oh, certainly not."

"What did they do?"

"Well, they shrugged—and didn't forgive me."

"But they had nothing to forgive," she replied, with a frown.

"In the world, my dear, that makes no difference." She was silent for a time and the girl stood motionless, looking at her. "Sometimes I have thought," she continued, "that it was not altogether his fault. With the error of tenderness and confidence I believed that my life was his, his mine; I believed that his every thought belonged to me—and perhaps I asked him too many questions, and when a woman begins to do that, she is unconsciously setting a trap for her husband."

For a moment the girl looked at her. "I don't know what you mean. But when you came here with all yo' putty dresses, I thought you must be happy."

"Little girl, there are many well-dressed troubles, and misery may gleam with diamonds. But we won't talk about it. I have battled it out and now I am surprised—and perhaps just a little disappointed," she added with a laugh, "to find that I'm not as unhappy as I was. Sometimes there is a consolation in feeling that we are utterly wretched."

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"Is there?" She meditated for a time, puzzled, and then said: "I don't believe it. You might just as well say that we have better health when we're sick."

Mrs. Mayfield looked away, and the girl stricken with remorse, hastened to her and said: "There, I have been too brash, haven't I? You must forgive me for I didn't intend to be brash."

"Brash, my dear? What do you mean by that?"

She laughed. "Why, I thought everybody know'd what brash meant. Well, it's er—too quick to say somethin' you oughtn't to say."

"Well, then, I don't think you were 'brash.'"

"Thank you." She resumed her work, and after a time left off to inquire: "May I ask you somethin'?"

"Certainly—anything."

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"Well, where you came from how long does it take anybody to—to fall—in love?"

Mrs. Mayfield blushed. "No longer than it does here, my dear. Sometimes here and everywhere love comes like death, in the twinkling of an eye. But why do you ask?"

Upon her bosom the girl pressed her hands. "Because lately there is somethin' here that tastes bitter an' sweet at the same time. You have told me somethin' about yo'se'f an' now I will tell you somethin'. I—I love Tom."

The woman arose. "Oh, but you mustn't tell it—you mustn't let him know it. He is wayward and I am afraid that he has innocently deceived you. He is hardly responsible—he says many things he doesn't mean. He—"

"And is he a liar, too?" the girl exclaimed, her eyes ablaze with anger.

"Oh, no, not that. But has he told you?"

She stood cold and defiant. "Not with words that I didn't understand, but sometimes when he looks into my eyes I feel that he is tellin' me with somethin' I do understand, and now—now I must shut my eyes." And catching up the churn she ran into the house, Mrs. Mayfield calling after her.

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"Come back, Lou, I didn't mean that. Please come back and let me explain." She hastened toward the door and Lou came running out. "Lou, I didn't mean—" But she would not stay to hear. She ran away and Mrs. Mayfield was begging her to return when Tom came hurriedly out of the house. The girl had seen him and with fluttering heart she was seeking the loneliness of the woods.

Mrs. Mayfield seized Tom by the hand. "Just a moment, Tom. Wait, sir; just a moment." He strove to pull away, but she held him back.

"Yes, as soon as I catch the fawn. Let me go, please."

"Why, have things come to such a pass as this? Wait just a moment, I tell you."

"Well, what is it?"

"Why won't you be more considerate? Why do you act this way? What are you trying to do? You must remember that Mr. Starbuck is our host, and that his daughter, while one of the most lovable of little girls—"

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"Ah, you are leaving off your romance and are coming down to level-headedness. Yes, she is lovable and as sweet as a wild strawberry, and I have fought against this thing until I am tired of it. But what are you trying to get at?"

"She is not of your world, Tom."

"Oh, world be blowed. I've got no world—never had one."

"Well, then, your set, your—"

"Damn my set, if I've got one. I wouldn't give her for all the sets in the world. You can see that—you must have seen it all along."

"Then you are in earnest?" she asked, putting her arm about him.

"In earnest? You might just as well ask a dying man if he means it."

"That's all I want to know, my boy—I want to know that you are true."

"You are all right, auntie," he said, kissing her.

"It is simply a question of love, Tom. And that should come before everything. Go and find her."

"Yes, if I have to track her with the hounds," he replied, hastening away; and she stood looking after him, with a new light in her eye. And while she was standing there, Jim came out of the house.

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"Ma'm," he said, and she turned with a start; and toward her he came with a gentle boldness, and she looked at him in surprise. "Ma'm, I have come to tell you good-bye."

Her breath came quick, and then with a smile she quieted herself as one resigned to evil news. "Why, you aren't going, are you?"

Standing a few paces from her he hung low his head. "Yes, I thought I'd better cut my stay a little short. My people need me."

As someone far away she saw him, though he was nearer now. "But don't we—don't your uncle need you?"

He was not too big, not awkward now—his hands were not in his way, and thinking not upon how to stand, stood gracefully; and the breeze that came down the creek brought cool perfume from the nestling coves where all the day and the night the wild rose nodded.

"No, ma'm; my work lies away over among the mountains." She turned to walk away from him, but looking up, was closer. "I beg yo' pardon, ma'm, but haven't you got a picture of yo'se'f you would give me?" [215]

"A picture of me? What do you want with it, Mr. Reverend?"

"My cabin is under the hill, and in the winter time it is dark there and I would like to have—have a never-failing lamp to lighten it."

"Oh," and her hands were pressed to her bosom, "You can't mean that."

"Ma'm, I don't joke about sacred things."

"Mr. Reverend—"

"If you would call me Jim one time—just once, I should have something to dream about."

She gestured and he caught her hand. "Please don't," she pleaded, slowly taking her hand away. "Please don't talk that way. You know I told you that you had revived my faith in man, after it had gasped and died. But you spoke a resurrecting word and—"

"But would my dreaming again and again that I had heard you call me Jim—would that kill it again? Honey,—I—I beg your pardon. I am used to talking to children, and I call them by pet names. I beg your pardon." [216]

She looked far away, at the blue water rippling down the hills. "If in your sight I could be as a little child."

"Ma'm, I lead a child, but you could lead me."

"To walk with you, Mr. Reverend, would be along the upward path, toward the sunrise."

"Ma'm, you make me think of Christian when he stood with clasped hands, looking up at the golden city where they sang, 'holy, holy.'"

"How could I make you think of that, Mr. Reverend?"

"Walking with me toward the sunrise. Ah, but the wild briar would tear your dress."

"But haven't the briars torn your flesh?"

He pointed upward. "Ah, and a wound in His service is balm to the soul."

"Mr. Reverend, a true woman would take most of the wounds if—"

"If she were—loved?"

"Yes," she said, and her face was pale.

Before her he drooped, sinking to the earth, and on his knees he gently took her hand. "Toward woman my heart has been dumb, but you have given it a tongue. I love you. You dazzled me and I was afraid to speak—I was afraid that I might be worshipping an idol." [217]

"Oh, not an idol. Oh, not that. No poor heart could be so humble as mine, Mr. Reverend. But strong in its love for you, it accepts your love as a benediction. Oh, if you only knew what I have suffered—"

"But I must not know and you must forget. With me you must begin your life over again."

Upon her hand he pressed a kiss, and no idle eye was there in mockery to gaze upon them and no ear save his own heard her when she said: "And together we will do His work."

"In the vineyard of usefulness. Ma'm, we will go among the stricken and nurse them."

Gentle mischief sometimes sweetens quiet joy. "Then, you haven't come to tell me good-bye," she said, and the light from her eye fell upon his face, leaving there a smile. "Well no, not now," he replied, arising. "But I had spoken for passage in the stage coach and I must go now and tell them not to save the place for me. And when I come back we will go to the mountain-top and view from afar the field of our life's work." [218]

"May I go with you?"

Now they were slowly walking toward the gap in the yard fence which Old Jasper called the gate.

"The way is short, but it lies over the creek and through the brambles," he said, and after a pause, looking fondly into her eyes he added, out of his great store-house of care and sympathy: "The thorns would thirst for your blood."

"They have drunk yours and your thorns shall be mine."

They stood at the gap in the fence. "Yes," he said, "when I have more than I can take care of."

The fact is—what shall I call you?"

"Mary," she answered.

"Mary," he repeated. "It is sweet with the memory of many a home and hallowed by the Christian's hope. And, Mary, when I come back I will bring a preacher and a paper from the law. You understand?"

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"Yes, I understand, and the understanding is beautiful and precious." She stood so near and he was so lost—so near that her lips were close to his and he kissed her and started as if the earth had shaken beneath his feet.

"And—and now, Mary, I won't have to beg your pardon when I call you by pet names."

"No, Jim."

"And we will surprise them, Mary."

"Yes, Jim."

He kissed her again and hastened down the road. She looked after him until his head sank down behind a hill, and then for a long time she stood there, leaning upon the fence, and suddenly, with her hands clasped, she cried: "Oh, miracles were wrought in the wilderness."

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE APPOINTMENT COMES.

While she was still standing there, musing over her happiness, Lije Peters, peering about, came into the yard. He cleared his throat and she looked at him, and moving further off, she sat down in a rocking-chair which she had brought from the house earlier in the day. With a show of respect Peters took off his hat.

"Howdy do, ma'm? I don't believe you an' me air very well acquainted."

"Our acquaintance hasn't ripened into friendship."

He laughed and replied: "Well, the bloom may be as putty as the fruit."

"Very good. I didn't expect it—of you."

"Didn't expect me at all, did you?"

"If I had I should not have remained here."

He cleared his throat. "I know all about bees, but I didn't know befo' that a butterfly could sting. But I'd ruther be stung than to have no attention paid to me at all." She arose to go away, but he intercepted her. "Beggin' yo' pardon, ma'm, for what I've said an' what I am about to say, will you let me talk business to you for about a minit?"

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"I know nothing about business," she replied.

"But you know somethin' about love, don't you? Putty much the same thing."

"How dare you talk to—"

"Now, don't be fretted. I've got my own way of gittin' at a p'int. I'm a thorn bush by the road-side. The sheep comes along an' I pick off some of their wool. An' towards me there comes an old sheep, with his eyes shet, a shakin' of his head. An' he'll lose all his wool. But you could turn him aside."

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Starbuck is the old sheep. You'd better help turn him aside. A word from you'll do it. I told him I wanted to borry a thousand dollars. He'll understand. You tell him to lend it to me."

"I will do nothing of the sort, you—"

"If you don't, you'll be sorry. Jest now I spoke to you about love. It wan't an accident. No. An' if he don't let me have the money, Jim the preacher may be ashamed to preach ag'in. An' he won't talk no mo' honeysuckle to you, nuther. He will disappear, an' yo' heart may grieve, but yo' jedgment will be glad."

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"You infamous scoundrel."

He bowed to her. "The scoundrel sometimes tells the truth, an' when he do it's the worst truth in the world; an' if I'm a scoundrel that's the sort of truth I'm a tellin'."

"Go away from here, you brute."

"All right, all right. I have give you yo' chance, an' now I must have it out with the old sheep."

When I see you ag'in yo' eyes may not be so bright. A hot pillow, turned over an' over in the night, when the rooster crows an' thar ain't no sleep, ain't good fur the eyes. I'm goin' now, an' you better think it over. Good-day, ma'm. I have give you yo' chance an' my conscience is clear."

He walked off up the road and she was about to go into the house when Old Jasper came along, with an axe on his shoulder. Seeing that she was disturbed, he inquired if anything were wrong. [223]

"Why, that man Peters was here a moment ago, and—"

"Oh, don't pay no attention to him. He's a joker," said the old man, and going to a bench near the fence, poured water into a tin can, went to the grind-stone, and upon it began slowly to pour a stream.

Mrs. Mayfield stood near, watching him, but her mind reverted to Peters. "But he says—"

"Never mind what he says," the old fellow broke in, grinding his axe. "We all ought to be kind to him." He examined the edge of the axe. "For I don't think he's goin' to live very long."

"Why, he looks healthy enough."

"Yes, but he's mighty deceivin'. Most of his men folks died when they was about his age. Suthin' the matter with the fam'ly that causes 'em to drop off along about then."

"Singular, isn't it?"

"Mighty curious."

"Couldn't the doctors do anything for them. Not that I care, you understand, but it's interesting as a—" [224]

"No, somehow the doctors was always called in too late. Ma'm, Jim tells me he's goin' home."

"Did he tell you just now when you must have met him in the road?"

"No. Jest now when I met him he didn't say nothin', but he looked at me and his eye was a hummin' of a tune."

"And when he comes back," she said, half musingly, "he may tell you what tune he was humming."

"Hah!"

"Wait till he comes back."

The old man, shrewder than she was aware, left off his work and at her looked a droll inquiry. She met his gaze. "Ma'm, you don't mean that with all yo' finery you—"

With a gesture she cut him short, "Don't talk that way, Mr. Starbuck. He comes to me a religion typified, and I would rather walk over a stony road with him than to ride in a chariot with any other human being."

The old man laughed and shook his head. "Oh, I know'd it as soon as I seed his eye a hummin' of a tune, an' I said to myse'f, 'at last the gate has been opened for him.'" [225]

"But please don't say a word about it to anybody, Mr. Starbuck. Let the result come as a surprise."

"I won't, but when does the—"

"Oh, I mustn't tell you that. I want to surprise you, too."

"All right. I reckon I'm the easiest man to surprise you ever come across."

She came closer to him. "Let me turn for you—Uncle Jasper."

He slapped his leg and laughed. "Uncle Jasper! Now that do sound like music, don't it? No, you better not turn this here grind-stone. You mout git splashed."

She took the crank from him and began laboriously to turn it. "Down in Maine where I came from I used to turn for the men when they ground their scythes—just for fun."

"Yes, fun for them that seed you do it, I reckon. Maine—Maine. That whar they uster burn witches?" [226]

"Oh, no, they never burned any witches in Maine."

"Why, couldn't they ketch 'em?"

"Oh, they never burned any witches in this country, Uncle Jasper. That's all a fable."

The old man pondered as if searching in his mind for a forgotten name. "But," said he, "they uster burn them fellers—fellers that done sorter this way," and he began to shake his shoulders.

"Oh, you mean Quakers."

"Yes, Quakers."

"Yes, they hanged Quakers."



"KOTCH 'EM STEALIN' HOSSES, I RECKON."

"Kotch 'em stealin' hosses, I reckon."

"No, hanged them on account of their religion."

"Whew, ruther hard on that sort of doctrine."

"Helloa, Jasper," a voice called, and looking about they saw Laz Spencer climbing upon the fence. They bade him good morning, and sitting on the top rail of the fence he took out a jews-harp and began to wipe it on his coat-sleeve.

"How air you gittin' along, Laz?" Old Jasper inquired.

"Never better."

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"Glad to hear it. Best day of a man's life is when he was never better. I'll let that nigger finish this job," he said, sticking the axe into a log; and Mrs. Mayfield, willing enough to play quits, smiled upon him and walked out to the gap and stood looking down the road.

"Have a drink of water, Laz?" Jasper inquired, pointing to a pail on the bench.

"No, laid on a rock an' got a drink outen the creek as I come along."

"Wall, this is fresh water. Wan't fotch from the spring mo' than twenty-fo' hours ago."

"Don't reckon you kin tempt me, Jasper."

The old man took up the gourd, and in attempting to drink, let the water pour through the handle and run down his sleeve. He threw the vegetable dipper back into the bucket and declared that a man might as well try to drink out of a sifter.

"Any news over yo' way, Laz?"

"Don't believe thar's anythin' wu'th dividin'."

"Nobody shot or cut?"

"Let me see. Reckon you hearn about Oscar Pryor."

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"No, not sence he borrid five dollars of me. What about him?"

"Went down in the bottoms whar folks war a leetle too civilized an' fell in a well."

"Did they git him out?"

"Oh, yes, they got him out jest in time."

"Jest in time to save his life?"

"No, jest in time to keep from sp'ilin' the water. He drownded all right."

"Ought to have drownded long ago," Jasper replied. "But I'd a leetle ruther it had tuck place befo' he got the five from me."

"But say, Jasper, come to think of it we did have some right sharp excitement over our way yistidy. 'Lowed thar war suthin' on my mind. Ricolleck the hoss the preacher swopped to Dave Somers?"

"The bay with white fetlocks?"

"Yes, thatter'n. Wall, Dave tuck him home an' put him in the stable, an' in the night he got up an' went out to rub him, havin' him on his mind, an' when he went into the stable he found the hoss dead."

"What, you don't mean it?"

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"Wall, I don't deceive a man about sich a matter. Yes, found him dead; an' he roused up his neighbors an' they all come an' looked at the hoss, but he didn't kere fur, as I tell you, he war dead. An' now the talk is that the preacher known that thar war suthin' wrong with him, an' jest wanted to git rid of him. Dave, you know, went up to the mourner's bench some time ago an' got a right lively artickle of religion; but when his hoss died he 'lowed, he did, that he didn't want no sich religion that this here preacher would fetch an' he ups an' cusses, he does, an' flings his religion away."

"Wall," said Jasper, "this here is news. What air they goin' to do about it?"

"Kain't do nothin', I reckon. Dave would whup the preacher, but the gal he is a goin' to marry told him he shouldn't. Say, Jasper, I was on my way down to Smithfield, an' I didn't know but you mout want suthin' fotch from down thar."

"No, ain't a hurtin' fur nothin' at the present. Lemme see. Yes, I want you to give a order to the stone-cutter for a tombstone for mammy's grave."

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"How big?"

"Oh, 'bout three feet by six."

"Reckon you'll want suthin' cut on the rock."

"Yes. Sot up mighty nigh all night a drawin' of it off. Got it right here." From his pocket he took a piece of paper and began to read: "'Old Black Mammy, come here nobody don't know when an' went home on the eighteenth of June, 1884. Her skin mout have been as dark as the night when thar ain't no moon an' no stars, but her soul is like the risin' of the sun when thar ain't a cloud in the sky.'" Mrs. Mayfield had turned to listen, and Jasper inquired of her: "Will that do, ma'm?"

"Yes, Uncle Jasper, it is very expressive."

"Wall, would you mind goin' over it an' fixin' it up for me?"

"I wouldn't change a word of it," she said, and he thanked her.

"Jasper," said Laz, "I didn't know you could write."

"Wall," the old man drawled, "I kain't write as putty as the county clerk, but I kin write as big. So you like it, ma'm?"

[231]

"Yes, Uncle Jasper."

"Wall," said he, looking at his work, "it's the truth, an' thar ain't nuthin' skeercer than truth on grave-yard rocks."

Margaret came out of the house. "Howdy, Laz."

"Ain't runnin' no foot races, but so as to be about."

"Folks all as well as usual?"

"Ain't hearn no loud complaint."

"Miz Mayfield," said Margaret, "Kintchin fotch me a letter from the post-office this mornin' an' as my eyes ain't right good to-day, I wish you'd come in an' read it to me."

"Yes, gladly."

"Thank you—'specially as my eyes ain't right good this mornin'. Skuze us, Laz," she said, turning to go into the house.

"Help yo'se'f," Laz replied, again wiping his jews-harp; and when the two women had gone into the house, he began to play, and the old man, sitting now upon the wood-pile, looking over his epitaph, nodded time. Suddenly the musician left off.

"Say, Peters has got his app'intment."

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The old man's arms dropped. "Air you shore?"

"I'm a tellin' you. He's got it writ out on a piece of paper that looks like white luther."

"Wall," said Jasper, getting up. "I don't know of any man that's a goin' to w'ar out his shoes a runnin'. But I'm sorry. Was in hopes that he couldn't git it. An' yit, I didn't put the strings back into my shoes."

"I understand. You don't want to die with 'em on. But I wouldn't give him any of the advantage."

"No, Laz, fur the man that gives the mad dog any of the advantage is almost shore to git bit. An' I don't want Jim to know any mo' about this comin' trouble than he kin help."

"I reckon not, Jasper. It's sorter noised about that he's a pinin' for the lady from off yander."

"Yes, caliker is got him at last. It's all right, though. The Lord has lit up brown jeans with a smile. Now, here's what I want cut on that rock," he added, handing the paper to Laz, but suddenly withdrawing it, remarked: "Remember, I ain't lendin' you this."

He gave the paper to the borrower, who, looking at it, turning it over and over, replied: "All right. Don't need it—yit." [233]

"Say, Laz, come over with me to the mill. There's suthin' I want to put away."

As they were going out through the gap, Lou came running into the yard. [234]

CHAPTER XVII.

NOT TO TELL HER A LIE.

The girl ran to the rocking-chair, sat down and covering her face with her hands, uttered what to her must have been a sad lament: "Oh, she has made a coward out of me." A moment later Tom came, walking briskly.

"Miss Lou," he said, slowly approaching, "what made you run away from me? I wanted to tell you—"

She sprang to her feet and with snapping eyes exclaimed: "What do you want to tell me? Somethin' that ain't true. Do you want to look a lie at me?"

"No, I want to tell you something that is true. Do you know why I let that scoundrel Peters insult me?"

And looking down she replied: "You told me not to ask and I haven't?"

"Was it because you didn't want to know?"

"Mebby I was almost dyin' to know, but you told me not to ask." [235]

"I didn't kill him because—"

"Not because you were afraid to try," she broke in.

"No. It was because they told me that—that you loved him."

"What!" she cried, blazing at him, "I love that—that skeer crow! Oh, how could they tell you such a thing; and if you believed it I am mad at you."

This greatly distressed him and he was quick to reply, "Oh, I didn't believe it much, you know."

"But you believed it strong enough not to—"

"Oh," he pleaded, "don't play me like a fish. Take the hook out of my mouth and don't make me flop. How did I know you didn't love him? Why, the prettiest girl I ever saw loved a—a scarecrow. And I wouldn't harm a scarecrow that you loved. I may be a scarecrow myself—I feel like one, and I know I must act like one, but I love you and I want you to be my wife."

And now she was all of a flutter. "Oh, you love me? Do you—do you?" She clasped her hands and he took them and drew her toward him. [236]

"Do I? Why, I love you till I haven't got any sense. Didn't you see me out there in the rain yesterday?" She shook her head, looking down, hiding her eyes from him. "Didn't you see me there? I didn't have sense enough to come in."

She snatched away her hands and stood looking at him. "Would you live a lie, like the man that married your aunt? Would you?"

"Oh, he was a sport."

"A 'sport!'" she gasped. "What's that?"

"A fool that thinks he's got a sure thing when he hasn't. A man who might risk his home on the turn of a card. I'm not that sort of a fellow. I never loved any girl but you, and I never can love any other."

"Oh, can it be true?" she cried, gazing at him; and neither of them saw Old Jasper, who at this moment came through the gap. He halted and stood perfectly still looking at them.

"You know it is true," said Tom. He put his hands upon his breast. "Why, when I first saw you it seemed—seemed that they were lighting candles all around in here. And Lou, you must be my wife. Don't you know it is true?" [237]

"Yes, I know," she replied, with her hand upon her heart, as if to calm it; "yes, I know, but there is somethin' a flutterin' here and I'm afraid it will fly away. But—but I love you so!"

In his arms he seized her and slowly Old Jasper came to them as they stood, lost to all earth, and about them he put his brown arms. They sprang apart and he took his daughter to his breast; and the boy stood there waiting, striving to say something.

"Mr. Starbuck, I—"

"Looks like everythin' has been said," Jasper broke in; and then upon the young fellow he cast a kindly look. "She couldn't hide that she loved you, sir."

"I am thankful for that. But everything has not been said, Mr. Starbuck—two more words are necessary, one from you and one from her mother."

"I didn't know how to try to hide that I loved him," said Lou. "I didn't want to try." She went over to Tom and he put his arm about her.

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"Do you think her mother will object, sir?"

Jasper looked away to hide the laughter that had jumped into his countenance. "Oh," said he, "I reckon she can be persuaded, and here she is."

Margaret and Mrs. Mayfield came out of the house. "Margaret," said the old man, "I reckon these young folks air goin' to git married."

Margaret held out her arms and Lou ran to her, and with her head on her mother's bosom, she declared that she never could have thought it so sweet to be ashamed.

"Suthin' called me back from the mill, and it was to see this," said the old man.

Lou turned to Tom. "You won't love me any the less because I couldn't hide that I loved you, will you?"

"Oh, there couldn't be any less, and in the whole world there isn't room for more," Tom replied; his aunt standing near, looking with misty eyes upon him.



"WELL," MARGARET EXCLAIMED, "I NEVER WAS SO SURPRISED."

"Well," Margaret exclaimed, "I never was so surprised."

Jasper ducked his head and with his hands behind him walked off. But soon he came back and replied: "No, but I reckon if it hadn't happened you'd a been a leetle mo' surprised."

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She flouted at him and said to Tom: "Goin' to git married?"

"Yes, madam, not next year, month, week—but now."

"Now!" exclaimed Jasper, with a clap of hands.

"My dear," Mrs. Mayfield said to Lou, "you need not be afraid to trust him. He won't live a lie."

Tom took the girl by the hand. "Come with me now, please. Let us go where the spirit boy used to play with you."

"Yes. And now I know that all the time it was you—you lived under the rock. Come on. We will go up among the hills an' make like we are lost."

And as they were walking away, Jasper said to his wife: "Margaret, that reminds me of a Sunday, a long time ago."

"Yes, Jasper;" and then she said to Mrs. Mayfield: "But law me, it don't take 'em long to fall in love an' git married these days."

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"No," Jasper replied, "not with the help of a right peart woman."

"Now, Jasper," she said, "you air shorely enough to provoke a saint, bein' a man. But, Miz Mayfield, this has all come about so sudden that—"

Jasper snorted and she scowled at him. "Don't pay no attention to him, Miz Mayfield. Yes, so sudden that I don't hardly know what to say. But Lou is a good child an' thar ain't but one pity about her, an' that is she hain't got much l'armin', though she did go to school fur two year over at Dry Fork."

"She will learn, Mrs. Starbuck, and he will be proud of her."

"I'm so glad to hear you say that, Miz Mayfield. An' you ain't disapp'inted at yo' nephew's choice?"

"It was for him and her to choose, Mrs. Starbuck, and all the rest of the world should be silent."

"But," Margaret persisted, "his father, the Jedge. What about him?"

"When he knows that all her people have been brave soldiers, he will call her his daughter."

"So glad," said Margaret, and then Jasper broke in.

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"But what's the use of canvassin' now that all the returns air in. We all seed how the thing was a driftin' an' thar wan't no way to stop it even if we wanted to. That young feller is a man. I am proud of him, an' as Miz Mayfield says, he'll be proud of her."

Still Margaret was loth to leave off. "I'm so glad to know that you ain't disapp'inted."

"No one could be disappointed in her, Mrs. Starbuck. She has a strong character."

"So glad to have sich a estimate from one that knows the world."

"It is knowing something of the world that causes me to place so high a value upon her."

"Thar," said Jasper, "thank her ag'in an' then we'll begin at suthin' else."

Margaret begged of Mrs. Mayfield that she would pay no attention to Jasper, who was always so full of his pranks, and then to the old man she whispered: "Old Miz Barker was a passin' this mornin' an' she 'lows that the app'intment has come. Have you fixed everythin' at the mill?"

"No. Laz is there a waitin' for me now."

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"Well, I'll go over with you."

They went away, looking back and begging to be "excused," and Mrs. Mayfield stood looking down the road. After a time she went over by the fence, sat down on a stump and began to pluck flowers from the vines that ran along the rails. Into the yard Kintchin came, singing; but when he discovered Mrs. Mayfield he left off his half-dancing walk, began to limp, and approaching her he said: "Ol' steer dun kicked me on de hip."

"I am sorry, Kintchin."

"Yas'm. But you ain't ha'f ez sorry ez I is. Never wuz kicked by er steer, wuz you?"

"No, that's an experience that hasn't fallen to me."

"Wall, w'en it do fall you ain't gwine furgit it. Jest thought I'd drap in an' rest er while," he continued, going over and seating himself on the wood pile. "Dat dear ole mammy lef' me twenty dollars."

"Kind old soul, wasn't she?"

"Yas'm. An' dar ain't many folks dat lef' me twenty dollars w'en da died. I's had er good many wives fust an' last, but I ain't neber married no sich er 'oman ez dat."

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"Then you have been married several times, have you, Kintchin?"

"Yas'm. Dar wuz my fust wife an' my fust step-wife, an'—"

"Your first step-wife?"

"Yas'm—stepped inter de place o' my fust wife. My fust wife wuz Sue, an' she wuz er good 'oman, I tell you. But she liked music too well. Dar come up yere one dem yaller barbers, an' he pick er thing at her dat looked sorter like er banjo, an' she cl'ared out wid him."

"That was sad."

"Yas'm. An' den dar wuz Tildy. She wuz monst'us fine. Jest about de color o' er new saddle. I lubbed dat lady."

"What became of her?"

"Who, Tildy? Wall, er white lady come up yere an' she had er silk shawl an' da fooled roun' till da 'cuzed Tildy o' stealin' it an' da sont her ter de pennytenchy."

"What, on an accusation?"

"Wall, da keep er pesterin' roun' till da proved it on her. Yas'm." He got up and slowly limped over toward her. "An' ain't you got fifty cents you could give me fur all dis inflamation? I needs it might'ly."

"Why, didn't you just tell me that mammy left you twenty dollars?"

"Ur—yes'm—in her will. But I got ter go an' sign de will an' dat'll cost me fifty cents."

"That's a peculiar sort of law."

"Yas'm. I didn't like dat law myse'f an' I told 'em ter 'peal it, but da wouldn't."

"Well," she said, arising and starting toward the house, "as you are so honest and industrious, I'll get it for you."

He looked after her and mused. "No matter whar er 'oman is when you ax her fur money, she got ter go some whar else ter git it. Huh, but deze innercent ladies is de sort dat suits me. I doan like deze ladies dat doan blebe nuthin' you say."

Mrs. Mayfield came out of the house. "Here it is," she said, giving him a piece of silver.

"Thankee, ma'm. I's gwine pray fur you de fust chance I gits, an' it won't be long now dat my rush is sorter ober fo' I does git er chance. But ef you'll jest gib me er quarter mo' I'll leave off ever'thin' an' pray fur you right now."

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"No, that's enough."

"Doan blebe much in pra'r, does you? Wall, I hatter make dis do."

Mrs. Mayfield stood at the gap, gazing down the road, and the old negro remarked to himself: "Dat's de way er lady looks w'en she's expectin' er man. Things is er gwine on roun' dis place. Dar ain't been all dis light steppin' fur nuthin'. Wush I could go somewhar an' pick me up er chunk o' er wife. It's er gittin' erbout time fur me ter marry ag'in."

Mrs. Mayfield walked down the road, and Kintchin with an improvised tune took up the axe which Jasper had stuck into the log. But just as he was about to begin the work of grinding it, Mose Blake, shoving a wheelbarrow, came into the yard.

"Whar's S—S—S—S—Star—"

"Talkin' ter me?"

"Ye—y—y—y—yes."

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"Den why don't you?"

"I a—a—a—am."

"You ain't said so."

"Shut yo' b—b—b—black mouth."

"Huh, I could do dat an' den talk better den you does."

"I can b—b—b—beat you t—t—t—talkin'."

"Yas, you kin beat any pusson I eber seed."

"Don't y—y—y—you furgit you a—a—a—ain't nuthin' but a n—n—n—n—nigger."



**"GO ON ERWAY AN' LET ME TALK TER MYSE'F. YOU
KAIN'T TALK."**

"Huh, da kin tell dat by lookin' at me; but atter lookin' at you da kain't tell whut you is. Why, you ain't nuthin'. Go on erway an' let me talk ter myse'f. You kain't talk."

"Talk better t—t—t—than you k—k—kin. I could p—p—preach."

"Yes, ter deaf folks. Say, you puts me in mind o' er chicken with de gapes."

"You air a f—f—f—f—"

"You needn't try ter tell me. I knows it."

"That's a—a—a—about all you d—d—d—do know. Mother sent me atter the wash k—k—k—kettle." [247]

"She don't need it much den. Go on erway."

"I'm goin' t—t—t—to git a g—g—gun an' come atter you."

"If you kain't shoot it off no better'n you does yo' mouf you kain't hurt me much."

From a corner of the fence Mose took up a wash-kettle and put it upon the wheelbarrow. "You'll b—b—b—be dead b—b—before night. Be easier t—t—to take what I come atter than to try t—t—to tell 'em w—w—what I want." As he turned his wheelbarrow about he saw Lije Peters standing in the gap. "L—l—l—look out, I'll r—r—run over you," and he lunged forward with his load, just missing Peters, who jumping to one side cried out:

"Yes, you stuttering pig, if you can't wheel no strai'ter than you can talk."

When Mose was gone Peters inquired of Kintchin: "Whar's Starbuck?"

"He wuz out yander jest now an' he'll come ez soon as he know you yere. Whut I tell you?" he added as Jasper made his sudden appearance.

"Here, nigger," said Peters, "go on away; I want to talk to Starbuck." [248]

Jasper told the negro to go and then he stood looking at Peters.

"I didn't expect to see you here ag'in after what passed the other day. Didn't I tell you—"

Peters held up his hand. "Ricolleck I ain't in yo' house. You told me not to darken yo' door ag'in, and I hain't. Don't overlook that fact. And I wouldn't be here, but my app'intment has come."

"Wall."

"An' I go on duty day atter to-morrer. Do you know what that means?"

"I told you not long ago what it mout mean."

"But it mout not turn out that way."

"Shot fo' an' stobbed three," muttered the old man, his mind reverting to the story paper.

"Starbuck, is that young feller Elliott any kin to Jedge Elliott in Nashville?"

"That's for you to fin' out."

"Wall, I didn't know, an' I come mighty nigh havin' trouble with him not long ago."

"Yes, an' I reckon he come mighty nigh a robbin' me of a pleasure—when the time comes."

"It was about Lou." [249]

"Miss Lou, you viper."

"Oh, that's all right. Starbuck, you ricolleck I told you I had that old-fashioned, single-barrel cap-an'-ball pistol. Here it is." He drew forth an old pistol.

"Peters, I'd advise you to come after me with a mo' improved weepin'."

"Oh, I'll do that an' with help from off yander, when the time comes. I ain't atter you yit. I jest wanted to give you one mo' chance. An' when I come shore enough, I'll fetch improved weepins. I ain't quite in my official capacity now."

"Yo' app'intment has teached you big words."

"Yes," said Peters, tapping the barrel of the pistol, "as big as the slug this thing is loaded with. My daddy told me that this here slug went through his brother's heart an' was buried in a tree. It was dug out an' now it's here—in this pistol ag'in. Jest fetched it along to remind you of the past."

"Oh, my ricollection is good, Peters. But I don't ricolleck how you come by that old pistol. None of yo' folks ever tuck it away from any of mine. I reckon some of yo' folks stold it outen the cou't house." [250]

"That's all right, Starbuck. No matter how it come, it is here. But I don't want no trouble with you, an' won't have none if you do the right an' easy thing. Raise that thousand dollars fur me. You've got it hid somewhar."

"If I had a million I wouldn't give you a cent."

"Mout change yo' tune befo' this thing is over with."

"Yes," said Jasper, "I mout whistle a dead march."

"Not over me," Peters replied.

"Yes, over you."

"You're a liar."

Starbuck slapped him in the face, and springing back, Lije cocked the pistol and raised it to shoot.

"Hold on a minute—just one minute," said Starbuck, and with the pistol leveled, Peters stood looking at him.

"Yes, I'll give you one minute, Starbuck, an' that is all. If you move I'll kill you." [251]

"If I do move, you scoundrel, it will be to kill you. Why, you po' fool—"

"Starbuck, any fool can be game—I thought I know'd all about you, but I never know'd befo' that you was so cool."

"Cool," Jasper repeated, "I ain't half as cool as you air keerless. I could kill you with that axe an' you couldn't help yo'se'f. That pistol won't shoot. Look! When you cocked it the cap fell off." [252]

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOWN THE ROAD.

With his old pistol useless in his hand the ruffian walked away, shaking his head and muttering that a time was coming soon. "And with help from off yander," Jasper heard him shout from the road. "I have cut down the tree whar that bullet lodged and burnt it with a slow fire, and the fire that's to burn another tree, a scrub oak, may be slow but it is a comin'. Do you hear me over thar?"

"A man has to be mighty deaf not to hear a wolf howl," Jasper replied, and took his way back to the mill where Laz and Margaret were waiting for him.

"Was it Peters you saw goin' into the yard?" Margaret inquired, and the old fellow answered: "Looked mighty like him—fur a time I thought it was, but my eyes ain't as good as they was."

In the meantime Jim was fighting his way through the briars and over the rough ground of the short cut from the little county town. And when he reached the road he saw Mrs. Mayfield coming to meet him. "The preacher wasn't at home," he said, as he came near to her, "but I left word for him and he will be here soon. Do the folks know anything about it yet?" [253]

"I told your uncle, but he seemed already to know." She gave a tender account of the scene in the yard, of Tom and Lou, and he said that like his uncle he had already known. "Fate got out of the wagon when you drove up to the gate, ma'm—honey," he said; "and I am thankful to the Lord that in no wise was it cruel on-sidedness. I couldn't tell that Tom loved Lou, but I knew she loved him."

"There is no need now of walking so fast," she playfully remarked, and he checked his haste. "No, for I am not walking toward you, but with you. I left time back yonder where I met you and after this there can't be any time, just a rising and a setting of the sun with time in a sweet dream between."

"Jim, I ought to tell you something about my married life; and when I have told you the truth, you may not hold me so blameless." [254]

"Mary, I don't date you back beyond the time when you drove up to the gate. I don't want to know anything about your past. It didn't include me."

"Your faith is simple and beautiful now, Jim, but may there not come a time when it will begin to inquire—when perhaps I might fret you? Weariness is a close critic, Jim."

"You may teach me many things, Mary, but not to find fault. Look back to your home in the town and think of what you are giving up for me—for a life of toil among the hills."

She took hold of his arm and drew him close to her. "I am giving up cold glitter for warm glow."

They turned aside to sit in the cool shade at the water-fall, and there they found Tom and Lou,

dreaming with their heads together. High above there had been a heavy rain and the falls were pouring with such a roar that there was no talk; but the four of them sat there on a great rock, gazing at the rainbow hanging above the yellowish water. But when they withdrew to a cove where it was quiet, Tom told Jim that he had put a boy on a horse and sent him after a marriage license.

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"When we come to think," said Mrs. Mayfield, "it is all very hasty. It might look better to wait."

"That's what I wanted to say," Lou replied. "I always thought that folks had to make up some new clothes when they were married—or befo'. But here I am with hardly any clothes at all."

"You can make clothes afterward just as well as before," said Tom. "I feel that as long as I'm not married I belong to the Governor—I mean my father," he explained to Lou; "but as soon as I am married I'll be my own—well, I might say my own boss." Archly Lou looked at him and he added: "Unless you are to be my boss. And you can, I tell you that."

"I have devised a charming plan," said Mrs. Mayfield. "We'll all be married up there on the top of the hill among the vines. Won't that be romantic? No church, no hot house flowers, but blossoms still alive, with humming birds sipping their honey. We'll make of it a marriage May day, to be lived over in after years; and we'll have a picture painted of the scene, nature's altar; and in the twilight of many a summer's day we'll muse over it, growing old."

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"Auntie, I accept your romance now," Tom replied. "You have infected us all and make us almost unnatural with happiness."

"But now we'd better go to the house," Jim suggested. "It is about time for the preacher to come and we don't want to keep him waiting. Ma'm, I—"

"Are you calling me ma'm, again?"

"It was to remind myself of a time when I wasn't so happy and to make myself doubly happy now by the reminder."

Coupling off and hand in hand they walked toward the house, ceremonious beyond naturalness in acting out the spirit summoned by a woman steeped in the essences of high-flown books. "The trumpet," she said when they heard Margaret's dinner horn, and not even Tom, who could have recalled many a rakish bout of a Saturday night and many an unholy laugh in church of a Sunday, dared to smile at her. "You've caught me all right, auntie, and I'm strutting like a bantam cock in the spring of the year."

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"But don't destroy it all by saying so," she replied, pressing close to Jim and peering round into his face.

Jasper and Margaret were waiting for them, at the table; and again Margaret was never so surprised as when she heard that they were at that moment expecting the arrival of the preacher. She did not quite approve of the hill-top marriage plan. Better would it have suited her purpose to parade the double wedding at Dry Fork, to shine in the presence of neighbors. But Jasper, expecting trouble, was in favor of the speediest method. "Miz Mayfield is the manager of the whole affair," said he. "Ma'm, have some of these here snap beans, b'iled with as brown a piece of bacon as you ever seed. What, Margaret, ain't a cryin'?"

"Of course a man would never cry on an occasion of this here sort," she whimpered. "You don't stop to think that our daughter is a goin' to leave us—it don't seem to make no diffunce to you."

"Wall, not as much diffunce as if she had loved him an' he hadn't loved her. Jim, I reckon here's about as fine a piece of co'n bread as you ever smacked yo' mouth on, white meal ground slow."

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Margaret's keen ears heard a halloa at the gate. "Thar's the preacher," she said. "An' goodness me, we ain't got a bite fitten for a preacher to eat." Jasper got up to meet the minister. "Fetch him in anyhow, Jasper. 'Pears like we ain't never fixed for nuthin'."

Jasper went out and into the dining-room conducted the horse-trading preacher. He shook hands with everyone, sat down, and, hungry from his ride, began to help himself. "Just married a couple over in the Spice Bush neighborhood," said he, receiving from Jasper a slab of the brown bacon. "Yes, the widow Doxey and old John Towson. This is good meat, brother Starbuck—smoked with hickory wood, I reckon."

"Yes, hick'ry an' sass'frass. I reckon you pick up a good many weddin's along about this time of the year."

"Well, a pretty fair sprinkling."

"So Miz Doxey finally cotch old John," said Jasper and his wife declared she wouldn't make light of it. "Light of it? She weighs two forty if she weighs a ounce. Oh, I knowd John would git her as soon as I seed him a puttin' them green blinds on his house. Ma'm, nothin' round here ketches a widow woman like green blinds. Swoppin' any hosses lately, Brother Fetterson?"

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"Traded off a nag yesterday. Didn't know but I might strike a swop with you to-day."

"Why," Margaret spoke up, knowing that in the combat of a horse trade, time would sail like a summer's cloud over the heads of the two men, "you haven't come to trade stock, but to marry these folks."

"Oh, that won't take long," Brother Fetterson replied. "Have you got that sorrel yet, Brother Starbuck?"

"She's out thar in the lot now, as slick as a mole."

"This is to be a double wedding," said Mrs. Mayfield, "and on the hill-top, among the vines."

"A right pretty idea, Miss. Now this hoss I'm a riding, Brother Starbuck, is a single footer, in fine condition and can run a quarter with the best of them." [260]

"I hearn that you swopped tuther day with Dave Somer's an' the hoss died durin' of the night," said Jasper. "Is that so?"

"Brother Starbuck," the preacher replied, looking grave, "life is just as uncertain among hosses as among men. We know not the day nor the hour when the healthiest hoss may be called, as it were; and I could not of course foresee the death of the hoss I swopped to Dave. I regretted his—I might say demise, but it was no fault of mine."

Mrs. Mayfield, feeling that the preacher was not attaching enough importance to the coming marriages, ventured to remark that her brother, who was a United States Judge at Nashville, had ever been regarded as a keen appraiser of a horse. But the fact that she was the sister of so distinguished a man did not at all startle the preacher. "Glad to know it, Miss. I'll go out and look at your hoss, Jasper."

"After the wedding," Margaret suggested. [261]

"And then you can swop hosses all day," said Jim.

"A good idea no doubt, Brother Jim Starbuck. And how are the people over in your highland district?"

"In need of the gospel as they are here," Jim replied.

"Yes, here and everywhere, Brother Jim Starbuck. Your breed of hosses up there are very sure-footed. I had one that could climb a hill-side like a goat. Many professions resultant from the revivals last fall, Brother Jim Starbuck?"

"Yes, and a number of additions to the church."

"That is indeed encouraging. I preached just beyond there one conference year, and aside from the death of a very valuable hoss, I was quite successful. Do you know a good brother named Adsit, big double log house on the left bank of the creek?"

"Yes, I am acquainted with him."

"A fair minded man, is he, Brother Jim. Let me have a colt very reasonable once."

"Shall we now go to the hill-top," Jim suggested.

"Yes, Brother Jim. But I should think that the ceremony could as well be performed here in the house." [262]

"That was not our plan," said Mrs. Mayfield. "We are going to be married among the vines, and if such a temple is distasteful to you, sir—"

"Oh, not at all, Miss, I assure you."

"And we are going dressed just as we are," she continued.

"Oh, the dressing, Miss, makes no difference to me. Well, if everything's ready we might as well go on."

Among the vines they stood. In the leaves above them the birds were twittering. The sweet air came cool from up the creek. In the short grass, stirred by a breeze, a harebell seemed tinily ringing. And down the hill they went, brides and bridegrooms, all wound about with a rope of white clover. [263]

CHAPTER XIX.

OLD FOLKS LEFT ALONE.

Early the next morning a wagon drew up at the gate. It was to convey the bridal party to a little village high up among the mountains. Margaret was tearful and Jasper was sad, hiding his countenance as he fussed with the harness. Tom insisted that it was no time for sorrow. "We'll be back in a week's time," said he. "And even after I take her down to town I'll bring her back here every month." But Margaret continued to sorrow. "I don't never expect to see you ag'in," she said and Lou laughed with tears in her eyes. "Why, it's nothin' to be away from home a week, mother. And just think how happy I am." But there were more tears; and Jasper stormed at a dog and shook the wagon wheel to satisfy himself that it was sound. The driver, as lank a lout as ever

slept in a stable, sat upon a board seat, stuffing his greedy mouth with ginger cake. He took up the lines and clucked to the horses, but it was discovered that something more remained to be said and he was commanded to wait.

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"Jest hold on a minit till I git sorter uster the idee," said Margaret. "I want to say somethin' an' I don't know what."

Old Jasper put his arm about her. "It's in the way of nature, my dear," he said and upon his shoulder she wept, the wagon waiting, the driver munching; and on the fence and in the trees the birds that had been wedding guests were singing, having come down from the vine-knob to carrol them a good-bye. At last there was nothing more to be said and the driver popped his hickory bark whip and the wagon rolled away. Jasper went into the house and sat down, deep in thought, but for a long time Margaret stood at the gate, and the old man saw her sobbing in her apron. She came into the room when no longer could she hear the wagon rattling over the stones, high up the hill, and he said to her: "In the way of nature, my dear, and you mustn't grieve. I count her a very lucky girl. That young feller will make her a good livin' and—"

"Well," Margaret broke in, "she deserves it. You talk as if he wan't lucky too. But I jest want to tell you he is and you needn't say he ain't. You ought to be ashamed of yo'se'f to belittle yo' own daughter thatter way. Well, I never. Never did I expect to see the day when you'd say yo' child wan't worthy of a young man, even if he is a jedge's son."

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"Air you about through?"

"Oh, don't talk to me. I'm out of all patience with you. Great goodness alive, is it all to his credit that he is a jedge's son? You talk like if she hadn't found him nobody else would a had her. And thar ain't a puttier girl in all this here section, although she hain't got as many clothes as she ought to have, a goin' a way off on a bridal tower."

"Gittin' putty nigh the eend."

"Laws a massy. Time was when I never dreamed that you'd slander yo' own kith an' kin. An' come right from yo' daughter's weddin' an' swopped hosses with a preacher. It was a sin and a shame. I never was so mortified in my life. And then at supper he prayed. Just think of it. I'll bet anything he cheated you."

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"Wall let us believe not. The next mornin' after standin' all night, the hoss I let him have will show his true worth. He's got a spavin, as you know, an' when he leads him out of the stable a j'int in his right leg'll pop like a pipe stem broke."

"Now Jasper Starbuck, is it possible that you put off that spavined hoss on Brother Fetterson? You ought to be ashamed of yo'se'f. Ain't you got no respect at all for the gospel?"

"Wall, not so powerful much respect for a gospel that always wants to ride a fine hoss at another's expense. Jest thought I'd l'arn him a lesson. Come out an' let's look at my new hoss."

They went out to the stable, and when Jasper attempted to lead forth the horse, the animal cringed and held back, and in his eye there was an expression of pain, for in truth he was so badly spavined that he had to hobble on three legs.

"Ah, hah, that's what you git for tryin' to cheat the gospel," said Margaret. "And you ought to be ashamed of yo'se'f, an' he a preacher at that—preached the loveliest funeral sermon over old Aunt Polly Myer I ever heard in my life."

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For a time old Jasper was silent. His wife asked him what he intended to do. "Wall," said he, "believe I'll knock this critter in the head, skin him, take a hindquarter over to that preacher's house and make him eat it raw."

"You'll do nothin' of the sort, an' yo' daughter jest married, too. I'm sorry, Jasper, that I said what I did a while ago. Yes, Lou is lucky—almost as lucky, Jasper, as I was when you asked me to be yo' wife."

"I'd ruther you'd scold me than to talk thatter way, Margaret. You know I can't stand it, an' please don't. Helloa, who's this a comin'?"

It was the post-master, who, ripping open many a man's letter could read it off just like print. He shook hands with Jasper and Margaret and said that he had several letters for the young fellow and the good-looking woman from away off. When Jasper gave him an account of the wedding and told him that the brides and the bridegrooms were gone, he said: "Wall, we jest as wall open the letters an' see if we kin find out what's in 'em."

Margaret fluttered at him. "You'll do nothin' of the sort. Jest leave 'em with me and I'll see that they air give over all right."

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"Wall, ma'm, no harm did," he said handing her the letters; and then to Jasper he said: "Brother Fetterson come a ridin' by my house late yistidy an' wanted to swop hosses with me. Had a five year old that I raised myse'f, a little under size but as tough as dried beef; so I swopped for a mighty likely nag."

"Have you looked at yo' swop to-day?"

"Yes, seed him a standin' out in the lot."

"Didn't see him walk, I reckon."

"No, was a tradin' lickin' for hounds at the time an' didn't stir him up; an' when I come away jest now he was off in the pasture somewhar. Didn't know but you mout want him."

"Ah, hah, an' in the hope that I do I reckon you've got a nigger astraddle of him stirrin' the spavin outen his j'int, hain't you?"

"Wall, reckon I better bid you good day," said the post-master, turning to go, and as he did old Jasper's laughter and Margaret's contempt followed him. "Got cheated hisse'f an' now he wants to come over an' cheat you," she said.

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"Yes," the old man replied, "but tain't no mo' than natral. I don't hold it much ag'in a man when he tries to cheat me. It's the old Adam a b'ilin' up in him."

"It didn't uster be thatter way in the good old times," she remarked, and scratching his head he replied: "Yes, it did, or worse. Away back they'd knock you on the head or stick a knife in you an' take what you had. Now they cheat you without knockin' you down, an' that is a improvement."

He was becoming too philosophical to suit Margaret, and she told him that he did not seem to realize the loss of his daughter. "Don't I? Wall, jest say the word an' I'll set down on a stump an' cry."

"Yes, but you wouldn't cry if it was me that was gone. Oh, anybody's goin' would put you out mo' than mine, an' you was jest achin' for a chance to show me."

"Then if you have give me the chance I must thank you for bein' so accommodatin'. But I wish you wouldn't worry me now, Margaret. In one respeck the goin' away of the folks was a blessin' fur the trouble that has been a threatenin' for some time is shorely a comin' Don't nag me."

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"Do I bother you, Jasper, an' trouble a comin' too? Well, I won't. I wonder if I ain't as mean as I can be."

"No, you're all right. An' it must be me that's as mean as a old dog a layin' in the corner of the fence with a bone. If I know'd how I'd go an' meet that trouble. Thar ain't nuthin' much wuss then to set down an' wait fur it to come sore-footed along the road, a lookin' fur you."

"But you won't do nuthun' outen the way, will you Jasper?"

"Nuthin'. I've shown all along that I was tryin' to keep out of a diffikilty. Wall, I'll walk on around the place—by myse'f, Margaret, fur I want to think."

He went slowly away, changing his course from time to time as he looked back and saw that she was watching him; and when she went into the house he walked briskly toward a tree down beneath a hill, and here he sat down, with his hat off. At his feet was a grave, trimmed with muscle shells brought from the creek, and shading the stone at the head was a rose-bush, in bloom.

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CHAPTER XX.

MET IT IN THE ROAD.

Long he sat there meditating over something precious as one does expecting trouble; and arising he walked rapidly to the gulch leading to his still house. But, reaching there, no moss-covered logs greeted his eye. There was a smoldering fire, with diminutive whirlpools of white ashes. He wiped his brow and upon a stone he sat down. The law had come with its torch, and for a long time his face was hard and grim. An hour must have passed, and then with an air of gentleness as one resigned to punishment, he went to a rock, the rock under which the spirit boy had dwelt, and reaching beneath it drew forth a Winchester rifle.

"I'll pump out these here brass temptations," he said, throwing out the cartridges and slowly, one by one, dropped them into the rivulet. Then, breaking the gun across the rock, he slowly started toward home.

Reaching the road, he stood looking up and down the rugged highway over which Old Jackson's carriage had bumped and rattled, over which long before the days of the railroad dry-goods and hardware had been transported from Philadelphia to Nashville. He did not stand there long alone. From the bushes came a loud command—"Throw up your hands"—and the government's guns were pointed at his breast. He obeyed and three men came forward to search him, and just then came the roar of Peters. "Why didn't you shoot the scoundrel!" Past the men he rushed with a knife, and Old Jasper, leaping in the air, struck him in the face with his iron fist and he lay senseless and bleeding on the ground.

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One of the deputies threw up his gun to shoot, but the officer in command seized the weapon and wrested it from his hands.

"You wolf, would you shoot a brave old man? He respects the law more than you—and a hundred per cent. more than this villain. I wish he had broken his neck. Here, Nick," he added,

speaking to his other attendant, "go up the hill to where Pagett has the wagon, bring it here and take this half-dead hulk to his home. Then drive over to Starbuck's, and I will be there with the prisoner. You go with me," he continued, speaking to the deputy whom he had disarmed. "Here, take your gun and remember that Uncle Sam isn't a murderer. Bring the hand-cuffs."

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Old Starbuck's face broke into many a seam and then grew tight. "Mister," he pleaded, "as an old soldier let me beg of you not to put them criminal things on me. If you must, wait till we drive away from the house. My wife mustn't see them. Let me tell you suthin'. Down the hill yander under a tree there's a grave an' in it the most precious dust human flesh ever withered into. Drag me there an' I will put my hand on that grave an' sw'ar that I won't attempt to git away."

"Nick," said the commandant, "take the hand-cuffs along and throw them under the wagon seat. We won't need them."

"I thank you, sir," replied Jasper. "Now we will go to the house, an' what I say to that po' woman down there you must stand to. This way, please."

Margaret was hanging out clothes when into the yard the two officers came, Jasper walking between them. Upon the ground she dropped a sheet and came running toward them.

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"There now, dear," said Jasper, "don't be skeered. These men only want me to go down to Nashville with them to give testimony at a investigation. I ain't a prisoner—don't you see I ain't got no hand-cuffs on? Gentlemen, come in an' we'll have a bite to eat ag'in the wagon comes. Don't put yo'se'f to no trouble, Margaret. 'Most anythin' will do."

"Oh," she began to moan, wringing her hands, "they air goin' to hang you. It's all Lije Peters' work, an' you ought to have killed him, for the Lord knows he's give you plenty cause. Where is the scoundrel?"

"Who, Lije? Why, he went over home; don't think he's a goin' down with us—we don't need him. Now, jest set us out some of them cold snap beans an' a hunk of co'n bread, fur the wagon will be here putty soon."

"Jasper," she said, blocking the way into the house, "your air deceivin' of me."

He laughed and replied: "But even that wouldn't be half as bad as for folks to go away an' tell it about that you wouldn't give a couple of strangers nuthin' to eat."

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"That's true," she admitted, leading the way into the house. "I'll fry a couple of chickens."

"Madam," said the commanding officer, "we are much obliged, but we'll not have time."

"Yes, you will," she insisted. "I'm not goin' to have you go down there among all them gover'ment folks a tellin' that I didn't know how to treat anybody in my house. You air jest achin' fur that opportunity, but I'll see that you don't git it. Now you set down here an' wait."

"You may ripresent the law," said Jasper to the officers, "but she stands for suthin' that's higher than all law—woman, an' I reckon you'll have to knock under."

And they did, waiting patiently for Margaret as she bestirred herself in the kitchen; and when they went in and viewed the neatness of the meal, they thanked her and fell to with the appetite of soldiers. They had eaten and were thanking her when they heard the wagon rumbling down the hill. Margaret began to whimper, but the old man laughed at her; and when the two men respectfully turned away to give the prisoner and his wife a word together, he said to her:

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"For a long time, as you know, this thing has been a hangin' over me, like a cloud ready to shoot out its lightenin', an' I am thankful that it's about over with. You stay here an' be brave, an' I'll be back all right. Send word by somebody to Old Miz Barker, an' she'll be tickled to come an' stay with you an' talk till she makes you feel that they air goin' to hang me."

"If you *was* a goin' to be hung, Jasper, you'd fret me with it. I don't believe there's harm in these here men. They didn't hand-cuff you, that's a fact. An' jest see how they eat! I ain't afeared of no man that eats well at my table. So, now you go on an' do the best you kin, an' don't worry about me."

He put his arms about her and kissed her on the forehead, and even when it was announced that the wagon was waiting, she did not waver, but bravely stood to her determination.

The wagon drove off and Margaret lingered in the door, gazing; but Jasper did not look back, and so, over the hill he passed from her sight, as all things else had passed, for in the blindness of her tears it was as if dark night had fallen. She turned about and in her ears his words rang, and again strong-set to be brave, the misty night was winked away. Hearing the hum of the old negro's tuneful spirit, she called him and he came to the door.

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"Kintchin, they have taken Jasper."

"Yas'm, an' da've tuck Lije Peters, too."

"Why, Jasper said he wasn't goin'."

"He ain't—he's gone. I was a hidin' in de bushes an' I seed Peters wid his knife, an' I seed er man way up an' den er man way down—wid blood spurtin' up. An' da tuck him home in er wagin; an' de folks dat wan't right well 'quainted wid him befo' ain't gwine know him now, fur he ain't

got no mo' count'nence den er stewed punkin. I neber seed sich er lick in my life."

"Oh, I'm glad," she cried, clapping her hands.

"Yas'm, an' I wallered dar like er hot hog in wet leaves, tickled mighty nigh ter death; an' den I run off caze da mout want me ter go ez er witness—an' mo'n dat, da might want ter sen' me ter de pennytenchy caze I grind de co'n."

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The last word alarmed her. "Do you think they will send him there? Do you?"

"Oh, no'm, I doan think dat. He'll git out all right caze he's er white man while I's er nigger, an' nuthin' tickel de white folks mo' den ter send er nigger ter de pen."

"Well, I want you to go over an' tell Old Miz Barker to come an' stay with me; an' you better put Laz or Mose on a hoss an' let him go as near as he kin an' lissun for news."

"Oh, dem two boys gwine git all de news da wants, ma'm. Er man dat wuz over ter de Peter's house say da gwine take 'em erlong as witnesses, an' dat's whut skeered me. I's mighty glad ter see you ain't takin' on no wus den you is. I wuz erfeared dat you gwine ter holler like er devil-skeered lady at er camp-meetin'."

"Kintchin, I have put my faith in the Lord."

"Yas'm, dat's whut I done—'bout ha'f my faif in de Lord an' tuther ha'f in my laigs. An' now I gwine pitch in ter work like puttin' out wild fire. Yas'm, I is. Dat's de way I gwine 'spress my sympathy."

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CHAPTER XXI.

INTO THE WORLD BEYOND THE HILLS.

"You are a wise man," said the commanding officer as the wagon toiled along. "You don't begin to plead your innocence."

"Maybe I haven't any. What is your name?"

"Foster."

"It may come my way to do you a favor, Mr. Foster. You have been kind to me. But why do we turn up here?"

"To pick up one Laz Spencer, witness."

"One Laz Spencer," mused the old man. "It would be a tug of nature to have two. But I'm sorry you are goin' to take him. Let him go and I'll agree to deliver the testimony expected of him."

"No, that can't be. We have our orders."

Out by the fence and with laborious stroke Laz was cutting wood. Leaving off his work as the wagon drew near he gazed with hand-shaded eye, and recognizing Jasper, threw down his axe and began to scramble over the fence, but one of the men fired a shot to scare him and he dropped back, took off his hat, scratched his head and remarked: "Sorter 'pears like you got me. Helloa, Jasper. Didn't know folks war a comin' around a takin' you a ridin'."

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"Get up into the wagon," Foster commanded.

"Yes, that's what I 'lowed I'd do. But let me go into the house an' put on some more duds if you air goin' to take me down into society."

"Go with him, Nick," said Foster, and the deputy leaped to the ground.

Old Mrs. Spencer came to the door and with her tangish tongue larrapped the men, called them cowards, dogs; and appealing to Jasper asked why he didn't kill them as his forefathers would have done. She swore that all spirit had gone out of the country.

"I've moulded bullets to kill better men than you," she exclaimed. "Not one of you is worth an ounce of lead; an' you tell them government fellers down there that thinks themselves so smart that if they tetch a hair on my boy's head, I'll come down there and murder the whole kit an' b'ilin' of them. Go on now, Laz, an' show 'em that you ain't afeared."

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"Got rid of her easy," said Foster, when the old woman turned back into the house; and Laz, overhearing him as he climbed into the wagon drawled out a reply:

"Don't take long for anybody to git rid of her."

She waved him a good-bye from the window, and humped upon a seat beside Jasper, Laz was silent for some time, and then he inquired if there were any news stirring.

"No. Anythin' goin' on round here?"

"Nothin' wu'th dividin' 'cept Mose Blake fell into the river yistidy an' was drowneded."

"What, you don't tell me so?" the old man exclaimed.

"Yes, couldn't swim a lick atter he struck the water an thar wan't no use in tryin' befo' he struck."

"Powerful sorry to hear it," said Jasper. "Good feller—worst habit of his was always tryin' to talk when he couldn't."

"Yep. But he ain't tryin' of it now."

"I am also sorry he's dead," said Foster. "We were going to take him down to town with us."

"No use to take him now," Laz replied; and a silence fell, broken only when they turned back into the highway, when the lout of a driver, impressed in the neighborhood, remarked to Laz: [282]

"I reckon you air as about as big a liar as they kin set up. Here comes Mose Blake now."

"Hah!" exclaimed Foster. "A good backwoods trick. Round him up, boys."

The stutterer was dressed in his best, on his way to pay stammering court to a girl. He strove to explain that he couldn't go with them, but the officers laughed at his attempts to talk, compelled him to get in, and drove on.

At night they camped near a spring, beneath a walnut tree, the officers standing turn about while the prisoners slept; and early the next morning they resumed their rumbling journey.

As they were now out of the neighborhood range of the two boys, everything began to possess a keen interest for them, the houses, cattle and even the dogs that ran along the yard fences to bark at the wagon. Just before sunset they saw from afar the capitol dome, the mausoleum of Stricklin, who built many state houses, constructing in each one a tomb for himself. Years had passed since Jasper, a battle-smoked and bleeding soldier, had trod up to that lofty pile of rock to receive his discharge from the ranks; and desolate, with no drum and no fife to march back to his wretched home. To him the scene was heart-heavy with memories, but to the boys it was the first glimpse of that great and mysterious life lying far beyond their native hills. [283]

"I reckon the man that lives in thar could go to a sale up whar we live an' buy every wagin an' team on the place," said Laz, pointing toward the fading state-house, and Mose replied:

"Reckon h—h—h—he could t—t—t—talk all day without a h—h—hitch."

"Whar do we sleep to-night, with some of the neighbors?" Laz inquired, and Foster laughed.

"You sleep," said he, with an old joke, "in a house that will keep the dogs from coming in and biting you."

"You mean the jail?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. We'll have to keep you close till we get through with you."

"Is that the law?"

"Yes, as we understand it."

"Wall, then, I may not have to shoot you the fust time I meet you in the big road. Got a good artickle of pie thar in the kitchin?"

"You shall have all the pie you want."

Then Mose began: "Ef t—t—t—that's the case you m—m—m—mout drive a l—l—l—little faster. An' p—p—p—pound cake?"

"Yes, you may have some of that, too."

"Then I'm g—g—g—glad I c—c—come. Never had as m—m—much p—p—pound cake as I co—could eat b—b—but once, an' then I staid all night with a feller w—w—w—when his mammy w—w—wan't at home."

"Am I to be locked up?" the old man asked.

"Yes, Mr. Starbuck."

The old fellow groaned and in the dusk shrank down, little in his humiliation.

"Sometimes," he said, "folks have to stay in there a good while before they air fotch to trial. Do you think you kin fix it so they kin have it over with my case as soon as possible?"

"Yes, we'll try to rush you through."

"Through to where—to where?" the old man muttered to himself. [285]

They passed a theatre as the audience was pouring out, from under the Hamlet spell of Booth, and Laz remarked: "Feller that preached in thar to-night must be as long-winded as our man Fetterson; but I'll bet Old Fetter could outswop him in a hoss trade."

"That's a theatre," Foster informed him, and after musing for a time he said:

"Place whar they swallow knives, I reckon. Seed a feller do that at a school-house one night, an' I thought he'd killed hisse'f, but he spit it out jest like a stick of molasses candy. Wall, suh, I never seed as many lanterns hung up befo'. An' I want to tell you they've got good roads through this place. What's that feller doin' over thar with that crowd about him?"

"Preaching," Foster answered.

"Wall, he couldn't call up mourners—the wagins would run over 'em. What do you think of all this, Jasper?"

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"Who, me?" the old man replied as if startled out of a dream, "I wasn't thinkin' of it—didn't see it."

"I don't reckon," said Laz, "that all these folks knows we air goin' to jail."

Old Jasper shook as if with a chill. "We know it, an' that's enough," he replied.

The wagon, directed by Foster, turned into a darker street, into an alley, and drew up in front of a building black in the dusk. The old man's legs were so stiffened that they had to help him out and rheumatically he walked through the portals of stone-walled disgrace. Into a cell they turned him, and when the bolt grated, he leaped from the rock beneath his feet, leaped as he had when he struck Peters; and then into a corner he sank with a groan.

The two boys were given the liberty of a long corridor, and up and down they walked, light of foot, in reverence for the dejected man behind the bars.

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CHAPTER XXII.

CAME TO WEEP.

Old Mrs. Barker, true to instinct, hastened to put on her saddest bonnet, kept in an old chest at the demand of funerals, and with all speed set out for the afflicted home. Margaret was feeding the chickens when this consoling stimulator of grief arrived, and what little sun was left, immediately went down.

Beneath the mantle-piece there was no blaze, the weather being hot, so they could not sit down "and weep the fire out," but they could hover over old ashes and weep them wet. The real griefs in old Mrs. Barker's life had been but few. It was a mercy-shaft that had shot Old Barker down; rheumatic cripple, he had beaten her with his crutch, and at his death she could not from her rebellious eye wring out a tear. No offspring had she over whose death to mourn, and now she was put to for a companion piece to sorrow. But her mind flew back to a time when there died a man whom she could have loved, and her tears came full with the memory of a blissful morning when at church he had tied her horse and walked with her to the door. She had forgotten his name, if indeed she had ever been possessed of it, but she spoke of him as "he" as fast as her tears were falling.

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"Ah, Lord, Sister Starbuck, I don't want to question the ways of Providence, but it do appear that we have staid here too long. I ought to have been taken when he left."

"You mean Barker, Sister?"

"Oh, no, I mean 'he'. I can remember how his hair waved, though I wasn't but sixteen at the time; and the day when he hitched my hoss for me, all the girls looked down-trod. It was more than fifty year ago."

"Of course I am a much younger woman," replied Sister Starbuck, "and I can't look back an' see no man but J—J—Jasper."

They returned to their silent weeping, and after a time a cup of coffee was suggested. Sister Barker objected. Her mind was so full of the past that she had no heart to swallow the devices of the present, but upon persuasion she yielded; and when the coffee was drunk, pipes were lighted and comfortably back they sat and talked about the neighbors. After a while an old carryall wobbled up to the gate and out got Mrs. Spencer. By the time she reached the door-step fresh tears were falling.

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"Come right in," said Margaret. "I am so glad to see you at this time."

"And what do you want with me—to set down an' help you cry? Wall, I ain't of the cryin' sort. I put my cryin' aside when I got outen the cradle." She sat down and with a palm-leaf fanned herself. "It's a plum outrage," she said. "An' what's the matter with you, Miz Barker? Ain't lost a cow, have you? Why, yo' face looks like a old rock atter a heavy dew."

Mrs. Barker—they were not sisters now—wiped away her yellowish tears. "I have the right to cry if I feel like it," she replied. "I was a thinkin' of he."

"A thinkin' of the cat's foot," the old "heroic" snapped. "You mean that journeyman hatter that you've talked about so much? He was drunk half the time an' wan't worth the attention it would take to shove him into the river. Conscience alive, you have shed enough tears over him to drown

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him. Now quit it an' let's talk business. They've got our folks in jail an' they air goin' to keep 'em there the Lord knows how long. An' if the law didn't have some little jestic on its side I'd take an axe an' go down there an' break down that jail door. But you know that Jasper *has* laid himse'f liable an' so has my boy, for knowin' of the fact—an' so have we all, for that matter. Hah, I was jest a thinkin' when Spencer had the fight at Pettigrew's mill. Them Sarver boys—ez triflin' a lot ez ever lived—had him down when I rid up on a hoss. An' the fust thing they know'd I stobbed one of 'em between the shoulder blades—an' they thought he never would git well."

"An' they killed Spencer right there," said Margaret.

"That's true enough, but they'd a killed him quicker if I hadn't got there. Ah, laws a massy, the meanness of this world. An' what did they try to do with me? Hauled me up befo' cou't, an' thar I went with little Laz in my arms, an' they tried me fur—'sault, I think them fetch-taked lawyers called it. An' I says 'salt or sugar, I'm here, an' what air you goin' to do about it?' They fotch money again' me, an' the lawyers they jawed an' they palarvered; an' finally I got a chance to speak to that weak-kneed jedge, I did, an' I says, 'Look here, I've a longer knife, an' if you tell this jury to convict me, I'll put about a foot an' a half of it under yo' rusty ribs.' An' you better believe he smiled on me. Margaret, there ain't no use to set around here an' grieve. In this here world grief never counted fur nuthin' yit. Stir about an' take care of yo' stock an' you'll feel better. Miz Barker, I seed you a comin' an' I know'd you'd make things worse, so I come to off-set you. An' now, if we air goin' to be good friends, let's talk of somethin' pleasant. Anybody dead over yo' way, Miz Barker—I mean anybody that ought to be?"

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This interested Mrs. Barker, and upon the head she tapped into sloth her rising resentment. "Nobody dead," she said, with a smack of the mouth, "but Liza Pruitt ain't expected to git well."

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"Oh, is that the one they had the talk about consarnin' of the preacher?"

"Yes, Brother Lane."

"Brother Fool. But atter all, not half as big a fool as she was. I do think of all the fools in the world the woman that gives the opportunity for 'em to hitch up her name with a preacher's—she's the biggest. Why, don't a woman know that everybody is a watchin' of a preacher? But he feels himself safer than any man in the world. Befo' I was married there was a preacher named Collier used to come to see me. I 'lowed he was a single man, an' when I found he wan't I handed him his hat an' I says, I does, 'Here, put this on an' see if it'll fit you.' He declared that it was a past'ral call, an' I says, 'Well, then, go out in the pasture.' Now let's put things in order for I'm goin' to stay all night."

She was imperious, but not without generosity, for she granted to Margaret the right to look sad. But she would brook no demonstration, and when Mrs. Barker sought to lead Margaret back for a hiccoughey stroll along the dew-dripping path, she turned upon her with a snap. "Miz Barker, putty soon you'll force me to wring you an' hang you out to dry."

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And what were the antecedents of this crankish old woman? Her grandfather was hanged, one of John A. Murrell's robbers; and when she was a girl, her father fortified his log house and fought the law that strove to oust him for lack of title. She had moulded bullets; and when both her father and mother had been wounded, she thrust a blunderbuss through the window and with buck-shot swept a bloody road. But her generous heart had kept her poor, and her back was bending with years made heavy by loss of sleep, sitting up, nursing the sick.

While she was stirring about, making ready for supper, Margaret, giving to herself a sudden straightening, stepped forward and remarked:

"Now, Miz Spencer, you air mistaken if you think you air any gamer than I am. Why, if necessity demanded, I could load a shot-gun with tears an' scald a enemy to death. I don't know quite as much about my folks as you do yourn, but I kin ricolleck a red puddle on the doorstep. So now, we air standin' on equal ground. Miz Barker, I reckon it's yo' nature to cry, so jest pitch in an' cry all you want to while we air gittin' supper; an' then in the night, I'll change yo' pillow every time it gits too wet fur you."

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"Gracious me, I don't want to cry that bad," Mrs. Barker replied. "There's a time for all things, an' I'm from a fightin' fam'ly, too, I'll give you to understand. Have you got any right young pigs? If you have, suppose we kill one an' roast it—'twon't take long."

This suggestion met with approval, and with the help of Kintchin, helloaed out of a nap behind the smoke-house, a pig was slaughtered and barbecued. In Old Jasper's house that night there was a feast—a strange picture, three old women at table and an old negro, with watery mouth, standing in the door.

With the coming of daylight Margaret arose while yet the others slept, and breakfast was ready with the rising of the sun.

"You must be plannin' a big day's work," said Mrs. Spencer, and Margaret replied: "Yes, for I can't see the end of it. Kintchin, ketch the gray mare an' put the side saddle on her. An' now, you folks kin stay here jest as long as you please."

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"Why, where air you goin'?" Mrs. Barker inquired; and Margaret, putting a pistol in the pocket of her dress, dropped a courtesy and said:

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TRIP NOT WITHOUT INCIDENT.

With a few silver dollars in her pocket, chinking against the steel of her pistol, Margaret jogged along the road. In observation the mountaineer is always minute; each day is a volume unto itself, and in this book abound many pictures. In a thorn-bush the old woman saw a mocking-bird feeding her young; in the dust she saw where a snake had smoothed his way across the road. She halted to look at a bare-legged boy, who with his straw hat was seining a rivulet.

Telling the time by the sun, she dismounted at noon and in the shade of a wild plum thicket, ate her luncheon, while the mare cropped the sweet road-side grass. But it was not intended that her journey should be without event. Along toward four o'clock she came to a bridge across a small stream. The planks were worn with heavy hauling—the whole thing dangerous, and into a hole the mare's foot sank. She floundered, fell, and when Margaret, unhurt, arose out of the dust, she saw with horror that the poor creature's leg was broken. The mare floundered to the road-side and then in misery sank upon the ground. [297]

"Poor old friend," said the woman, with sorrow in her voice, tears streaming from her eyes, but in her hand was the pistol. "Good-bye, an' don't hold this ag'in me fur it's all I can do." Close to the horse's head she held the barrel of the pistol—fired, and without looking, resumed on foot her solitary way. A few miles further on she halted at a tavern, hoping that by spending the night, morning might bring along a friendly wagon, going her road; and she waited until the sun was high, and then set out on foot. But along toward ten o'clock she was overtaken by a huckster in a cart. She asked him to let her ride and he drew up, but looked suspiciously at her.

"I asked you to let me ride, if you please. I had to kill my po' mare 'way back yander—broke her leg in a bridge."

"What sort of a mare?"

"Gray—one of the best old nags I ever saw." [298]

"Well, where air you goin'?"

"To Nashville. Will you let me ride?"

"Got business down there, I take it."

"Yes, or I wouldn't want to go."

"I don't know about that. Women folks goes a good many places where they hain't got no business. Ain't a runnin' away from yo' old man, air you?"

"No, I'm goin' to him."

"Huh, he run away frum you. Is that it?"

"No, they tuck him away. Air you goin' to let me ride?"

"Tuck him away for what?"

"They have accused him of makin' wild-cat lickin'."

"Here, give me yo' hand an' I'll help you up. Wait, I'll make the seat soft with this coat. Now we're all right. An' I've got a baked turkey leg an' some mighty fine blackberry cordial—your'n."

She thanked him, and when she had eaten and drunk, he began to apologize for his slowness in permitting her to ride with him.

"Ma'm, I didn't know but you mout be one these here women preachers. One of 'em come up into my neighborhood an' it seemed that befo' she come nature was a smilin' like she was waitin' fur her sweetheart. Well, me an' my wife went to hear her preach, an' she talked right well—never hearn a woman talk better—an' she cotch the folks. Worse than that, she cotch my wife an' turned my home into a hell, an' nature shut her eyes an' all war dark fur me. Nothin' would do my wife, but she must go out an' preach too. I begged her—told her that I loved her better than I did forty gospels, an' I did; but she would go. I told her not to come back—but one night about three months atterward, when it was a pourin' down rain, an' my little child was a cryin', there come a knock on the door, an'—an' I know'd. I opened it an' there she was an' as I was a huggin' of her, she says, 'Jeff, I b'l'leve a woman's duty is at home. Christ was a man.' Ma'm, I kin haul you all the way down there. I know where the jail is—I've been in there—an' I'll take you right straight to it." [299]

"What did they take you there for?"

"It war a funny thing. I went up in the hill country, fur up from my home, an' the man what I stopped with was a maker of lickin'—an' atter dark I went with him to his still an' helped him fetch some wood for the fire; an' jest as I flung down a turn, bang, bang, an' here was the [300]

government men. Well, they tuck us down, an' of course I know'd I'd git outen it for I hadn't made no licker, but, bless you, the jedge sent me to the penitentiary for a year; an' ever sense then my wife she 'lows that I'm afeared to fetch up enough wood at home. Ain't a cryin', air you' ma'm?"

"They air goin' to hang Jasper," she moaned.

"You don't mean Jasper Starbuck. Well, I'll be blamed," he added, reading her answer in her tear-streaming eyes. "I hope not, ma'm. Did you ever hear him say anythin' about Jeff Waters? Mebby not, fur he never ricollecks sich things. But he toted me off the field at Shiloh when the bullets was like a swarm of bees. That's how I come to have this," he said, and raising his left leg, hit it a resounding whack with the hickory staff of his whip. "Timber, ma'm."

That night they were given shelter at a farmer's house, and were on their journey again by the rising of the sun, but shortly afterward the cart ran into a rut and one of the wheels was broken. Margaret petulantly wondered if the Lord were trying to keep her from reaching Nashville, and Jeff Waters replied:

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"Well, if He tries right hard, He'll hold you back all right."

In the woods he cut a pole, braced his axletree, and dragged the cart four miles to a blacksmith's shop, and two hours afterward, having lost much time precious to the woman, they were again jogging along the road. They put up at a tavern at night, Jeff sleeping in his cart under a shed, explaining that he was now close enough to town to warrant such precaution against thievery.

"I don't know why there air mo' thieves in town than in the country," he said, and Margaret challenged his admiration and aroused his surprise by remarking:

"I reckon it's because there air mo' folks in town."

He told her that she was gifted with fine reason and that the one saying alone was more than enough to pay her passage.

[302]

As they drew nearer to town she began to grow nervous, but, with her woman's tact, exhibited no astonishment at what she saw; nor did she, after entering a busy street, show that she had ever been accustomed to a scene less lively. They drove straightway to the jail, and when tremulously she inquired for Jasper, they told her that he was not there.

In the mountains Tom and Lou were sojourning in a little town, when by chance they heard of the old man's arrest. At first Lou was overcome with alarm and grief, but her husband charmed her back to enthusiasm and to smiles.

"Why," said he, "they will take him before my father, and as soon as I get there the governor will turn him loose—be tickled to do it."

"But they will take him to jail, won't they?"

"Mebby, if they don't take him up home. By this time they've found out all about him. We'll drive across the country, get on a railroad train and be there in a jiffy."

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CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO FRUITFUL WITNESSES.

Upon the case of the illicit distiller Judge Elliott had ever sat with utmost severity. As a colonel of cavalry he had distinguished himself. His left sleeve was empty. Lukewarm friends said that he was harsh and unforgiving. His intimates pointed to the fact that children were fond of him.

One morning he came into the chambers adjoining the court-room and for a long time sat musing at his desk. Capt. Johnson, U. S. Marshal, and Foster, deputy, came in shortly afterward, the captain taking a seat at his desk and Foster standing like a sentinel at the closed door. The captain, after examining a number of papers, glancing round from time to time as if to note whether or not the Judge had come out of his abstraction, remarked to Foster:

"How's your barometer? Or should I call it thermometer?"

"Both, I guess," Foster replied. "I have two."

[304]

He meant old wounds, foretellers of weather whims.

"Are we going to have rain, Foster?"

"Don't know—I feel fair weather."

"My instrument may be a little acuter than yours. Mine says rain."

The Judge looked up. "Rain by all means," said he; and then after a time the Captain remarked:

"Doesn't appear that you are going to have much of a vacation, Judge."

"That's a fact, and to one I had been looking forward. I am tired of this everlasting hum-drum, listening to false statements and prying into the criminal weaknesses of other men. The Lord knows that we have weaknesses enough of our own. But I don't see any immediate relief. The criminal docket precludes any adjournment. And I have a civil case under advisement. My son Tom is married. And so is my sister."

"What!" exclaimed the Marshal. "When did all this occur?"

From his pocket the Judge took a letter. "Tom and my sister went up into the mountains and— [305]
this letter tells all I know about it, and it is little enough:

'Dear Father: I have married a mountain girl and auntie has married her cousin, a preacher, but a good fellow all the same. I called it a double stroke of lightning, but auntie said it was perfume stealing down from the wild vines. For me it wasn't anything that came stealing—but with a jump. As soon as I saw her I said to myself, 'wow, I'm gone.' You have always chided me for being what you called too brazen with girls, but this girl scared me in a minute. It's a fact, but I said to myself, 'Old fellow, what's the matter with your knees?' I made up my mind to win her if I could, but she kept me cowed, not by what she said, for she didn't say much, but by what she looked. Auntie's husband's preaching knocks anything I ever heard—that is, I hear it does, for he hasn't preached for us yet. I would have written to you sooner, but the creek rose suddenly and the mail couldn't get over. When I come home I will offer my wife as a plea for pardon, and if you don't grant it I will appeal from your decision. To-day we go on higher up the mountains where we can stand on tip-toe (auntie's idea) and touch the honey-moon. She and Jim ain't with us at present, having gone over to his preaching grounds, fifteen miles from here. We are in a little town that looks like stage scenery. Haven't seen but one fellow that looked like he could box. If my wife don't object, I may try him a few rounds. If I can get within range I may draw on you, as I am about broke. Yours, Tom.'

The Judge slowly folded the letter, and putting it into his pocket, remarked: "The rascal doesn't even tell her name."

"Well," smilingly replied the Marshal, "her name is Elliott now, you know."

"Yes," the Judge mused, "so it would seem. Draw on me if he gets within range. Oh, he'll get the range all right. I have never known him to fail." [306]

"By the way, Judge, have you decided to take up the case of that old man Starbuck to-day? He is in there, ready."

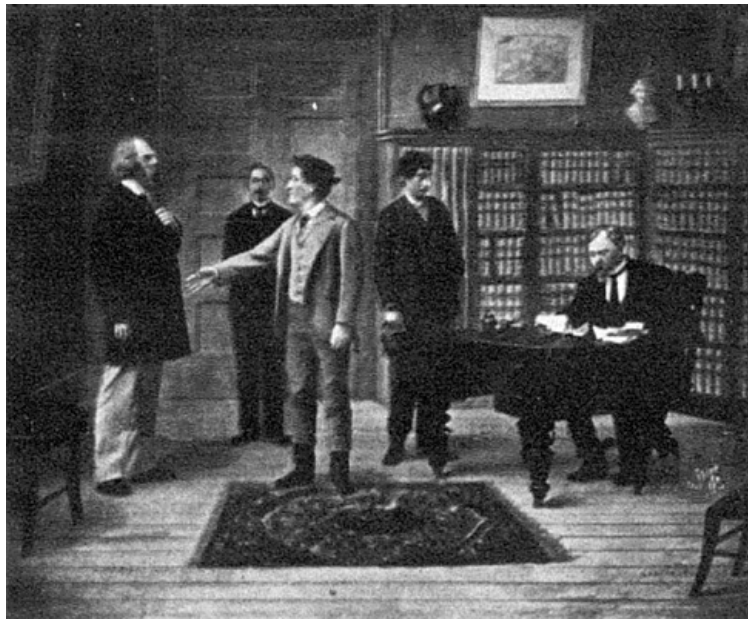
"Yes. I have heard that he was a gallant soldier in the Union army, and I have decided to examine him here in chambers. I wish to save him every possible humiliation. And I don't know but it might be well to examine those witnesses here, informally. Mr. Foster, bring in those witnesses."

Foster opened the door, stepped out into the corridor, and with a motion of his hand, commanded: "This way, you two."

And into the room came Laz and Mose. The Judge, who at the time was looking over a paper, paid no attention to them as they entered. Laz took off his hat and stood near the desk, staring at him. Nearer the Marshal stood Mose, with his hat on. The Marshal motioned for Mose to take off his hat and the stammerer made similar motions at the Marshal, as if answering a flirtation. The Marshal made a sign to Foster, who, while Mose was looking in another direction, advanced and took off his hat. Mose wheeled about, snatched his hat, and, recognizing Foster, shook hands with him. Then he shook hands with the Marshal, turned and walked over toward the Judge, who was still absorbed in his paper. [307]

"Judge," said the Marshal, "these are the witnesses."

Mose stretched forth his hand, and with a sharp pencil rap upon the desk, the Judge commanded: "Stand where you are."



**"IF YOU AIR THE JEDGE, I AM SORTER
DISERP'INTED IN YOU."**

"If you air the Jedge," said Laz, gazing intently, "I am sorter diserp'inted in you. I thought a United States Jedge must be about eight feet high."

"Well, never mind what you thought. You are here to tell what you know. Here, you," he added, speaking to Mose, "what is your name?"

"M—M—M—M—M—M—"

"Well, never mind. Where do you live?"

"Well, if y—y—y—y—you don't know a feller's n—n—n—name it don't m—m—m—make no d—d—d—diffunce whar he lives, d—d—d—does it?"

Laz struck in. "He won't tell you a lie, Jedge. He won't have time."

[308]

Rap, rap, at Laz.

"Never mind, sir. I will attend to you presently. You," he said, speaking to Mose. "Did you ever see Mr. Starbuck make whiskey?"

"Well, I've seed him m—m—m—make l—l—l—lasses."

The Judge grew impatient. "Do you know why you are here?"

"B—b—b—because they c—c—c—cotch me."

"No nonsense, sir."

"P—p—p—pap he 'lows I ain't g—g—g—got no sense of any s—s—s—sort, much."

The Judge sighed. "When you go into the court-room, do you think you can understand the nature of an oath?"

"W—w—w—well, I ought to. I've b—b—b—been c—c—c—cussed enough."

And Laz broke in: "He don't cuss hisse'f, Jedge, but he knows good cussin' when he hears it."

The Judge turned upon him. "Will you please keep quiet? I am striving to deal kindly with you, and I hope you will not lose sight of that fact." He spoke to Mose: "How far do you live from Mr. Starbuck's place?"

[309]

"W—w—w—well, you can't tell h—h—how far it is, the r—r—road's so crooked."

"Captain," said the Judge, "this boy should not have been brought down here. Let him stand aside. Over here," he said to Laz, motioning; and Laz stepped forward as if measuring the distance.

"About here, Jedge?"

Rap, rap!

"Have you ever seen Mr. Starbuck make whisky?"

"I've seed him grind co'n."

"And haven't you seen him boil the corn after it was ground into meal?"

"Yes, suh. They cook it up that way for the hounds. Thar's a feller up our way that's got mo' than a hundred hounds. They call him hound poor."

Rap, rap, rap!

"Let me tell you about this feller, Judge. It may have some bearin's on the matter in hand. This here feller goes down to the store, kep' by the post-master, once a week an' swops off a hound for a pint o' licker. One day he tuck down the biggest hound you ever seed an' when the store-keeper had give him the pint of licker this here feller looks at his hound an' says, 'What! don't I git nothin' back—no change?' An' the store-keeper give him back a rat tarrier an' a bull pup."

[310]

In spite of himself the Judge ducked his head and laughed, and the Marshal shook his sides. But the outburst of merriment was soon over. "That is all very interesting as a character study, but we are not here to study characters, but to get at facts."

Mose had moved around and was standing near the corner of the Judge's desk. "I w—w—w—wish I could talk t—t—t—thatter way."

"Mr. Foster, take this boy out."

Foster came forward and Mose seized his hand as if meeting an old acquaintance after the lapse of many years.

The Judge spoke to Laz: "When you go in under oath you'll have to be more careful. Your drollery might send you to jail. You may go now."

As Laz turned to go he spied on the Judge's desk a fancifully wrought ink-stand. Slowly moving toward the desk and craning his neck he took up the ink-stand, stroked it and said: "Jedge, I'd like to borry this thing. Fetch it back in a month or so."

[311]

"Put it down and get out. Wait a moment."

"Told me to get out."

Rap, rap!

"Hold yourself in readiness to appear before the court. Now you may go."

But he hesitated. "Hope you ain't miffed at me, Jedge, for sayin' I war sorter diserpp'inted in you. I didn't mean no harm; an' say' Jedge, you ask Old Jasper an' he'll tell you whuther he's made licker. He ain't one of the sort that tells a lie, Jedge, an' I hope you'll do the best you kin fur him; an' if you have to send him to the penitentiary I hope you'll let me take half the time. I'd like to do that much fur him. As fur me, Jedge, it don't make much diffunce whuther I'm locked up or not. An' say, if it ain't stretchin' a p'int, I'll take it all, but don't let him know how it come about."

The Judge looked at him and his eye was not hard. "Go on, young man. You don't know where you got that spirit of self-sacrifice—you can never know; but I appreciate it. Go on, young man."

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CHAPTER XXV.

TOO PROUD TO BEG.

"The old man may tell the truth," said the Judge. "Mr. Foster, have him brought in."

Foster stepped to a side door, opened it, looked in and beckoned. He stood aside and old Jasper walked into the room.

"Judge," said the Marshal, "this is the prisoner."

"Where is the Judge?" Jasper inquired, looking about.

"This is Judge Elliott," the Marshal answered, motioning.

"Jedge Elliott!"

"Yes, I am Judge Elliott."

He stood looking straight at the Judge. "Then, suh, I can't say that I'm glad to meet you."

"Nor I to meet you, under such circumstances, Mr. Starbuck. I am indeed sorry to see so venerable a looking man brought here on a charge so serious. And I request from you a straightforward statement."

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Old Jasper turned toward Foster. "I can't talk while he's in here, Jedge. He seed me in jail and I can't talk befo' no man that has seed me there."

"You needn't hesitate to speak within his hearing, Mr. Starbuck. He was a soldier, too."

"What, all soldiers? Then I have been tuck into camp."

"But not into the camp of your enemies. At a time when your state took up arms against the Federal government, you stepped forth to fight for the Union, and it is in consideration of this fact that I grant to you an examination here in chambers, to save you every possible humiliation. And now I ask you—"

"Jedge, I didn't come here to beg."

"I understand that. I simply request a straightforward statement."

"If you will let me give it in my own way, Jedge, you shall have it."

"In your own way, Mr. Starbuck. Proceed."

"Well, then, I'll begin at the beginnin'. Jedge, I live away up in the hills. My granddaddy settled there an' cleared off his field on a hill-side where the sun struck it a slantin' an' raised his co'n an' made his licker an' the gover'ment never said a word. One day him an' his two sons was a workin' in the field an' all of a sudden they heard a drum and fife over in the road. The boys looked with big eyes an' the old man clim' up on the fence and shouted, 'whut's the matter here?' and a man with red, white an' blue ribbons on his arm cried out, 'Old Andy Jackson needs soldiers to go to New Orleans.' An' my granddaddy he turns roun' to the youngsters an' says, 'Come on boys.' They went, suh, an' one of them boys he didn't come back. Wall, the years passed an' my daddy an' my oldest brother was a workin' in that same field, a raisin' of his co'n an' a makin' of his licker—an' mind you the gover'ment never had opened its chops, fur it was good licker—an' all at once jest like years befo' there came a beatin' of drums an' a blowin' of fifes over in the road. An' my daddy clim' up on the fence an' says, 'Whut's the matter now?' An' a man tuck a fife outen his mouth an' shouts, 'Mexico has trod on us an' we need soldiers.' An' my daddy turns, he does, an' says to my brother, 'Come on Bob.' They went, Jedge, an' Bob he didn't come back. Am I a makin' it too long?" [314]

"No, Mr. Starbuck, proceed."

"Do it sound like I'm a beggin'?"

"No" said the Judge, "it is the rude epic of my country. Go on."

"I thank you, suh. Well, finally, my time come. I married a game little woman an' we had two of as fine boys as the world ever seen. I raised my co'n on that same hill-side an' made my licker an' the government never said a word. An' when me an' them boys was a workin' up there we could hear that little woman a singin' down at the house—a singin' the songs of glory she had hearn the old soldiers sing. Well, one day me an' them boys—twin boys, Jedge,—was a hoein' the co'n in the field. I ricolleck it jest as well as if it was yistidy. An' atter all these years I can hear that song a comin' up from the house. An' then—then come that same thrillin' noise, the beatin' of drums an' a blowin' of fifes. We clim' up on the fence, jest like my granddaddy an' my daddy had done, an' I cried out, 'Whut's the trouble now?' The drums stopped, an' one of the men raised his flag up high an' shouted, 'The country is a splittin' up an' the Union needs soldiers.' An' I says, 'Come on, boys.' I can look back now, Jedge, an' see that little woman a standin' under a tree a wavin' us a good-bye with an old flag. I can see her yit. Jedge, we went down into the fiery furnace. We seed the flag droop an' fall, an' then—then rise in victory. Yes, I seed it. But my boys—my boys that was like picturs in the book—they was left at Gettysberg. An' when that po' little woman hearn that they wan't comin' back, she pined away an' died—an' when I come home a bleedin', there was a grave under the tree where we had seed her a standin' jest befo' we went down beyant the hill. I—" [315]

"Mr. Starbuck—"

"Wait a minit, Jedge, I ain't through yit. What did I know how to do when I got back to work? What had my granddaddy an' my daddy done? I went to raisin' of my co'n an' a makin' of my licker, an' still the gover'ment never said a word. But atter a while I hearn it was ag'in the law, an' I says, 'me an' all my folks have been a sheddin' of our blood for our country, an' some of them fellers that makes the laws never done that.' But I stopped sellin' the licker. I made it whenever I wanted to, somehow jest for a old time's sake, an' I sent it to sick folks—sent some of it to our ripresentative in Congress, right into the heart of the gover'ment an' not a word was said." [316]

"Old man—"

"I ain't quite through yit, Jedge. The neighbors knowd that I made licker when I wanted to an' they never said nuthin', but lately a scoundrel took it into his head to give me trouble. Fust he wanted to marry my daughter an' then he threatened that unless I'd give him a thousand dollars—but, Jedge, I'd seen him in hell fust!" [317]

"You must not use such language, Mr. Starbuck. You are before the law."

"Excuse me, suh, excuse me. Wall, an' they brought me down here, an' here I am. That's all, Jedge."

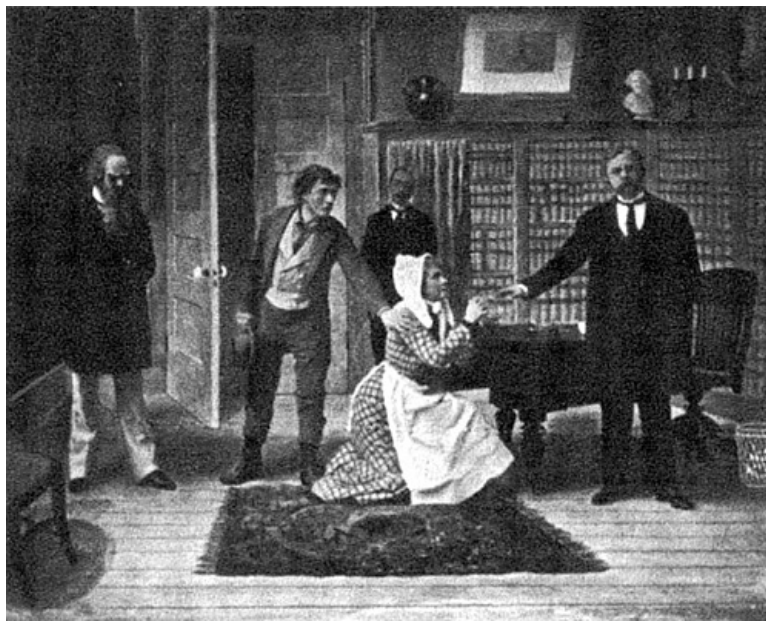
The Judge arose. "Old man, you are a patriot, from a race of patriots, and in my heart, I can hardly—" [318]

There came a rap at the door. Foster opened it and Margaret rushed into the room.

"Jasper!" she cried, running to him.

He put his arm about her. "Margaret, how did you get away down here?"

"Mr. Starbuck," the Judge began, but with a pleading gesture the old man cut him off. "Please don't say nothin' mo' while she's in here."



"JUDGE, FOR THE LORD'S SAKE DON'T HANG HIM"

"I come a ridin' an' a walkin' the best I could," Margaret moaned, looking about, "an' Jasper, I watered the flowers down there under the tree befo' I come, because I knowd it would please you. An' if they hang you, they've got to hang me, too. Judge, there ain't no better man than he is, an' for the Lord's sake don't hang him." She sank upon her knees; but Jasper quickly lifted her to her feet. "There, you must never do that."

"Madam," said the marshal, "Judge Elliott wouldn't—"

"Judge Elliott!" she gasped, and Jasper whispered in her ear: "Don't let him know that his son has married our daughter. He would think we was a beggin'."

[319]

"Mrs. Starbuck," the Judge kindly spoke, "will you please retire until we have concluded this examination?"

"Yes, suh, but let me tell you about him, Judge. I was po' an' I didn't have no home an' I was almost starvin' an' he married me, an'—you do love me, don't you, Jasper?"

"Yes, now go on as the Judge tells you. Go on an' it will be all right an'—"

"You'll come too, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll be there putty soon. That's right, now, go on."

At the door she halted, and before going out, summed up all her arguments—a pitiful courtesy.

"Mr. Starbuck," said the Judge, "I am told that in resisting arrest you so badly injured a deputy that he is not able to be here to-day. I am inclined in every way to favor you, but that, as you must know, is a very serious charge."

"Judge, that ain't true. I didn't resist arrest. Let me tell you about that man Peters. I have had mo' than one cause to kill him in se'f-defense, but I didn't want to do that. A man that has seed as much blood as you an' me has, don't want to kill nobody if he kin help it. Judge, he is a hound. I had surrendered to the law and was standin' with my hands up, an' he come a runnin' to kill me with a knife, an' I smashed his infernal countenance. No, I didn't resist arrest."

[320]

Foster stepped forward. "Will your honor please permit me to speak a word. I was in charge of the expedition and the old man tells the truth. Deputy Peters did try to kill him."

"Captain," solemnly remarked the Judge, "issue an order for the arrest of Deputy Peters, and my word for it, Mr. Starbuck, he shall be dealt with severely. And now, old man, I may be exceeding my authority, but I have not the heart to send you to prison. Promise me that if I permit you to go home you will not—"

"Judge, my granddaddy an' my daddy didn't have to make no sich promises to the gover'ment they help to save."

The Judge walked up and down the room. "Captain, I haven't the heart to send him to prison—I cannot. And Mr. Starbuck, if the marshal does not see you, walk out."

[321]

"Judge," the marshal spoke up, turning his back, "my old eyes are so bad I can't see anything."

Both men stood with their faces turned away. Jasper looked at them. Then came Margaret's voice, calling, "Jasper, Jasper."

"I'm a comin' Margaret, I'm a comin'," and slowly he walked toward the door. But at that moment there was a commotion in the corridor, Margaret was heard to cry out, "Why, where did you all come from," and then Tom, followed by Lou and Margaret, came hastily into the room. Jasper hastened to his daughter and whispered:

"Remember who you are."

The Judge was not looking. Tom walked round in front of him.

"Why!" exclaimed the jurist, still seeing no one but Tom, "When did you get back. And where is your—"

"Got back this minute. I have come to see you about Mr. Starbuck."

[322]

"Too late. He is discharged."

"I—I—thank you. He is my wife's father."

"What!" exclaimed the Judge, turning about, and then he saw Lou, standing with Margaret and the old man. He held out his hand and the girl came timidly to him. About her he put his one arm; upon the forehead he kissed her: "The daughter of patriots—my daughter. Mr. Starbuck, why didn't you tell me?"

"Jedge," the old man replied, "it would have looked like I was a cringin'. I know how to bleed for my country, but I don't know how to beg for myse'f."

THE END.

Announcement

This book was written from the drama of "THE STARBUCKS," produced at the Dearborn Theatre, Chicago, with the following cast:

JASPER STARBUCK,	EMMETT CORRIGAN
MARGARET STARBUCK, his wife,	LOUISE RIAL
LOU STARBUCK, his daughter,	MAMIE RYAN
JIM STARBUCK, his nephew,	HARRY BURKHART
LIJE PETERS,	THOMAS COLEMAN
TOM ELLIOTT,	HARRY STUBBS
JUDGE ELLIOTT, his father,	JOHN STEPPLING
MRS. MAYFIELD, his aunt,	GRACE REALS
KINTCHIN,	WILLIAM L. VISSCHER
BLACK MAMMY,	NANETTE FRANCIS
LAZ SPENCER,	WILLIAM DILLS
MOSE BLAKE,	WILLIAM EVARTS
CAPTAIN JOHNSON,	C. M. GIFFIN
FOSTER, deputy marshal	GEORGE BOTTS
SAMUEL M. FOREST, STAGE MANAGER	

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THE DEAD CITY

A Tragedy

By **GABRIELLE D'ANNUNZIO**

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