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A CHILHOWEE LILY

By Charles Egbert Craddock

1911

Tall, delicate, and stately, with all the finished symmetry and distinction that might appertain to a cultivated plant, yet sharing that fragility of texture and peculiar suggestion of evanescence characteristic of the unheeded weed as it flowers, the Chilhowee lily caught his eye. Albeit long familiar, the bloom was now invested with a special significance and the sight of it brought him to a sudden pause.

The cluster grew in a niche on the rocky verge of a precipice beetling over the windings of the rugged primitive road on the slope of the ridge. The great pure white bloom, trumpet-shaped and crowned with its flaring and many-cleft paracorolla, distinct against the densely blue sky, seemed the more ethereal because of the delicacy of its stalk, so erect, so inflexibly upright. About it the rocks were at intervals green with moss, and showed here and there heavy ochereous water stain. The luxuriant ferns and pendant vines in the densely umbrageous tangle of verdure served to heighten by contrast the keen whiteness of the flower and the isolation of its situation.

Ozias Crann sighed with perplexity as he looked, and then his eye wandered down the great hosky slope of the wooded mountain where in marshy spots, here and there, a sudden white flare in the shadows betokened the Chilhowee lily, flowering in myraids, holding out lures bewildering in their multitude.

"They air bloomin' bodaciously all over the mounting," he remarked rancorously, as he leaned heavily on a pickaxe; "but we uns hed better try it ter-night ennyhows."

It was late in August; a moon of exceeding lustre was in the sky, while still the sun was going down. All the western clouds were aflare with gorgeous reflections; the long reaches of the Great Smoky range had grown densely purple; and those dim Cumberland heights that, viewed from this precipice of Chilhowee, were wont to show so softly blue in the distance, had now a variant amethystine hue, hard and translucent of effect as the jewel itself.

The face of one of his companions expressed an adverse doubt, as he, too, gazed at the illuminated wilderness, all solitary, silent, remote.

"Pears like ter me it mought be powerful public," Pete Swolford objected. He had a tall, heavy, lumpish, frame, a lackcluster eye, a broad, dimpled, babyish face incongruously decorated with a tuft of dark beard at the chin. The suit of brown jeans which he wore bore token variously of the storms it had weathered, and his coarse cowhide boots were drawn over the trousers to the knee. His attention was now and again diverted from the conversation by the necessity of aiding a young bear, which he led by a chain, to repel the

unwelcome demonstrations of two hounds belonging to one of his interlocutors. Snuffing and nosing about in an affectation of curiosity the dogs could not forbear growling outright, as their muzzles approached their shrinking hereditary enemy, while the cub nestled close to his master and whimpered like a child.

"Jes' so, jes' so, Honey. I'll make 'em cl'ar out!" Swofford replied to the animal's appeal with ready sympathy. Then, "I wish ter Gawd, Eufe, ye'd call yer dogs off," he added in a sort of aside to the youngest of the three mountaineers, who stood among the already reddening sumac fringing the road, beside his horse, athwart which lay a buck all gray and antlered, his recently cut throat still dripping blood. The party had been here long enough for it to collect in a tiny pool in a crevice in the rocky road, and the hounds constrained to cease their harassments of the bear now began to eagerly lap it up. The rifle with which Eufe Kinnicutt had killed the deer was still in his hands and he leaned upon it; he was a tall, finely formed, athletic young fellow with dark hair, keen, darkly greenish eyes, full of quickly glancing lights, and as he, too, scanned the sky, his attitude of mind also seemed dissuasive.

"Pears like thar won't be no night, ez ye mought call night, till this moon goes down," he suggested. "'Pears nigh ez bright ez day!"

Ozias Crann's lank, angular frame; his narrow, bony face; his nose, long yet not large, sharp, pinched; his light grey eyes, set very closely together; his straggling reddish beard, all were fitting concomitants to accent the degree of caustic contempt he expressed. "Oh, to be sure!" he drawled. "It'll be powerful public up hyar in the mounting in the midnight,—that's a fac'!—an' moonlight is mighty inconvenient to them ez wants ter git spied on through totin' a lantern in cur'ous places."

This sarcasm left the two remonstrants out of countenance. Pete Swofford found a certain resource in the agitations of his bear, once more shrinking and protesting because of the dogs. "Call off yer hound-dogs, Rufe," he cried irritably, "or I'll gin 'em a bullet ter swallow."

"Ye air a plumb fool about that thar bar, Pete," Kinnicutt said sourly, calling off the hounds nevertheless.

"That thar bar?" exclaimed Swofford. "Why, thar never war sech a bar! That thar bar goes ter mill, an' kin fetch home grist,—ef I starts him out in the woods whar he won't meet no dogs nor contrairy cattle o' men he kin go ter mill all by his lone!—same ez folks an' the bes' kind o' folks, too!"

In fact the bear was even now begirt with a meal-bag, well filled, which although adding to his uncouth appearance and perhaps unduly afflicting the sensibilities of the horse, who snorted and reared at the sight of him, saved his master the labor of "packing" the heavy weight.

Swofford had his genial instincts and in return was willing to put up with the cubbishness of the transport, —would wait in the illimitable patience of the utterly idle for the bear to climb a tree if he liked and pleasantly share with him the persimmons of his quest;—would never interfere when the bear flung himself down and wallowed with the bag on his back, and would reply to the censorious at home, objecting to the dust and sand thus sifting in with the meal, with the time honored reminder that we are all destined "to eat a peck of dirt" in this world.

"Whenst ye fust spoke o' digging" said Kinnicutt, interrupting a lengthening account of the bear's mental and moral graces, "I 'lowed ez ye mought be sayin' ez they air layin' off ter work agin in the Tanglefoot Mine."

Ozias Crann lifted a scornful chin. "I reckon the last disasters thar hev interrupted the company so ez they hain't got much heart todes diggin' fur silver agin over in Tanglefoot Cove. Fust," he checked off these misfortunes, by laying the fingers of one hand successively in the palm of the other, "the timbers o' one o' the cross cuts fell an' the roof caved in an' them two men war kilt, an' thar famblies sued the company an' got mo' damages 'n the men war bodaciously wuth. Then the nex' thing the pay agent, ez war sent from Glaston, war held up in Tanglefoot an' robbed—some say by the miners. He got hyar whenst they war out on a strike, an' they robbed him 'cause they warn't paid cordin' ter thar lights, an' they *did* shoot him up cornsider'ble. That happened jes' about a year ago. Then sence, thar hev been a awful cavin' in that deep shaft they hed sunk in the tunnel, an' the mine war flooded an' the machinery ruint—I reckon the company in Glaston ain 't a-layin' off ter fly in the face o' Providence and begin agin, arter all them leadin's ter quit."

"Some believe he warh't robbed at all," Kinnicutt said slowly. He had turned listlessly away, evidently meditating departure, his hand on his horse's mane, one foot in the stirrup.

"Ye know that gal named Loralindy Byars?" Crann said craftily.

Kinnicutt paused abruptly. Then as the schemer remained silent he demanded, frowning darkly, "What's Loralindy Byars got ter do with it?"

"Mighty nigh all!" Crann exclaimed, triumphantly.

It was a moment of tense suspense. But it was not Crann's policy to tantalize him further, however much the process might address itself to his peculiar interpretation of pleasure. "That thar pay agent o' the mining company," he explained, "he hed some sort'n comical name—oh, I remember now, Renfrow—Paul Renfrow—waal—ye know he war shot in the knee when the miners way-laid him."

"I disremember now ef it war in the knee or the thigh," Swofford interposed, heavily pondering.

Kinnicutt's brow contracted angrily, and Crann broke into open wrath: "an' I ain't carin', ye fool—what d' ye interrupt fur like that?"

"Wall," protested Swofford, indignantly, "ye said 'ye know' an' I didn't *know*."

"An' I ain't carin'—the main p'int war that he could neither ride nor walk. So the critter crawled! Nobody knows how he gin the strikers the slip, but he got through ter old man Byars's house. An' thar he staid till Loralindy an' the old 'oman Byars nussed him up so ez he could bear the pain o' bein' moved. An' he got old man Byars ter wagin him down ter Colb'ry, a-layin' on two feather beds 'count o' the rocky roads, an' thar he got on the steam kyars an' he rid on them back ter whar he kem from."

Kinnicutt seemed unable to longer restrain his impatience. He advanced a pace. "Ye appear ter 'low ez ye air tellin' news—I knowed all that whenst it happened a full year ago!"

"I reckon ye know, too, ez Loralindy hed no eyes nor ears fur ennybody else whilst he war hyar—but then *he war* good-lookin' an' saaft-spoken fur true! An' now he hev writ a letter ter her!"

Crann grinned as Kinnicutt inadvertently gasped. "How do you uns know that!" the young man hoarsely demanded, with a challenging accent of doubt, yet prescient despair.

"Kase, bubby, that's the way the story 'bout the lily got out. I was at the mill this actial day. The miller hed got the letter—hevin' been ter the post-office at the Crossroads—an' he read it ter her, bein' ez Loralindy can't read writin'. She warn't expectin' it. He writ of his own accord."

A sense of shadows impended vaguely over all the illuminated world, and now and again a flicker of wings through the upper atmosphere betokened the flight of homing birds. Crann gazed about him absently while he permitted the statement he had made to sink deep into the jealous, shrinking heart of the young mountaineer, and he repeated it as he resumed.

"She warn't expectin' of the letter. She jes' stood thar by the mill-door straight an' slim an' white an' still, like she always be—ter my mind like she war some sort'n sperit, stiddier a sure enough gal—with her yaller hair slick an' plain, an' that old, faded, green cotton dress she mos' always wears, an' lookin' quiet out at the water o' the mill-dam ter one side, with the trees a-wavin' behind her at the open door—jes' like she always be! An' arter awhile she speaks slow an' saaft an axes the miller ter read it aloud ter her. An' lo! old man Bates war rej'iced an' glorified ter the bone ter be able ter git a peek inter that letter! He jes' shet down the gates and stopped the mill from runnin' in a jiffy, an' tole all them loafers, ez hangs round thar mosly, ter quit thar noise. An' then he propped hissself up on a pile o' grist, an' thar he read all the sayin's ez war writ in that letter. An' a power o' time it tuk, an' a power o' spellin' an' bodaciously wrastlin' with the alphabit."

He laughed lazily, as he turned his quid of tobacco in his mouth, recollecting the turbulence of these linguistic turmoils.

"This hyar feller—this Renfrow—he called her in the letter 'My dear friend'—he did—an' lowed he hed a right ter the word, fur ef ever a man war befriended he hed been. He lowed ez he could never fur-get her. An' Lord! how it tickled old man Bates ter read them sentiments—the pride-ful old peacock! He would jes' stop an' push his spectacles back on his slick bald head an' say, 'Ye hear me, Loralindy! he 'lows he'll never furget the keer ye tuk o' him whenst he war shot an' ailin' an' nigh ter death. An' no mo' he ought, nuther. But some do furget sech ez that, Loralindy—some do!'"

An' them fellers at the mill, listenin' ter the letter, could sca'cely git thar consent ter wait fur old man Bates ter git through his talk ter Loralindy, that he kin talk ter every day in the year! But arter awhile he settled his spectacles agin, an' tuk another tussle with the spellin', an' then he rips out the main p'int o' the letter. "This stranger-man he 'lowed he war bold enough ter ax another favior. The cuss tried ter be funny. 'One good turn desarves another,' he said. 'An' ez ye hev done me one good turn, I want ye ter do me another.' An' old man Bates hed the insurance ter waste the time a-laffin' an' a-laffin' at sech a good joke. Them fellers at the mill could hev fund it in thar hearts ter grind him up in his own hopper, ef it wouldn't hev ground up with him thar chance o' ever hearin' the end o' that thar interestin' letter. So thar comes the favior. Would she dig up that box he treasured from whar he told her he hed buried it, arter he escaped from the attack o' the miners? An' would she take the box ter Colb'ry in her grandad's wagin, an' send it ter him by express. He hed tole her once whar he hed placed it—an' ter mark the spot mo' percisely he hed noticed one Chilhowee lily bulb right beside it. An' then says the letter, 'Good bye, Chilhowee Lily!' An' all them fellers stood staring."

A light wind was under way from the west Delicate flakes of red and glistening white were detached from the clouds. Sails—sails were unfurling in the vast floods of the skies. With flaunting banners and swelling canvas a splendid fleet reached half way to the zenith. But a more multitudinous shipping still swung at anchor low in the west, though the promise of a fair night as yet held fast.

"An' now," said Ozias Crann in conclusion, "all them fellers is a-diggin'."

"Whut's in the box!" demanded Swof-ford, his big baby-face all in a pucker of doubt.

"The gold an' silver he ought ter hev paid the miners, of course. They always 'lowed they never tuk a dollar off him; they jes' got a long range shot at him! How I wish," Ozias Crann broke off fervently, "how I wish I could jes' git my hands on that money once!" He held out his hands, long and sinewy, and opened and shut them very fast.

"Why, that would be stealin'!" exclaimed Kinnicutt with repulsion.

"How so? 't ain't his'n now, sure—he war jes' the agent ter pay it out," argued Crann, volubly.

"It belongs ter the mine owners, then—the company." There was a suggestion of inquiry in the younger man's tone.

"'Pears not—they sent it hyar fur the percise purpose ter be paid out!" the specious Crann replied.

"Then it belongs ter the miners."

"They hedn't yearned it—an' ef some o' them hed they warn't thar ter receive it, bein' out on a strike. They hed burnt down the company's office over yander at the mine in Tanglefoot Cove, with all the books an' accounts, an' now nobody knows what's owin' ter who."

Kinnicutt's moral protests were silenced, not satisfied. He looked up moodily at the moon now alone in the sky, for only a vanishing segment of the great vermilion sphere of the sun was visible above the western mountains, when suddenly he felt one of those long grasping claws on his arm. "Now, Rufe, bubby," a most insinuating tone, Crann had summoned, "all them fool fellers air diggin' up the face of the yearth, wharever they kin find a Chilhowee lily—like sarchin' fur a needle in a haystack. But we uns will do a better thing than that. I drewed the idee ez soon ez I seen you an' Pete hyar this evenin' so onexpected. 'Them's my pardners,' I sez ter myself. 'Pete ter help dig an' tote ef the box be heavy. An' you ter find out edzac'ly whar it be hid.' You uns an' Loralindy hev been keepin' company right smart, an' ye kin toll Loralindy along till she lets slip jes' whar that lily air growin'. I'll be bound ez she likes ye a sight better 'n that Renfrow—leastwise ef 't warn't fur his letter, honeyin' her up with complimints, an' she hevin' the chance o' tollin' him on through doin' him sech faviors, savin' his life, an' now his money—shucks it's mo' *our* money 'n his'n; 't ain 't his 'n! Gol-darn the insurance o' this Renfrow! His idee is ter keep the money his own self, an' make her sen' it ter him. Then 'Good-bye, Chilhowee Lily!'"

The night had come at last, albeit almost as bright as day, but with so ethereal, so chastened a splendor

that naught of day seemed real. A world of dreams it was, of gracious illusions, of far vague distances that lured with fair promises that the eye might not seek to measure. The gorgeous tints were gone, and in their stead were soft grays and indefinite blurring browns, and every suggestion of silver that metal can show flashed in variant glitter in the moon. The mountains were majestically sombre, with a mysterious sense of awe in their great height. There were few stars; only here and there the intense lustre of a still planet might withstand the annihilating magnificence of the moon.

Its glamour did not disdain the embellishment of humbler objects. As Rufe Kinnicutt approached a little log cabin nestling in a sheltered cove he realized that a year had gone by since Renfrow had seen it first, and that thus it must have appeared when he beheld it. The dew was bright on the slanting roof, and the shadow of oak trees wavered over it. The mountain loomed above. The zigzag lines of the rail fence, the bee-gums all awry ranged against it, the rickety barn and fowl-house, the gourd vines draping the porch of the dwelling, all had a glimmer of dew and a picturesque symmetry, while the spinning wheel as Loralinda sat in the white effulgent glow seemed to revolve with flashes of light in lieu of spokes, and the thread she drew forth was as silver. Its murmuring rune was hardly distinguishable from the chant of the cicada or the long droning in strophe and antistrophe of the waterside frogs far away, but such was the whir or her absorption that she did not perceive his approach till his shadow fell athwart the threshold, and she looked up with a start.

"Ye 'pear powerful busy a-workin' hyar so late in the night," he exclaimed with a jocose intonation.

She smiled, a trifle abashed; then evidently conscious of the bizarre suggestions of so much ill-timed industry, she explained, softly drawling: "Waal, ye know, Granny, she be so harried with her rheumatics ez she gits along powerful poor with her wheel, an' by night she be plumb out'n heart an' mad fur true. So arter she goes ter bed I jes' spins a passel fur her, an' nex' mornin' she 'lows she done a toler'ble stint o' work an' air consider'ble s'prised ez she war so easy put out."

She laughed a little, but he did not respond. With his sensibilities all jarred by the perfidious insinuation of Ozias Crann, and his jealousy all on the alert, he noted and resented the fact that at first her attention had come back reluctantly to him, and that he, standing before her, had been for a moment a less definitely realized presence than the thought in her mind—this thought had naught to do with him, and of that he was sure.

"Loralindy," he said with a turbulent impulse of rage and grief; "wherst ye promised to marry me ye an' me war agreed that we would never hev one thought hid from one another—ain't that a true word!"

The wheel had stopped suddenly—the silver thread was broken; she was looking up at him, the moonlight full on the straight delicate lineaments of her pale face, and the smooth glister of her golden hair. "Not o' my own," she stipulated. And he remembered, and wondered that it should come to him so late, that she had stood upon this reservation and that he—poor fool—had conceded it, thinking it concerned the distilling of whisky in defiance of the revenue law, in which some of her relatives were suspected to be engaged, and of which he wished to know as little as possible.

The discovery of his fatuity was not of soothing effect. "'T war that man Renfrow's secret—I hearn about his letter what war read down ter the mill."

She nodded acquiescently, her expression once more abstracted, her thoughts far afield.

He had one moment of triumph as he brought himself tensely erect, shouldering his gun—his shadow behind him in the moonlight duplicated the gesture with a sharp promptness as at a word of command.

"All the mounting's a-diggin' by this time!" He laughed with ready scorn, then experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling. Her face had changed. Her expression was unfamiliar. She had caught together the two ends of the broken thread, and was knotting them with a steady hand, and a look of composed security on her face, that was itself a flout to the inopportune search of the mountaineers and boded ill to his hope to discover from her the secret of the *cache*. He recovered himself suddenly.

"Ye 'lowed ter me ez ye never keered nuthin' fur that man, Renfrow," he said with a plaintive appeal, far more powerful with her than scorn.

She looked up at him with candid reassuring eyes. "I never keered none fur him," she protested. "He kem hyar all shot up, with the miners an' mounting boys hot foot arter him—an' we done what we could fur him. Gran'daddy 'lowed ez *he* warn't 'spon-sible fur whut the owners done, or hedn't done at the mine, an' he seen no sense in shootin' one man ter git even with another."

"But ye kep' his secret!" Kinnicutt persisted.

"What fur should I tell it—'t ain't mine?"

"That thar money in that box he buried ain't *his'n*, nuther!" he argued.

There was an inscrutable look in her clear eyes. She had risen, and was standing in the moonlight opposite him. The shadows of the vines falling over her straight skirt left her face and hair the fairer in the silver glister.

"'Pears like ter me," he broke the silence with his plaintive cadence, "ez ye ought ter hev tole me. I ain't keerin' ter know 'ceptin' ye hev shet me out. It hev hurt my feelin's powerful ter be treated that-a-way. Tell me now—or lemme go forever!"

She was suddenly trembling from head to foot. Pale she was always. Now she was ghastly. "Rufe Kinnicutt," she said with the solemnity of an adjuration, "ye don't keer fur sech ez this, fur *nuthin'*. An' I promised!"

He noted her agitation. He felt the clue in his grasp. He sought to wield his power, "Choose a-twixt us! Choose a-twixt the promise ye made ter that man—or the word ye deny ter me! An' when I'm gone—I'm gone!"

She stood seemingly irresolute.

"It's nuthin' ter me," he protested once more. "I kin keep it an' gyard it ez well ez you uns. But I won't be shet out, an' doubted, an' denied, like ez ef *I* wan't fitten ter be trested with nuthin'!"

He stood a moment longer, watching her trembling agitation, and feeling that tingling exasperation that might have preceded a blow.

"I'm goin'," he threatened.

As she still stood motionless he turned away as if to make good his threat. He heard a vague stir among the leaves, and turning back he saw that the porch was vacant.

He had overshot the mark. In swift repentance he retraced his steps. He called her name. No response save the echoes. The house dogs, roused to a fresh excitement, were gathering about the door, barking in affected alarm, save one, to whom Kinnicutt was a stranger, that came, silent and ominous, dragging a block and chain from under the house. Kinnicutt heard the sudden drowsy complaints of the old rheumatic grandmother, as she was rudely awakened by the clamors, and presently a heavy footfall smote upon the puncheons that floored the porch. Old Byars himself, with his cracked voice and long gray hair, had left his pipe on the mantel-piece to investigate the disorder without.

"Hy're Rufe!" he swung uneasily posed on his crutch stick in the doorway, and mechanically shaded his eyes with one hand, as from the sun, as he gazed dubiously at the young man, "hain't ye in an' about finished yer visit t—or yer visitation, ez the pa'son calls it He, he, he! Wall, Loralindy hev gone up steers ter the roof-room, an' it's about time ter bar up the doors. Waal, joy go with ye, he, he, he! Come off, Tige, ye Bose, hyar! Cur'ous I can't 'larn them dogs no manners."

A dreary morrow ensued on the splendid night. The world was full of mists; the clouds were resolved into drizzling rain; every perspective of expectation was restricted by the limited purlieus of the present. The treasure-seekers digging here and there throughout the forest in every nook in low ground, wherever a drift of the snowy blossoms might glimmer, began to lose hope and faith. Now and again some iconoclastic soul sought to stigmatize the whole rumor as a fable. More than one visited the Byars cabin in the desperate hope that some chance word might fall from the girl, giving a clue to the mystery.

By daylight the dreary little hut had no longer poetic or picturesque suggestion. Bereft of the sheen and shimmer of the moonlight its aspect had collapsed like a dream into the dullest realities. The door-yard was muddy and littered; here the razor-back hogs rooted unrebuked; the rail fence had fallen on one side, and it would seem that only their attachment to home prevented them from wandering forth to be lost in the wilderness; the clap-boards of the shiny roof were oozing and steaming with dampness, and showed all awry and uneven; the clay and stick chimney, hopelessly out of plumb, leaned far from the wall.

Within it was not more cheerful; the fire smoked gustily into the dim little room, illumined only by the flicker of the blaze and the discouraged daylight from the open door, for the batten shutters of the unglazed window were closed. The puncheon floor was grimy—the feet that curiosity had led hither brought much red clay mire upon them. The poultry, all wet and dispirited, ventured within and stood about the door, now scuttling in sudden panic and with peevish squawks upon the unexpected approach of a heavy foot. Loralinda, sitting at her spinning wheel, was paler than ever, all her dearest illusions dashed into hopeless fragments, and a promise which she did not value to one whom she did not love quite perfect and intact.

The venerable grandmother sat propped with pillows in her arm-chair, and now and again adjured the girl to "show some manners an' tell the neighbors what they so honed to know." With the vehemence of her insistence her small wizened face would suddenly contract; the tortures of the rheumatism, particularly rife in such weather, would seize upon her, and she would cry aloud with anguish, and clutch her stick and smite her granddaughter to expedite the search for the primitive remedies of dried "yarbs" on which her comfort depended.

"Oh, Lord!" she would wail as she fell back among the pillows. "I'm a-losin' all my religion amongst these hyar rheumatics. I wish I war a man jes' ter say 'damn 'em' once! An' come good weather I'll sca'cely be able ter look Loralindy in the face, considering how I hector her whilst I be in the grip o' this misery."

"Jes' pound away, Granny, ef it makes ye feel ennywise better," cried Loralinda, furtively rubbing the weales on her arm. "It don't hurt me wuth talkin' 'bout. Ye jes' pound away, an' welcome!"

Perhaps it was her slender, elastic strength and erect grace, with her shining hair and ethereal calm pallor in the midst of the storm that evoked the comparison, for Ozias Crann was suddenly reminded of the happy similitude suggested by the letter that he had heard read and had repeated yesterday to his cronies as he stood in the road. The place was before him for one illumined moment—the niche in the cliff, with its ferns and vines, the delicate stately dignity of the lilies outlined against the intense blue of the sky.

The reminiscence struck him like a discovery. Where else could the flower have been so naturally noticed by this man, a stranger, and remembered as a mark in the expectation of finding it once more when the bulb should flower again—as beside the county road? He would have been hopelessly lost a furlong from the path.

Crann stood for a moment irresolute, then silently grasped his pickaxe and slunk out among the mists on the porch.

He berated his slow mind as he hurried invisible through the vast clouds in which the world seemed lost. Why should the laggard inspiration come so late if it had come at all? Why should he, with the clue lying half developed in his own mental impressions, have lost all the vacant hours of the long, bright night, have given the rumor time to pervade the mountains, and set all the idlers astir before he should strike the decisive blow!

There, at last, was the cliff, beetling far over the mist-filled valley below. A slant of sunshine fell on the surging vapor, and it gleamed opalescent. There was the niche, with the lilies all a-bloom. He came panting up the slope under the dripping trees, with a dash of wind in his face and the odor of damp leafage and mold on the freshening air.

He struck the decisive blow with a will. The lilies shivered and fell apart. The echoes multiplied the stroke with a ringing metallic iteration.

The loiterers were indeed abroad. The sound lured them from their own devious points of search, and a half dozen of the treasure-seekers burst from the invisibilities of the mists as Ozias Crann's pickaxe cleaving the mold struck upon the edge of a small japanned box hidden securely between the rocks, a scant foot below the surface. A dangerous spot for a struggle, the verge of a precipice, but the greed for gain is a passion that blunts the sense of peril. The wrestling figures, heedless of the abyss, swayed hither and thither, the precious

box among them; now it was captured by a stronger grasp, now secured anew by sheer sleight-of-hand. More than once it dropped to the ground, and at last in falling the lock gave way, and scattered to the wind were numberless orderly vouchers for money already paid, inventories of fixtures, bills for repairs, reports of departments—various details of value in settling the accounts of the mine, and therefore to be transmitted to the main office of the mining company at Glaston. “Ef I hed tole ye ez the money warn't thar, ye wouldn't hev believed me,” Lora-linda Byars said drearily, when certain disappointed wights, who had sought elsewhere and far a-field, repaired to the cabin laughing at their own plight and upbraiding her with the paucity of the *cache*. “I knowed all the time what war in that box. The man lef' it thar in the niche arter he war shot, it bem' heavy ter tote an' not wuth much. But he brung the money with him, an' tuk it off, bein', he said, without orders from the owners, the miners hevin' burnt down the offices, an' bruk open the safe an' destroyed all the papers, ceptin' that leetle box. I sewed up the man's money myself in them feather beds what he lay on whenst he war wagined down 'ter Colb'ry ter take the kyars. He 'lowed the comp'n'y mought want them papers whenst they went into liquidation, ez he called it, an' tole me how he hed hid 'em.”

Rufe Kinnicutt wondered that she should have been so unyielding. She did not speculate on the significance of her promise. She did not appraise its relative value with other interests, and seek to qualify it. Once given she simply kept it. She held herself no free agent. It was not hers.

The discovery that the lure was gold revealed the incentive of her lover's jealous demand to share the custody of the secret. His intention was substituted for the deed in her rigid interpretation of integrity. It cost her many tears. But she seemed thereafter to him still more unyielding, as erect, fragile, ethereally pure and pale she noted his passing no more than the lily might. He often thought of the cheap lure of the sophisms that had so deluded him, the simple obvious significance of the letter, and the phrase, “Goodbye, Chilhowee Lily,” had also an echo of finality for him.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A CHILHOWEE LILY ***

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