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### **A Tar-Heel Baron**

*SECOND EDITION*



"OAKWOOD"

### **A Tar-Heel Baron**

*by*

# Mabell Shippie Clarke Pelton

With Illustrations by  
Edward Stratton Holloway



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TO

F. A. P.

*"One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake."*

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# A Tar-Heel Baron

## I

### Friedrich von Rittenheim

The incongruity of his manner of life was patent to all who saw. The mountaineers around him recognized it, but they attributed it to the fact of his being a foreigner. The more cultivated folk realized that a man of the world who bore every mark of good birth and breeding was indeed out of place in the gray jeans of the North Carolina farmer, guiding the plough with his own hand.

At first no one knew just how to take him, even to the calling of his name. Baron Friedrich Johann Ludwig—and a half-dozen more—von Rittenheim was a good deal to compass. The farmers and the negroes finally settled upon "Mr. Baron."

As to "taking him," it was he who took them, and by storm. He was as poor as his poorest neighbors, that was evident, so they felt no jealousy, and laid aside the mistrust which is the countryman's shield and buckler. He asked agricultural instruction from the men, was courteously respectful to the women, and played with the children. Among those of more gentle birth there was little question of their reception of him after once he had ridden to their doors, making the first visit, as in the old country. To be sure, he had appeared astride a mule, but neither his mount nor his dress could conceal a soldierly bearing that made him the envy of every man who saw him. And he had but to click his heels together and make his queer foreign bow that displayed the top of his fair head, and to kiss the fingers of the "gnädige Frau," to win the hearts of all the women. His English, in itself, was no small charm, for, though he had conquered his w's and th's, his use of idiom was ever new.

It was of the Baron that Dr. Morgan and his wife were talking as they drove towards home at sunset of a late March day.

"Hanged if Ah know how the fellow gets on," said the Doctor. "It was fall when he came here, and that farm he bought from Ben Frady hadn't any crop on it but a mahty little corn. He did his winter ploughing and killed the pig he took with the place, but how he's pulling through Ah don't know."

The Doctor spat in a practised and far-reaching manner into the red clay mud, and shook the reins over the backs of the horse and mule, which plodded on unheeding.

"This is 'starvation time,' too. Ah noticed yesterday our bacon was getting low," returned Mrs. Morgan, with the application to self that a country life induces. "The Baron never did tell any one about his money affairs, did he, Henry?"

It would be hard to say why she asked, unless for the sake of continuing the conversation, for, had there been any such bit of gossip, it would have been the Doctor's exclusive property only so long as it took him to drive from the place where he had heard it to his own house.

"Not a word," he replied. "Hi, Pete, what are you doing?"

Always a careless driver, the Doctor was more than ever so when the state of the roads precluded travelling faster than a walk. He had not noticed the mud-hole which the mule had tried to jump. In his harnesses, twine, rope, and wire played as prominent a part as leather. In fact, most of the points of responsibility were guarded by those materials rather than by the original. Pete's jump and his mate's consequent shy proved too much for long-worn traces, and two of them snapped.

"Hang those things! That outside one popped just yesterday, Sophy," said the Doctor, in a tone of grievance, as if the fact of its having broken yesterday ought to have rendered him free from the liability of a similar annoyance to-day.

"Ah reckon you-all 'll have to get a new harness some time," returned Sophy, placidly, holding the reins which her husband transferred to her as, with no great relish, he lowered his long, lean person into the red sea of mud below.

"Rather juicy down here. Got any string, wife?"

"Not a bit. You'll have to take a piece out of the lines," suggested Mrs. Morgan, with resource born of long experience.

"Ah 'low Ah will, though they're pretty short now from doing the same thing befo'."

He examined them gravely.

"They ain't very strong, either," he added. "Let's see, where are we at?" He looked about him for landmarks. "Oh, there's the road that leads to the Baron's over yonder. Give me yo' handkerchief fo' this other trace now, and we'll try and get there befo' it pops again."

Friedrich von Rittenheim was standing on the porch in front of his cabin, gazing at the western sky. A royal mantle of purple enwrapped the shoulders of mighty Pisgah against a background of lucent gold. The expression of anxiety and of spiritless longing left the man's face as he watched the melting glory.

"*Wunderschön!*" he murmured. "I wonder if she, too, is seeing it, also."

The Doctor's buggy came laboring into sight around the corner of the house.

"*Ach*, here are my so good friends, who are ever welcome. I kiss your hand, gr-racious Madam," he cried, as he went to the side of the carriage, and unshrinkingly saluted an old fur glove, from which the gracious madam's every finger was protruding.

"Ah've broken mah traces, Baron. Can you-all let me have some wire or string?"

"With delight, my dear Doctor. And will you not do me the honor to enter herein, dear lady, while the Herr Doctor and I r-repair the har-rness?"

He helped her from the buggy with a courtesy that induced a responsive manner in her, and she sailed ponderously into the cabin, displaying an elegance that caused her husband to chuckle and say to himself,—

"He certainly does fetch the women!"

The Baron stirred the fire, whose light fell on a scar, the mark of a student duel, that crept out from under his hair. He left Mrs. Morgan stretching her plump feet and puffy hands to enjoy the flames' warmth, while her keen eyes examined every corner of the bare room, its tidily swept hearth, and the bunch of galax leaves on the table.

"You-all keep pretty neat fo' a bachelor," she said, when the two men came in after their task was done. "Ah always tell the Doctor it's lucky he's married and has some one to look after him. You see he's no great shakes at keeping clean now;" she looked him over with an eye made critical by his proximity to the German, who was a model of soldierly neatness; "and if he wasn't married, Ah don't know what he'd be!"

Von Rittenheim didn't know, either, so he said, "That is one advantage of an ar-rmy training, Mrs. Mor-rgan."

"Well, Ah don't know as Ah agree with you there, Baron," she replied. "Henry was in the army all through the Civil War, and Ah don't think his habits were a bit improved at the end of it."

Henry grinned appreciatively, but the Baron's features betrayed only such interest as incited Mrs. Morgan to further conversation.

"Where's the rocking-chair you had when Ah was here befo'? That was Ben Frady's mother's chair. Ah've seen the old woman sitting out on the po'ch in it many a time."

She waited for an answer, and Friedrich colored to the roots of his hair. It was on his tongue's tip to say that it was in the next room, but Mrs. Morgan was quite capable of penetrating there; and, besides, telling the truth was another result of army training. He stammered something about having disposed of it, and hastened to ask if Madam would not like a cup of coffee.

It was a natural pride that deterred von Rittenheim from confessing to these friends of not many months' standing that he had sold the chair, the only thing in the house worth selling, and had sold it from necessity. The Doctor was right in his suspicions that the Baron was not getting on comfortably. Ten days ago he had spent his very last cent, and he was learning the true meaning of the word "poverty." The crop of corn that he had bought with the farm had served him until now as feed for the mule, as meal and hominy, and, by the alchemy of the alembic, as whisky. The end of the bacon from Ben Frady's pig was on the shelf in the cupboard before which he was standing, and he had just offered to his guest the last of the coffee with which the sale of old Mrs. Frady's chair had provided him. It was this anxiety that had clouded his brow as he looked at the sunset. He had nothing to send to market, not even wood, for his bit of forest yielded only enough for his own use. He had sold his cow, and had let a man have his mule for its keep.

It had not hurt his pride to live on this little mountain farm. He was as independent there as at home; more so, because the social demands upon him were as nothing. But no money and no food meant that he must work for a wage, and that galled him. Then, at this season of the year, what work was there to be done? No one needed extra laborers.

It looked very much as if he were brought face to face with starvation, and a man of thirty-five does not encounter such a prospect as gayly as a youth.

Fortunately for his further catechism, the idea of coffee appealed to Mrs. Morgan, and von Rittenheim set about making it, secretly wondering what his breakfast would be like without it, but preparing it none the less cheerfully.

"I gr-rieve, dear Frau Mor-rgan," he said, as he offered her the cup, "that I have not cr-ream for you,—or sugar, either," he added, peering into a bowl that he knew to be empty. He brightened as he picked up a little pitcher. "But molasses; may I give to you molasses?"

"Yes, indeed," returned Mrs. Morgan, cordially. "Ah like them just as well as sugar. Just a few, now," as she held out her cup.

"Shall it be coffee for you, Herr Doctor, or whisky? See, I have a jug of corn whisky which I myself made."

"No need to ask me, sir. Whisky, of course," and the Doctor's eyes twinkled under their shaggy brows. "Not bad fo' new whisky," he commented, as he swallowed the fiery stuff. "How do you make it, Baron? Ah didn't know you had a still."

"Nor have I, except a little affair in a bucket, with a bit of r-rubber hose for a worm. It makes enough for me. It is not a pleasant drink," he added, quaintly.

"But better than nothing, eh?" returned the Doctor, jovially, and then was sorry that he had said it, for his glance had fallen within the cupboard, and had spied out the emptiness of the larder. To cover his mistake, he added,—

"Mind you-all don't sell any. It's against the law, you know."

"A very str-range law. If I from my corn make meal or hominy, or what you call 'r-roughness,' for the cattle to eat, I may sell them. But if I make whisky, I must dr-ink it all myself, eh?"

"Yes, or give it to me! You see they must tax us on something, and while they class whisky as

a luxury—"

"Corn whisky?" interrupted Friedrich, incredulous.

"—they know it's enough of a necessity with us North Carolina mountaineers, at any rate, to return some revenue."

"My sympathy is with the moonshiners, I confess, Herr Doctor; though it is also with men who think such a beverage good to drink! You go? Ah, dear lady, I hope it will be soon again that you honor my house."

The Baron looked after the buggy as it disappeared in the dusk, and then turned back into the cabin, once more to face the harsh reality of his thoughts.

It grew clear to him that he must seek work in Asheville, the nearest large town, a dozen miles away. He must walk there and beg for employment like any tramp. Such straits as this he had not anticipated when he had made the sacrifice that had forced him to leave the Fatherland, though he did not for a moment regret that sacrifice.

What he could not formulate was just how he had been brought to his present pass. It was with stinging honesty that he owned it to be through some lack of foresight or of energy. But how should he have energy when he had no purpose in life?

To be sure, there was Sydney Carroll, who might supply purpose to any man who loved her, if that man were not a broken-spirited craven. The hopeless longing that had been in his eyes while he gazed at the sunset filled them once more. What had he to offer her but devotion,—the one capacity that was mighty within him? No, not even Love could endow him with Purpose.

Always he completed the circle of his thoughts. He must work for somebody else. That would be, indeed, a new experience and a bitter.

He was fighting with his pride when a call outside summoned him. It was the cry that has brought many a man to his door to be shot to death; but von Rittenheim had no feuds, and went forward without hesitation.

"Can you-all give me some supper?" asked a man who loomed big in the darkness as he sat on his horse. "Ah must have taken the wrong turn back yonder and wandered off the county road."

"This road goes only by my house like a bow of which the county road is the string," explained the Baron. "Dismount, I beg, and with much pleasure will I give you what I can."

It was little enough, though to the bit of bacon was added a couple of apples roasted in the ashes. It was to the credit of the visitor's powers of perception that he did not ask for other than was set before him, and compel his host to disclose his poverty. He was a man of middle age, with a shrewd face whose expression was spoiled by an occasional look of slyness or glance of suspicion.

"Very fair whisky," approved the stranger. "Do you get it round here?"

"I make it."

"You do?" with a sudden contraction of the eyelids.

Von Rittenheim saw nothing but his own regret at his necessarily meagre hospitality, for which he tried to make amends by being increasingly agreeable.

"You will like to see my little affair?" he asked, after describing the primitive manufacture of his still.

"Ah'm afraid Ah must be going on; Ah'm obliged to get to Asheville to-night. But if you'd sell me a quart of yo' whisky to keep me warm on the way, Ah'd like it."

He opened the door and looked out.

"It's right smart cold," he added.

Friedrich made no reply. He had checked his first impulse, which was to offer to give the fellow all the whisky he wanted, and he looked with a sort of fascination at the coin which the other drew from his pocket and tossed on to the table. Undoubtedly he was hungrier than ever he had been in his life, and not only had he seen his supper devoured before his eyes, but there would be nothing to eat in the morning before his long walk to town. With this money he could buy something at the store which he must pass on his way.

His recent conversation with Dr. Morgan went through his mind. He glanced at his guest, who was buttoning his coat and tightening a spur preparatory to starting.

"I think he will not tell," thought von Rittenheim, and he found an empty bottle and filled it from the jug. Then he helped the stranger with his horse, and after his departure returned to look ruefully into the fire.

"Never before," he mused, "did one of my race commit so petty a wrong."

## II

### The Snare of the Fowler

It was at the early hour when the morning brings to the earth no warmth and but a dim and grudging light, that a sharp rap summoned von Rittenheim to his cabin door. Three men stood outside in the grayness, their horses tied to trees behind them. To his surprise, Friedrich recognized his guest of the previous evening.

"*Ach*, my good friend, you did not reach Asheville last night?"

Unconsciously he frowned as he realized that if these men wanted breakfast he would have to confess that there was nothing to eat in the house. At the thought his instinct of hospitality and his pride both suffered.

"Yes, Ah got to Asheville, and Ah've come back—fo' you."

The man entered the cabin and motioned to his companions, who stepped one to each side of the Baron.

"What do you mean?" Von Rittenheim spoke with amazement born of entire lack of understanding. His mind could not compass the treachery of the man to whom he had given his last mouthful.

"Ah mean that Ah'm a United States deputy-marshal, and that Ah 'rest you fo' retailing."

Von Rittenheim started, a motion that caused three hands to seek as many pistol-pockets.

"You mean for selling to you last night that whisky to keep the cold from you?"

"Correct. Of co'se you-all took yo' chances, 'n you struck the wrong man."

Deputy-marshal Wilder chuckled complacently. He had made few captures lately, and he counted on this to look well at headquarters. Besides, he was having less trouble with the "big Dutchy" than he had expected. Indeed, he had prepared his assistants for a hard fight.

"You mistake—I did not str-rike you—yet," said Friedrich, misunderstanding. "But I comprehend that you arrest me, and for what."

Von Rittenheim looked at Wilder with so much contempt that the man turned away shamefaced. Still, the justice of his capture appealed to the German, trained in the soldier's school, for it was true that he had transgressed the law, and knowingly. That he should have yielded to the weakness aroused his irritability.

"I am a fool," he ejaculated.

"You-all needn't say anything to incriminate yo'self," said the deputy, more from habit than because the remark was appropriate.

"I go with you."

Von Rittenheim put on his hat. One of the men tinkled a pair of handcuffs in his jacket-pocket, and raised his brows inquiringly at Wilder. The latter nodded, though doubtfully. As he picked himself up from the floor a little later he realized that his doubt was justified. At the mere sight of the irons the Baron had flashed into fury. He flung one man across the table with a violence that brought him several minutes' quiet. The other rolled into a corner, and Wilder fell altogether too near for comfort to the bricks of the fireplace.

As the deputy-marshal rose he felt von Rittenheim's grasp on his throat.

"You understand not," he cried, his usually good English almost unintelligible in his excitement, "You understand not—how, indeed, should you?—that I am a gentleman. When I say I go with you, I go."

Giving him a shake as a final relief to his feelings, he added, imperatively,—

"Come, pick up your fr-iends and let us start. You have a horse for me?"

No one was disposed to make another attempt to handcuff the captive, and the little detachment set out, headed by the prisoner, who had much more the appearance of a leader than did any one of the crestfallen group behind him.

The miles passed but slowly, so heavy was the road's deep mud, and it seemed to von Rittenheim that he had been travelling for hours when they crossed the Six Mile Branch that measured but half their journey done. The keen air of the early morning, whose cold was accentuated by a drizzling rain, chilled him to the bone, unfortified by food as he was. He experienced the physical misery that forces to submission men of large build more quickly than those of lighter make.

His mind suffered in sympathy, and his thoughts were of the bitterest. Never had his experience known an act of perfidy like that of Wilder. To have betrayed his hospitality was bad enough,—to have lured him on to selling the whisky was the act of a villain. He cursed the chance that had brought the fellow to his door. How had it happened?

The scoundrel had said that he had missed the way, but that was not probable. The county road was plain enough. He must have passed Dr. Morgan, too, who would have set him right.

A pang of suspicion came into his mind. One had betrayed him, why not the other? The Doctor was aware that he had the whisky. He must have stopped Wilder, knowing him to be an officer, and told him about it.

As a matter of fact, the deputy's story was true. In the dusk he had turned into the Baron's road without noticing that he had left the highway. He had passed the Doctor, and had spoken to him, but it was on the State Road, before he had found himself to be out of his way.

Von Rittenheim, faint from lack of food, sick at heart over his position, and filled with disgust at his betrayal, was in a mood to accept any suspicion, and the evil thought grew fat within him. He pondered every word of his conversation with the Morgans, and fancied that he saw indisputable evidence of the Doctor's falseness in his talk about whisky.

The course of affairs in Asheville was brief. Wilder rode beside his prisoner when they came to the town, not because he feared Friedrich's escape, but that he might have the appearance of being in command of the troop. Von Rittenheim was too closely absorbed in his own painful thoughts to pay any attention to this enforced companionship. He dismounted wearily as the squad drew rein before the Federal Building, and followed the deputy-marshal into the commissioner's office.

It was early, but Mr. Weaver was at his desk, for he happened to be pressed with work.

He was a nervous, bustling man, with an expression of acuteness, and a trick of rubbing his head with a circular motion, as if he were trying to effect a tonsure by force of friction. He nodded a recognition of Wilder and his men, and sent a look of surprise at Von Rittenheim, whose appearance was not what was usual in the prisoners brought before him, although his dress seemed to indicate the mountaineer.

"What for?" he asked Wilder, gruffly, when he was at liberty to attend to them.

"Retailing," returned the deputy-marshal, and proceeded to tell a story in which the details of his method of purchasing the liquor were meagre, but the account of the German's resistance to the officers was full.

Baron von Rittenheim pleaded guilty to the charge against him, and listened to the exaggerated tale of the arrest without comment, though with a look of disgust that did not escape Mr. Weaver. Perhaps he knew his man in Wilder. At any rate, a few trenchant questions brought out the fact that Friedrich had resisted only when an attempt was made to handcuff him.

"Really, Wilder," said the commissioner, sharply, "you make me tired. Haven't you got good sense? Do you suppose a fellow like that is going to run away?"

"No knowing what these cussed foreigners won't do," growled Wilder, and added something about being blown up before his prisoner, that brought a frown to Mr. Weaver's brow.

He was puzzled about von Rittenheim, and he felt sure that there was something in the case that was not in evidence; but the man had pleaded guilty, and there was nothing to do but to hold him for the Grand Jury.

"Who'll go on your bond?" he asked, taking up his pen.

"Bond?"



"You must give a justified bond for your appearance before the United States Court in May."

"Oh, I see. I do not know. I have no fr-iends."

"It's only two hundred dollars."

"It might be only two hundred cents, still would it be the same. Yesterday I thought I had fr-iends, but to-day——"

He broke off abruptly, and again Weaver gave a perplexed rub to the top of his head. He opened a door and spoke to a negro boy who passed a waiting life in the anteroom.

"Sam, ask Mr. Gudger to step here, if he's in the building."

Mr. Gudger was a professional bondsman who added this calling to that of real-estate dealer and insurance agent, and interwove the three occupations with some talent and much success.

Von Rittenheim's farm served to secure Gudger against loss, while the mention of its existence caused the commissioner again to rub his head. Why in the world should a man ——? He gave up the conundrum in despair, and applied himself to the necessary business.

Friedrich took but a passive part in the transaction, whose detail, with its rapid interchange of technicalities, he did not attempt to understand. His courteous dignity and submission to the justice of the legal procedure told nothing of the caldron of feeling boiling within him at the *in*-justice that had brought him to a pass where this thing was right.

As he walked away from the Federal Building, his mind began to leave these thoughts and to dwell on the almost equally disagreeable subject of what he should do next. His immediate need was of something to eat. He was sick with hunger, and he found himself even casting a regretful thought after Wilder's quarter of a dollar. His hand had happened to touch it in his pocket during his morning ride, and he had flung it from him as far as he could into the woods beside the road.

"But, no," he thought, "rather would I starve than buy food with that."

He went up Patton Avenue, and eyed the signs on the buildings in the hope of seeing one that would suggest to him some way of making money.

The early morning's rain had turned into snow, that beat into the open place from the north, and drove the loafers from their accustomed haunts. The pavement was whitening rapidly.

"The first of April to-morrow," thought von Rittenheim, disgustedly. "What will happen to those pease that I put into the gr-round last week?"

As he stood, sheltered from the storm by a projecting building, he reflected that it was useless for him to go back into the country. There was no planting to be done as early as this, except that of a few garden vegetables, and he had no seeds to plant even if he went.

He remembered as if it were long ago that he had meant to come to Asheville to-day, and thought with grim humor that after all he had not been obliged to walk.

Yes, he must find some occupation in town that would support him during the month that intervined before the sitting of the court. He knew that the usual sentence for moonshining was "A hundred dollars or three months," and, since he had no money, he must submit to the degradation of imprisonment. May, June, July. That would bring him to August, and it would be time enough then to consider the future.

A von Rittenheim in prison! A shudder went through him with the thought, and a wild desire to avert the evil. If only he had not pledged his farm to that bondsman!

Friedrich's life had not been one to promote business knowledge. At home he had known but little of affairs—in America, nothing. He did not realize that he might have raised on his place ten times the amount of his fine without affecting Mr. Gudger's interests. He thought that his negotiation with that excellent person had put his estate out of his hands for all similar uses. Vaguely he thought that the bondsman would be released when his trial came on, and that at that time the land would be free again, and that perhaps it might be arranged then. But he did not see how, for they would not allow him to go out to do it, and he did not know any one who would take a mortgage on it. And, oh, how sleepy he was—and how hungry—and how the cold bit through him!

He bestirred himself and walked around the square. He was studying the window of a harness-shop which appealed to him as having to do with the subject he knew most about—horses; and he was pondering in what capacity he would offer his services to the proprietor, when he was accosted by a negro boy.

"The boss wants you-all over yonder," he said, grinning affably.

"The—who?" asked the Baron, to whom the appellation was new.

"The boss in the revenue office, Mr. Weaver. He wants you. Ah'm his boy Sam."

Friedrich supposed that some form had been omitted, and returned with docility to the Federal Building. Mr. Weaver nodded pleasantly as he entered.

"This German was brought in here just after you went out, von Rittenheim. I want you to interpret, if you will."

Friedrich's breakfast seemed now more nebulous than ever, but even this hour's tedium came to an end, and Weaver, with a "Thank you," pushed a half-dollar along the table towards him.

"No, no. It is a pleasure, my dear sir," began the Baron, when suddenly he brought his heels together, made his low bow, and took the money. "I thank you, *mein Herr*. I need it. I will take it."

Mr. Weaver looked at him with the provincial American's amusement at foreigners' ways, mingled with shrewdness.

"By the way, do you mind telling me how you-all got into this scrape?"

The German flushed and tossed back his head. Then he controlled himself, and said, gently, —

"But perhaps you have a r-right to know. If you will excuse me for a time, however, I will r-return after a breakfast. I left my house very early this morning."

Weaver noticed the sudden pinched look of faintness that turned von Rittenheim's ruddy face ashy.

"He's missed more than one meal," he thought, but said aloud only, "Any time before two o'clock."

It was not much that the commissioner learned from von Rittenheim after all, for food brought back self-reliance and courage, and he felt that the whole story of his trouble would be an appeal for sympathy that he could not make. However, he told enough to cause Weaver to say under his breath a few condemnatory things about the deputy-marshal, and then he asked,—

"What are you going to do?"

"I hope to find some occupation in Asheville until the time of my tr-rial."

"What do you want to do?"

"I care not. I am well, str-rong. I fear not labor."

Mr. Weaver compared with a glance von Rittenheim's figure with his own puny proportions, and said,—

"No, I should think not!"

Then he rubbed his head and asked,—

"Can you teach?"

"I know not. Never have I done such a thing. I am a soldier."

"That's easily seen. Still, you're a university man."

He touched his forehead just where on Friedrich's the tip of his scar was visible.

"Oh, yes. I was at Heidelberg."

"I suspect you'll do if you-all are willing to try. My boy's fitting for college, and he's getting badly behind in his German. If you'd tackle his instruction for a few weeks, I'm sure it would be of great value to him. Will you do it?"

"If you will accept a novice, I shall be gr-rateful." And again Friedrich made his low bow.

"Then be at my house at five this afternoon, and here's a week's salary in advance. You'll be wanting it, perhaps."

So was Baron von Rittenheim established as Tommy Weaver's tutor, and fortunate he thought himself.

Fortunate he was, in that this engagement secured to him his simple living; but most unlucky in that it left him with too much spare time. Had he worked at a task that occupied

seven or eight hours a day, his thoughts would have filtered through the weariness of his body, and been purified thereby. But his leisure was abundant, and he spent it in brooding over his troubles.

To those that had wrung him before was added his present shame. And his shame was embittered by his suspicion of Dr. Morgan. He held Wilder of no account. He was beneath a gentleman's notice. But Dr. Morgan had pretended to be his friend. He dwelt on all his intercourse with him, and weighed every conversation that he remembered. There came to him half a hundred trifling circumstances that seemed to substantiate his distrust.

The lack of his accustomed exercise told on his health. He grew moody and irritable, and daily the wish for revenge grew stronger. Satisfaction was due him, and satisfaction he would have.

### III

#### A Weak Man's Strength

It was three weeks later. Bud Yarebrough, going rabbit-hunting, pondered, as he trudged along the road, upon the freaks of an April that had come in with snow, and alternately had warmed and chilled the swelling hopes of bud and blossom, until the end of the month showed trees and shrubs but a trifle farther advanced than at its beginning.

"Jus' like M'lissy used to treat me!"

He made the comparison with a breath of relief that that time of wretchedness and rapture was past.

He heard the sound of hoofs approaching from behind, and whistled to heel his three scrawny hounds. When he made sure of the rider's identity, he shifted his gun to his other shoulder, and pulled off his remnant of felt in salutation of Miss Carroll. As she stopped to speak to him, he stared earnestly at her horse's neck; but kind Nature permits even a shy man's vision to take a wide range, and Bud by no means was unobservant of the brilliant skin framed by a glory of red hair; of the velvet dark eyes with their darker lashes; and of the corduroy habit, brownly harmonious with the sorrel horse and the clay road, as with its wearer's coloring.

"How is Melissa, Bud?"

Some of Sydney Carroll's friends thought her voice her greatest charm.

"And the baby? She's a dear baby! I think she looks like Melissa, don't you?"

"She's tol'able—they's tol'able. Yes, Miss Sydney, they says so," replied the lad, whose condition as the father of a family seemed to cast him into depths of bashfulness.

"It's a great responsibility for you, Bud. I hope you feel it. And I hope that you won't let *this* happen often."

Sydney gravely tapped her eye with her finger, while Bud stole a shamed hand over his own visual organ, which was surrounded by the paling glories of a recent contusion. The color mounted to his hair as he stammered,—

"Hit wasn't that—that what you think, Miss Sydney. Hit was a stick o' wood——" But his voice trailed off into nothingness before the girl's gaze.

"Bud, I know—I heard how it happened. Don't tell me what isn't true."

Bud kicked a stone that lay at his feet.

"You-all always does find out," he murmured, with unwilling admiration. "You see Ah was right smart glad about the baby, 'n 'bout M'lissy bein' so well, 'n Ah jus' took a little; 'n Pink Pressley was awful aggravatin', 'n Ah jus' 'lowed Ah didn' want nothin' t' interrup' mah joy," he ended, looking up with a humorous twinkle that brought a responsive smile to the severe young face before him.

"But Ah know hit ain' right to M'lissy," he went on hurriedly, for he realized that the smile was only transitory, "'n Ah'm goin' to try, Ah sho' am," he added, stepping out of the way of the horse, grown uneasy at this long colloquy. "Ah certainly am goin' to get out the tools 'n look 'em over to-morrow," he finished, as Sydney gathered up her reins.

"I hope so, Bud; but why don't you do it *to-day*?" she called back, saying to herself, as Johnny broke into a canter, "As if poor Bud ever could do anything to-day! He should have been born in the land of *mañana*."

The horse lengthened his stride into a sweeping gallop where the condition of the road permitted, slackening his pace and betaking himself to the side, and even to the footpath on the bank, when the mud grew too deep for speed. The girl paid little attention to him, for, like all mountain horses, he was accustomed to pick his way with a sagacity that man cannot assist.

On Sydney's face rested a shade too heavy to have been brought there by the failings, customary to the country, of Melissa's husband. But twenty years are not proof against the joint attack of sunshine and fresh, sweet air and the glorious motion of a horse, and she seemed a happy, care-free girl to Bob Morgan, sitting in the sun on his father's porch.

Unlike the Carroll house, which was of stone and surrounded by roofed verandas, Dr. Morgan's dwelling presented an unabashed glare of whitewashed weather-boarding. It needed only green shutters to be a hostage from New England. In summer a rose climbed over the portico and broke the snowy monotony, but at this season the leafless stems served only to enhance the bareness.

As he heard Sydney's approach Bob raised his aching head from his hand and sprang unsteadily to his feet. She was quick to notice his condition, for she knew only too well the weakness that was wringing the heart of the good old Doctor and lining "Miss Sophy's" face. Bob was their only son and only child, "'n hit do seem strange," the country women said, "that a man who's done's much good's the ol' Doctor shouldn' have better luck with his boy."

Sydney flushed as Bob ran unevenly along the path to take her from the saddle. Her experiences seemed to be like history this morning. A little sigh escaped her as she looked about for the Doctor, and then resigned herself to be lifted down by Bob's strong and eager, though shaking, hands.

To him her manner was quite the reverse of her attitude towards the other victim of a weak will from whom she just had parted. If to Yarebrough she was straightforward, to this man she was diplomatic. If to Bud she was Mentor, to Bob she was Telemachus. If Bud stared at her in puzzled surprise at her "always finding out," Bob exerted himself to appear before her a man on whom she could rely, because he was sure that she never had thought of him otherwise.

"Yes, it is a lovely day," she replied, in answer to his salutation. "Is your mother at home? And what in the world is the matter with your face?"

He was holding open the gate for her to pass, and she saw that it would be absurd any longer to ignore his appearance.

"The calf got mixed up in the rose-bush, and while I was getting him out he kicked me," explained Bob, glibly, shamelessly loading upon the back of a tiny and unoffending little bull-calf nibbling in front of the door the burden of his scratched and bruise-stained countenance.

Sydney averted her eyes as he told this unblushing lie, and sighed again as she thought of the poor mother, for she knew how long a Carolinian can stay on a horse, and that Bob must have been bad, indeed, to have rolled off, as it was evident that he had done.

"You must let me do it up for you," she said. "Go and get me the witch-hazel and something for a bandage."

She sat and waited for him in the living-room, where modern taste had made use of the blue-and-white homespun coverlets of the Doctor's grandmother as door curtains and couch covers. She noticed the kettle swung over the fire from the same crane that had balanced its burden thus for a hundred years, and she listened to Bob knocking about up-stairs in the room over her head.

"Now, sit down," she cried, when he returned. "You're so dreadfully tall. Towels! That won't do at all! Here, I'll wet my handkerchief and put that on first."

"May I keep it?"

Bob's good eye twinkled merrily, and what was visible of the other showed some amusement.

"Of course not. You'll return it to me as soon as you can."

Sydney's mouth twitched in appreciation of his audacity.

"I'm afraid I can't very soon," he replied, gravely. "I expect to need it for a long, long time."

He turned to the mirror and gazed therein at his shock of black hair rising above the linen, and at the one rueful eye visible below.

"It makes me look rather a fool, doesn't it? But it's awfully sweet of you to do it, Sydney. I say, Sydney." Suddenly he wheeled about and seized both her hands. "Is it always going to be this way? Are you never going to care for me? You know I'd give my life for you. You never asked me to do anything yet that I didn't do," he hurried on, yearning for an answer from her, yet knowing well that when she raised those white lids the eyes would not give him the reply that he wanted. "Truly, I'll do anything you say, if only you'll care a little, just a little, dear!"

He drew her to him, and she raised to his her eyes, warm, brown, swimming in tears. He let fall her hands, realizing that she *knew*—that she always had known—and feeling how empty were his words when he had never tried to do for her sake the one thing that might touch her.

Letting fall her hands, he sank speechless upon his knees, and buried his head in the blue-and-white coverlet of the couch.

With tear-laden eyes Sydney walked to the gate, her hands outstretched before her, like a blind man feeling his way. Johnny rubbed his nose in sympathy against her shoulder as she unfastened his chain. It was the first time in Bob's fond, foolish, generous life that ever he had allowed Sydney to do for herself anything that he could do for her.

As Johnny carried his mistress down the State Road, and the "bare, ruined choirs" of the trees became clear to her eyes once again, she realized that a new pain and a new pity had come into her life—and a new responsibility.

#### IV

#### "Thou Shalt Not Covet thy Neighbor's Wife"

It was fortunate that Johnny needed no guiding hand, for his mistress was far too absorbed in her thoughts to give him any attention. She did not see the ranks of gray tree-trunks through which peered glimpses of blue as the land fell away against the background of the sky; the heavy bunches of mistletoe in some leafless top failed to attract her attention; and she was blind to the beauty of the coarse green pine-needles against the brown masses of the oak-leaves that cling to the branches all winter to cheat the Devil of his bargain, the Earth, which is to be his when all the boughs are bare.

Her whole soul was filled with a longing to help Bob Morgan,—Bob, her dear old playfellow, so lovable and, alas! so weak. Already she had tried to foster his self-respect and to encourage his firmness by indirect means. It seemed now as if the chance were given her to act more openly. If only she could do so without rousing in the boy's breast a hope that she could not fulfil, for she knew that never could she love him as he wanted to be loved!

It was not that a difference of birth, of rearing, of tradition placed her apart from him. She even had a fondness for him, but love—no!

She had been thinking a great deal about love of late. She knew what it was to have men in love with her. Her grandmother, with whom she lived at fine old Oakwood, had introduced her in Baltimore, where she revived many old-time connections; and she had had another season in New Orleans. Her striking beauty had brought her a success that pleased Mrs. Carroll more than Sydney herself. The haughty old lady approved the girl's coldness, and nodded in agreement with Aunt Frony, who watched her young mistress's path with proprietary satisfaction.

"She cert'nly do favor her paw; 'n she walks along tru all dem gen'lemen like Joseph tru dat co'nfiel' wif de sheaves a-bowin' befo' him, 'n he never pay no mo' 'tention to 'em 'n if dey jus' common roughness—'n no mo' do she!"

"My son's daughter demeans herself as one of her family should," had been Mrs. Carroll's reply; but she was really gratified at this aloofness that seemed to excite the attention which she felt to be her granddaughter's due, without inducing a surrender of her heart. Sydney's marriage would take from her her only companion, and was an evil that the old lady recognized as necessary, but to be put off as long as possible.

Sydney regarded the various love-affairs in which she had had a part as the usual incidents

in every woman's career. They had touched her little. She was extraordinarily lacking in conceit, and she could not realize, since her sympathy was unquickened by a responsive affection, that a love of short growth could mean much to its possessor. This lack of appreciation of love's intensity was increased by the fact that her own simplicity of thought and straightforwardness of character always had prevented her from taking seriously any man's attentions until they resolved themselves definitely into intentions.

None of her experiences had moved her like this with Bob Morgan. When, in the autumn, she had given up her season in town on account of her grandmother's feebleness, it had been one of her consolations that at least she would be free from that sort of complication. And here was something worse than anything that had gone before, because her real fondness for Bob gave her an insight into his pain, and a pity for the sorrow that she knew she must inflict upon him.

She felt vaguely into the darkness for a realization of what love was. She had lain awake many a night that winter, waiting for her grandmother's call, listening to the rain as it dripped upon the roof from the twig-tips of the oaks, and dreaming a waking dream of what a love would mean that would make any sacrifice a joy, any pain a rapture. And, like all women from Time's beginning, she had cried into the shadow, "Oh, that I, too, may have this joy, this sacrifice, this pain!"

At the cross-roads Johnny fell into a walk until he should learn his rider's wish. *He* preferred to go home; but if she chose the right-hand road he was willing to carry her over it, mistaken as he felt her decision to be.

Sydney roused at the change of gait and turned the horse into the homeward way; but, just as he was settling down gleefully to his work, she remembered that she had failed entirely to accomplish the errand upon which her grandmother had sent her; the errand that had clouded her brow with anxiety.

Mrs. Carroll was very fond of Baron von Rittenheim. He interested her, he amused her, he aroused her curiosity, and his formal manners recalled to her memory the gallants of her youth. He called upon her frequently, and the old lady looked forward to his visits with agreeable anticipation. For three weeks he had not been to Oakwood, and she was determined no longer to endure such neglect,—at any rate, to investigate it. To this end she had sent Sydney to Dr. Morgan's to inquire of him news of the recreant German. And Sydney had not stayed to see the Doctor or Mrs. Morgan!

Obedient to the rein, Johnny stopped and looked about with an air of inquiring patronage. His mistress was not given to abrupt changes of intention, but he was willing to humor her when they appeared.

"I can't go back to the Doctor's, of course," thought Sydney. "I'll go to Melissa Yarebrough's,—she'll know."

Off from the State Road, just beyond the cross-roads, a rough trail led into the woods. Sydney turned into it, and rode between bushes of laurel and rhododendron, whose glossy leaves shone dark above her head even as she sat upon her horse. Patches of vivid green moss crept confidingly to the foot of the oaks, and a bit of arbutus, as pink as the palm of a baby's hand, peered from under its leathery cover. A few daring buds tentatively were opening their tiny leaves to the world, and some stray blades of grass pricked, verdant, through the general brownness.

This was but a deserted lane, which Sydney had chosen as affording a short cut to Melissa's, and, of a sudden, the passage was closed by a snake fence eight rails high. It was beyond Johnny's jumping powers, but his rider was undaunted. Leaning over the right side of the horse she dexterously pulled apart the top rails where they crossed, and Johnny cleverly stepped back in time to avoid their hitting his legs in their fall. Pressing forward again, she dislodged the next pair, and then Johnny took the breach neatly, and picked his discriminating way through the brush on the other side.

Though their cabins were a mile apart, the Yarebroughs were Baron von Rittenheim's nearest neighbors, and Sydney thought that Melissa would know if he were ill, as she feared.

But as she rode on in sinuous avoidance of protruding boughs and upstart bushes, she was seized by a shyness quite new to her. It seemed as if she could not bear to question Melissa about the Baron. She fancied she saw the girl's possible look of amusement. It became suddenly a position which she stigmatized as "horrid!"

Beside her a big white pine spread an inviting seat of heaped-up tags, and she slipped off the horse and leaned against the broad trunk. Johnny, at the bridle's length, nibbled at the enamelled green of the lion's tongue with equine vanity,—for he knew that it would beautify his coat,—and pushed his muzzle down among the dry leaves beyond the radius of the pine-needles, lipping them daintily in search of something more appetizing beneath.

The sunshine forced its way through the thick branches of the pine and frolicked gayly with Sydney's ruddy hair, as she tossed aside her hat and sat down to recover her composure, so suddenly and extraordinarily lost. Perhaps five minutes, perhaps ten, had passed thus in reflection which she called to herself "disgustingly self-conscious," when Johnny lifted his head and pointed his ears towards that side where the undergrowth was thickest. Sydney sprang to her feet and put on her hat, for she had no desire to be caught day-dreaming.

Having taken this precaution, however, she stood quite still, and Johnny, with satisfied curiosity, renewed his search among the fallen leaves.

The approaching sounds betrayed that there was a path on the other side of the thicket. Indeed, Sydney remembered that one ran from Melissa's cabin to a spring not far off, and she realized that she must be nearer to the house than she had appreciated. The voices were those of a man and a woman in no good humor with each other. In fact, a lively quarrel seemed to be in progress.

"Ah certainly wish you-all wouldn' come here no mo'." It was Melissa. "Ah don' wan' to see ye; 'n you are so aggravatin' to Bud."

"Ye used to like to have me come, ye know ye did, M'lissy. Don' you-all remember the time Ah kissed ye behin' the big oak in yo' daddy's pasture? Ye liked me well enough then."

"You shut up, Pink Pressley. Ah was a silly girl then, 'n Ah'm a married woman now, 'n hit's time you-all stopped foolin' roun' here."

The voices lessened in the distance, and a jay-bird which had screamed lustily at their approach turned his attention once more to Sydney, and found her still standing, bridle in hand.

She was shocked at the trouble that seemed to threaten the happiness of Bud Yarebrough's household, and she stood uncertain whether to turn back from the encounter upon which unwittingly she had intruded, or whether to go on in case Melissa needed her help or her comfort. Johnny pushed against her invitingly, and she mounted him from a near-by stump, and, breaking through the scrub, turned his head along the path in the direction of the cabin.

The house proved, indeed, to be close at hand; it had been hardly worth while to mount the horse, so near it stood to the pine-tree of Sydney's ambush. The mud daubing between the logs shone bright through the hazy spring atmosphere, and a thick white smoke, betokening a handful of chips newly tossed upon the fire, ascended slowly into the air as if eager to explore the dulled blue sky above.

As Sydney came around the corner of the cabin, for the path debouched at the rear, a terrified white rooster came running from the front, his outstretched wings lengthening the stride of his sturdy yellow legs, and his wattles swinging violently from side to side. At the same moment angry voices again struck Sydney's ears.

"Never, never, never!"

Melissa was tremulously insistent.

"Ah'll make you-all sorry you ever married Bud Yarebrough," the man responded, and Sydney turned the corner just in time to see him seize Melissa by the waist and lean over to kiss her. The girl took advantage of the loosening of his hold as he caught sight of Miss Carroll, and delivered him a resounding slap upon his cheek, when she turned panting to her opportune visitor.

"You-all saw, Miss Sydney, he didn' do hit! He's that hateful, he won' let me alone,—always pesterin' roun' here when Bud ain' to home. Ah 'low Ah jus' hate him!"

Stricken still with surprise, Sydney sat upon her horse, her face scarlet with distress and stern with disapproval. Pink glanced up at her, and began to sidle off, abashed. He could not forbear, however, throwing back a parting threat.

"You-all remember what Ah said. Ah'll make you sorry you ever married Bud Yarebrough."

"What does it mean, Melissa?" asked Sydney, dropping from the saddle and turning her face, now colorless, upon the weeping little wife crouching in a corner of the doorway.

"Jus' what you-all heard, Miss Sydney. He's always comin' here when Bud's away; 'n when he meets Bud anywheres they's always quar'lin', 'n Ah'm jus' wore out with him."

Sydney hung the horse's bridle over the end of an upturned horseshoe nailed to a tree before the cabin, and sat down on the door-step beside her humble friend.

"Melissa, tell me,"—she was very grave,— "did he ever before—does he—?"

She sought vainly for some phrase less bald than that which seemed so uncompromisingly full of embarrassment.

"Did he ever try to kiss me, ye mean? No, indeed, Miss Sydney; he sho' didn'. Only one time when Ah was a girl we kep' company fo' a right smart bit, 'n one night, when a lot of us was playin' tag in the pasture, he caught me 'n kissed me. That's the only time, honess', Miss Sydney. He never done a thing like this befo' to-day since Ah been married; jus' hung roun' 'n been aggravatin'."

Sydney took the hard hand between her own soft palms and stroked it gently.

"Hush, dear, don't sob like that. Can't Bud keep him away? Can't he forbid him to come here?"

"Ah'd be afraid to tell him about this, he's that fiery-tempered, Bud is. He goes along jus' as easy, 'n then some day he jus' natchelly goes rarin'. When Ah've tol' him how Pink comes botherin' me, he jus' says, 'Pore feller, he didn' get ye. Ah'm sorry fo' him.' But 'f Ah tell him this he might shoot him, 'n Ah couldn' bear that!"

Melissa ended with a shuddering cry, and Sydney remembered pityingly how the girl's brother had been brought home dead two years ago, shot in a quarrel whose primary cause was corn whisky.

"Tell me, Melissa, what did he mean by that threat,—that he'd make you sorry you'd married Bud? How can he harm him?"

"Ah don' know, oh, Ah don' know," sobbed the poor girl; "only hit's somethin' mahty mean fo' sho'. He's that low-down 'n sneaky hit's sho' to be somethin' mean," she reiterated.

"It seems to me, Melissa, that if I were married, I shouldn't want to have a secret that my husband didn't know. Of course, you understand Bud best; but be sure, quite sure, that it is right before you keep anything from him, won't you?"

A wail from within the cabin brought both the girls to their feet. The fortunate rule that most women who have to worry over their husbands have children to divert their minds was unbroken in Melissa's case. She wiped her eyes, took the morsel from the bed, and kissed it passionately, while Sydney looked on with avid gaze.

"May I take her for a little while, Melissa?" she asked, humbly. "She's so sweet!"

## V

### A Strong Man's Weakness

Through all the year's round of weather, good and bad; through the snow of January and the wind of March; through the glare of the warm April days before the foliage casts its protective shade over the earth; through the heat of midsummer and the glorious wine-clear air of October, round again to the rigors of Christmas,—through all the circle of the twelvemonth Melissa's door stood open.

To all appearance, ventilation is a hobby ridden and overridden in the Carolina mountains, but the doors are not left open for hygiene's sake, or even in hospitality's good name. It is to promote the performance of the ordinary duties of life, more comfortably carried on in the light than in the dark; for since the shuttered openings that serve as windows are unglazed, the door must be left open to admit the sun's bright rays.

The one room of Melissa's cabin was scrupulously clean. Pictures of the President and of one of the happy victims of Somebody's Pleasant Pain-Killer were tacked upon the walls beside long strings of dried red peppers and of okra. A gourd, cut into the shape of a cup, hung upon a nail by its crooked neck. The bed was covered neatly with a blue-and-white homespun coverlet, and a kettle steamed upon the fire at the opposite end of the room.

The sunlight swept across the floor as far as Sydney's feet, and glinted upon the silver spur at her left heel. It crept up to her radiant face and glowing hair. As she held the little baby in her strong young arms, she stood transfigured like an angel of old in the eyes of Friedrich von Rittenheim as he walked up the trail that served as an approach to the cabin.

"*Himmliches Mädchen*," he whispered, and pulled off his cap with a feeling of guilt that he was bringing into this pure presence his thoughts of hatred and revenge.



Little Miss Yarebrough had a narrow escape from a fall as her temporary nurse's eyes fell upon the figure outside the door.

"Ah, Baron, it is you!" cried Sydney, tucking the baby into the hollow of one arm and extending her hand. "Grandmother has been disturbed about you. Have you been away? It is a long time since you were at Oakwood."

"Has it seemed so to you?" he said, tenderly. "I have been to the town, and I am but now returned within a pair of minutes. I have come to ask Mrs. Yarebrough to put into order my house for me."

The unexpected sight of Sydney was like the sudden breaking out of sunshine through a bank of stormy cloud to the man whose whole mind had been filled for days with poisonous thoughts. He beamed upon Melissa and shook hands with her cordially.

"Yes, sir, Ah'll go this mo'nin'. You-all wants yo' flo's mopped up, Ah suppose."

She took the baby from Sydney and laid her on the bed, and began to get together what paraphernalia she needed.

"Bud ain' comin' home to dinner, so Ah c'n stay 'n cook yo's 'f ye want," she called, cheerily, breaking in upon the silence that had fallen between her two guests; a silence fraught with happiness for the man, and with a return of that terrible shyness for the girl. Why she, the belle of two seasons, whose composure always had been the envy of the girls of her age, should stand overcome with embarrassment before this jeans-clad German she truly did not know. All power of initiative seemed to have passed from her, and von Rittenheim stood before her and feasted his eyes upon her in a way that she had been wont to condemn as "horridly foreign," and she did nothing to relieve the situation.

At last the happy idea of flight suggested itself. She pinned her hat more securely and unlooped her skirt.

The glow died from von Rittenheim's face.

"You go? So goes ever-ything from me—love and fr-riendship—and even hope," he added, in a whisper. Then, as Sydney looked at him curiously, "Let me bring Yonny for you."

Sydney kissed a "good-by" upon the fat hand of the baby, now hooded for her journey to the Baron's, and murmured to Melissa,—

"You will think of what I said? You will be quite sure?"

She turned and surrendered her slender, booted foot to the Baron's palm, and was tossed deftly into the saddle. She had no realization of the thrill that went through him at the touch; he had no notion of the admiration that his dexterity roused in her.

"I came by a path through the woods and tore down some of Bud's fence. Will you go with me and put it up? It is only a little way."

Von Rittenheim was delighted at the prolongation of his happiness. To walk with his hand on her horse's neck; to do her a trifling service! It was heaven!

"You will come soon to Oakwood, won't you? Grandmother is eager to see you, and we are expecting some guests from New York on this afternoon's train—the Wendells; I want them to know you."

The words were as sweet as the voice, and he repeated them in a whisper as he put together the rails of Bud's fence after Johnny's surmounting heels had cleared them.

Then the chill swept around his heart again. It did seem to him as if he were losing everything that made life good. In the old country he had yielded up the little that was left after happiness had been stolen from him. Here he had yearned for friendship, and it had played him a scurvy trick; he had begun to see a faint glimmer of hope at the end of the black cavern—just a point of light that gave promise of a land of sun and cheer beyond. And now he felt that he had no right to travel towards that point of light, to strive to reach it and make that land his own, while shame hung over him, and black and bitter thoughts filled his heart.

His was a simple nature, von Rittenheim's,—one that yielded easily to the common thralls of love and life. He should have been the happy head of a family with the daily round of duties on a large estate to occupy his thoughts. It was one of the freaks of fate that the kindly outpourings of his heart always had been flung back at him. Unkind chance had done her best to ruin a gentle and trusting disposition.

He was musing on his wrongs as he tramped along the path between Bud's cabin and his own. His high-flung head was bent and his gaze downcast. He struck ruthlessly at the dry stalks of goldenrod on the bank, nodding southward before the prevailing wind. He still was

brooding as he approached his cabin; brooding so darkly as to bring over his judgment the dim mists of error and of injustice with their attendant cloud of revenge.

A mud-spattered buggy before the door drew his attention. It must be—yet how would he dare? Still it *was* Dr. Morgan's buggy. That long-haired black mule was unmistakable. The sight of it shook von Rittenheim as a breeze drives through pine-boughs. He felt choked, and put his hand to his throat.

The old man had come to exult over him, and what could he do in his own house? Ah, there was only one thing to be done. Everything pushed him towards it.

But *now*—he would not be so cowardly as not to face the man he hated, though a step into the brush beside the road would have concealed him. As he approached he saw the Doctor's tall figure filling the height of the doorway, though there was plenty of room to spare on each side. He was talking to Melissa Yarebrough, who was within making a fire as a preliminary to her cleaning and cooking operations.

"He sent you-all over, did he? Well, Ah 'low that means he's coming along in a little bit. He's been away? Is that so? Ah wonder where. Oh, here he is. How are you, Baron? Pretty day, isn't it? Melissa tells me you-all've been away."

"Yes," curtly. "I have been away, as no one should know better than you."

"Better'n me? Ah never knew it till this minute when Melissa told me. Ah was at Mrs. Carroll's this morning, and she commissioned me to find out where you-all were at, and why you hadn't been to see her. She had sent Sydney to my house for news, but Ah missed her on the road somehow. The old lady put me through mah catechism, and Ah couldn't tell her anything about you since the day Sophy and Ah were here, so Ah came by to find out."

"Do you dare say to me, sir, that you do not know where I have been?"

"Ah certainly do say it! How in the world should Ah know all the movements of people in God-forsaken coves like this?"

The German's persistence was beginning to irritate the Carolinian, grown autocratic and unaccustomed to question by long years of practice among a country-folk submissive to the dictation of a leader.

"You are under my r-roof there where you stand. Come you down here where only heaven's blue covers you, and I will tell you some things which it is well that you should know."

To keep them out of mischief Friedrich thrust his clinched hands into his pockets. Morgan did not see the application of von Rittenheim's words about the sky, but he felt a threat in his tone, and, being no coward, he came down the steps promptly. He even went so far as to dispense with his quid.

A sharp contrast they presented,—the German, erect, well-poised, plainly a soldier in spite of his ill-fitting clothes; the American, lank and stomachless, yet taller than the other in spite of his bent shoulders. His tawny beard was guiltless of care. Of all his slack body only his eyes showed alertness as they looked sidewise from under his old felt hat.

"Ah don't know what you-all are driving at, but Ah'm thirsting fo' that information you're advertising to present me with free!" he drawled.

Von Rittenheim now had himself under control, though his feet and hands were cold because of the retreat to his head of the fighting fluid.

"Let me ask you—after you were here with Mrs. Morgan—it is now three weeks ago—did you not meet a man who asked you the way?"

"Asked the way? Let me see. Yes, Ah 'low we did. White horse?"

"A white horse. Exactly," returned von Rittenheim, dryly. "You directed him on his road only too well."

"What do you mean? He asked if there was any cut that would shorten the way to Asheville, and Ah told him the shortest he could do was to stick to the State Road."

"Allow me to tell you, sir, that you lie."

Dr. Morgan flung up his head angrily. But he was loath to think that von Rittenheim, whom he liked, was trying to pick a quarrel with him. Besides, English spoken with a foreign accent fails to carry conviction to ears unaccustomed to hearing it, and Morgan thought the German unfortunate in his choice of a word.

"You mean Ah'm mistaken, and there is a short cut? If there is, Ah don't know it. Where do you leave the State Road?"

"I mean, sir, that you tell not the truth, that you lie, when you say that that was your conversation with that man. You lie, I say!"

Now there could be no mistake. The Doctor's sixty years fell from him like a mantle. He looked a young man, and his face unfurled the banner of wrath that knows no nation, but calls all the earth its own. The two men glared at each other like dogs leaping against their collars, eager to bury their teeth in each other's throats.

"By God," growled the elder man, "if you-all weren't a damned foreigner Ah'd kill you! But Ah suppose you don't know any better, and Ah've got to let you alone."

He turned and walked to his buggy. He did not forget to pat the noses of the horse and mule that drew his equipage. He clambered into the carriage, which protested, creaking, against his weight, and he jogged slowly out of sight.

"Oh, my Lawd," he whispered to himself, gently rocking from side to side,— "oh, my Lawd, why ain't he an American? Oh, why ain't he? But a foreigner! He ain't responsible!"

Friedrich watched the retreating buggy with mingled disgust and surprise.

"Why did he not r-resent that? If not that, what? He is br-rave, that is clear; then why does he not fight? Ah, these Americans, I compr-rehend them not!"

A furnace of indignation, he walked into the house. He passed through his living-room, where Melissa was scrubbing the floor and singing a doleful hymn as an encouragement to exertion, and went into his bedroom. There, in the glass, he suddenly came upon his own face, filled with bitterness, scowling.

He paused, shocked that this mask of hatred should be his. Abashed, he turned away from the too truthful mirror of his tell-tale features. A gurgling sound fell upon his ear, and he saw, lying contentedly upon his bed, babbling inexplicable nothings, waving meaningless gestures, rosy, happy, a baby—Melissa's baby.

The soldier looked down upon her solemnly. His face grew less stern and his whole form seemed to relax.

Glancing guiltily towards the open door of the other room, he leaned over the bed, and, turning the little head to one side with the tip of his forefinger, he kissed the baby's cheek just on the rosiest spot.

## VI

### "I Warrant There's Vinegar and Pepper In't!"

A heavy rain was beating against the windows with intermittent bursts of fury. Dr. Morgan, sitting in front of the fire in the room in which Sydney and Bob had had their painful interview on the previous morning, heard a mandatory whoop from without. Thrusting his stockinged feet into his slippers, and laying down the *Pickwick Papers* with a sigh for the probability of his having to make a visit in such a storm, he opened the door. A blast of wind brought in a sheet of rain that dampened the ashes swept from the fireplace by the sudden draught.

"O-oh, Doctor!" came a voice from the rider on the other side of the fence.

"Hullo! Who are you?"

"Bud Yarebrough. Ah got a letter fo' you."

"Well, light, ye fool, and put yo' beast under the shack."

The Doctor slammed the door and shivered back into the range of the fire's glow.

"Come in," he shouted, when he heard Bud's stamping feet on the porch. "Come in and warm. Who's sick, Melissa or the baby?"

Bud unwound the scarf that protected his ears, shook the water from his jacket, and began to untie the strings that secured pieces of sacking to his feet.

"Ne'er one. M'lissy's tol'able, 'n the baby's right smart. Doctor, Ah don' know's Ah ever knew a baby 's was 's lively 's Sydney M'lissy."

"Common failing o' first babies," grunted the Doctor.

"Now mos' babies," pursued Bud, spreading out his scarf and the pieces of burlap to dry before the blaze,— "mos' babies ain' overly interestin', but Ah 'low Ah never saw a baby suck her thumb no prettier'n Sydney M'lissy!"

"Did you-all say something about a letter?"

The Doctor was torn between a desire to be hospitable and a yearning to return to Sam Weller.

"Yes, Ah got a letter fo' ye."

Bud began to hunt in the inner recesses of his apparel.

"'N Ah 'low he cain't be well."

"He? Who?"

The Doctor's hopes of picking up his book again, which had risen when he heard of the admirable physical state of Melissa and the baby, sank once more.

"Mr. Baron. He sho' mus' be crazy to go out in such weather's this, 'n what's mo', to expect me to."

"He seemed to know the right person to apply to."

"That's the trouble with me. Ah'm that lackin' in good sense Ah do anythin' anybody asts me to 'cos Ah'm flattered to be ast!"

"Does he say he's sick?"

"He don' say so, but he looks powerful res'-less 'n wild-like. He came over 'bout noon 'n ast me would Ah carry you this letter."

Here Bud's prolonged search resulted in the discovery of the letter's outline under his sweater, and he extracted it by way of the neck of that elastic garment.

"Ah said, no, Ah wa'n' no fool to go out in such weather, 'n then he cut loose 'n talked the most awful language. Ah couldn' understan' a word of hit; Ah reckon hit's his foreign words or somethin', but Ah never heard anythin' like hit befo'. 'N then he ast me again, mahty quiet like, wouldn' Ah take this letter to you-all fo' him, 'n Ah jus' natchelly thought Ah would!"

The boy grinned sheepishly. The Doctor nodded and ran his finger under the flap of the envelope.

"So you think he's sick."

"M'lissy does. When Ah was puttin' the saddle on the mule she come out to the stable with them bits o' crocus sack fo' mah feet, 'n she said Mr. Baron'd jus' gone, 'n she 'lowed he had a fever comin' on, he looked so bad."

Dr. Morgan was reading the letter for the second time, frowning heavily over it.

"What do you-all think yo'self?"

"Well, Ah don' see how he can be right to walk a mile to our house in this weather, not needin' to, 'n to *in*-sist on mah comin' here. Is they e'er an answer?"

The older man rose and put a log on the fire, while Bud gathered together his primitive panoply and began to arm himself against the elements.

"You tell him, Bud, that Ah'll attend to it when the mud dries after this rain. Ah get enough hauling round to do in the mud, without anything extra," he added.

Bud's curiosity was suffering.

"Ain' you-all goin' to see him?"

"You tell him what Ah say." The Doctor picked up his book with an air of dismissal. "Shut the do' tight," he called, and then read the same page three times over with unthinking mind, until he heard Bob's step coming down the stairs.

"Bob."

"Sir?"

The young man looked out of the window, wondering how soon the rain would stop enough for him to go to see Sydney.

"Read this."

Bob took the letter.

"The Baron," he said, studying the small, foreign hand.

"Read it aloud."

Bob began obediently:

"MY DEAR SIR,—It is now more than three weeks that you played upon me a trick most treacherous. What it was I will not relate, for it would be needless. This I do assert, and more, that when you tell me you do not know what I mean, as you told me yesterday, you say not the truth. When I demand that you give to me the satisfaction that a gentleman should offer to another under such circumstances, I feel that I am treating you with a courtesy which you do not deserve. I think a whipping would suit better your contemptibility. Still, nevertheless, I conceal my pride, and I beg that you will meet me at whatever place you may appoint, and that you will fight with me with any weapon that you may choose.

"My unfriended condition in this country makes it not possible that I should be accompanied by a person who shall be suitable to be my second. But I entreat that my poverty in this respect will not deter you from bringing a friend with you.

"I am, sir,

"Yours with faithfulness,

"FRIEDRICH JOHANN LUDWIG V. RITTENHEIM."

Bob whistled,—a long sibilation of amazement,—and then laughed and laughed again.

"What have you-all been doing to the old fellow?"

"Ah haven't any idea."

"He says you talked it over yesterday."

"You hardly could say we discussed it," said the Doctor, dryly. "He insisted that Ah knew the drift o' his remarks, which Ah didn't, and rung in something about a man on a white horse."

"Who was he?"

"Blamed if Ah know. Ah begin to think, like Bud, the man's sick. He certainly was angry over something, and he used pretty strong language."

"Swearing?"

"No. Told me Ah lied."

Bob whistled again.

"That warmed you under the collar, I suspect?"

"It did wilt mah linen a trifle. However, Ah took it that, being a foreigner, he didn't know just how strong a word he was employing, so Ah drove off and left him."

"I reckon from this," holding up the letter, "he did know, and meant just what he said. It looks as if you'd been too lenient. You ought to have given him a biff or two on the spot."

"Maybe Ah had oughter."

Morgan pulled his beard thoughtfully.

Bob read the letter through once more.

"Quaint English, isn't it? The idea of a regular challenge gets me. I don't know when I've come across anything funnier."

"The notion ain't so novel to me, but duels are scarce nowadays. The State ain't so overly encouraging to them. Hand me down those Statutes and let me see exactly how they fix us."

Bob took the book from the shelf against the wall, and the Doctor turned over the pages.

"Here it is, in the Constitution. 'Article XIV., Section 2. Penalty for fighting a duel. No person who shall hereafter fight a duel, or assist in the same as a second, or send, accept, or knowingly carry a challenge therefor, or agree to go out of the State to fight a duel, shall hold any office in this State.' H'm," sniffed the Doctor. "Strikes me that won't prevent a lot of

people from fighting. It discriminates against the would-be office-holder, but not against *me*, who wouldn't swallow an office if you put it in mah mouth."

"Or von Rittenheim, who wouldn't know one if he saw it! Perhaps it's a delicate tribute to the desire of all North Carolinians to serve their State."

"What disturbs me," said Dr. Morgan, shutting the book, "is that Ah like the fellow, and Ah don't want to shoot him all up fo' nothing. And, as Ah said befo', Ah sho' do think the fever's coming on him."

"What are you going to do?"

"Blest if Ah know!"

"What answer did you send?"

"Ah told Bud to tell him Ah'd attend to it when the mud dried."

"Good. That'll give you two or three days to find out what's the matter with him. Oh, what a joke, what a joke!"

Bob subsided into a chair, overcome with joy at the idea of his father as a participant in a formal duel.

"Let me know how it comes on, won't you, sir? May I be your second?"

"No," returned the Doctor, hunting his place in the discarded novel. "Ah'm laying off to have you governor some day, and Ah don't want to have you disqualified this early!"

Bob grinned appreciatively, and again explored the clouds.

"I'm going to see Sydney. May I show her this?"

Bob took his father's "H'm" for an assent, and went out to saddle his horse.

Von Rittenheim, sitting before the fire with *Wallenstein's Lager* on his knee, but with eyes bent upon the flames that burst with tiny explosions from the logs, and with mind wandering far from thoughts of Schiller,—von Rittenheim was waiting with what patience he could command for Bud's return.

With the falling of the wind at dusk the rain ceased. Friedrich lighted his lamp and opened his door to look up the road, a view not commanded by his single window.

He prepared his evening meal of coffee and bread and the batter-cakes that he had learned to like and then to make in this land of the frying-pan. Still Bud did not come. At eleven o'clock he went to bed, for he knew that no countryman, unless he were going for the doctor, would be abroad at that hour, with such mud under foot.

The next day's noon brought no news of the recreant messenger, and von Rittenheim went to the Yarebroughs' cabin in search of him.

"He ain' home," Melissa said, in the raised voice that she felt to be necessary to the German's understanding of her English. "He's gone to shoot cotton-tails. Ah 'low Ah'll make you-all a pie, 'f ye like," she added, offering this practical sympathy to the suffering that she saw written on his face.

"A pie of cotton-tails! Delightful! It will give me pleasure," said von Rittenheim, politely, with vague notions of birds floating through his brain. "Did he—Bud—br-ring no message for me yesterday in the afternoon?"

"No. He said the Doctor 'lowed he'd 'tend to hit—what yo' letter was about—when the mud dried, 'n Bud reckoned that wasn' no message, 'n hit wasn' no use goin' over to tell you jus' that."

"When the mud dried," repeated Friedrich. "Remarkable! Good-morning, Mrs. Yarebrough. Most remarkable!" he kept repeating to himself as he walked home. "He is not afraid, of that I am certain. Why, then, does he delay? Remarkable!"

## VII

### In the Southern Appalachians

It was five o'clock, and a pretty girl, Katrina Wendell, was standing at one of the long windows of the drawing-room at Oakwood, looking out upon the storm.

She had not Sydney's unusual beauty, nor had she her imperious manner, the heritage to Southern women from generations of slave-holding ancestors; but she had charm and a certain distinction, and she had the stamp with which New York seals her daughters imprinted upon every tuck and frill of her clever gown.

"Katrina, it isn't polite to look so bored," said her brother John, who was amusing himself with Sydney's help by drawing caricatures of the men of the day.

Katrina flushed. She *was* bored, but John was a beast to mention it. She had just brought her first season to an ignominious close by falling in love with the worst match of the year,—Tom Schuyler, handsome, irrepressible, and penniless. Mrs. Wendell promptly had refused her consent to the engagement, and, with equal decision and what Tom called "disgusting alacrity," had sent her daughter South under her brother's care to accept the hospitality of Mrs. Carroll, a life-long friend.

Under the circumstances it was not strange that the prospect from the window did not appeal to Katrina.

John, on the other hand, was reaping his reward for the self-sacrifice that had made him accept the duty of escorting his sister to North Carolina. Unlike the martyrs of old who went unprotesting to their doom, he had obeyed his mother's commands in no submissive spirit. It was a relief to the keenness of his martyrdom to kick against the pricks, and kick he did from New York to Flora, during all such parts of the twenty-four hours as were not occupied in attending to the wants of his admirable appetite, or in yielding to the refreshment of such repose as a sleeping-car can offer. Even he felt that his recompense was undeservedly great when he found himself welcomed at the little Flora flag-station by Sydney. He was twenty-eight, and at that age a pretty girl still stands far up on the list of diversions. No, decidedly, John was not bored.

Katrina made no answer to her brother's accusation.

"Poor Katrina," said Sydney, going to the window and standing beside her guest. "It is an abominable day for your first one. Just look at that!"—she summoned John by a glance over her shoulder; "pouring! And usually we pride ourselves on our view."

Sheets of rain were driving across the field at the foot of the knoll upon which the house stood. At times the mountains beyond were shut off entirely. Again the clouds overhead blew past, and through a leaden light the storms in the distance could be seen, thickening under some canopy of blackness, or ceasing as the upper mist grew thin.

"What an advantage it gives you to have such a stretch of open country," said John. "Here you can see a storm coming when it is yet twenty miles away, and make your plans accordingly; but in New York, with the horizon line on the roofs of the houses across the street, you may be caught by a shower that was lurking over the Battery when you left your own door."

"I can't understand the foliage being so little advanced," said Katrina. "It's the last of April, and yet the leaves hardly are starting. They aren't much ahead of the Park."

"You expected a Florida climate, perhaps. We never cease to have winter letters from people in the North who lament their cold, and wish they were with us on our 'rose-covered veranda in the Sunny South,' and it may be zero when we are reading their flights of imagination."

"Is it really ever as cold as that?"

"Not often, but quite often enough. I've known snow as late as the twentieth of April, and I've been to a picnic on Buzzard Mountain in January."

"We're always hearing about this wonderful climate. It sounds as if it were remarkable chiefly for eccentricity."

"Oh, the average temperature is very even. The summers are delightful, too,—a long warm season instead of a short hot one. Though you may have fires now and then, it's not cool enough to close the windows, night or day, from the first of May to the first of October, and yet it seldom goes over eighty-five."

"It's the equilibrium between altitude and latitude, showing what it can do, isn't it?" asked John. "The fact that we are half a mile above the booming waters of the deep, my dear Katrina, counterbalances the nine hundred miles that lie between us and that large and noisy city to which I have no doubt your heart is turning fondly."

"Here are some men on horseback, Sydney," said Katrina, again ignoring her brother.

The wind was dying and the rain was lessening with each fitful gust.

"Are they cavaliers approaching the presence, or hinds of the estate coming to crave an audience?" demanded John, who professed much amusement at what he had seen of the semi-feudal manner of life at Oakwood, and at Sydney's responsibilities with regard to the work of the farm and to the tenants.

The girl peered into the gathering gloom.

"It must be Bob Morgan. Yes, it is; and that looks like Patton McRae's black mare."

"By their nags ye shall know them," said John. "Who are these estimable youths? I look upon them with the eye of jealousy."

"Bob Morgan? Oh, he's Dr. Morgan's son. You passed his house near the post-office. And the McRaes live at Cotswold; there's a big family of them. Will you ring for tea, Mr. Wendell?"

"I fly to do your bidding, even though it be to succor my rivals, for such I feel they are," and he slapped his chest melodramatically.

Much stamping of feet and shaking of garments heralded the announcement of the two young men by Uncle Jimmy, the old colored butler.

"How good of you both to come in this weather," said Sydney, flashing a greeting at each one in turn. "You are just in time to prevent Miss Wendell from being bored to death."

"Delighted to prevent your demise," said Patton, promptly, and attached himself at once to Katrina's following.

"Uncle Jimmy," said Sydney to the old man who was poking the fire with an assiduity born of a desire to stay in the room as long as possible, "tell Mrs. Carroll that tea is just coming in, and that Mr. Bob and Mr. Patton are here."

"See what you've brought us, Mr. McRae," Katrina was saying, as a ray of sunshine broke the twilight darkness.

The mountains stood a deep and penetrable blue against a golden break behind the Balsams. Fierce black clouds hurried across the upper sky, dragging after them ragged ends of mist, and beneath this roofing the setting sun aimed its luminous shafts across the *rest* made by Pisgah's rugged peak.

No one broke the spell of beauty by a word, but Wendell saw a glance pass between Sydney and Bob,—the look of sympathy sure of its fellow.

The sound of Mrs. Carroll's cane brought them all to their feet. She entered, tiny, autocratic, keen, leaning upon Uncle Jimmy's faithful arm.

"Good afternoon, Bob. Good afternoon, Patton. You are doubly welcome on this stormy day. Put my chair a little more to the side of the fireplace, Bob. Yes, Patton, the footstool, if you please. You may go, James. John, the hook for my cane is on the left of the mantel-piece. Katrina, tell Sydney to put a shade less cream in my tea than she did yesterday. No cake, thank you, John, but a rusk,—yes, a rusk appeals to me. Bob, what wild thing did you do on that horse of yours on your way here?"

"Not a thing, Mrs. Carroll. He came along like a Shetland pony. Gray Eagle doesn't like rain. It depresses him."

"Patton is riding the black mare to-day, grandmother," called Sydney from behind her tea equipage.

The old lady raised her eyes in comical despair and shook her head mournfully.

"You certainly have courage, my dear child."

"Only the courage of a Cotswold lion, I'm afraid. But you mustn't be distressed about her, she's really beginning to do Sydney credit."

"You see, Mr. Wendell, Black Monday was raised on the place here, and she's been the hardest colt to break of any we ever had. Patton owns her now, but I feel a personal responsibility for her because he took her out of my hands before she was thoroughly quiet."

"I see," nodded John, gravely, in accord with Sydney's seriousness. "You fear some burst of girlish exuberance."

"Did you see her roll in her saddle just as we were coming out of church Sunday?" asked Patton, turning eagerly to Sydney.

"How do you dare to use such half-broken creatures?" cried Katrina.

"My dear," said Mrs. Carroll, "when you've been with us a little while you'll realize how close



we are to primitive conditions. To-day you break the horse you mean to ride next week. To-morrow you kill the steer or the pig or the chickens that were your pets to-day."

"I suppose it must be so always in the country, but you can't be very primitive here with a large town near by and a railroad."

"In reality we are only as far from the Asheville Court House as the people on the upper boundary of the Bronx are from Castle Garden; but in point of convenience, owing to the scarcity of trains and their poor arrangement, we are almost as near to Washington."

"Still, the railroad has opened the country and given the farmers new markets," asserted John.

"Undoubtedly; but that is not an unmixed good, in my opinion," said Mrs. Carroll, stoutly. "They sell more cabbages and apples, but they buy cheap fabrics and ready-made clothing in place of the stout homespun that the women used to weave."

"You'd be surprised," said Patton, "to know how little the country people use the railroad. There was an example of it day before yesterday. A man from McDowell's Creek, about six miles from Flora, took his first train-ride since the road was put through, fifteen years ago."

"How extraordinary that seems! It was the day of his life, I suppose." Katrina's eyes were large with amazement.

"In a way it was," said Bob, dryly, "for in Asheville he celebrated his adventures not wisely, but too well, and on the way out he fell from the platform and was killed."

"Bob, how can you be so flippant?" objected Sydney to the crestfallen young man. "It seems a terrible end."

"All sudden deaths seem terrible to us who are left behind," said Mrs. Carroll; "but even such an ending does not give us the shock that it would if we did not live in a community accustomed to the accidents consequent upon every man's carrying a revolver. It's a bad habit. I hope you boys don't do it."

"No, indeed, Mrs. Carroll," they both replied, with suspicious promptness, and they sat up very straight, so that the backs of their coats presented an unbroken line.

John smiled at them.

"Are they often used?" he asked.

"Quite too often," answered Sydney, gravely. "As grandmother says, we do, indeed, live close to nature. If a man is angry with his neighbor, he calls him to his door on some moonless night and shoots him."

"In primitive society the primitive wants of man are satisfied in primitive ways," remarked Bob.

"Moses ought to have put the Ten Commandments on something stronger than stone if he meant them to be unbroken," added Patton.

Mrs. Carroll shook her head at him.

"I don't see how you can be so very primitive," insisted Katrina. "Now this——" She glanced expressively about the room, where old portraits surmounted the dark panelling and heavy rugs glowed warmly in the firelight.

"Oh, we are as composite in our mountains as are the people of any other part of these composite United States," said Sydney. "The mountaineers themselves are a mixture. There are men in coves distant from the railroad who are living on land to which their ancestors drove up their cattle from the low country three or four generations ago. These men are a law unto themselves. They have no opportunities for educating their children, and once in a while you hear of a family that never has heard the name of God."

"My great-grandfather came here in the early eighteen hundreds," said Bob, "and a queer lot he must have found. They say that there was a crop of younger sons of good English families which had been planted here as a good country for the culture of wild oats."

"I suppose that in the eighteenth century this was as remote a place as any to lose black sheep in, if losing was their desire," suggested John.

"It's quite true, quite true, what Bob says," Mrs. Carroll took up the explanation. "Mr. Carroll used to tell me that he knew it to be a fact that Bud Yarebrough's father—Bud is a ne'er-do-weel who lives in a cove not many miles from here, Katrina, my dear—was a great-grandson of one of the Dukes of Calverley."

"Then Melissa's baby is the Lady Sydney Melissa Something-or-other!" laughed Sydney.

"There's a legend of a penal colony, too," said Patton.

"That is disputed," replied Mrs. Carroll.

"If there was one, Pink Pressley is of its lineage, I am sure," said Sydney.

"If heredity counts for anything, I should think that a colony of black sheep whose diet had been wild oats would account for all the lawlessness of the community," offered John.

"For a great deal of it, undoubtedly, and their life of freedom from restraint for so many years would be responsible for more."

"But these people are not close about you here," exclaimed Katrina.

"Indeed, they are. They are our neighbors and our friends. Why, there's a tenant on our place who has been tried twice for murder."

"Bob and I found a deserted still in the woods over the creek the other day," said Sydney. "That suggests another of our friends' occupations."

"But your influence must be at work among them constantly."

"We hope it is, and that is why we lay stress upon the compositeness of our settlement," said Mrs. Carroll. "There are the country people we've been telling you about, and there's a group of what we call Neighborhood people, for distinction's sake. The Delaunays at the Cliff were originally from New Orleans, and the Hugers were from Charleston, and we came from Virginia. Before the war we used to come over the mountains every summer in carriages to take refuge from the heat of the lowlands, and after the war we were glad to live here permanently."

"It was post-bellum poverty that drove us here from the Scotch-Presbyterian settlements in the middle of the State," said Patton. "We're another element."

"And is there really fusion going on as there is in other parts of the country?" asked Katrina.

"My people have assimilated with the peasantry, as I suppose Mrs. Carroll calls them, ever since they came," said Bob.

"This settlement must be unique," said John.

"No. I know of two not very far from here, and I've heard of others. The more fortunate people consider themselves as closely allied to the country as do the mountaineers. We are integral parts, and we insist on being so considered."

"We aren't a wholly bad lot, we mountaineers," said Bob. "I speak as of the soil, you see. Too much whisky and tobacco and hog-meat have deprived us of physical beauty, and we are sadly lacking in moral strength, but the life of freedom and lawlessness developed good traits, too. We don't lie,—that is, about important things," he added, hastily, putting his hand under his coat; "and we don't steal, and we are loyal to our friends."

"Especially when the minions of the law are after them," grinned Patton.

"Ah, you've betrayed yourselves," cried Sydney. "I know it was you two boys who hid Pink Pressley when the revenue men were chasing him the last time."

"The last time?" John asked the question.

"Oh, Pink used to be a chronic moonshiner. He seems to be a reformed pirate now," said Patton. "He must be in love."

"Whisky is the curse of this country," said Mrs. Carroll, vehemently, while Bob gazed into the fire and Sydney played with the sugar-tongs. "You can't deny lying, Bob, when the moonshiners are lying to the revenue men every day, and their friends are lying in their behalf; and you can't say they don't steal, when they are defrauding the government with every quart of blockade they sell. The mountaineers may be loyal to their friends, but it is to conceal crime."

"Illicit stilling seems to be regarded like smuggling," said John. "The government is fair game."

"Whisky stunts the growth of children, and blunts the morals of youth, and makes murderers of men," went on the old lady, disregarding John's interruption, and sitting with expressive straightness. A silence fell upon the group that John and Katrina felt to be painful without understanding why. Patton and Sydney were burning with sympathy for Bob. It was Patton who broke the quiet.

"And they drink it from a dipper!"

The ensuing laughter snapped the strain of embarrassment.

"We have another class of people that we haven't described to Katrina," said Sidney. "The resident foreigners."

"Like Baron von Rittenheim," said Bob, absently, staring at the fire.

"Another title! How in the world did he come here?" asked Katrina.

"Oh, he's one of the footballs of Fate," said Patton.

"Usually they're English,—the footballs," said Bob. "They come here to mend either health or fortune, stay a few years, and go away."

"Mended?"

"Yes, in health, if they—stop drinking." Bob brought it out with a jerk. "This climate's great, you know."

"But not with improved finances?"

"Yes, that too. It's a fine place for economy."

"For what purpose did this German come?" asked Katrina.

"He's one of the mysteries," said Patton, rising to take his leave.

Bob called Sydney from the drawing-room into the hall, and handed her a letter.

"Father got it this afternoon," he said. "It's awfully funny."

Sydney took it from its envelope. Bob, bending to buckle on his spurs, did not see her flush at the signature and then grow pale as she read.

"Bob," she whispered, hoarsely, "promise me,—promise that you'll let me know—if they do it—when it's going to be."

And Bob, who had no thought but to amuse her, said, heartily, "Why, of course."

Had von Rittenheim, sitting before his fire awaiting Bud's return, been able to see into the minds of his neighbors, he would have found matter more productive of mental confusion than were English irregular verbs to him.

That Dr. Morgan, after receiving a challenge, could settle back to the perusal of the *Pickwick Papers* as placidly as if he had attended to the last minute detail of the conventions attendant upon that process called "giving satisfaction," was a thing that his traditions, his education, and his environment had put it out of his power to understand.

That Bob could regard the incident as a joke was even farther from his grasp. An indifference caused by a lack of fear,—that was within his range. But that this method of wiping out an insult should be regarded as funny,—of such an emotion under such circumstances he could not conceive.

Sydney's feeling, could he have known it, was closer to his comprehension, because it is not beyond man's imagination to guess, approximately, the frame of mind into which a woman would be thrown upon hearing of such a prospective meeting. What he could not see was the importance that his own part played in the girl's fear.

The thing seemed to her barbaric, mediæval, horrible. She shook to think of harm that might come to her good old friend, the Doctor. She became an abject coward when she remembered that the old man was noted throughout the mountains as a perfect shot.

She could not understand herself. She had not had this feeling at all when Ben Frady had cleared the open space before the post-office of all loafers, and she unwittingly had ridden on to the scene, and, grasping the situation, had demanded his revolver from him and had received it.

Not until afterwards had she had any such sensations as this, when a message had come to the house that the negroes on the farm were cutting each other, and she had walked in upon them and had ordered them to separate.

Bob had told her that he didn't know what it was all about, and the uncertainty made the situation only more disquieting. Like most Southern women, it did not occur to her to interfere before the event in any affair that was men's own; but she began to formulate a plan that depended for its success upon Bob's keeping her informed as to the course pursued by his father. Could she depend on him? Her anxiety was cruel.

**Sydney Rides against Time**

Three days later Bud brought to von Rittenheim the following note:

"DEAR BARON,—I say again that I haven't any idea what you are driving at, but I never yet went back on a fight, so if you still want one I'll meet you at twelve o'clock to-morrow on top of Buck Mountain. I think you went to a picnic there when the chestnuts were ripe last fall, so you know the place. I'll take the weapons along with me, and you can examine them when you get there. I don't want any second.

"Yours truly,

"HENRY MORGAN."

Von Rittenheim puzzled over the English of this document, and nodded his head in satisfaction.

"At last he performs his duty. Buck Mountain I know. It is a distant spot, ten miles from here. He is strange not to say what are the weapons; but what can you expect?"

With a shrug derogating the social experience of his adopted land, he proceeded to negotiate with Bud for the use of his mule on the next day.

It was nearly eleven o'clock on the following morning when Bob Morgan drew rein before the Carrolls' door, and asked to see Sydney.

"Beg her to come to the door just a moment, Uncle Jimmy. No, I'll not send the horse around. And she'll want Johnny saddled at once. Send word to the stable, please."

When she appeared he ran up the steps as far as his bridle would allow, and spoke in a low voice, with a glance at the windows.

"It's this morning, Sydney, at twelve. Will you come? Father didn't tell me about it until just as he was leaving the house, and he said he didn't want me, but I'd promised you, and we'll be in time if we hurry, I've ordered Johnny."

The girl clutched her throat with a feeling that every bit of strength was leaving her body. Bob, buckling his curb rein, saw nothing. His only thought was to give her some sport. A fight, more or less, counted but little with him personally; and he did not think that this one actually would take place, else he would not have considered taking a girl to it.

Sydney spared a thought of wonder at Bob's nonchalance, but as swiftly reflected that perhaps men always were cool in such emergencies. To her it meant murder,—the crime of life destroyed. And whose life? Perhaps that of her dear old friend. Perhaps—!

The blood surged back to her brain and she mastered herself.

"We have so little time," she panted. "I'll be ready in a minute."

Before the horse was at the mounting-block she was awaiting him, buttoning her gloves, while she extended her foot for Bob to buckle her spur. She had put on her riding-skirt, but otherwise was as she had come to the door.

"Don't you-all want a coat, Sydney?" asked Bob, solicitously. "Or a hat?"

"No, I'm quite warm. Where is that boy? Hurry, Clint," she called to the little negro, who was bringing the horse around with a slowness born of his enjoyment of the brief ride.

"Off with you, quick, now, boy!" It was Bob, who was catching the girl's impatience. "Here, take Gray Eagle."

He flung his bridle to the lad, and threw Sydney into the saddle as quickly as she could wish. She adjusted herself carefully, for she knew how the discomfort of a twisted skirt may make a difference of a minute in the mile, or may mean real danger at a jump.

"There's no time to lose, it's five minutes past eleven now," she said, glancing at a strap watch on her wrist, and touching Johnny with her spur.

Bob's horse was off in pursuit before his master was well on his back.

"I declare, she might have given me a fairer start!" he growled, as the sorrel settled down ahead of him into a run that bade fair to keep even the advantage. They had had many a race, Bob and Sydney, and usually it was the girl who was the more cautious rider of the

two. To-day, however, she took risks that amazed even her old-time playmate, who thought he knew her every mood.

By the long driveway and the road it was two miles to the Doctor's house, and five from there to the foot of Buck Mountain. By a cut across the sheep-pasture the first part of the way could be reduced nearly a mile.

"She certainly is keen for the fun," thought Bob, as he saw Sydney turn from the avenue and drive Johnny at a gate which he knew that she did not care often to take.

"Too high for Johnny. I must tell her not to do that again," he commented, as he noticed during his own flight that the top rail was split from contact with the first horse's heels.



A fence at the top of a sharp ascent

#### A fence at the top of a sharp ascent

Down the hill and across the field tore the sorrel, leaping the branch, and slackening to allow the gray's approach only when he came to a fence whose position at the top of a sharp ascent forbade his taking it.

Sydney looked back impatiently as Bob covered the dozen lengths between them and swung off to open the gate.

"You might wait for a fellow," he grumbled, but already the girl was through, and her white blouse and ruddy hair shone half-way across the unenclosed meadow upon which she had entered. For the first time her pale face impressed Bob.

"Looks like she saw something," he thought, with a remnant of old superstition. "I do believe she thinks there's going to be bloodshed." And with a view to reassuring her, he caught up with her in the path through the belt of woods that led from the field to the road. Their horses were nose on tail, and of necessity going slowly.

"Sydney!" he cried, "O-oh, Sydney! You don't think it's serious, do you? Because——"

Here the path debouched into the open road, and Johnny was off again before Bob could finish, and his question, meant to inspirit Sydney, had sounded to her only like a desire for his own reassurance, and had alarmed her more than ever.

A mad feeling within pricked her to tear on without slackening. She felt that she could have galloped to the very top of the mountain without fatigue. Her horsewoman's intelligence, however, warned her to think of her animal, and she took him along quietly through the open place before the post-office, giving Bob a chance to catch up.

He was thoroughly out of temper now. Never before had Sydney been so careless of him. He couldn't understand it; but he was beginning to realize that she was taking the adventure seriously, and, with boyish malice, he resolved to make no further effort to undeceive her.

Indeed, as they rode on slowly and silently, side by side, for a few hundred yards, he became not so sure himself that the duel was the joke that he had considered it.

He knew his father to be a man ready in his own defence, and of a high, though controlled

temper; and he had not overlooked the fact that the stocks of two guns were protruding from the holster that projected from under the skirt of the Doctor's McClellan. Furthermore, he knew that the German was in deadly earnest.

As these suspicions assailed him, he turned to Sydney and touched the spur to his gray. The girl responded to his look, and they set into the steady gallop that covers much country with but little effort either to horse or rider.

Sydney held out her watch for Bob to see. It was quarter past eleven. Nearly five miles lay before them to the foot of the mountain, and to the summit there was a long, steep mile and a half which was the time-consumer to be reckoned with.

A mile beyond the post-office they turned from the State Road into a less-travelled, and hence rougher, side road. Through a stretch of sandy mud they breathed the horses again, and then on, on, on to the big hill whose vast bulk was beginning to tower mightily before them. Past the old school-house they dashed, without a glance for its forlorn state of decay; past one of the farm gates of the Cotswold estate; past the Baptist Bethel, indistinguishable from a school-house except for the white stones in the graveyard, upon which the sun glinted cheerfully.

Quarter after quarter they left behind them, slowing up only for steep descents or for patches of lengthwise road-mending whose upthrust branch ends are liable to snag a horse's legs. Johnny and Gray Eagle took in their stride the brooks that babbled gayly across the way; they shied at a glare of mica on the red clay of the bank; they dodged ruts, and leaped mud-holes, and pushed for the middle of the road.

At the end of the third mile Sydney asked, not lifting her eyes from the ground before her, "Is the bridle-path open?" It was the first time she had spoken since they left Oakwood.

"I don't know. It may be washed. We'd better keep to the sled-track."

"It's half a mile longer."

"But the other might delay us more."

Sydney did not urge the point, but looked at her watch as they reached the opening where the ascent began.

It was twenty minutes of twelve.

Without a word she held out her hand to Bob. She felt sick and faint, and her companion's whistle was not reassuring.

"They'll probably be late," he suggested, but he remembered as he said it that his father had left home for the meeting-place before he had started to take the news to Sydney.

The trail began in a steep acclivity that soon brought the horses to a walk. When it was surmounted the beasts needs must blow, though they pressed on willingly enough at a half-minute's end. A fairly level bit followed along the ridge of the foot-hill they just had climbed. It was not wide enough for them to travel abreast, and Johnny led with a sharp trot that made clever avoidance of the stones and roots and stumps that sprang into sight before him as at the summons of a malignant spirit.

The next upward stretch was over a ledge of rock from which the winter's rains had washed the soil. A trickling spring kept its surface constantly wet, and its slippery face brought Johnny to his knees.

Sydney uttered a cry which ordinarily would have been one of pity for her favorite's pain. Now it was a note of fear lest the fall might mean delay. But the brave sorrel heaved himself up, and turned across the path to pant after the exertion.

"Are you all right, Sydney?" came Bob's anxious cry from below, whence he had seen the accident.

"It was nothing," she called. "Come, Johnny, poor old man!"

She patted his lowered neck, and he bent his hoofs to catch his toe-calks in the cracks of the rock.

Another fleeting pause at the top rewarded his endeavor, and then a couple of hundred yards of hardly perceptible upward incline produced again the swift and ready trot.

Five minutes more of easy climbing brought into view the tobacco barn which was one of the mountain's landmarks. Beyond it the grade became much more abrupt, and although it was worn fairly smooth by the sleds of the men who planted aërial cornfields far up on the highest clearings, yet its steepness rendered this last half-mile the truly formidable part of the ascent.

Johnny glanced up it with regretful eye, stopped an instant, took a long breath, shook himself, and went bravely to his task.

Sydney's every thought was a passionate longing to press on,—to hurry, to rush, to fly. Her lips grew white when she saw that the hands of her watch pointed to four minutes of twelve.

"It is not possible to be in time," she agonized. "O God, delay them! O God, stop them!"

She bent forward over the horse's withers, and stretched upward, as if to pull him higher by her buoyancy. She was heedless of the stream that gurgled beside the trail among the evergreen sword-fern—a noisy betrayer of the mountain's angle. She did not observe that she was alone, that Bob was not following her. She was deaf to his cries as he struggled below with the gray, which was plunging against an attack of yellow jackets, and refused to take the trail.

Johnny stopped, his sides heaving pitifully.

"Oh, can I bear it? Oh, go on; do go on! O God, give me strength to wait."

Though she tore off her gloves in nervous impatience, still she left the rein upon the horse's neck, for she knew that the willing beast was doing his best.

He stopped again, and still once more, before they came to the foot of the bald, whose slippery, dead grass added another peril to the climb. The trail ended here, for it was not needed where a sled could go anywhere over the clearing.

"Come, dear boy. Come, dear old horse," she urged. "Five minutes more will take us there."

The watch's cruel face told the hour to be twelve minutes past twelve, but Sydney did not feel so keen a pang as when she looked last, although it was later than the fatal hour. The continued silence gave her confidence. Only the bay of a hound in some cove below, and the yelp of a puppy, reached her.

She was dully dogged. The horse stumbled and scrambled on.

"We can't do better than our best, Johnny. May God keep them! Oh, Johnny! My dear, faithful Johnny, don't fall! Get up—*get up!*" she cried.

As he settled on to his side to roll up on to his feet again,—a process that his labored breathing and the weight of his rider made difficult on the sharp incline,—she slipped from his back and struggled on on foot.

She was near the crest of the mountain,—the bunch of chestnut-trees on the summit showed their swelling buds against the sky just over her head,—yet how slow was her advance! The sedge-grass caught her feet; the blackberry-vines tore at her skirt; a rolling pebble threw her down upon her hands.

In an instant she was up and on again,—she was at the summit at last! And there, just below the crest on the other side, facing each other on their animals, like knights of old, were the two men she sought.

## IX

### "It Needed Only This!"

Trembling she stood, looking down upon the foes below her. Her hands were knotted against her breast, that heaved with nature's cry at her cruelty. The thumping of her heart shook her body mercilessly. The anguish of her soul dried her throat, and filled her eyes with dread, and made her an embodiment of horror. Yet a stir of gratitude fought with fear for a place in her.

"Thank God, I am not too late!" was her voiceless cry.

Through the clear air came the sound of a voice, sharply articulate.

"It is not enough that you eat my bread and go forth from my door to do your treacherous act. You come again to my house to scorn at me after my humiliation, and you have not the courage to own your falseness. And now, when I demand from you the satisfaction that most surely do you owe me, how do you make a mock at me? Is that a weapon with which gentlemen do fight? Is it a shot-gun that men do carry to a duel?"

The hitherto still figure on the Doctor's horse stirred uneasily.

"And see, I break it." The mule turned back his ears, as upon them fell the click of the opening gun, followed by the drop of a shell into an open palm. "Ach, yes, I thought so! It needed only this! This so small shot is for the birds!"

A thud vibrated on the air—the sound of the flung-down weapon.

"Now, if you-all were only an American, Ah could make you understand right quick that——"

The Doctor's slow drawl was broken by an exclamation from von Rittenheim. Morgan followed the German's eyes, and saw above them against the fleckless blue of the heavens the brilliant figure of the girl, her hands straining against her breast, her face a field where anxiety and grief flitted like clouds across the background of the sky.

She came down towards them when she saw herself observed, and the two men silently dismounted as she approached, and pulled off their caps, less in salutation than from instinctive respect for deep emotion.

It was a poor little appeal she made, as words went. Her voice was hardly whisper-high, so labored was her breathing. She held out her hands to them one after the other, in supplication.

"You won't do it! Oh, please don't! I came—— You mustn't——" Her breath came in gasps.

Von Rittenheim mutely took the pleading hands in his, and reverently kissed them. He faced the Doctor brokenly.

"I thought you had heaped upon me every humiliation. Until now this was lacking. You might have spared me this!"

Mounting his mule he broke into the thicket and disappeared.

The two left behind—the tawny, stooping Carolinian and the girl, gone white-lipped in spite of the beating of her heart—stared in silence at the copse as long as they could hear the crash of the breaking twigs and resisting branches.

Sydney still was intent on the lessening sounds when the old man's keen blue eyes withdrew themselves from the wood and scrutinized her face, pitifully drawn and colorless.

"H'm," he grunted, and added, mentally, "Hard lines for Bob."

The sound of his ejaculation reached the girl's dulled ears. She turned to him with a touch of distrust, and yet a look of question that seemed to implore her old friend for an explanation that might save him to her as an honest man. The Doctor was touched by it. He nodded in the direction in which the Baron had disappeared.

"Crazy, plumb crazy," he averred.

Sydney's dry lips formed a soundless "Why?"

"He's got some notion in his head that Ah've done him an injury—you heard him?"

She nodded.

"Ah swear to you, Sydney, Ah haven't any idea what he means, but he harps on it, and he sent me a challenge, as Ah suppose you know, or you wouldn't be here."

"Yes. Bob brought me."

"Ah bluffed him off fo' three days. Ah hoped Ah might think of something that would get him out of that vein without hurting his foreign feelings, but Ah couldn't think of anything, so Ah 'lowed to pretend to play up to his game, and in some way turn it into a joke."

"The bird-shot was the joke?"

The Doctor colored dimly under his tan.

"Well, Ah must confess that it seemed to me mo' humorous when Ah was loading up the guns at home than when the Baron was discoursing about it."

"I should think so. I should think——"

Sydney bit her sentence in two. She felt too uncontrolled to allow herself to comment upon the Doctor's conduct.

"Ah certainly believe he's crazy or going to have a fever, and Ah'll find some way of watching him. Ah suppose he won't let me on his place now; Ah'll have to see Bud. Where's yo' horse?" he asked, suddenly.



Sydney pressed her hand to her head confusedly.

"I don't know. Back there somewhere."

"Come, we must hunt him. You seem tired to death, child. Did you ride hard?"

"It was about an hour and ten minutes to the foot of the bald."

She was dragging herself wearily up to the chestnut-trees.

"An hour and ten minutes to the foot of the bald? From where?"

"From home."

"From Oakwood? Holy Smoke! What did Bob let you do such a fool thing fo'?" he ejaculated, angrily. "Where is Bob, anyway?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him since—I think it was—I don't know where it was," she ended, weakly, and with distress.

The Doctor looked at her keenly.

"Here, never mind him; he can take care of himself well enough; better than he can of you, by the looks of it. Sit down, now; yes, right here on the grass, and drink this."

He gave her a draught from his flask, standing over her threateningly when she hesitated at the entire contents of the cup cover.

"Take it all," he insisted, "every drop. It's the only thing on earth that's health to its enemies and death to its friends."

Sydney leaned back wearily against a jutting rock and closed her eyes. Her head swam, and she resigned herself to the Doctor's commands with the blessed feeling of relief that a woman has when responsibility falls from her own upon some man's shoulders.

A whoop from the chestnuts made her open her eyes.

"Is it Bob?"

"Yes, leading Johnny." Doctor Morgan raised his voice. "Come down here. You're a pretty feller to carry a girl to ride," he continued, as Bob tied the horse to one of the chestnuts and sprang down the slope. "No girl in my time ever shook me like that. Where did she lose you?"

Bob answered nothing to his father's gibes, but bent anxiously over Sydney.

"You are not hurt, de—Sydney? Just awfully done up? I ought not to have let you come. It's been too hard a ride. It's all my fault," he went on, accusingly, while the Doctor nodded his head in agreement, and Sydney tried in vain to interrupt.

"No, indeed, Bob, you were not to blame at all. I made you promise, and I couldn't have forgiven you or myself if I hadn't been here when—"

She fell back against the rock, and the Doctor broke in, by way of diversion,—

"Where's Gray Eagle?"

"Down at the tobacco barn. He got wild and balked the steep part of the trail, so I tied him to a tree and left him to kick it out."

"You walked up, then?"

"Yes, and found Johnny gluttonously eating blackberry-vines on the other side of the bald. That scared me to death, for I thought he'd made way with Sydney in some mysterious fashion,—perhaps eaten her,—and was indulging in dessert! Where's your enemy?"

The Doctor glanced quickly at Sydney, and frowned at Bob.

"Gone home," was all he would say.

They lifted the girl on to her horse, and Bob guided him down to the very foot of the mountain. At the tobacco barn the Doctor untied Gray Eagle, subdued by his enforced loneliness, and led him behind them.

"Bob will stay to luncheon at Oakwood, it's so late," said Sydney to him as they parted at his gate. "You'll not forget to find out in some way if the Baron is ill, will you?"

"No, my dear, I'll watch him like the Pinkertons' eye that never sleeps," returned the old man, genially.

"Mrs. Carroll has gone into the dining-room," the servant told them at the door, and Sydney assumed much cheerfulness as she made her apologies.

"I've brought Bob, grandmother. He's been all over everywhere with me this morning. You'll forgive me, Katrina, for leaving you, won't you? Where's Mr. Wendell?"

"Not back from Asheville yet."

"He went in yesterday," explained Mrs. Carroll to Bob. "I suppose the train is late. It does seem as if they grow more and more uncertain, and when there are only two a day each way, it certainly is annoying, very. You wouldn't know what to make of so meagre an arrangement, would you, Katrina dear?"

"There's the carriage now," said Bob. "The train couldn't have been much over an hour behind time; surely you wouldn't complain of that."

"I feel as if I had been journeying for days," said John, sitting down, "and had seen the sights of far-distant worlds."

"It's the obelisk in Court Square that makes you think that," suggested Sydney.

"Or the battlements on the library building," added Bob.

"Are there street-cars?" asked Katrina.

"Street-cars? Why, child, there are street-cars to burn—electric ones, too. I felt grievously defrauded. I wanted a mule tram."

"The mule is an unfashionable animal," said Mrs. Carroll. "Time was when a handsome pair of mules was considered not unsuitable to draw a gentleman's carriage."

"The farmers aren't using them so much, either," said Bob. "They're too unreliable. Horses are cheaper, too."

"I saw some very decent saddle-horses in town—of their kind."

"What's their kind?"

"Long-tailed single-footers, Katrina."

"The easiest gait in the world," put in Bob, combatively, disregarding the tails.

"It looks so. And not a Derby hat in the whole place except mine."

"And not a silk one, except on colored coachmen," added Sydney, maliciously.

"Did you drive about?"

"I saw all the sights, dear Mrs. Carroll. I have done to a brown the Vanderbilt place, the Sunset Drive, and the junction of the Swannanoa and the French Broad. I flogged a rebellious horse to Gold View, and I scaled Beaumont and looked down into Chunn's Cove. I gazed at the—you will excuse me, I hope—faded exterior of a tobacco warehouse—"

"The farmers don't grow much now," interpolated Bob.

"So I was told. And I beheld with rapture the architecture of the Federal Building. That's the fullest beehive for its size, isn't it? Post-office, revenue office,—goodness knows what's in it!"

"Is the United States Court on yet?" asked Bob.

"Not being a victim, I don't know."

"You don't have to be a victim to find that out. The whole town is filled with the rural population who are interested in the liquor cases,—and our rural population is unmistakable."

"If that's the sign, then it isn't on, for only about half the town looked egregiously rural. Now I think of it, though, the court is going to sit day after to-morrow."

"Of course. It's the first Monday in May, isn't it?"

"Please ask me how I knew it. Thank you, Mrs. Carroll. I see that you are about to oblige me. Know then, good people, that this humble worm that you see before you has had the honor of occupying the same seat in the train with a minion of the law,—in fact, a revenue officer."

"Coming out to-day?"

"Yes. And, furthermore, he paid the flag-station of Flora the distinguished attention of getting out there."

"Was he after somebody?"

"He was about to jog the memories of several people, and I think you'll be surprised to know who one of them is. Mrs. Carroll, how can you expect the less fortunate part of your community to keep in the straight and narrow way, when the aristocracy—yea, verily, the nobility—sets it so bad an example?"

"What do you mean, John?"

"I'm going to write a tale to be called 'The Titled Moonshiner; or, The Baron's Quart of Corn.'"

Sydney and Bob looked at each other with dawning comprehension, yet without the ability entirely to clear away the fog.

"John, are you hinting any slur against Baron von Rittenheim, our neighbor and good friend?" The old lady was radiating dignity and indignation.

"I'm not hinting a thing, my dear Mrs. Carroll. I'm telling you what the affable revenue man told me. About a month ago, it seems, your friend and neighbor entertained a guest who proved to be, not an angel in disguise, but a deputy-marshal on his way to Asheville. Not knowing the official position of his visitor, von Rittenheim sold him a quart of whisky of his own vintage. Whereupon, like all other chilled vipers that have been warmed by this or other means, even from the far days of fable, the beast retaliated. He returned the next day and arrested him."

Mrs. Carroll and Katrina cried out in surprise and indignation. Bob's eyes were fixed upon Sydney, and she, ghastly white, was crumbling her bread into bits.

"The next day? Why, that is why he didn't come here for so long, Sydney!"

"He's under bond to appear at the next sitting of the United States Court, and, as that comes in on Monday, you understand the appearance of my friend the enemy on the train."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Katrina.

"Why in the world should the Baron sell any whisky, I should like to have some one tell me," demanded Mrs. Carroll. "And why didn't we see it in the paper?"

"Probably the name was put in incorrectly," Bob suggested. "The Asheville reporters aren't accustomed to German."

Sydney was silent. But upon Bob, for his father's sake, she laid accusing eyes, for she thought she had a clue to the words that had come to her ears through the clear air as she stood upon the top of Buck Mountain.

## X

### Through the Mist

One day in the autumn, a few weeks after he had bought Ben Frady's farm, von Rittenheim had taken his gun, and had whistled to heel one of the hounds that had preferred to stay in his old home with an unknown master rather than endure the precarious temper of the known quantity, and had climbed Buzzard, the mountain behind his cabin, in search of squirrel or quail.

As the day advanced, fleecy clouds gathered over the sky and obscured the sun, and then thickened and turned leaden. Suddenly, as the huntsman tramped across a clearing, a one-time cornfield high on the side of the mountain, he saw a mass of fog rolling towards him, and before he could descend below its level he found himself enveloped in the mist of a passing cloud. Heavy as a palpable thing it closed around him, impenetrable to the eye, chilling to the whole physical being, fraught with discouragement and depression to the mind.

Friedrich tried to regain a path that he remembered to have crossed a few minutes before, but under the trees the gloom was too dense for profitable search. Moisture began to collect upon the leaf tips and to drip upon him. The dog did not answer to his whistle. There were no points of the compass; there was no view of the valley below. He was like a ship rudderless. He only knew of a surety that the earth was beneath his feet, and as night drew on, and he could no longer see the soil his boot-soles pressed, he only knew that he was

descending.

And then of a sudden came the barking of a dog in greeting, and the bray of a hungry mule, and he found himself close upon a cabin, and by a freak of fortune it proved to be his own, and he was at home.

Vaguely enough, yet insistently, the experience kept recurring to him during the days in Asheville, when he was awaiting his trial.

He went into the court-room in the Federal Building and watched, with a languid curiosity born of its foreignness, the easy-going ceremony of the opening of court. A group of lawyers laughed and gossiped at the front. A larger number of men, who proved to be potential jurors, gathered on one side and talked together more quietly, impressed by the novelty of their experience; while the men who had served on the jury before explained the furnishing of the room to them.

Some ladies were ushered into seats near the bench by a dapper young lawyer. Behind a railing, all about von Rittenheim, in front of him, beside him, and back of him, were the lean forms and bent shoulders of the mountaineers who were witnesses or principals in the whisky cases that fill so fully the docket of this court. From their appearance it was impossible to tell which were the law-breakers and which the bearers of testimony against them. There were old men and boys. Children were clinging to the skirts of their mothers, who had come to town either as witnesses or for the holiday. One woman was quieting a crying baby with the gag that a baby never refuses. She herself was soothed by the snuff-stick that protruded from the space left vacant by the early decay of her two front teeth.

The air rapidly grew heavy with the smell of unwashed bodies and of moist tobacco, and with the peculiar oily odor of corn whisky.

A short man of important bearing stepped in front of the rail and scanned the mass behind it. He easily singled out von Rittenheim, whose cropped head shone fair from among the trowsled pows around him.

"Oh, von Rittenheim," he called, "step out here a minute."

"My so good friend, Mr. Weaver?" acknowledged Friedrich, looking at him through the squinting eyes that a sharp headache gave him.

"You'll be held by the grand jury, of course, von Rittenheim, but you needn't stay here all the time. Just drop in once or twice a day and see how the list stands. Some of these are old cases crowded out of the last term, and we may not get to you until Wednesday or Thursday. It ain't a right enjoyable place to stay in, and you'd better go out in the fresh air—you look sick."

"My head does give me pain," Friedrich admitted.

"Your case can't possibly be called to-day, anyway. You'd better go off until to-morrow."

"I thank you. I will when I have seen the honorable judge come in. It is most new to me, these customs of yours."

"I reckon they must be," returned Weaver, with something like pity in his upward glance at the drawn face above him. He scuttled off as a voice cried,—

"The court! the court!"

The lawyers scampered to their places behind the bar, and stood to acknowledge the entrance of the judge.

Beyond thinking him strangely unjudicial in appearance, Friedrich took no interest in him, for he did not regard him as the arbiter of his fate, since he had learned the customary sentence for cases like his, which was pronounced with the regularity of machinery and knew no variety.

He waited until another half-hour's observation had made clear to him the method of drawing the jurors. He left this task still in process of being fulfilled, and urged his way out of the press that held him fast.

The fresh, cool air was as wine to him, for wine invigorates the body while it clouds the mind. His lungs greedily took in great draughts of its light purity, and his blood raced so merrily that he grew confused. Always the pain bit into his eyes, and through his half-closed lids he saw but dimly the people around him and the pavement beneath his feet.

He went back to the little room that he had hired, and slept heavily into the afternoon. When he went out to get his supper at a restaurant, the gaunt figures of his fellow-criminals were at every step. They gazed curiously into the lighted shop-windows; they talked in groups that overflowed the curbstone into the gutter. In a vacant lot back of the Methodist church the

glare of a camp-fire showed the covered wagon that was to give a night's shelter to the family whose shadows were cast large against its canvas side.

As he passed each group of them the odor that he had breathed for an hour in the morning assailed his nostrils and seemed to force itself into his lungs. He could not eat his supper, and he spent a restless night, filled with horrid dreams. Sydney was selling whisky to Mr. Weaver. The Judge turned into Dr. Morgan, who grinned triumphantly at his victim as he stood in the crowd behind the rail. He bent to kiss the hand of Mrs. Carroll, and she held in it a shell filled with bird-shot.

Always the sickening odor of the overheated court-room choked him, and his head throbbed unceasingly, and the balls of his eyes beat in anguished unison.

The first electric-car passing the house in the early dawn crashed into his dream as the bullet that was speeding from his revolver to Dr. Morgan's heart, and found its resting-place in Sydney's breast instead. He woke to find himself soaked with the sweat of exhaustion.

The cloud of that day on the mountain still clung around his fancy as he went out upon the street again. A horrible something, as penetrable as mist, as keen as the sting of conscience, as inevitable as the burden of life, seemed to inwrap him. He felt it dully, and wondered how much of it was physical and how much mental, and he didn't care which it was.

He ate a little breakfast, though it was odious to him, and went out to meet again the lantern-jawed mountaineers, who, like him,—*like him*,—were drifting towards the Federal Building.

Yes, he was going to the court-room to be tried for a criminal offence; he was a criminal, a criminal, a criminal. It buzzed angrily through his head.

He stumbled over a child sitting beside his mother on the edge of the sidewalk in front of the post-office. The woman had her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands, and in her eyes was the look of waiting that comes to women with uncertain husbands. She cuffed the child, and then shook him to still the uproar she had created. Two more children sat on the curb beyond her, and beyond them, up Haywood Street, men leaned against the iron fence or squatted in pairs upon the sidewalk. Friedrich wondered how they kept their balance, and went on up the stairs, through pools of tobacco-juice, to the court-room, where the day's work already had begun.

He secured a seat, and leaned his head against the wall. A negro man, accused of fraudulently obtaining a pension, was explaining volubly how he had received the injury upon which he based his claim.

His case was given to the jury, which filed out, and the second set of men made themselves comfortable in the abandoned seats, with much scraping of chairs and of throats, and adjustment of cuspidors to the range of each juror.

The case of the next prisoner, tried on a charge of a fraudulent use of the mails, lashed to frenzy the prosecuting attorney. He compared this foul violator of the laws of his country with Sextus and Benedict Arnold and Judas Iscariot. The national eagle had been insulted in his nest, and his screams were ringing from mountain-peak to mountain-peak. The echoes of Mitchell were sending back the cry, and Saint Elias's snowy top gave forth an answering sound.

Von Rittenheim understood enough of the rapid English to realize its irrelevancy, and wondered idly why the man was such a fool, not knowing that it was the presence of a visiting national senator from the hotel that had inspired this eloquence.

The air grew worse as more and more people pushed into the already crowded room. Some one opened a window, and some one else immediately begged to have it shut. There was a constant shuffling of feet and a restless moving of hands. Friedrich found himself smothered by the evil-smelling clothes of his companions as he sat against the wall, and he stood, to bring his head up into a clearer air. The steam in one of the radiators began to thump and clang, and each crash smote a raw nerve in his beating temple.

The feeling of striving against the mist, yielding but inexorable, had him fully in its possession, and through the fog he saw the face of Wilder, the deputy-marshal. Their eyes met, and the malice in the officer's drove the German mad. How long must he stand here and wait among these swine? Yet he remembered many hours of waiting motionless upon his horse, and he rebuked himself for a poor soldier.

Ah, if only he could tell the whole truth; if only he could stand before the bar of the world—of God himself—and say, "I am guilty. Of violating the law I am guilty. I am willing to bear my punishment for what I have done. But if I am guilty, how is he innocent who brake my bread and then tempted me? He who ate my last mouthful, and then offered me an unlawful chance to get more? Is the law of hospitality to be held of no account? And how is he

innocent who poses as my friend, who drinks from my cup, who holds my hand in his, and who goes forth to betray me? Is there no law that binds a friend in honor? I have broken a law—the law of man. Those two men of whom I speak have broken the laws of the heart, the ties of honor and of love. I am a criminal in the eyes of men. They are sinners before the face of God."

Friedrich was trembling as he felt these words flow through his mind. The men on each side of him noticed his agitation, and drew away from the emotion of his tense face. So insistently did the words ring in his ears that it seemed to him that he must have spoken them aloud. Yet he was conscious that he had not, and that when the time came for him to face this throned he would never go beyond the first three words, "I am guilty."

He found himself speaking quietly to Mr. Weaver, and looked on at the conversation as if he were a thing apart from himself.

"The next case but one after this will begin the moonshine cases, and you-all surely won't come on until to-morrow morning. You might as well go now."

"I thank you," said Friedrich, and stumbled from the room.

In the corridor he leaned for a moment against the wall, that he might be sure to keep his balance as he went down the steep stairs dizzying before him.

How he reached the court on the next day he never could remember. He was conscious of feeling very ill, worse than ever he had felt in his life. His spine pulsed painfully up into his brain; his eyes burned back in their sockets until the two shafts of anguish met in one well-nigh unbearable torture. The cloud-mist wrapped about him and hindered him, and yielded only to blind him more. The same evil smells reeked around him, and a wave of nausea surged within him.

He heard his name called, and some one guided him to that part of the Judge's platform that served as a dock. He raised his hand, and heard afar off some words about the truth and God. He was bidden to kiss the filthy cover of a book. Dimly he heard a question and answered it.

"I am guilty."

A chair was pushed towards him and he sat down, conscious of a strange silence in the usually noisy room.

He heard Wilder telling his story of his purchase of a quart of whisky, "an' he owned it was blockade," and a long and detailed account of "the Dutchy's" resistance to arrest, in which the ferocity of his behavior would have been creditable to a bloodthirsty villain driven to desperate straits.

A voice asked him if he had anything to say, and he heard himself repeating once again, "I am guilty."

Then the voice of the laureate of the eagle's nest soared, and fell to a whisper, and swelled again, and Friedrich wondered if "example" would be "*Muster*" or "*Beispiel*." And "different class,"—what did that mean? How stupid he was about English!

By-and-by there was silence, and the Judge's voice said,—

"Three months or a hundred dollars."

And then there was a long, long silence.

## XI

### In the Corn

Summer had come.

The soft days of spring had gone by, the days when the feeling of growth impresses every sense. The haze-filled April mornings, warming into the forcing ardor of noon, had stirred into life the activity latent in root and twig. May's glowing sun, shining through the scantily covered branches, made dancing motes of heat wave above the surface of red clay. The aspens fluttered into exquisite greenness. The sourwood put forth the satin of its tender leaves. All over the mountain-sides and through the forest thickets the oak-tips blushed faint

pink, a delicate velvet against the stout bristles of the yellow pines.

Birds flew over, bound for the North, each with his instinctive goal; some almost at their journey's end, others with many a long ethereal mile before them. Some of them sojourned for a few days, following the ploughman as he overturned the mellow earth. Others let this high land be the end of their wanderings, and settled here to the duty of love-making and the pleasures of domestic life.

The azalea flamed in yellow and orange and scarlet glory, a note of savage color on spring's soft palette. The delicate clusters of the laurel, and, later, of the rhododendron, crowned the stems of the parent bush, as sometimes a fair girl springs from a rough and ugly father.

The germ grew strong within its warm seed-prison, and sent inquiring leaflets into the upper world; and the adventurers never returned, but sent back demands for food and drink, as colonists to a new land rely upon the mother-country for sustenance and support.

On the steep mountain-sides, and in the coves that dimple the lower slopes; on the flat lands of the plateau, and in the meadows along the French Broad, the slender shafts of the corn-leaves were pushing upward with what success their position fostered. By mid-June the crop in the bottom-land was knee-high, while that nourished by the field over which Sydney had stumbled on the top of Buck Mountain was only half as tall.

Bud Yarebrough and Pink Pressley were hoeing among stalks half-way between these heights on the upland slopes of the Baron's farm, whose cultivable land they had hired for the season. Stripped to their shirts, whose open throats showed each a triangle of sunburned skin, they worked rapidly down the adjoining furrows, one keeping a hoe's length behind the other, that their tools might not interfere. Conversation was more pithy than voluble.

"Damn hot," ejaculated Pink, stopping to hitch up his trousers, and then to spit on his hands before resuming his hoe.

"Mos' dinner time," returned Bud, looking up at the sun, and then over his shoulder towards the spring-betraying group of trees to which Melissa was accustomed to bring his dinner when he was working here. "They's some feller tyin' his horse in front of the cabin. Who is hit?"

Pink leaned on his hoe and squinted across the blazing field to the grove that sheltered von Rittenheim's house.

"Bob Morgan, Ah reckon. Looks like his horse."

"Come to get somethin' fo' Mr. Baron. O-oh, Bob!"

Bob looked around his horse's nose, and held up his hand in token of understanding. He unlocked the cabin and disappeared within, coming out again with a bundle, which he tied on to the saddle, and then led his animal towards the trees at the spring. The two laborers tossed down their hoes and moved to the same haven.

"What time is hit, Bob?"

Morgan looked at his watch.

"Five past twelve, Pink. Working hard?"

"Yep. Tol'able big crop." He sat down at the foot of a tree and opened his dinner-pail.

"Have some?" he asked, pointing the opening at Bob, who was settling into repose with his hat over his face.

"No, I thank you. I must be going home in a few minutes. How are you getting on? Bought any more stock lately?"

Bob lay on his back with one long leg balanced on the other knee like a see-saw on a saw-horse. The rowel of his spur rattled as he jerked his foot up and down at the ankle.

"No." Pink had his mouth full.

"How many head have you got now?"

"Oh, jus' a mule 'n a couple o' cows."

"Sold your horse?"

"'M. Here Bud, take some o' this. Ah jus' natchelly hate to have you-all die o' starvation."

"No, she's comin'. Ah see her now." And Bud ran to meet his wife and to relieve her of the baby.

"Hungry, ain' he?" sneered Pink, as he watched his partner's alacrity, while Bob struggled to his feet to greet Melissa.

"Say, you-all wasn' wantin' to buy a cow, was ye, Bob?" asked Pink.

"Got one to sell?"

"Yes, the muley cow."

"No, I don't guess I want her."

"You seemed so damn curious about my stock, Ah 'lowed ye were purchasin'."

"Oh, no. I just thought you must have an extra lot of cattle to be providing for, or you wouldn't have needed to hire this land and to make an extra big crop of corn."

A dull red showed on Pink's forehead above the tan-mark, and crowded into his pale-blue eyes, destitute of lashes. The two men looked steadily at each other. Then, as Melissa drew near, Pink broke into an ugly laugh.

"Give a dog a bad name, eh? You-all needn' be quite so bigoty now yo' fine friends have been at the same business."

He waved his hand towards the cabin, and Bob, in his turn, flushed as he shook hands with Melissa.

The girl gave scant greeting to Pressley. Her husband's new friendship with him was distasteful to her; it filled her with foreboding when she remembered his threats.

Yet there had been nothing definite of which she could complain to Bud since the day when Miss Carroll had caught Pink trying to kiss her. He had never been to the cabin since his rebuff, but she knew that he and Bud were constantly together, and this partnership in the hiring of the Baron's land was a culmination of their friendly relations.

"Ah don' see how ye c'n stan' him, nohow, Bud," she often said, and Bud as often replied,—

"Ah never did see anythin' like the prejudice o' women! They certainly ain' no doubt about yo' sex, M'lissy."

Pink bore his part in the present conversation with no trace of embarrassment. Indeed, there was an assertiveness in his bearing that reacted upon Melissa to produce extreme shyness. Neither cause nor effect escaped Morgan's shrewd black eyes.

"How's Mr. Baron?" asked Bud, between bites.

"Doing very well. He gets out on the porch every day now."

"Great luck he has," growled Pressley. "Yo' father never paid my fine when Ah was given mah choice between 'a hundred dollars or three months."

"My father likes to choose his friends," replied Bob, sternly. Melissa looked distressed.

"What's sauce fo' the goose ought to be sauce fo' the gander," argued the ex-moonshiner.

"It ain' fittin' fo' you-all to say anythin' ag'in' Dr. Morgan, whatever he may se-lect to do," asserted Bud, combatively, and Pink hastened to hedge.

"Ah 'low not. He certainly was white to me when Ah broke mah laig. 'N as fo' Mr. Baron, Ah always did like him, 'n this is a new tie between us. Now we're brothers."

He chuckled with a full appreciation of his insolence, for the story of von Rittenheim's downfall and its cause was well known throughout the country.

Melissa went white at the malignity of his tone. She turned to Bob with a question:

"Mrs. Carroll 'n Miss Sydney—are they wore to a frazzle takin' care o' him?"

"Mrs. Carroll's all right. They've had two nurses from Asheville all the time, you know. Miss Sydney's wonderful. There's such a lot to do about a house when there's a serious illness, even for people who aren't doing the actual nursing."

"Ah s'pose so. Wouldn' hit be nice, jus' like a story, 'f they'd fall in love with each other—Mr. Baron 'n Miss Sydney?"

"Now, ain' that jus' like a girl!" ejaculated Bud, gulping the last of his coffee.

Bob sat down and fanned himself with his hat.

"Hot, ain' hit?" observed Pink, dryly. Then he turned to Melissa.



"You-all's fo'gittin' that he might be in prison at this minute. No woman o' his class would marry him now. No woman likes to think her man's guilty o' breakin' the law, eh? You-all wouldn' like yo' husband to be a moonshiner, would ye?"

The man's body leaned towards the girl, and he fixed her with a cruel stare from which she seemed unable to move her eyes. Seated as he was, he looked like a huge snake upreared to strike.

He went on mercilessly. "O' co'se ye wouldn'. Ah expect you'd never hol' up yo' haid ag'in. What woman can when her man's that-a-way?"

"Oh, dry up, Pink," cried Bud. "You-all make me feel like Ah had the constable after me now, 'n Lawd knows hit ain' *me* that's raced 'em through these woods."

Pink acknowledged the shot with a grunt.

Melissa rose to go, and Bud picked up the baby and handed it to her.

"Hit's her busy day fo' sleepin', ain' hit?" he said, poking a blunt finger into the soft cheek.

"I must go, too," said Bob, "or my mother'll jar me up for being late."

"Good-by," said Bud, genially. "Stop by ag'in some time."

"Miss Sydney's been so busy she ain' rode over here fo' a long time. Will you-all give mah love to her, please?" said Melissa, timidly.

"'N mine," Pink started to add, but a dangerous look in Bob's eye induced him to change it to "'N mah *re*-gards to Mr. Baron," though his grin remained unaltered.

## XII

### Illumination

For the first time since the beginning of his illness, von Rittenheim was walking unassisted towards the cluster of trees on the Oakwood lawn, beneath whose shelter rugs and low chairs and a tea-table made a summer sitting-room. Mrs. Carroll, who already was established in the shade, watched anxiously her guest's feeble approach.

"You should have let the nurse or James come with you," she called to him. "It's too far for you to walk alone."

"Ah, dear Mrs. Carroll, it is so good not to have that admirable nurse or the good Uncle Yimmy with me."

He let himself down carefully into a big chair.

"And you see that not yet do I disdain cushions. The down of that pr-rovident bird, the eider duck, makes a substitute for the flesh that ought to pad my poor bones. Thank you, Uncle Yimmy," to the old negro, who had just set down the tea-tray, "thank you, yes, one more pillow behind my shoulders."

"You'll have tea?"

"May I have tea? Is it possible that I r-return in one same day to two examples of independence? I walk abr-road alone, and I say again to my dear Mrs. Carroll, 'I thank you. It does me pleasure to accept a cup of tea from your hands.'" He held up his own hand against the sun. "A little worse for the wear, my hand, eh? But still of use."

A slight change of position brought into view the field at the foot of the knoll upon whose top they were. Friedrich sat upright in his chair, while a flush tinged his worn cheeks.

"What makes Miss Sydney down there?" he cried.

"Sydney? Oh, she is breaking some of the colts; teaching them to jump, I think she said, to-day."

Mrs. Carroll adjusted her eye-glasses. Two negro grooms were setting up a low hurdle with wings, while two small black boys dangled joyously from the halters of a couple of young horses, and a third bore Sydney's saddle upon his head.

"Is it Bob Mor-rgan with Miss Sydney?" asked Friedrich, wistfully, as the girl walked across

the field beside a man who was leading a tall gray, already saddled.

"Yes, that's Bob. A huge fellow, isn't he?"

"And fear you not that Miss Sydney should ride those so wild colts?"

"Not now. I used to be frightened to death, but I've seen her and Bob down there doing that for so many years that I've learned not to be afraid. She rides really very well, you know, and Bob is careful of her."

"He would be."

Von Rittenheim sighed, and leaned back with closed eyes. He wished with all his soul that it were he down in the field fitting the saddle—that *dear* side-saddle—to that dancing creature; that it were he who was responsible for the safety of Sydney.

"Bob gives her a lead over, you see, on his horse, which is a well-trained animal."

Friedrich opened his eyes in time to see the gray take off neatly. Sydney followed, and lifted her mount so cleverly that he had leaped his first hurdle before he knew what he was doing. The watchers on the knoll could see Bob, sitting on his horse at one side, clap his hands in approval, while the pickaninnies turned cartwheels in the grass.

"She does r-ride most beautifully, Miss Sydney. It is truly pleasurable to see her," murmured von Rittenheim, though his expression was one of approval rather than delight.

"Do you know, Mrs. Carroll, have I told you how much this *Aussicht—view*, is it not?—and the position of your house make me to think of my home? It is on the edge of the Schwarzwald, and we look down from the Schloss into a valley, oh, so lovely! with trees and a little r-river."

"A much wilder prospect than we have here at Oakwood."

"But not more beautiful, and the feeling is the same."

A vulgar emotion assailed the well-kept precincts of Mrs. Carroll's mind. Curiosity, commonplace curiosity surged within her. She yielded to its force.

"How could you bear to leave it?"

"It was the old pr-reference of the man in the window of the burning castle,—behind, the flames r-roaring mightily, and below, the spears of his enemies."

"A choice between evils."

"Yes, if you will for-rgive my calling your country an evil. I was unhappy—too unhappy to stay where every day I saw something to make me worse; and that evil was gr-reater than to banish myself, even though I do love my country dearly."

"Was it necessary for you to come so far? Could you not find peace in your own land?"

"I thought not. You see—if I do not weary you I will tell you. Shall I tell you?"

"You never weary me," returned Mrs. Carroll, heartily. "I shall consider that you do me an honor if you care to speak to me about yourself."

"It shall be only a little," began Friedrich, repenting of his expansiveness. "Perhaps I have told you that I am the older of my family. I have one br-rother four years younger. Our parents are dead several years, and Maximilian is married two years ago with Hilda von Arnim."

"You spoke of them both when you were ill; in your delirium, you know."

"Of Max and Hilda? What did I say?"

A sharp note was in Friedrich's voice.

"My dear Baron, I must make the humiliating confession that long disuse has impaired sadly my understanding of German. If you should speak to me very slowly, probably I could comprehend you, but at that time you were not speaking slowly."

"My nurses?"

"Neither of them speaks a word of anything but English."

"It is an escape," he murmured. "Forgive me, *gnädige Frau*. It is a startle to think that perhaps you have given to the world your heart's thoughts."

"Be reassured. It was only the names, Max and Hilda, that we understood."

"When my trouble came to me, it was unbearable to stay at the Schloss, so I must go away. Yet Maximilian was not able to preserve the estate as it should be kept. He is not rich, Max, and he is a little what you call swift, eh? He spends much."

"I see."

"So if I leave him to care for the Schloss I must leave him also my incomings, and, if I act so, I cannot live myself in my own country where I have friends of the army and of society; where I have a—what is it?—a stand?"

"Position?"

"Yes, yes, a position to hold up. I must go where it concerns nobody if I am changed in purse. So to America I came, it is about two years since, and for one year I travelled everywhere to see where I liked best, and for the diversion also, for I was most sad. Then my money grew down so small that I saw I must stop, so to this lovely land I happened, and I bought my little farm. But, alas! I fear I am not a farmer. Still, I shall learn. I am determined of that."

"I'm sure you will. You haven't had a chance yet."

"And this year, what can I do? I am so misfortunate as to be away and sick at the time of planting."

"You won't be without some little return, for when we found that you would be ill so long we let your fields to two men who have planted them, and will pay you one-third of their crop of corn. That's the customary rent here, and it will keep your mule through next winter, at any rate."

"Now, that is truly kind and thoughtful. It is, indeed, friendly!"

"You must thank Dr. Morgan for that arrangement."

Von Rittenheim sat erect and stared at the little old lady before him. A look of confused and struggling recollection was called into life by her words.

"I must thank—whom?"

The spirit of the gallant adventurer who had been Mrs. Carroll's immigrant ancestor to the Virginia wilds pushed her on to dare the situation. She also sat upright, and the two faced each other undauntedly.

"You must thank Dr. Morgan for that kindness, and for others even greater."

"Dr. Morgan?"

Clearer remembrance brought with it the old feeling of suspicion and its accompanying look of hatred, which distorted Friedrich's handsome face.

"Yes, Dr. Morgan. I want you to listen to what I am going to tell you. You are well enough now to hear the truth."

"It is your right, madam, to say to me what you may like."

Von Rittenheim turned his stern face towards the training-field, and kept his eyes upon the moving forms that shifted below him.

Mrs. Carroll was unabashed.

"Dr. Morgan is an old and tried friend of mine and of all my family. He has seen life come and go at Oakwood. He rejoiced with us at Sydney's birth, and he was my chief help and support when her father and mother left us two here together, alone."

With a certain tenderness—the yearning that a man feels to protect the feeble and the helpless—Friedrich turned his softened eyes towards her.

"I tell you this because I can say truthfully that I know him to be faithful in friendship and incapable of treachery."

Friedrich turned again with tightened lips to his contemplation of the meadow.

"We heard of your being summoned to court and for what purpose."

Mrs. Carroll stopped, for a grayness settled over the young man's face, and the eyes that he turned upon hers were filled with horror.

"You had forgotten?"

"Yes, I had forgotten."

All the pride went out of him, as the fading of the sun's flush leaves the evening clouds without illumination and dull.

"I had for-gotten, but now I r-remember. It comes back to me. Yes, now I r-remember all—all."

He turned away his face both from her and from the field below, and rested his cheek on his hand. Mrs. Carroll noticed the thinness of his wrist, and her heart misgave her.

"Shall I go on?"

"If it please you."

"Bob Morgan went into Asheville to follow your career in behalf of all your friends here."

Von Rittenheim's head fell lower.

"He was in the court-room when you were——"

The old lady hesitated and watched von Rittenheim sharply. She was doubtful of his strength after all.

"When I was—yes, continue, please," he said, with muffled voice.

"When you were sentenced."

She hastened on, pretending not to hear the groan that followed her revelation.

"He galloped out here at once as fast as he could, and told us about it—his father and me. He feared an illness for you then—you looked not yourself, he said. We decided that it was best for you to come here to Oakwood. We could not bear to think of your going to the hospital."

Friedrich felt vaguely across the table for the plump little hand of his hostess, and pressed it blindly.

"They drove into town that same afternoon, Dr. Morgan in our carriage, and Bob in his buggy, and found you in the—found you very ill."

"Found me where?"

"You were delirious even then."

"Found me where?"

Friedrich pushed aside the cups and placed both elbows on the table. He seemed to Mrs. Carroll to have grown haggard since she had begun her recital.

"Found me where?" he repeated for the third time.

"You insist?"

"It is my r-right."

"They found you in—in the jail."

Mrs. Carroll turned away from the wretched man before her and sobbed undisguisedly. On them fell a quiet pregnant with emotion. The hush was broken by the crash of a tea-cup upon which Friedrich's fingers had happened to fall.

"Bob secured the nurses and drove one of them out in the buggy, and the Doctor and the other one brought you in the carriage."

"Why did they let me go from the—jail?"

"The Doctor paid your fine."

Often during the preceding weeks Mrs. Carroll had thought of this conversation with von Rittenheim, and the statement that she had just made always had figured as the climax of her argument in the Doctor's behalf. Now she felt no pleasure in it. The man before her was too crushed for her to exult over. He made no comment, merely said, reflectively,—

"Yes, there was a fine. It comes to me,—'one hundred dollars or three months.' It is the last thing I r-remember."

"You were dangerously ill by the time you reached Oakwood, and for three days Dr. Morgan left you only to visit his other patients. Between the attacks of stupor you talked a great deal, usually in German, but occasionally in English. From what you said then, and what Dr. Morgan remembered of conversations you had had with him, and from what Bob learned in Asheville, we gathered that you thought that when Dr. and Mrs. Morgan met the marshal on

the road after they had been to your house, they betrayed you to him, and your arrest was the consequence. Is that so?"

Von Rittenheim nodded. "Yes, it is so."

"I hope it will come to you as clearly as we see it who are the Doctor's friends, that he is incapable of such a thing."

"Dear lady, even already I think I see it. I r-remember darkly my trial; how the officer told of his trick to entr-rape me into selling. Ah, dear Mrs. Carroll, I was anxious to despair from my so unusual poverty, and I was hungry, and bitten with shame for my weakness—and hopeless."

Unconsciously his eyes turned to the field below, where Sydney's hair gleamed red bronze in the sunset light. She was dismissing the men and horses. A great wall seemed to von Rittenheim to spring up between them, a wall made thick by his folly, and high by his disgrace, and strong by his weakness.

"Though I am shameful to say such things as if they were excuses, nothing excuses me. I am without justification. I say so most humbly to you."

Weakly he leaned back among his cushions. Mrs. Carroll glanced at him and hurried on.

"When the first fury of the disease was spent, you seemed distressed at the sight of the Doctor, though you did not recognize him fully; so, though he has not failed to come here twice each day, it is through the nurses' reports and Bob's that he has been treating you. He can do so much better for you now if you will see him."

"If I will see him?" he repeated. "Yes, I can at least make some little amends for my folly—my distr-rust. But can I win back ever my self-r-respect, so that you and other people can r-respect me? So that——"

He stopped as Sydney's voice reached him. She was coming up the hill, laughing with Bob.

Von Rittenheim looked appealingly at Mrs. Carroll.

"Sydney," she called, "go on to the house, dear, with Bob, and send James here."

She rose and laid her hand tenderly on the bent head.

"Stay here a while. It is still quite warm enough for you."

She went slowly across the lawn and disappeared beneath the veranda's roses. A level ray from the setting sun touched Friedrich's fair hair with gold, and went on to be splintered into a thousand tiny shafts against the swelling side of the silver cream-jug.

### XIII

#### Reconciliation

The sunshine of a clear June day was beating upon the gravel of the driveway, and a few woolly clouds, the forerunners of the early afternoon's daily shower, clung over the tops of the southern mountains.

Behind the screen of vines and climbing roses that sheltered the porch von Rittenheim sat reading a New York paper of two days before. It was the morning after his explanation with Mrs. Carroll, and the emotional outcome of the talk had been a state of abasement of soul that had sapped his little store of strength. His thin hands shook weakly, and he continually changed his position, and glanced expectantly at the long window which opened upon the gallery.

Sydney's voice inside the house made him clutch his paper nervously. She spoke loudly, as in warning.

"The Baron? You'll find him on the porch, Dr. Morgan. The nurse says he didn't sleep very well last night."

"He didn't? We must mend that." And the Doctor stepped from the window and approached his long-unseen patient.

Von Rittenheim looked up into the wrinkled brown face with its shrewd, kind eyes, and

covered his own eyes with his hand.

"You know?" he asked, brokenly. "Mrs. Carroll has told you?" He felt his other hand taken into a cordial grasp.

"Mrs. Carroll has told me that she has described to you all the happenings of yo' illness that had escaped yo' attention, so to speak. Curious troubles, these brain affairs, aren't they? Make you feel as if you'd been on an excursion outside of yo'self for a while, and had to hear all the home news when you got back."

Von Rittenheim grew composed as the Doctor rambled on.

"She has not told you," he said, insistently, "of my so deep r-regret for the injustice that I made towards you. I can never do atonement for my br-rutal behavior, for my unjust suspiciousness. That you can take my hand shows much par-rdon in you."

"Now, don't talk about that any more, Baron. It ain't worth it," Dr. Morgan replied, awkwardly. "Ah don't guess that circumstances looked very favorable to me. Anyway, you-all can please me best now by doing credit to my doctoring skill. Quit having the appearance of a skeleton just as quick as you can."

"I'll try," answered Friedrich, meekly.

"And don't worry too much over what's gone by," went on the Doctor, clumsily. "Breaking the law's breaking the law, Ah'm not denying that; but it makes a lot of difference what the motive is, and you've suffered your share of punishment, too. It's the right of every man to begin afresh. Avoid mud and give yo' horse a firm take-off, and he'll leap as clean as a whistle for you. Lawd, Ah'm getting plumb religious," he ejaculated, wiping his face.

Friedrich's knowledge of English was put to a test, but he listened with his eyes as well as his ears, and nodded slowly.

"I think I understand," he said. "But do you think that people—my fr-riends"—his eyes turned towards the house—"that my friends can overlook it—can ever think of me as they used to think of me?"

"Oh, I reckon she will," replied Dr. Morgan, with a smile that disconcerted von Rittenheim and drove him to a new topic.

"You will for-rgive me if I do talk some business with you," he said, hastily.

"Do you feel well enough?"

"Oh, yes. I shall feel much better when I have cleared my mind of all these things. I want to say to you that I do much appr-eciate, also, besides your kindness, all the money that you have paid, and—no, let me talk, please, Herr Doctor—and I must tell you that I shall write to-day to Germany for a r-remittance. There is a sum which I can have. Yes, I see you look, wondering that I have lived so poor. Well, I explain to you that I have sworn that I would not use it for myself—I have another use for it—so long as I am well and can earn enough for living; but now I am not well, and I have expenses in the past weeks, and I must live until I grow str-rong to work in some way; so am I justified to myself to send for the money, you see."

"Fix it any way you like," said the Doctor, cheerily, "only remember that if it ain't convenient to pay up *ever*,—why, just banish it from your mind, and Ah'll never think of it again, Ah promise you. Now, is that all?" he asked, as he leaned towards his patient and put a practised finger on his pulse. "Yes? Then Ah'd like to know where that Sydney is with that egg-nog. Here, you Sydney," he cried, putting his head into the house and letting his cracked voice echo into the darkness. "What kind of a nurse are you? How do you expect to rise in the profession, miss, if you don't have an egg-nog ready the instant yo' patient happens to think of it? Oh, here you are! Well, sit down here, then, and see that the Baron takes every drop of that, and don't tire him out with yo' chatter. Do you understand?"

After which burst he kissed her, and disappeared into the house. Sydney turned blushing to the Baron, and laughed at his wistful look.

"Age has its compensations," he said, as he took the tumbler from her. "But I do not begrudge the good Doctor all the happiness that comes to him. He is a most generous man."

"He's a darling!"

"A darling? Ah, yes. I should not have used that word for *him*, but I agree with the sentiment."

"You are critical this morning. Don't you ever allow yourself any liberty of speech in German? Do you always say exactly what you mean, and use exactly the right word?"

"Oh, Miss Sydney, you describe to me a pig—no, a pr-rig person. Surely I use many picture words in my thinking of—well, just to illustrate what I mean, I will say, in my thinking of *you!*"

Sydney moved her position so that her face was partly hidden behind the back of the Baron's wheeled chair.

"Now, there is *Schatz*," went on Friedrich, sipping his egg-nog placidly, but keeping a wary eye upon the bit of pink cheek that was still within his range of vision. "I like to think of you as *Schatz*,"—there was a danger-betokening movement of the glowing head,—"because you are such a treasure to your grandmother."

He paused a moment, but there was no reply.

"And *Perle*—it is a pretty word, *Perle*—it makes you to think of the r-radiance of the moon, so pure, so soft. Yes," he went on, hastily, "*Perle* r-rhymes with *Erle*—that means an alder-tree—and that r-reminds me of you."

"I must say I fail to see the resemblance," came an injured voice from behind the chair.

"Not see? Oh, Miss Sydney, surely—with your cleverness! Listen to this, then; perhaps you like it better that I call you my—I mean *a—Rose*."

"That's because my hair is red."

"It is a white r-rose that always figures in my mind. A beautiful white r-rose with a heart of gold."

By a dexterous touch upon one wheel he whirled his chair about so that he saw her downcast face.

"A heart full of goodness to others is it, and of courage, and of love."

He was leaning eagerly towards her. She lifted her eyes with an effort, and met his. Then he remembered.

"Yes," he continued, hurriedly, "full of love for the poor and the desolate."

Sydney rose.

"Your pretty figures do me too much honor," she said, unsteadily, and went into the house with lingering tread and look.

Friedrich gazed after her.

"God knows I would be counted among the poor and the desolate," he cried, softly, to himself. "But I must not speak again of this until I am more worthy to stand before her—if ever that can be!"

## XIV

### The Fourth of July

That the settle-*ment* celebrated the Fourth of July was not due to an exuberance of patriotism, but to the mercantile spirit of Uncle Jimmy's son, Pete.

Pete was married, and lived in one of the cottages on the Oakwood estate, where he worked intermittently, sandwiching between thin slices of manual labor thick layers of less legitimate emprise.

Independence Day, as the anniversary of the birth of our country's liberty, is not celebrated with enthusiasm in the South. It meets with more cordial acceptance when regarded as another opportunity for knocking off work.

Pete's plan catered to all conditions of conscience, from the seared commodity that asked no excuse for playing to the scrupulous article that considered justification necessary, and found it in the infrequency of such amusement.

He advertised far and wide, by placards in the scattered stores and post-offices that cling near the railway stations and dot the Haywood Road on the other side of the river, a—

GANDER PULIN  
FORTH OF JULY  
AT 5 OCLOCK.  
FRADYS FEILD.

"I always make a point of going to these outdoor gatherings of the country people," explained Mrs. Carroll to the Baron, as they drove towards the field. "I think they like to have me."

Von Rittenheim had insisted upon going home to his cabin a few days before, since which time the old lady had missed him grievously. He was not yet strong enough to take the five-mile ride to Oakwood on his mule, and she had made the gander-pulling an excuse to go to his cabin to see how his housekeeping was progressing, and to take him for a drive.

"We don't have gander-pullings often now, since the law requires that the fowl shall be dead," she explained. "It demands less skill to break the poor thing's neck when it isn't writhing wildly."

"And it does not r-rouse the br-rutal desire to kill that seems to live in every one of us men. Will Miss Sydney be there?"

"Yes, she is going on horseback—"

"Ah!"

"—with John Wendell."

"Eh?"

"You didn't meet them—John and Katrina Wendell—when they were here in the spring. They went North again not long after you came to Oakwood."

"Oh, dear madam, I do so earnestly hope that my going to Oakwood did not deprive you of more welcome guests."

"Not the least in the world. They went back to New York to put the crown to a pretty romance."

"A love-story!"

"Katrina was sent down here, under her brother's care, to forget a certain Tom Schuyler, whom her mother considered impossible because he was penniless."

"The poor but honest suitor."

"A poor but lavish suitor would describe him better. It seems that an aunt of his was moved to give him a present of five hundred dollars. He says that he had just paid his tailor's bill as a concession to his desire to *range* himself, and he really didn't know what to do with the money. It wasn't enough to get anything really nice with,—he'd been trying to make his father give him an automobile,—unless it were a ring for Katrina. He concluded, however, that Mrs. Wendell would object to her daughter's accepting it, and that he might as well take a little flyer with it."

"Take—what is that?"

"Speculate—in stocks."

"And he made his for-rtune?"

"No, on the contrary. He took his father's advice about his purchase, and lost his five hundred dollars within twenty-four hours."

"Then wherefr-rom came his good luck? For surely I perceive the pr-resence of good luck."

"His father was so remorseful over his poor counsel, and so delighted with Tom's apparent desire to 'settle down,' that he made amends for his unfortunate 'tip' by giving his son a very decent sum of money."

"It is like a story, is it not? So the brother and sister went up from here to the wedding."

"It was only a few days ago, and now Tom and Katrina have come to us on their *Hochzeitreise*."

"And the brother?"

Mrs. Carroll glanced amusedly at her companion.

"He came to-day on the afternoon train, to continue the visit which Katrina insisted on shortening for him in May, he says."



"You will enjoy them."

Friedrich's tone was not enthusiastic, and he pulled his moustache gloomily.

"Very much. They are charming young people. See, there are Tom and Katrina now, just turning into the field."

Von Rittenheim raised his hat as Mrs. Schuyler waved her hand to Mrs. Carroll, and studied critically the bride's radiant face and pretty gown as the victoria followed the phaeton through the opened fence-rails. He found her charming and acknowledged it reluctantly, not because he begrudged her her beauty, nor because he thought her handsomer than Sydney, for he did not, but because he had a secret fear of the attractiveness of the brother of so fascinating a girl.

"Tom," said Mrs. Carroll, as Mrs. Schuyler came to the side of the carriage, "I want you to know my very dear friend, Baron von Rittenheim—Mr. Schuyler. Now take the Baron over to Katrina, Tom, and then find Mrs. Morgan,—that's she in the red-wheeled buggy,—and beg her to come and sit with me here. Vandeborough," to the coachman, "drive me under that apple-tree, where there is more shade. How do you do, Eliza?" she said to a woman by whom the carriage slowly passed; "I'm glad to see you out to-day. And you, Mary. Jack Garren, is that you? You grow too fast for my memory. Ah, Jane, I hope your rheumatism is better,—and is that Mattie's Bertha? Stop here, Vandeborough. This will be comfortable. Ah, Mrs. Morgan, it is kind of you to make me a little visit, but I couldn't possibly climb into that buggy of yours. I don't know how you achieve it."

"Nor do Ah, Mrs. Carroll. Ah thought it was high five years ago, when Ah didn't consider mahself overly fat, so you can imagine what the effort is now." And she shook jovially.

"Is the Doctor here?"

"Yes, indeed. He drove me. He always comes to these things. They generally need him before they get through, and it often saves him a long trip into the mountains if he's on the spot when things happen."

"I dare say his presence prevents a good many quarrels."

"Maybe so; but Ah should hate to have any mo' fights than there are. There's always whisky about, you know."

"If the chief crop of this country could be changed, what a blessing it would be!"

"Ah don't know as it would make much difference as long as potatoes were left."

"And thirst."

"There's Bob now. O-oh, Bob!" she called, waving a fat hand to her son as he cantered across the open on his gray.

Bob looked about for the source of the call, and turned his horse towards the tree.

"He's growing handsome, Mrs. Morgan," said Mrs. Carroll, in an undertone, as the tall fellow leaped to the ground, slipped the bridle over his arm, and pulled off his cap.

"He looks as his father did at his age," returned Mrs. Morgan, fondly, glancing across to where her husband was talking to a group of lank mountaineers from whom he was hardly to be distinguished.

"It's right nice of you to come this afternoon, Mrs. Carroll," Bob was saying. "The people always appreciate it. What is it, mother? Those boys? Oh, they're having a game of ball; and the men you see over yonder are throwing horseshoes over a peg—with mighty poor skill, too. Here come Patton McRae and Susy. Excuse me. I'll help him with his horses," for Patton's black mare hated the harness even more than she did the saddle, and was doing her best to demoralize her mate and overturn the buggy.

Sydney, entering the field from the State Road, glanced past the tethered mules and the chair-laden wagons, from which the horses had been taken, to where Bob sat in the carriage beside Susy, saying something very pretty to her, if downcast lids and a blush are any evidence; in reality, teasing her about an absent sweetheart.

Wandering farther, her eyes saw the quoit-throwers, and the groups of women and children sitting in the shade, enjoying an interchange of gossip with the zest of infrequent meetings. She saw the clusters of laughing negroes, and the tent where Pete and his wife were doing a vigorous business in cakes and ice-cream and lemonade. She waved her hand to her grandmother and Mrs. Morgan. She noticed the men and boys who strolled with apparent aimlessness towards the thicket on the edge of the field, and returned wiping their lips on their sleeves. And she saw Katrina talking animatedly to Baron von Rittenheim, who sat beside her, while Patton McRae watched her with adoring eyes, and Tom wore the conscious

smile that indicates the young husband's pride of possession.

Sydney had been feeling very much without occupation since the Baron had gone home, and the anticipation of seeing him again this afternoon had been pleasant to her. He never had made love to her more definitely than on the morning after his interview with Dr. Morgan, but to herself she acknowledged that he admired her, and while she was not sure of his entertaining a more pronounced feeling, up to this time she had known, at least, that his eyes were only for her. And here he was *revelling*—she underlined the word in her thought—in Katrina's vivacity and charm. The sensation of rivalry was new to her and not pleasant.

As for Bob, she had a feeling of warm affection for dear old Bob, and a desire to be useful to him, and she meant to make her influence over him one for good, if that were possible. She was thoroughly glad in the news that had come to her that Bob had not been drinking for several months now. But how he could help referring to the passage that had occurred between them she could not understand. She didn't really want him to make love to her,—that was a notion altogether too unmaidenly,—but she did feel as if an expression of affection from *somebody* would be very comforting.

She turned to John Wendell, who rode beside her, and gave him a more generous smile than it had been his lot to receive while Sydney was the possessor of those agreeable anticipations of the early afternoon.

"You like it? All this?" She waved her hand comprehensively.

"I love it," he answered, promptly, looking at her clear-cut face with its frame of red hair under her sailor hat, and at the well-made linen habit.

"It must be novel to you."

"Not very." He pulled his moustache to conceal an amused smile. "It depends upon where new ends and old begins, you see. Now, I came down here in April, so my feeling is not 'the last cry.'"

"But at that time of year you didn't see—oh, how foolish you are!" she cried, and touched Johnny with her spur. His response brought him near the phaeton, which seemed a focal point for a general movement.

"They're going to have the gander-pulling now," exclaimed Bob, who had come with Susy to join the group. "The best view will be from this side."

"Are you going to ride, Mr. Morgan?" asked Katrina.

"Yes, I think so."

"Bob never can resist any game that's played with a horse," said Sydney, laughing.

"You know you'd like right well to try it yourself," he retorted.

Baron von Rittenheim gave his seat beside Mrs. Schuyler to Miss McRae, and went to Sydney's side.

"At last the sun begins to shine," he said, in a low voice, smiling up at her and patting Johnny's neck.

"Your universe has many suns, I'm afraid," responded Sydney, a trifle pettishly, yet swiftly, scanning his face for signs of returning health. She was not unobservant, either, of his new white summer clothes.

Friedrich glanced across the horse to Mrs. Schuyler.

"I find agreeable the light of the lesser planets," he said, "but—there is only one Sun."

Looking up at her, he laughed again, so heartily and with such genuine pleasure at seeing her that Sydney melted.

"You look so *well*," she cried. "It is a delight to see you. But it's not a compliment to our care that you grow better so fast when you leave us."

"Rather is it a tribute to your so admirable nursing that has prepared me to recover with speed, even though I have it no longer."

"Will you ride, Baron?" asked Bob. "You're welcome to Gray Eagle if you will."

"I thank you, greatly, but I dare not. The eye of my caretaker is upon me, and your Herr Father is here somewhere. No, decidedly, I am afraid," and he leaned with every appearance of contentment against Johnny's shoulder.

"How about you, Mr. Wendell?"

"I think I will, if Miss Sydney will trust me with the horse."

"Of course; and I'll give you a lovely prize if you bring me the head."

"It's yours," cried John, while Friedrich bit his lip, in annoyance, and thought on the *Ewigweibliche*.

"Can you find me something, Mr. Morgan?" cried Schuyler. "I really can't stand here and see you fellows having this fun without me."

"What's Mr. Schuyler driving, Sydney? 'Possum? She'll do, if you don't mind. I'll swipe a saddle off of one of those mules over there." And he and Tom fell to unharnessing the useful 'Possum, while the Baron held Gray Eagle and commented on Bob's resource.

"He is full of device," he said, heartily, "and r-ready, always, to think and to do." And Sydney remembered some of the things he had done, and nodded with misty eyes.

## XV

### The Gander-Pulling

Under all the trees where horses had been hitched, the mountaineers were tightening girths, mending unsound bridles, and pulling down stirrups from the saddles across which they had been flung to be safe from fly-kicking hoofs.

Some men had switches tucked under their saddle-flaps. Others, less provident, swung on to their beasts, and, heavily elastic, trotted across to the brush to cut a "hickory" from a sourwood-tree.

Pete was testing the strength of a stout oak pole driven into the ground, across whose fork was lashed, like the cross-bar of a "T," a leaf-stripped sapling. To the tip of this rod the negro was tying the legs of a big, white goose, whose extended wings and pendant head betrayed compliance with inexorable law.

"Hit's a damn shame," Pete murmured, as he anointed the creature's neck and head with liberal smearings of lard. "Whar de fun o' pullin' on a ole daid t'ing lak dis? But Ah hope dey'll tink hit's great!" And he beat vigorously on a pan to attract the attention of all hearers.

"Gen'lemen. O-oh, gen'lemen!" he cried, at the top of his lungs. "Now fo' a great ole gander-pullin'! De only one we've had in dis settle-*ment* fo' t'ree year. Every gen'leman as craves to enter dis gander-pullin' will kin'ly ride up here and *de*-posit a quarter 'f a dollar. Only twenty-five cen's fo' de priv'lege o' takin' a pull at dis yer goose,—warranted a tasty goose! One-half dis sum o' money goes to de gen'leman who succeeds in *re*-movin' de haid from dis fowl, an' also de goose hitself, which sho' do look lak good eatin'!"

Pete's old hat soon sagged with the coins that were tossed into it, while his keen eye noted each entry as surely as if he wrote the name in black and white. It would have been useless for anyone to try to enter the lists without paying the proper fee.

Two lines of excited onlookers served at once to define a lane, whose ultimate point was the gallows whereon hung the goose, and to rouse to excitement the horses, whose overworked spirits did not respond promptly to the sudden stimulus.

They cheered the aspirants with jovial condemnation.

"Show us what yo' ole plug c'n do, 'Gene."

"Sho', Alf, you-all ain' goin' to ride that po' critter!"

"He's powerful gaunted up, yo' war-horse, Bud."

"Mighty strength'nin' ploughin' is, but not stimmerlatin'!"

"High-strung animal, that clay-bank o' Pink's."

Pink's temper was in that state where he enjoyed hugely gibes at his friends' expense, but was in no mood to receive amiably jests directed against himself.

"Whar's you-all's horse?" he shouted, in exasperation, to one of his tormentors. "Ah reckon no one would len' you anythin' mo' vallyble 'n a billy-goat. Now dry up. Pete, start this thing."

He rode to the end of the passage where the horsemen were gathering. Alf Lance, Melissa's father, whose horses Bud and Pink were riding, scanned them both to make sure that they were not too drunk to be trusted with his animals.

Pete fussed about nervously.

"Which o' you gents will begin dis pullin'?" he called. "Now, sahs, come on."

Pink pushed his horse towards the edge of the crowd, but he was hailed with dissuasive cries.

"Aw, hold on, Pink."

"Don' be so bigoty."

"Who you-all think ye are?"

"Where's Bob Morgan?"

"Yes, Bob's the feller!"

"O-oh, Bob!"

It was their tribute to the Doctor, this giving precedence to his son, and Bob so understood it. It was, therefore, irritating to have Pink thrust forward his red face and look him over sneeringly.

"Aw, gwan," he cried, "lessee what you-all c'n do."

The bunch of horsemen fell to one side, and Bob started Gray Eagle from well back in the field near the deserted wagons. He passed the mounted men and thundered through the lines of standing howlers. The gray had been his master's coadjutor in so many situations of excitement and even peril, that the cheering mob did not provoke him unduly. He galloped, unswervingly, up to the hanging goose, though his ears were pricked forward, and he shuddered as the instinctive repulsion from death pulsed through him. Bob's outstretched hand grasped the long and slippery neck, while the inarticulate yell with which the Southern farmer calls his dogs and chases his cows and terrifies his enemies went up from the onlookers. Tightly he clutched the greasy thing, and tried to give a sharp twist that should break the vertebræ. But his hand slipped swiftly down to the flat head, which offered no hold for his grasp, the beak ripped through his fingers, and the sapling, which had bent and followed him as Gray Eagle dashed on, snapped back, waving triumphantly its unharmed burden.

"Hard lines, old man, but the fun lasts longer so," cried Wendell, as Bob pulled up beside him after circling the spectators.

"Who's that?" the New Yorker asked, as a lank country horse plunged down the lane, shied violently at the feathered horror, threw his rider into the crowd, and galloped with flapping stirrups over the field.

"Gene Frady. He never can stay on anything. He's all right, dad," to the Doctor, who was moving towards the upper end. "See, he's chasing his horse now."

With a drunken whoop, Pink Pressley rushed his animal towards the prize; but his condition, combined with twitches and jerks of the bridle, and rakings of the spur, had acted upon his mount's usually stolid nerves, and half-way up the alley he whirled about and tore back, carrying his cursing rider far up the road before he calculated the probable results to himself of this outburst, and consented to return.

Bud Yarebrough was more fortunate. He leaned far forward and succeeded in getting a firm grasp of the neck, but he had guided his horse too close to the bird, and his jerk drew it directly over his face, blinding him with grease and feathers.

His plight was greeted with howls of derision, which fell into silence as John Wendell made the trial. His unpractised hand in some way pulled down the goose, and the rebound of the sapling plucked the booty out of his grasp, and flung it high above his head.

Tom Schuyler was equally unlucky.

Alf Lance forgot that he was left-handed until he was close upon his quarry, when he dropped his reins and pawed vaguely at the air as his horse carried him on.

Another yell announced Pink Pressley's return. Now his chastened steed bore him straight enough to the goal, but by that time Pink was too drunk to distinguish the goose he was after from the flock that swirled and dipped before his eyes, and he never touched a feather.

"Doctor, you-all'll have to show us how," said Alf Lance.

"Come on, Doctor."

"Yes, yo' the feller."

"Bob, give yo' father yo' horse and let him larn ye what's what."

"Oh, I hope he'll do it," cried Sydney. "He's capital at it!"

"Fo' the Lawd's sake!" ejaculated Mrs. Morgan, rising to her feet in the carriage and steadying herself by an informal hand on Mrs. Carroll's shoulder. "Fo' the Lawd's sake, if that ain't Henry Morgan! Well, did you ever!" And her fat body trembled with pride and excitement.

Gray Eagle took his second turn with the same equanimity as if his own master were on his back. He galloped handsomely towards the goose; there was a quick snatch and a snap, and the old man turned short and came back, holding aloft his trophy.

"Wah, wah, wah!"

Yells, whistles, and cat-calls greeted his success. Sydney and Katrina and Mrs. Carroll clapped their hands, and the Doctor, folding in his handkerchief the somewhat dubious treasure, rode over to the apple-tree and presented it to his wife.

During the confusion attendant upon the harnessing of horses and mules, Bob, restoring 'Possum's saddle to the mule from which he had borrowed it, heard Pink Pressley's voice on the other side of the big oak by which he was working.

"Howdy, Mr. Baron," he was saying.

"Howdee," responded von Rittenheim, with an accent that made Bob throw back his head and laugh silently. "You had bad fortune with your horse this afternoon."

"Correct. Damn pore horse. Some day Ah'll have a good horse o' mah own, not a ole borrowed plug. Ah'm goin' to be rich some day. You-all know how, eh? Say,"—he was wagging his head solemnly to and fro, disgustingly near von Rittenheim's face,— "Ah reckon you'd like to go into business with me now ye made a start at hit."

Bob remained behind his shield, hoping that Pressley would go away before von Rittenheim had the mortification of seeing him.

"Ah reckon you-all need money mahty bad," drawled the drunken voice. "A feller always does when he wants to get married, 'n hit's clear what yo' after with Miss Sydney."

Like bolts from heaven, two blows fell upon him simultaneously, and von Rittenheim and Bob faced each other over his fallen body.

"Leave him alone," said Bob, hoarsely. "He'll sleep it off."

Then he strolled over to his father.

"Dad, I suspect you'd better take a look at Pink Pressley under the big oak-tree. I've just given him a biff in the solar plexus, or mighty near it."

## XVI

### On the Bridge

All through July the growing heat of summer forced the people of the low country up into the mountains in search of an altitude where humidity is not a factor in the sum total of suffering. Every evening's six o'clock train brought families of travellers, glad to escape from the steaming heat of Charleston or Savannah, or ready to run the risk of the fever-killing frost coming too late for the beginning of the New Orleans schools. They emerged dishevelled and weary from the hot cars. The elders counted children, nurses, and luggage; the children sat down at once upon the ground and took off their shoes and stockings.

By the first of August the whole Asheville plateau was transformed from its winter state.

The large towns were filled with pretty, pale girls, gay in muslins and ribbons and big hats, who danced and drank soda-water in the mornings and danced again in the evenings, or went on drag-rides, and flirted at all hours.

The small hotels in the country were full of the same girls, chaperoned by gay mammas, who played whist six hours a day, while their charges found temperate amusement in walking to the post-office in the cool, purple dusk, and in dancing—chiefly with each other—after supper.

The proportion of men to girls was the usual summer ratio. Nice discriminations of extreme age or extreme youth counted for little against ability to dance. The girl with brothers of almost any size was popular among her kind, and the girl who "grabbed" was held in cordial contempt.

Woe be unto the youth who really fell in love. His courtship was the cynosure of all eyes. Its progress was reported hourly. His presence was noted and his absence commented upon. His ardor was gauged by the thermometer of many eyes, and the barometer of hotel partisanship betrayed the storms of love.

The Neighborhood awoke from its winter sleep. Every house had its guests, and there were constant gayeties both by day and evening.

The first moon of August, by lighting the dark forest roads, became responsible for nightly festivities. On one of the earliest evenings of the month she looked down upon carriages and horsemen making their way to the French Broad, where Fletcher's Bridge crosses the river. The Schuylers, with Sydney and John, were in the Oakwood surrey, while Vandeborough cantered behind to take care of the horses "while de white folkses eats."



**To the French Broad, where Fletcher's Bridge crosses the river**

The Cotswold party filled a three-seated buckboard and a surrey, and rejoiced further in outriders. Baron von Rittenheim bestrode his mule. The Delaunays brought a carriage-load of girls, who laughed a great deal in the soft, full voices the far South gives her daughters. From the Hugers' party came scraps of talk about "the City," and the "Isle of Palms."

There was a wagon-load of people from the Buck Mountain House, too, friends of the Hugers.

By Sydney's command the picnic fire was built by the river's bank in a large field, whose openness showed the quick march across the heavens of the rising moon.

Every one brought a stick to lay on the blazing pile. Bob and one of the Delaunay girls fetched water from a spring that hid its coolness under a shelving rock in the forest across the road. Susy McRae made the coffee, hindered by John's advice, more voluble than useful. Tom Schuyler was instructed in the proper method of propping up a broiler before the blaze, so that the chicken might cook without exacting a human burnt offering. Patton volunteered for the task of getting the potatoes into the ashes. The rest of the girls laid the table-cloths on the ground, and opened the baskets, and the rest of the men hunted up logs for seats, and brought the cushions and rugs from the carriages.

Sydney dominated the scene, giving a clever suggestion to Tom, encouraging Susy to disregard John's teasing, which threatened some harm to the coffee, sympathizing with Patton over a burn, and showing Katrina how to cook bacon on a long forked stick.

After the meal was eaten and complacency filled them, she it was who sent their suppers to the coachmen, and who packed up baskets and folded cloths, aided by von Rittenheim and

Bob.

"Oh, do stop doing that, Sydney," cried Mildred Huger. "You make us all feel so mean not to be helping you, and you know it isn't necessary right now."

"Yes, come and sit by me, Sydney," said John. "I've been saving a place, and it'll be a treat for you."

"Wait a few minutes, Sydney," said Tom, "and you shall have my valuable help."

"There, it's all done, dear people," cried Sydney, "and we can watch the moon with a clear conscience."

"Will you not come with me to the bridge to see it?" begged Friedrich, in a low voice. "Ah, do come!"

Bob, who had been about to ask the same thing, turned away and stretched himself at Mildred Huger's feet. Susy softly touched her guitar, suggesting popular airs, and voices took up the tunes, now stopping to say something funny and to laugh while others carried on the song, now joining in an energetic chorus. On the outskirts of the circle farthest from the dying fire sat the couples in whom the soft night and the moonlight and the music were arousing sentiment. More than one young fellow watched Friedrich and Sydney as they disappeared behind the willows on the bank, and wished that he had been the first to suggest the bridge, and envied the two their vantage point.

They stood side by side upon its hoof-worn planks. Under their feet swept the musical flow of the stream, molten silver in the moonlight as it slid towards them, a sparkling, dancing mist of tossing diamonds as it fled away over the stones of the rough bottom.

They faced the wonderful glory of the moon. Her hand was on the bar at first, and his beside it. After a moment he glanced at the tempting nearness, and put his in the pocket of his jacket. Then he turned his back upon the moon, and leaned on the railing by her, facing the lesser splendor that was to him as dazzling.

"Will you forgive me if I spoil the beauty of this perfect night by speaking to you a little about—myself?"

His voice was serious. Sydney looked at him and turned away her head. Her lips trembled.

"I have not the right to force upon you a subject so unworthy. But I think it is just that you should know—that all my friends should know—what work I am going to try now to do to retrieve myself. Ah, you make the little gesture that means 'Say not that word.' But you will let me say just this one thing I want to, if you please. When I say 'retrieve myself,' I understand well that nothing can destroy the fact that my name is written on those books over there,"—he waved his hand in the direction of Asheville,— "and I know well that for my fault all my life I shall suffer in one way or another. But I can truly say, in God's sight,"—he stood bareheaded, and faced again the heaven's pomp,— "that I have repented my weakness most bitterly, both for what it did lead me to, and because such weakness in itself is shameful."

Sydney lifted to his her eyes blurred with tears.

"Don't," she whispered, hoarsely.

"*Ach*, Heaven help me, look not at me like that," he cried; "I cannot bear everything!"

Silence lay between them after this cry of pain. Friedrich began again, very low.

"I see now clearly what I saw not at the time,—that my weakness came upon me from my own lack of strength to make an effort. I was crushed by a grief when I left my land to come to America. I allowed it to paralyze my will. I let myself drift, not caring enough about what became of me to exert myself to ward off poverty. Poverty never had been mine, —I did not realize it, but I did know well the meaning of self-respect and honor, and it was base of me to permit my will so to sink."

Again he paused.

"I tire you? You let me go on?"

Sydney's face looked white in the moonlight. She assented by a motion of the head.

"Even when I knew—you—"

Sydney gazed down at the scintillant water. Von Rittenheim did not turn to her, and went on, steadily,—

"—and admired your beauty and your sweetness—forgive me that I say these things so baldly—and wondered at the responsibilities you assumed, and at the care you took of

every needling person who came near you—even fr-om you whom I admired and—whom I admired with all my str-ength, I did not learn the lesson that was before my eyes."

"How can you say all this to me, Baron? You must not."

"You will do me the justice to listen just a pair of minutes longer. Now I see it all clearly; now I have a purpose in my life. It is to make you look upon me with r-respect,—with so much r-respect that you will for-rget that on one of those turned-over pages of my life there is a blot."

"And you have chosen to seek your salvation through work! It is a fine spirit, Baron, and the American gospel—though perhaps you may not like it the more on that account."

"You are an American."

Sydney blushed and laughed,—her sweet, rich laugh. She was glad to be a little farther away from tragedy.

"Shall I tell you my plan? You will see how I am practical! My salvation lies in the unpoetic shape of—cattle."

"Cattle?"

"I have some money for which I sent to Germany; some that I felt it r-right to use if I should be in gr-great need of it, but which I should not have sent for except that I was ill. With this money and my little farm I go into partnership with young Mr. McRae. His father gives to him one-half of his so large estate. On his place and mine we r-raise a cr-rop which we feed to our cr-reatures."

"Where are they to come from?"

"Some we do r-raise ourselves, and some we buy here and there, every-where in these mountains where we can find two or three colts—no, calves."

"Will there be a sufficient market to justify you?"

"How wonderful for business are you! Yes, we think so. Alr-ready have we an or-rder to send a whole carload of steers to R-richmond."

"Really? You've really begun?"

"Yes, I take much pr-ride to say that we have begun two days ago. Patton is to buy the calves at first, he does so well understand the folk of the mountains; and later, when I talk more accurately English, then I shall help him. Until then my part is on the farms."

"I think it is admirable! It will give you so much to do and to interest you. You are sure to succeed."

She smiled at him generously and with perfect sympathy. Her white dress shone cool against the purple sky, and her face rose radiant above.

Von Rittenheim leaned over her as she sat on the bridge's railing. On the road, not far away Susy McRae's guitar betrayed her approach, and John Wendell's barytone hummed the air that she was picking. Von Rittenheim put his foot on the topmost bar and leaned his elbow on his uplifted knee. By his position Sydney was screened entirely from the oncomers.

"I seem to have a gr-great deal to say to-night. Now I shall tell you a little stor-ry."

His tone was gay, but Sydney saw that his eyes were grave.

"Does it begin 'Once upon a time'?" she fenced.

"*Ja. Es war einmal* a knight, who led a happy life in his own country until a gr-grief came to him which he thought the most ter-rible sorrow that could come to anybody. He learned better afterwards, but at the time it seemed to him not to be endured. So he left his home and became a wanderer over the earth. And for many months he r-roamed, and nothing ever made him for-rget his tr-rouble until one day he saw a beautiful pr-rincess. Ah, she was a most lovely pr-rincess, with a face like a r-rose, and teeth like pearls, and a heart that was a tr-reasure of goodness."

Friedrich warmed with his subject. He was looking his fill on the downcast face before him, while Sydney pulled at the little handkerchief in her lap, and carefully smoothed out a corner of it on her knee.

"As soon as he saw her the knight knew that his old tr-rouble was not what he had thought it. And he knew also at once what would be the gr-reatest happiness that life could give him. He determined to win this happiness if he could, but first he had to pr-rove himself to the pr-rincess that he was a knight of cour-rage and not a weakling. So he told her of his purpose



and begged of her a favor that he might wear it on his heart."

There was a pause, so long that Sydney asked, still with downcast head,—

"How does the story end?"

"I know not."

"You don't know?"

"I never learned it any farther. What do you think comes next?"

"I don't—I think——"

Bravely she raised her eyes to his, and stood before him, blushing divinely.

"I think she gave him a token and bade him Godspeed." And Friedrich found himself with a morsel of cambric in his hand, which he kissed passionately, while Sydney was walking towards the bridge's end, answering Susy's cry.

"Here I am. Is it time to go?"

And John was answering,—

"Mrs. Carroll warned us to go home early on account of the dance to-morrow night."

Laughing and singing they went through the moonlight, some with the happy hearts they had brought, others saddened by some of the whimsies of Fortune that seem lurking to spoil our joy when most we exult. Gladdest of all the blissful ones rode Friedrich von Rittenheim. At the cross-roads he waved a gay "good-by" to the Oakwood surrey as it bore away from him the lady of his love. He stopped his mule and looked long after it, and threw a kiss at its bulky form as it plunged into the wood.

He did not put on his cap again, but stuffed it into his pocket, and trotted on towards home with the moonlight shining on his fair hair. The good creature between his knees felt his exhilaration and broke into a short canter as an expression of sympathy with his master's humor. The negroes whose cabins he passed pulled the clothes over their heads, whispering "Hants!" as he galloped by, singing "Dixie" at the top of his lungs.

Sydney had taught it to him, the stirring song, and he brought it out roundly,—

"Oh, I wees' I was in the land of cotton,  
The good old times are not for-gotten,  
Look away, look away, look away,  
Deexie Land."

## XVII

### Out of a Clear Sky

There came to von Rittenheim as he stabled his mule, with many a tender pat upon his coarse coat, one of those times of spiritual insight when we see ourselves as after a long absence we look with scrutiny upon once familiar objects. A perception of new growth filled him with surprise, as we look at the seedling under the window, and notice of a sudden that it has grown to be a sapling. With the scrutiny and the perception came a comprehension of new power, such as we feel objectively when our child asserts himself, and we understand in a flash that the man is born within him, and that the days of childhood are past.

The remembrance of the months of regret and sorrow that had followed upon his coming to America struck him with nausea. The thought of his long ineptitude for the life which he had adopted voluntarily gave him a feeling of self-contempt. The inertness of his will disgusted him.

And then all this disgust and contempt was swept away by a great wave of courage and determination and strength. He tingled with the consciousness that once more there had come to him the intrepidity with which his youth had faced the future, the will-power to take up life again, and the force to work and to win.

Reverently he thanked God for each increment of might that pulsed through him, as he struck a match and lighted his lamp,—so automatically the commonplace actions of life are

performed while the spirit surges within.

Reverently he thanked God for the love that filled him, and for the hope of return that had come to him. Then he stretched his arms upward to their fullest height, merely for the sake of feeling his physical strength, and broke into a torrent of tender German epithets, —*Englein Geliebte, Herzenfreude, Liebling*. He took out the little handkerchief and kissed it again and again, and walked restlessly about his room, too glad and too happy to be quiet.

The nickel clock upon the mantel-shelf struck eleven, and at the same time something like the sound of wheels penetrated his exaltation. He stopped in his march and listened. No one could have turned by mistake into his road in such brilliant moonlight, yet he knew no one who would visit him at that hour. He thought it possible that some one was taking the back road to Bud's cabin, so he made no move until the vehicle stopped before his house. Then he stepped hastily into his bedroom and slipped his revolver into his pocket before he responded to a gentle rap.

Flinging back the door he saw standing on the porch a woman, a girl, about whom the breeze blew a scarf of thin black stuff. Two trembling hands were held out to him as if to implore a greeting, and a white face looked up from its dark inwrapment like the face of a wistful child. The moon, sailing high in the zenith, cast no light beneath the porch's roof, and von Rittenheim stood unrecognizing.

She spoke in German.

"Friedrich, you do not know me?"

"Hilda!"

There was dismay in his tone and surprise unspeakable. He made no offer to take her hands, and they sank at her side. The driver seeing that his fare had found whom she sought, deposited her trunk and a valise upon the floor of the porch, with a succession of heavy thumps, and drove off with a relieved "Good-night," to which he received no response.

"Friedrich, your welcome is not cordial. Surely you know me? You called me 'Hilda.'"

"Yes, I know you. You are Hilda," he repeated, dully. "Why are you here?"

"Won't you ask me in and let me tell you?"

"I beg your pardon." He stepped back that she might pass him. "You have surprised me almost out of my senses—entirely out of my manners, as you see."

He gave her a splint chair—one of the two which were the room's complement—and stood before her. His arm lay on the mantel-shelf, his fingers clutching its edge until the nails grew white. The girl took off her heavy black bonnet and laid it on the table. The lamp behind her shone through the golden hair that made a halo around her face, the face of a child, unworldly, confiding. The only mark of maturity about her was the straight line of a determined mouth.

Friedrich spoke first.

"You are wearing black. Is it Max?"

The great, innocent blue eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, it is Max."

"Poor child!"

A shiver passed over the girl.

"And poor Max! When was it?"

"Five months ago."

"Five months ago? You can't mean that! Five months ago! Why wasn't I told?"

"I hadn't your address."

"Max had it."

"I looked through all his papers and found nothing."

"Herr Stapfer, my lawyer, had it."

"I applied to him, and he gave me an address in Texas that you had sent him a year ago."

"It is true. I believe I never wrote to him after I settled here until last June."

"Yes, it was in June that I heard from him again that you were here, and ill. I begged him not

to tell you of Max's death. I did not know how ill you were, and I feared for you. Then I decided to come myself to find you—and care for you if you needed care."

"Your aunt?"

"She is dead. I have no one now—but you."

Silence fell on them. The little figure with the dark robes of her mourning clinging about her, rose and stood before him, her linked fingers twisting nervously together.

"You will let me stay? You told me once—you swore it, do you remember?—that your life was mine; that I had but to tell you of my need. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

His eyes were on the ground and never met her steady gaze, but she seemed satisfied with what she saw. Her hands stopped their nervous play.

She looked curiously about the room.

"This is a hunting-lodge, I suppose. But you must not think I care. I shall get on very well. And may I go to my room now?"

Von Rittenheim was startled into activity by the simple request.

"I think you must wait until some preparation is made. I will go and fetch a woman who will look after you. You will not be afraid if I leave you alone for a few minutes?"

"Entirely alone?"

"Yes. There is no one here. But see, I leave you my pistol, and you can lock the door on the inside, and when I come back I will call in German. No one else near here knows a word of German."

"Shall I be safe?"

"Perfectly—even without those precautions. I will hurry."

He stood an instant outside the door listening to the noise of the key in the lock. Then he turned in the direction of the Yarebroughs', and ran feverishly along the path.

His knock upon the door was answered by a sleepy "Who's that?" and the click of a gun's hammer. Von Rittenheim explained his identity, and Bud responded by opening the door an ungenerous crack. The Baron told his necessity,—how his sister-in-law had arrived unexpectedly, and would Mrs. Yarebrough be so good, so *very* good, as to go back with him and see if she could make her comfortable, and spend the rest of the night there?

Bud shut the door, and Friedrich heard the sound of discussion. Kindness of heart and curiosity to see the strange lady triumphed over the claims of sleep, and Bud opened the door again to call through the crevice,—

"She'll go, Mr. Baron."

It was almost midnight when they reached the cabin, Friedrich and the whole Yarebrough family; for Sydney Melissa could not be left behind, and Bud had a curiosity of his own. Von Rittenheim spoke in German and the door was unlocked. He made a hasty explanation to Hilda concerning the number of his escort.

Melissa stared with all her eyes at the childish beauty before her.

"Oh, Mr. Baron," she cried, with sudden courage, "Ah'd like to take care of her, she's so little an' pretty. Ah don' min' hit a bit, Bud; truly Ah'm honin' to," in unconscious confession of her previous timidity. "You-all go long back with Bud, Mr. Baron, 'n Ah'll make her comfortable. Will ye have yo' trunk in here, ma'am?"

To Hilda's answer, "Yes, if you please," in faltering English, Melissa cried, in ecstasy,—

"Don' she speak pretty! Now, Bud, you tote in the lady's trunk, 'n then go. She's tired." And the usually timid country girl entered into her new *rôle* of care-taker with extraordinary zest.

Friedrich approached his sister-in-law.

"Good-night," he said. "You will be quite safe. Have no fear."

She held out her hand to him. He hesitated a moment, and then took it in a brief clasp.

"Good-night," was all she said.

Declining Bud's offer of shelter, von Rittenheim bade him farewell, and strode into the

darkness of the forest. Yarebrough looked after him, puzzled and disapproving.

"He ain' none so glad to see his sister-in-law," he pondered. "Ah wonner what hit all means."

Friedrich took no heed of his way beyond a numb feeling of pleasure when it grew steeper and rougher. He had left the trail long since, but he was stayed by no obstacle, was arrested by no barrier of Nature's make. A lizard asleep on a tiny ledge of rock, jutting from a cliff, scuttled away in fright as a man in sudden onslaught scaled its face. A pair of cotton-tails bobbed from one thicket to another in wildest terror as he came breaking through. A trout, floating in a rocky basin of the brook, fled with a dexterous flip of fin and tail to the protecting shelter of an overhanging root, as the placid pool was agitated by the passage of an enemy, following the course of the stream as the path of least resistance.

To all these sights and sounds Friedrich was blind and deaf. He spoke no word. It was as if he were deprived of every power but that of motion. He plunged on like a man of old pursued by the Erinyes.

Though he was unconscious of fatigue, the mad pace began to tell on him, and his muscles cried for quarter. At such times he rushed either to the right or left, going along the side of the mountain until he found an easier upward passage, but always ascending, never turning down the slope; always fleeing from the pursuing wretchedness; always subtly conscious of the futility of flight.

So mounts a small bird into the air, pursued by a hawk. Higher and higher he flies, straight up into the blue, hoping that the wind may blow him far beyond his pursuer's reach, believing that the light atmosphere that suffices to support his frail body may be too tenuous to uphold his heavier enemy. Hoping thus and believing; but realizing at last the unequal contests between their strengths, the failing of his own force, the fateful, certain, deadly approach of the antagonist whose power it is useless to oppose.

One above the other two shelves of rock arose, like two steps of a giant's staircase. Friedrich's exhausted body sank upon the moss of the upper, and the bracken and small shrubs closed over him, as if to shield him in their gentle embrace from the trouble that had driven him to their care. He lay on his back, staring with unseeing eyes at the tree-leaves far above his head, black against the sky's purple.

His mind seemed to be exhausted with his body. It moved with painful slowness, and groped vaguely after the things of memory.

Was it yesterday—when was it that he had seen Sydney moving about in the yellow firelight? Had he not—yes, he was sure he had—led her under the willow-trees and on to the old bridge, with the glistening glory under their feet, and the moon in splendor above them? And had she given him—no, of course not—but yes, what was this? He pressed to his lips the scrap of lace from his pocket. And there had been one splendid hour of hope and strength and courage—one hour when the past had fallen away from him and the future opened to his sight a not impassable avenue.

The moon cast level shadows as the great planet rolled towards the western hills. Friedrich fancied himself in Germany, far back in the long ago, when he was madly in love with Hilda. The story unfolded before him like a panorama of some one else's life. It was, indeed, he who had loved Hilda, but he felt not a flutter of the emotion now. *Now* he knew what real love was. Yet this ardent, jealous lover was he, and she had jilted him for Maximilian. He went over again the old arguments in her behalf. Why shouldn't she prefer Max—gay, handsome old Max? He was nearer her age, and he had just had a legacy from his Aunt Brigitta, whose favorite he had been. Of course, that reason did not count. But he was gay and handsome and younger. Surely those three excuses were enough.

That wedding day! Should he ever forget it? He had thought to go away, but that would have been unkind to Max, and perhaps have put Hilda in a wrong light in the eyes of those who knew them. No, he was the head of the family. His duty was to sit through the wedding-breakfast which her aunt gave to the bride, and to preside at the feast that welcomed the pair to Schloss Rittenheim. Though the old love could not enter him again, the old torture came back poignantly.

After the feast was over and the guests had gone, he had found himself with her in a recessed window, looking down upon a carriage rolling away in the moonlight. He had taken her hands, and had compelled her gaze. She looked so fragile, so helpless, as he thought of his brother's carelessness and love of self, and he swore a solemn oath to stand ready to help her and to care for her, if ever need should be. Max, a little uncertain in speech and gait, had called her then, and Friedrich had ordered a horse, and had ridden recklessly into the forest—on and on and on.

For a whole month he had endured the torture of greeting her calmly every morning, and of lifting her tiny white hand to his lips every night, and then he had decided that there was no reason for such crucifixion, and he had come to America.

And in America he had met the princess—the splendid princess!

The moon sank behind the mountains, and with its disappearance Friedrich slept.

## XVIII

### Business Plans

Through the early morning's shifting mist—the haze that foretells a fine day—two men felt their way up the side of Buzzard Mountain. They followed no path,—indeed, there are few trails to follow,—but they climbed steadily on, as if they knew well their way, and as if speed were of importance.

With all their perseverance they could not cover much ground, for the ascent is sharp enough to clutch the lungs, and the mist covered for them a world of stumbling-blocks.

"H'm," grunted the leader, Pink Pressley. "They oughter be a black oak about here with a varmint hole in hit."

He stopped and peered about him through the gloom, while Bud, his companion, took the opportunity to lay his burden upon the ground while he wiped his forehead with a blue handkerchief. He made no response to his friend's remarks, but wore the air of one who does what he is bid, and follows where he is led. Pink swung himself into motion again.

"Ah reckon we ain' high enough, yet," he growled, and swore softly as he struck his foot against an unseen stone.

"Hang ye, don' do that," he cried, angrily, as he heard the breaking of a branch behind him. "Why don' ye blaze yo' way right along, or mark yo' path with a rope? Do you wan' the whole settle-*ment* follerin' us up here?"

With praiseworthy discretion Bud still refrained from speech. A particularly steep bit of climbing silenced his companion as well. Yarebrough was the first to discover the landmark.

"Is that the black oak?" he asked.

"Where?"

He pointed above them and a little to the right, to a veteran whose side had been cut by hunters for the discomfiture of a 'coon or 'possum that had taken refuge within.

"Yep."

They climbed to it, and both men set their heavy loads upon the ground.

"Much further?" asked Bud.

"No, come on. Sun'll be up soon 'n we'll be late gettin' down."

Pressley pointed to the east, where a sort of inner glow seemed to illuminate the haze and make it thinner and more penetrable. They shouldered their packs and again Pink led the way. He advanced, now, with a certain care. From the tree he counted a hundred paces to the right, and called Bud's attention to the number.

"That brings ye to this hickory—see?—with a rock under hit. Now, then, straight up from this is the place we's after, twenty-five steps, about; but hit's hard to tell, hit's so steep."

He deposited his load upon a flat platform of rock, above which, at a height of a dozen feet, the bank overhung. Under the bank was a hole, not clear enough to be called a cave, nor of any great size. Bud sank down, gratefully, beside his leader, and scrutinized the place.

"Not overly large," he commented, "but Ah 'low hit 'll be right smart bigger when hit's cleaned out."

"Hit is," returned Pressley, laconically. He spoke with so much decision that Bud looked at him sharply.

"You-all ain' ever——?" He hesitated.

"Used hit before? Not much! Ah ain' a plumb fool! But they's nothing like comin' from a fam'ly that's observin' an' contrivin'."

A smile of self-appreciation swept over his face.

"Ah've knowed about this place ever since Ah was fryin' size. In fact, mah father—well, never min' him. Only you'll fin' they's plenty o' room inside to stow away that rubbish an' all our little do-es beside."

"Whereaway's the water?"

"They's a spring over yonder a little bit."

Bud stared at the hole sullenly, and slowly scratched his head. Pressley, unslashing a mattock and shovel from his pack, did not notice him.

"Ah swear, Pink," broke out Yarebrough, in puzzled indecision, "Ah swear Ah donno's Ah like this business."

Pressley sneered.

"Don' talk so loud. Yo' rather late findin' hit out."

"No, Ah ain'. Ah ain' never been sho'."

"Sho' 'bout what?"

"Oh, Ah donno. Kin' o' hard to say. You-all don' think we'll get caught?"

"Not 'f you keep that big mouth o' yo's shut."

"Mr. Baron did."

"Mr. Baron's a fool. He trusted a stranger."

"Hit'll kin'er make ye uneasy 'bout talkin' to fellers on the road, won' hit?" said Bud, who was the most sociable man in the settlement.

"Hit'll sharpen yo' judg-*ment*. The way you-all go on now you ain' fur off Mr. Baron fo' never suspectin' nobody."

It was this very quality in Bud that was playing into Pink's hands. Yarebrough, however, felt properly rebuked.

"Ah ain' had yo' experience, ye know. Ah never see but one marshal to know him."

"When ye do see one, an' yo' sho', never forget him. Hit's the only way. Here, take this mattock 'n pull those small rocks out, 'n pile 'em on this crocus-sack so's they won' make any trash on this-yer platform."

Bud did as he was bid, and the men worked quietly and steadily for ten minutes.

"Here she is," Pink whispered, at last, and peered excitedly into the cavern.

It was, as he had said, not very large, but large enough.

"Now pick up that sack with me an' tote hit in here. We mus'n' leave anythin' roun'. Here, this corner 'll do. Now bring me in that pipe 'n the little keg. We c'n leave all the tools here *ex-ceptin'* our axes. Axes looks well 'f we meet anybody goin' down."

"H'm," grunted Yarebrough once more, and scratched his head again. He stepped out of the cave on to the platform that Nature's hand had laid. The brightening light indicated the approach of dawn, though the sun had not yet risen. The mist was not dispelled, but it had grown thinner, and trees at some distance down the mountain began to have individual shape through the veil of dry haze that inwrapped them. The air was cool and sweet. The birds were singing, though still sleepily, but one in a tree over his head burst into a glorious heralding of the morning. Bud thrust his hands into his pockets and whistled softly. Pink roused him roughly from his reverie.

"Come, boy, we gotter fix up this yer openin' somehow."

Bud answered irrelevantly:

"Ah wisht Ah was certain about M'lissy."

Pressley let fly the bush that he was bending across the mouth of the cave.

"What about her?" he asked, sharply.

"Oh, everythin'!"

Explanation was difficult to his slowness of thought.

"She'll be wonderin' what takes me away from home so much at night; an' Ah don' much like

to leave her alone, neither."

"Cain' ye trust her?" jeered Pink, with an evil scowl, but Bud turned on him so fiercely that he added, hastily,— "to keep still if ye tell her?"

"Tell her? Tell M'lissy! Ah wouldn' tell her fo' a good deal! You-all don' know M'lissy."

"She'd jump ye, Ah reckon."

"No, Ah don' allow she'd say much. The way hit is, ye see, M'lissy,—hit's foolish 'f her,—but M'lissy kinder thinks Ah ain' a right bad feller, an' Ah sorter hate to disabuse her min' o' that opinion."

"She mus' know you-all drinks."

"Yes, Ah 'low she do."

"An' ye play craps."

"Oh, well, that ain' anythin'."

"An' ye fight chickens."

"Of co'se; everybody does that."

"'N you've killed paddidges befo' the law was off."

"Who hasn'?"

"If she knows all those things she sho' cain' think yo' a plumb angel."

"Ah don' s'pose she's lookin' fo' wings. All the same, Ah do hate to have her know Ah'm about to do this."

"Oh, this is all right. She don' know yo' in debt an' need the money."

"No, she don'."

"Would that worry her?"

"Ah reckon hit would, specially if——"

"If what?"

"You seem powerful eager to know what'll worry M'lissy."

"If ye don' know what worries people ye cain' know how to help 'em." Pink was suavity itself.  
"If what?"

"Ah was goin' to say, specially 'f she knowed it was you-all Ah owed hit to."

"Lemme tell ye somethin' right now, Bud: M'lissy wouldn' fin' everybody clever 'nough to len' money to a no-'count feller like you. She better like me 'f she don'."

"She don' know hit, ye see. 'N she never shall 'f Ah c'n help hit."

Pressley grunted and seemed to reflect. Then he shook his head and muttered to himself.

"Hit might spoil the other."

"What ye say?" asked Bud.

"Nothin'. Ah'm studyin' 'bout fixin' a sort o' do' fo' here, so's the light won' shine out none when we-uns is workin'."

"Where's the smoke goin' to?"

"They's a split in that upper rock, fur back, we c'n run a bit o' pipe through. Leastways, they was when Ah was a kid."

"'N 's they ain' been no *con*-vulsion o' nature since that happy time, you 'low hit's still there."

"May be filled up; 'twan' overly big. But that's easy fixed."

"Say, Pink, don' you think we'd make any money—jus' as much money—'f we paid the tax, 'n could retail openly?"

"Paid the tax? Paid—— Fo' the Lawd's sakes! Pink Pressley payin' the gover'men' tax!"

He gave a great burst of laughter, which he quickly strangled, looking about suspiciously, and shook and shook with suppressed mirth. Bud stared at him seriously, and with some offence.

"Ah don' see nothin' e'er so ludicrous about that suggestion."

"Oh, Lawd!" Pink was rocking gently from side to side. "You don'? Jus' look yere, then. Have you-all got twenty-five dollars to pay the Federal gover'men' fo' this privilege? 'N fifty to pay the State? 'N fifty to pay the county? 'F you got a hundred 'n twenty-five dollars to spen' so free, Ah'd like to see hit!"

Bud rubbed his head and said nothing.

"'N who'd ye get to go on yo' bond? Mrs. Carroll 'n Miss Sydney, Ah s'pose! Oh, dear!"

Again he laughed, soundlessly.

"If ye go into hit so expensive, ye gotter have the plant to do a big business, 'n where'd ye get that? 'N ye'd have to get mo' co'n 'n you 'n me c'n make ourselves, 'n that'd mean ye gotter buy hit, or rent mo' lan' 'n hire niggers to work hit, 'n how'd ye pay fo' that?"

Bud listened gloomily, chewing the side of his finger.

"Them gover'men' fellers cain' make nothin'," went on Pink. "Firs' place they's co'n at fifty cen's a bushel. One bushel o' co'n makes about two gallons o' whisky; they's an *ex-pense* o' nigh twenty-five cen's a gallon to begin with. Then the gauger comes 'roun', 'n ye have to pay a tax on all he's smart enough to fin',—a dollar 'n ten cen's a gallon. They's a dollar 'n thirty-five cen's a gallon befo' the stuff's lef' yo' sto'house. 'N what payin' market c'n ye fin' fo' hit when any feller who wan's c'n get all the moonshine he needs fo' a dollar or a dollar 'n a quarter a gallon? Oh, Ah tell you, 'f ye wan' to make any money with a gover'men' still ye gotter have a switch-off that the gauger cain' fin. 'N 'f ye do that, ye might's well's, far's yo' morals is concerned, do hit all moonshine 'n save those ex-penses Ah listed fo' ye right now."

"Ah s'pose yo' right," assented Bud. "Blockadin's blockadin', whether ye do hit by moon or day. Do you-all 'low Calkins might inform on us?"

"Him's runs the still back o' Buck? Ah don' guess so. He knows Ah could tell the sto'keeper the whereabouts o' a pipe in his still-house that don' run into no sto'house. Oh, no, he won' inform on us."

"Ah hope not," said Bud, dismally. "Anyway, you-all better come on down now. Gimme that axe, will ye?"

"We gotter be right careful not to make no path comin' here. We better never come twict the same way."

Bud nodded his understanding.

"Come on," he urged. "Ah'm's empty 's a gun."

## XIX

### Hilda

Pink roses and red swung to and fro in the sunshine as they climbed the Doctor's whitewashed porch. Big bees hummed their sleepy drone from the fragrant hearts of the flowers, and a humming-bird whirred busily in and out in search of the honeysuckle that he loved. Up-stairs Mrs. Morgan was darning stockings in the coolest room in the house,—a bedroom with a northern exposure. A white shirt-waist gave a puffy look to a body that could ill endure such appearance of enlargement, and a black belt accentuated the amplitude of girth that it encircled. The good lady sat in an armless rocking-chair, or rather *on* it, for she was by no means contained therein, but bulged over and beyond at all points. Her feet, shod in heelless black slippers, above which puffed white stockings, rested upon a low footstool, and her widespread knees provided a generous lap for the support of her supply of socks and her implements,—her needle-book' and darning-gourd and balls of cotton. She had that look of comfort that fat people seem to radiate even when it is evident that physical annoyance is their own share.





**"Pink roses and red swung to and fro in the sunshine as they climbed the doctor's whitewashed porch"**

Discomfort had no part in the picture that Mrs. Morgan presented, however, for a cool breeze gently ruffled her hair, and her eyes, when she lifted them from her work, rested contentedly on the fertile fields of the Doctor's farm, which were thriving, under Bob's management. She nodded with, pursed-up lips, as she wove her little lattices in heel and toe.

"He's doing better than ever Ah thought he would," she murmured. "Better, even, than Ah dared to hope,—thank God!"

Up and down, over and under, in and out went her needle.

"It's such a joy to Henry to have him so."

The scissors snipped a thread at the end of a darn, and a new hole displayed its ravage over the yellow surface of the gourd.

"It's been going on some months now, bless him! Ah'd like to know how he started in. Ah believe mahself it's Sydney."

The work sank into her lap for a space, while her shrewd eyes roamed over the fields, and sought Buck Mountain beyond, thrusting its topmost clump of chestnut-trees against the sky. She nodded to her thoughts as she picked up the unfinished sock.

"She's a wise mother who knows where her son ties his horse, and Ah confess Ah haven't always known, but it strikes me it's mostly the Oakwood hitching-post."

She smiled at her own sagacity.

"Not that Sydney'd have him. Though she might do a great deal worse, a great deal worse," she added, loyally. "But he cares for her enough to want to please her, and it takes the best to satisfy Sydney."

A step on the stairs outside made itself heard.

"Come in, dear. Ah was just thinking about you."

Bob flung his cap on the bed, sat down on a cricket beside his mother, and leaned his head against her shoulder.

"Tired, dear?"

"No, just hot. I've been over every field on the farm since breakfast."

"In all this sun!"

"Do you think it ought to cease to shine to shade your boy? There'll be a right smart crop this year."

"So your father was telling me yesterday."

"I've got better hands than usual."

"And they have a better overseer."

She let fall the stocking from her left hand and patted the shock of black hair resting on her shoulder. Silence fell between them—the embarrassment that comes from the broaching of a delicate subject.

"It's hard work," he sighed, and her mother-love knew that he did not refer to the management of the farm.

"We all have our dragons to fight, and yours is one of the hardest kind. Ah'm sure he's growing weaker, though."

"But he's still in the ring," groaned Bob, with a comical look, and they laughed in sympathy.

"I ought to have begun on him long years ago for your sake, ma dear, but—it wasn't you!" he blurted out, and hastened to kiss her, lest she be offended.

She could not help just a little sigh.

"It's what happens to most mothers, and we are thankful for the result, and put our vanity into our pocket."

"I don't want you to suppose that I'm such a puppy as to believe that she—you know who—cares for me—that way, you know. But I happened to think one day when—well, never mind what happened—I just thought that while she might never care anyway, she was dead sure not to if I went on being the kind of thing I was."

"True, dear, and even if she never did,"—how she longed to give him hope, as she had given him every toy he asked for in his baby days! But wisdom came to her now, and love gave her strength,—“even if she never did, the victory would still be a victory."

"And you'd care, anyway. Oh, mothers are good things! Do you mind my telling you-all this?"

He was sitting before her now, with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands. She leaned forward and kissed him.

"You've given me the greatest happiness Ah've known for years, dear."

He pulled at the stockings in her lap.

"I don't think I've had much show lately, do you?"

"You mean—?"

"Oh, well, I reckon I don't mean anything. It's all in the game. There's father," as a cry of "O-oh, Sophy!" was heard below. "Sophy's up here in the north room, dad," he called, eliciting from his mother the expected—

"You impertinent boy!"

The Doctor came in, bringing with him an air of excitement that made Bob cry,—

"What's up?"

Mrs. Morgan laid down her half-darned sock in anticipation.

"You never can guess the latest development."

"Ah've no desire to, Henry. Ah'd rather hear it at once."

"Who do you think's come?"

"Where?"

"To the Neighborhood."

"Henry, don't be so aggravating! Why don't you-all tell what you've got to tell, if you *have* got anything to tell."

This sarcasm drove on the Doctor to disclosure.

"Baron von Rittenheim's sister-in-law."

"His sister-in-law!" cried Bob.

"What in the world will he do with her in that cabin of his?" ejaculated Mrs. Morgan.

"Is she pretty?" This from Bob.

The Doctor was quite satisfied with the sensation he had aroused, and sat down to tell his story comfortably.

"Ah've just come from Oakwood, and Sydney told me. It seems she turned up last night after the Baron got home from the picnic; drove out from Asheville. He had to go and get Melissa Yarebrough to come and look after her."

"He wasn't expecting her, then?"

"Sydney says no. Of course he couldn't ask visitors to that shack of his."

"Ah suppose she hadn't any idea he was living that-a-way."

"Ah reckon not. She's his brother Maximilian's wife, or widow, rather, for she brought him the news of his brother's death. Sydney says he was quite broken up about it when he came over soon this morning to ask Mrs. Carroll if she would take her in. The old lady'd gone to fetch her when Ah got there."

"Did you wait?"

"You bet!"

"Is she pretty?" Bob asked again, with some insistence. Perhaps the Baron—how could he, though? But there was at least a chance of his falling in love with his own countrywoman.

"Pretty? I should say so! She looks like a lovely child, or an angel on a Christmas card, or something. Oh, you needn't grin. She won't look at you!"

"Saving all her looks for you, I suppose! Can she speak English?"

"Yes; but not enough to hurt anything. You'd ought to have seen her run up to Sydney, just like a little girl, and cry out, 'Oh, I thank you for that you have been so kind, every one, to my dear Friedrich!'"

"How did Sydney take that?" Mrs. Morgan could not resist a glance at her son.

"Oh, Sydney always does everything all right."

"What did she say to you, dad?"

"Oh, something about Friedrich telling her that Mrs. Carroll and Ah were his best friends."

"How long's she going to stay?"

"Ah don't know. Ah came away right off."

At Oakwood Baroness Hilda von Rittenheim's coming partook of the nature of an event. Sydney, who never had happened to hear even her name mentioned, went about during the time of her grandmother's absence in a state of agreeable anticipation. She was curious to see this unexpected arrival, and she took pleasure in arranging flowers in her room, and in shading the windows to produce the most desirable light.

"It will please him," she thought, "for us to be nice to her. Poor thing, she's lost all she cared for in the world; everybody ought to be nice to her." And she thought how happy she was herself, and resolved to be as kind as she knew how to be to the new-comer.

Sydney had a strong reluctance to face emotional or spiritual crises, and not even after her conversation on the bridge did she acknowledge to herself that von Rittenheim loved her, or that she cared for him. She was content to feel the glow that warmed her when she knew that she was the princess of his fable, and not to analyze her own feeling further, or to posit in him more than admiration.

Americans usually think of German women as fat and affectionate, or, if they are extremists, as "fit only to propagate their own undesirable race." Sydney formulated no idea of Hilda's appearance, but she found herself none the less surprised when she and Dr. Morgan watched from the window the tiny figure in its black robes, descending from the carriage.

"Why, the Baron said she was twenty-five, but she doesn't look any older than I do," she cried, and she flew down the steps to welcome her.

Hilda's little speech of thanks was natural and pretty, and Sydney liked her at once because she liked Friedrich. Katrina was delighted with her. Tom declared that he could listen to that accent forever, and John went into absurd raptures that were more serious than they sounded. Even Mrs. Carroll, usually not enthusiastic, granted her to be "Pretty? Yes, even lovely. And charming? Very."

Hilda must have felt herself to be under scrutiny during the day, yet she betrayed no knowledge of it. Her behavior was perfect. Several times she alluded to Max.

"Poor Max! The shock of his death was to me severe. Have I known Friedrich long? Oh, yes, indeed. Before ever I met Maximilian. I was living with my aunt in Heidelberg when he was at the University. I was a little girl then. Ah, yes, Friedrich always was *nett* to me, even so before Max. Yes, always shall I love Friedrich."

It occurred to Sydney that there was a shade too much insistence on this mutual affection, but she berated herself for a "jealous piece," and ordered Uncle Jimmy to bring out on the lawn coffee as well as tea, in deference to her guest's probable predilection.

"Yes, dear Frau Carroll," said Hilda, in answer to a question. "Indeed, have I much to talk with him. He comes this evening to see me. I have much to tell him and to hear from him."

Over her cup she glanced shrewdly at Sydney, who was enraged to feel herself blushing.

When Baron von Rittenheim appeared in the evening, Sydney and the Schuylers and John were just starting for the Hugers' dance.

"Surely you will go," the little Baroness had said, "and you will not think of me one time."

"You ask too much," murmured John.

She glanced at her mourning with a look that might have meant yearning for Max, or a desire to go to the ball.

Then she raised her eyes to Friedrich's, and Sydney was surprised to see a look of anger sweep over her childish face. Seeking its cause she found von Rittenheim's eyes fixed on herself, so full of love and longing and sadness that her one wish was to comfort him. Involuntarily she took a step towards him, and held out her hands. Then she remembered herself, and swept him a low courtesy, as if in thanks for the admiration of his gaze.

"You like my frock, M. le Baron?" she asked.

Von Rittenheim's eyes went to the fluffy white mass lying on the floor, and rose again to her face.

"He's speechless with rapture, Sydney," said John.

"I am, indeed," said Friedrich, bowing with his hand on his heart.

"Then come on, Sydney, and let language flow once more." And Tom dexterously threw her cape over her shoulders.

"See that? I've learned to do that really well since I was married. I've been practising in private. Mrs. Schuyler, allow me." And he repeated his performance and swept his flock before him to the door.

## XX

### Sacrifice

"I know that you two have much to say to each other," said Mrs. Carroll, when the noise of departing wheels had died away. "Ring the bell, Baron, please, and tell James to light the lamp in the little sitting-room. And in considering your plans, let me beg both of you to remember that it will be a pleasure to us all if the Baroness will stay at Oakwood as long as she wishes."

Hilda ran to the elder woman in her childish, impulsive way, and thanked her with many little German phrases of gratitude. Von Rittenheim raised her hand to his lips and murmured,—

"You make my decision easier, dear lady."

In the little sitting-room Hilda established herself in a huge arm-chair, whose high back cast a shadow on her face, and Friedrich, at the window, drew in great breaths of sweet summer air. He turned to her when Uncle Jimmy had gone.

"First tell me about Max."

"Yes, I must tell you about Max. I am afraid it will be an added grief to you to know that Max —"

"What is it?" he asked, sharply and apprehensively, as she hesitated. How familiar to him was that feeling of apprehension about his brother. Hilda was sitting erect in the big chair, looking at him fixedly.

"Max—shot himself."

"My God! Shot himself! Poor girl!"

The expression on Hilda's face changed to one of relief—almost of joy. After all, his first thought had been for her.

"Why did he—how did it happen?"

"He had had troubles——"

"Money?"

She nodded.

"I think they distressed him more than usual. And he was—he wasn't quite himself."

Von Rittenheim stared persistently out of the window, his face almost entirely turned away from her. He lost not a word of what she said, and at the same time there ran through his mind memories of their boyhood days together, and of their adventures at the gymnasium and the university. Then their rivalry over Hilda. With what careless ease Maximilian had won her away from his brother, just for the pleasure of victory. He felt again a dash of the old bitterness.

"You mean he was drunk?" he asked, bluntly.

She raised her tiny hands before her face as if she were warding off a blow. Friedrich hardly could hear her "Yes."

Her action suggested an idea to von Rittenheim.

"Tell me, Hilda." He stammered over the question. "Did he—did Max ever strike you?"

Without a word Hilda pushed back the hair that fell over her forehead at one side, and showed, close to the roots, a scar.

Friedrich gazed at her in horror.

"You poor, poor girl!"

Again the glow of satisfaction warmed her face.

"Where was he when he—when he died?"

"At the Schloss—in my dressing-room."

"You were there?"

"My dress was wet with his blood."

Over Friedrich there rushed man's protective feeling, the desire to shield a woman from pain; his own yearning of not so many months ago, to fend this one fragile creature from the world. He drew nearer to her, and she leaned back in her chair and looked up at him out of the shadow.

"I could not bear to live at the Schloss any longer—there were horrible memories, and I was alone; I told you my aunt had died. You know she was my only relative."

Von Rittenheim knew. It was at her aunt's house in Heidelberg that he had met Hilda.

"Then Maximilian had told me that we could not live in the Schloss if you did not supply the money to carry it on. After he died I could not feel myself indebted for that to you when I had treated you so badly."

She hung her head. Von Rittenheim made a gesture of polite dissent, and walked again to the window.

"You always had enough money, I hope?"

"No sum ever was large enough for Max." They both smiled. "But a piece of great good fortune came to me just after you went away."

Von Rittenheim turned again to the window and betrayed some embarrassment, but Hilda

was intent upon her story, and noticed nothing.

"Some of the investments into which my dowry had been put appreciated enormously in value."

So that was the way Herr Stapfer had explained it. Friedrich nodded approvingly.

"So I always had enough for my needs, even when——"

"When what?"

"Forgive me. I did not mean to say it."

"You were going to say, 'Even when Maximilian took it?'"

She hung her head again, like a sorry child. He noticed how her neck and arms shone white through the thin black of her gown.

"After all, you are his brother. Perhaps I should tell you. At the end—it was because of that that he shot himself, poor Max! He came to me in my room and asked me for money, and I told him I had none. Indeed, he had taken the last I had a few days before. He did not believe me, and he threatened to shoot himself if I did not give it to him."

"Coward!"

"Of course, I did not think that it was more than—excitement. How could I believe that he was in earnest? But he kept crying, 'Give it up, give it up!' The servants heard him. And then ——"

Friedrich crossed quickly to her and leaned over the chair as she sat with her face buried in her handkerchief.

"Hilda, it seems to me no woman ever needed pity and comfort more than you. You have come many thousands of miles to claim it from me, and I will not fail you. You reminded me last night of my oath to you. I repeat it now. My life is at your service if it can bring you happiness."

The words sounded forced and stilted to his ears, even while he pressed the little white hand that she put out blindly towards him. He was not sorry for his pledge; he felt that he could have done no less; but Sydney's proud, earnest face flashed before him, and his memory saw it soften and flush with the happy shyness that covered it when she gave him her handkerchief,—and he wondered to what extent Hilda would consider that his promise bound him.

A few days made it clear that he had committed himself to no mere form of words. She received the admiration of every man in the Neighborhood. Patton McRae's elastic heart added another to its list of occupants, and John Wendell fell seriously in love with her. But always in the foreground she placed von Rittenheim. It was not alone that she looked for his coming, and monopolized him when he arrived; that she deferred to him, and did half a hundred tell-tale things; but in some way, by a hint here and a phrase there, she made every one understand how it had been with them in the past,—how madly he had loved her; how foolish she had been to break the engagement; how worse than foolish, for she had broken his great, noble heart, too. But, now—with a pretty sigh and an appealing look—now was her opportunity to remedy the harm she had done. When one or two of the bolder ones hinted at an engagement, she denied it, with a rebuking glance at her black gown, her fascinating, floating diaphanous black gown. Still, it became evident to every one that when a proper time had elapsed after Maximilian's death, her consolation would be even more remedial.

John haunted her steps, and left her only when the Baron came. Then he disappeared until his rival's departure. Sydney grew distant in manner to von Rittenheim, and often he did not see her at all when he went to Oakwood. Hilda's visit to Mrs. Carroll was prolonged on the ground that seemed to have place in every one's mind, though no one could trace its origin, that she would stay on near Friedrich until it was time to go home to Germany to begin her wedding preparations,—say, until after Christmas,—and that they would be married as soon as the year of mourning was over.

"It would be disgracefully soon if her husband had been a good man, of course, but he was such a beast!" And a shrug made all the necessary condonement for the hastening of the marriage.

By September the whole neighborhood was converted to this belief, all except John, who *would* not believe, and Sydney, who had not trusted herself to think.

The compulsion of thought seized her in her own room one night, after a day when it had been forced upon her that there could be but one truth, and that the conclusion to which her friends had come. From window to window she walked, dragging her trailing draperies, softly blue in the moonlight. She was fretted into constant motion by the impelling might of

a desire to do something that would put off the moment when she must stop and think out the situation. She tried to divert her fancy to the channels of her daily life. She decided what colts should be broken next summer. She devised a new plan for keeping Bob employed and happy when the dull days of winter should come. She endeavored to be grateful that her grandmother was less harassed by pain than usual. Yet through all wretched the insistent cry, "Face it. You must face it."

That compelling threat she knows who recognizes that the one dearest to her on earth must die. It commands the scrutiny of facts, and an end to the glossing of truth. It rings the knell of hope. Later comes the sustaining reflection of the future life,—its opportunities for work and its attendant happiness for him who enters upon it. But now is self's confrontation with loneliness, with sorrow, with despair.

The cry became insistent in Sydney's ears. Face it she must.

She stepped through the long window upon the balcony which commanded west and south. The moon swam cold in the steel-blue sky. The ribbon of low-lying mist betrayed the devious winding of the creek. On the horizon swung the gray masses of the mountains, their hardness veiled in the tender light of distance. Sydney fell on her knees and twisted her hands one within the other. She spoke in a whisper.

"I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it! Oh, I cannot bear it!" she repeated over and over.

Then stung to openness by the lash of the constant inward cry—

"I love him! Oh, I love him! Oh, I cannot bear it!" she moaned yet again.

She rocked to and fro upon her knees, and hid her face in her hands to shut out the glory of beauty and calm that lay before and around her.

"I never thought that love would be like this. To feel it—to be sure of it—and to have to give him to another woman!" She began to cry weakly.

The moon flooded the gallery with its light. A diamond on one of Sydney's clasped hands winked as gayly as if a tragedy were not filling the girl's heart. Then oft-read words came to her lips:

"Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing more courageous, nothing higher; nothing wider, nothing more pleasant; nothing fuller nor better in heaven and earth."

"For it carries a burden which is no burden, and makes everything that is bitter sweet and savory."

"He that loveth flieth, runneth and rejoiceth; he is free and is not bound."

"He giveth all for all."

"He giveth all for all." She repeated it again and again.

She had, indeed, dreamed of a love for which sacrifice should be a joy. But that this should be the kind of sacrifice! Even through her wretchedness the humor of it penetrated, and a woe-begone smile fluttered over her lips.

The singing words came to her again.

"Let me be possessed by love, mounting above myself."

"Let me love thee more than myself, and love myself only for thee."

She knelt upright and rested her folded arms upon the railing. Peace seemed to be flowing in upon her, and a purpose grew into form within her mind. With increasing control she rose to her feet.

"If my love is worth anything it can do even that."

Her uplifted face shone strong and beautiful as she left the splendor without, and knelt beside her bed.

"O God, I thank thee that thou hast granted me the power to love. Help me now, I implore thee, to make use of this, my dearest treasure, for the joy of others."

## A Poke Party

Friedrich was sitting at his solitary breakfast. He had grown expert in the daily preparation of bacon, eggs, cornbread, and coffee; but that is a poor feast which is denied the sauce of companionship, and he dallied with his spoon, while he stared gloomily through the open door. The jaded green of the late September foliage harmonized with his mood of depression.

He went to Oakwood now only so often as courteous attention to his sister-in-law—poor little girl!—seemed to demand. Sydney avoided him; and John, who still lingered, although the Schuylers had gone north long before, gave him the black looks of a jealous rival. Hilda, though never assuming before him the part of betrothed which every one assigned to her, nevertheless made him feel the bond by which he had engaged himself,—a net as fine as silk and as strong as steel; an enmeshment of chivalry and sympathy and love for his good word.

He made his new business the excuse for his infrequent visits. It was no subterfuge, for even in the short period of two months the "McRae Cattle" were earning encomiums, from those who knew stock, for their good condition and the flavor of their beef. Both on the Baron's place and at Cotswold long shelter-sheds were being erected for winter protection; and at Cotswold, whose larger size warranted the establishment of a more extensive plant, the firm had put in a small stationary engine to cut the feed, and was building a silo for the preservation of the winter supplies. A dehorning machine, which caused a moment of present torture for the sake of months of future peace, served an additional purpose as an advertisement. Farmers came from far back in the mountains to see the inhuman weapon, and incidentally brought along a calf or two to sell as an excuse for their waste of time. Their denunciations sent more of the curious, who were not deterred by motives of tenderness from submitting their creatures to the operation, provided they received a good price.

When Hilda had discovered her brother-in-law's straitened circumstances she had offered to him a part of her income, deploring his evident poverty with real distress of voice and manner.

"I don't understand why it is so,—you are not extravagant, like Max,—but I can see the fact plainly enough, and I beg you to take it, dear Friedrich."

Friedrich kissed her hand in gratitude, but refused, explaining that he had enough capital for the undertaking of his business venture, and that his personal wants were of the simplest.

"But your house, Friedrich. It is not fitting that a von Rittenheim should live in a cabin like that."



**It is not fitting that a von Rittenheim should live in a cabin like that**

"Man makes the house, Hilda, and I don't feel that my dignity is hurt. I am comfortable, and that is all that is necessary."

He happened to think of this conversation as he drank the last of his coffee, and he realized that Hilda's offer was another of the tiny threads that linked him to her. He thought how



true it was now that, so long as he could make his living out of his new business, he cared nothing for the roof that sheltered him; while on that golden night of happiness when Sydney and he had watched the river flow under the bridge, he had been glad of his new prosperity because he could build for *her* a house such as she should fancy.

He did not allow himself to think often of Sydney. He was glad that he had had the strength to refrain from asking her to be his wife until he had something more substantial than his name to offer her. It relieved somewhat the present situation. Yet her avoidance of him he could construe only as contempt for a man who had played with her while bound by other ties. Sometimes he felt that he must explain to her how intangible were those bonds. Yet he was sufficiently conscious of their actual existence to feel that the difficulties of explanation were almost insurmountable. And Hilda, poor child, took his devotion entirely for granted.

His thoughts were leading him in a circle, and it was a relief when Melissa appeared in the doorway. He sprang up to welcome her.

"Come in, Mrs. Yare-brough. How do you do?"

"Ah'm well, thank ye. How are you?" returned Melissa, in the polite formula of her kind.

"Won't you have a cup of coffee?"

"No, Ah thank you. How's Mrs. Baron?"

"Mrs. Baron? Oh! She was very well the last time I was at Oakwood. She asks fr-requently for you and the baby."

"Mrs. Baron's so sweet! Ah never 'lowed to like anybody's much's Miss Sydney, but Mrs. Baron's jus' splendid."

With a woman's care-taking instinct, she began to gather together the dishes on the table and prepare them for washing.

"No, let me," she said, in response to von Rittenheim's objection. "Jus' while Ah'm talkin'. Ah stopped by to tell ye that Ah'm goin' to have a party to-night, an' Ah'd be proud to have you-all come to hit."

Her interest in him was so evident, and her desire to give him pleasure so real, that Friedrich responded, heartily,—

"Certainly, I shall go. It will give me delight. It is kind of you to ask me."

Melissa turned away, and rattled the knives and forks in gratified embarrassment.

"Hit's goin' to be to mother's 'cos her house is larger. You know where hit is?"

"Yes, indeed. Is it a dance?"

"Hit's a poke party, but there'll be dancin', too."

"A poke party! What is that?"

"Don't you-all know what a poke party is?"

"Poke? That is what I do with my finger at the baby."

Melissa laughed aloud.

"You wait 'n see, then. Ah reckon hit'll be a surprise party fo' you as well as a poke party."

It was clear that Melissa had imparted to her friends the Baron's guess as to the probable nature of a poke party, for he was greeted with broad smiles as he made his way through the crowd of men and boys about Mrs. Lance's door into the room where dancing was going on. Melissa came to him and proposed a seat beside Mrs. 'Gene Frady until the cotillon should be ended, but von Rittenheim preferred to go about the room as dexterously as he might in avoidance of the dancers, speaking to his acquaintances among the women and girls who lined its walls. There was space upon the floor for only two sets, and the lookers-on gossiped patiently, until such time as Alf Lance, the fiddler, should grow weary and let fall his bow.

"They's fo' blue waistes here to-night. Ollie Warson looks mahty sweet in her's."

"Do you think so? Hit seems like she favored her paw too much."

"Well, Bill Warson 'lows that if they's any good looks in the family, they come from him."

"Maw, you-all got a hairpin? Give hit to me next time I turn co'ners."

"Look at Evvie Williams! She always gets a seat nex' the window, so's she c'n talk to some feller out o' hit."

"Ah did, too, when Ah was that age."

"Yes, Ah remember you did. Ah don' guess Hamp Pinner's goin' to dance with Ollie tonight."

"Yes, he is. He jus' ast her in through the window."

"Sh, sh, sh. Will you hush yo' fuss!"

"Ah'm well, thank ye, Mr. Baron. How are you?"

"Look at Drusilla Pinner cross her feet, an' her a church-member, too!"

"Ah been lookin'. She's awful careless about her dancin'."

"This child'll have to go to bed in the other room. He's yellin' jus' tur'ble."

"Ah 'low M'lissy 'll make some money out o' this. They's right smart here."

Von Rittenheim made his rounds and joined the group of men at the door. They received him pleasantly, for he was a favorite among them. Indeed, since his misfortune in the spring he had noticed an added warmth in their attitude, and a certain intimacy of approach. As he talked to them the music stopped abruptly, and with its last note he found himself alone, for the youths about him had precipitated themselves into the room to secure their partners for the next cotillon. The enterprising Hamp came in through the window, by which port of entry the orchestra departed in search of the reviving pail on the back porch.

Melissa came timidly to von Rittenheim.

"Won't you-all dance this nex' one, Mr. Baron? Ah'll get ye a partner."

"I fear I should make too many mistakes. I do not understand well enough English to know quickly what says the director."

"Oh, yo' partner 'll tell ye all that."

"Then, if you will be that partner, will I try."

"Oh, no. Hit looks like Ah'd been askin' you."

"But no, Mrs. Yare-brough, for I would not tr-rust myself to the care of anybody whom I knew less well."

"Truly? Then we'll stand here?" And Friedrich, looking at her beaming face, did not regret the effort.

The other participants in the cotillon gained no praise from the spectators, for every eye was upon their unexpected guest. They applauded his successes and smiled encouragingly upon his mistakes. They admired his good looks in pleased undertones, and secretly urged Alf to prolong the dance and their pleasure until it seemed to Friedrich that he had been on the floor for hours.

When at last the music stopped, Bud's voice was heard calling, loudly,—

"Come in yere, boys, 'n get yo' pokes."

The girls found seats for themselves, while the men crowded into the other room.

"Hit's supper," said Melissa, giving Friedrich a little shove towards the door. "You'll see now."

"May I have the honor of bringing yours to you?"

"No, Ah thank ye, Mr. Baron. Ah always eats mine with Bud. But you-all go in an' get some, an' you'll fin' somebody to eat hit with when ye come back."

In the other room the men crowded before a table upon which were piled paper bags of different sizes. Each man was taking two, one for himself and one for his partner.

"This size poke is ten cents," insisted Bud, in the uproar, "'n this size is fifteen. They's good things in 'em all. The quality's the same, hit's the quantity makes the difference. Yes, they's devil ham san'wich. Ah know they is, 'cos Ah cut mah finger openin' a can fo' M'lissy this mo'nin'. Yes, they's cake, too. You, Hamp, that size is fifteen!"

As Friedrich approached, a laugh went up at the expense of 'Gene Frady, who had taken a bag of each size.

"Watch out which one 'Gene gives his wife," cried Bud, sarcastically.

The babies on the bed, four of them, were aroused by the noise, and joined their voices thereto. Three older children, who were sleeping rosily under the covers, slumbered on

peacefully.

"One poke, or two, Mr. Baron? Ah'm proud to see you-all here," said Bud.

"A poke is a bag, eh? Give me two pokes, if you please, Bud. Yes, the large ones."

Returning to the dancing-room, he made his way to Mrs. Lance, Melissa's mother, who was sitting near the window. She was flattered into silence by the attention of the offered poke, and they ate the contents of their bags with solemnity.

A figure moving in the dim light outside attracted Friedrich's attention. He put his head out of the window. The man came directly beneath, and looked up.

"Ah, Pink, I thought that was you. I want to see you at some time."

"Ah'll watch out fo' ye when you-all's unhitchin' yo' mule."

"Very well. I'm going in a few minutes. You do not come in?"

"No. Hit's M'lissy's party, 'n she 'n me ain' friends."

"Here, take this, then."

Friedrich dropped his partly filled poke into the ready, uplifted hand.

"I had my supper very late to-night," he explained to Mrs. Lance, "and a man outside a party looks so forlorn, don't you think so?"

"Some of 'em deserves hit," returned Mrs. Lance, laconically. "He's one."

Von Rittenheim was fumbling with the halter-strap of his mule, when Pressley appeared beside him out of the shadow of a pine-tree.

"Is that you, Pr-ressley? Do you r-ride or walk?"

"Ah'm walkin'."

"Then will I not mount."

Friedrich slipped the reins over the mule's head, and led him out on to the highway. Pressley walked beside him. The stars shone brightly enough to make visible the open road.

"Are you-all goin' to ask me about the rent, Mr. Baron? Bud 'n me's been pullin' fodder fo' a week. Hit's all ready in the upper field, 'n you c'n take yo' choice any time. They's good bundles, fo' han's to the bundle."

"Thank you. No, it was not of that I was going to speak. I want to tell you that about six weeks ago—it was in August—I was up on Buzzard Mountain one night, and I fell asleep there."

Pink looked at him suspiciously in the darkness, and put a piece of the road between them.

"I fell asleep on a ledge of r-rock, and when I woke up I heard voices just under me."

"The hell ye did!"

"It was you and Bud."

"Well, what ye goin' to do about hit? Hit ain' befitin' you to squeal on us."

Von Rittenheim turned hot in the darkness, and made an impulsive motion that induced a corresponding disturbance in his companion.

"If I had thought of doing that I should not have spoken to you to-night."

Pressley nodded, and came across the intervening space.

"You-all wan' to come into the game, eh?"

"No, I do not want to join you, if that is what you mean."

"Well, what do ye want, anyway?"

"I wees' to say a few things to you. I do not ask you to stop moonshining. You are old enough to decide for yourself what kind of life you pr-refer to lead, though you know well that the life of a law-br-reaker is not the r-right sort."

"Oh, quit preachin', Mr. Baron. You-all's a law-breaker, yo'self."

Friedrich clutched the reins with a jerk that made the mule give a disgusted snort. The justice of the retort compelled him to self-control, as well as the knowledge that a giving

way to rage would accomplish nothing, whereas coolness might do something.

"You know as well as I do the penalty of breaking the law. You've suffered it more than once, they tell me."

"Ah reckon Ah've cost 'em right smart mo'n they ever got out o' me," chuckled Pink.

"So I do not ask you to face the results of what you do, because you know well what they are, and you have made your choice. But I do ask you to think carefully before you undertake the responsibility of making Bud a criminal."

Pink's eyes shone cruelly in the darkness, but he only said, "Seems like you-all been a long time startin' on this yere work o' reform. You said hit was six weeks ago you heard us a-talkin'."

"Perhaps I have been wrong to delay. But that morning Bud seemed not sure and determined about joining you, and I hoped that he might make up his mind to refrain."

"How do you know he ain'?"

"Oh, by the grape-vine telegraph. Those things always are known. Also have I heard the men at the party to-night talking about it."

"Bud ain' no boy. Don' you think he's old enough to decide fo' himself fo' or ag'in' the life of a law-breaker, as you call hit."

"No, I do not. Bud is several years younger than you in real age, and he is a child beside you in determination. Also, he admires you."

"Ah'm grateful for the compliment!"

"You could do anything with him."

"Ah'm doin' what Ah wan' to with him."

Von Rittenheim looked at his opponent in disgust, and fell back upon his last argument.

"You know well what are the chances of your getting caught. You've been caught before."

"Yes, but Ah won' be this time. Hit was fellers that was mad with me who told on me befo', 'n Ah've fixed hit this time so Ah ain' got no enemies. They's only one feller that might inform."

"Who's that?"

"You."

The Baron flung up his head in quick scorn, and Pressley noted the gesture shrewdly, and nodded in satisfaction. Still he drove in another nail.

"A feller who'll listen will tell."

Friedrich colored angrily.

"You mean me? It does not sound well to hear—that! At first when I awoke on the mountain I was sleepy. I realized not what it meant. When I did know, I had no wees' to die at once. I was unarmed myself, and a man in your position would shoot determined to kill."

Pressley smiled at this tribute to his quickness and resolve.

"But it is not a question of me. What I was going to say was that you know there's a chance of your being arrested, and surely you would not care to feel that it was through you that Bud had brought that shame and disgrace upon his wife."

"His wife?"

The ejaculation sounded to von Rittenheim like the hiss of a snake, and he drew away from Pressley as from a reptile.

"You have no relatives to suffer; alone you bear the burden of your misdeeds. But if Bud goes wrong consider of the grief of that poor Melissa, and think of the baby growing up to know that her father is a criminal!"

"You-all think you got a mahty strong argyment there, Mr. Baron, don' you? But let me tell you, that's the weakest one you could bring. M'lissy Lance told me 'No' when she was a girl, an' M'lissy Yarebrough's never spoke a decent word to me since she's been married, 'n 'f unhappiness comes on her, Ah'll be glad of hit; 'n 'f hit comes through mah doin', hit's only what Ah'm aimin' at."

"Aimin' at?' What mean you by that?"

"Ah mean Ah'll be gladder still 'f she's hurt through me."

"Know you not that it is a coward who takes pleasure in the pain of women and children?"

"So be," returned Pink, cheerfully. "A coward Ah am, then, fo' that's the way Ah feel."

"I warn you I shall speak to Bud."

"Talk yo' hatful, Ah don' care. Ah got a pull on him. Talk all you please so long's ye don' talk to the marshal."

"An' Ah ain' afraid o' yo' doin' that," he continued to himself, as he turned into the side road that led to his cabin. "You-all's had enough o' them folkses; an' you ain' that kind, either."

## XXII

### Von Rittenheim Collects his Rent

It was in the cool of the next day's afternoon that von Rittenheim, with 'Gene Frady, who was working for him, drove up to the field where was piled his rent corn. Bud was awaiting him there, and after he had chosen his heap from the three which were as nearly alike as it was possible to make them, he sat on a fallen tree and idly watched the two men loading the wagon. The western sky gave prophecy of a cloudless sunset, and Friedrich wished that his own path towards oblivion were as free and clear, and smiled faintly at the triteness of his comparison.

He owned to himself as he sat there that he was contented. He had entered upon his business with the desire to retrieve his past, and to make for himself a future that might be worthy for Sydney to share. Now the latter spur to ambition was gone, but it was replaced by an urgent desire to forget in work the bitter disappointment that had befallen him. Pushed by that incentive his venture could not long remain a venture. Such energy was bound to bring success. And the victory, which was daily more evident and more substantial, combined with the feeling that he was doing his duty as he saw it, to produce content.

But happiness? No. Never while—— Oh, what was the use of thinking about it? He rose impatiently, and walked through the brush at the top of the field, slapping at the leaves with a switch that he had been stripping.

Of a sudden he stopped and sat down on a stump.

"Goin' down with me, Mr. Baron?" called 'Gene from the top of the loaded wagon.

"No, I think not. I'll stay and talk with Bud a while. Come up here, Yare-brough," he added, as Frady drove off, whistling.

Bud approached, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with his shirt sleeve.

"Bud, did you know this was here?"

Von Rittenheim reached behind him and tapped something that gave forth a sound of earthenware.

"Know what was there?"

"Come and see."

Yarebrough stepped behind the stump, upon whose top the Baron swung around so as to keep his face in view.

"Whose jug?" asked Bud.

"I know not. I thought you might know."

Bud picked it up, disclosing a silver half-dollar upon which it had been resting. He looked at it as if afraid, and then glanced sheepishly at Friedrich.

"A half a gallon," remarked the German, dryly.

The mountaineer reddened and stooped for the coin.

"Wait!" commanded von Rittenheim. "Before you touch that, I want to ask you if you would be willing that your wife should know how you ear-ined that money?"

Yarebrough changed his weight uneasily from one foot to the other, and then sat down suddenly, as if his legs were not equal to his support.

"Well, Ah wasn' fixin' to tell M'lissy," he acknowledged.

"Know you not that that so good little woman would r-rather be hung-r-ry than have you give her money that you gained by br-reaking the law?"

"Well, Ah wasn' fixin' to give hit to her."

"You weren't? What are you going to do with it?"

Unfortunately for the success of Friedrich's plan for Bud's moral regeneration, Yarebrough's affection for the Baron made him reticent on the fact of his debt to Pressley.

"For," he thought, sagely, "if Ah tell him Ah owe Pink, he'll go to lend me the money, 'n Ah know he cain' afford hit. Would he ever 'a' gone into sellin' blockade himself if he hadn' been as pore as a crow?"

His wit not being very ready, however, he offered no excuse, but said,—

"Ah reckon Ah don' care to tell ye."

Friedrich laid his hand on the young man's shoulder as he sat beside him on the ground.

"Think what it means, Bud, to do what now you do. You put yourself in the class of wr-rongdoers instead of in the r-ranks of those who do r-right. You will br-reak Melissa's heart if she finds it out, as certainly she will. And think of the baby. You want her to have an honest father, don't you?"

Bud was ground between the upper and the nether millstone. On one side of his weak will was his affection for his wife and child, and his desire to please the Baron. On the other was his fear of Pressley's sneers and his habit of submission to the older man's domination. And since his inclination towards good was not assisted by the mighty lever of a love of good for virtue's sake, the millstones clung close together, and the grinding still went on.

To compromise with a disagreeable present is a desire which it takes a stronger man than Bud to shake off. His inner light showed him no reason for making such an effort.

"Ah s'pose Ah hadn' oughter do hit," he admitted, "but hit's mahty temptin'. Now that there's the first money Ah seen from hit yet. Hit's all been hard work up to now, an' nothin' comin' in."

He lifted the jug and looked longingly at the coin on the ground.

"You don' know what hit is to wan' hit so bad, Mr. Baron."

"Do I not know? Good God! Bud, it was because I wanted half that sum so much that I couldn't r-resist the temptation of it shining in a man's hand, that I did the thing for which never shall I for-give myself. You know, Bud; you r-recollect——"

He hid his face in his hands and gave a sob of tortured remembrance. Bud's easy sympathies were strained almost to the point of tears.

"Ah know," he responded, hastily; "you hadn' oughter 'a' done hit. Don', Mr. Baron, don'! Ah'll think about stoppin', Ah certainly will. Sit up, Mr. Baron," he cried, agitatedly, "here's folkses comin',—Mrs. Baron an' Miss Sydney."

Von Rittenheim raised his head, hardly believing Bud's cry to be other than an excuse to rouse him from his emotion. But he saw in the road below him a party of four people on horseback approaching his cabin. Even from his elevation he could recognize Sydney's erect carriage, and the white habit that it pleased Hilda to wear. He rose to his feet.

"Think of what I say, boy," he said to Yarebrough. "I am older than you, and God knows I've earned my experience."

Bud watched him down the hill. When he was greeting his guests at the door of his cabin, Yarebrough picked up the jug and the coin, and disappeared into the woods.

Wendell was taking the baroness off her horse, and Bob was performing the same office for Sydney, when Von Rittenheim reached them.

"We are come to beg a welcome fr-rom you for a few minutes, dear Friedrich," said Hilda, in English.

"Which surely is yours," returned Von Rittenheim, kissing her hand. He turned to Sydney, but she was busy doing something to her saddle, and greeted him over her shoulder. His hand dropped to his side.

"Let me help you tie the horses, Bob," he insisted, and took Sydney's animal from him.

"Dear Yonny," he murmured, in the unresponsive ear, as he fastened him in the shade, and gave him a pat and a lump of sugar from his pocket.

"May we go in?" asked Hilda. "I want to see the state of your storeroom," she added, with an air of protecting care that sat prettily on her youthful face.

"*Natürlich*," called Friedrich from Johnny's side. "The key of the cupboard is in the table-drawer."

Sydney was alone on the porch when Friedrich came up the steps.

"Your view is lovely," she said. "I think I like Pisgah better from this angle than from any other."

"Then do I, too," he replied, looking at her with his heart in his eyes, for it was long since he had seen her, and to a lover yesterday, when it is passed, is as a thousand years.

Sydney threw up her chin haughtily, and von Rittenheim thought ruefully of the category in which undoubtedly she classed all his remarks of that kind.

"Will you not enter?" he said. "Never have you honored my roof, I think." And Sydney was glad to do so to avoid being alone with him.

They found Hilda leaning against the table opposite the cupboard, while Bob recited the contents of the shelves, and Wendell wrote them down.

"Two packages of oatmeal."

"Oatmeal," echoed John.

"One tin of mustard."

"Mustard."

"A sack half-full of cornmeal."

"Cornmeal."

"What in the world are you doing?" cried Sydney, in amazement.

Friedrich looked annoyed. No one likes to have his house-keeping arrangements too closely scrutinized.

"Friedrich, this list is going to help you ver-ry much to know what you must or-rder from the—how you call him?" She appealed to John and Bob in turn. "The grocy?"

Friedrich smiled to conceal his irritation.

"My way, Hilda, is to get more of something when I find empty the box that holds it. I'm afraid I am not pr-rovident."

She returned his smile adorably.

"That I must teach you," she said, and Sydney and John turned away.

Sydney walked to the mantel-shelf, which was so high that it was on a level with her eyes. There was an array of pipes and a tin box of tobacco; a volume of Schiller, with some matches lying loose upon it; and, flat on the board, a photograph. She picked it up idly, not noticing what she was doing, conscious only of doing something, so that her separation from the others might not be noticeable. Her discovery proved to be half of a picture of a Neighborhood picnic, taken by an itinerant photographer who had established his tent near the Flora post-office. It was that side of the group in which she was standing, and her figure was brought into relief by a frame of card-board slipped over it like a mat. It had become a picture of herself, and of herself alone.

Her first feeling—the instinct that comes before thought—was one of pleasure; he had cared enough to do that. But quick upon it came the cry of wounded pride. She found von Rittenheim at her side, and turned upon him fiercely.

"How dare you?" she cried, in an undertone. "How dare you do such a thing? You know I never have given any man my picture,—once I told you so,—and you have made this a picture of me alone. You, who—"

She broke off, choking, but she had enough voice to add,—

"But it is like you, it is like you!" as she tore the card into bits and flung it into the fireplace.

Friedrich stooped involuntarily to catch the falling fragments, but he saw at once the

foolishness of his movement, and desisted. He said nothing, and Sydney, made ashamed of her tirade by his silence, as she would not have been by any words, at last looked up at him. The expression on his face was so hopeless, so unutterably sad, that she, in her turn, stood silent.

"Could you not have left me that?" he whispered, hoarsely.

Sydney was held by the inexplicable bond of his mute pain. A sense of comprehension went through her, and with it a thrill of happiness. It might be that after all—yes, it *must* be that he had not been trifling with her, that he had cared, that he was suffering as she herself was suffering. And if so, how rewarded was her sacrifice! Her love had been strong enough to make her willing that he should love another woman, if his happiness lay in so doing. Her reward came in the knowledge that after all his love was hers—that he was sharing her sacrifice. *Why* this was she did not understand; she only felt sure that she was right, and she gloried in it. Then, woman-like, she reproached herself for the moments when she had cheapened her renunciation by the suspicion that he had been flirting with her.

Friedrich stood beside her, his left hand clutching his heart. He felt as if, in destroying that picture, so often gazed at through clouds of meditative smoke, so often kissed, she had done him a physical injury. Through his coat he pinched hard her little handkerchief, which always rested over his heart, lest she should divine its presence, and in some way tear that from him, too. His suffering was so great that he did not follow her change of expression, but his fingers felt hers touch them ever so fleetingly, and her whisper came to his ears,—

"Forgive me. I think I understand now."

Across the room came Hilda, who never could stay away from Friedrich many minutes, in spite of Wendell's efforts to interest her; and Wendell himself, following her reluctantly only when her progress brought him near von Rittenheim; and Bob, never truly happy except near Sydney. There was laughing and talking, in which Friedrich and Sydney heard themselves taking part, and wondered how it could be.

"Also we brought you an invitation," said Hilda, "as well as our so interesting selves."

"Yes," said Bob, "we're going on a 'possum-hunt to-morrow night, and we want you and your best dog."

"You shall have me! I remember last year when first I came I heard the dogs on the mountain, but then I had no kind friends to make me the invitation."

"It's a little early, but we want to be sure to have one before Mr. Wendell goes."

"You go soon?"

Von Rittenheim's interest was only a courteous expression of concern, but John, fretted by Hilda's alternate encouragement and coldness, was tormented by his nerves, and not in command of his judgment. He saw in the Baron's question a malicious pleasure in his prospective departure.

"Yes," he said, "I must go soon, I'm afraid. You're playing in luck these days, old man. You gain what I lose—and the close season for moonshiners is coming on, now that the corn is ripe."

Hilda, who did not understand a word he said, laughed softly, as if in amusement at his wit. Von Rittenheim, who had not been able to follow the colloquialisms, frowned at "moonshining," which rang out for his ears above all else. Sydney and Bob looked with horror at the sneering face before them.

"John," said Sydney, sternly, "you forget yourself strangely."

As they were about to start she leaned from her horse and gave her hand to Friedrich.

"You have much to forgive me," she said.

"For much have I to thank you," he returned.

## XXIII

### The 'Possum-Hunt



Buzzard Mountain, wooded to the top, extends for two miles north and south. Its long, gradual slope is like the body of a dormant animal, rising from the sunken haunches over a long and flattened back, and falling again to the nose dropped sleepily between the outstretched paws.

The meet for the 'possum-hunt was at its northern end, on the outskirts of the settlement. The run was to be along the crest towards the south, bringing the hunters out at the end of the ridge nearest their homes.

The night was lighted by a youthful moon, not brilliant enough to dim the lustre of the stars, shining clear through the air. It was cool with the first touch of autumn; so cool as to invite to exercise, yet so warm as to make it a pleasure to be in the open.

The hunters were in high spirits. The men from the hamlet about the post-office,—'Gene Frady and Alf Lance, Mitchell Robertson, the blacksmith, Doc Pinner, the carpenter, and a half-dozen more, with a boy to drive back the horses, were piled into a wagon. There were much pushing and scrambling for places, and many ejaculations of discomfort.

"Git off mah feet, 'Gene."

"Hang 'em outside, man. Ah gotter sit somewheres."

"Ouch! What fool put rye-straw in here?"

"Powerful penetratin', ain' hit?"

"Now, look here, that dog's gotter run with the rest. They ain' no room for him in this wagon."

"Cain' you-all make them horses o' yo's git along a little mo' lively, Alf? Mr. Baron'll 'a cleaned the mountain o' 'possums befo' we git there."

"How you-all think they's goin' ter hurry with so many fellers ter haul? Some o' you boys gotter light 'n walk up this hill in a minute, so ye better enjoy drivin' while ye can."

At a deserted cabin on the road that ran through the northern gap they found Bob Morgan and John Wendell, who had come in a buggy, and the Baron on his mule. A small negro was to take the vehicle, with von Rittenheim's animal tied behind, around the base of the mountain to the German's house, there to await the end of the hunt. The boy's brown face was twitching with excitement, as the men began to throw their coats into the wagon, and to light their torches, split from the heart of the yellow pine.

"Oh, Lor', Missa Bob," he cried, rubbing one bare foot up and down the other leg in ecstasy, "lemme go, too. Ah'll never ast ye nothin' again, Ah swear Ah won't. *Please*, Missa Bob."

"Can't do it, Scipio," said Bob, kindly. "You're the only man we've got to look after these creatures. Here, don't let your eyes pop out of your head. I tell you, you drive to Mr. Baron's and tie the horse and the mule,—tie 'em strong, mind,—and then you can come up the other side and meet us."

Scipio's mournful eyes followed the disappearing forms with an appreciation of their purpose rather than of the picturesqueness of their appearance. The flaming lights grew silent as the distance became too great for his ear to catch their sizzling. They danced hither and yon,—now scattered, now flashing in a bunch. He followed the course of a very bright one as it appeared and vanished, but went always on and up.

"Ah 'low dat's Missa Bob's," said the loyal little soul. "He sho' would have de bigges'."

On the hill-side the men opened their line to cover a wide stretch of the mountain, and plunged upward through the scrub of pines and oaks. There was much running about of the dogs, and desultory barking, corrected by spicy admonitions from their masters, until the ascent's steepness forced silence upon them by the weapon of difficult breathing.

Once 'Gene Frady tripped on a root and fell headlong, pitching his torch into the dry duff a man's length before him. There was a rush to stamp out the incipient fire, the autumn terror of the forests, before any one lent a hand to help the fallen. Robertson went half-way up his leggings in a spring, and stood swearing fiercely, while the rest jeered at him and ordered him to move on before he muddied up a good drinking-place. Bob and Friedrich pushed on on adjoining courses, an occasional cry of "*malerisch*," or "*zauberisch*," showing that von Rittenheim was regarding the scene as well as the sport. On the other side of Bob climbed Wendell, sullenly self-reproachful in the Baron's presence, yet of too exuberant a nature not to be alive to the excitement of the chase.

Of a sudden a hound gave voice,—the bay that makes hunters of us all. The other dogs rushed to his standard, yelping, barking, galloping from all directions across their masters' paths, until the forest seemed suddenly alive with them. One after another found, and added his note to the general cry that trailed off into the distance. The men who had started to

follow paused, and the rest drew together.

"Rabbit," suggested Bob, disgustedly, and the others nodded, and began to whistle for their retainers.

Singly they returned, with swinging tongue and pendant ears, and a disposition to sit down and contemplate the scenery. Then once more came a cry, the steady bay of a dog at stand. His companions instantly forgot their fatigue, pricked up their ears, pulled in their tongues, and started towards the herald, with all the huntsmen in pursuit.

Gathered about a veteran oak, whose blasted top betrayed it the lightning's victim, were grouped the dogs, each one shoving to better his place in the bunch, each with tuneful throat and uplifted tail. Occasionally one from the outskirts would rush around the crowd of his fellows and try to push in from the other side of the ring. The ones nearest the tree snuffed at a hole in the trunk between the roots, and dug fiercely with their forepaws.

"Holler, ain' hit?"

"Yes. He's went in that-a-way."

"Don' look like hit's holler up fur."

"No. Reckon we c'n chop him out."

Lance pushed among the dogs, kicking and cuffing them out of his way, and sounded the tree with the back of a hatchet.

"Ah 'low hit's gone all the way up," he cried.

"Well, chop hit 'n fin' out!" returned his friends, impatiently.

He began cutting a square and soon broke through the outer shell.

"Gimme a glove, one o' you fellers," he cried. "Ah ain' aimin' to have a finger chewed off this time."

Some one tossed him the desired protection. He put it on and thrust his arm into the hole, while the crowd pushed up on to the dogs, and they yelped excitedly.

"Ah tol' ye so. Hit's holler clear up's fur's Ah c'n reach."

"All right. We'll smoke him out, then. Git out o' here, you dogs, an' give us a chance at this fireplace."

The hole at the base of the tree was quickly enlarged enough to push in a smudge, and the opening which Lance had made above was closed with moss and green leaves.

"Hi, there she comes," cried some one, enthusiastically, as the thick white smoke made its way out of the broken top. "The varmint won' stan' that long."

Soon, indeed, amid a shower of bark and burning punk, a black and white ball scrambled into the air and dropped from the ragged splinters that offered no sufficient hold for its claws.

As swift as sight, 'Gene Frady dashed close to the bole and caught the falling creature in his hands. High above the leaping dogs he held it, while they snarled, defrauded of their prey.

"Quick, that crocus sack," he called. "Ah promised the kids to bring one home. Give him a switch, Mitchell."

The 'possum, rousing from the semi-stupor into which the smoke and the shock of his fall had thrown him, was beginning to struggle violently. Robertson broke a finger-thick stick and thrust it between the snapping jaws, that clamped upon it fiercely. The rat-like tail wound about the other end of the rod, and the bag was drawn over him while he clung to his fancied means of safety. Frady flung his burden high on his back to secure it from the dogs, and the others put out the fire in the tree, and again fell into open order to beat the woods.

The next 'possum which they discovered, more fortunate than his brother, who had been sighted on the ground where locomotion is slow and awkward for his kind, was aloft in the branches when the dogs spied him. He clambered dexterously about with his hand-like extremities, aiding his progress with his prehensile tail; but he had not calculated upon the added heaviness which his autumn diet had given him. He ventured upon a sapling that bent beneath him. Wendell added his weight to bear it to the ground, and the dogs leaped at their victim and tore him into bits.

Both men and dogs were tired now, and pushed on with less enthusiasm. The dogs, indeed, who had covered many more miles in their wild dashings than had their masters, were not above sitting down occasionally and lapping a memento of the last 'possum's sharp teeth, or

passing a rueful paw over a slit and bleeding ear.

As they were approaching the southern end of the mountain, and realized that the edge of the excitement was blunted, the men walked nearer to each other, and talked on indifferent themes as they pushed through the brush just below the top of the ridge. One after another fell silent, perhaps through fatigue; possibly impressed with the beauty of the night.

Through the openings in the tree-tops the stars shone with steady clearness, doing their best to replace the light of the little moon which had gone to rest early, like most young things. Under the forest cover the starlight did not penetrate, and the darkness was illumined by the yellow flare of the torches. The fall of feet on crackling twigs, and the slapping of smitten shrub-leaves broke the thick silence that falls on the earth with night.

To Pink Pressley, crouching at the entrance of his cave, the sound of approaching steps was a threat. He had put out his fire as soon as he heard the dogs on the other end of the ridge, and for two hours he had followed the course of the hunt by their barking and the cries of the men. He guessed it to be what it was,—a 'possum-hunt,—yet suspicion born of guilt hinted always at such a hunt as an excuse for a raid upon his still.

On the other hand, the party was coming from the north, and might be made up of men from Asheville. In that case, since, perhaps, they did not know the mountain, it was quite possible that they would turn back before they reached his hiding-place. At any rate, he determined to stay where he was, and run the risk of detection. If it should prove to be a raid, he was not averse to exchanging shots with the revenue men. The thought of it filled him with a fierce joy. Three times they had destroyed his whole plant, and this time he meant to fight for it.

He took down the boards that filled the cave's mouth, and pulled the bushes more carefully before it. The dogs would find and reveal him as quickly with one arrangement as the other, and he had no desire to undergo a siege shut up in that hole, when he might burst out and defend himself with some enjoyment.

Screened by his net-work of bushes, he listened keenly to every sound. A misgiving seized him that Bud had betrayed him, and he cursed him in a whisper. Yarebrough had told him in the afternoon that his baby was ill, and that he could not leave Melissa alone with her that night; but he had confessed at the same time, with his usual lack of reticence, that the Baron had "been a-talkin'" to him, and Pink suspected that the baby's illness was a fabrication to excuse his non-appearance at the still, and possibly his treachery. Pressley's judgment of his partner's honor was based on his own, and he felt in his pocket to make sure of the safety there of a letter whose crackle sounded pleasantly in his ears.

"'Twon' do to give him too much rope," he muttered.

Nearer came the soft scampering of dogs and the trampling of men, and the torches' glow warming the unlighted forest. Pressley hoped that they might pass along the mountain's side below him, or on top of the ledge that roofed his cavern, but there always was danger from the dogs. Even as he thought it, one padded along the shelf of rock that lay like a step before his door, and stopped short with a growl. He was so near that Pink struck him with the butt of his revolver, and sent him off with a paw uplifted in pain.

The man leaned out from his shelter and stared towards the right, whence the lights were coming. Then he looked straight ahead for a moment, down the mountain, under the leafy tops, and wished it were all over and he knew how it had come out.

When he looked back the foremost men were in view, a group of three or four, with their dogs following at heel soberly enough. Their torches flung grotesque shadows on the trees, and distorted their figures into uncouth semblances. He could not recognize them, yet they seemed familiar. Those two in front—was it—? Yes, by God! Like a fiend he sprang from his lair and rushed at von Rittenheim, as if from the very bowels of the rock. His face glared, malignant, in the unsteady light.

"So you did squeal on me, you damned German!" he yelled. "Take that and that and that." He fired three times full at von Rittenheim's face. With the third shot another rang in unison, and Pressley fell, twisted and snarling, on the stone before his still.

Bob Morgan's hand, holding the smoking pistol, fell to his side.

"Are you all right, von Rittenheim?" he asked; then added, weakly, "I reckon you'll have to carry me down, boys. He's touched me." And he staggered into Friedrich's arms.

He had been walking a stride higher up the hill-side than von Rittenheim, and, flinging himself from his greater elevation between the German and his assailant, he had received the bullets meant for Friedrich's head lower in his own body.

**"Fought the Fight"**

Bob lay white and still upon his bed, breathing painfully. Two of Pink's bullets had torn their way through his lungs, and the third had splintered his collar-bone. A surgeon had come out from Asheville, and, after examining the wounds, had sent for help. When the second physician arrived, they had probed and prodded the inert body, while Dr. Morgan, with an ever-growing fear clutching at his heart, administered the chloroform with a steady hand. Outside the door Mrs. Morgan had knelt against the wall, tearless, and without a word of prayer.

Now it was over, and there was no hope, only waiting for the end,—the waiting that saps courage from the heart of the onlooker, and makes endurance seem a thing impossible; the torture of seeing suffering that is not to be relieved; suffering that seems all unnecessary, since death is to be the issue after all.

Bob had asked for Sydney as soon as he came out of the chloroform, and she had responded at once.

"You won't leave me, dear?" he had questioned, when he opened his eyes from the drowsiness that the opiate forced upon him, and saw her sitting beside him.

"No, Bob; I'll stay as long as you want me."

He had smiled feebly at her.

"It won't be very long."

A glimmer in his eyes showed that he understood the possible impertinent interpretation of his speech.

"You won't mind letting me hold your hand, Sydney, will you?" he had said, in his hoarse, weak voice. "It's one of the perquisites of dying. Tuck your fingers in there, dear. Those doctors have strapped me up so I can't move my arm."

So she sat with her hand in his, and her eyes looking out across the meadows to Buck Mountain, while Bob dozed and woke and dozed again, always smiling happily at her when he found her still beside him, and pressing her fingers in his weak grasp.

As the sun sank towards the west he roused from his stupefied slumber, and spoke with growing clearness.

"It's mighty good of you to stay here, Sydney. I'm selfish to ask you, but I haven't seen you much lately, I've been so busy with the crops."

"You've never failed me, Bob dear. It's my turn now."

"It's just because I'm weak, I suppose, but I want a little flattery. Don't you think I've done pretty well about—drinking?"

"You've been wonderful, Bob. I honor and respect you more than I can say. You feel that, don't you?"

"Thank you, dear. You know I did it for you? Oh, I told her all about it," as Sydney glanced towards the corner where Mrs. Morgan, worn out with grief, was sleeping behind a screen. "I've been a little more hopeful about you lately, since—well—"

He paused, not liking to finish his sentence "since the Baroness came," for it suggested implications too delicate for utterance.

"But I always knew, really, that you couldn't care for me in that way. It was a temporary deceit, the way you can make yourself believe for a few minutes that you haven't a toothache, and then it jumps on you again."

"Dear old Bob."

Sydney bent forward and kissed him. Over his face spread a radiance of unexpected happiness.

"Oh, Sydney, you darling! I say, Sydney, if you wouldn't think that I'm taking advantage of my condition—would you mind—*would* you do that again?"

She kissed him again, gladly, willingly, and he sank happily to sleep. When he woke once more he asked for von Rittenheim.

"He's down-stairs. He's been waiting all day hoping you'd want to see him."

Sydney summoned Friedrich. He uttered an exclamation of sorrow as he saw the big black eyes looking from their hollows, and the white face of the man so suddenly brought to this pass from the full tide of strength.

"For-r my sake!" he groaned. "How with all my soul I wish it were I!"

He took Bob's other hand—Sydney had resumed her old position—and tried to command his voice. It was Bob who spoke first:

"What about Pressley?"

Von Rittenheim looked questioningly at Sydney, who nodded.

"He's dead, Bob."

A ray from the setting sun found its way to the bed and lighted up the dying man's face.

"Kind of sudden for him, too," he mused. "Did he live any time at all?"

"No. Your bullet went through his heart. He must have died instantly."

"It's a mighty serious thing to do, to kill a man. I never realized before how serious it was. But I'm not sorry."

"You saved my life, Bob. I can't talk about it. Only, I'd give it gladly, gladly, to keep you, old man."

He bent his head with a sob.

"Never mind that, Baron. I suspect Yarebrough'll be all the better for not having Pink to lead him into mischief."

"It has saved him from a heavy punishment. They found in Pr-ressley's pocket a letter offering to turn State's evidence."

"That would have sent Bud to jail and freed himself, wouldn't it?" asked Sydney.

"Yes. He must have been afraid of betrayal."

"No," cried the girl; "I'm sure he planned the whole thing to spite Melissa. I heard him threatening her one day. He said he'd make her sorry she ever married Bud."

"I think you're right, Sydney," said Bob. "He was working Bud all summer, I'm confident, with the purpose of betraying him at the end."

He sank a little into the pillow, and Sydney gave von Rittenheim a glance of dismissal.

"You're tired, dear," she said to Bob.

"A little. I think I'll take a nap. Oh, Baron, I almost forgot. I was in Asheville a few days ago, —Monday, Tuesday,—I don't know when," he went on, weakly, "and I met a man who said he thought he knew you. He's at the hotel,—a German."

"Did he tell you his name?"

"I can't remember. Something long. He said if you were Friedrich von Rittenheim from the Black Forest that he knew you well, and would you look him up? You will, won't you?"

"Yes, I will."

"If you don't, he'll think I've broken my promise."

"I will. He shall know that you told me. Good-by, Bob, good-by."

But Bob was asleep and did not answer.

It was with the ebbing of the night and the coming of the dawn that Bob's soul went out,—went out in stress and travail.

When the struggle was over, Sydney left the old doctor and his wife kneeling side by side at the edge of the bed, and crept down-stairs. Von Rittenheim was sitting before the fire, his head buried in his hands. He sprang to meet her as she entered.

"Is he——? Has he——?"

The girl nodded.

"Just now."

Suddenly she threw her arms over her head and broke into stifled sobs.

Friedrich was torn with distress. He drew her to the fire, and established her in a big chair, wrapping her warmly in a rug from the couch. Somewhere he found a glass of wine, and made her take it. Then he knelt beside her, rubbing the fingers that were cold and cramped from Bob's long clasp, and talking softly to her as to a child.

God alone knows the force he put upon himself not to take her in his arms and comfort her on his breast; not to pour into her ears the words that were burning his heart out. Drops of moisture stood on his forehead as he resisted the temptation that was the stronger because he felt that she returned his love, and that these forbidden words would be her greatest comfort. But Sydney was not insensible of their subtle, unspoken sympathy, and at last yielded to the solace of warmth and the consciousness of being cared for, and, exhausted, closed her eyes in sleep.

Friedrich stirred the fire and watched its light play on the face of the woman he loved, and gave himself up to wonder and longing and regret.

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Unless it had been that of Dr. Morgan himself, no other death in all the country round could have touched so nearly so many hearts. Around the grave, lined with the glistening laurel-leaves of victory, stood old and young, rich and poor, men and women, and even little children. There were those who had come because he was the Doctor's son; there were those who had been with him on many a gay excursion; there were those who had experienced his tenderness and loving-kindness. Old man Johnson, from over the river, who had walked eight painful miles, laid the first shovelful of earth into the grave. Patton McRae helped to cover his life-long friend. The negroes from the farm sobbed audibly as they worked. A tramp came into the graveyard from the road and asked whose buryin' it was. They told him, and he swore softly, and begged to be allowed to help. John Wendell yielded his shovel to Hamp Pinner, and he to Colonel Huger.

Then the women came forward and covered the mound with boughs of green, and clusters of flowers, and sprays of bright leaves, and Sydney laid about the whole grave a garland of feathery aster and delicate fern. Through the quiet came a sweet, sonorous voice reading the words of the hymn,—

"Love's redeeming work is done,  
Fought the fight, the victory won."

Out of the church-yard, side by side, with bowed heads, walked Bud Yarebrough and Friedrich von Rittenheim,—the man whose fragile honor had been preserved by Bob's act, and the man whose life he had given his own to save.

## XXV

### Carl von Sternburg

Mrs. Morgan and the Doctor had insisted upon giving to von Rittenheim Gray Eagle and Bob's buggy. They could have done nothing kinder or more tactful, for Friedrich was apprehensive even of their seeing him for whom their son had given his life, and their insistence upon his accepting this remembrance of their dead boy proved their feeling towards him more cogently than any words.

It was the good gray horse that he was driving towards Asheville a few days after the funeral, on his way to fulfil his promise to Bob to hunt up the German who had claimed acquaintance with him.

As he travelled on, he thought of the two notable journeys which he had made on this same highway,—the heart-chilling ride through the penetrating morning mist at the head of the men who had arrested him, and the wild flight through the darkness to secure the surgeon for poor Bob. Between the two had intervened a lifetime of experience. He had been branded a criminal, and had rehabilitated himself; he had knocked at the door of death, and been refused; he had lost his confidence in man's honesty, and had regained a fuller faith in his goodness; he had watched the slow blossoming of the tender flower of love's hope within his heart, and he had seen it overshadowed by the stouter growth of loyalty to his word.

Of his future, in so far as it might have to do with Sydney, he did not allow himself to think. There was no shaft of light lying upon that road. But a clear and steady, though not far-reaching flame illumined the present, for he felt sure now that she loved him, and that gave him a certain happiness. It was like having a beautiful secret,—a secret whose delight would be doubled if it might be shared with the world, but nevertheless a secret which gave joy in mere solitary contemplation.

*Hilda* was a subject which forced itself with increasing potency upon his mind. After the first shock of her sudden coming had passed, he had been touched by her turning to him in her loneliness. That Sydney's withdrawal from him lay at Hilda's charge he could not fail to see, and he blamed himself for the occasional repulsion against his sister-in-law with which the situation filled him. She was so sweet, so childlike, so full of trust in him, so regretful for her mistakes of the past, so reticent as to Maximilian's ill-behavior. Her whole conduct won his respect and confidence, even while he felt himself subtly encompassed by the seine of her entire reliance upon the keeping of his oath. That she expected him to marry her he did not formally concede to himself, but he was quite sure that she did not expect him to marry any one else.

His errands done,—a commission for Mrs. Morgan and some business for the firm,—he betook himself to the hotel and asked for the register. He was running over the names when he heard some one behind him saying, in German,—

"It *is* my von Rittenheim! It is my dear Friedrich!" and "dear Friedrich" and a somewhat stout young man a few years younger than he flung themselves into each other's arms, and kissed both cheeks after the manner of their race, while the clerk turned to his safe to conceal the grin that inwreathed his countenance.

"Von Sternburg! What in the world brought you here?"

"Baedeker. This scenery is among the things a globe-trotter has to see."

"Shall you stay long?"

"I go to Florida day after to-morrow. Come on to the veranda and tell me about yourself."

"If I can stop asking questions long enough!"

It was while they were talking and smoking in the sunshine with the glorious western range spread before them, that von Sternburg said,—

"And poor old Max is dead."

He knocked the ash from his cigar with his little finger, and glanced at Friedrich, who was non-committal.

"Yes," was all he said.

"I suppose they've never found any trace of the she-devil, have they?"

Friedrich sat up with a jerk and stared at von Sternburg.

"She-devil? What she-devil?"

"What she-devil? Why, the Baroness, of course. Max's wife."

"No trace of Hilda? She-devil? What are you talking about?"

"Do you mean to say that you don't know about Maximilian's death?"

"I know he shot himself."

"And you don't know why?"

"I had not heard from Max for six months before he died. I did not know of his death until several months after it occurred!"

"That was strange! Your man of business did not write you?"

"It was my fault. I hadn't sent him my address for a long time. When I did there was a reason for his not writing at once."

"Who is he?"

"Stapfer."

"I knew it!"

Von Sternburg slapped his knee.

"Stapfer was crazy over her, and she had some reason for your not knowing."

"*She!* Are you talking about my sister-in-law?"

"Oh, you needn't put on any dignity over her. She isn't worth it, though I suppose you don't know that as well as you will in a few minutes."

Friedrich passed his hand over his face.

"I can't understand it. You say Stapfer was in love with Hilda?"

"And she made use of him, just as she did of Moller and von Hatfeldt and everybody else who came near her. She overreached herself about von Hillern, though."

"It seems treachery to listen to you, von Sternburg."

"Treachery! Why, my dear boy——"

Von Sternburg ended his sentence with an expressive gesture.

"And Max—did he know?"

"Why, that's what killed him, man! Haven't you kept in touch with anybody in the Fatherland who would write you any news?"

"I haven't received a letter from a soul except Max and Stapfer since I came to America."

Von Sternburg gave a whistle of surprise.

"Then you don't even know how Max improved? Everybody thought when he married Hilda von Arnim that he did it merely for the pleasure of cutting you out. Forgive my speaking so plainly."

He laid a deprecating hand on von Rittenheim's knee. Friedrich nodded silently.

"I haven't a doubt in the world that that was his chief motive then. But after you left he fell a victim to the charm that she seems to exert over everybody who doesn't know her tricks—you must let me go on now," he said, quickly, in response to a motion of von Rittenheim's, "or I can't establish my case. He fell madly in love with her, and it made another man of him."

"There was much good in Max."

"Well hidden all through his youth, you must allow. He gave up drinking——"

"Not entirely?"

"He drank only what a gentleman takes for dinner."

"He was not intoxicated when he sh—when he died?"

"I know for a fact that he was not drunk once during the whole last year of his life."

"You know? How do you know? Forgive me, Carl," as a look of annoyance clouded von Sternburg's face, "but every proof is important to me."

"I was living at our Schloss—at my father's. I saw Maximilian nearly every day. We were together constantly."

"Extraordinary!" murmured Friedrich. "Did this wonderful change extend to his money affairs?"

"Well, you know Max could use any amount of money, and you couldn't expect him to become an economist at one shot. Then he always spent a great deal on his wife; he was continually sending to Paris for something for her."

Friedrich scowled thoughtfully.

"Still he paid all his old debts out of his Aunt Brigitta's legacy, and didn't make any new ones."

"That means more for Max than it would for most people."

"He told me that he could not have afforded to keep up the Schloss without your help, but aside from the expenses of the house he had plenty, plenty."

"And Hilda?"

"Oh, the Baroness is a millionaire. Her aunt in Heidelberg died more than a year ago and left her all her fortune. Max never got a pfennig of it though, even in a Christmas-gift."

There flashed across Friedrich's mental view his cabin, differing in no respect from those of the "mountain whites," his neighbors. Then a picture of a little figure with white neck and



arms shining through the filmy blackness of her gown, shrinking into an arm-chair, and saying, "I always had enough for my needs, even when——"

"Was he kind to her?"

"Kind? I tell you he loved her with the most unselfish devotion. It was his dearest wish to live a life so correct that she might be proud of him. You couldn't expect more than that, could you?"

"Not from Maximilian," admitted von Rittenheim. "Perhaps the very intensity of his love may have made him exacting towards her?"

"My dear fellow, she paid no more attention to him and his wishes than if he were the lowest servant on the estate. She had a constant flock of men hanging about, with whom she flirted desperately, entirely regardless of Max's feelings. I must say he bore it like an angel! Why, if my wife—well, never mind, I haven't one yet. She made herself conspicuous with Moller—Colonel Moller, you know, before von Hatfeldt killed himself on her account."

"The Graf's son?" Friedrich was startled.

"The second son. He took poison and told his father why. The old man went to Max about it."

"Poor old Max!"

"What could he do? When he charged her with it there's nothing so sweet and gentle on earth as that girl! What had she done? Nothing at all, but torment a poor fellow until his nerves and will were wrecked. How could she be responsible for that?"

Friedrich saw before him John Wendell, haggard and sneering, saying to him something so insulting that Sydney had grown white, and Bob had raised a threatening arm.

"But, as I said, she overreached herself with von Hillern. Fortunately for him he was in love with some one else, which was his safeguard, but he was willing enough to singe his wings, and the Baroness was determined to make him give up his marriage, as a sign that he loved her."

Von Rittenheim stared at the mountains and thought of Sydney. Von Sternburg continued,—

"Maximilian was fully alive to everything that went on, and he was beside himself with distress. Apart from the pain of his own unrequited love, he was acutely anxious over the gossip about her."

"Von Hillern is an old friend of our family."

"Exactly. I think Max blamed him very little, but it preyed on his mind."

"You think it became unhinged?"

"I think so. Indeed, I'm almost sure of it. He hadn't the constitution to endure any mental anxiety."

"I suppose he shot himself in a fit of alienation."

"He shot himself because his wife refused to give up her affair with von Hillern. Whether it was mania, or a passing craze of jealousy, I don't pretend to say."

"How do you know it wasn't on account of financial troubles?"

"I was there in the next room at the time."

Von Rittenheim leaned forward and fixed his eyes on von Sternburg's face with keen anxiety.

"You heard him?"

"I had gone to ask Max to ride with me. The servant who opened the door said he dared not announce me to the Baron; that he was storming about in his dressing-room. I ran up-stairs and into Max's room, which was empty, but I heard his voice in the Baroness's room, which adjoined it."

"You understood what he said?"

"Perfectly. It seemed to be the end of a long argument. He cried, 'Hilda, will you or will you not give up von Hillern?'"

"And she said?"

"'I have told you repeatedly, Max, that I will not.' Then he seemed to go wild, and cried, 'Give him up! Give him up!'"

Von Rittenheim paled. He never moved his eyes from his friend's face.

"Without a word of warning, he fired two shots. I broke open the door instantly, expecting that he had killed Hilda, but he had ended his suffering in another way."

Friedrich's head sank, and Carl again laid a hand upon his knee in awkward sympathy.

"Of course, the whole thing came out," he continued. "The servants knew everything, as they always do, and I had to tell my story at the inquest. The Baroness braved public opinion for a time, first playing the innocent and then the martyr; but one day Graf von Hatfeldt called upon her, and told her a few home truths, and that very night she left the Schloss. Nobody knows where she went to, unless it's Stapfer. If he does, he has kept her secret."

Friedrich preserved a silence that disturbed von Sternburg. Carl crossed his knees uneasily and lighted a cigarette, glancing occasionally at his friend. Just how deeply this would cut him he had no means of knowing.

At last von Rittenheim, looking worn but not unhappy, lifted his head. He rose and walked to the edge of the veranda, and stretched himself as if to shake off some trammel of thought.

"After we have had luncheon, will you do me a great kindness, Carl?" he asked. "Will you drive home with me into the country, and spend the night?"

"My dear fellow, I shall be delighted to do so," cried von Sternburg, surprised and relieved at this unexpected turn of the conversation.

## XXVI

### Surrender

Uncle Jimmy lighted the room and took away the tea-equipage, while Mrs. Carroll established herself with a book before the fire. Hilda and John arranged the chess-board on a little table near the lamp. The red shade cast a warm glow over the girl's fairness and gave a look of physical vigor to her delicate charm. John made his moves with unthinking swiftness, happy in the sight of her beauty and in the chance touch of her hand.

In a large chair Sydney lay back languidly, her hands idle upon her lap. The shock of Bob's death had exhausted her, and she found herself spent, physically and emotionally. A book lay open upon her knees, but her eyes closed wearily, or stared unseeing into space. She was thinking of all that Bob's life had meant to her of companionship and affection; of the pain that his weakness had brought her, and the pride that had watched his redemption. She had yearned over him in maternal tenderness. Yet she knew that she could but have brushed the edges of his future; that his death at this time saved him from inevitable sorrow. She sighed as she thought that perhaps he knew now, dear old Bob, how completely she was able to sympathize with him in the bitterness of his longing. Involuntarily she glanced at Hilda, and admired her beauty. Hilda caught her look and smiled in return.

"*Armes Kind*," she cried, tossing her a kiss from her finger-tips, "you are so tired."

It was astonishing to Sydney that she felt no jealousy or envy of Hilda. It seemed to her that it was not natural that she should feel so kindly disposed towards the woman who had taken her lover from her. Yet it was true. Although she could not help an occasional wince at some look or word, yet she had no hard feeling. She did not attribute this lack to any excellence of her own character. It seemed to her but simple justice that a woman who had made so sad a mistake, and who had expiated it so rudely, should have her reward; whereas, what had *she* done to deserve recompense? Did happiness come at any one's whistle?

But how she wished it would.

Mrs. Carroll laid down her book and sighed in disgust.

"I do wish," she said, "that there was some one here old enough for me to talk to."

"Try me," said John, as the oldest of the company addressed, while the girls laughed.

"I grow so impatient with it," went on the old lady, pursuing aloud her train of thought. "It seems as if the whole body of French fiction writers was in a conspiracy against one's illusions. They are clever enough to see the value of them, you would suppose, yet almost every book you take up teaches that honor is a thing of the external life, and not a part of the very essence of one's being."

"Do you call that an illusion?" asked Sydney.

"I call it a truth, and belief in it an article of faith," said Mrs. Carroll, stoutly, "but these people"—she tapped the book she had laid down—"posit it as an illusion, and then demolish it by all sorts of examples that could occur nowhere outside of Gaul!"

"Do you forget the books that are 'crowned'?" asked John.

"When a Frenchman attempts to be spiritual, it is an unfortunate fact that he becomes insipid," asserted Mrs. Carroll, with a finality that made them laugh again.

"You keep to this day your illusions!" said Hilda, softly admiring.

"I am most glad to say that I do. They are worn, but serviceable still," replied Mrs. Carroll, smiling. "Even at my age, I still believe that most husbands cherish their wives, and that most wives love their husbands, and wear their names worthily."

"Checkmate."

"Oh, Mr. Vendell!"

Hilda was so adorably regretful, and her lack of mastery of her was so captivating, that John was desperately sorry that he had taken advantage of her preoccupation.

"It was Mrs. Carroll who beat me, not you," she said. "I was listening to her and not thinking."

"Of me? You never do," he whispered.

She was resetting the board, and giving John delicious little thrills from her finger-tips, when Uncle Jimmy threw open the door.

"Baron von Rittenheim," he announced.

Sydney rose in greeting, and Mrs. Carroll gave an exclamation of pleasure at the coming of her favorite, but both were startled into silence by Hilda's cry. The chess-board emptied its burden upon the floor with many tinkling crashes, and she was on her feet, one hand pressed against her head, and the other turned palm outward as if to avert a blow. A grayness like the livery of death came over her face, but now so vitally warm. The red lamp-light behind increased her ghastliness. Her eyes were fixed on the man who had followed von Rittenheim into the room.

"You, you!" she whispered, hoarsely.

Von Sternburg gave a cry of amazement.

"The Baroness—*here!* Why didn't you tell me, Friedrich?" he demanded, while his mind quickly reviewed the possible relations between von Rittenheim and his sister-in-law, and considered the effect upon them of his frank disclosures of the morning.

Friedrich, whose gaze had been searching keenly first one face and then the other, gave a nod, and without replying to his friend, introduced him to Mrs. Carroll and Sydney. Von Sternburg bent over each hand and then approached Hilda. She was regaining her control, though she trembled so violently as to justify in his precaution Wendell, who had sprung to her, fearing that she would fall.

"This is an unexpected meeting, Baroness," von Sternburg said, in English.

"Why have you come?" she asked, in the same hoarse but articulate whisper.

"As I told Friedrich, Baedeker brought me. I had no idea that I was to have the pleasure of seeing him again among these mountains, much less, you."

"You two men must have had an enormous amount to say to each other," said Mrs. Carroll. "John, give Hilda that large chair. The surprise of seeing Baron von Sternburg has been too much for her."

Hilda sank into the offered seat, and von Sternburg placed himself beside her. He fitted his clothes to the cracking-point, and he had the lack of impressiveness that goes with rotundity. Yet it was clear that he felt himself to have the whip-hand of the situation, and Hilda's manner acknowledged it.

Across the room the others were talking together, though von Rittenheim was not without preoccupation.

"You don't seem glad to see me," von Sternburg said, in German.

Hilda ignored his opening.

"I suppose you have told Friedrich everything," she said at once, in a tone dull with the chagrin of defeated hope.

"Yes," replied von Sternburg, "I think I have."

"Then I hate you!"

She sat erect, and an angry flush colored her cheeks.

"No doubt."

"You have destroyed the only chance of happiness I ever expect to have."

"Do you deserve happiness?"

"Won't you grant me that mercy?"

"Have you ever shown mercy?"

As her regret over the failure of her plans had been swallowed up in resentment at the doer of the mischief, so her passion was swept away by a wave of self-pity. She turned to him with fierce reproach.

"You think I am so heartless as to be outside of the needs of other women, don't you?"

"I must confess that you are the only one of your kind in my experience."

Hilda was maddened at his irony.

"Can you not believe that I am eager to be happy in the way that other women are? That I *long* to feel the love that comes to every one but me?"

"No,—pardon me,—I cannot believe that."

"Insolent! I don't know why I try to justify myself to you. But listen. Can you imagine what it is to be without a heart? To make men love you for the sport of it, and not to care when they kill themselves for your sake,—truly *not to care*? And at the same time to have another part of yourself wanting to care,—yearning to feel pity?"

"Is that dual nature yours?"

"You are sneering. You always have thought of me as rejoicing in cruelty, I suppose."

"Certainly as indifferent to suffering."

"You have believed that I thought myself normal; that I was unconscious of my want of feeling."

"I never observed any recognition of your temperament evidenced in your conduct."

"But it is true, Baron. I swear to you that I know my need so well, so painfully well, that on the chance of Friedrich's saving me from all that it means, I was willing to force him to poverty, and to separate him from all that he held dear."

"I don't doubt it, though I don't see how you expected that to help you."

"I thought that, if I could have him near me always, perhaps my heart might wake within me. I do not love him, but he is the only man I ever met whose every thought I honor."

"Yet you were willing to sacrifice him!"

"I needed him."

Von Sternburg looked at her in abhorrence.

"I suppose you don't know what an abomination of selfishness you are."

She did not seem to hear him, but added, bitterly,—

"Now you have come, my hope is gone."

Von Sternburg looked across the room. Friedrich was leaning over Sydney's chair.

"It is still in the family, I should say. It merely has changed its abiding-place."

A spasm which was the recognition of defeat, not the anguish of loss, went over Hilda's face. She crossed the room to Mrs. Carroll, von Sternburg following slowly after.

"Dear Mrs. Car-roll," she said, in English, "Baron von Sternburg has brought news that compels me to leave Oakwood soon—yes, to-morrow. I hope you know how gr-rateful I am to you for your hospitality. Your kindness always will be a br-right spot in my life!"

She looked charmingly young and very lovely as she stooped and kissed the old lady's cheek.

"To-morrow? Oh, surely not to-morrow!" cried Sydney, in hospitable reproach.

"Sydney dear, you are wonderful! I r-really believe you mean it after everything." And she tapped the taller girl's cheek with her tiny hand.

She was entirely self-possessed now, much less agitated than the two men who knew her secret, or than Wendell, who had been stricken at the news of her departure; or than Sydney, who was overcome by embarrassment as she came to appreciate the meaning of her guest's speech.

"I expect never to see you again, Friedrich; I should pr-refer not; so I want to make my confession to you now. Oh, any one may hear," she said, in answer to a gesture of Friedrich's. "I am quite indifferent—now. Did the Baron tell you that Max shot himself because I r-refused to give up a flirtation? It is quite tr-ue. I lied to you, Friedrich, and I did an injustice to a man who had conquered the follies of his life. Ah, Mrs. Car-roll, I did not love my husband or wear his name vorthily. I am one of the lost illusions."

She looked from one to another in quick observance of their emotion.

"Then, my scar," she went on, lightly, "that was another lie. I've had it ever since I was a child. And here is something that Baron von Sternburg could not have disclosed. You see I am r-revealing everything. I am sure he told you that I am rich? Yes? But he was not aware that *I knew* from Herr Stapfer that you were depr-iving yourself for me."

"Oh, Hilda," cried Mrs. Carroll, in quick censure of the non-restitution that might have averted a life-time's self-reproach from Friedrich, "How could you keep it!"

"The money itself was nothing to me, but I hoped that through Friedrich's poverty I might gain some power over him, and make him do what I wanted. I shall see that it is r-restored to you at once, Friedrich."

She turned to Wendell, and her face changed subtly. She became the tempting woman, alluring in the innocence of her child-like beauty.

"Do you still mean what you said to me yesterday, Mr. Vendell?"

She leaned towards him a trifle—the merest trifle. Wendell stood silent.

"Do you still want to marry me—John?" The name was but a breath.

He stared at her as if fascinated by the spell of her glowing eyes. With an effort he looked away from her to von Rittenheim.

"Tell me," he said, huskily, "I don't understand. Her husband? Is—?"

"She will not dishonor you," answered Friedrich to the unspoken question.

"She'll merely br-reak your heart," completed von Sternburg, brutally.

Wendell turned to Hilda in relief, to find her drawn haughtily erect before him. She did not notice his extended hands.

"You doubted me," she flung at him, arrogantly. "I demand from those who love me, all—or nothing."

She swept from the room, small, proud, forceful; while John threw himself upon a chair and buried his head in his hands.

## XXVII

### Dixie

Gray Eagle was trotting briskly along the road over which another hand had guided him so often,—the Oakwood carriage-way. On his back sat Friedrich, erectly vigorous, singing for the trees' benefit,—

"Oh, I wees' I was in Deexie,  
Look away, look away!  
In Deexie Land I take my stand,  
To live and die in Deexie."

The aspen fluttered its yellow leaves in applause, and the sourwood threw at him by the breeze's hand a cluster of its scarlet foliage. The mouse-gray goldenrod nodded approval of

his mood, and the oak-trees swung their yet green boughs in sympathy with his light-hearted onward rush.

The air was cool and warm, and bright and mellow, and all the contradictions that make October the month of the year's mature perfection; that middle age of the seasons, when the blossoms of folly are past, and the fruits of the will are ripened, and the chill of bare winter is still in the future.

Occasionally, in sheer exuberance, von Rittenheim rose high in his stirrups and gave a whoop of gladness that made Gray Eagle skip in sympathetic deviation from his usual long stride.

It was during one of these upstandings, when his head was brought above its customary level, that Friedrich saw a girl running away from the carriage-road down the lane that led to the sheep-farm. The sunshine burned on her brilliant head, and Gray Eagle found his glad career brought to a sudden close, and his amusement abruptly reduced to the occupation of nibbling the stem of the young tree to which he was tied. He watched his rider's long legs vault over the gate, and pondered wisely on the similarity of interests of his two masters, for he, too, now descried a flash of color in the distance.

Sydney's race ended beneath a huge oak, against which she leaned, breathless and laughing, and faced her pursuer, who was close upon her. The musical ring of his rowelled spurs ceased as he grasped her hands.

"*Unartiges Mädchen!* Do you intend never to let me see you again? Tell me what you mean by it."

Not a word said Sydney—only laughed at him provokingly.

"I am of a mind to punish you," he cried, drawing her towards him, and leaning over her. He looked determined, and Sydney surrendered her silence with dignified haste.

"No, no, don't," she said, in reply to his gesture rather than his words. "I'll tell you anything. What do you want to know?"

"First, wherefore you were r-running down here."

"To escape from you."

"Tr-ruly?"

He dropped her hands and looked cut to the heart; so hurt that Sydney hastened to apply ointment to the wound.

"But I was walking on the carriage-road to meet you."

"You were?" Friedrich's gloomy face was alive again. "Then why did you r-run?"

"I don't know. For the same reason a kitten won't come when she's called, I suppose."

"Even though she wants to?"

"Who knows what a kitten wants?"

"It would give me the gr-reatest of pleasure, Miss Car-roll, to shake you!"

"I don't doubt it."

"It is such a hard blow to my vanity that you r-ran. See, I tr-ry to comfort myself in this question: Perhaps you did not know it was I whose horse you heard?"

"Of course I knew it was you."

"Oh, Sydney, dear Sydney, did your heart tell you that your lover was on the r-road?"

The girl blushed hotly at this bold speech, but she declined to be sentimental.

"Not at all," she said. "There was other evidence. Who else could sing like you, 'Oh, I wees' I was in Deexie'?"

Her mimicry of his pronunciation was so good, and at the same time so absurd, that they both laughed joyously.

They walked slowly towards the gate, behind which Gray Eagle was waiting with what patience he might.

"Tell me, my pr-rincess, why have you not allowed me to see you since that evening, though I have come every day?"

"That terrible evening! Oh, Friedrich——"

"Say that again!"

"What? Friedrich?"

"Yes. Now just one time more."

"How absurd you are, Friedrich!"

"I thank you. Now tell me."

"Why, for the first day or two there was so much to do in getting them away in their different directions—Hilda and John. Grandmother has had a letter from John, from Palm Beach. He has joined Baron von Sternburg there. And then—oh, Friedrich, perhaps it was foolish, but I could not feel as if we ought to be happy, you and I, so soon after *that*."

"What a dear, sensitive child you are! And you thought the time of mourning was up to-day, did you?"

"No, but—you won't make fun of me if I tell you?"

"I have al-ways supposed that it was you who teased me."

"But you might think it was funny ever so many years from now!"

"Ah, now there are going to be *years* in the future. Only a little while ago the future was made up of thousands and thousands and thousands of inter-rminable days."

"I know."

"You felt it so, too?"

"Yes. That's the reason why—you won't ever laugh at me, will you?—I wanted the years to begin to-day. I couldn't wait another twenty-four hours."

"My dar-rling!"

They stopped, and Friedrich drew her gently into his arms.

"Will you let me kiss you?"

She lifted her face trustfully to his, and Gray Eagle watched them gravely over the gate.

"I wees' I could make you know what you are to me, my pr-rincess, what it means that you give yourself to me. It is not merely that I love you, my dar-rling, with all the strength that has been gathering in me while the years were adding themselves to my age. And it is not only that I think you are per-rfect, so lovely in the char-acter, and so clever, and so beautiful, my dear white r-rose. It means, besides those things, that you have saved me from the sin of letting my poor powers grow weaker; that you have changed me from a plaything of chance into a man of will and action. I am bor-rn again, my heart's joy, into a world of force and possibility, and you are the queen of the world, most pr-recious."

She laid her bright head against his breast.

"Will you not say something to me, heart's dear-rest?"

"I am too happy, dear, to speak."

"And I am too happy to keep still!"

They released Gray Eagle from his bondage, and walked along the carriage-road towards the house.

"After all, Friedrich, it was Bob who gave us to each other."

"Twice over, dear. He sent me to von Sternburg, and he saved my life for—us."

"Poor Hilda!"

"Poor Bob!"

THE END

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