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Title: The Jucklins: A Novel

Author: Opie Percival Read

Release date: August 31, 2008 [eBook #26499]
Most recently updated: January 4, 2021

Language: English

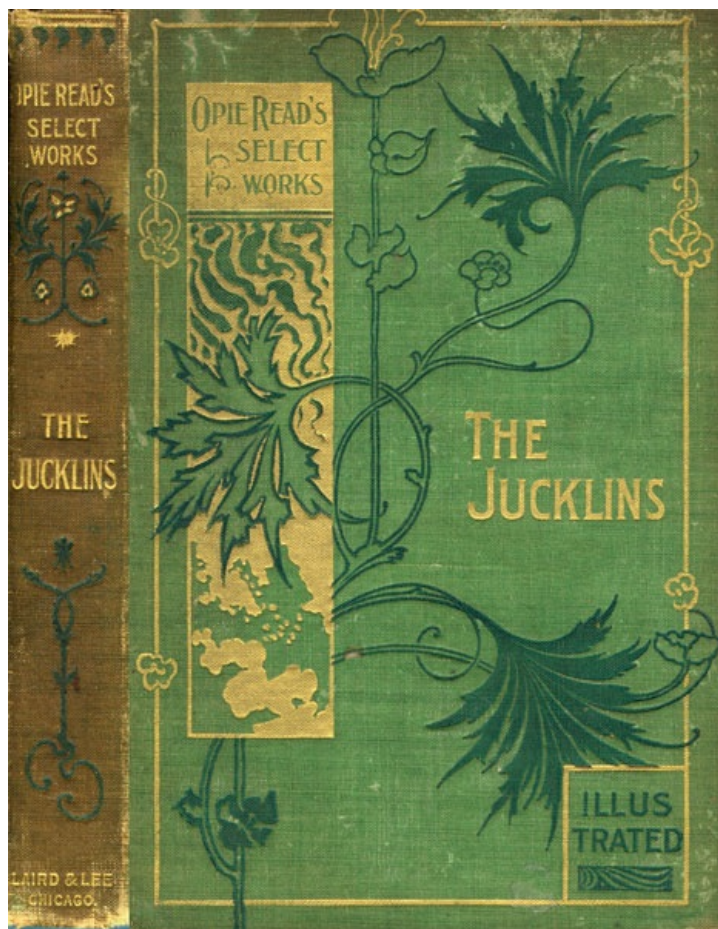
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THE JUCKLINS



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A NOVEL

BY

OPIE READ

Author of "Old Ebenezer," "My Young Master," "On the Suwanee River," "A Kentucky Colonel," "A Tennessee Judge," "The Colossus," "Emmett Bonlore," "Len Gansett," "The Tear in The Cup, and Other Stories," "The Wives of The Prophet."

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THE JUCKLINS

CHAPTER I.

The neighbors and our family began to laugh at me about as far back as I can remember, and I think that the first serious remark my father ever addressed to me was, "Bill, you are too lazy to amount to anything in this life, so I reckon we'll have to make a school teacher of you." I don't know why he should have called me lazy; I suppose it must have been on account of my awkwardness. Lazy, why, I could sit all day and fish in one place and not get a bite, while my more industrious companions would, out of sheer exhaustion of patience, be compelled to move about; and I hold that patience is the very perfection of industry.

In the belief that I could never amount to anything I gradually approached my awkward manhood. I grew fast, and I admit that I was always tired; and who is more weary than a sprout of a boy? My brothers were active of body and quick of judgment, and I know that Ed, my oldest brother, won the admiration of the neighborhood when he swapped horses with a stranger and cheated him unmercifully. How my father did laugh, and mother laughed, too, but she told Ed that he must never do such a thing again. With what envy did I look upon this applause. I knew that Ed's brain was no better than mine; and as I lay in bed one night I formed a strong resolve and fondly hugged it unto myself. I owned a horse, a good one; and I would swap him off for two horses—I would cheat some one and thereby win the respect of my fellows. My secret was sweet and I said nothing. By good chance a band of gypsies came our way; I would swindle the rascals. I went to their camp, leading my horse, and after much haggling, I came home with two horses. It was night when I reached home, and I put my team into the stable, and barred up my secret until

the sun of a new day could fall upon it. Well, the next morning one of the horses was dead, and the other one was so stiff that we had to shove him out of the stall. My father snorted, my poor mother wept, and for nights afterward I slipped out and slept in the barn, burrowed under the hay that I might not hear the derisive titter of my brother Ed.

We lived in northern Alabama, in a part of the country that boasted of the refinement and intelligence of its society. When I was alone with boys much younger than myself I could say smart things, and I had a hope that when I should go into formal "company" I would, with one evening's achievement, place myself high above the numbskulls who had giggled at me. The time came. There was to be a "party" at the house of a neighbor, and I was invited. I had a suit of new clothes, and after dressing myself with exceeding care, I set out, strong of heart, for the field of victory. But I weakened when I saw the array of blooded horses hitched without, and heard the gay laughter within, a merriment rippling and merciless; and I stood on the porch, sick with the sense of my awkwardness. I was too big, and I knew that I was straining my clothes. Through the window I could see a trim fellow laughing with a girl, and I said to myself, "If I can catch you out somewhere I will maul you." I was not acquainted with him, but I hated him, for I knew that he was my enemy. To an overgrown young fellow, ashamed of his uncouth, steer-like strength, all graceful youths are hateful; and he feels, too, that a handsome girl is his foe, for girls with pretty mouths are nearly always laughing, and why should they laugh if they are not laughing at him? Long I stood there, stretching the seams of my clothes, angry, wishing that the house might catch fire. I heard footsteps, and looking about, recognized a member of the household, an old and neglected girl. I was not afraid of her, and I bowed. And I felt a sudden looseness, a giving away of a part of my gear. She called me Mr. Hawes, the very first time that any one had called me anything but Bill; she opened the door and bade me go in. I had to duck my head as I stepped forward, and there I was inside the room with the light pouring over me. I took one step forward, and stumbled over something, and then a tittering fool named Bentley, exclaimed: "Hello, here comes little Willie." I don't know how I got out. I heard a roar of laughter, I saw grinning faces jumbled together, and then I was outside, standing with my hot hand resting in the frost on the top rail of a fence. Some one was urging me to come back—the neglected girl—but I stood there silent, with my hot hand melting the frost. I went out into the moon-lighted woods, seized a sapling and almost wrenched it from the ground. Down the road I went toward home, but I turned aside and sat on a log. I felt a sense of pain and I opened my hands—I had been cutting my palms with my nails. But in this senseless fury I had made up my mind. I would waylay Bentley and beat him. Hour after hour I sat there. Horses began to canter by; up and down the road there was laughter and merry chatting. The moon was full, and I could plainly see the passers-by. Suddenly I sprang from the log and seized a bridle rein. A girl shrieked and a man cut my hand with a whip, and I jerked the horse to his knees. Bentley shouted that he would kill me if I did not let go, but I heeded not; I jerked him off his horse, kicked his pistol across the road, mashed his mouth, slammed him against the ground. The shrieking girl cried out that I was a brute, and I told her that I could whip her whole family, a charming bit of repartee, I thought, but afterward I remembered that her family consisted of herself and an aged grandmother, and I sent her an abject apology. Bentley's horse cantered away, and I left the fellow lying in the road, with the girl standing over him, shrieking for help. It was all done in a minute, and with jolting tread I stalked away before any one came up. Of course there was a great scandal. My poor mother was grieved and humiliated, ashamed to meet any of the neighbors; and my father swore that instead of becoming a school teacher I ought to turn out as a highwayman. My brothers thought to have some fun with me, but I frightened them with a roar, and for a time they were afraid to smile in my presence. I was almost heartbroken over my disgrace. Without undue praise I can say that I was generous and kindhearted; even as a child I had shown almost a censurable unselfishness; I had given away my playthings, and my sensibilities were so tender that I could not bear the sight of a suffering animal, and I remember that an old man laughed at me because I could not cut the throat of a sheep when the poor thing had been hung up by the heels. And now I was put down as a heartless brute. Bentley's face constantly haunted me. I was afraid that he might die, and once when I heard that he was not likely to get well, I was resolved to go to him, to beg his pardon. Two weeks had passed; it was night and rain was pouring down, but I cared naught for the wetting. I found Bentley sitting up with his face bandaged. His mother frowned at me when she opened the door and saw me standing there under the drip, and it was some time before she asked me to come in, and I have thought that she would have driven me off had not the sight of me, wet and debased, aroused her pity. Bentley held out his hand when I entered the room, and he said, "I don't blame you, Bill. It was mean of me, but I wanted to be smart." I was so full, so choked with emotion, that it was some time before I could say a word. But after a time I spoke of the rain, and told him that I thought that I had heard a wildcat as I came along, which was a lie, for I had heard nothing save the wind and the rain falling on the dead leaves. He laughed and said that he did not suppose that I would have been very much frightened had the cat jumped at me. Then I told him that I was the biggest coward on earth, and sought to prove it by offering to let him kick me as long as he might find it amusing. I told him that everybody despised me for the way I had beaten him, everybody, including my own family, and that I deserved the censure of all good people. We talked a long time, and he laughed a great deal, but when I told him that I was coming over to work for him three weeks, his eyes grew brighter with tears. This filled me up again and I could do nothing but blubber. After a long time I asked him if he would do me a favor, and he said that he would. Then I took out a watch that I had brought in a buckskin bag, and I said, "Here is a thing that used to belong to my grandfather, and it was given me by mother when I was ten years old. It is a fine time-piece and is solid. Now, I want you to take it as a present from me. You said you would do me a favor." But he declared that he could not take it. "Why, I would despise myself if I did," said he. I told him that I would despise myself if he did not. His

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mother, who had left us alone, came in, smiling, and said that I must not think of parting with so valuable a watch, the mark of my grandfather's gentility, but I put the watch on the table and plunged out into the rain and was gone. Bentley's mother returned the watch the next day, and then there went about the neighborhood a report that I was so much afraid of Bentley's revenge that I had tried to buy him off with a watch. Bentley had said that I should not work for him, but when the time for breaking up the land came, I went over and began to plow the field. His mother came out and compelled me to quit, but I went back at night and plowed while other people slept; and thus I worked until much of his corn-land was broken up. The neighbors said that I had gone insane, and a few days afterward, when I met a woman in the road, she jerked her old mare in an effort to get away, and piteously begged me not to hurt her. I made no further attempt to get into "company," and thus, forced back upon myself, I began to form the habits of a student; and to aid me in my determination to study law, I decided to teach school. So, when I was almost grown—or, rather, about twenty-three years old, for I appeared to keep on growing—I went over into another neighborhood and took up a school. And they called me "Lazy Bill." I couldn't understand why, for I am sure that I attended to my duties, that I played town ball with the boys, that I even cut wood all day one Saturday; but confound them, they called me lazy. I spoke to one of the trustees; I called his attention to the fact that I worked hard, and he replied that the hardest working man he had ever seen was a lazy fellow who worked merely as a "blind." To sleep after the sun rises is a great crime in the country, and sometimes I sat up so late with my books that I had to be called twice for breakfast. And no amount of work could have offset this ignominy. I taught school during three years, and found at the end of that time that I was no nearer a lawyer's office. Once I called on an old judge, the leading lawyer in a neighboring village, and told him that if he would take me I would work for my clothes, and the humorous old rascal, surveying me, replied: "I have not contemplated the starting of a woolen mill. Why don't you go to work?" he asked. I told him that I was at work, that I taught school, but that I wanted to be a lawyer. He laughed and said that teaching school was not work—declared it to be the refuge of the lazy and the shiftless. I then ventured to remark that the South would continue to be backward as long as the educator was put down as a piece of worthless rubbish. I went away, and a few days later one of the trustees called on me and said that I had declared their children to be ignorant rubbish, and that therefore they wanted my services no longer. I returned home. My brothers were gone, and my parents were in feeble health. My father died within a year, and soon my mother followed him. The farm was poor and was mortgaged, and empty-handed I turned away. I heard that a school teacher was wanted up in North Carolina, near the Tennessee line, and I decided to apply for the place. I walked to the railway station, twenty miles distant. I have said that I went away empty-handed. I did not; I carried a trunk, light with clothes and heavy with books. I had put my trunk on the railway platform and was striding up and down when I saw two men, well-dressed, rich-looking, standing near. This amounted to nothing, and I would not mention it but for the fact that it was at this moment that I received my first encouragement. One of the men, speaking to his companion, remarked: "Devilish fine-looking fellow. I'd give a great deal to be in his shoes, to have his strength and his youth." I turned away, eager to hear more, yet afraid lest the other man might say something to spoil it all. But he did not. "Yes," he replied, "but he doesn't know how fortunate he is. Gad, he looks like an imported bull."

The train came and I was whirred away, over streams, below great hanging rocks; but I thought not of the grandeur of the rocks nor of the beauty of the streams, for through my mind was running the delicious music of the first compliment that had ever been paid me. And I realized that I had outgrown the age of my awkwardness, that strength was of itself a grace to be admired, that I should feel thankful rather than remember with bitterness the days of my humiliation. I observed a woman looking at me, and there was interest in her eyes, and I knew that she did not take kindly to me simply because she was an old and neglected girl, for she was handsome. Beside her sat a man, and I could see that he was eager to win her smile. He hated me, I could see that, but he couldn't laugh at me. I noticed that my hands and feet were not over large, and this was a sort of surprise, for I recalled hearing a boy say that my foot was the biggest thing he ever saw without a liver in it. I reached back and wiped out the past; I looked out at a radiant cloud hanging low in the west, and called it the future. Fool? Oh, of course. I had been a fool when a boy, and was a fool now, but how much wiser it was to be a happy fool.

I was to leave the train at Nagle station, and then to go some distance into the country, which direction I knew not. I made so bold as to ask the handsome lady if she knew anything of the country about Nagle, and she smiled sweetly, and said that she did not, that she was a stranger going South. I had surmised as much, and I spoke to her merely to see what effect it would have on the man who sat beside her. Was my new-found pride making me malicious? I thought it was, and I censured myself. The lady showed a disposition to continue the talk, but the man drove me into silence by remarking: "I suppose there is something novel about one's first ride on the cars." How I did want to reach out and take hold of his ear, but I thought of Bentley and subsided. When I arose to get off at my station, I thought that the lady, as I passed her, made a motion as if she would like to give me her hand. This might simply have been the prompting of my long famished but now over-fed conceit, my bloating egotism, but I gave the woman a grateful thought as I stood on the platform gazing at the train as it faded away in the dusk that appeared to come down the road to meet it.

I had expected to alight at a town, but the station was a lonely place, a wagon-maker's shop, the company's building and a few shanties. I asked the station master if he knew where the school teacher was wanted, and he answered that from the people thereabouts one must be needed in every household.

"And I should think," I replied, giving him what I conceived to be a look of severe rebuke, "that a teacher of common decency and politeness is most needed of all."

"I reckon you are right," he rejoined. "Is he the man you are looking for?"

"I don't want to get into trouble here," said I, "but I insist upon fair treatment and I'm going to have it."

"All right, sir. Now, what is it you want to know?"

"Why, I was told that there was an opening for a school teacher in this neighborhood."

"And so there is, but don't you know that no neighborhood could be proud of such a fact? Therefore, you ought to be more careful as to how you make your inquiries."

I saw that he wanted to joke with me and I joked with him. And I soon found that this was the right course, for he invited me into his office and insisted upon my sharing his luncheon, cold bread and meat and a tin bucket of boiling coffee. I soon learned that he was newly graduated from a school of telegraphy, and that this was his first position. He had come from a city and he gave me the impression that he was buried alive; he said that he had entered an oath in his book that if some one didn't get off at his station pretty soon he would set the whole thing on fire and turn train robber. "Don't you think that would be a pretty good idea?" he asked, laughing.

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"It would be a pretty dangerous one, at least," I answered.

"Yes, but without danger there is never any fun. My old man insisted upon my taking that night-school course; and the professor of the institution held out the idea that I could be a great man within a short time after graduating; led me to believe I could get charge of a big office in town, but here I am stuck up here in these hills. No rags about here at all."

"No what?"

"Rags, calico, women—catch on?"

"You mean no society, to speak of."

"That's it. Oh, away off in the country it's all right, but I can never go more than three miles from this miserable place. You'll have to go about fifteen miles."

"How do you know?"

"Why, an old fellow from a neighborhood about that far away came out here the other day and sent off a dispatch, telling some man off, I don't remember where, to send a teacher out there."

"And one might have come by this time," I suggested, with a sense of fear.

"No, you are the only one that has put in an appearance, and the only one that is likely to come. I understand that they don't treat teachers very well out there."

"How so?"

"The boys have a habit of ducking them in the creek, I hear."

"Oh, is that all? Be fun for me."

"You won't think so after you see those roosters. Let me see. Take the Purdy road out there, and go straight ahead to the east, and when you think you have gone about fifteen miles, ask for the house of Lim Jucklin. The last teacher, I understand, boarded at his house."

"You appear to know a good deal about it."

"Well, the truth of it is, I do, for the last teacher came and went this way. And he told me like this: 'The thing opened up all right, plenty of rags, but that evening some of the young fellows came to me and said that unless I brought some sort of treat the next morning they would put me in the creek; said that they hated to do it, but that time-honored customs must be observed. I didn't bring any treat and I went into the creek. Then I left.' Yes, that's what he said, and I concluded that as for me I would rather be here. It isn't so lively, but it is a good deal dryer. But you can't get there to-night. Better take a shake-down here with me till morning, and then you may catch some farmer going that way with a wagon."

I thanked him for this courtesy, and readily accepted it. And the next morning, with my trunk on my shoulder, I set out upon what I conceived to be my career in life.

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The month was April, and the day was blithe, with no blotch in the sky. The country was rough, the road was pebbly in the bottoms and flinty on the hills, but there was a leaping joy everywhere; in the woods where the blue-jays were shouting, down the branch where the woodpecker tapped in an oak tree's sounding board. It must have been a low-hanging ambition to be thrilled with the prospect of teaching school, or was it buoyant health that made me happy? I eased down my trunk, and boyishly threw stones away off into an echoing hollow. A rabbit ran out into the road and stopped, and with a stone I knocked it over. Tenderly I picked it up, felt its fluttering heart, and groaned inwardly when the little heart was stilled. I called myself a murderer, an Anglo-Saxon brute, to kill a harmless creature merely upon a devilish impulse, and in the gravelly ground I began to dig a grave with my knife, and I was so much taken up with this work and with my grief, that I heeded not the approach of a wagon.

"What are you doing there?" some one called.

I looked up. A farmer had stopped his blowing horses and was looking at me. "I'm digging a grave," I answered.

"Diggin' a grave? Why, who's dead?"

"A rabbit." He moved uneasily, and gave me a searching look. And I saw that he took me to be insane. "I killed the poor thing," I explained, "killed it out of mere wantonness, and I am so grief-stricken that I am going to do the best I can for the poor thing—going to give it a Christian burial."

The man laughed. "I wish you would kill the last one of them," he said. "Set out as nice a young orchard as you ever saw last winter, and the devilish rabbits killed every one of the trees."

"Then I am not so much of a murderer after all," I replied. "I might have known that rabbits are not altogether harmless. How far do you go on this road?"

"About ten miles."

"Will you let me ride with you?"

"Yes, be glad to have you."

I put the rabbit into his grave, raked the dirt on him with my foot—hardly a Christian-like way, I admit—placed my trunk into the body of the wagon, and took a seat beside the man. And there was something about him that at once interested me. His hat was off and the breeze was stirring his grizzly hair. His nose was large and thin, and when he turned his face square upon me, I saw that his eyes were gray and clear. He wore no coat, his shirt sleeves were rolled back, and though he must have been more than fifty years old, I could see that he had enormous strength in his arms. And he was looking at me admiringly, for he said, "You must be pretty much of a man."

"I am not a child except in my lack of wisdom," I answered.

"Gad, you talk like a preacher. Which way are you going?"

"Over to Lim Jucklin's house."

He gave me another square look and remarked, "That's my name."

"You don't tell me so?"

"Didn't you hear me tell you so?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, then, I did tell you so."

"I am delighted to meet you, sir. I am a school teacher, and I hear that one is wanted in your neighborhood."

He looked at me from head to foot, and replied: "I shouldn't wonder but you are the right man. What's your name?"

I told him and after a few moments of silence he asked, "Any kin to the Luke Hawes that fought in the Creek war?"

"He was my grandfather."

"Ah, hah, and my daddy fit with him—was a lieutenant in his company. Let's shake hands. Whoa, boys." He stopped his horses, got up, shook down the wrinkled legs of his trousers and reached forth his hand.

"You are a stranger in North Carolina," he said when he had clucked to his horses.

"Yes, I am a stranger everywhere you might put it," I answered. "I am from Alabama, but the people made so much fun of me in the community where I was brought up that I am even a stranger there."

"What did they make fun of you about?"

"Because I was overgrown and awkward."

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"Whoa, boys! Let's shake hands again. I got it the same way when I was a boy, and I come in one of never gettin' over it."

We drove on and had gone some distance when he asked: "Do you know all about 'rithmetic?"

"I at least know the multiplication table."

"It's more than I do. Get up there, boys. And down in my country they think that a man that don't know all about 'rithmetic is a fool. I have often told them that there wan't no record of the fact that the Saviour was good at figgers, except figgers of speech, but they won't have it that a man is smart unless he can go up to a barn and cover one side of it with eights and sevens and nines and all that sort of thing. I've got a daughter that's quicker than a flash—took it from her mother, I reckon—and I have a son that's tolerable, but I have always been left in the lurch right there. But I can read all right, and I know the Book about as well as the most of them, but that makes no difference down in our neighborhood. The pace down there is set by Old General Lundsford. He knows all about figgers and everything else, for that matter, but figgers is his strong holt. He owns nearly everything; is a mighty 'ristocrat and don't bend very often; lives in the house that his grandfather built, great big brick, and never had no respect for me at all until I wallowed him in the road one day about thirty odd years ago. And along about ten years after that he found out that he had a good deal of respect for me. What do you know about game chickens?"

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"Not very much; I simply know that they are about the bravest things that live."

He gave me another one of his square looks and replied: "There is more wisdom in such talk as that than there could be crowded into a wheat bin. But, do you know that people make fun of me because I admire a game rooster? They do. I don't want to fight 'em for money, you know; I'm a good church member and all that sort of thing; I believe the Book from one end to the other; believe that the whale swallowed Jonah, I don't care if its throat ain't bigger than a hoe-handle; believe that the vine grewed up in one night, and withered at mornin'; believe that old Samson killed all them fellers with the jaw-bone—believe everything as I tell you from start to finish, but I'll be blamed if I can keep from fightin' chickens to save my life. And I always keep two beauties, I tell you. Not long ago my wife ups and kills Sam and fed him to a preacher. Preacher was there, hungry, and the other chickens were parading around summers on the other side of the hill, but my wife she ups and kills Sam, a black beauty, with a pedigree as long as a plow-line. And, sir, while that man was chawin' of my chicken he gave me a lecture on fightin' roosters."

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"You spoke of your son and daughter. Do they attend school?"

"Oh, no; they are grown long ago."

"Then how is it that the teacher usually boards at your house?"

"I don't know; but they do. Reckon they jest fell into the habit. My house is handy, for one thing; ain't more than three miles from the school—jest a nice, exercisin' sort of walk. Whoa, boys! Sorter have to scotch 'em back goin' down here. Saw a man get killed down there one day; horse kicked him, and do you see that knob over there where them hickory trees are? I had a hard time there one night. A lot of foot-burners come to my house one night durin' the war and took me out and told me that if I didn't give them my money they would roast my shanks. I didn't have any money and I told them so, but they didn't believe me; and so they brought me right over there where them hickories are, tied me, took off my shoes and built up a fire at my feet; but about the time they had got me well blistered, along come some Yankee soldiers and nabbed 'em. And a few minutes after that there wasn't anything agin their feet, I tell you, not even the ground. Well, we are gettin' pretty close to home now."

"But we haven't come fifteen miles from the station, have we?"

"Well, you had come about five mile before I overtook you and we have come nearly ten since then. These hosses are travelers. Oh, I reckon we've got about three more miles to go yet."

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The country was old, with here and there a worn-out and neglected field. A creek wound its way among the hills, deep and dark in places, but babbling out into a broad and shiny ford where we crossed. One moment the scene was desolate, with gullied hill-sides, but further on and off to the right I could see poetic strips of meadow land, and further yet, upon a hill-top, stood a grim old house of brick and stone. We turned off to the right before coming abreast of this place, and pursued a winding course along a deep-shaded ravine, not rough with broken ground, but graceful with grassy slopes and with here and there a rock. My companion pointed out his house, what is known as a double log building, with a broad passage way between the two sections. A path, so hard and smooth that it shone in the sun, ran down obliquely into the ravine, and at the end of it I saw a large iron kettle overturned, and I knew that this marked the spring. I liked the place, the forest back of it, the steep hills far away, the fields lying near and the meadow down the ravine. I hate a new house, a new field, a wood that looks new; to me there must be the impress of fond association, and here I found it, the spring-house with moss on its roof, the path, a great oak upon which death had placed its beautiful mark—a bough of misletoe.

"You hop right out and go in and make yourself at home, while I take care of the horses," said the old man. "Go right on," he added, for he saw that I was hesitating. "You don't need an introduction. Jest say that you are Whut'sname and that you are the new school teacher."

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"But I don't know yet that I am to be the teacher."

"Well, then, tell 'em that you are Whut'sname and that you don't know whether you are to be the teacher or not."

"But won't you stop long enough to introduce me?"

"Oh, I reckon I mout. Come on. There is wife in the door, now."

He did not go as far as the door; he simply shouted: "Here's a man, Susan. He can tell you his name, for blamed if I ain't dun forgot."

CHAPTER III.

Into this household I was received with open-handed graciousness. Nothing can be more charming than the unconscious generosity of simple folk. To this family I applied the word simple and cut myself with a cool smile at my own vanity. Was I not a countryman and as rustic-minded as they? But I had come from another community, had crossed a state line and the lines of several counties, and besides I took to myself the credit of having read many a cunning book, and therefore these people were surely more simple than I. Traveling unquestionably gathers knowledge, but the man who reads has ever a feeling that he is the proper critic of the man who has simply observed.

Mrs. Jucklin gave me a strong grasp of welcome, apologized for the lack of order that I must surely find in the house and conducted me to the sitting-room, a large apartment, with a home-woven carpet on the floor. A turkey wing, used for a fan, hung beside the enormous fire-place, and on the broad mantelpiece, trimmed with paper cut in scollops, an old Yankee clock was ticking. The woman shook a cat out of a hickory rocking chair and urged me to sit down. She knew that I must be tired after my long ride, and she said that if I would only excuse her for a moment she would go down to the spring-house and get me a glass of milk, to give me strength wherewith to wait until she could stir about and get something to eat. And above all, I must pardon Limuel's abruptness of manner. But really he meant nothing by it, as I would find out when I should become better acquainted with him. She was a little, black-eyed woman, doubtless a descendant of a Dutch family that had come to the colony at an early date, for she reminded me of my mother, and I know that mother's grandfather was a Dutchman. I begged Mrs. Jucklin not to go after the milk, but she ran away almost with the lightness of a girl. In truth, to think of the milk made me shudder; I couldn't bear the thought of it. During the hard times at the close of the war, when I was a child, we had to drink rye coffee, and I remember that once the cows got into the rye field and gave rye milk. The coffee and the milk together had made me sick, and ever since then I had looked upon milk with a reminiscent horror. But there she came with it.

"My dear madam," I pleaded, "I would much rather not drink it."

"Oh, but you must, for I know you are tired out."

"But I don't drink milk."

"And it is because you can't find any like this. Just taste it, then."

The old man came stalking into the room and I gave him an appealing look. "I gad, Susan," said he, "let him alone. Don't you reckon he's got sense enough to know what he wants? Take the stuff away."

With a sigh of disappointment she placed the tumbler upon the mantelpiece. "Where's Alf?" the old man asked.

"Gone over to the General's to help about something."

"Where's Guinea?"

"She's about somewhere. That's her in the passage, I think. Guinea?" There was no reply, save of hastening footsteps, and a moment later a young woman entered the room. She was not very tall, but she was graceful, and her dark eyes were dashed with mischief. She reminded me of the woman whom I had seen on the train; her smile was the same, but her eyes were brighter. She had a peculiar laugh, a musical cluck, and at first sight I was glad that I had met her, but a moment later I was afraid that she was going to laugh at me. The old man did not introduce me; his wife did not know my name, and I sought to speak my name, but had lost it just at that moment and could merely splutter something. I was not much embarrassed, though; I recalled what I had heard the two men say, and behind me was the strong brace of a woman's kindly regard.

"We are glad to see you," said the girl, looking straight at me. I replied that I was glad to see her, and then we both laughed; she with her musical cluck and I with a goat-like rasp, it seemed

to me. We all drew up about the fire-place, a habit in the country, and it was then that I thought of the open-handed graciousness of the household. Had I correctly caught this girl's name, Guinea? And with a countryman's frankness I asked if that were her name. [33]

"Well, no," said Mrs. Jucklin, speaking for her, "it ain't her sure enough name, but it's all that she goes by. And it came about in this way: A long time ago, when she was a little bit of a girl, she was toddlin' about the yard with a checked dress on, and one of the neighbors lookin' at her said that she looked exactly like a little guinea chicken, and ever since then we have called her Guinea. Her right name is Angeline."

"Her right name is what?" the old man asked, looking up.

"Angeline," I said.

"Well, it's the first time I ever heard of it."

"Now, Limuel, why do you want to act that way? A body would think that you don't know anything about your own family."

"Never heard of it before," said the old man.

"You are surely the most provokin' man I ever saw, Limuel. You know the very day we named the child, and now you pretend——"

"Pretend? I don't pretend nothin'. Can't blame a man for never hearin' of the name, can you?"

"Mister," she said, turning to me, "please don't pay any attention to him. He'd pester me nearly to death if I'd let him. But come, Guinea, we must stir about and get something to eat."

The mother and the daughter went out into a kitchen detached from the main part of the house, and the old man looked at me and laughed. And after a moment of chuckling he said: "I reckon that I've got two of the finest in the world." [34]

"Children?" I asked.

"No, game roosters. One's named Sam and the other's named Bob."

"I thought you said that Sam had been eaten by the preacher."

"Oh, that Sam was, but I've got another one. I always have a Sam and a Bob. When a Sam dies I get another Sam, and likewise with a Bob. But you know what's a fact? I never allow 'em to fight to a finish. If I did the sport would be gone. You must never let one rooster know that the other one can whip him, for if you do there won't be any fight after that—you must always keep each one believin' that he is the best man. I reckon I've had more than a hundred, but I never let 'em fight to a finish. My folks here don't care nothin' about fun—they even frown on it, Alf with the rest, and I hold that he ought to know better, bein' a man, but so it is. I've got a chicken house back here, with a high picket fence around it, and I keep it locked, I tell you. Have to, or the preachers would eat up my sport, and this ain't findin' no fault with their doctrine, for I believe the Book from kiver to kiver. After we get a snack we'll slip off and have a set-to. What do you say?"

I hardly knew what to say. I was afraid to decline, lest I might lose his good opinion, and I was loth to accept the invitation, fearing that I might lower myself in the estimation of the women; but while I was casting about the old man relieved me by saying: "However, we've got plenty of time before us. It's always well to hold a good thing in reserve, you know. After dinner we'll go over and see Old Perdue and find out if you can arrange with him about the school. He's got the whole thing in charge. General Lundsford has charge of nearly everything else, but he don't take much stock in free schools. He argues that nothin' that's free is any good, and in the main he's about right; but we've had some pretty good schools here, the only trouble bein' to keep the teachers out of the creek. What education my son Alf has he picked up about home, here, but Guinea was sent off to school, way over at Raleigh." [35]

"I am glad to see that you thought so much of the importance of training her mind," I remarked.

He gave me a troubled look, moved uneasily, as I had seen him move when I told him that I was burying a rabbit, ran his fingers through his upright, bristling hair and for a long time was silent. And as I looked at him I fancied that he was trying to think of something to say, something to lead my mind away from what he had already said. I had seen the quaint, half-comical side of his nature, and now I saw that he could be thoughtful, and in his serious mood his face was strong and rugged. His beard, cropped close, reminded me of scraps of wire, some of them rusted; and when he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand I wondered that he did not scratch the skin off. [36]

Guinea came to the door and told us that the meal was ready. The old man got up, with a return of his comical air, and told me to follow him. The girl continued to stand near the threshold and as I drew near unto her she said: "This door wasn't cut quite high enough for you, was it? Look, father, he has to duck his head. The boys may have a time putting him into the creek." She was now talking to her father, but was looking at me, so I took it upon myself to answer her. "Yes, for you have called attention to the fact that my legs are long and the rascals may have hard running with trying to catch me."

"Oh," she replied, "but I was thinking of your strength rather than your swiftness. Come this way. Father has run off and left you."

The old man had stepped down out of the passage and had gone some distance toward a small house surrounded by a picket fence.

"You go with her," he called, looking back, "and I'll be there pretty soon."

"No telling when he will come now," the girl remarked, walking close beside me. "He's got two of the most spiteful chickens out there you ever saw, and whenever anything goes wrong with him he bolts right out there, no matter who is here, and makes those vicious things peck at each other. Mother and I try hard to reform him, but we can't." [37]

It was Mrs. Jucklin's time-grayed privilege to apologize for the scantiness of her fare, and this she did with becoming modesty and regret. She had not expected company; the regular dinner hour was over long ago, and somehow she never could understand why she couldn't get a meal out of the regular time. But if I would only give her a chance she would reclaim herself. She called my attention to the corn bread; declared that it was not fit to be eaten, and she didn't know what made the stove act that way. But the milk she knew was good. Oh, she had forgotten that I didn't drink milk. Guinea smiled at me and clucked at her mother. "Don't pretend that you like anything just to please her," she said, when Mrs. Jucklin had turned about to keep a hoe-cake from burning. "All you've got to do is to say nothing until she gets through—that, and simply to remember that she enjoys it."

While we were eating we heard a voice crying: "Hike, there, Sam; get him down, Bob! Hike there!"

"They are warming up to their work," Guinea remarked, and her mother sighed; and then she began to talk louder than was her wont, striving to drown the old man's voice. "It isn't any use, mother," said the girl. "The gentleman will find it out sooner or later."

"And I suppose," said I, "that you think that you may find out my name sooner or later. Please pardon me for not introducing myself. My name is——" [38]

"Hike, there, Bob! Get him down, Sam! Now you are at it! Hike, there!"

"My name is Hawes, William Hawes, and I am from Alabama."

"And you have come to teach the school?" said the girl.

"Yes, if I can make the arrangements."

"But is there anything very satisfying in such an occupation?" she asked.

I felt then that she placed no very high estimate upon my worth, and on her part this was but natural, for among country people school-teaching is looked upon as a lazy calling.

"I have not chosen teaching as my real vocation," I answered.

"Hike, there, I tell you! Hike!"

"It is my aim to be a lawyer, to be eloquent, to stir emotions, to be strong in the presence of men. My earlier advantages, no matter how I sought to turn them about, gave me no promise of reaching the bar; I had good primary training, but in reality I had to educate myself, and in the work of a teacher I saw a hope to lead me onward."

"Came within one of letting them fight to a finish," said the old man, stepping into the room.

"Limuel, why will you always humiliate me?" his wife asked, placing a chair for him.

"Humiliate you! Bless your life, I wouldn't humiliate you. The only trouble is that you are tryin' to make me fit a garment you've got, ruther than to make the garment fit me. I ain't doin' no harm, Susan, and it's my way, and you can't very well knock the spots off'en a leopard nur skin an Etheopian. Here comes Alf." [39]

The son was a young fellow of good size, shapely, and with his mother's black eyes. Guinea introduced me to him, and at once I felt that I should like to win his friendship. The old man explained my presence there. "And now," said he, "I want you to go over to old Perdue's with him after dinner and see if any arrangements can be made. He's goin' to board with us, and I want to tell you right now that he is from good stock; his granddaddy was the captain of the company that my daddy fit in durin' the Creek war, and from what I learn I don't reckon there was ever sich fightin' before nor since. What are they doin' over at the General's?"

"Nothing much," Alf answered. "They started to plow this morning, but it is still most too wet."

"Was Millie at home?" Guinea asked.

"I think so, but I suppose you know that Chid isn't."

"Never mind that," the old man spoke up. "Leave all cuttin' and slashin' to folks that ain't no kin to each other. You've been to dinner, have you, Alf? Well, hitch the mare to the buckboard and go with this gentleman over to old Perdue's."

CHAPTER IV.

[40]

At the end of the passage, facing the ravine, I stood and talked to Guinea, while Alf was hitching the mare to the buck-board. The sun was well over to the west, pouring upon us, and in the strong light I noted the clear, health-hue of her complexion. A guinea chicken, swift and graceful, ran round the corner of the house, and, nodding toward the fowl, I said: "I am talking to her namesake and she is jealous."

I thought that the shadow of a pout crossed her lips, but she smiled and replied: "If my real name were not so ugly I'd insist upon people calling me by it. I hate nicknames."

"But sometimes they are appropriate," I rejoined.

"But when they are," she said, laughing, "they never stick. It's the disagreeable nickname that remains with us."

"Is that the philosophy you learned at Raleigh?" I asked.

She shrugged her shapely shoulders, laughed low in her throat and answered: "I haven't learned philosophy at all. It doesn't take much of a stock of learning for a girl who lives away out here."

"But she might strive to learn in order to be fitted for a better life, believing that it will surely come."

[41]

"How encouraging you are, Mr. Hawes. After a while you may persuade me that I am really glad that you came."

"You have already made me glad," I replied.

"Have I? Then mind that I don't make you sorry. Alf's waiting for you."

As we drove toward Perdue's I wondered what could have caused old man Jucklin's change of manner at the time he had spoken of sending his daughter away to be educated. Surely, he could not deplore the grace and refinement which this schooling had given her. Would it be well to ask Alf? No; he could but regard such a question as a direct impertinence.

The mare trotted briskly and the rush of cool air was delicious. The road was crooked, holding in its elbows bits of scenery unsuspected until we were upon them, moss growing under great rocks, weeping in eternal shade, a bit of water blazing in the sun, a hickory bottom, where squirrels were barking; and from everywhere came the thrilling incense of spring.

Alf, though a farmer, had not the stoop of overwork, nor that sullenness that often comes from a life-long and close association with the soil; he was chatty, talked to his mare, talked to me and whistled to himself. He pointed out a cave wherein British soldiers had been forced to take refuge to save themselves from the pursuit of victorious patriots, but what they had supposed was a refuge was, indeed, a trap, for the patriots smoked them out and took them to General Green's camp. We drove upon a hill top, and, looking across a valley, I saw a large brick house on a hill not far beyond. And I recognized it as a place that I had seen earlier in the day. "It's where General Lundsford lives," said Alf, following my eyes with his own. "We go by there. He used to own a good many negroes and some of them still hang about him. Most of his land is poor, but enough of it is rich to make him well off. And proud! He's proud as a blooded horse. Most of the very few old-timers that are left in this part of the country. We are getting somewhat Yankeeified, especially away over to the east where so many northern people come of a winter. But he doesn't take much to it—still cuts his wheat with a cradle."

[42]

We drove down into the valley, crossed a rude stone bridge, and slowly went up the other side. The mare, brisk from having been pent up, showed a disposition to quicken her pace, but Alf held her back, searching with his strong eyes the yard, the summer house in the garden hard by and the orchard off to the left. I looked at him and his face was eager and hard set, but his eyes, though strained, were soft and glowing. I spoke to him, but he heeded me not, but just at that moment he drew himself straighter and gazed toward the house. And I saw a woman crossing the yard. The road ran close to the low, rough stone wall, and when we had come opposite the gate Alf stopped the mare and got out to buckle a strap. But I noticed that he was looking more at the house than at the strap. A broad porch, or gallery, as we term it, ran nearly half way round the house, and out upon this a girl stepped and stood looking over us at the hills far away. I saw Alf blush, and the next moment he had sprung upon the buck-board and was driving off almost furiously. I wondered why he should be afraid of her. He was not overgrown, not awkward, but lithe, and I knew that he loved her and that his own emotion had frightened him.

[43]

Perdue lived but a short distance beyond the General's place, and soon we were there, talking to the old fellow out at the fence. When I told him my business he looked sharply at me, appearing to measure me from head to foot; and he said I was, no doubt, the man he had been longing to see. "And now," said he, after we had talked for a time, "if you are willing to take this school and go ahead with it, all right. I am determined that the boys and girls of this community shall get an education even if they choke the creek with teachers. If I had full swing I'd raise a lot of men and go around and club the big boys. Oh, it hasn't been this way very long. We've had

first-rate schools here, but those devilish Aimes boys are so full of the old Harry—but we'll fix 'em. The ground will be all right for plowin' to-morrow, and the big boys will have to work until the corn is laid by, but I reckon you'll get a pretty fair turn-out. There's enough money appropriated to have a rattlin' good school, and if you'll stick by me we'll have it."

[44]

I told him that I would stick by him. "All right," said he, "see that you do. Let me see. This is Friday. You hold yourself in readiness to begin Monday mornin', and to-morrow I will ride around the neighborhood and spread the news."

So that was settled. Briskly we drove away, and again upon nearing the house of the old General, Alf pulled the mare back into a walk. This time, though, he did not stop, but as we slowly passed he swept the house and the yard with his eager glance. The sun was down when we reached home. How long the day had been, what a stretch of time lay between the going down of the sun now and its rising, when I had shouldered my trunk at the railway station!

As I was getting down in front of the door I heard Mr. Jucklin calling me, and when I answered he came forward out of the passage and said that he wanted to see me a moment. He led the way and I followed him into the dark shadow of a tree. "I forgot to tell you not to say anything about that," said he.

"About what?" I asked.

"About wallowin' him—the old General. He requested me not to mention it, bein' so proud, and I told him that I wouldn't, and I don't know what made me speak of it to-day, but I did."

"Oh, I won't mention it," I spoke up rather sharply, for I was disappointed that he had not told me something of importance.

[45]

"All right. And I am much obleeged to you. He is one of the proudest men in the world and he don't want anybody to suspect that any feller ever wallowed him; but I want to tell you right now that I have wallowed a good many of 'em in my time. Are you goin' to teach the school?"

"Yes, the arrangements have been made, and I am to begin work Monday morning."

"Good enough. Well, we'll go on in now and eat a snack, for I reckon the women folks have got it about ready."

We went early to bed. The house was but a story and a half high, and I was to room with Alf, up close to the clap-board roof. I could not stand straight, except in the middle of the apartment, but I was comfortable, for I had a good bed, and there was plenty of air coming in through two large windows, one on each side of the chimney at the end, toward the south. While the dawn was drowsiest, just at the time when it seems that one moment of dreamy dozing is worth a whole night of soundest sleep, Alf got up to go afield to his plow, and as the joints of the stairway were creaking under him as he went down I turned over for another nap, thankful that after all the teaching of a school was not the hardest lot in life. And I was deliciously dreaming when Guinea called me to breakfast.

I spent the most of the day in my room, getting ready for my coming work. Against the chimney I built a shelf and put my books upon it; I turned a large box into a writing table, and of a barrel I fashioned an easy-chair. My surroundings were rude, but I was pleased with them; indeed, I had never found myself so pleasantly placed. And when Alf came up at night he looked about him and with a smile remarked: "You must own that lamp that we read about. Wish you would rub it again and get my corn out of the grass." He looked tired and I wondered why he did not go to bed, but he strode up and down the room, smoking his pipe. He was silent and thoughtful, refilling his pipe as soon as the tobacco was burned out; but sometimes he would talk, though what he said I felt was aimless.

[46]

"I've some heavier tobacco than that," I said.

"This will do, though it is pretty light. Raised on an old hill."

He sat down and continued to pull at his pipe, though the fire was out. He leaned with his elbow on the table; he moved as if his position were uncomfortable; he got up, went to the window, looked out, came back, resumed his seat and after looking at the floor for a few moments said that he thought that it must be going to rain.

"Perhaps so," I replied, "but that's not what you wanted to say."

He gave me a sharp glance, looked down and then asked: "How do you know?"

[47]

"I know because I can see and because I'm not a fool."

"Anybody ever call you a fool?" he asked, with a sad laugh. He leaned far back and looked up at the clapboards.

"That has nothing to do with it, Alf. Pardon me. Mr. Jucklin, I should have said. The truth is, it seems that I have known you a long time."

"And when you feel that way about a man," he quickly spoke up, "you make no mistake in accepting him as a friend. Call me Alf. What's your first name?" I told him, and he added: "And I'll call you Bill. No; the truth is I didn't care to say that I thought it was going to rain; I don't give a snap for rain, except the rain that is pouring on my heart. You remember that girl that came out

upon the gallery. I know you do, for no man could forget her. You know that Guinea asked me if Millie was at home. Well, that was Millie Lundsford, the old General's daughter. We have lived close together all our lives, but I have never known her very well, and even now I wouldn't go there on a dead-set visit. She and Guinea went off to school together and are good friends. Guinea tries to plague me about her at times, not knowing that I really love her. I couldn't go off to school, didn't care any too much for education, but since that girl came home and I got better acquainted with her I have felt that I would give half my life to know books, so that I could talk to her; and since then I have been studying, with Guinea to help me. And you don't know how glad I was when I heard that you had come here to teach school, for I want to study under you. But secretly," he added. "I can't go to the school-house; I don't want her to know that I am so ignorant."

[48]

I reached over and took hold of his hand. "Alf, to teach you shall be one of my duties. But don't put yourself down as ignorant, for you are not."

He grasped my hand, and, looking straight into my eyes, said: "I wish I knew as much and was as good-looking as you. Then I wouldn't be afraid to go to her and ask her to let me win her love, if I could. To-morrow you go over to the General's, pretending that you want to get his advice about the school, and I will go with you. Hang it, Bill, you may be in love one of these days."

"Why, Alf, I don't see why either of us should be afraid to go to the General's house. Go? Of course, we will. But you make me laugh when you say that if you were only as good-looking as I am. Let me tell you something." I briefly told him the uneventful story of my life, that ridicule had found me while yet I was a toddler and had held me up as its target. "You might have grown too fast," he remarked when I had concluded, "but you have caught up with yourself. To tell you the truth, you would be picked out from among a thousand men. Where did you get all those books? I don't see how you brought them with you in that trunk, and with your other things."

"The other things didn't take up much room," I answered, and, turning to the books, I began to tell him something about them, but I soon saw that his mind was far away. "Yes, we will go over there to-morrow," said I, and his mind flew back.

[49]

"And walk right in as if we owned half the earth," said he, but I knew that he felt not this lordly courage, knew that already he was quaking. "Oh, I'll go right in with you," he said. "You lead the way and I'll be with you."

When I had gone to bed a remark that he had made was sweeping like a wind through my mind: "Hang it, Bill, you may be in love one of these days." I was already in love—in love with Guinea.

CHAPTER V

[50]

Alf was still asleep when I arose from my bed the next morning. I stood at the head of the stairs and looked back at his handsome, though sun-browned face, and I felt a strange and strong sympathy for him, but I had not begun to agonize in my love; it was so new that I was dazzled. When I went down stairs Guinea was feeding the chickens from the kitchen window, and the old man was walking about the yard, with his slouch hat pulled down to shut out the slanting glare of the sun. But he saw me and, calling me, said that he would now show me his beauties. And just then I heard Guinea's voice: "If he starts to make them fight you come right away and leave him, Mr. Hawes," she said. "We don't allow him to fight them on Sunday."

"Miss Smartjacket," the old man spoke up, "I hadn't said a word about makin' 'em fight. Hawes, these women folks don't want a man to have no fun at all. As long as a man is at work it's all right with the women; they can stand to see him delve till he drops, but the minit he wants to have a little fun, why, they begin to mowl about it. Of course, I'm not goin' to let 'em fight on Sunday. But a preacher would eat one of 'em on Sunday. All days belong to 'em. It's die dog or eat the hatchet when they come round. And yet, as I tell you, I believe in the Book from kiver to kiver. Step out here, Hawes."

[51]

I thought that I received from Guinea a smile of assent, and I followed him. The enclosure wherein he kept his chickens was almost as strong as a "stockade." The old man unfastened a padlock and bade me enter. I stepped inside, and when the master had followed me he was greeted with many a cluck and scratching, the welcome of two game cocks in a wire coop, divided into two apartments by a solid board partition. "I jest wanted you to look at 'em and size 'em merely for your own satisfaction," said the old man, fondly looking upon his shimmering pets. "This red one over here is Sam, and that dominecker rascal is Bob. Ah, Lord, you don't know what comfort there is in a chicken, and how a preacher can eat a game rooster is beyond my understandin'. But I'm with him, you understand, from kiver to kiver. Keep quiet there, boys; no fight to-day. Must have some respect, you know."

He took a grain of corn from his pocket, placed it between his teeth, and with a grin on his face got down on his knees and held his mouth near the bars of Sam's cage. The rooster plucked out the grain of corn, and Bob, watching the performance, began to prance about in jealous rage. "Never you mind, Bob," said the old man, getting up and dusting his knees. "I know your tricks. Held one out to you that way not long ago, and I wish I may never stir agin if you didn't take a crack at my eye, and if I hadn't ducked I'd be one-eyed right now. But they are callin' us to breakfast. Bound to interfere with a man one way or another."

[52]

It was with great care that Alf prepared himself to go with me to the General's house. Out under a tree in the yard he placed a mirror on a chair and there he sat and shaved himself. Then he went upstairs to put on a suit of clothes which never had been worn, and anon I heard him calling his mother to help him find buttons and neckwear that had been misplaced. And he shouted to me not to be impatient, that he was doing the best he could. Impatient! I was sitting in the passage, leaning back against the wall, and near the steps Guinea stood, looking far out over the ravine. She had donned a garb of bright calico, with long, green-stemmed flowers stamped upon it, and I thought that of all the dresses I had ever beheld this was the most beautiful and becoming. She hummed a tune and looking about pretended to be surprised to see me sitting there, and for aught I know the astonishment might have been real, for I had made no noise in placing my chair against the wall.

"I ought not to be humming a dance tune on Sunday," she said, stepping back and standing against the opposite wall, with her hands behind her.

"I don't see how the day can make music harmful," I replied.

"The day can't make music harmful," she rejoined. "But I can't sing. Sometimes when I can't express what I am thinking about I hum it. How long are you and Alf going to be away?"

[53]

"As long as it suits him," I answered. "I have decided to have no voice as to the length of our stay."

"Then you are simply going to accommodate him. How kind of you. And have you always so much consideration for others? If you have you may find your patience strained if you stay here."

"To stand any strain that may be placed upon our patience is a virtue," I remarked—sententious pedagogue—and she lifted her hands, clasped them behind her head, looked at me and laughed, a music sweet and low. Just then Alf came out upon the passage, looking down at himself, first one side and then the other; and it was with a feeling of close kinship to envy that I regarded his new clothes. He apologized for having kept me waiting so long, but in truth I could have told him that I should have liked to wait there for hours, looking at the graceful figure of that girl, standing with her hands clasped behind her brown head.

The distance was not great and we had decided to walk, and across a meadow, purpling with coming bloom, we took a nearer way. I said to Alf that one might think that he was a stranger at the General's house, and he replied: "In one way I am. I have been there many a time, it is true, but always to help do something."

"Is the family so exclusive, then?" I asked.

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"Oh, they are as friendly as any people you ever saw, but, of course, I naturally place them high above me. The old General doesn't appear to know that I have grown to be a man; always talks to me as if I were a boy—wants to know what father's doing and all that sort of thing. He doesn't give a snap what father's doing."

"And the girl. How does she talk to you?" It was several moments before he answered me.

"I was just trying to think," he said. "To tell you the truth, I don't know how she talks to me. I can't recall anything she has ever said to me. She calls me Alf and I call her Miss Millie, and we laugh at some fool thing and that's about all there is to it. But I know that the old man would never be willing for me to marry her. He is looking pretty high for her or he wouldn't have spent so much money on her education."

"But, of course, the girl will have something to say," I suggested.

"I don't know as to that," he replied; "but, of course, I hope so. You can't tell about girls—at least, I can't. The old General married rather late in life and has but two children. His wife died several years ago. Chydister, the boy, or, rather, the man—for he's about my age—is off at a medical college. He doesn't strike me as being so alfired smart, but they say that he's got learning away up in G. The old man says that he is going to make him the best doctor in the whole country, if colleges can do it, and I reckon they can. He and I have always got along pretty well; he used to stay at our house a good deal."

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We crossed the creek, by leaping from one stone to another, and pursued a course along a rotting rail fence, covered with vines. And from over in the low ground came the "squish" of the cows as they strode through the rank and sappy clover. We crossed a hill whereon stood a deserted negro "quarter"—the moldering mark of a life that is now dreamy and afar off—and after crossing another valley slowly ascended the rounding bulge of ground, capped by the home of the General. Alf had begun to falter and hang back, and when I sought gently to encourage him he remarked: "But you must remember that this is the first time that I have ever been here with new clothes on, and I want to tell you that this makes a big difference."

"It has been some time since I went anywhere with new clothes on," I replied, which set him laughing; but his merriment was shut off when I opened the gate. Behind the house, where the ground sloped toward the orchard, there were a number of cabins, old, but not deserted, for negro children were playing about the doors and from somewhere within came the low drone of a half-religious, half-cornshucking melody. An old dog got up from under a tree, but, repenting of the exertion, lay down again; a turkey loudly gobbled, a peacock croaked, and a tall, bulky, old man came out upon the porch.

"Walk right in," he called, and shouting back into the hallway he commanded some one to bring out three chairs. And even before we had ascended the stone steps the command had been obeyed by a negro boy. "Glad to meet you, sir," he said when Alf had introduced me. "You have come to teach the school, I believe. Old man Perdue was over and told me about it. Sit down. What's your father doing, Alf?"

"Can't do anything to-day," Alf answered, glancing at me.

"I suppose not. All the folks well? Glad to hear it," he added before Alf could answer him. "It's been pretty wet, but it's drying up all right."

He wore a dressing gown, befigured with purple gourds, was bare-headed and I thought that he wore a wig, for his hair was thick and was curled under at the back of his neck. His face, closely shaved, was full and red; his lips were thick and his mouth was large. I could see that he was of immense importance, a dominant spirit of the Old South, and my reading told me that his leading ancestor had come to America as the master of a Virginia plantation.

"Henry!" the old General called. "Fetch me my pipe. Henry!"

"Comin'," a voice cried from within. His pipe was brought and when it had been lighted with a coal which Henry carried in the palm of his hand, rolling it about from side to side, the General puffed for a few moments and then, looking at me, asked if I found school-teaching to be a very profitable employment.

"The money part of it has been but of minor consideration," I answered. "My aim is to become a lawyer, and I am teaching school to help me toward that end."

He cleared his throat with a loud rasp. "I remember," said he, "that a man came here once from the North with pretty much the same idea. It was before the war. We got him up a school, and by the black ooze in the veins of old Satan, it wasn't long before he was trying to persuade the negroes to run away from us. I had a feather bed that wasn't in use at the time, and old Mills over here had a first-rate article of tar on hand, and when we got through with the gentleman he looked like an arctic explorer. Where are you from, sir?"

I told him, and then he asked: "The name is all right, and the location is good. My oldest brother knew a Captain Hawes in the Creek war."

"He was my grandfather," I replied. He looked at me, still pulling at his pipe, and said: "Then, sir, I am, indeed, glad to see you. Alf, what's your father doing?"

"Nothing, sir; it's Sunday," Alf answered, blushing. The old General looked at him, cleared his throat and said: "Yes, yes. Folks all well?"

I heard the door open and close and I saw Alf move, even as his father had moved when he came upon me in the road. I heard light foot-falls in the hall, and then out stepped a girl. She smiled and nodded at Alf and the General introduced me to her. Alf got up, almost tumbled out of his chair and asked her to sit down. "Oh, no, keep your seat," she said. "I'm not going to stay but a minute." She walked over to a post and, leaning against it, turned and looked back at us. She wore a flower in her hair, and in her hand she held a calacanthus bud. She was rather small, with a petulant sort of beauty, but I did not think that she could be compared with Guinea, for all of Alf's raving over her. Her cheeks were dimpled, and well she knew it, for she smiled whenever anything was said, and when no word had been spoken she smiled at the silence.

"Alf, what has become of Guinea?" she asked. "It seems an age since I saw her."

"She was over here last, I think," Alf answered.

"Ahem—m—" came from the General. "You'll be counting meals on each other, like the Yankees, after a while," he said. "Why don't you quit your foolishness; and if you want to see each other, go and see. I don't know what your feelings are in the matter, sir," he added, turning to me, "but I don't see much good in this so-called public school system. And of all worthless things under heaven it is a negro that has caught up a smattering of education. God knows he's trifling enough at best, but teach him to read and he's utterly worthless. I sent a negro to the postoffice some time ago, and he came along back with my newspaper spread out before him, reading it on the horse. And if it hadn't been for Millie I would have ripped the hide off him."

"He didn't know any better," the girl spoke up. "Poor thing, you scared him nearly to death."

"Yes, and I immediately gave him the best coat I had to square myself, not with him, but with myself," said the old man. "But I hold that if the negro, or anyone else, for that matter, is to be a servant, let him be a servant. I don't want a man to plow for me simply because he can read. Confound him, I don't care whether he can read or not. I want him to plow. When I choose my friends it is another matter. Your father go to church to-day, Alf?"

"I don't know, sir," Alf answered, moving about in his chair, and then in his embarrassment he got up and stammeringly begged the girl to sit down.

"Why, what's all this trouble and nonsense about," the General asked, looking first at the girl and then at Alf. "'Od zounds, there oughtn't to be any trouble about a chair. Fifty of them back in there."

Alf dropped back and the girl laughed with such genuine heartiness that I thought much better of her, but still I did not think that she was at all to be compared with Guinea. The General yelled for Henry to bring him another coal, and when his pipe had been relighted he turned to me and said: "You don't find the old North State as she once was, sir. Ah, Lord, the ruin that has gone on in this world since I can remember. And yet they say we are becoming more civilized. Zounds, sir, do you call it civilization to see hundreds of fields turned out to persimmon bushes and broom sedge? Look over there," he added, waving his hand. "I have seen the time when that was almost a garden. What do you want?" The last remark was addressed to the negro boy who had suddenly appeared. "Dinner? Yes, yes. Come, Mr. Hawes, and you, Alf. This way. Get out!" A dog had come between him and the door. "Devilish dogs are about to take the place, but they are no account, not one of them. Lie around here and let the rabbits eat up the pea vines. Even the dogs have degenerated along with everything else."

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I walked with the General, and, looking back, I was pleased to see that Alf had summoned courage enough to follow along beside the girl. We were shown into a long dining-room, with a great height of ceiling. The house had been built in a proud old day, and all about me I noted a dim and faded elegance. The General bade us sit down, and I noticed that his tone was softened. He mumbled a blessing over a great hunk of mutton and, broadly smiling upon me, told me that he was glad to welcome me to his board. "The school-teacher," said he, "modifies and refines our native crudeness. Yes, sir, you have a great work, a work that you may be proud of. Had education more broadly prevailed, had the people North and South better understood one another, there would have been no bloody disruption. Now, gentlemen, I must request you to help yourselves, remembering that such as I have is freely yours. When age comes on apace there is nothing more inspiring than to see the young and the vigorous gathered about us. And it is thus that the evening of life is brightened. Henry, pass the bread to Mr. Jucklin, and the peas, the very first of this backward season, I assure you. Mr. Hawes, can you recall the face of your noble grandfather?"

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"No, General; he died many years before I can remember."

"A pity, I assure you, for what is more spurring to our ambition than to recall the features of a noted relative. Some of this lettuce, Mr. Hawes? A sleepy, but withal a soothing, dish. My daughter, I must request you to help yourself. Charming weather we have, Mr. Hawes, with the essence of youth and hope in the air."

How completely had his manner changed. His eyes, which had seemed hard and cold when he had waved his hand and looked out over the yellow sedge grass, were beaming now with kindly light, and his voice, which I had thought was coarse and gruff, was vibrant with notes of stirring sympathy. Alf, heartened by the old gentleman's streaming courtesy, spoke a low word to the girl who sat beside him, and she nodded, smiling, but with one ear politely lent to the familiar talk of her father.

After dinner we were shown into the library, wherein were many law books, and the General, catching the longing glance that I shot at them, turned with bewitching patronage, bowed and said:

"You have expressed your determination to become acquainted with the law and to practice the wiles of its logic; and so, if you can make no better arrangements, I pray, sir, that you make this room your office."

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Alf's eyes bulged out at this, doubtless looking upon me as the most fortunate man alive, and in my country bluntness I blurted: "You are the kindest man I ever saw."

In this room we talked for two hours or more, and the afternoon—or the evening, as we say in the South—was well pronounced when I declared that it was time for us to go. Alf looked up surprised, and in a voice sad with appeal, he asked if it were very late. I could have given him the exact time, but was afraid to take out my grandfather's watch—afraid that the General and his daughter might think that I was seeking to make a display, so I simply said: "Yes, time that we were going."

"Don't be in a hurry, gentlemen," the General protested; "don't let a trivial matter rob us of your society."

Alf pulled back, but I insisted, and so we took our leave. The old gentleman came out upon the porch with us. "Henry!" he yelled, turning about, "who the devil left that gate open? Go and shut it, you lazy scoundrel. Those infamous new-comers over on the creek take my place for a public highway. And I hope to be hung up by the heels if I don't fill the last one of them full of shot."

"I'll never forget you," Alf remarked as we walked along, down through the meadow. "You have stood by me, and you bet your life I don't forget such things. Of course, I have known the old man ever since I can remember, but he never treated me so well before. And when the time

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comes, if I can get him in that dining-room I don't believe he'll refuse me. It's a blamed big pity that I can't talk as you can, but you just stick to me and I will talk all right after a while."

"Oh, I'll stick to you," I replied, "but I didn't notice that I talked in a way to amount to anything. I felt as stupid as an ass looks. What did the girl say? You were talking to her very earnestly over by the window."

"To save my life, I can't recall anything she said, Bill, but I know that every word she spoke was dripped honey. I'd almost give my life to take her in my arms and hug her just once. Ever feel that way about a girl?"

I was beginning to feel just exactly that way, but I told him no, whereupon he said: "But you may one of these days, and whenever you do, you call on me to help you, and I'll do it, I don't care who the girl is or how high up she may stand. Many a night I have lain in bed and wished that Millie might be going along the road by herself and that about three men would come up and say something out of the way to her, just so I could spring out and wipe the face of the earth with them. I'm not as big as you are, but for her I'll bet I can whip any three men you ever saw. By the way, don't even speak Millie's name at home. The folks don't know that I'm in love with her. There's one thing that stands in my favor."

"What is it?" I asked. He looked up at me, but was silent, and becoming interested by his manner I was about to repeat the question, when he said: "I'm not at liberty to speak of it yet. You've noticed that Guinea has more education than I have. Well, her education has something to do with the point that's in my favor, but I've said too much already and we'd better drop the subject." [64]

I was burning to know more, for I recalled the change of manner that had come over Mr. Jucklin at the time he spoke of having sent his daughter away to school, and I was turning this over and over in my mind, when Alf said: "A young fellow named Dan Stuart often goes to see Millie, and I don't know how much she thinks of him, but some of his people are high flyers, and that may have an influence in his favor. Doc Etheredge, out here, is his cousin, and old man Etheredge owned nearly a hundred and fifty negroes at one time. But when that girl stands up at the altar to marry some one else, they will find me there putting in my protest."

When we reached home I found Guinea sitting under a tree, reading, and I had joined her when the old man called me. Looking about I saw him standing at the end of the house, beckoning to me. "I want to see you a minute," he said, as I approached him. I wondered whether he was again going to show me his chickens, and it was a relief when he conducted me in an opposite direction. He looked back to see if we were far enough away, and then, coming closer to me, he said: "This is the way I came to do it."

"Do what?" I asked, not over pleased that he should have called upon me to leave the girl.

"Wallow him, the old General. He claimed that my hogs had been gettin' into his field, and I told him that I didn't feel disposed to keep my hogs up when everybody else's were runnin' at large, and then he called me a scoundrel and we clinched. I took him so quick that he wasn't prepared for me, and I give a sort of a hem stich and down he went, right in the middle of the road. And there I was right on top of him. He didn't say a word, while I was wallowin' him, but when I let him up, he looked all round and then said: 'Lim Jucklin, if I thought anybody was lookin' I'd kill you right here. You are the first man that ever wallowed a Lundsford and lived, and the novelty of the thing sorter appeals to me. You know that I'm not afraid of the devil, and keep your mouth shut about this affair, and we'll let it drap.' And he meant just what he said, and I did keep my mouth shut, not because I was afraid of his hurtin' me, but because I was sorry to humiliate him. Ever hear of John Mortimer Lacey? Well, shortly after that him and Lundsford fit a duel and Lacey went to New Orleans and died there. So, don't say anything about it." [65]

"About what? Lacey's going to New Orleans and dying there?"

"No, cadfound it all, about my wallerin' the General."

"I won't," I answered, and then I thought to touch upon a question that had taken a fast hold upon me. "By the way, you spoke of having sent your daughter to school at Raleigh——"

"The devil I did! Well, what's that got to do with you or with anyone else, for that matter? I'll be—you must excuse me, sir," he quickly added, bowing. "I'm not right bright in my mind at times. Pecked right at my eye, and if I hadn't dodged I'd be one-eyed this minute—yes, I would, as sure as you are born. But here, let us drop that wallowin' business and that other affair with it, and not mention it again. Don't know why I done it in the first place, but I reckon it was because I'm not right bright in my mind at times. You'll excuse my snap and snarl, won't you? Go on back there, now, and talk about your books." [66]

"I am the one to ask pardon, Mr. Jucklin. I ought to have had better sense than to touch upon something that didn't concern me. I guess there must be a good deal of the brute in me, and it seems to me that I spend nearly half my time regretting what I did the other half."

"Why, Lord love your soul, man, you haven't done nothin'. But you draw me close to you when you talk of regrettin' things. I have spent nearly all my life in putty much that fix. After you've lived in this neighborhood a while you'll hear that old Lim has been in many a fight, but you'll never hear that anybody has ever whupped him. You may hear, though, that he has rid twenty mile of a cold night to beg the pardon of a man that he had thrashed. We'll shake hands right

here, and if you say the word we'll go right now and make them chickens fight. No, it's Sunday. Kiver to kiver, you understand. Go on back there, now."

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With Guinea I sat and saw the sun go down behind a yellow gullied hill. From afar up and down the valley came the lonesome "pig-oo-ee!" of the farmers, calling their hogs for the evening's feed. We heard the flutter of the chickens, flying to roost, and the night hawk heard them, too, for his eager, hungry scream pierced the still air. On a smooth old rock at the verge of the ravine the girl's brother stood, arms folded, looking out over the darkening low land, and from within the house, where Mrs. Jucklin sat alone, there came a sad melody: "Come, thou fount of every blessing."

The girl's eyes were upward turned. "Every evening comes with a new mystery," she said. "We think we know what to expect, but when the evening comes it is different from what it was yesterday."

"And it is thus that we are enabled to live without growing tired of the world and of ourselves," I replied. "And I wish that I had come like the evening—with a mystery," I added.

I heard her musical cluck and even in the dusk I could see the light of her smile. "But why should you want to come with a mystery?" she asked.

"To inspire those about me with an interest regarding me. Even the stray dog is more interesting than the dog that is vouched for by the appearance of his master. I never saw a pack-peddler that I did not long to know something of his life, his emotions, the causes that sent him adrift, but I can't find this interest in a man whom I understand."

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She laughed again. "But haven't you some little mystery connected with your life?" she asked.

"None. I have read myself into a position a few degrees above the clod-hopper, but that's all. If there were a war, I would be a soldier, but as there is no war, I am going to be a lawyer."

"It would be nice, I should think, to stand up and make speeches," she said. "But wouldn't you rather be a doctor?"

I don't know why I said it, but I replied that I hated doctors, and she did not laugh at this, but was silent. I waited for her to say something, but she uttered not a word. It was now dark, and I could just discern Alf's figure, standing on the rock. The song in the house was hushed.

"I don't really mean that I hate doctors," I said, seeking to right myself, if, indeed, I had made a mistake; and she simply replied: "Oh." "I mean that I should not like to practice medicine," I added, and again she said: "Oh." A lamp had been lighted in the sitting-room, and thither we went, to join Old Lim and his wife, who were warm in the discussion of a religious question. The Book said that whatever a man's hands found to do he must do, and, therefore, he held that it was right to do almost anything on Sunday.

"Even unto the fighting of chickens?" his wife asked.

"Oh, I knowed what you was a-gittin' at. Knowed it while you was a-beatin' the bush all round. When a woman begins to beat the bush, it's time to look out, Mr. Hawes. I came in here just now, and I knowed in a minute that wife, there, was goin' to accuse me of havin' a round with Sam and Bob, but I pledge you my word that I didn't. Just went in and exchanged a few words with 'em. Man's got a right to talk to his friends, I reckon; but if he ain't, w'y, it's time to shut up shop."

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Alf came in and, with Guinea, sang an old song, and their father sat there with the tears shining in his eyes. He leaned over, and I heard him whisper to his wife: "Did have just a mild bit of a round, Susan, and I hope that you and the Lord will forgive me for it. If you do I know the Lord will. I'm an old liar, Susan."

"No, you are not, Lemuel," she answered, in a low voice. "You are the best man in the world, and everybody loves you."

I saw him squeeze her wrinkled hand.

I could not sleep, but in a strange disturbance tossed about. Alf was talking in a dream. I got up and sat for a time at the window, looking out toward the gullied hill that had turned out the light of the sun. On the morrow my work was to begin. And what was to be the result? Was it intended that I should reach the bar and win renown, or had I been listed for the life of a pedagogue? Was my love for the girl so new that it dazzled me? No, it was now a passion, wounded and sore. But why? By that little word, "Oh." I put on my clothes, tip-toed down stairs and walked about the yard. The moon was full, low above the scrub oaks. A streak of shimmering light ran down toward the spring, and over it I slowly strode. I heard the water gurgling from under the moss-covered spring-house, and I saw the leaf-shadow patch-work moving to and fro over the smooth slabs of stone. Long I stood there, looking at the pictures, listening to the music; and turning back toward the house, I had gone some distance when I chanced to look up, and then, thrilled, I slowly sank upon my knees. At one of the large windows, in the northeast end of the house, stood Guinea, in a loose, white robe, the light of the full moon falling upon her. Behind her head her hands were clasped, and she stood there like a marble cross. Her face was upward turned, and the low yellow moon was bronzing her brown hair—a glorified marble cross, with a crown of gold, I thought, as I bowed in my worship. My forehead touched the path, and when I lifted my head—the cross was gone.

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CHAPTER VI.

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We ate breakfast early the next morning, while the game cocks were yet crowing in their coop. When I went down I heard the jingling of trace chains, and I knew that the old man was making ready to plow the young corn. I had insisted upon walking to the school-house, telling Alf that all I wanted was to know the direction, but he declared that it was no more than just that I should be driven over the first morning of the session. So, together we went on the buck-board. Guinea had laughingly told me not to be afraid of the creek, that the large boys were at home, plowing, and as we were skirting the gullied hill I glanced back and saw her standing in the yard, looking after us. The road lay mostly through the woods, with many a turn and dip down among thick bushes to cross a crooked stream. Sometimes we came upon small clearings, where tired-looking men were grubbing new-land for tobacco, and I remember that a half-grown boy, with a sullen look, threw a chunk at us and viciously shouted that if we would stop a minute he would whip both of us. I imagined that he was kept from school by the imperious demand of the tobacco patch, and I sympathized with him in his wrath against mankind. A little further along we came within sight of an old log house, and then the laughter of children reached our ears. We had arrived at the place where my work was to begin. Alf put me down, and, saying that he must get back home, drove away; and a hush fell upon the children as I turned toward the house. Inside I found a cow-bell, and when I had rung the youngsters to their duties, I made them a short speech, telling them that I was sure we should become close friends. I had some difficulty in arranging them into classes, for it appeared that each child had brought an individual book. But I was glad to see that old McGuffy's readers prevailed, for in many parts of the South they had been supplanted by books of flimsy text, and now to see them cropping up gave me great pleasure. There they were, with the same old lessons that had fired me with ambition, the words of Shakspeare and the speeches of great Americans.

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By evening my work was well laid out, and as I took my way homeward, with Guinea in my mind, there was a strong surge within my breast, the leaping of a determination to win her.

As I neared home, coming round by the spring, I saw the girl running down the path, the picture of a young deer, and how that picture did remain with me, and how on an occasion held by the future, it was to be vivified.

"Oh, you have got back safe and dry," she cried, halting upon seeing me. "Why, I thought you would come back dripping. No, I didn't," she quickly added. "Don't you know I told you that all the large boys were at work? Wait until I get the jar of butter and I'll go to the house with you."

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"Let me get it for you," I replied, turning back with her.

"You can't get it," she said, laughing; "you'll fall into the spring. But, then, you might hold it as a remembrance to temper the severity of the ducking yet to come."

"Miss Guinea," I made bold to say, standing at the door of the spring-house, "do you know that you talk with exceeding readiness?"

"Oh, do you mean that I am always ready to talk? I didn't think that of you."

I reached out and took the jar from her. "You know I didn't mean that," I said; and, looking up, with her eyes full of mischief, she asked: "What did you mean, then?"

"I mean that you talk easily and brightly—like a book."

"You'd better let me have the jar," she said, holding out her hands. "I'm afraid that you'll fall and break it, after that. You know that a man is never so likely to slip as he is when he's trying to compliment a woman."

"No, I don't know that, but I do know that a Southern woman ought to know the difference between flattery and a real compliment."

"Why a Southern woman?" she asked. She looked to me as if she were really in earnest and I strove to answer her earnestly.

"Because Southern women are not given to flirting; because they place more reliance in what a man says, and——"

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"I think you've got yourself tangled up," she said, laughing at me, and I could but acknowledge that I had; and then it was, in the sweetest of tones, that she said: "But if I had thought you really were tangled I would not have spoken of it. Now tell me what you were going to say, and I promise to listen like a mouse in a corner."

"No, I'm afraid to attempt it again." I was in advance of her, for the path was narrow and the dew was now gathering on the grass, but she shot past me, and, looking back, said beseechingly: "Won't you, please?" The sun was long since down and the twilight was darkening, but I could see the eagerness on her face. "Do, please, for I like to hear such things. I'm nothing but the simplest sort of a girl, as easy to amuse as a child, and you must remember that you are a great big man, from out in the world."

"Come on with that butter!" the old man shouted, and with a laugh the girl ran away from me.

I wondered whether she were playing with me, but I could not believe that she was. In those eyes there might be mischief, but there could not be deceit.

Bed time came immediately after supper. The old man did not go out to look after his chickens, so tired was he, and there was no song in the sitting-room. I sat in the passage, where the moonlight fell, and hoped that the girl might join me, but she did not, and I went to my room, where I found Alf, half undressed, sitting on the edge of the bed. I had sat down and had filled my pipe before he took notice of me, but when I began to search about for a light he looked up and remarked: "Matches on the corner of your library."

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"Here's one," I replied, and had lighted the pipe when he said: "Saw her to-day, Bill—saw her riding along the road with Dan Stuart. She didn't even look over in the field toward me, but he waved his hand, and I saw more hatred than friendship in it. Blame it all, Bill, I'm not going to follow a plow through the dirt all the time. I can do something better, and after this crop's laid by I'm going to do it. I don't think that she wants to marry a farmer."

"What does Stuart do?" I asked. "How can he afford to be riding about when other men are at work?"

"Oh, I guess he's pretty well fixed. He's got a lot of negroes working for him and he raises a good deal of tobacco. No, sir, she didn't even look toward me."

"But haven't you passed her house when you were almost afraid to look toward the porch when you knew that she was standing there?"

"Of course I have!" he cried. "Yes, sir, I've done that many a time—just pretended that I had business everywhere else but on that porch. Ain't it strange how love does take hold of a fellow? It gets into his heart and his heart shoots it to the very ends of his fingers; it gets into his eyes, and he can't see anything but love, love everywhere. It may catch you one of these days, Bill, and when it does, you'll know just how I feel."

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I looked at this strong and honest man, this man idolizing an image that he had enshrined in his soul, and I thought to tell him that, with my forehead touching the ground, I had worshiped his sister, but no, it was too delicate a confidence—I would keep it to myself.

We were astir in the dawn the next day, ate breakfast by the light of a lamp, but Guinea was not at the table, and I loitered there after the others were gone out, hoping to see her, but she did not come, and then I remembered that Mrs. Jucklin was also absent, and that the services of the meal had been performed by a negro woman.

When I returned at evening, with the droning of the children's voices echoing in my ears, it seemed to me that I had been gone an age. I came again by the spring, but Guinea was not there, but I heard her singing as I drew near to the house. She was in the passage, gleefully dancing, with a broom for a partner. When she saw me she threw down the broom and ran away, laughing; but she came back when she found that I had really discovered her. "You must think that I am the silliest creature in the world," she said, "and I don't know that I can dispute you. Millie Lundsford has just gone home. She and I have been going through with our old-time play, when, with window curtains wound about us to represent long dresses, and with brooms to personate the brave knights who had rescued us from the merciless Turks, we danced in the castle. And I was just taking a turn with a duke when you came. What a knight you would have been."

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"And what an inspiration I should have had to drive me onward and to set my soul aflame with ambition," I replied, looking into her eyes.

It must have been my look rather than my words that threw a change over her; my manner must have told her that I was becoming too serious for one who had known her so short a time, but be that as it may, a change had come upon her. She was no longer a girl, gay and airy, with a romping spirit, but a woman, dignified.

"Has your work been hard to-day?" she asked.

"It has been more or less stupid, as it always is," I answered, slowly walking with her toward the dining-room.

When we had sat down to the table Alf came in with his new clothes on, and whispering to me when his sister had turned to say something to her mother, he said: "Got something to tell you when we go up stairs."

Mrs. Jucklin was afraid that I did not eat enough; she had heard that brain workers required much food; her uncle, who had been a justice of the peace, had told her that it made but small difference what he ate while engaged in getting out saw logs, but that when he began to meditate over a case in court he required the most stimulating provender. "And now," she said, "if there's anything that I can fix for you, do, please, let me know what it is. Now, Guinea, what are you titterin' at? And that negro woman doesn't half do her work, either. I declare to goodness I'd rather do everything on the place than to see her foolin' round as if she's afraid to take hold of anything; and her fingers full of brass rings, too. I jest told her that she'd have to take 'em off, that I didn't want to eat any brass. Laws a massy, niggers are jest as different from what they was as day is from night. Talk to me about freedom helpin' 'em. But the Lord knows best," she added, with a sigh of resignation. "If He wants 'em to be free, why, no one ought to complain, and goodness knows I don't. Yes, they ought to be free," she went on after a moment of reflection.

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"Oh, it was a sin and a shame to sell 'em away from their children. But it's all over now, thank God. Now, I wonder where your father is, Alf. Never saw sich a man in my life. Looks jest like he begrudges time enough to eat. There he comes now."

The old man came in, covered with dirt. "Alf, is the shot gun loaded?" he asked, brushing himself.

"Yes, sir. Why?" We looked at the old fellow, wondering what he meant, but he made no explanation. Alf repeated his question. "Why?" And the old man exclaimed: "Oh, nothin'. Jest goin' to blow that red steer's head off, that's all. Confound his hide. I wish I may die this minute if I ever had sich a jolt in my life. Went along by him, not sayin' a word to him, and if he didn't up and let me have both heels I'm the biggest liar that ever walked a log. Hadn't done a thing to him, mind you; walkin' along 'tendin' to my own business, when both of his heels flew at me. And I'll eat a bite and then go and blow his head off."

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"Oh, Limuel," his wife protested; "a body to hear you talk would think that you don't do anything at all but thirst for blood. If the Lord puts it in the mind of a steer to kick you, why, it ain't the poor creeter's fault."

The old man snorted. "And if the Lord puts it in my mind to kill the steer it ain't my fault, muther. Conscience alive, what are we all dressed up so about?" he added, looking at Alf. "So much stile goin' on that a body don't know whuther he's a shuckin' corn or is at a picnic. Blow his head off as soon as I eat a bite."

I could see that Alf was anxious to tell me something, and immediately after supper I went up stairs with him. He took off his coat, and after dusting it carefully hung it up and sat down. He looked at me as if he were delighted with the curiosity that I was showing, and then as he reached for his pipe he began: "I was a-plowing out in the field about three hours by sun, when I saw Millie come out of the valley like a larkspur straightening up in the spring of the year, and after waiting a while, but always with my eye on the house, I quit work, slipped up here and dressed myself so as to be ready to walk home with her. I was rather afraid to ask her at first, knowing that this was breaking away from all my former strings and announcing my determination of keeping company with her, out and out, and I don't know exactly how I got at it, but I did, and the first thing I knew I was walking down the road with her. And this time I do remember what she said, but there wasn't anything so encouraging in it. The fact is she had something to tell me about you."

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"About me? What can she know about me? Probably she was giving you her father's estimate of me."

"No, but somebody else's estimate," he replied. "You recollect a fellow named Bentley?"

"Bentley? Of course, I do. We lived on adjoining farms, and I have a sore cause to remember him. But how could she have heard anything about him?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Mrs. Bentley is old man Aimes' sister, and she's over here now on a visit, and when she heard that you were teaching school in the neighborhood she declared that it would be a mercy if you didn't kill somebody before you got through. And then she told that you had waylaid her son one night and come mighty nigh killing him. She said that she was perfectly willing to forgive you until she saw the scar left on her son's forehead, and a woman can't very well forgive a scar, you know. Old Aimes and all his sons are slaughter-house dogs, and they appeared to take up a hatred against you at once. Don't you remember as we drove to the school a boy threw a chunk at us as we were passing a clearing and swore that he could whip us both? Well, that was the youngest Aimes, and the trick now is, as I understand it, to send him to school with instructions to do pretty much as he pleases and to take revenge on you in case you whip him. Millie said that her father swore that it was a shame and that if you wanted any help from him you could get it. Nobody likes the Aimes family. Came in here several years ago, and have been kicking up disturbances ever since."

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I told Alf why I had snatched Bentley off his horse, nor in the least did I shield myself. I even called myself a brute. But I told him of the season of sorrow and humiliation through which I had passed, that I had insisted upon giving Bentley the only valuable thing I possessed, that against his mother's command I had striven to work for him during the time he was laid up, and that I had even plowed his field at night.

"I don't know that you were so far wrong in beating him in the first place," said Alf, "but if you were, your course afterward should have more than atoned for it. By gracious, I feel that if some one would plow for me I'd let him maul me until he got tired. Millie said that she was afraid that something might happen to get you into trouble. She seemed a good deal concerned about it, for I reckon she's got the noblest and purest heart of any human being now in the world, and she said that she thought that if you were to give up the school her father could make some arrangements for you to study law in Purdy, the county seat. I told her that you would be delighted to quit teaching under ordinary circumstances, but that just at present you'd teach or die. Was I right?"

"Surely, and I thank you for having defined my position. I wonder if we can commit an innocent error, an error that will lie asleep and never rise up to confront us? Now, I shall have a fine reputation in this neighborhood."

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"Oh, don't let that worry you, Bill. It'll come out all right. I'd be willing to have almost any sort of name if it would influence that girl to talk in my favor as she did in yours. I don't know what to think; somehow I can't find out her opinion of me. I slyly spoke about that fellow, Dan Stuart, but she didn't say a word. Confound it, Bill, can't a woman see that she's got a fellow on the gridiron? They can't even bear to see a hog suffer, but they can smile and look unconcerned while a man is writhing over the coals. I don't understand it."

"Nor do I, Alf, but I've been over the coals—I mean that I can well imagine what it is to be there."

He lay down, and with his head far back on the pillow, looked upward as if with his gaze he would bore through the roof and reach the stars. He was silent for a long time, but when I had blown out the light and had gone to bed, thinking that he was asleep, I heard him muttering.

"Talking to me, Alf?" He turned over with a sigh and answered: "No, not particularly. I was just wondering whether a man ought to try to outlive a disappointment in love or kill himself and end the matter. We are told that God is love, and if God is denied to a man, what's the use of trying to struggle on? I suppose the advantage of knowledge is that it enables a man to settle such questions at once, but as I am not learned, having grabbed but a little here and there, I have to worry along with a thing that another man might dismiss at once. What's your idea, Bill?"

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"My idea is that a man ought never to give up; but, of course, there are times when he is so completely beaten that to fight longer is worse than useless. But learning cannot settle questions wherein the heart is involved. The philosopher may kill himself in despair, while the ignorant man may continue to fight and may finally win. The other day you spoke of something that was in your favor—something that has to do with your sister's education. Would you think it impertinent if I ask you what that something is?"

"No, I'd not think that," he answered. I had risen up in bed and was straining my eyes, trying to find his face, to study his expression, but darkness lay between us. "Not impertinent in the least, but I can't tell you just now. After a while, if you stay here long enough, you'll know all about it. Bill, if that young Aimes comes to school and begins any of his pranks, take him down and I'll stand by you, and people that know me well will tell you that I mean what I say. The old man has never been whipped yet, I mean my father, and nobody ever saw his son knock under."

CHAPTER VII.

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The next morning, when with quick stride, to make up for an anxious lingering in the passage way, I hastened toward the school, I heard the gallop of a horse, and turning about, saw old General Lundsford coming like a dragoon. Upon seeing me he drew in his horse and had sobered him to a walk by the time he reached a brook, on the brink of which I halted to let him pass.

"Why, good morning, Mr. Hawes. Beautiful day, sir. I am going your way a short distance, and if you'll get up here behind me, sir, you shall ride."

I thanked him, telling him that I much preferred to walk. "All right, sir, and I will get down and walk with you until duty, sir," he said sonorously, with a bow; "until duty, sir, shall call us apart."

I urged him not to get down, telling him that I could easily keep pace with his horse, but he dismounted even before crossing the stream, preferring, he said, with another bow, to take his chances with me. And thus we walked onward, the horse following close, now and then "nosing" his master's shoulder to show his preference and his loyalty. The season was mellowing and the old gentleman was airily dressed in white, low shoes neatly polished and a Panama hat. He was delighted, he said, to hear that I was getting along so well with the school, and he knew that I would be of vast good to the community. "I have heard of the Aimes conspiracy," said he, "and I am glad that I met you, for I wanted to talk to you about it. The truth of it all is, not that you once larruped that fellow Bentley, but that old Aimes wishes to put a sly indignity upon me by misusing one who has been entertained at my house. That's the point, sir. He heard that I had given you countenance at my board, and what his sister afterward told him was an excuse for the exercise, sir, of his distemper. But, by—I came within one of swearing, sir. I used to curse like an overseer, but I joined the church not long ago, and I've been walking a tight rope ever since. But as I was about to say, you are not going to let those people humiliate you."

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"I am going to do my duty," I answered, "and my duty does not tell me to be humiliated."

"Good, sir; first-rate. As a general thing, we do not look for the highest spirit in a school-teacher—pardon my frankness, for, as you know, one who is dependent upon a whole community, one who seeks to please many and varied persons, is not as likely to exhibit that independence and vigor of action which is characteristic of the man who stands solely upon honor, with nothing to appease save his own idea of right. But I forgot. The grandson of Captain Hawes needs no such

homily. The Aimes family is a hard lot, sir, but a gentleman can at all times stand in smiling conquest above a tough. Scott Aimes, a burly scoundrel, and, therefore, the pet of his father, at one time threatened to chastize my son Chydister, who is now off at college. And I said not a word in reply, when my son told me of the threat. I merely pointed to a shot-gun above the library door and went on with my reading of the death notices in the newspaper. That gun is there now, sir, and whenever you want it, speak the word and it shall be yours."

I laughed to myself and thought that I must be getting on well with the old General—first the offer of his library and now of his gun—and I thanked him for the interest which he had shown in me, a mere stranger. "A well-bred Southerner is never a stranger in the South," said he. "We are held together by an affection stronger than any tie that runs from heart to heart in any other branch of the human family. But," he added, sadly shaking his head, "I fear that this affection is weakening. Our young men are becoming steeped in the strong commercial spirit of the North. I should like to continue this pleasant and elevating conversation, but here's where I am compelled to leave you."

"Can I assist you to mount?" I asked, hardly knowing what else to say. He shoved his hat back and looked at me in astonishment. "You are kind, sir, but I am not yet on the lift." But he instantly recognized that this was harsh, and with a broad smile he added: "Pardon me for my shortness of speech, but the truth is that a man who has spent much of his life in the saddle contemplates with horror the time when he must be helped to his seat."

"General, I am the one to ask pardon," I replied, bowing in my turn.

"Oh, no, I assure you!" he exclaimed, mounting his horse with more ease than I had expected to see. "It was your kindness of heart, sir; a courtesy, and though a courtesy may be a mistake, it is still a virtue. Look at that old field out there," he broke off. "Do you call that an advancement of civilization. By—the tight rope, again—it is desolation."

It seemed that while walking he had regarded me as his guest, but that now, astride his horse and I on foot, he looked upon me as a man whom he had simply met in the road.

"A return of prosperity," he said, gathering up his bridle rein, "a fine return, indeed. About another such a return and this infernal world won't be fit to live in. I wish you good morning, sir."

That very day there came to school the sullen-looking boy whom I had seen in the tobacco patch. I asked him his name and he answered that he had forgotten to bring it with him. "Perhaps," said I, "it would be well to go back and get it."

"If you want it wus'n I do I reckon you better go atter it."

This set the children to laughing. My humiliation was begun.

"I understand why you have come," said I, "and I must tell you that you must obey the rules if you stay here. What is your name?"

"Gibblits," he answered. The children laughed and he stood regarding me with a leer lurking in the corners of his evil-looking mouth.

"All right, Mr. Gibblits, where are your books?" He grinned at me and answered: "Ain't got none."

"Well, sit down over there and I'll attend to you after a while."

"Won't set down and won't be attended to."

"Well, then, I'll attend to you right now." I grabbed him by the collar, jerked him to me and boxed his jaws. He ran out howling when I turned him loose, and for a time he stood off in the woods, throwing stones at the house. The war was begun. And I expected to encounter the Aimes forces on my way home, but saw nothing of them as I passed within sight of the house. I hoped to see a look of sweet alarm on Guinea's face, when I should tell her of the danger that threatened me, and there was sweetness in her countenance, when I told her, though not a look of alarm, but a smile of amusement. Was it that she felt no interest in me? The other members of the family were much concerned, but that was no recompense for the girl's apparent indifference. The old man snorted, Mrs. Jucklin was so wrought upon that she strove to prepare me a soothing dish at supper, but Guinea remained undisturbed. I could not help but speak to Alf about it when we had gone up to our room. "Oh, you never can tell anything about her," he said. "It's not because she isn't scared, but because she hates to show a thing of that sort. I'm mighty sorry it has come about. But there's only one way out—fight out if they jump on you. I don't know how soon they intend to do anything, but I'll nose around and come over to the school this evening if I hear anything. Don't let it worry you; just put it down as a thing that couldn't be helped."

It did not worry me—the fact that I might be on the verge of serious trouble, did not; but the thought of Guinea's careless smile lay cold upon my heart, and all night I was restless under it. And when I went down stairs at dawn I met her in the passage way, carrying a light. She looked up at me, shielding the light with her hand to keep the breeze from blowing it out, and smiled, and in her smile there was no coolness, and yet there was naught to show me that she had passed an anxious night. Ah, love, we demand that you shall not only be happy, but miserable at our wish. We would dim your eye when our own is blurred; we would smother your heart when our own is heavy, and would pierce it with a pain. Upon her children this old world has poured the

wisdom of her gathered ages, and could we look from another sphere we might see the minds of great men twinkling like the stars, but the human heart is yet unschooled, yet has no range of vision, but chokes and sobs in its own emotion, as it did when the first poet stood upon a hill and cried aloud to an unknown God.

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Away across the valley and over the hills the peeping sun was a glaring scollop when I came out to take my course through the woods toward the school. I knew that the girl stood in the door behind me. Alf and the old man were already in the field; I could hear them talking to their horses; and Mrs. Jucklin was up stairs—Guinea and I were alone. I turned and looked at her and again she smiled.

"The world seems to be holding its breath, waiting for something to happen," she said. "To me it always appears so when there is a lull in the air just at sunrise."

"What a fanciful little creature you are," I replied.

"Little! Oh, you mustn't call me little. I'm taller than mother. I don't want to be little, although it is more appealing. I want to be commanding."

"But what can be more commanding than an appeal?" I asked.

"Yes, when the appeal is pitiful, but I don't want any one to pity me," she said, laughing. "You big folks have such a patronizing way. You don't look well this morning, Mr. Hawes. Is it because you have been worrying over those wretched Aimes boys? Won't you please forgive me?" she quickly added. "I don't know why I said that, for I ought to know that you are not afraid of them."

"I didn't sleep very well," I answered, "but I was not thinking of the Aimes boys. Shall I tell you what worried me?"

"Yes, surely."

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"It may require almost an unwarranted frankness on my part, but I will tell you. It seemed to me that——" I hesitated. "Go on," she said. "Well, it seemed that you were strangely unconcerned when I told you that I was likely to have trouble with those people."

She stood with her head resting against the door-facing. I looked hard at her, striving to catch some sign of emotion, but I saw no evidence of feeling; she was cool and reserved.

"I don't know why you should have thought that," she said. "Why should I be so uncharitable. I was very sorry that anything was likely to interrupt the school."

"Oh," I replied, and perhaps with some bitterness, "it really amounts to but little—the threat of those ruffians, I mean—and to speak about it almost puts me down as a fool. I hope you will forgive me."

I hastened away, with a senseless anger in my heart, and I think that it is well that I saw no member of the Aimes family that morning on my way to school.

Everything went forward as usual; play-time came, and the children shouted in the woods, and the hour for dismissal had nearly arrived when in stalked Alf with a shot-gun. He nodded at me and took a seat far to the rear of the room, as if careful lest he might interrupt the closing ceremonies. And when the last child was gone my friend came forward, shaking his head.

"What's the trouble now?" I asked, taking down my hat.

"Put your hat right back there, unless you want to wear it in the house," he said. "I have found out that those fellows are laying for you, and it won't be safe to start home now; we'll have to wait until dark. Oh, they'll get you sure if you go now. They have been to town, I understand, and have come back pretty well loaded up with whisky. Oh, they are as bold as lions now. But we'll fix them all right. We'll wait until dark and not go by the road, and to-morrow morning we'll go over and see what they've got to say."

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"Alf, I don't know how to express my thanks to you. You are running a great risk——"

"Don't mention that, Bill. You stood by me, you understand—walked right into the General's house with me, and I said to myself that if you ever got into a pinch that I'd be on hand and stand with you. Did you bring a pistol?"

"Yes, and I am very glad that I didn't meet one of those fellows as I came along. However, I should not know one of them if I were to meet him in the road."

"But you'll know them after a while. Do these doors lock?"

"I think not, or, at least, they could be easily forced open. Do you think they are likely——"

"They are likely to do anything now," he broke in. "And there are just four of them big enough to fight—of the boys, I mean, for the old man has sense enough to keep out of it."

"It is a wonder, then," said I, "that he hasn't sense enough to keep his sons out of it, as he must know that no good can be the result."

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"That's all true enough," Alf replied, "but I have heard that you can't argue with the instinct of a brute, and I know that it is useless to argue with red liquor. Here, let's shove the writing

desk against this door," he added. "Once more, shove again. That's it. Now we'll pile benches against the other one. We can't do anything with the windows, but must simply keep out of the way of them."

"Do you think they will shoot through them?" I asked.

He halted, with the end of a bench in his grasp, and looked at me. "Bill, if I didn't know better I'd swear that you are not of the South. Don't you know that if you enrage white trash it is likely to do anything? Don't you know that consequences are never counted?"

"I know all that," I replied, "but I was considering the incentive. I know that if you give the Cracker a cause he will do most anything, but have I given him a cause?"

"You have given him all the excuse he wants. One more bench. That's it. And now the fury of their fight will depend upon the quantity of liquor they have with them. I didn't tell any of the home folks that I was coming here—told them that I might meet you and that we might not be home until late. I wouldn't be surprised—"

Out in the woods there was the blunt bark of a short gun, the window glass was splintered in a circle, a sharp zip and a piece of the clay "chinking" flew from the opposite wall.

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"What did I tell you?" said Alf, looking at me as if pleased with the proof of his forecast. "You get over on that side and I'll stay here. Get down on the floor and look through between the logs if you can find a place, and if you can't punch out the dirt, but be easy; they might see you. There he is again." The glass in the other window was shattered. "That's all right," said Alf. "They may charge on us after a while, and then we'll let them have it. Have you found a place?"

"I have made one," I answered, lying flat on the floor, gazing out. No shot had been fired from my side, and I had begun to think that the entire force was confronting Alf when in the sobering light I saw a man standing beside a tree not more than fifty yards distant. He appeared to be talking to some one, for I saw him look round and nod his head. I did not want to kill him, although the law was plainly on my side, but a man may stand shoulder to shoulder with the law and yet wound his own conscience. Another figure came within sight, among the bushes, appearing to rise out of the leafy darkness, and then there came a loud shout: "Come out of there, you coward!"

"Don't say a word," said Alf. "They are trying to locate you. I don't see anybody yet, and it's getting most too dark now. But I reckon we'd both better fire to let them know that there is more than one of us. We don't want to take any advantage of them, you know," he added, laughing.

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"It doesn't look as if we were," I answered. "I could kill one of them, Alf."

"The devil you could! Then do it. Here, let me get at him."

"No," I replied, waving him off from my peep-hole. "It is better not to kill him until we are forced to."

"But we are forced to now, don't you see? They've shot at us. There you are!" They had fired a volley, it seemed. "Let me get at him," said Alf.

"I'll try him," I replied. And I poked the barrel of my pistol through the crack, pretended to take a careful aim and fired.

"Did you get him?" Alf asked.

"Don't know; can't see very well."

"Well, if I find one of them he's gone," he replied, returning to his own look-out. And a moment later the almost simultaneous discharge of both barrels of his gun jarred the house. "Don't know whether I got him or not," he said, as he drew back and began to reload, "for I couldn't see very well, but I'll bet he thinks a hurricane came along through the bushes. It's too dark now to see anything and all we can do is to wait."

"Wait for what?" I asked.

"Wait for them to try to break in. They'll try it after they have had a few more pulls at the bottle, I think. Now let's keep perfectly quiet and watch."

The moon had not yet risen and the woods stood about us like a black wall. No wind was abroad, the air in the house was close, and I could hear my own heart beating against the floor. There was scarcely any use to look out now, for nothing could be seen, and I arose and sat with my back against the wall, taking care to keep clear of the small opening which I had made. It was so dark in the room that I could not see Alf, but I could hear him, for softly he was humming a tune: "Hi, Bettie Martin, tip-toe fine." For days he had been heavy with the melancholy of his love, but now in this hour of danger his heart seemed to be light and attuned to a rollicking air. I have known many a man to breathe a delicious thrill in an atmosphere of peril, to feel a leap of the blood, a gladness, but it was at a time of intense excitement, a sort of epic joy; but how could a man, lying in the dark, waiting for he knew not what—how could he put down a weighty care and take up a lightsome tune?

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Down in the hollow a screech owl was crying, and his mate on the hill-top replied to his call, while in the room near me was the whif of a bat. And Alf was now so silent that I thought he must

have fallen asleep, but soon I heard him softly whistling: "Hi, Bettie Martin, tip-tip-toe fine."

"You seem to be enjoying yourself," said I. "If you had brought a fiddle we might have a dance."

I heard him titter as he wallowed on the floor. "This is fun," he said, "the only real fun I've had since—I was going to say since the war, but I was too young to go into society at that time."

"What do you think they are up to now, Alf?" I asked.

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"Blamed if I know. Getting tired?"

"Well, I don't want to stay here all night. What are we waiting for?"

"It's hard to tell just at present, and if we don't get a more encouraging report pretty soon we'll break the engagement and go home. What's that?"

I listened and at first heard nothing, and was just about to say that it must be the screech-owl come closer, when from a corner of the house there came a distant and sharp crackle. I heard Alf scuffle to his feet. "We are in for it!"

It was true, for now we could see the light glaring on the bushes and a moment later a spear of light shot inward, revealing my friend standing there with his hands buried deep in his pockets. "Those old logs are as dry as a powder horn," he carelessly remarked. "Won't take long to burn the thing down."

"But what are we going to do?" I cried. And now the room was aglow, and shadows were dancing on the wall.

"I was just thinking," said he, looking about. "They'll begin shooting in here as soon as that end is burned out. Wish I had seen that rascal when he slipped up here to kindle this fire. Helloa, it's spread to the roof."

I strove to show him that I could be as calm and as careless as he, but now I was startled, and excitedly exclaimed: "We shall be burned up like rats in a barn!"

"Oh, I reckon not. Here, let's pull up a plank out of the floor and crawl under and if we can get into the bushes we'll be all right. Here's a crack. But I can't move it," he added, after straining at the board. "See if you can get your fingers through here."

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I dropped upon my knees and thrust my fingers through the crack. The fire had now gained such headway that the air was hot and a glare danced on the wall where the shadow had crept; and we heard the Aimes boys yell in the woods a short distance off. With all my strength I pulled at the board; I got off my knees and braced myself, and with a quick jerk the board came up with a loud rip and I fell backward on the floor.

"Go ahead," said Alf, quietly standing there, with his gun under his arm. "Get down through and work your way toward the other end."

"You go first, Alf."

"I'm in no hurry. But may be I know of an opening where the sheep come under in winter. Follow me, then."

Down we went into the fine and suffocating dust. Here and there the sheep and the hogs had dug deep beds in their restlessness, when nights had been cold, but in places the floor was so close to the ground that I could scarcely crawl through. We heard one end of the roof fall in, and then a volley was fired from the woods.

"What did I tell you?" said Alf. "We understand their tactics, any way. Don't believe you can get through here, Bill. Wait, I can dig down this lump with my gun. Wish I had a hatchet. Ever notice how handy a hatchet is?"

"For God's sake, let me get at it, Alf. I can feel the heat. The whole thing will fall down on us in a minute. That'll do; I can squeeze through."

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Alf crawled into one of the deep beds and reached back to help pull me through. "Bill, looks like this place was made for you, only I wish they had made it a trifle bigger. Once more."

And there I struggled and there he pulled. "I am gone, Alf; I can't get out. Save yourself if you can."

"If you can't get out I know you are not gone, Bill," he replied with a laugh, but it was a laugh of despair rather than of merriment. "Don't give up. Once more. You are coming. What did I tell you?" And again he laughed, but not in despair. We were now at the wall, at the very hole through which the sheep were wont to come in. "You first, this time, Bill. Sheer off to the left. The bushes are not more than fifteen feet away."

With but little difficulty I squeezed through the opening. And now I was in a hot and dazzling glare. A breeze had sprung up with the flames, and behind me was a roar, and a crash of the falling beams. I looked not about me, but straight ahead toward the thicket, now waving as if swept by a strong wind; and within a minute after reaching the outer air I was crawling through a thick clump of blackberry briars, with Alf close upon my heels. We soon came upon a sheep-

walk covered with briars, and now we could make faster time. The Aimes boys were still firing into the burning house, and it was evident that they had not discovered our escape.

"We can walk now," Alf whispered. "Turn down here to the right and keep the shumac bushes between us and them. Now we are all right." [100]

Not another word was spoken until we had reached a knoll, some distance away. Then we halted and looked back. And now the old house was but a blazing heap. Alf was peeping about through the trees, and suddenly his gaze was set. He cocked his gun and brought it to his shoulder.

"No," I said. "You will only regret it." I grasped the gun and both hammers fell upon my hand. "Get back!" he commanded.

"No," I said, my hand still under the hammers. "You must not."

He looked hard at me for a moment and then suffered me to take the gun. The fire was now dying, and, looking to the left, whence the firing had come, I saw two of the Aimes boys standing under a tree.

"Bill, I could kill both of them," Alf said, in a sorrowful voice.

"I know, my dear boy, but you must not. You would always regret it. We will let the law take charge of them to-morrow."

"Not to-morrow, Bill, but to-night. To-morrow they will be gone."

"All right; just as you say. Where is the nearest officer?"

"A deputy sheriff lives about two miles from here, off to the right of our road home. Come on." [101]

We came into the road after making a circuit through the woods, and hastened onward. And we must have gone nearly half the distance to the deputy's house when we heard the Aimes boys coming behind us, drunk and whooping. "They think we are burnt up," said Alf; "but we'll show them. Let's get aside into the bushes, and when they come along we'll let them have it."

"We will get aside into the bushes," said I, "but we will not let them have it. Come over this side. Let me have your gun."

He let me take the gun, and as he stood near me, waiting for the ruffians to pass, I thought that he made an unseemly degree of noise, merely to attract their attention so that he might have an opportunity to fire at them. "Keep still, Alf," I whispered.

They came down the road, singing a bawdy song. For a moment I was half inclined to give Alf his gun, but that early lesson, the waylaying of Bentley, restrained me. We heard the scoundrels talking between their outbursts of song. "Piece of roast hog wouldn't go bad jest about now, Scott. I feel sorter gnawish after my excitement of the evenin'."

"Wall, if you air hongry and hanker atter hog, why don't you go back yander and git a piece that we've jest roasted?"

Alf's hand closed about the barrels of his gun, and strongly he pulled, but I loosened his grip and whispered: "Let them go. There is no honor and very little revenge in shooting a brute." [102]

"I reckon you are right," he replied, but he did not whisper, and out in the road there was a quick scuffling of feet and then a halt. I threw one arm about Alf and pressed one hand over his mouth.

"What was that, Scott?"

"I didn't hear nothin'."

"Thought I heared somebody a-talkin'."

"Yes, you thought like Young's niggers—thought buck-eyes was biscuits. Come on, boys. We'll go over and wake old Josh up and git more lickin'."

They passed on, and when I had given Alf the opportunity to speak he said: "Good. They are going over to a negro's house and we'll get there about the time they do, and if we can't get anybody but the deputy to help us we'll have to kill one or two of them. Now keep up with me."

Off through the woods he went at a trot, leaping logs and splashing through a brook where it was broad; and I kept well up with him. Already my mind had ceased to dwell upon the narrowness of our escape; I was thinking of Guinea as she had stood, shielding the light with her hand.

We were not long in reaching the house of the deputy sheriff. A loud call brought him out to the fence. And when we had quickly told him what was wanted, he whistled to express his gratification or his surprise and I fancied that I saw his hair bristling in the moonlight, for he had come out bareheaded.

"Now let me think a minute, boys," said he. "I have been an officer long enough to know that it ain't much credit to take a fellow after he's dead—most anybody can do that. What we want is to capture them and to do that we've got to have more men. Alf, I tell you what you do. You and your friend slip over to old Josh's and keep watch to see that they don't get away, and I'll ride as fast as I can and get General Lundsford and your daddy. What do you say?"

"I say it's a first-rate plan," Alf answered. "I don't think the General would like to be left out and I know that father wouldn't. Come on, Bill."

The negro's house was not far away, and hastening silently through the woods we soon came within sight of it, on the side of a hill, at the edge of a worn-out field. We softened our foot-steps as we drew near unto the cabin, and we could hear the ruffians within, singing, swearing, dancing. We halted at the edge of the woods, within ten feet of the door, and listened. "Let us slip up and take a peep at them," said Alf; and carefully we climbed over the old fence, taking care not to break any of the rotting rails lest we might sound an alarm. We made not the slightest noise, but just as we were within touching distance of the cabin, a dog sprang from behind a box in the chimney corner. I don't know how much noise it might have been his intention to make or whether he belonged to the stealthy breed of curs whose delight it is to make a silent lunge at the legs of a visitor, but I do know that he made not a sound, for I grabbed him by the throat and the first thing he knew his eyes were popping out between their fuzzy lids. I choked him until I thought he must be dead, and then, with a swing, I threw him far over the fence into the woods. We listened and heard him scrambling in the dried leaves and then he was still. The cabin was built of poles and was old. Many a rain had beaten against the "chinking" and we had no trouble in finding openings through which we could plainly see all that went forward within. Just as I looked in I heard the twang of a banjo, and I saw the old negro sitting on the edge of a bed, picking the instrument, while two white men were patting a break-down and two others were trying to dance. At the fire-place a negro woman was frying meat and baking a hoe-cake.

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"Generman," said the negro, twanging his strings and measuring his words to suit his tune, "don't want right now to be so pertinence—be so pertinence; but, yes, I'd like to know, hi, hi, hi, yes, like to know whut you gwine gimme fur dis yere, yes, whut you gwine gimme fur all dis yere?"

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The patting ceased instantly, and the two men danced not another shuffle, and one of them, Scott, I afterward learned, cried out: "What, you old scoundrel, air you dunnin' us already?"

"Oh, naw, sah, skuze me," said the old negro, "I ain't doin' dat, fur I dun tole you dat I didn' want ter be pertinence, but dar's some things, you know, dat er pusson would like ter un'erstan', an' whut I gwine git fur all dis yere is one o' 'em. I has gib you licker an' I has gib you music, an' wife, dar, is cookin' supper fur you, an' it ain' no mo' den reason dat I'd wanter know whut we gwine git fur it."

"Well, we'll pay you all right enough," replied Scott Aimes. "You've always treated us white, and you are about the only man in this neighborhood that has."

"I thankee, sah," the negro rejoined; "yas, I thankee, sah, fur I jest wanted ter be satisfied in my mine, an' I tell you dat when er pusson is troubled in his mine he's outen fix sho nuff. Hurry up dar, Tildy, wid you snack, fur deze genermen is a-haungry."

"I hope she won't get it ready any too soon," I whispered to Alf, and he, with his face close to mine, replied: "You can trust an old negro woman for that. It won't take Parker very long to ride over to the General's house, and they can pick up father on the way back."

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"Won't your mother and—and Guinea be frightened?"

"Not much. They've seen the old man go out on the war path more than once. Let's see what they are doing now."

Scott had taken the banjo and was turning it over, looking at it. We saw him take out a knife and then with a twang he cut the strings. "Good Lawd!" exclaimed the negro, and his wife turned from the fire with a look of sorrow and reproach, for the distressful sound had told her accustomed ear that a calamity had befallen the instrument. "Now jest look whut you done!" the negro cried, and his wife, wiping her hands on her apron, looked at Scott Aimes and said: "Ef dat's de way you gwine ack, I'll burn dis yere braid an' fling dis yere meat in de fire. Er body workin' fur you ez hard ez I is, an' yere you come er doin' dat way. It's er shame, sah, dat's whut it is. It's er plum shame, I doan kere ef you is white an me black."

Scott roughly tossed the banjo into a corner and laughed. "Sounds a blamed sight better in death than in life," said he.

"But who gwine pay fur dat death music?" the negro asked.

"Pay for it!" Scott turned fiercely upon the negro and Alf caught up his gun. "Wait!" I

whispered.

"Pay for it!" Scott raved. "Why you infernal old scoundrel, do we have to pay every time we turn round? But we'll make it all right with you," he added, turning away; and Alf lowered his gun.

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"I hopes ter de Lawd you will," said the woman, "fur we needs it bad enough."

"You do?" Scott replied. "Well, you'd better be thankful that we don't blow on you for sellin' whisky without license."

"Dar ain' no proof o' de fack dat I has sol' none ter-night," said the old negro, shaking his head.

"What's that?" Scott demanded, wheeling round.

"Skuze me, sah, nothin' er tall. Jest er passin' de time o' de day, sah."

"Didn't I tell you that we would pay you for everything we got?"

"Yas, sah, an' you's er generman, sah; yas, I thanks you fur gwinter pay me."

"Yo' supper is done an' ef you'll jest gib me room I'll fix de table," the woman remarked, taking the bread off the griddle.

"I hear them coming!" Alf whispered. I looked round and saw them at the fence. They had tied their horses in the woods. We stepped out from the shadow and held up our hands to enjoin care.

"I'll go first, and you boys follow me," said the General, cocking his pistol and letting the hammer down to see if it worked well.

"Oh, I reckon not," Lim Jucklin replied. "I'm older than you are and you know it. Come on, boys."

"Older!" the General exclaimed, with such force that we had to tell him to make less noise. "I am eight months older than you are, and you know it. Come on, boys."

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Old Lim took hold of him. "This ain't altogether your picnic; the invertations come from my house, and——"

"What the devil difference does it make?" the deputy spoke up. "I'm the only officer present and I'll go first."

I thought that it was my time to act, and, telling them to follow me, I reached the door almost at a stride and threw my full weight against it. The door flew off its hinges and fell on the floor broad-side, and the Aimes brothers, now seated at a table, were "covered" with guns and pistols before they had time to stir in their chairs. They appeared to be horror-stricken at seeing Alf and me, and in a moment their hands were in the air.

"Josh," the deputy commanded, "bring us a plow line. Never mind, you haven't time for that. Take off that bed cord."

The woman had squeezed herself into a corner, between a "cubbord" and the wall, but she came out and protested against the use of her bed cord. "Get that cord!" the deputy commanded. "Move that hand again, Scott Aimes, and I'll kill you. Here we are," he added, when the negro had tumbled off the bed-clothes and unfastened the cord. "Now cut it in four pieces."

"Fur de Lawd's sake!" the woman shouted, "you ain' gwine treat er pusson datter way, is you? Fust da cuts de banjo strings an' den yere come de law an' cuts de bed cawd. Laws er massy whut got inter dis worl' no how."

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"Keep quiet," said the deputy. "Here, big man, tie their wrists and don't be afraid of hurting them. I've had my eye on you gentlemen for some time. That's it, give it to them hard. Tie their ankles, too. But we have only four pieces of rope. Go now and get a plow-line, Josh."

We put back the table and the chairs and stood our prisoners in the center of the room, sullen and coarse-featured brutes, and waited for the negro to come with the plow-line, and presently he appeared with a new grass rope. "That's just exactly what we want," said the deputy. "Cut it in four pieces, and, big man," he continued, speaking to me, "I must again call on you. Tight around the shank and no feelings considered. That's it; you go at it in the right way—must have tied chickens for the market. I must really beg pardon of these gentlemen for not getting a warrant; we were pushed for time and, therefore, we are a trifle irregular, but my dear sirs, I promise you that you shall have a warrant just as soon as we get into Purdy. You should be satisfied with my admitting that I am irregular."

The General roared with a great laugh. "Your apology is of the finest feather, the most gracious down," said he, "but our friends must remember that in an irregularity often lie some of the most precious merits of this life."

"If we hadn't been huddled round this here table you wouldn't be havin' sich fun," said Scott Aimes, quivering under my strong pull at the rope. "We never did ask nothin' but a fair show, but we didn't git it this time, by a long shot."

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"Silence, brute," the General commanded. "As low as you are, you should know better than to break in upon the high spirits of a gentleman. Oh, I have understood you all along. You were working your courage toward me. Hush, don't you speak a word."

"Got them all strung?" the deputy asked, examining the ropes. "Good. Now, Josh, you run over to my house as fast as you can and tell my wife that you want the two-horse wagon. And hitch it up and come back here as fast as you can. Go on; I'll pay you for everything."

"Thankee, sah, I'm gone. It loosens er ole pusson's feet, sah, ter know dat he gwine be paid. Hard times allus comin' down de big road, er kickin' up er dust."

"Are you going?" the deputy stormed. "Confound you; I'll put you in jail for selling whisky if you are not back here in fifteen minutes."

"Gone now!" exclaimed the negro, bounding from the door and striking a trot. "Gone!" we heard him repeat, as he leaped over the fence.

"Mr. Parker," said Scott Aimes, stretching his neck toward the officer, "I've jest got one favor to ask of you. Git that bottle over thar an' give us fellers a drink. It was licker that got us into this here muss, an' you ought to let licker help us a little now."

"Old fellow used to keep a grocery over at Blue Lick," the deputy remarked, looking at me rather than at the prisoner, "and when a man's money was all gone he used to say: 'Lord love you, honey, I couldn't think of letting you take another drop; I'm so much interested in your welfare that I don't want to see you hurt yourself.' No, Scottfield"—and now he looked at the prisoner—"I am too much interested in you to see you throw yourself away. Don't be impatient. 'Just wait for the wagon,' says the old song."

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The old General had sat down, but old Lim continued to stand there, his arms bare and his teeth hard-set. On his countenance lay the shadow of a regret, and I have thought that he was grieved at the spoiling of the fight that he thought should have taken place to reward him for the trouble of leaving home. The prisoners winced under his gaze, as his eyes leaped about from one to another. But he said not a word; just stood there, with his teeth hard-set.

Soon we heard the wagon, rumbling along the road that skirted the old field, and we began to set our prisoners near the door, picking them up and putting them down like upright sticks. The wagon drew up near the door, the woman held a light for us and we began our work of loading. And I was glad when the deputy said that he no longer needed our assistance; I was afraid that he would ask me to drive to town with him.

"Well," he said, gathering up the lines and glancing back at his load, "a pretty good haul for these hard times. Whoa, wait a minute. Say, General, I suppose you have heard some talk of my candidacy for the office of sheriff, and I reckon you have seen to-night whether or not I am worthy of the trust. It's always well to put in a word in time, you know. I reckon I've got you all right, Alf, and, big man, wish you could vote with us this time. Well, I'll let you gentlemen know when you are wanted at court."

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Old Lim and the General led their horses and walked with Alf and me; and we heard many a grunt and snort as we told of the burning of the school-house. Old Lim swore that I ought to have let Alf kill Scott Aimes, but the General sided with me. "That would have done no good, Lim," said he. "It's far better as we now have it. I am glad to see, Mr. Hawes, that you have so much discretion, a most noble quality, sir. Now as to the loss of the house, that amounts to nothing. It ought to have been set afire long ago. And I'll tell you what shall be done: A new building shall be put up at once, not of logs, but of frame, and it shall be neatly painted to show people that we are keeping up with the times. Every neighborhood about us has a fine school-house; the old log huts have disappeared, and we are going to march right in the van, sir. But I want to tell you right now that it was in those log school-houses that the greatest men in the nation have been taught; and when I see a pile of logs out in the woods I fancy that I can hear the classics lowly hummed."

"Gentlemen," said old Lim, "if it was day time instead of night I would invite you to see some of the finest sport you ever run across, for I'm in the humor for it right now. But chickens have a prejudice agin fightin' at night. Many a time when I had trouble on my mind and couldn't sleep I've got up and tried to stir their blood, but they want to nod; that's what they want to do at night—nothin' but nod, unless you've got light enough, and then if you stir 'em up they'll git so mad that they'll go it smack to a finish."

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"Talking about those chickens?" the General asked. "Confound them, they'd have no attraction for me if it were mid-day. But pardon me. I mean simply that I take no interest in such things."

Old Lim grunted. "Right here is where I git on my horse," said he. And he mounted and rode on ahead in moody silence.

I was now walking beside the General and Alf was just behind me. Several times the young man sighed distressfully and I knew that something heavy had fallen upon his mind. Presently he pulled at my coat and as I dropped back he took my place. "General, you said just now that Bill was right in not letting me shoot that fellow, Scott Aimes." He hesitated and was silent for a few moments, striding beside the General, and the General said nothing—was waiting for him to continue. "Said that I was wrong," Alf repeated, "and I reckon I was, but I hope you won't say anything about it—at home."

"Why not at home, sir? Hah, why not at home? 'Od zounds, can't a gentleman talk in his own house?"

Alf began to drop back. "What he means, General," said I, taking his place, "is that he has so much respect for you that he does not want you to think ill of him when you are alone, meditating in your own house."

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"Ha, now, a fine whim, but it's a respectful whim and shall be honored, sir. I don't understand the young men of this day and generation, but I know what respect means. I don't know that I condemned you, Alf; I spoke for the most part of the discretion of your friend. Well, gentlemen, here is where I leave you."

He threw the bridle reins over the horse's neck and was preparing to mount, when Alf started forward as if to help him, but I clutched him so vigorously that he turned upon me and asked what I meant. "Keep still," I whispered. "I'll tell you after a while."

By this time the old gentleman was astride his horse. He took off his hat, bowed with the air of a cavalier, and, bidding us good-night, galloped off down the road. Then I told Alf why I had held him back, that I had almost insulted the old man by offering to assist him in mounting his horse; and Alf stood there actually trembling at the narrowness of his escape. I know that we should have been burned up had he been half so badly frightened while we were in the school-house.

The nights were shortened by the season's approach to the first of May. It seemed a long time since the twilight had glimmered on the leaves, and it was past midnight when we reached home. Old Lim had put up his horse and was standing at the draw-bars, waiting for us.

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"For a smart man," said he, "I reckon the General's got about as little sense as any human now alive. By jings, he's a crank; that's what's the matter with him; and the first thing he knows people will be keepin' out of his way."

A light flashed from the passage and we saw Guinea and her mother standing on the log step, gazing toward us.

"It's all right!" the old man cried. "Go on to bed, and don't be standing around this time of night."

Alf and I, leaving the old man at the bars, went to the house. "Oh, I'm so glad you've all got back," said Mrs. Jucklin, striving to be calm, but whimpering. "Are you sure that you are all safe and sound?"

Guinea began to laugh. "Of course, they are, mother, don't you see?"

"But what's your father still standin' out yonder for? I jest know he's crippled. Limuel, are you hurt?" she cried.

"Yes, I am hurt, and by a man that prefers to be a crank. Said that he wouldn't care anything about 'em even if it was daylight."

"Oh, but you are not shot, are you?" his wife exclaimed, starting toward him.

"Go in now, Susan, and don't come foolin' with me. Who said I was shot? Go on to bed, everybody, and I'll come when I git ready."

"But you must be hungry, Limuel?"

"Hungry, the devil—excuse me, ma'm. I'll eat a snack mebby between now and mornin'."

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"It's no use to talk to him," she said, with a sigh, and, turning to me, she added: "You and Alf must be nearly starved. We've kept the coffee warm. Guinea, go and pour it out for 'em."

"Will you tell me all about the fight?" the girl asked when we entered the dining-room. "I like to hear about such things."

I strove to make light of it, but, seeing that this would not satisfy her, I told of the burning of the house and of the capture of the Aimes brothers, colored our danger in the house, to see her lips whiten and her eyes stare; pictured myself as I must have looked when I seized the dog, to choke him, and to throw him far into the woods—told her all, except that I had caught the hammers of Alf's gun.

"I don't see how you kept from killing them when you got the chance," she said, leaning with her elbows on the table and her chin in her hands, musing: "I don't understand how you could keep from it."

Alf threw down his knife and fork and struck the table with his fist. "I wanted to kill Scott—had a bead on him, but Bill grabbed my gun. Guinea, I'm glad you stand by me, you and father; but the General thinks I was wrong, and I was just about to think that everybody's heart was right but mine. I am glad you are with me, Guinea."

I looked at her as she sat there, musing; her hair was tangled as if a storm of thought had swept through her head, and sorely I wondered whether a care for me had been borne through the storm. I forgot the presence of Alf; I forgot everything except that I would have given my blood and my soul to please her, and with bitterness I said: "Oh, if I had known that you wanted

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him killed I would not only have let Alf kill him—I would have killed him myself."

She looked up from her attitude of musing and met my outbreak with a quiet laugh. "The bigger a man is the sillier he is," she said, still laughing. "Why, I don't want him dead. I wouldn't like to have anyone killed. I merely wondered how, having come so close to being burned up, you could keep from killing him. I thought that I understood most men, but I don't understand you, Mr. Hawes."

"Yes, you do!" I cried; "you understand me too well, and that is why you torture me."

"What!" exclaimed Alf, springing to his feet, "are you on the gridiron? Has she got you where somebody has got me? By—there comes mother."

I looked back as I passed out of the room, and Guinea sat there, musing. Alf put his arm about me as we went up the stairs. We did not light the lamp, but sat down in the dark, sat there and for a long time were silent.

"Bill, oh, Bill."

"Yes," I answered.

"Bill, don't ask me anything. Father may tell you something to-morrow. God bless you, Bill. You have stood by me. Good-night."

CHAPTER IX.

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It must have been daylight before I worried my way into a sleep that seemed jagged and sharp-cornered with many an evil turn; and when I awoke the sun was shining. I looked out, and far across the field I saw Alf, walking behind his plow. The hour was late for one to rise in the country, for the sun was far above the tops of the trees. But I cared not for any impression that might be made by my apparent laziness; my head was heavy and my heart was crushed. No sound came from below, and after dressing—and how mean my clothes did look—I sat down at my writing desk—sat and mused, just as I had seen Guinea sitting, with her elbows on the table and with her chin in her hands. And Alf would ask the old man to tell me something. Tell me what?

I went down stairs. Mrs. Jucklin was sweeping the yard. She put down her broom upon seeing me and came forward, wiping her hands. I began to apologize for being so late. "Oh, that makes no difference," she said. "Alf told us not to wake you. I will go in and fix you something to eat."

"Now, don't put yourself to any trouble, for, really, I couldn't eat a bite; I'm not very well. Where is Mr. Jucklin?"

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"Why, you must eat something. He's gone to the blacksmith shop broke the point off his plow against a rock and had to go and get it fixed. He ought to be back by now. It ain't but a little ways down the road. Are you goin' over there? Well, if you see him tell him that Guinea and I are goin' to see Mrs. Parker and won't be back till evenin'. Tell him that we'll leave everything on the table."

Down the road I went, looking for the blacksmith shop, and I had not gone far before I saw the old man coming, with his plow on his shoulder. He was talking to himself and did not see me until I spoke to him. "Let me take that plow," I said. "Give it to me. I'm stronger than you."

"I reckon you are right," he replied, looking up at me with a grin, "but I can tote it all right enough."

But I took the plow from him, and walked along with it on my shoulder, waiting for him to say something.

"You haven't seen Alf this mornin', have you?" he asked.

"No; I was asleep when he got up. Why?"

"Well, jest wanted to know. Alf takes some strange notions into his head once in a long while, and he had one this mornin'. Told me to tell you suthin' that very few folks know. Don't know why, unless he thinks more of you than he does of any other young man. Never saw him take to a person as he has to you. And I reckon I better tell you. But I hate to talk about it."

We walked on in silence, and in my impatience I shifted the plow from one shoulder to the other. "I'll take it when you git tired of it," he said. "Now, it may be putty hard for you to understand the situation, and I'm free to say that I can't make it so very plain, but I'll do the best I can. One day, a long time ago, old General Lundsford came to me—long after I had wallowed him, you understand. And now as to that wallowin', why, he could have killed me if he had wanted to. He's game. Well, he came to me, and about as nearly as I can ricollect said this: 'My

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son Chydister, strong-headed little rascal that he is, vows an' declares that when he grows up he is goin' to marry your daughter Guinea. I'll be frank with you and tell you that I didn't approve of it, and I scouted the idea, not that your daughter ain't as good as any girl, but because I don't mind tellin' you, I've got a family name to keep up. I told him this, but he was so young and so headstrong that he swore that it made no difference to him. You know they have played together, up and down the branch, and he thinks there aint nobody like her. Well, sir, he kept on talkin about it until I knowed that he was set, and that there wasn't any use to try to turn him, so I began to think it over seriously. That boy is my life's blood, and I want to please him in every way I can, and I don't want him to marry beneath him. I'm goin' to make a doctor out of him, the very best that can be made, and his companion must be an educated woman. They are goin' to marry when they grow up in spite of anything we can do, and now I've got a request to make of you. I know that you wouldn't let me give you a cent of money, but as an honest man you can't refuse to let me lend you enough money to send your daughter to school along with my own daughter; and whenever you think that you are able to pay me back, all right, and if you never are able, it will still be all right."

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The old man paused, and now I walked, along carrying the plow in front of me, stumbling, seeing no road, caring not whither my feet might wander. "I'll take it now," he said, reaching for the plow. "You don't know how to tote it, nohow."

I pushed him back and said: "Go on with your story."

I was walking so fast that he was almost trotting to keep up with me. "Right there I was weak," he said. "I thought of what a bright creature my girl was, thought of what education would do for her, thought that I could soon pay back the money, and I agreed. And I want to tell you that it has been hot ashes on me ever since. They are goin' to marry all right enough, but it galls me to think that I had to send her out to have her educated at another man's expense—cuts me to think that she wasn't good enough for any man just as I could give her to him. And I'm goin' to pay back that money if I have to sell this strip of poor dirt, that's what I'm goin' to do. Yes, sir, even if it's ten years after they are married. Chyd is off at school now, and has been for a long time; only comes home for a while at vacation, and it seems to me that if he's goin' to be a doctor it's time he was at it. But I understand that they are goin' to send him to another place after he gits through with this one. I don't know much about him, but they say that he's a first-rate sort of a fellow. Oh, I knowed him well enough when he was little, but I haven't seen so very much of him since he growed up. Guinea thinks all the world of him, of course, and says that they were born for each other. Gimme that plow here. You don't know how to tote it nohow. I'm not goin' right straight back to the field; I'm goin' to the house. Them hot ashes is on me an inch thick."

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I let him take the plow; I left him at the draw bars, and with heavy and dragging feet I climbed up to my room. I sat down to my desk, but not with elbows resting on the board, not with my chin in my hands; I couldn't bear to think of that attitude. Now, I understood why she had said "Oh" with such coolness when I had declared that I hated doctors. My heart was freezing, my head was hot, and in a fevered fancy I saw Guinea and that boy playing up and down the rivulet. I saw them wading in the water; heard him tell her that when they grew up she must be his wife, and I saw her, holding her dress about her ankles, look up at him and smile. I knew that he had never been awkward, I knew that he looked like Bentley, knew that he would have made fun of me, and down in my heart there was a poisonous hatred, yellow, green, venomous. I am seeking to hide nothing; I cannot paint myself as a generous and high-minded man. When stirred, I seem to have more rank sap than other men—less reason, more senseless passion. I roared at the picture, sitting there gripping the desk, and frightened it away; and to myself I acknowledged the faults which I now set forth, but an acknowledgment of a fault is not within itself virtue. The fool's recourse is to call himself a fool, to upbraid himself, curse himself and then in graciousness to pardon himself. You might as well reason with a rattlesnake, striking at you—might as well seek to temporize and argue with a dog drooling hydrophobic foam, as to tell the human heart what it ought to do. Reason is a business matter and it can make matches, but it cannot make love.

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Long I sat there, gripping the desk, gazing at the rafters overhead, groaning in the lover's conscious luxury of despair. Should I go away? No; I would stay and see it out. I would be light and gay—a bear's waltz. I would laugh and rebuke fate; I would punish Guinea for having played with that boy up and down the brook; I would be all sorts of a fool.

The old man's voice came ringing through the air. "Hike, there, Sam; hike, there, Bob. Get him down. Hike, there!"

He was having a round with his chickens, to fan off the atmosphere of humiliation, to blow away the hot ashes that were so thick upon him. I remembered that I had not delivered Mrs. Jucklin's message, and I hastened out to the "stockade," and knocked at the gate. "Hike, there, boys! Who's that? Whoa, boys, that'll do! Go in there, Sam! Ho, it's you, eh?" he said, opening the gate. "Sorry, but you didn't git here quite in time. You had the opportunity, but you flung it away. What, gone over to Parker's? That's all right. Well, I must be gettin' back to the field. Looks like the grass will take me in spite of everything I can do. You'll help until they get the school-house built? Now, I'm much obleeged to you, but we can't rig up another outfit. Why, yander you go already," he added, pointing to a wagon load of lumber drawn along the road. "It's Perdue's wagon. Yander comes another one, with Ren Bowles, the carpenter, on board. Oh, they are goin' to rush things. I've heard that already this mornin'. You never saw a neighborhood stirred up much worse than this one is over that affair, and there is strong talk of lynchin' them fellers; and

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this mornin' a party went over to see old Aimes and told him that if he wan't gone by 10 o'clock they would string him up, and I reckon he's gone by this time. They are makin' great heroes oute'n you and Alf, I tell you. A number of 'em wanted to see you, but Alf wouldn't let 'em wake you up. I saw Parker while I was down at the shop; he'd jest got back from town; and he told me that the grand jury that's now in session would indict them fellers to-day, and as court is already set they may be brought to trial for murderous assault and arson right away, and I want to tell you that they'll do well if they save their necks. Parker said that he reckoned you and Alf better go over to Purdy to-morrow. Well, I must git back, for that grass is musterin' its forces every minute I'm away."

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I worried through the day, saw Guinea in a haze, heard her voice afar off, and at night I went to bed worn out and limp. Alf did not come up until some time after I lay down. He came softly whistling a doleful air to prove that his sympathies were with me, sat down upon the edge of my bed and remained there a long time motionless and silent. I knew not what to say to him and he was evidently puzzled as to what he ought to say to me. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth may speak, but out of the heart's fullness there also flows a silence.

"Bill," he said, reaching over and turning down the light which I had left brightly burning, "I killed a snake to-day that I reckon must be six feet long. Came crawling across the field as if he had important business over in the woods, but he didn't get there. Ever kill many big snakes?"

"Not very many," I answered, "but I am well acquainted with them and I have been bitten by a big snake that lies coiled about the universe, striking at a heart whenever he sees it."

He got up, blew out the low blaze of the lamp, and sat down on his own bed, I could tell from the creaking of the slats; and after a time he said something about the gridiron on which a man was compelled to wallow. Ordinarily I would have laughed, hot ashes on the father and hot coals under the son, but now I sighed deeply.

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"Bill, you know, the other day I said that there was something in my favor, an outgrowth of my sister's education. A family union, don't you see? But I had no idea when I said it that this very thing would put the fire under a man that has stood by me. I'm awfully sorry that things had to be shaped that way. You know what I mean; father told you all about it. Is it bad, Bill? I won't say a word about it and the old folks don't suspect a thing, but do you love her much? Tell me just as if she wasn't any kin to me."

"Did the martyrs who stood in the fire love their God?" I asked.

He sighed. "She's got you, Bill. The time has been so short that I didn't think it could be so bad, but love doesn't look at the clock nor keep a calendar. Are you going to try to keep on living, Bill?"

"Yes, I'm going to study law when I get through with this school, and I'm going to make the law of divorce a specialty. If I can't do I may undo; I'm going to be a wolf, and whenever I see a man aiming a gun at another man, I'm not going to catch the hammers. Why, yesterday my heart was tender because it thought to please her. Discretion! I've got no discretion. I'm a brute. I murdered an innocent rabbit on my way to your home—killed it just because I could; and what man is as innocent as a rabbit? Yes, Alf, I am going to live."

"But you won't hate Guinea, will you? She couldn't help it."

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"Oh, I couldn't hate her. No, I won't hate her; I'm going to stand by, ready to give her my life whenever I think she needs it."

And thus we talked, senseless creatures, sighing in the dark. But so it is with human life everywhere—a foolish chatter and in the dark a sighing.

Several days passed and yet we were not summoned to appear at court. I did not avoid Guinea, neither did I seek her. But often we were together, sometimes alone, on the oak bench under the tree, at the spring, on the old and smooth rock at the brink of the ravine; and her smile none the less bright, was warmer with sympathy. A Sunday had gone by and Alf had seen Millie, but she was riding to church with Dan Stuart.

One evening Parker sent us word to be in Purdy early the next day. And at dawn the next morning the buck-board stood ready for the journey. Mrs. Jucklin had worked nearly the night through, baking bread and roasting chickens to tide us over the trip. Alf complained at the load we were expected to carry, and this grieved her. "You know there's nothin' fitten to eat there," she said. "You know that Lum Smith stayed there three days year before last and come home and was sick for a month. Mr. Hawes, I appeal to you—make him take it."

And off we drove with our bread and roasted chickens. The women stood on the step and shouted at us, and we waved our hands at them as we turned a bend in the road. Ours was an important journey, and many of the neighbors came out as we passed along and cried words of encouragement. On a hill-top we heard the gallop of a horse, and out of a lane dashed a girl—Millie. She smiled at us, nodded as her horse jumped, and gave us a gleam of her white hand as she sped off down into the woods.

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"They tell us that the Savior rode an ass," said Alf, "but we have seen heaven gallop by on a horse." He stood up and gazed toward the woods. Our horse gradually came to a standstill, but Alf stood there, gazing, shading his eyes with his hand. "It ain't the sun that dazzles," he said.

"It's her smile."

"She'll make a poet of you, Alf."

"She could do more than that; she could make a man of me."

I don't know of a more dingy and desolate-looking town than Purdy. The houses are old, and the streets are rutted. The court-house, in the center of the square—my temple of fame—is mean and rain-streaked. And this is what I saw at a glance: An enormous wooden watch, with its paint cracking off, hanging in front of a jeweler's; the mortar and pestle of a druggist on top of a post; a brick jail, with a pale face at the bars; lawyers' signs; doctors' signs; a livery stable, with a negro in front, pouring water on the wheels of a buggy; a red-looking negro, with a string of shuck horse collars; a dog in front of the court-house sniffing at a hog; the tavern, with its bell outside on a pole; men pitching horse-shoes in the shade; a woman, with her arms on a gate; a girl trying to pull a dirty child into a yard; a man in front of a store stuffing straw into a box; horses tied to racks about the square; men lolling about the court-house—these features made the face of Purdy.

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We had put up the horse, Alf had gone to see a friend of his and I was walking past a vacant lot when some one shouted at me, and, turning round, I saw a man coming toward me. "Helloa, there," he said, coming up, smiling. "You ought not to forget your old friends."

"Oh," I replied, recalling his face, "you are the agent at the station where I got off the train."

"Yes, used to be," he said, shaking hands with me, "but I'm over here now, but not as a railroad agent, for there's no road here. I am the honored and distinguished telegraph operator of this commercial emporium. Couldn't stay over yonder any longer. No calico—not a rag there. Got to see the flirt of calico. See that?" A woman was passing. "You can stand here and see it going along all the time, and you've got to be mighty respectful toward it, I tell you, for there's a shotgun in every house and a father or a brother more than ready to pull both triggers at once. That's right, I suppose; but it does hamper a fellow mightily. Ever in St. Louis? That's the place. Muslin and soft goods everywhere and nine chances to one there ain't a gun in the house. Might be, you know, but there is so much mull and moriantique and all that sort of thing that there ain't guns enough to go round, so you can smile and nod on the street; but you can't do it here. Here you've got to have a three-ply, doubled and twisted introduction before you can smile even at cottonade. I've been here a week, and hold about the most responsible position in the town, and society hasn't taken me up yet, but I reckon it will after a while. I reckon you could get in all right. They have heard all about your fight—know that you are game, and nothing counts more than that, for they have an idea that a game fellow is always a gentleman."

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Just then a boy came up and told him that there was a call. "I'll be there after a while," the operator replied. "Go on back. I've been pitching horse-shoes with some fellows," he continued, speaking to me, "and ain't quite through yet. I'll have to teach him so that he will be able to tell them that I'm busy when I'm not there. I've found out that what we want in this life is leisure. People are getting too swift. There's no need of half the telegraphing that's done. Why don't they write and save trouble and expense? There goes a nice piece of calico. I must get acquainted with it, too, I tell you. Well, believe I'll stroll on back. Come in while you're here. The trial won't take up much of your time. It's all pretty much cut and dried, anyway."

At 10 o'clock the Aimes brothers were brought before the bar. The jury was already selected and the trial was at once taken up. I was put upon the stand and instructed to tell my story without any fear of reflecting too much credit upon myself. I could see that they wanted a thrilling recital and I gave it to them. And when Alf followed, he found them eager for more. The prosecuting attorney made a speech, as red as the fire that had burned the school-house; the lawyer appointed for the defence made a few cool remarks, and the case was closed. We were anxious to take the verdict home with us, and we had made preparations to remain over night, but the jury came to an agreement without leaving the box, so we had nothing to do but to return home. The Aimes brothers were given a term of fifteen years each in the penitentiary.

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The sun was down when we got upon the buck-board, and over the road we drove, under the stars, our stars, for in sympathy they looked down upon us. The moon was late, but we preferred the dark—it was sadder.

"I wonder how it's all going to end," said Alf. "If we could only rip apart that black thing down the road and look into the future."

"And if you could rip it," I replied, "if you could and were about to do so, I would grab your hand with a harder grip than I gave the gun when I caught the hammers."

"Then you don't want to know? You'd rather continue to writhe on the gridiron than to turn over and fall into the fire and end the matter?"

"Alf," said I, "does it strike you that we are a couple of as big fools as ever drove along a county road?"

"Whoa!" he shouted, pulling upon the reins and stopping the horse. And then he laughed. "Fools; why, two idiots are two Solomons compared with us. Let's stop it; let's be sensible; let's be men."

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"I'm with you, Alf. Shake hands."

We drove along in silence. After a long time he said: "Here's where she crossed the road; and do you see that?" he asked, pointing to the Milky Way. "That was done by the waving of her hand. I wish to the Lord I knew just how much she thinks of Dan Stuart."

"Ah, but that wouldn't relieve you," I replied, "for I know how much Guinea thinks of Chyd Lundsford and feel all the worse for it. There are always two hopes, walking with a doubt, one on each side, but a certainty walks alone."

"I reckon you are right," he rejoined with a sigh. "How many strange things love will make a man say, things that an unpoisoned man would never think of. Poisoned is the word, Bill; and I'll bet that if I'd bite a man it would kill him in a minute."

"What sort of a fellow is young Lundsford?" I asked, with my teeth set and my feet braced against the dashboard.

"Oh, he ain't a bad fellow; he ain't our sort exactly, but he's all right."

"Smart and full of poetry, isn't he?"

"I never heard him say anything that had poetry in it. Don't think he knows half as much about books as you do. Oh, about certain sorts of books he does, books with skeletons in them, but knowing all about skeletons don't make a man interesting to a woman. I have read enough to find that out. Why, I have more than held my own with men that are well up in special books—have held my own with all except that fellow Stuart. Now there's Etheredge, that I told you about one day—kin to Dan Stuart. He's a doctor, and they tell me that he is well educated, but I never heard him say a thing worth remembering. I reckon old Mrs. Nature has a good deal to do with it after all."

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They were sitting up waiting for us at home, although it was past the midnight hour when we drove into the yard. Old Lim snorted when he learned that the Aimes boys were not to be hanged, but his wife, merciful creature, was saddened to think that even more mercy had not been shown them. And then she anxiously inquired whether we had found ourselves short in the matter of provisions. We told her that we had brought back nearly all the load which her kindness had imposed upon us, and then with disappointment she said: "Goodness alive, why didn't you give it to those poor fellows to take to the penitentiary with 'em, for I know that there's nothin' there fitten to eat."

The old man stood looking at her, with his coat off and with his shirt-sleeves rolled up. "Susan," said he, "I don't want to git mad, I don't want to go out yander, snatch them chickens out of the coop an' make 'em nod at each other in the dark, but when you talk that way you almost drive me—by jings, you almost drive me out there agin that tree, hard enough to butt the bark off. Do you reckon they are takin' them fellers down there to feed 'em, to fatten 'em up and then turn 'em loose? Hah, is that your idee? 'Zounds, madam, they are lucky to get there with their necks. And here you are lamentin' that there's nothin' at the penitentiary fitten to eat. Go on to bed, Susan, for if you don't I'm afeered that I'll have to say somethin' to hurt your feelin's, and then I'd worry about it all night."

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"Now Limuel, what is the use in snortin' round that way? Can't a body say a word?"

"It do look like a body can," he rejoined; "and I'm afeered that a body will, and that's the reason I want you to go to bed."

Old Lim sat down and the subject was dropped. I noticed his wife looking anxiously at me, and just as I was about to leave the room she said: "Mr. Hawes, you'll please pardon me for mentionin' it, but there's a button off your coat, and I'll be glad to sew it on if you will be so kind as to leave it down here."

"No, I will sew it on," Guinea spoke up. "Give me your coat, Mr. Hawes."

"I will not be the means of keeping you up any longer," I replied, looking into her eyes, and feeling the thrill of their sweet poison; "I will do it myself."

"And rob me of a pleasure?" she asked.

"No, relieve you of a drudgery. Come on, Alf."

Two fools went to bed in the dark and sighed themselves to sleep, and two fools dreamed; I know that one did—dreamed of eyes and smiles and a laugh like a musical cluck.

CHAPTER X.

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More than a month passed and they were still working on the school-house. The simple plan had been drawn with but a few strokes of a pencil, the sills had been placed without delay, but

they had to plane the boards by hand and that had taken time. Alf and I had again sat at the old General's table, had listened to his words so rounded out with kindness, and upon returning to the porch had heard him storm at something that had gone amiss. Millie showed her dimples and her pretty teeth, smiling at Alf and at me, too, but I saw no evidence that she loved him. Indeed, she had been so much petted that I thought she must be a flirt, and yet she said nothing to give me that impression. Guinea was just the same, good-humored, rarely serious. One Sunday I went to church with her, walked, though the distance was two miles; stood near the cave wherein the British soldiers had hidden themselves, and talked of everything save love. I cannot say that I had a sacred respect for her feelings; I think that I should have liked to torture her, but something closed my heart against an utterance of its heavy fullness.

One Saturday afternoon I was told that the school-house would be ready on the following Monday. I had been out many times to view the work, but I decided to go again to see that everything was complete. I expected that Alf would go with me, for the corn was laid by, but I could not find him. His mother told me that he had put on his Sunday clothes and that she had seen him going down the road. And so I went alone. The house was done, and what a change from the pile of old logs! The walls were painted white and the blinds were green. The bushes were cleared off, and the scorched trees had been cut down, split up and hauled away. I have never seen a neater picture, and in it I saw not only the progress of the people, but the respect in which they held me.

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I had come out of the woods on my way home and was on a high piece of grazing land not far from the house when I saw a man ride up to the yard fence, dismount, tie his horse and go into the house. This within itself was nothing, for I had seen many of the neighbors come and go, but a sudden chill seized upon me now, and there I shook, though the heat of June lay upon the land; and it was some time before I could go forward, stumbling, quaking, with my eyes fixed upon the horse tied at the fence. In the yard behind the house I came upon Mrs. Jucklin, gathering up white garments that had been spread to dry upon the althea bushes. "Chyd Lundsford has come," she said, and I replied: "Yes, I know it."

I stepped upon the passage and passed the sitting-room door without looking in; I sat down in a rocking chair that had been placed near the stair-way, sat there and listened to a girl's laugh and the low mumble of a man's voice. "Let us go out where it's cooler," I heard Guinea say, and I got up with my head in a whirl.

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"Mr. Hawes, this is Mr. Lundsford."

"Glad to meet you, sir," I said, taking hold of something—his hand, I suppose. I was urged to sit down again; Guinea said that she would bring two more chairs, and when I had dropped back between the arms of the rocker I looked at the man standing there, and a sort of glad disappointment cleared my vision and placed him before me in a strong light. He was short, almost fat, and in his thin, whitish hair there was a hint at coming baldness. The close attention that he had been compelled to give practical things, the sawing of bones, the tracing of nerves, the undoing of man's machinery, had given him the cynical look of a hard materialist. But when he stepped back to take the chair which Guinea had brought I saw that he moved easily, that he was cool and knew well how to handle himself. And this drove away the meager joy of my glad disappointment.

"I hear you are going to take up school Monday," he said. "Rather late to begin school just now, I should think."

"Under ordinary circumstances it would be regarded as late in the season," I answered, "but we have been so interrupted that we now decide to have no vacation."

"I guess you are right. Had a pretty close shave with those fellows, didn't you? Ought to have killed them right there. I've seen Scott. Thought he was a pretty bright fellow, naturally; rather witty. Would make a first-rate subject on the slab."

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"Because you thought him witty, sir?" I asked.

"Of course not; but because he is a good specimen—big fellow." He looked at me and I thought that he was measuring my chest. "Yes," he continued, "ought to have killed them. Man's got to take care of himself, you know, and he can't make it his business to show mercy. Most all the virtues now are back-woods qualities."

"I don't believe that," Guinea spoke up. "Every day we read of the generosity of the world."

"Oh," he said, passing his short fingers through his thin hair, "you read about it, and people who want to shine as generous creatures take particular pains that you shall read about it. You've a great deal to learn, my dear little woman."

"And perhaps there is a great deal that she doesn't care to learn," I ventured to suggest; and I quickly looked at her to see whether I had made another mistake. I had not, her quiet smile told me, and I felt bold enough to have thrown him over the fence.

"What we wish to know and what we ought to know are two different matters," he said. "But I hold that we ought to know the truth, no difference what the truth may be. I want facts; I don't want paint. I don't want to believe that the gilt on the dome goes all the way through."

"But," said I, "the gilt on the dome doesn't prove that the dome is rotten; it may be strong

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with seasoned wood and ribs of iron."

"Yes," he drawled, "that's all very good, very well put, but it means nothing. By the way, before we get into a discussion let me invite you over to our house to-night. Quite a number of young people will drop in. Not exactly the night, you know; but the old idea that white people shouldn't go out of a Saturday night, the night reserved for negroes, is all nonsense. So, I have asked them to come. Alf will come, I suppose, and so will our little spring branch nymph."

"I didn't suppose that you believed in nymphs, now that you have gone out and learned that everything is false," Guinea spoke up.

"I don't believe in painted ones," he replied, "but you are not painted."

"I shall be pleased to come," I remarked, and then I asked him how long he expected to remain at home.

"Oh, about a month, I should think. I am gradually getting along and I don't want to go to school all my life. I want to begin practice next year."

"In this neighborhood?" I asked, and he gave me a contemptuous look. "Well, not if I have any sense left," he answered. "I might ride around here a thousand years and not win anything of a name. Look at Dr. Etheredge, fine physician, but what has he done? No, I'm going to a city, north, I think."

He stayed to supper and this angered me, for I had set my heart on walking to the General's house with Guinea. Alf had not returned and we wondered whither he could have gone. And when the time came to go, that impudent sprig of a doctor asked me if I would ride his horse around by the road, said that he wanted to walk across the meadows with Guinea. How I should have enjoyed knocking him on the head, but I thought that Guinea supplemented his request with a look, and I consented. [140]

There were many horses tied at the General's fence, and there was laughter within, when I rode up, and I was reminded of the night when I had stood with my hot hand melting the frost on the fence. But I thought of what the men had said on the railway platform, of the woman whom I had seen on the train, and boldly I walked in. The General met me with a warm grasp, and was asking me if I had seen his son, when in walked the young fellow himself, with Guinea beside him. The parlor and the library, opening one into the other, were well filled with good-humored young folk, and among them were old people, none the less good-humored. I was surprised to find myself so much in demand, for every one asked for an introduction, but with bitterness I knew that it was because I had come near being burned up in an old house. They played games, but of this they soon tired; they sang and one of the ladies plucked a sparkling fandango, and then Chydister Lundsford was called upon for a speech. He was not at all embarrassed and he talked fairly well; and when he was done they called upon me. I got up with one hand resting on the piano, and stood there, nervous at first, but strangely steady later on. I told them that I could not make a speech, but that with their permission I would tell them a story, one of my own. They cried out that they would rather have a story than a speech, and I gave them a half humorous, half pathetic sketch, something that had long been running in my head and which I intended to write. What a strong confidence came upon me as I noted the effect of my words! I was drawing a picture and they were eager to see it; I was playing on a strange, rude instrument, and how they bent to catch every vibration. I was astonished at myself, thrilled with myself. And when the climax came, chairs were tipped over as if in a scramble, and a wild applause broke out. Every hand was stretched out toward me, every eye was bright with a tear. The old General grabbed me and, throwing back his great head, almost bellowed a compliment; and through it all I saw Guinea sweetly smiling. They urged me to give them another story, were almost frantic in their entreaty; they had heard the heart-beat of their own life and they must hear it again. I told another story, one over which I had fondly mused, and again the hands came out toward me, and again the General bellowed a compliment. I can scarcely recall anything else that passed that evening. Yes, I remember that as I was taking my leave, to walk across the meadows with Guinea and Chyd, Millie stood in front of me. Once or twice I thought that she had something that she would tell me, for her lips moved, but she said nothing except to bid me good-night. [141]

And where was Alf all this time? No one had spoken his name; Millie had not asked me about him. I walked briskly in advance, half happy, but, of course, with my mind on Guinea, whose low voice reached my ears through the quiet that lay on the grass-land. [142]

"Why don't you wait for us?" she cried. I turned about and waited, and as she came up, holding Chyd's arm, she said: "I hope your success to-night hasn't turned your head."

"And I hope that I don't deserve such a suspicion," I answered, not with bitterness, but with joy to think that she had felt my apparent indifference.

"Oh, I don't see anything to cause a spat," said Chyd, straining himself to take long steps. "Good stuff, of course, but nothing to turn a man's head—a mere bit of fancy paint. But you ought to write it. Good many people like nonsense. I mean something light, you know. Two-thirds of the human family make it their business to dodge the truth. But it is a good thing for a school-teacher to make himself felt in that way."

"Perhaps Mr. Hawes doesn't intend to be a teacher all his life," Guinea replied, speaking in kindness, but with no interest, as to whether or not I was to remain a pedagogue.

"God forbid," I replied. And the young doctor gave me a sarcastic cough. "Man ought to do what he's best fitted for," said he. "Trouble is that a man generally thinks that he's fitted for something that he isn't—hates the thing that he can do best."

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"Your knowledge of the practical fortifies you against any advance that I might make," I replied. "I don't pretend to be practical."

"Hum, I should think not," he rejoined. "Good deal of a dreamer, I take it. And you are in the right place. Everything dreams here, the farmers and even the cattle. Going to pull down the fence, eh? Guinea'll be over by the time you get it down. What did I tell you? Regular fawn, eh?"

We had passed out of the meadow. They waited in the road until I replaced the rails which I had let down. The road ran along the ravine and home was in sight. I looked across toward the smooth old rock and saw a dark object upon it. We went down into the ravine and as we were coming out, a voice cried: "Is that you, Bill?" And instantly Guinea answered for me. "Yes, Alf. And here's Chyd."

"How are you, Chyd?" he shouted, and then he added: "Bill, I want to see you a minute. Stay where you are and I'll come down."

I halted to wait for him. He stopped a moment to shake hands with Chyd, and then he hastened to me. "Old man, I've got something to tell you," he said. "Let's walk down this way—no, not over in the road, but up the hollow." He gripped my arm tightly, walked fast, then slowly and then stopped. "Let's sit down here, Bill." We seated ourselves on a rock. "You have been over to the General's, along with Chyd and Guinea, haven't you? Of course, you have—what's the use of asking that? Do you know what I did to-day? Not long after dinner I went over there determined to find out how I stood. I was brave until I got nearly to the house and then my courage failed. I stood by the fence in the blackberry briars and gazed at the house. After a while I saw her come out and start down the Ebenezer road. And then I whipped round and met her. And as I stood beside the road, waiting for her to come up I noticed for the first time that the sun was nearly down. For hours I had been standing in the briars. I pretended not to see her; let on like I was hunting for a squirrel up in a tree, until she came up. Then I spoke to her and she started as if she was scared. She said that she was going over to Lum Smith's to tell the young people to come over at night, and I asked her if I might walk along with her. She said with a laugh that I might go part of the way, and then I knew that she was ashamed for any one to see her with me. This cut me to the red, but I walked along with her. I felt that I had nothing to say that would interest her, but I kept on talking, and once in a while she would look up at me and laugh. At last, and it was just as we came within sight of Smith's place, I asked her what she really thought of Dan Stuart. I knew that this was a fool's break, and if it hadn't been I don't suppose I would have made it. She looked up at me, but she didn't laugh this time. I begged her pardon for my rudeness, and she reminded me that I was only to come a part of the way with her. I then told her that I would wait for her to come back. She said that she might not come back that way. I replied that no matter which way she came back I would see her. She went on, laughing now, and I waited, but I didn't have to wait long before I saw her coming. As she came up I asked her if she was ready to grant my pardon and she wanted to know what about. We walked along together and she began to tell me about her brother, how smart he was and all that, and I said that I didn't think that he was as smart as you, Bill; I wanted to take credit for a friendship I had formed, you see? But a moment later I was sorry, for I was afraid that she might say something against you, but she didn't. She said that you were a smart man—a distinguished-looking man, and that she liked you ever so much. At first I was pleased, but a second afterward I was jealous of you, Bill. Did you ever see as blamed a fool as I am? But I didn't hate you, Bill. No, my heart was warm toward you even while she was praising you—even while I was jealous. I again asked her what she thought of Dan Stuart, and she looked up at me and wanted to know if I knew what he thought of her. I told her that everybody loved her, and that I didn't suppose he was mean enough not to love her. She said that she knew people who didn't love her, and I told her that if she would show them to me I would butt their heads together for being such idiots. We were now almost within sight of the General's home and I was not getting along very fast. I was determined to make a break. We were on a hill, where the trees were tall, almost over-lapping the road. To the right ran a path through the briars, a nearer way home. I asked her to wait and she stopped. The sun was down and it was now almost dark. And it was then that I told her that I loved her. I don't know how I acted or what I said, but I know that I was down in the dust at her feet. She stood there, pale and trembling, looking around as if she would call for help. I asked her to marry me, and she laughed, Bill—laughed at me and darted down the path. Then I went into the woods and roamed about I don't know where; and that is the reason I wasn't at the gathering to-night. I'm bruised and crippled, Bill—my heart is sore, but I want to tell you that when she's standing on the floor with that fellow Stuart, with the preacher in front of her, I'll be there, putting in my plea. I won't give up as long as there is a fighting chance left. Don't say a word about it. Forgive me for dragging you off down here. God knows you've got a deep trouble of your own. And I wish my word could settle it—I'd speak it, though it might hurt my chances at the General's. Well, let's go to the house."

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Guinea and Chyd, old Lim and his wife went to church the next day, leaving Alf and me alone. Alf held himself in reasonable restraint until the old people were gone, and then he broke out so violently that I really feared for his reason. And it was mainly my fault for I read him a passionate poem, the outcry of a maddened soul, and he swore that it had been written for him, that it was his, and I caught his spirit and fancied that he might have written it, for I believed then, as I believe now, that great things do not come from a quiet heart, that quiet hearts may criticise, but that they do not create, that genius is a condition, an agony, a tortured John Bunyan.

I went to the spring to get a bucket of fresh water, and when I returned Alf was nowhere to be found. I went out and shouted his name, but no answer came back. I went out into the woods, walked up and down the road, but could see nothing of him. The shadows fell short and the old people and Guinea and Chyd returned from church, and the noon-tide meal was spread, but Alf came not. But save with me there was no anxiety, as he was wont to poke about alone they said. Evening, bed-time came. Chyd went home, and I went up to my room. I heard the old man locking the smoke-house door—heard his wife singing a hymn, heard Guinea's faint foot-steps as she returned from the gate, whither she went to bid her lover good-night, and her little feet fell not upon the path, but upon my heart. I went to bed, leaving the lamp burning low, and was almost asleep when I heard Alf on the stairs. He ran into the room with both hands pressed against his head. I sprang up. He ran to me and dropped upon his knees at the bed-side, dropped and clutched the covering and buried his face in it. I put my arm about him, knelt beside him, heard his smothered muttering, and put my face against his. "Bill!" he gasped in a shivering whisper, "Bill, I have killed him!"

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"Merciful God!" I cried, springing back. He reached round, as if to draw me down beside him. "Hush, don't let them hear down stairs. Come here, Bill."

I lifted him to his feet, turned him round so that I could see his face. It was horror-stricken. "I have killed Dan Stuart."

He stood with both hands on my shoulders looking into my eyes.

"Wait a minute and I'll tell you. It wasn't altogether my fault. He ought to be dead. He tried to kill me. I left here without any thought of seeing him; didn't want to see him. I went away over yonder into the woods. I heard you calling me. Later in the day I came out near the wagon-maker's shop, and several fellows were sitting there, and I stopped to answer a question somebody asked me, and pretty soon here came Stuart. He grinned at me, but this didn't make me want to kill him. Do they hear me down stairs?"

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"Go on, for God's sake!" I urged. "Why did you kill him? Didn't you know——"

"I knew everything, Bill. But I didn't want to kill him. I turned away, and walked up the road, and he came along after me on his horse. And when we were some distance away he made a slighting remark about Millie. I wheeled around and he snatched out a pistol and pointed it at me. I hadn't a thing, and there he was on a horse and with a pistol pointed at me. There was not a stone, nothing within reach. I was cool, I had sense, and I told him that he might have his fun, but that I would see him again. And when he had cursed me and abused me as much as he liked he rode away, leaving me standing there. I ran over to Parker's and told him that I wanted a pistol to shoot a dog with, and he gave it to me. Then I went back to the road and waited. He had gone over to the General's, I thought, and I knew that he would come back that way. I would make him swallow his words—I knew that he didn't mean what he said about Millie—knew that he simply wanted to stir me up and have an excuse to kill me. So I waited in the road not far from Doc Etheredge's, waited a long time and at last I heard some one coming on a horse. I didn't hide; I stood in the middle of the road. A man came up, but it wasn't him; it was Etheredge. He spoke to me, asked me good-naturedly why I was standing there, and I told him that I was waiting for a dog that I wanted to kill. He turned into his gate, a short distance off, and I stood there. After a while I heard another horse, and I knew his gait—single-foot. It was Stuart. He was singing and he didn't appear to see me until he was almost on me. His horse shied. 'Who is that?' he asked, and I told him. 'And you are going to take back what you said,' I remarked as quietly as I could, 'or I'm going to kill you right here.' He didn't say a word—he snatched at his pistol and then I fired, and he fell forward on his horse's neck. The horse jumped and I sprang forward and caught the body and eased it to the ground—stretched it in the road and left it. But I went up to Etheredge's house and hallooed, and when he answered I told him that the dog had come and that his name was Dan Stuart, and that he would find him lying in the road. I heard him shout something, but I didn't wait for him to come out, but went into the woods and came on home. And now I've got to go."

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"Go where?" I asked, facing him round as he strove to turn from me.

"To town to give myself up. Don't tell the old folks to-night. Tell them in the morning—tell them that they'll find me in jail."

I strove to restrain him; I could scarcely believe what he had told me. I asked him if he had not been dreaming. He shook his head, pulling away from me. "If you are my friend, Bill, do as I tell you. It's all over with me now, and all I can do is to answer to the law." He caught up his hat. "Tell them at morning; make it as soft as you can—tell them how I love that girl—tell them that I am crazy. Don't hold me, Bill. I must go. God bless you."

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He pulled away from me and went down stairs so easily that he made scarcely a sound. I followed him, begged him to let me go with him, but, creeping back half way up the stairs, he said: "You can be of more service to me here. Tell them and to-morrow you can see me in jail. I don't want them to come and take me there. Do as I tell you, Bill. Don't let the folks see me in jail. Go on back."

I went back to the room and sat there all night, and at morning I heard the old man unlock the smoke-house, heard his wife singing a hymn. I knew that they expected me at early breakfast, so that I could reach the school-house in time, for my new session was to begin that morning. So the sun was not risen when I went down stairs. But nature held up a pink rose in the east, and the hilltops were glowing, while the valleys were yet dark. Guinea came out of the sitting-room, and seeing me in the passage, walking as if I were afraid of disturbing some one, laughed at me. "Why, what makes you slip along that way? You act as if you were the first one up. Why, I have already gathered you some flowers to take to school. And you won't even thank me. Why, Mr. Hawes, what on earth is the matter?"

I held up my hand. "There will be no school to-day," I said. "Don't say a word, please."

"But what's the matter?" she asked, with a look of fright.

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"Come out here under the tree. Will you promise not to scream if I tell you something?"

"But what can you tell me to make me scream? Oh——"

"I'm not going to speak of myself," I broke in, fearing that she might think that I was going to tell her of my love. "Come out here, please."

She followed me to the bench under the tree and she stood there nervously gazing at me as I sat down, waiting for me to speak and yet afraid to hear me.

"What is it, please? But don't tell me anything bad—I don't want to hear anything bad."

"But you must hear this. Alf—Alf has had a quarrel with Dan Stuart. It was worse than a quarrel, and has——"

"Killed him?" she said, gazing at me. "Don't tell me anything."

She sat down beside me and hid her face. "Alf has gone to town to give himself up, and we must tell your father and mother. It wasn't murder—it was self-defence. You go and tell your mother, tell her as quietly as you can. I see your father out yonder. I will tell him. Tell her that they got into a quarrel last night."

She went away without looking back at me, without letting me see her face, and as I passed the corner of the house I heard her talking and before I reached the old man I heard a cry from that poor old woman.

Old Lim was at the door of his "stockade," oiling the lock. "Devilish thing don't work well," he said. "A padlock is generally the best lock or the worst; you never can tell which. If I could jest git a drap of the grease into the key-hole I'd soon fix it. But it won't go in, you see. By jings, the devil has his own way about half the time, and his influence is mighty powerful the other half. Now, we're gittin' at it. I reckon we'd better go on to breakfast, though. I almost forgot that you had to go to your school. Why, man, what the deuce is the matter with you this mornin'?"

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He dropped the chain to which the lock was fastened and looked steadily at me. "What's gone wrong, man?"

"I'm not going to school to-day," I answered, endeavoring to be calm.

"What's the matter? House burnt down again?"

"Worse than that, Mr. Jucklin. Alf——"

"What about him?" he broke in, nervously grabbing the chain.

"Did you know that he was in love with Millie Lundsford?" I asked, now determined to be calm.

"Well, what of it? Young folks are in and out of love with each other mighty nigh every day in this neighborhood. Is that Susan callin' me? Be there in a minute!" he shouted. "Hasn't had a row with the old General, has he?"

"No, but with Dan Stuart. They quarreled last night and fought and Dan was killed."

His shoulders drooped; he spoke not, but he jerked the chain, the gate flew open and he stepped inside and shut it with a slam; and I heard him fumbling with the fastening that held the door of the coop. I strode away as fast as I could, went to the school-house to dismiss the children and to tell them that I knew not when the session would be resumed. And when I returned everything was quiet. The old man was slowly walking up and down the spring-house path, evidently waiting for me.

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"Tell me all about it," he said, when I came up; "tell me from beginnin' to end."

And I told him just as Alf had told me. He listened with his mouth half open, rolling up his

shirt-sleeves and then rolling them down again, as if he knew not what to do with himself.

"Well," he said, when I was done, "I don't know that I can blame him, poor feller, but they'll hang him."

"Do you think so?" I cried, with a start, for I had not dwelt upon that possibility; it had not occurred to me, so wrapt had I been in thinking of his own mental distress and the heart-breaking grief of his mother. "Do you really think so?"

"I know it—just as clear to me as that sunshine. Stuart's kin folks have got money and they'll spend every cent of it to put Alf on the gallows. Etheredge don't like Alf and will spend every cent he's got; and here we are without money. Yes, they'll hang him."

"But General Lundsford—won't he stand as Alf's friend?"

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The old man shook his head. "He can't, and I don't know that he would if he could. I mean that he can't and still be true to himself. Ever since our agreement, the one I told you about, he has been putty open in talkin' to me, and I know that he wanted Millie to marry Stuart. No, he's too proud to help us."

"But can he for family reasons afford not to help us? His son——"

"Don't speak of that now, if you please, sir. Are you goin' to the house?"

"I don't know. I am almost afraid to meet his mother."

"Don't be afraid of that. She won't reproach you; she knows that you had nothing to do with it—knows that he never would have killed him if he had asked your advice and followed it."

"I don't mean that—I mean that I cannot bear to look upon her grief."

"She is a Christian, sir. She is praying to her God, and whatever comes she will trust in Him. The stock that she is from has stood at the stake, sir."

We were slowly walking toward the house. Suddenly he clutched my arm with a grip that reminded me of Alf, and in a voice betraying more emotion than I had known him to show, asked whether I intended to leave him. I put my arm about him and pressed him to me, just as if he were Alf telling me of the love-trouble that lay upon his heart.

"I understand you, God bless you," he said. "Don't say a word; I understand you. Git on the mare and go to town and find out all you can. I won't go jest now—can't stand to see my son in jail. But don't say a word, for I understand you. I reckon the neighborhood is pretty well alive over it by this time. See if they'll let him go about on bail, but I don't reckon they will, even if he did give himself up. They'll think that he done it because he must have knowed that they were bound to catch him. Go on and do whatever your judgment tells you, and I know it will be all right."

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Over the road I went, toward Purdy, and the people who had come out of their houses to speak words of encouragement to Alf and me when we were on our way to see the Aimes boys tried, now stood about their doors, gazing stupidly. At the wagon-maker's shop a crowd was gathered, and I was recognized as I drew near by young men who had met me at the General's house the night before—now so long ago, it seemed—and they came out into the road and urged me to tell them all I knew. I felt that Etheredge had already stirred in his own coloring, but I told the story of the tragedy just as I had told it to the old man; and I had gathered rein to resume my journey when a man rode up. "I'm going back to town!" he shouted, waving his hand to a man who stood in the door of the wagon-maker's shop. I rode on and he came up beside me.

"Are you Mr. Hawes?" he asked, and when I had answered him he said: "I am Dr. Etheredge."

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I bowed and he nodded with distinct coolness. He was not of happy appearance; he was lean and angular, gray beyond the demand of his years, and it struck me that he must be given to drink, not because he was gray, but because there were puffs under his eyes and broken veins where his skin was stretched over his high cheek-bones.

"A devil of an affair, this," he said. "Man met in the public highway and murdered."

"Don't put it that way," I spoke up, "for perhaps you are not yet acquainted with the causes that led to it."

"No cause, sir, should lead to murder."

"I agree with you there, but many a man has been compelled to kill in order to save his own life."

He sneered at me. "But has many a man been compelled to stand for hours in a public road, and in order to save his own life shoot down an innocent person? I always held that Alf Jucklin was a dangerous and a desperate man, and everybody knows that he comes of that breed. I never did like him; and he took a dislike to me without cause. Stood near a church in a crowd of men one day when I seemed to be under discussion and declared that a man to be a doctor ought to be smart and to be smart a man must say something to prove the thought within him; and then he asked if any one had ever heard me say anything worth remembering."

I felt that he wanted to quarrel with me, and I was in the humor to gratify him. "And did

anyone ever hear you say a thing worth remembering?" I asked.

"Sir!" he snarled.

"You heard what I said. And I take a degree of cool pleasure in telling you before we go further that you can't ride a high horse over me."

"A pedagogue's pedantry," he muttered.

"A man's truth," I replied. "And by the way," I added, "you appear to be well horsed. Suppose you ride on ahead."

"Does this road belong to you, sir?" he demanded, turning a severe brow upon me.

"A part of it does, and I am going to ride over that part without annoyance. Do you understand?"

"Sir, I can understand impudence even if I can't say a thing worth remembering. But rather than have words with you I will ride on, not to accommodate you, but to preserve my own dignity and self-respect."

"Good!" I mockingly cried, "and if you continue to improve in expression I shall after a while be forced to believe that Alf's estimate of you was placed too low."

"I thank you, sir, for giving me the opportunity to say that a jury's estimate will hereafter most influence your friend, and that he will be placed high enough."

"You continue to improve, Doctor, and I believe that your last remark is worth remembering. At least, I shall remember it, and when this trouble is over, no matter what the result may be, I will hold you to account for it. And to prove that I am in earnest I'll lend you the weight of this." And with that I cut at his face with a switch. His horse shied and the apple tree sprout whistled in the air. He said something about hoping to meet me again and rode off at a brisk canter. I knew that I had acted unwisely, felt it even while the impulse was rising fresh and strong within me, but I was in no humor to bear with him. I rode along more slowly than I was disposed, to let him pass out of my sight, for every time I looked up and saw him I felt a new anger. And I was relieved when a turn in the road placed him beyond my view. I heard a galloping behind, and, looking round, I saw the old General coming with a cavalryman's recklessness. He dashed up and did not draw rein until he was almost upon me.

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"Whoa! I have been trying to overtake you, Hawes. What did I tell you? Didn't I say that the country was gone? I'll swear I don't know what we are coming to when a man is shot down in the road like that."

"General, did you overtake me to ride to town with me?"

"I did; yes, sir."

"Then you mustn't talk that way."

"I beg your pardon, sir. Perhaps I should not have expressed myself in that manner. Let us ride along and discuss it quietly. Tell me what you know."

"It were better, General——"

"Never mind about your grammar and your bookish phrasing. Tell me what led up to it."

"Must I tell you that your daughter is——"

"By G——, sir, what do you mean?"

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"You needn't turn on me, sir."

"Surely not. Pardon me. What about it?"

"I don't know that I ought to tell you—a man of more judgment wouldn't—but I suppose I must now that I have gone so far. Alf is in love with your daughter, and on that account Stuart insulted him, abused him at the point of a pistol."

Then I told him all that I could, all but the fact that Stuart had spoken slightly of the girl, for I knew that this would only enrage him and, indeed, set him harder against Alf, as he would doubtless believe that my friend had simply forged a mean excuse. For some distance after I had told him the story, he rode along in silence, troubled of countenance and with his head hanging low. But just before we came into the town he looked up and said: "Poor fool, I can't help him."

"But you can see that justice is done."

"Mr. Hawes, in this instance we may take different views of justice. Pardon me, but your friendship—and, indeed, I can but honor you for it—your friendship may cry out against justice."

"I admit, General, that my friendship is strong, although I have known the young man but a short time, yet I think that I respect justice."

"We all think so until justice pinches us," he replied, placing himself in firm opposition to me, yet doing it kindly. "I am more concerned in this, Mr. Hawes, than you can well conceive. I can say this, but I cannot follow it up with an explanation. But the fact that he stood waiting there in

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the road is what will tell most against him. Had he met him at another time, under almost any other conditions, it would have been different, would have taken away the aspect of calculated murder. Yes, I am deeply concerned and on two accounts. But I cannot mention them. Dan Stuart was near to me; I had known him all his life and he was a young man of promise, was popular throughout the community—more popular than Alf, and this will have its effect."

"But wasn't he more popular because he had more money?" I asked, and the old General gave me a look of reproof.

"Money does not make so much difference in the South, sir. You have been filling your head with Northern books. It is refinement, sir, real worth that weighs in the South."

"I hope not to antagonize you, General, but I am of the South and I have cause to hold an opposite opinion. Have I not seen the most vulgar of men held in high favor because they were rich? The mere existence of a state line does not change human nature. Man is not changed even by the lines drawn about empires."

"I admit, sir, that the South has undergone a change, but in my day a man was measured according to his real worth, not in gold, but in honorable qualities."

"It is but natural to look back with the prejudiced eye of affection, General, and it is respectful that I should not argue with you. I turn here to the livery-stable. Good-morning." [162]

"I honor you for your consideration, sir," he replied, bowing. "Let us hope for the best, but I must stand by justice."

When I had put up my horse I went directly to the jail. A crowd hung about the doors, eager to see the prisoner. When I told the jailer who I was he admitted me without a word. Alf sprang from a bench, seeing me enter the corridor, and came forward to the bars of his cell.

"Not much room for shaking hands here, Bill," he said, smiling sadly. "It is already an age since I left home. How are you, old man? Tell me how they took it. No, don't. I know. Well, I gave myself up and the sheriff wouldn't believe me at first, but he got it through his head after a while. He was very kind and when he had locked me in here he went to see whether I could be let out on bail, but I understand that I can't. It's all right; I might as well be in here. Bill, I have tried to feel sorry for killing him, but I can't. I reckon I must be about as mean as they make them. And it will all come out pretty soon, for court is still in session and all they've got to do is to rig up their jury after the inquest and go ahead. I'm going to make the best of it. The worst feature is the disgrace and suffering at home, and, of course, that almost tears my heart out when I let it. But to tell you the truth, I'd rather be hanged than to be on the grid-iron all the time."

Who's that?" [163]

Etheredge came into the corridor. He leered at Alf and Alf sneered at him. "I suppose you found the dog that I told you was lying in the road—the dog that tried to bite me," said Alf, with a cold smile.

"Jucklin, I didn't come in here to be insulted."

"All right, there's the door. Say, there, jailer, you have just let in a gray rat and I wish you'd come and drive him out."

I turned to Etheredge and pointed to the door. "I must respect your wish," he said, speaking to me. "I've an engagement with you—you are to be my guest," and without another word he strode away.

I remained with Alf as long as the jailer thought it prudent to let me stay, and then I went about the town to gather its sentiment. And I was grieved to find that every one declared it to be cold-blooded murder. My heart was heavy as I rode toward home, for the old people were looking to me for encouragement. Guinea met me at the gate. She tried to smile, but failed.

"Don't try to look pleased at seeing me," I said. "It is too much of an effort." And if she could not smile she could give me a look of gratitude. She went with me to the stable, saying not a word; and when I had turned the horse loose she followed me to the sitting-room. At the door I faltered, but Mrs. Jucklin's voice bade me enter. She was sitting in a rocking-chair, with the Bible in her lap, and placing her hand upon the book, she thus spoke to me: "Don't hesitate to talk, for His rod and His staff shall comfort me." [164]

I had not noticed the old man, so bent were my eyes upon his wife, but now he arose into view, and, coming to me, he whispered: "From the stock that stood at the stake."

I told them all I knew, which was not much; and then knelt down and prayed with them.

Stuart was buried the next day, and the mourners passed our house. Mrs. Jucklin was sitting at the window when the hearse and the buggies came within sight, and her chin was unsteady as she reached for her book. And there she sat, holding the old leather-covered Bible in her lap.

I had thought that Chyd Lundsford would come, with words of encouragement, but we saw him not, neither that day nor the next. But four days later I came upon him as I was going to town. He had a gun, was followed by a number of squirrel-dogs and came out of the woods near the spot where Alf had eased Stuart from his horse to the ground. I stopped and bluntly asked him why he had not been over, and he answered that he was busy preparing for a rigid examination. I asked if they were going to examine him on the art of killing game, and he laughed and replied: "No, on the science of killing men. By the way," he added, looking up into the top of a tree, "how is Alf getting along? Does he appear to be hopeful?"

"He is more desperate than hopeful," I answered.

"Yes, I should think so. Is that a squirrel's nest? I have heard it hinted that a love-affair had something to do with it—an affair pretty close, at that. Well, I've got nothing to do with it. Can't drive out of my mind what I have had so hard a time driving into it. Sorry, and all that sort of thing. That's no squirrel's nest. But if people persist in being romantic they must expect to have trouble. I'm sorry for the old folks—must take it rather hard. Good-hearted and simple enough to worry over it, surely. Well, if you happen to think of it, give Alf my regards."

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The coroner's jury had returned an expected verdict, influenced largely by what Etheredge had to say. I had given my testimony, but I could not make it sound as I wanted it—Alf's own words were against him, as I repeated them that day. The preliminary trial, the mummery before a justice of the peace, also went against Alf; the grand jury had brought in its finding, and the next step was the formal arraignment before the circuit judge. And I was now on my way to town to engage additional legal help, as the lawyer whom we had retained appeared to be luke-warm and half-hearted. I had heard many stories relating to the great force and ability of an old ex-judge named Conkwright, and I called at his office, though I had been warned that his price was exceedingly high. He met me gruffly, I thought, but I soon discovered that he had a heart. I told Alf's story, now so familiar to my own ears that I fancied that I could give it with effect, and I must have touched him, for he said: "Oh, well, I'll go into it and we'll say nothing about the price. I've been working for nothing all my life, and I don't see why I should change now. Why, of course, he ought to have killed him," and his old eyes shone as he said it. "Had to kill him. It strikes me that they are rushing things pretty fast, especially as the docket is covered with murder cases that have been put over from time to time. That Stuart set has lots of influence. Beat me for re-election, I know that. But we'll show them a few things that are not put down in the books. And you don't want the young lady's name mentioned. Of course, not. Wouldn't be gallant, eh? Well, I'll go down and see the young fellow some time to-day. They'll take it up in about a week from now, that is, if we are ready, and we'll be there. Tell old Jucklin not to fret. He's an old lion-tamer, I tell you, and if I had any interest in that fellow Etheredge I'd advise him to walk pretty straight. But the old man has quieted down mightily of late years."

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Alf had undergone no change. He was glad to know that Conkwright took an interest in him, but he shook his head when I told him that we were sure to win.

"I don't believe it, Bill; don't believe it because I don't feel it. But don't tell the old folks that I'm not hopeful. Have you seen Millie?"

"No, and have seen Chyd but once, and then I came upon him in the road."

"What, hasn't he been to the house? A fine husband he'll make for Guinea. Tell her that I say she must forbid his coming near her again. No, don't," he added. "It's better to wait. I wish she loved you, Bill, but I'm afraid she doesn't."

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"I know she doesn't," I replied.

"Has she said so?"

"No, but she seems always afraid that I may tell her of my love."

"And I would if I were you, Bill. No, not yet. Tell father not to come near me yet a while. He couldn't stand it."

He had written home, begging his parents and his sister not to think of seeing him, had actually commanded them not to come near the jail.

"Mother can stand more than he can, for she's more religious. How about your school?"

"Oh, it's all right. The people know that I couldn't teach now, even if I should try ever so hard, and they are very considerate. They say that they are willing to wait."

"God bless them for that, any way. And this reminds me of a preacher that came in yesterday to pray for me. I thanked him for his kindness, but told him that some one was at home praying, and that one of her words had more influence in my behalf than all the prayers he could utter in a life-time. I merely mention this to show what sort of an atmosphere I'm in. I didn't like the fellow's looks—understand that he hasn't been a preacher but a week. Still on suspicion, as they

say, Bill. I was almost crazy, but my mind has cooled wonderfully. A fellow's mind generally does after he's done the worst he can."

"I hope that my reading of the poem didn't start you off."

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"Oh, no, that had nothing to do with it—relieved me, if anything; set me to thinking that some one else had been in the same fix. By the way, a telegraph operator here brings me something nearly every day. Says that he's a life-long friend of yours. Told me to tell you that he was about to pick up a piece of calico and take it home with him—said that you would understand. Now, you go on home and stay there until the trial. You have almost worn yourself out. You and the General are still on good terms, I suppose. Wish you could slip over there and see Millie. Do you know what Chyd's waiting for? He's waiting to see how the trial goes. Bill, I'm beginning to feel sorry for Stuart. But his face doesn't come up before me at night with a death-look. There's a good deal of nonsense about that sort of thing. When I see him he's always sitting on his horse, cursing me. And that's not very pleasant. Go on, Bill. I have kept you too long. It's nearly night."

Old man Jucklin was smartly encouraged when I told him what the ex-judge had said, and he related a number of anecdotes of the old fellow's early days on the circuit.

"Oh, help is comin' our way," old Limuel said, and his wife, pointing to her book, replied: "It has always been with us."

"At the stake," he whispered.

I did not speak of having seen Chyd. I had no right to do so, for I knew that he was now an additional distress. But the next morning when Guinea and I were alone at the breakfast table she asked me if I had not met him down the road—said that she had seen him crossing the meadows with his dogs. I began to quibble and she spoke up spiritedly: "Oh, you shouldn't hesitate to tell me. It amounts to nothing, I'm sure."

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"I must manage some way to see Millie," I remarked, determined to say no more about Chyd lest I should lose my temper.

"I hope you won't go to the house," she replied, her face coloring.

"I won't, but I didn't know but that I might see her going to a neighbor's house and then——"

"No," she broke in, "I hope you won't even do that. She must know how we feel, and if she had any interest in us she would come over here. No, I won't say that. I don't know what she may have to contend with. But her brother could come if he wanted to, but it makes no difference, I'm sure."

"Suppose I meet Millie in the road; shall I speak to her?"

"Surely, but don't ask her why she hasn't been to see us. What did Chyd say?"

"Not much of anything—said that so long as people were romantic they must expect trouble."

She frowned and thus replied: "A good authority on the evils of romance."

"Why not an expert on the thrills of romance?" I asked. "Hasn't he played up and down the brook?"

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"So have the ducks," she answered, with a return of her smile. "But let us not talk about him—I would rather not think about him."

I could not play the part of a hero; I was not of the stock that had stood at the stake glorifying the deed with a hymn. I had wanted to drop the subject, not because it was painful to her, but because it pressed a spike into my own flesh; but her wish to dismiss him from her mind urged me to keep him there, to torture her with him. Brute? Surely; I have never denied it, but I loved her, and in love there is no generosity. The lover who seeks to be liberal is a hypocrite, a sneak-thief robbing his own heart.

"But how can you put him out of your mind if he is worthy of your love?" I asked. "You did not place him therein, nor can you take him away."

She looked at me a long time, looked at me and read me; she did not frown, she smiled not, but searched me with her eyes until I felt that my motive lay bare under her gaze. "You would help Alf in his trouble," she said, "but you would throw a trouble at me."

How sadly she spoke those words, and my heart fell under them and lay at her feet in sorrow and in humiliation. I strove to beg for pardon, but I stammered and my words were almost meaningless.

"Oh, you have my forgiveness, if that is what you are trying to ask for. Now, please don't say anything more. I know you didn't mean to make me feel bad."

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"I think I'd better cut my throat!" I replied, taking up a table knife.

She laughed at me. "How can a big man be so silly? Cut your throat, indeed. Why, what have you done to deserve it?"

"What have I done?" I cried, leaning over the table and making a fumble, as if I would take

her hand—"what have I done? I have wantonly wounded the divinest creature—"

She was on her feet in an instant; she put her hands to her ears and shook her head at me. "No, you must not say that. Don't you see I can't hear what you say? So, what is the use of saying anything? Think you are a brute? No, I don't; but you must not talk like that. I can't hear you—I won't hear you. Oh, don't worry about Mr. Lundsford. He will kneel at my feet."

CHAPTER XIII.

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The next day I took a "turn" of corn to the water-mill, far down the stream. The old man had not been off the place since Alf went to jail, and the office of attending to all outside affairs was conferred upon me. Guinea came out to the corn-crib and stood at the door, looking in upon me as I tied the mouth of the bag. The old man was not far off, calling his hogs; a sad cry at any time, but growing sadder, it seemed to me, as the days wore along.

"Old Moll will have a load," the girl said; "you and that bag."

"Yes, if I were to ride on the bag like a boy, but I'm going to walk and lead her."

"Oh, that will be nice," she cried. "Nice for Moll. I wish I could go with you. It's beautiful all down that way; high rocks and pools with fish in them. It isn't so awfully far, either. I have walked it many a time."

"Alone?" I asked, tugging at the string.

"That doesn't matter. It's the distance I'm talking about. Why, you haven't asked me to go."

"But I ask you now," I said, dragging the bag toward the door.

"No, I won't go now," she replied, making way for me to come out.

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"Won't you, please?"

"No, not since I have come to think about it. I'd have to walk along all the time with my hands to my ears, for I just know you'd say something I don't want to hear. You are as cruel as you can be, lately."

I had taken up the bag to throw it across the mare, but I dropped it upon the log step.

"You'll burst it if you don't mind, Mr. Hawes."

"But I handle it more tenderly than you do my heart!" I cried. "You have thrown my heart down in the dust and are trying to burst it."

Her hands flew to her ears. "Oh, I knew you were going to say something mean. But I can't hear you now. Isn't it an advantage to say what you please and not hear a word? You can do this way if you want to. No, I won't go—really, I can't. I mustn't leave mother."

She ran away toward the house, and I stood watching her until she was hidden behind the old man's "stockade." Torturer she was, sometimes with her dignity, but worse with her whimsical, childish ways, when she seemed to dance on the outer edge of my life, daring me to catch her in my arms. But was it not my size that made her feel like a child? It must have been, for whenever she spoke of Chyd she was deeply serious. I was resentful as I led the old mare toward the mill. Oh, I understood it all. She had seen that I sought to punish her, had read me as we sat together at the table, and now she was torturing me. Well, I would give her no further opportunity; I would let her lead young Lundsford into her mind and out again, just as it suited her fancy.

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The coves and nooks and quiet pools that lay along the stream were dreamful; there was not a mighty rock nor bold surprising bluff to startle one with its grandeur, but at the end of every view was the promise of a resting place and never was the fancy led to disappointment. Now gurgle and drip, now perfect calm, the elm leaf motionless, the bird dreaming. And had history marched down that quiet vale a thousand years ago and tinged the water with the blood of man, how sweetly verse would sing its beauty, from what distances would come the poet and the artist, the rich man seeking rest—all would flock to marvel and to praise. Ah, we care but little for what nature has done, until man has placed his stamp upon it.

I loitered and mused upon going to the mill and upon returning home. And when I came within sight of the house I halted suddenly, wondering whether I had forgotten something. Yes, I had. I had forgotten my resolve to be cool and dignified under the reading eyes of that girl. I led the mare to the rear end of the passage and had taken off the bag of meal when Guinea came out.

"Mr. Hawes," she said, "I wish you would forgive me for the way I acted last night and this morning. Now let us be good friends, friends in trouble, and let us hereafter talk with sense and without restraint. I am going to be frank with you, for I don't see why I should be cramped. I am

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not going to pretend not to know—know something, and you must wait; we must all wait for—for anything that is to come. I hardly know what I am saying, but you understand me."

She held out her hand, and I took it, tremulously at first, but I held it with a firm and manly honesty as I looked into her eyes. "Yes, I understand you, and it shall be as you say. I have been strong with every one but you, and I am going to show you that I can be your friend. Wait a moment. You know what I think, but I will not hint at it again. It was mean of me—yes, I must say it—it was mean of me to jibe you. But I'll not do it again. If you only knew what my early life was. I was the victim of size, an awkward boy, the jest of a neighborhood; and while I might have outlived some of my awkwardness, I am still sensitive, for I carry scars."

"Awkward," she laughed. "Why, I don't see how you could have been called awkward. Everybody at the General's spoke of how graceful you were, and really it would make you vain if I were to tell you all that was said."

The old man came round the house, and Guinea sprang back. I was still holding her hand. "Hah," he grunted. "Got home all right, eh? Parker was over here just now and said that the trial had been set for next Thursday, not quite a week from now, you understand. He seems to think we are goin' to pull through all right; said that you've made friends with everybody in the town. That's good, both for now and also for after a while, when you set in as a lawyer. I tell you, Parker's visit helped us mightily, and Susan has eat a right smart snack, and I didn't know how hungry I was till right then. You better go to town to-morrow."

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I went in early the next morning and found nothing to serve as a basis for the hopefulness that Parker had given the old people. Conkwright was busy with the case, frowning over his papers, but he had no words of encouragement, except to say that he was going to do the best he could. But after a while he flashed a gleam of hope by remarking that there was one important factor in our favor. And eagerly I asked him what it was.

"It won't do to talk it around," said he, "but we can count on the judge doing the square thing. He is comparatively new in our district, and the Stuart influence hasn't taken hold on him—has had no cause to. His favor, or, at least, his lack of a cause to be directly against us, will mean a good deal; it will enable us to secure a new trial at any rate."

As I entered the corridor of the jail I saw Alf's face brighten behind the bars. "Have you seen Millie?" he asked.

"No, your sister commanded me not to go near the General's house."

His countenance fell, but he said: "I reckon she's right. And I didn't mean that you should make a dead-set call, you know—didn't know but you might happen to meet her. That preacher, the one I told you about, has been round again, and he declares that I must come into his church. They do pull and haul a fellow when they get him into a corner, don't they? Well, I don't see what else can be done now except to go into court and have the thing over with. I know as well as I know my name that he would have killed me if I hadn't killed him; not that night, of course, but some time. I am sorry, though, that I stood there in the road, waiting for him, for that does look like murder, Bill. But look how he had drawn his sight between my eyes and abused me for everything he could think of. And whenever I see him now, there he sits on his horse, with one eye half shut and the other one looking down the barrel of his revolver at me. I can see his lips moving and can hear every word he says."

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I went home that day earlier than usual, resolved to keep the old people in the atmosphere of encouragement which the deputy sheriff had breathed about them, and I told them that the presiding judge was our friend, and that old woman put her worn hands in mine and gave me a look of trustful gratitude. "God rewards the man that seeks to ease an old mother's heart," she said; and the old man, standing there, with his sleeves rolled up, threw the droop out of his shoulders, the droop that had remained with him since that early morning when he stood at the gate of his "stockade," fumbling with the chain. "And, Susan," he spoke up, "if we've got two judges on our side we're all right. Let him set down there, now. Let him set down, I tell you. When a woman gets hold of a man she never knows when to turn him loose. I'm tempted now to go and see him. No," he added, shaking his head, "can't do it—couldn't bear to see a son of mine locked up like a thief. But it won't be for long. That judge will say, 'turn that boy loose,' and then—oh, it's all right, Susan, and a year from now we'll almost forget that it ever took place."

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His wife began to cry, for in this trouble her heart demanded that he should lean upon her for support, and it appeared to me that whenever he straightened up to stand alone, she felt that her office was gone.

"Susan, don't take on that way. Jest as we see our way clear of the woods, you act like you are lost. Smile, till you find the path, and then you want to cry. Act like you want the Lord to do it all—don't want the circuit judge to do nothin'. That's it, brighten up there now, and, Guinea, you go out and tell that nigger woman to cook enough for a dozen folks. Hawes, I've got them chickens down to a p'int that would make your eyes bulge out."

"I believe that Bob came very near making one of yours bulge out," I replied.

"Ah, didn't he, the old scoundrel. But Sam pecked a grain of corn out of my mouth this mornin' and never teched a tooth. That's what they call art, ain't it? Come out with me."

"Limuel, let him stay with me, won't you?" his wife pleaded.

"Of course, Susan, but don't you reckon a man wants to unstring himself once in a while? They can't understand us, Hawes. Women know all about the heart, but they are sometimes off on the soul."

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"You think more of those old chickens than you do of me, anyhow," his wife whimpered, still resentful that he was not leaning upon her for support.

"Did you hear that, Hawes? By jings, sir, you've got to be foolish or a woman will think you've ceased to love her. The minute you are strong she thinks you have forgotten her. About the happiest woman I ever saw was one that had to support a bed-ridden husband. Fact, as sure as I'm standin' right here. She was the kindest and sweetest thing you ever saw, but when the feller got up finally and got strong enough to go about, blamed if she didn't jump on him every time he come in sight."

"Now, Limuel, you know you are makin' up every word of that."

"It's the truth, I tell you—knewed the man well."

"Well, who was he?"

"Oh, he lived away over yonder on the branch, out of your range."

"He didn't live anywhere; that's the truth of it."

"But, Susan, he might have lived anywhere. His name is man and his wife's name is woman. What, you goin' to cry about it? Now, there, it's all right. No, there never was such a man. I'm an old liar, that's what's the matter with me. Never was a man fitten to live with a good woman. Why, bless your life, what would I be without you? Why, you've been the makin' of me. And a long time ago, when I used to drink licker and fight, you'd set up and wait for me and you never scolded me, and that very fact turned me agin licker, for I jest nachully thought that it was too much work for you to keep up a show of good humor all the time. Yes, it's all right, and that boy's comin' out of there without a scar on him, and I'll pay back the money that I owe the General——" He hastened out of the room, and we heard him yelling at his chickens.

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CHAPTER XIV.

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I went to town every day, and every night I returned, self-charged with hope; and now the trial was at hand. When the work of impaneling the jury was begun, old Conkwright was there with his challenges. How shrewd he was, how sharp were his eyes. And when night came the panel was far from complete.

"It will take a long time at this rate," I said, as we were leaving the court-room.

"I don't care if it takes a thousand years; they sha'n't ring in a stuffed toad on me," replied the ex-judge. "Did you notice that fellow with a long neck? They've fixed him all right and I knew it. I am not altogether easy about that short fellow we've got, but I hope he is man enough to be honest. There is no more trickery anywhere than there is in a murder trial in this country. Well, they've put their worst men forward, and I think we shall have better material to-morrow."

And it appeared that we had, for the jury was sworn in the next afternoon. The testimony was so short and so direct, the witnesses were so few that the trial could not last long; and when at home I gave this as an opinion, the old people were glad, for they declared that it shortened the time of their son's absence. On the day set for the opening of the argument hundreds of the farmers gave over their work and rode to town, for the Southerner loves a passionate speech, and the court-house is still his theater.

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The old man walked down the road with me, but he stopped before we reached the place where Stuart had been stretched upon the ground.

"Well," he said, turning back, "I reckon to-day'll finish it. At least they'll give it to the jury and it oughten't to take 'em long after what the judge says in his charge to 'em. I feel that it's goin' to be all right. Don't you?"

The truth was that I did not, but kindness is not always the truth; so I said: "Everything looks that way. Conkwright is as sharp as a thorn and he'll be in their flesh from the beginning to the end."

"By jings, jest say that again. That ought to settle it right now, hah? Stay with 'em till they git through, and you'll find us waitin' for you when you git back."

I nodded, waved my hand at him and galloped away, and from a hill-top I looked back and saw him still standing there in the road. Parker caught up with me and we in turn overtook a man whom I did not care to encounter—Etheredge. I had seen him every day during the trial, had

caught his blurred eye as I was giving my testimony on the stand, had heard him tell his damaging story.

"Ho, there," he said, as I was about to pass him. "Haven't forgotten me, have you?"

"My memory is unfortunately so good that it retains many objectionable things," I answered. [184]

"Glad to hear it; pleased to know that you haven't forgotten our little engagement."

He rode along with me. The way was just broad enough for two horses abreast, and the deputy dropped back. "We need not wait for the termination of the trial," I replied.

"That so? Strikes me that you are pretty keen, especially as there is an officer right behind you. Say, you seem to blame me for the interest I am taking in this affair. Have you stopped to think of the interest you are taking in it? Jucklin's no relation of yours and probably never will be. Did you hear what I said? Probably never will be."

"Unfortunately I haven't an apple tree sprout with me to-day, Mr. Etheredge."

"And it's a good thing for you that you haven't. Do you reckon I'd let you lash at me while so many people are riding along the road?"

"I don't suppose you would let me do so at any time if you could help yourself."

"Oh, I don't know. Might let you amuse yourself if there were no one in sight. But I've got nothing against you, young man. I've lived long enough to forgive an over-grown boy's impulses."

He could not have cut me deeper; and his sleepy old eyes saw the blood and he laughed. "Got under your hide a little that time, eh? We've all got a thin place somewhere in our skin, you know. You needn't look back; the officer is right behind us." [185]

"I wish he were not in sight," I replied.

"You don't like him, eh? Why, I always thought, he was a pretty good fellow. But, of course, I am willing to accept your judgment of him. But if you don't like him why do you wait for him to come up?"

"I am waiting for you to go on, sir," I replied. "And if you don't I will knock you off that horse."

"Very well. I see a man on ahead who is doubtless better company. I trust, though, that I shall have the pleasure of a closer association with you at some future time. Good-morning."

I waited until Parker came up. "Did you get enough of him?" he asked, laughing. "I knew you would—nearly everybody does. Under the circumstances it was an insult for him to offer to ride with you."

"And he and I will have a trouble as soon as this one is settled," I replied.

"Oh, I reckon not. I don't see why any man of sense should want to have trouble with you. Just look how they are flocking to town. Hope they'll turn out this way and vote for me at the next election for sheriff. Women, too. See them coming out of that gate?"

When we rode into the town the streets were thronged and horsemen, wagons and buggies were thick on the public square. The ginger cake and cider vender was there, with his stand near the court-house steps, and the neigh of the colt and the distressful answer of his mother, tied to the rack, echoed throughout the town. Dogs, meeting one another for the first time, decided in their knowing way that they were enemies, but suddenly became allies in a yelping chase after one of their kind that came down the street with a tin can tied to his tail. [186]

I went at once to Conkwright's office and found him with his feet on a table, contentedly smoking a cob pipe.

"I was just thinking over some points that I want to make," he remarked as I entered.

"And I hope, sir, that you are in the proper humor to make them."

"Can't tell about that. Oratory is as stealthy and as illusive as a weazel at night. You never know when he's coming."

"But do you feel well?" I anxiously inquired.

"Oh, feel first-rate, but that doesn't make any particular difference. Sometimes a man may think that he feels well, but when he gets up to speak he finds that he is simply sluggish. Reckon I'll get through all right. Do the best I can, any way, and if I fail it can't be helped. Guess we'd better go over."

An anxious day that was for me. I looked at Alf, now beginning to grow pale under his imprisonment, and I saw his resentment rise and fall as the state's attorney pictured him, waiting, listening with eagerness for the sound of a horse's hoofs. I was to be a lawyer, to defend men and to prosecute them for money, and yet I wondered how that bright young fellow, with the seeming passion of an honest outcry, could stand there and tell the jury that my friend had committed the foulest murder that had ever reddened the criminal annals of his state. Old man Conkwright sat, twirling his thumbs, and occasionally he would nod at the jurymen as if to call their attention to a rank absurdity. But I did not see how he could offset the evidence and the [187]

blazing sentences of that impassioned prosecutor. At last Conkwright's time had come, and when he arose and uttered his first word I felt the chill of a disappointment creeping over me. He was slow and his utterance was as cold as if it had issued from a frost-bitten mouth. I went out and walked round the town, to the livery-stable, where a negro was humming a tune as he washed a horse's back; to the drug-store, where a doctor was dressing a brick-bat wound in a drunken man's scalp—I walked out to the edge of the town, where the farming land lay, and then I turned back. I was thinking of my return home, of the sorrow that I should take with me, of those old people—of Guinea.

Some one called me, and facing about I recognized the telegraph operator coming across a lot. "Glad to see you," he said, coming up and holding out his hand. "Didn't hear about her, did you?"

"Hear about whom?" I asked, not pleased that he should have broken in upon my sorrowful meditation.

"Mrs. McHenry."

"No, I've heard nothing. What about her?"

"Why, there's everything about her. She's my wife—married night before last. Know that piece of calico I pointed out that day, the time I said I had to be mighty careful? Well, she's it. I'll walk on up with you. Run it down—run in panting, you might say. Said I had to have her and she shied at first, but that didn't make any difference, for I was there three times a day till she saw it wasn't any use to shy any longer; so she gave in and I caught the first preacher that happened to be hanging around and he soon pronounced us one and the same kind—something of the same sort. Go right down that street and you'll see calico on my clothes line most any time. Say, it will be a pity if they hang that young fellow. And I'll tell you what I'll do. If they send anything off to any of the newspapers I'll spell his name wrong. Get even with them some way, won't we? Yonder comes my boy and I reckon there's a call for me at the office. They are rushing me now—seems to be the busy season. I've been to the office twice already to-day."

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Long before I reached the court-house I heard old Conkwright bellowing at the jury. The windows were full of people and outside men were standing upon boxes, straining to see the old fellow in his mighty tirade. I could not get into the room, but I squeezed my way to the door and stood there, with my blood leaping. Now I could see why they had called him powerful. His face was aglow, his gray hair was upon end and his eyes were shooting darts at the jury. I know not how long he spoke, but I know that suddenly he was silent, looking upward, and then, spreading his hands over the jury, said: "May God in his infinite mercy influence your decision." He sat down, and I noticed then that the air was cooler with a breeze that sprang up when the sun had set. The state's attorney made a few remarks, and then the judge delivered his charge to the jury, an address short, but earnest. Now there was a shoving and a crush—the jurymen were filing out. I saw them leading Alf back to the jail, but I did not go to him, so pulled and hauled I was by hope and fear. But I made my way to the old lawyer, and asked him what he thought.

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"I don't know," he answered. "Don't you see the disposition there is to rush everything? I don't think they will be out long."

"You made a great speech, sir."

"Wasn't bad, considering the material. We were at a disadvantage. He stood there in the road, you know, and that is a hard thing to get round."

"But the judge must have felt your speech."

"Why, my son, I don't suppose he heard it."

I went away and again I walked about the town. It was dusk and the tavern bell was ringing. On the court-house steps and on the public square men were discussing the trial and venturing their opinions as to the result. I heard one man say: "The old soldier made a great fight, but the odds were against him. Bet ten dollars they find him guilty."

"There's his friend over there," another man spoke up. "Don't talk so loud."

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"Can't help who's there listening; money's here talkin'. Any takers?"

Not far away there was a wooden bridge over a small stream and thither I went and leaned upon the rail, listening to the murmur of the water. I thought that this must be the brook that rippled past our house, and I went down to the water's edge and bathed my aching head. Then I remembered that I had eaten nothing since early morning, and I thought that I would better go to the tavern, and was turning away when I heard some one cry: "The jury is in and court has met again!" I scrambled up and hastened toward the court-house, and at the steps I met a number of men coming out. "It's all over," one of them said to me. "Imprisonment for life. Conkwright has moved for a new trial and the judge has granted it."

I hastened to the jail, whither they had taken Alf. I found him seated on his bed. He got up when he saw me.

"Bill," he said, in a voice low and steady, "I am not going to the penitentiary if you are my friend."

"And you know that I am, Alf."

"Then you will lend me your knife."

"No, Alf, I can't do that—not now. Remember that we have another chance."

"I don't mean now—I mean if that last chance fails. Now I want you to do something for me. You tell father that he must sell his farm immediately and leave here. Tell him that I'll hate him if he doesn't do as I say. You can stay here and write to him, and if I don't come out at the next trial, all right, and if I do, I can go to him. It may seem hard, but he's got to do it. He wouldn't live here, any way. Will you do it?"

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"I will, for I don't know but it is a good plan. No, he wouldn't live here. He will do as you request."

"Well, go on home now and rest. Hanged if you don't look as if you've been on trial for your life," he added, laughing. "Tell him that I'm not crushed—that it has come out better than I expected."

The night was dark, the road was desolate, and I heard the lonesome lowing of the cattle. And now and then a horseman passed me, for I was not eager to get home. At a gate near the road-side some one was standing with a lantern, and just behind me came the rattle of an old vehicle. I turned aside to let it pass, and as I did the light of the lantern fell upon me and a voice asked: "That you, Mr. Hawes?"

"Yes," I answered, turning back into the road and following a buggy.

"I 'lowed so," said a man in the buggy, "for we don't grow many of your size about here. I have heard that they used to, but they don't now. Good many things have happened since that day you come over to see me about the school. I'm Perdue. And, by the way, there's a hundred dollars at my house waitin' for you, and if you don't come after it I'll send it over."

"But you don't owe me anything yet," I replied.

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"Yes, the money's there and it's yourn. You couldn't help not bein' in a fix to teach. As I say, it's there for you, and you might as well have it. Sorry for the old folks, tell 'em, but it can't be helped."

On he drove, shouting back that he would send the money the next day, and my protest, if, indeed, I entered one, was weak and faltering, for of all men in that neighborhood I thought that I stood most in need of a hundred dollars.

Now I was nearing the house. The hour was late, but a light was burning in the sitting-room. No one came out, though my horse's hoofs fell hard enough upon the stones to tell them of my coming; and when I got down at the gate I found a horse tied to the fence. Some person, eager to bear evil tidings, had forestalled me. I led my horse to the stable, went to the house, and had just stepped into the passage when Parker, the deputy sheriff, came out of the sitting-room. "I thought you'd go on back to the jail to stay a while, so I came on over to tell them. No trouble, you know—only a short distance out of my way."

All within was silent. I stepped inside. The old man was standing with his back to the fire-place; the old woman sat with her book in her lap and Guinea stood at the window, looking out into the darkness. I sat down in silence, for I knew not what to say, and in silence for a time we remained. The old woman sobbed, clutching more tightly her book, and the old man looked at her sharply and then almost flung himself out of the room. And a few moments later I heard him shouting: "Hike, there, Sam! Hike, there, Bob! There's plenty of light; you've got three lanterns. Hike, there! To a finish, to a finish!"

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"Mrs. Jucklin, it is no time for despair," I said, and Guinea turned from the window. "We have already secured a new trial, and the next time it will surely go in our favor. That is the history of nearly all such cases. Be strong just a little while longer. You have been our prop, and now you must not let us fall."

She arose and with an old-time courtesy bowed to me, and Guinea came forward and held out her hand, and she must have seen a sudden light leap into my eyes, for she said: "I am Alf's sister and yours, too."

This came as a repulse to my heart's eager yearning; no sister's confidences could answer the call that my nature was shouting to her. But I gulped down a rising soreness of the heart and I said: "I thank you."

The old man, with heavy tread, strode into the room. "It was to a finish," he whispered. His hands were covered with blood. "It was to a finish, and they are both dead."

There was a sharp rap at the door. Guinea opened it and in came the old General. "Mr. Jucklin, can I speak to you in private?" he asked, bowing to the women.

"No. What you've got to say, out with it here."

"I would rather say it in private. Why, what's the matter with your hands?"

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"It was to a finish, sir, and let what you say be to a finish, even if it is three times as bloody."

"Oh, I have come out of no hard feelings, sir. Ladies, would you and our friend, Mr. Hawes, mind retiring?"

"They are goin' to stay here, sir," the old man replied, rolling up his sleeves.

"All right, just as you will, sir. Mr. Jucklin, years ago we entered into an arrangement——"

"And I have cursed myself ever since!" the old man exclaimed.

"Just wait until I get through, if you please. We entered into an arrangement, prompted by a boy's fancy and warmed by a father's over indulgence. I know that this is a sore time to come to you, and I don't want to appear unkind, for my aim is tender, though my determination is just. Young hearts may whisper to each other, and that whispering may be music, sir; but in this life there are duties too stern to be melted and turned aside by a melody. And, sir, one of the most sacred duties that can fall to the trust of a man is to see that the family name, which is to survive after he has folded his hands in eternal stillness—pardon my devious methods, for I assure you that my windings proceed from a kindness of heart—I say that my duty now is to those who may bear my name in the future. I trust that I am now sufficiently started to speak plainly. I don't doubt the real worth and sterling integrity of your stock, Mr. Jucklin, but an agreement that we once made must be set aside."

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He stood with his broad hat in his hand and out of it he grabbed a handkerchief and wiped his face. Old Lim gazed steadily at him. "My words sound cold and formal," the General continued, "and I wish that they might be warmer and more at ease, but in vain have I tempered with them. The short of it all is, and I have striven not to say it bluntly—is that the engagement which has held us in prospective relationship is hereby broken; but by this I do not mean that your son is guilty of murder, for in his heart he may see himself justified, but a decision of court has—and I wish I could find a softer means of saying it—court has pronounced him guilty, and that places the marriage out of the question. Bear with me just a moment more, for I assure you that I am suffering keenly with you, that my heart is in sorrowful unison with your own. Family pride may be regarded a hobby in this day when refinement and respectability are sneered at, but it is a virtuous hobby, and I have held it so long that I cannot put it down. And now, in so far as there is any question of a financial obligation, we will turn our backs upon it and forget that it ever existed."

He put his handkerchief into his hat, changed his hat to his other hand and stood looking at Jucklin; and I had expected to see the old man leap off the floor in a rage, but I cannot recall ever having seen a cooler show of indifference. "I put gaffs on 'em early this mornin' an' kept 'em waitin' for the finish, and when it come it come soon," he said.

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"Mr. Jucklin, I had hoped to make myself sufficiently clear. I have come, sir, to break the engagement that was foolishly arranged by us to bind your daughter and my son."

"Bob died first, but Sam could jest stagger, and he fluttered against me and covered my hands with his blood; and I must apologize for not washin' 'em, but it is not too late to make some sort of amends. I will wipe 'em on your jaws, sir!"

He sprang forward, but I caught him. "You must be perfectly cool and perfectly sensible, Mr. Jucklin," I said, as quickly as I could, holding him. "Remember that he is in your house."

And this quieted him. Even the most pronounced backwoodsman in the South is sometimes graced with a sudden and almost marvelous courtesy, the unconscious revival of a long lost dignity; and this came upon the old man, and, bowing low, he said:

"I humbly beg your pardon, sir."

"And I should be a brute not to grant it," the General replied, bowing in turn. "But I hope that reason rather than the fact of my being under your roof will govern your conduct."

During this time, and, indeed, from the moment when the General had entered the room, Guinea stood beside the rocking-chair in which her mother was seated; no change had come over her countenance, but with one hand resting on the back of the chair she had remained motionless, with the exception that she placed her hand on her mother's head at the moment when I caught the old man in my arms. I saw this, though her motion was swift, for I was looking at her rather than at her father. And now the General turned to the girl.

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"My dear," he said. She frowned slightly, but her lips parted with a cold smile that came out of her heart.

"My dear child, it is hard for me to say this to you, for I feel that you can but regard me a feelingless monster that would rend an innocent and loving heart, and God knows that I now beg your forgiveness, but in this life cruel things must be done, done that those who come after us may feel no sting of reproach cast by an exacting society. I am an old man, my dear, and shall soon be taken to the burial ground where my fathers sleep in honor. They left me a proud name and I must not soil it. The oldest stone there is above a breast that braved old Cromwell's pikemen—the noble heart of a cavalier beat in that bosom—and can you ask——"

"I have asked nothing, General."

"You are a noble young woman."

"But your son will come to me and kneel at my feet."

A flush flew over the General's face. "No, it is with his full consent that I have come. Indeed, I would have put off my coming until a more befitting day, but he knew his duty and bade me do mine."

"He will kneel at my feet," she said; and he had not replied when we heard footsteps in the passage—wild footsteps. There was a moment of sharp clicking at the door latch, as if a nervous hand had touched it, and then Millie broke into the room. Her face was white, her hair hung about her shoulders. [198]

"You have kept me away!" she cried, stamping her feet and frowning at her father. "Yes, you have kept me away, but I have come and I hate you."

The old General was stupefied. "You may tell your cold-blooded son what to do," she went on, "but my heart is my own. He asked me to marry him and I will—I will break into the penitentiary and marry him. And you would have had me marry Dan Stuart. Just before he was killed he told me he would kill Alf if I said I loved him. I will go to the jail and marry him there."

She ran to Guinea, and they put their arms about each other and wept; and the old woman pressed her book to her bosom and sobbed over it. Through old Lim's wire-like beard a smile, hard and cynical, was creeping out, and the General was fiercely struggling with himself. He had bitten his lip until his mouth was reddening with blood.

"Come, you are going home with me," he said.

"I am not!" his daughter cried, with her arms tight about Guinea. "I am not; I am going to the jail."

"Then I will take you home."

"Don't touch me!" she cried, shrinking back into a corner. "Don't touch me, for I am almost mad. What do I care for your pride? What do I care for the old graveyard? You have tried to break my heart, but I will marry him. He is worth ten thousand such men as your cold-blooded son. Don't you touch me, father. Mr. Hawes!" she screamed, "don't let him touch me." [199]

The old General had stepped forward as if to lay hands upon her, but he stepped back, bowed and said: "You are a lady and I am a gentleman, and these facts protect you from violence at my hands, but I here denounce you—no, I don't, my daughter. I cannot denounce my own flesh and blood. I will leave you here to-night, hoping that when this fit of passion is over reason will lead you home. Good-night."

CHAPTER XV.

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Long we sat there in a calm, after the General left us; and the two girls, on a bench in a corner, whispered to each other. How wild had been my guessing at the character of Millie! How could one so shy, so gentle, so fond of showing her dimples, cast off all timidity and set herself in opposition to her father's authority and pride? I could but argue that she was wrong, that she had forgotten her duty, thus to stand out and violently defy him, and yet I admired her for the spirit she had shown. And I believed that Guinea was just as determined, just as passionate. But she was wiser.

I told the old man what Alf had requested me to tell him, that he must sell his farm and go away, and he replied that he would. "I don't think, though, that I can get very much for it. Parker's land joins mine, and may be I can strike a trade with him. Of course, I don't want to live here any longer, for no matter what may come now we've got the name. Susan, I never saw a woman behave better than you have to-night. The old stock—and I'm with the book from kiver to kiver. And now, Millie, let me say a word to you. Of course, I know exactly how you feel, and all that—how that you couldn't help yourself—but to-morrow mornin' after breakfast I would, if I was in your place, go right home and ask my father's forgiveness. I say if I was in your place, for if you do you won't have half so much to be sorry for, and in this life I hold that we're doin' our best when we do the fewest things to regret. What do you think?" [201]

"I'm sorry I talked that way, and he's getting old, too. But I had a cause. He made me stay in the house, and he ought to remember that I am of the same blood he is and that it's awful to be humiliated. But there's one thing I'm going to do. When Alf's tried again, I'm going to tell them what Stuart said. I would have done it this time, but I was ashamed to say anything about it. I have been nearly crazy, but I'm awfully sorry that I talked that way. And, oh, suppose he were to die to-night? I never could forgive myself. I must go home now, Mr. Jucklin. Yes, I can't stay another minute. You'll go with me, won't you, Mr. Hawes?"

"I will gladly do so," I answered.

"And I will go, too," said Guinea.

We took a lantern, but the night was so dark that we went round by the road, rather than over the meadows. Millie said that she scarcely remembered how she had come, but she thought that she had run the most of the way. And over and over as we walked along she repeated: "I'm awfully sorry."

As we came out of the woods, where the road bent in toward the big gate, we saw a light burning in the library. Millie stopped suddenly and clutched my arm. "Suppose he won't let me come back?" she said. "I don't know in what sort of a humor I may find him. Mr. Hawes, you go on and see him first, please?"

"And I will wait out here," Guinea spoke up, and her voice trembled. "Of course, I can't go into the house after what has happened. Nobody must know that I am here."

I left them standing in the dark, and when I stepped upon the porch I heard some one walking heavily and slowly up and down the library. On the door was a brass knocker, and when I raised it and let it fall, the foot-steps came hastily to the door. A hanging lamp was burning in the hall, and I saw that the old General himself had opened the door.

"Oh, it's you Mr. Hawes. I couldn't tell at first. My old eyes are getting flat, sir. Step into the library."

"No, I thank you. I have but a moment to stay."

"Step in, sir," he insisted, almost commanded, and I obeyed. Chyd was under a lamp, reading a sheep-skin covered book. He looked up as I entered, nodded, and then resumed his reading.

"Sit down," said the General.

"No, I thank you, for, as I say, I have but a moment to remain. Your daughter is exceedingly sorry that she acted——"

"Where is she, sir?"

"She has come with me, but fearing that your resentment——"

"What, is she out there waiting in the dark? What, my child out there waiting to know whether she can come into her father's house? I will go to her, sir. Come, Chyd, let us both go."

I stepped to the door and stood confronting the old man and his son.

"You can go, General, if you will, but your son must remain where he is."

"What, I don't understand you, sir. How dare you—what do you mean, sir?"

"Your son must not come with us. That is what I mean."

"Not go to welcome his sister home. Get out of my way, sir!"

"Wait, General. He should not go out there, for the reason that some one else, out of kindness, has accompanied your daughter and me."

"Ah, I beg your pardon," said the old man, bowing. "Chyd, stay where you are."

Millie was inside the yard, but Guinea was in the road, standing at the gate. "Come, my child!" the old man called. Millie ran to him and he took her in his arms. And he lifted her off the ground, slight creature that she was, and carried her up the steps.

Guinea took my arm and homeward we went, and not a word was spoken until we entered the dark woods.

"You saw Chyd?" she said.

"Yes, and the old gentleman wanted him to come out."

"To kneel at my feet so soon?"

"No, to welcome his sister. Are you so anxious for the time to come?"

"Yes," she answered, without hesitation.

"And is it because you love him?" I asked bitterly.

"You and I are to be the best of friends, Mr. Hawes, and you must not reproach me."

"Forgive me if I have hurt you," I said, stupidly.

"But you must not keep on wounding me merely to be forgiven. I said that he would kneel at my feet, and this may sound foolish to you, but he will. How do I know? I feel it; I don't know why, but I do. And we are to leave the old home if father can sell the land. It's better to go, but it will be still better to come back, and we will. Do you think that I am merely a simple girl without ambition? I am not; I dream."

"I know that you are a noble woman."

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"Oh, don't flatter me now. It's first reproach, and then flattery. But have you thought of the real nobility of some one else—yourself?"

I strove to laugh, but I know that it must have been a miserable croak. "I have done nothing to merit that opinion," I replied.

"Oh, it is a part of your nature to suppress yourself. Do you know that I expect great things of you? I do."

"I know one thing that I'm going to do—I am going to buy the old house and a narrow strip of land—the path and the spring. That's all I want—the house, the path and the spring, with just a little strip running a short distance down the brook where the moss is so thick. I have the promise of money from Perdue, and I think that I can borrow some of Conkwright. Yes, I must have the house and the path and the spring and the strip of moss-land that lies along the branch. It will be merely a poetic possession, but such possessions are the richest to one who has a soul; and no one with a soul will bid against me. It is a mean man that would bid against a sentiment."

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"You must be nearly worn out," she said, when for some distance we had walked in silence.

"I may be, but I don't know it yet. And so long as I don't know it, why, of course, I don't care."

For a long time we said nothing. Her hand was on my arm, but I scarcely felt its weight, except when we came upon places where the road was rough; and I wished that the way were rougher, that I might feel her dependence upon me. Once she stepped into a deep rut, and I caught her about the waist, but when I had lifted her out, she gently released herself. She said that the road was rougher than she had ever before found it, and I was ready to swear that it was the most delightful highway that my feet had trod; indeed, I did swear it, but she warned me not to use such strong language when I meant to convey but a weak compliment.

"Let us walk faster," she said. "It is away past midnight. I do believe it's nearly day. Can you see your watch?"

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"Yes, but I can't see the time."

"Nobody can see time, Mr. Teacher of Children."

"But I could not tell the time even if I were to hold the lantern to the watch."

"Oh, of course you could. Why do you talk that way?"

"I am moved to talk that way because I know that the watch, being in sympathy with me, refuses to record time when I am with you—it frightens off the minutes in an ecstasy."

"Nonsense, Mr. Hawes. I do believe daylight is coming. What a night we have passed, and here I am unable to realize it, and mother is heart-broken over our disgrace. But I suppose it will fall upon me and crush me when we have gone away. My brother sentenced to the penitentiary! To myself I have repeated these words over and over and yet they don't strike me."

"Perhaps it is because your mind is on some one else," I replied, with a return of my feeling of bitterness.

With a pressure gentle and yet forgetful her hand had been resting on my arm, but in an instant the pressure was gone like a bird fluttering from a bough, and out in the road she was walking alone.

"I earnestly beg your pardon. I scarcely knew what I was saying. Won't you please take my arm?"

"To be compelled to drop it again before we have gone a hundred yards?"

"No, to drop it when we have reached the gate. Won't you, please? I don't deny that I am a fool. I have always been a fool. My father said so and he was right. Everybody made fun of me because I was so easily cheated; and you ought to be willing to forgive a man who was born a failure. Whenever there has been a mistake to be made I have made it. Once I was caught in a storm and when I came in dripping, my father said that I hadn't sense enough to come in out of the rain. But I am stronger with every one else than I am with you, and——"

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She was laughing at me; but it was a laugh of sympathy, of forgiveness, and I caught her hand and placed it upon my arm. And so we walked along in silence, she pressing my arm when the road was rough. Daylight was coming and we could see the house, dark and lonesome beyond the black ravine.

"What a peculiar man the General is," I said, feeling the growing heaviness of the silence. "I can hardly place him; but I believe he has a kind heart."

"Yes," she replied, "he is kind and brave and generous, but over it all is a weakness."

"And he is of a type that is fast disappearing," said I. "A few years more and his class will be but a memory, and then will come almost a forgetfulness, but later on he will reappear as a caricature from the pen of some careless and unsympathetic writer."

We had crossed the ravine and were now at the gate, and here I halted. "What, aren't you going in?" she asked, looking up at me, and in the dim light I could see her face, pale and sad.

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"No," I answered, "I am going to town."

"At this hour, and when you are so tired?"

"The horse is rested, and as for myself, my duty must give me vigor."

"I don't understand you. What can you do in town?"

"I can bear the divinest of tidings—I can tell Alf that Millie loves him."

She stood looking down, and, bending over her, I kissed her hair, and oh, the heaven of that moment, at the gate, in the dawn; and oh, the thrilling perfume of her hair, damp with the dew brushed from the vine and the leaf of the spice-wood bush. And there, without a word, I left her, her white hands clasped on her bosom; and over the roadway I galloped with a message on my lips and incense in my soul.

CHAPTER XVI.

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The sun was an hour above the tree-tops when I rode up to the livery-stable, and the town was lazily astir. Merchants were sprinkling the brick pavements in front of their stores, and on the public square was a bon-fire of trash swept from the court-house. I hastened to the jail, and for the first time the jailer hesitated when I applied for admission. My eagerness, apparent to every one, appeared to be mistrusted by him, and he shook his head. I told him that he might go in with me, that my mission was simply to deliver a message.

"The man has been sentenced," said he, "and I don't know what good a message can do him. I am ordered to be very strict. Some time ago a man was in this jail, sentenced to the penitentiary, but he didn't go—a friend came in and left him some pizen. And are you sure you ain't got no pizen about you."

"You may search me."

"But I don't know pizen when I see it. Man's got a right to kill himself, I reckon, but he ain't got no right to rob me of my position as jailer, and that's what it would do. Write down your message and I'll take it to him."

"That would take too long. The judge has granted him a new trial and surely he wouldn't want to kill himself now."

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"Well, I reckon you're right, but still we have to be mighty particular. I don't know, either but you might be taking him some whisky. Man's got a right to drink whisky, it's true, but it don't speak well for the morals and religious standin' of a jailer if he's got a lot of drunken prisoners on hand; so, if you've got a bottle about you anywhere you'd better let me take it."

"I've got no bottle."

"That so? Didn't know but you might have one. Prohibition has struck this town putty hard, you know. Search yourself and see if you hain't got a bottle."

"Don't you suppose I know whether I've got one or not? But if you want one you shall have it."

"S-h-e-e! Don't talk so loud. There's nothin' that sharpens a man's ears like prohibition. Say," he whispered, "a good bottle costs about a dollar."

"Here's your dollar. It's my last cent, but you shall have it."

"Oh, it ain't my principle to rob a man," he said as he took the money. "But I do need a little licker this mornin'. Why, I'm so dry I couldn't whistle to a dog. No pizen, you understand," he added, with a wink, as he opened the door.

The drawing of the bolts must have aroused Alf from sleep, for when I stepped into the corridor he was sitting on the edge of his bed, rubbing his eyes.

"Helloa, is that you, Bill? What are you doing here this time of day? Why, I haven't had breakfast yet."

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"I have come to tell you something, and I want you to be quiet while I tell it."

"That's all right, old man. Go ahead. I can stand anything now."

I told him of the scene in the sitting-room, of the walk to the General's house—told him all except that kiss at the gate. He uttered not a word; he had taken hold of the bars and was standing with his head resting upon his arms—had gradually found this position, and now I could not see his face. Long I stood there, waiting, but he spoke not. Suddenly he wheeled about, fell upon his bed and sobbed aloud. And so I left him, and ere I reached the door I knew that his

sobbing was a prayer, that his heart had found peace and rest. Upon a pardon from the governor he could have looked with cool indifference, for without that girl's love he cared not to live; but now to know that through the dark she had fled from her home, rebellious against her father's pride, wild with love—it was a mercy granted by the Governor of governors.

I went to see Conkwright and told him of the threat that Stuart had made, and the old man's eyes glistened. "We ought to have had that girl on the stand in the first place," he said. "But it was a delicate matter and, of course, we didn't know that she could bear so strongly upon the case. It's all right—better as it is, and that boy will get off as sure as you are sitting there. That threat was worse than his standing in the road, waiting. Yes, sir, it's all right, and you may take up your school again and go ahead with your work."

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"I don't want to go ahead with it, Mr. Conkwright. I want to study law with you. The school was only a makeshift, any way. You are getting old and you need some one to do the drudgery of your office. I will come in and work faithfully."

"Don't know but you are right, Billy."

"I wish, sir, that you wouldn't call me Billy."

"All right, Colonel."

"And I don't care to be called Colonel. You may call me Bill, if you want to, but Billy——"

"A little too soft, eh? All right. I don't know but you are the very man I want. You are faithful and you've got a good head. Call again in a day or two. It has been a long time since I had a partner. Yes, come in again, and I think we can arrange it."

"There is something else that I want to speak about, and to me it is of more importance than ——"

"Love!" the old man broke in, winking at me.

"I'll tell you, if you'll wait a moment. Then you may place your own estimate upon it."

I told him of the broken engagement, of Chyd's indifference, of the old couple's plan to leave the community, and I unfolded my sentimental resolve to buy the old house. "And now I must ask a favor," I continued. "Old man Perdue told me that he would pay me for the time—time I have not taught, but as I am not going to fill out the term it wouldn't be right to take the money."

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"Ah, and it is law you want to study?"

"Why, of course. Didn't I make that plain?"

"Oh, yes. And you don't think it would be right to take the money? Go ahead, though."

"I know it wouldn't be right. And what I want to ask of you is this: The investment will require about two hundred dollars. Won't you lend me that amount?"

He scratched his head, scratched his chin, bit off a chew of tobacco, stretched himself and said: "Well, I have been lending money all my life, and I don't see why I should stop now. Did you ever hear of anybody paying back borrowed money except in a poker game? I never did. Do people really pay back? I don't know what the custom is over in the part of the country you came from, but the rules are very strict here, and they are not violated very often—they rarely pay back. And they never violate the rule with me."

"My dear sir, I will pay you——"

"Yes, I know. Oh, you've got the formula down pretty fine. Make a good lawyer. I've got some money in that safe, that is, if nobody has robbed me. Let me see if I've been robbed."

He opened the safe and took out a package of banknotes. "Don't believe I've been robbed. Rather singular, too," he went on, counting the money. "Two hundred, you said. Better take two-fifty—you need some clothes. Pardon me for being so keen an observer. It really escaped my notice until this moment. But what you want with the old house is more than I can understand. No, Billy—Bill, I mean—no, I understand it and it is a noble quality."

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He rolled up the money, handed it to me and continued to talk. "After all, sentiment is the only thing in life, but you'd better not tell this about town—I'd never get another case. Yes, sir, and the poet is the only man who really lives. Now go on and buy your acre of sentiment, and when you have closed the bargain, lie down upon your possessions and go to sleep. Tell the old man that he is a fool for going away, but tell him also that I don't blame him for being a fool. Yes, sir, I love a fool, for it's the wise man that puts me to trouble. Give my warmest regards to that old woman. Let me tell you something: Many years ago I was a poor young fellow working about the court-house. And the clothes you've got on now are wedding garments compared with what mine were. Well, one day I stopped at Jucklin's house to get out of the rain—he hadn't been married long—and soon after I went into the sitting-room, the wife began to whisper to the husband, and when she went out, which she did a moment later, Jucklin turned to me and said: 'Go up stairs, take off your britches and throw 'em down here, and I'll bring 'em back to you after a while.' I was actually out at the knees, sir, and I did as he told me, and when he brought my trousers back they were neatly patched. Yes, sir, give my warmest regards to that old woman, for if she isn't a Christian there never was one. Well, what are you hanging around here for? Trying

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to thank me? Is that it? Well, just go on, my boy, and we'll attend to that some other time."

"You know what I feel, Mr. Conkwright, and I will not attempt to thank you, but I must say that I was never more surprised in a man. I was told that you were hard and unsympathetic."

"Sorry you found me out, sir. Let a lawyer get the name of being kind and they say that he is emotional, but has no logic. Blackstone had to give up poetry. Well, good-day. I'm busy."

I ate breakfast at the tavern, nodding over the table; and I was so sleepy that I could scarcely sit my horse as I rode toward home. The day was hot and drowsy was the air, in the road and on the hill-side, where a boy, weary and heavy with the leg-pains of adolescence, was dragging himself after a plow. Once I dozed off to sleep and awoke under a tree, the wise old horse knowing that he could take advantage of my sleepiness to bat his eyes in the shade, and when I spoke to him he started off at a trot as if surprised to find that he had turned aside from his duty. I was nearly home and was riding along half asleep when the frightful squealing of a pig drew my attention down a lane that opened into the road. The animal was caught under a rail fence and his companions were running up to him, one after another, and were raking him with their sharp teeth. I got down and fought off the excited beasts, knocked one of them down for his cruelty, and lifted the fence to liberate the prisoner; and when he was free his companions, the ones that had been ripping his hide, ran up to congratulate him upon his good fortune; and in the whole performance I saw a heartless phase of human life, musing as I rearranged the rails that had been lifted away, and when I straightened up there stood Etheredge looking at me.

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"These are my hogs," he said.

"I didn't know that," I replied, "but I might have known that they were members of your family."

"Yes, you might have known a great many things that you have never been wise enough to find out. But I don't want to lash words with you, Mr. Hawes. I simply stopped to tell you that a man who would go out of his way to lift a heavy fence to help a hog is not a bad fellow; and I want to apologize for anything that I have said to anger you. I have nothing against you and I don't blame you for sticking to a friend. One of these days you'll find that I'm not half as bad a fellow as you have had cause to think me. Let us call off our engagement. Is it a go?"

"Doctor, I have no desire to kill you, and I think that your death would be the result of our keeping that engagement."

"Pretty confident sort of a man, I take it. And after all, bravery is nothing but a sort of over-confidence. But I don't believe that you would kill me; I believe that it would be the other way, and it is not out of fear that I propose a setting aside of our indefinite agreement to meet each other. But be that as it may, we will call it off unless you insist, and if you do, why, as a gentleman I shall be compelled to meet you. I am brave enough to confess that I can't help but admire you morally and physically. In a small way, I was once a demonstrator of anatomy, and from an outside estimate I must pronounce you as fine a specimen of manhood as I ever saw. And if you'll come over to the house we'll take a long drink on the strength of it."

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"The spirit of your hospitality is not lost upon me, Doctor, but the truth is, I never drink. But with a cheerful willingness I accept your other proposition—to set aside our engagement. It was no more your fault than mine."

"Yes, it was, Mr. Hawes—I wantonly nagged at you. But we will let it drop. Under present conditions we can't be very good friends, but there will come a time when you must acknowledge that malice may know what it is to be honest, if not generous."

"Don't go now, Doctor; you have interested me. Tell me what you mean."

"I wish you good-day, Mr. Hawes," was his reply, as he strode off down the lane. And he left me holding him in a strange sort of regard; he had flattered me and had hinted at a future generosity. Could it be that he intended to modify his evidence when again he should appear against Alf? A demonstrator of anatomy—and he could soothe a nerve as well as expose a muscle. I felt kindly toward him as I rode along, though blaming myself for my weakness. But I have never known a very large man who had not some vital weakness—of vanity, egotism, over-generosity, foolish tenderness—something in ill-keeping with a well-poised morality. With old Sir John we have more flesh, and, therefore, more of frailty.

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As I came within sight of the house I saw three men slowly walking about in the yard, and, upon reaching the gate, I recognized them as Parker, Jucklin and Perdue. I turned the horse into a lot and joined them.

"Well," said Jucklin, "it's all over and I have sold out to Parker."

"Not the house, too!" I cried in alarm.

The old man smiled and winked at Parker. "Well, not quite," he said. "Guinea told me what you wanted, and sir, you can have it, though I tell you right now that it ain't worth much."

"Will you take two hundred dollars?"

"Not from you, Bill. You may have the house and the path and the spring and the strip of moss, for if you haven't earned that and more——"

"Hold on, Mr. Jucklin. I want the property made over to me in regular form when I have paid you for it. I will accept of no concession; want to pay as much as Mr. Parker would have paid, and I have borrowed money enough to close the deal. You are going away and you will need every cent you can possibly raise; and I demand that you take the two hundred dollars that I have collected for you. It will be of no use to say that you will not, for I am determined, and, although you have been very kind, you will find me a hard man to fight. And remember that there is a debt to be paid."

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He held out his hand and looked over toward the General's house as I gripped his rough palm.

"I have buried 'em over by the edge of the woods," he said; "buried 'em with their gaffs on. I couldn't help it—they had to fight to a finish. Yes, it shall be as you say. I will pay what I owe and still have money enough to get away off somewhere. We'll draw up the papers in town and have it over with at once."

"Mr. Hawes, I've got a hundred dollars that's yours," said old man Perdue. "I have brought the money, and here it is."

"I can't take it, Mr. Perdue. I haven't earned it, and shall not earn it. I am not going to teach your school."

"The deuce you say! Why, my grandson thinks there ain't nobody in the world like you—says you can whip any livin' man. You must teach that school."

"No, I am going to study law with Judge Conkwright."

"What, with him? Don't you do it. Why, there ain't a harder hearted man on the face of the earth than he is. Smart as a whip, but he don't go to church once in five years. Oh, you needn't smile, for it's a fact. Not once in five years, and what can you expect from a man like that? Oh, he'll grind you into the very ground. Ain't got a particle of feelin'."

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"I expect him to teach me the law and I can get along with my present stock of religion. But even if he were to offer me his religion, I would accept it. I know him better than you can ever know him. But we have no cause to discuss him. No, I can't take your money."

"But you have earned some of it. Twenty-five dollars, at least."

"Well, I will take that much."

"Take it all," said Parker.

"No, twenty-five," I replied.

"You are your own boss," Perdue observed; "you know best. Here's your twenty-five, and I'll make it fifty if you'll send out word that the new man, whoever he may be, mustn't go into the creek. You are the sort of a reformer that this community has needed. Well, gentlemen, I've got to get home. Issue your proclamation, sir, and send for the other twenty-five."

Parker said that it was time for him to go, and, adding that he would meet Jucklin in town, left us at the door.

Mrs. Jucklin was brighter than I had expected to find her, and when I told her what Conkwright had said, that Alf would surely be acquitted, the light of a new hope leaped into her eyes.

"I told Limuel that God would not permit such a wrong," she said. "Didn't I, Limuel?"

"You said something about it, Susan; I have forgot exactly what it was. It's all right if the judge says he knows it. Yes, sir, it's all right. But we'll leave here all the same. Don't reckon we'll ever come back; can't stand to be p'inted at. Fight a man in a minit if he p'int's at me."

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"Oh, Limuel, don't talk about fighting when we are in so much trouble."

"Fight a man in a minit if he p'int's at me. Knock down a sign-post if it p'int's at me. Well, we want a little bite to eat. Been about six weeks since I eat anything, it seems like."

All this time I was wondering where Guinea could be, and was startled by every sound. The mother asked me how Alf looked and how he had acted when I had pictured Millie's leaving home; and I told her mechanically, wondering, listening; and I broke off suddenly, for I thought there was a footstep at the door. No, it was a chicken in the passage. They asked me many questions and I answered without hearing my own words. Mrs. Jucklin went out to the dining-room and the old man began to talk about his chickens. He had found them bloody and stiff, and had buried them in a box lined with an old window curtain. And now there was a step at the door. I looked up and Guinea stood there, looking back, listening to her mother. And thus she stood a long time, I thought, and yet she must have known that I was in the room. Mr. Jucklin spoke to her and she came in, walking very slowly. Her face was pale, with a sadness that smote my heart. She sat down and looked out of the window. Mrs. Jucklin called the old man, and when he was gone I told Guinea that I had left Alf in a convulsive joy; and, still looking out of the window, she said: "You are the noblest man I ever met."

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I sprang to my feet, but quickly she lifted her hand and motioned me back, though she still

looked away. "Sit down, please. Don't you remember our agreement to be frank with each other?"

"Yes, I remember it, but frankness means the opposite of restraint."

"Yes, but frankness should always have judgment behind it."

"Guinea!" She looked at me. "Guinea, you say that after a while he will kneel at your feet."

"Yes, after a while, Mr. Hawes."

"But let me—let me kneel at your feet now!"

Slowly she shook her head. "No, Mr. Hawes, you must never do that. Sometime we may kneel together, but you must never kneel to me. Now we are frank, aren't we? We may go to church together and hear some one pray a beautiful prayer, a prayer that may seem the echo of our own heart-throbs. Sweet is confidence, and I ask you to have confidence in me. Let me have my way, and when the time is ripe, I will come to you with my hands held out. Yes, when the time is ripe. And then there will be no reproaches and nothing to forgive, but everything to worship and to bless. Oh, I am a great talker when once I am started, Mr. Hawes, and I think all the time. I thought this morning as I stood at the gate, just as you left me standing; I heard you galloping down the road. And do you know what I thought of? It was almost profane, but I thought of the baptizing at the river of Jordan, when the spirit came down like a dove; and I knew what must have been the thrilling touch of that spirit, for the holiness of love had touched my hair. No, Mr. Hawes, not now. There, sit down again and let me talk, for I am started now. Oh, and you thought that I was dumb and feelingless? You mustn't weep; but as for me, why, I am a woman and tears are a woman's inheritance. There, I have said enough, and after this we must speak to each other as friends—until the time when I shall come to you with my hands held out; and then I am going to tell you of a woman who loved a man, not with a halting, half-hearted love, but with a love as broad as God's smile when the earth is in bloom. You didn't know that I was so persistent, did you? Isn't it time for a woman to be persistent? No woman has ever kept silence, they tell us, but women have been constrained to talk around the subject, festooning it with their insinuating fancies. But women are more outspoken now and are permitted to be truer to themselves. Yes, you must have confidence in me; let me indulge my dream a while longer, and then I will come to you, but until then let us be friends."

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"But won't you let me tell you something now? Won't you let me tell you that in the moonlight I bowed until my head touched the dust, worshiping you as you stood——"

"No, not now; not until I come. And won't you respect my wishes, even if they are foolish?"

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"Now and forever, angel, your word shall be a divine law unto me."

"They are calling us," she said. "Come on."

CHAPTER XVII.

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In the afternoon I went to town with the old man, to attend upon the transfer of the property, and I slept in the wagon, conscious of Guinea when the road was rough, and sweetly dreaming of her when there was no jolt to disturb my slumber. It was long after midnight when we returned. I was resolved to go early to bed, for Guinea and her mother were sadly engaged packing a box with the bric-a-brac upon which time and association had placed the seal of endearment.

"Now, I wonder what has become of that old lace curtain," said Mrs. Jucklin. "I have looked everywhere and can't find it, and I know it was in the chest up stairs."

The old man began to scratch his head.

"I don't know who could have taken it," Mrs. Jucklin went on. "It couldn't have walked off, I'm sure. Limuel?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"Do you know what has become of that old curtain?"

"What, that ragged old thing that wan't worth nothin'?"

"Worth nothin'! Why, it belonged to my grandmother."

"I never heard of that before."

"Oh, yes, you have, and what's the use of talkin' that way? You've known it all the time."

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"News to me," said the old man.

"It's not news to you, anything of the sort; but the question is, do you know what has become

of it?"

"Susan, in this here life many things happen, things that we wish hadn't happened. I am not sorry that they fit to a finish, for that had to be; but I am sorry that I wrapped 'em in that curtain when I buried 'em."

"Gracious alive, what has possessed the man! Oh, you do distress me so. How could you do such a thing, Limuel? I do believe you have gone daft. But you go right out there now and dig up them good-for-nothin' chickens and bring me that curtain. Go right on this minit."

"What, Susan, and rob the dead and the brave? You wouldn't have me do that."

"Go on, I tell you, or I'll go myself, and throw the fetchtaked things over to the hogs. The idee of wrappin' up them cruel, good-for-nothin' things in a curtain like that. Oh, I never was so provoked in my life."

The old man got up and stretched himself. "Bill," said he, "I am sometimes forced to believe that the women folks are lackin' in human sympathy. Ma'm, I'll fetch your curtain, but I've got to have somethin' to wrap around the dead and the brave."

"Don't you take that apron. Why, if he wouldn't take the best apron I've got, right out from under my very eyes. And you can't have that stand cover, either."

"Well, but, by jings, what can I have? Am I a traveler that has jest stopped here to stay all night? There's no use in talkin'; I'm goin' to have 'em put away decent. Take me for a barbarian?"

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He went out, and just as I was going up to bed I met him in the passage way, with a roll of white stuff in his bare arms, and as he stepped into the room I heard his wife exclaim: "Mercy on me, if he hasn't taken his best shirt. And what he is goin' to do for somethin' to wear the Lord only knows."

I heard Guinea laughing, and then I heard the old man say that what a man happened to wear would make but little difference with the Lord.

I was so worn that my sleep that night was dreamless, but when early at morning they called me to breakfast I knew that during the hours of that deep oblivion I had been vaguely conscious of a dim and shadowy happiness; and a vivid truth came upon me with the first glimpse of sunlight.

The old man was waiting at the foot of the stairs. "Bill, we are goin' over to the station right after we eat a bite," he said. "We can't take but a few things, and we'll leave the most of our trumpery till we git settled somewhere. Take care of that horse you've been ridin'—he don't belong to us; was left here by a man some time ago, feller that had to go away off somewhere to see his folks. So, you jest keep him till he's called for; and I've left you plenty of corn out there to feed him on. You can study your books here about as well as you can in town, and I wish you'd sorter look after the things. Parker will drive us over to the station."

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"And am I to go also?" I asked.

"No, I believe not. It's Guinea's arrangement and not mine. Let her have her own way. All women have got their whims, the whole kit an' b'ilin' of 'em, and you might as well reason with a weather cock. Wait a minit before we go in. As soon as we git half way settled Guinea will write to you. I have no idee where I'm goin', but it will be away off somewhere. It makes me shudder every time I meet a man that I know, and I'd bet a horse that if I was to meet a cross-eyed feller I'd fight him. If Alf gits clear he can come to us. And you—I'm sorry you have decided to go in with Conkwright, for I wanted you to come with Alf."

"I will come. Nothing shall stand in the way. Mr. Jucklin, have you noticed——"

"Yes, I've noticed everything. And it's all right. And Susan has noticed everything and it's all right with her. There never was a prouder human than Guinea, sir; the old General's pride is rain water compared to her'n. And she's got an idee in her head—I don't exactly understand it, but she's got it there and we'll have to let her keep it till she wants to throw it aside. I was over to the General's before sun up this mornin'. He swore that he wouldn't take the money, but I left it under a brick-bat on the gate post and come away. Well, everything is settled, and all I can say now is, God bless you."

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We were silent at breakfast, and we dared not look at one another. A wagon came rattling through the gate, and Parker shouted that he was ready. No one had said a word, but the old man struck the table with his fist and exclaimed: "I insist on everybody showin' common sense. I don't want anybody to speak to me. I'll fight in a minit. Git in that wagon without a word. Hush, now."

I wanted to lead Guinea to the wagon, to feel again her dependence upon me, but she pretended to be looking away when I attempted to take her hand, and so she walked on alone; but I helped her into the vehicle, and I kissed her hand when she took hold of the seat. She gave me a quick look and a smile; and the wagon rolled away. I stood on the log step, watching it, and as it was slowly sinking beyond the hill I saw the flutter of a handkerchief.

I went up to my room and sat down, sad that I had seen her going away from me, yet happy to know that she had left her heart in my keeping. But the foolishness of this separation struck me with a force that had been lacking until now, and for a time I felt toward the old man a

hardness that not even a keen appreciation of his kindness and his drollery could soften. Gradually, however, the truth came to me that Alf had drawn the plan, and with my arms stretched out toward the hill-top that had slowly arisen between me and the fluttering handkerchief I foolishly apologized to the old man. I did more foolish things than that; I improvised a hymn and sang it to Guinea—a chant that, no doubt, would have been immeasurably funny to the cold-hearted and the sane, but it brought the tears to my eyes and rendered the rafters just above my head a work of lace, far away. And at these devotions I might have remained for hours had not a sharp footfall smote upon my ear. I hastened down stairs, and at the entrance of the passage stood Chyd Lundsford, looking about, slowly lashing his leg with a switch.

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"Helloa! Where are all the folks?"

"They are gone, sir," I answered, stiffly bowing to him.

"Gone? I don't know that I quite catch your meaning."

"If it be illusive you have made it so. I said that they were gone, which means, of course, that they are not here."

"I understand that all right enough, but do you mean that they are not in at present or that they have really left home?"

"They have no home, sir."

He gave himself a sharp cut with the switch. "It can't have been so very long since they left, for the old man was over to see father this morning. Which way did they go? I may overtake them."

"That would be greatly against their wish, sir."

"I am not asking for an opinion. I want to know which way they went."

"I am not at liberty to tell you that. They have gone out into a world that is as strange to them as America was to Columbus."

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"Rot. There isn't a smarter woman anywhere than Guinea. She has read everything and she knows the world as well as I do. But why are you not privileged to tell me which way they went? I have something to say that concerns them closely. Did they go toward town?"

"Do you suppose that they would go away without first seeing their son?"

"Then you mean that they went to town. Why the devil can't you speak out? Why should you stand as a stumbling block?"

"Why should I stand as a sign post?"

"Now here, you needn't show your selfishness in this matter. She wouldn't wipe her feet on you."

"No, but she would wipe them on you."

"What!" He took a step forward, but he stepped back again and stood there, lashing himself with the switch. "My father tells me that you are a gentleman," he said.

"And you may safely accept your father's opinion of me," I answered.

"But you are not striving, sir, to make that opinion good."

"A good opinion needs no bolstering up."

"This bantering is all nonsense. I've got nothing against you; I have simply asked you a civil question."

"And I hope to be as civil as you are, but out of regard for the feelings of those old people and their daughter I cannot tell you which way they went. You couldn't overtake them, any way."

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"But I can try."

"Yes, you could have tried yesterday and the day before, and a week ago, when they needed your sympathy."

He dropped his switch, but he caught it up again, and his face was red. "I might say, sir, that what I have done and that which I have failed to do is no business of yours, but I feel that there is a measure of justice in what you say, and I acknowledge that I have been wrong. That is why I am here now—to set myself right."

"In matters of business we may correct an error, Mr. Lundsford; we may rub out one figure and put down another, but a mark made upon the heart is likely to remain there."

"I will not attempt to bandy sentimentalities with you, sir. I am a practical man, a scientist, if you wish; and I came here to tell that girl that my breaking off the engagement—you must know all about it—was wrong. I told my father to come, for just at that time I didn't feel that as a man who looks forward to something a little more than a name I could afford to marry her. But I was wrong; any living man could afford to marry her. I was wrong, and that ought to settle it."

"And I think, sir, that it does settle it as far as you are concerned."

"Do you mean that she won't marry me? Oh, yes, she will, not out of any foolish love, but because she would be proud of my success. Well, I may not overtake her, but I will write to her. Yes, that will do as well. She will want to know how things are getting along here, and will write to you, and when she does I wish you would show me her letter. What are you laughing at? Haven't you got any sense at all?"

"I hope so, but I am not so much of a scientist that I am a fool."

"No, but you are so much of a fool that you are not a scientist, by a d——d sight."

He had me there, and it was his time to laugh, and he did. He was so tickled that he roared, walking up and down the passage; and he was so pleased that he held out his hand to shake upon the merit of his joke. I was not disposed to be surly and I shook hands with him, and he clapped me on the shoulder, still laughing, and declared that it was a piece of wit worthy of the dissecting-room, and that he would jolt his fellows with it.

"I am glad you are so much pleased," I remarked.

"Why, don't you think it's good, eh? Of course, you do. Well, it's better to part laughing, anyway."

"You are not too much of a scientist to be a philosopher," I said. And I expected him to continue his line of deduction and to say that I was too much of a philosopher to be a scientist, but he did not; he sobered and gravely remarked:

"Yes, I am devilish sorry that this thing came about, and I hope that Guinea will not take a romantic view of it. I guess they'll be back after a while, if Alf is cleared, and from what I hear I suppose he will be."

"May I ask how your sister is?"

"Certainly. She's all right; doesn't eat much, but her pulse is normal—little excited, but hardly noticeable. Loves that fellow, doesn't she? Strong, good-looking boy, but not very practical. Hope he'll come out all right. Ah, I was going to say something, but it has escaped me. Oh, yes, you are in love with Guinea. Be frank, now."

"Yes, I worship her."

"Hardly the word, but it will do, on an impulse. I think a good deal of her myself. I said just now that she wouldn't wipe her feet on you, and I beg your pardon. She may wipe them on you. You are going to stay here, eh? Well, come over to the house. No reason why there should be any ill-will between us. Good-day."

I sat down on the step and watched him until he had ridden out of sight, and I was pleased that he went toward his home, not that I was afraid of a renewal of the engagement; I knew that it was forever set aside. But I felt that his overtaking the wagon would bring an additional trouble to the father and the mother; indeed, I was afraid that the old man might kill him. Strange fellow Chyd was, and I liked him as an oddity, as something wholly different from myself or from any impulsive being. He was not cruel—he simply had no heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I walked about the old place until nearly noon, and then I went to town. The jailer met me with a doubtful shaking of his scheming head, and I knew that again he had received orders to be rigid in his discipline, but I was resolved that the old rascal's appetite for liquor should not play a second prank upon me; so when he hinted at another bottle I told him that I had spent so much of my life as a temperance lecturer that it was against my conscience to buy a favor with whisky. I looked steadily at him, and he began to wince.

"Why, to be sure," said he, "but, my dear sir, I didn't buy whisky with that dollar—bought a ham with it. If I didn't I'm the biggest liar in the world; and I don't reckon there's a family in this town that needs another ham right now worse than mine does."

"That may be, but I can't afford to pay so heavy a price every time I enter this place. You know that I am associated with the prisoner's lawyer, but we'll waive that right—I'll go to the sheriff and get an order from him."

"Why, my dear sir, that's unnecessary. Walk right in; but remember your promise not to say anything about that ham. There are a lot of vegetarians in this town, and if they hear of my eating meat they'll hold it against me. Walk in, sir."

I found Alf in high spirits. Conkwright had called and had assured him that his day of liberty was not far off. I told him that the old house was deserted, and he stood musing, looking at me dreamily, as if his mind were hovering over the scenes of his boyhood. I let him dream, for I knew the sweetness of a melancholy reverie. Sometimes the soul is impatient of the body's dogged hold on life, and steals away to view its future domain, to draw in advance upon its coming freedom—now lingering, now swifter than a hawk—and then it comes back and we say that we have been absent-minded. Alf started—his soul had returned. "And weren't you surprised to see them drive toward town?" he asked.

"Who, your parents and Guinea? They didn't; they drove toward the railway station."

"But they came to town, my dear boy—were here in this jail. They must have driven round to deceive you, for they knew that you would want to come with them, and they deceived you to spare you the pain of seeing us together. And I'm glad you were spared, though mother stood it much better than I expected. But this was because she firmly believes I'll be cleared. They haven't been gone a great while—there's a station not far from this town. Father played another trick on you. Yesterday, when he came to town to deed over the land, he left you dozing in the wagon and slipped off round here. I was surprised, for I had positively ordered him not to come. But he set me to laughing before he got in. 'Open that door by the order of the sheriff!' he cried at the jailer. 'Here's the order; look at it, but don't you look at me. Fight you in a minit.' And then he came in, and the first thing he told me was that they had gaffs on. He said that he had fought hard to keep mother from coming, at night when the rest were asleep; and I swore that she must not come, but she did. Bill, you brought me a message that sent me to heaven; and now let me ask if you know that Guinea loves you? There, don't say a word—you know it. She told me, standing where you are now—told me everything, and what a talker she is when once she is started. But you must let her have her way, and she will come to you, holding out her hands. Have you seen Millie?"

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"No, not since that night. But I am going to see her."

Then I told him that Chyd had come to the house—I reproduced the scene, and Alf's merriment rang throughout the jail.

"Yes," he said, "you can go over there all right enough. The General likes you, anyway. I don't know what he thinks of me—still sizes me as a boy, I suppose; and if he were to come in here now I believe he would ask me what father was doing. But it makes no difference what he thinks. The judge tells me that you are going to study law with him. Jumped into an interesting case right at once, didn't you?"

We talked a long time and we laughed a great deal, for we were in a paradise, although in a jail. And I left him with a promise that I would soon bring him a direct word from Millie.

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I found Conkwright in his office, with his slippered feet on a table. He bade me come in, and he said nothing more, but sat there pressing his closed eye-lids with his thumb and fore-finger. How square a chin he had and how rugged was his face, trenched with the deep ruts of many a combat. His had been a life of turmoil and of fight. He was not born of the aristocracy. I had heard that he was the son of a Yankee clock peddler. But to success he had fought his way, over many an aristocratic failure.

"Judge, have you finally decided that I may come into your office?"

"Thought we settled that at first," he replied, without opening his eyes. "Yes, you may come in; glad to have you, and, by the way, I've got some work I want you to do right now. A woman was in here to-day to see if I could get her husband out of the penitentiary. I don't know but I helped put him there—believe I did. I was busy when she came in, and when she went away I remembered how poorly she was dressed, and I am afraid that I didn't speak to her as kindly as I should have. She lives at the south end of the street behind the jail, left hand side, I believe. Look in that vest hanging up there and you'll find twenty dollars in the pocket, right hand side, I think. Take the money and slip down to that woman's house and give it to her. But don't let anyone see you and don't tell her who sent it. Might tell her that the State sent it as wages due for overtime put in by her husband. And you needn't come back this evening, for it's time to close up."

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I looked back at him as I stepped out. He had not changed his position and his eyes were still closed. And this was my first work as a student of the law—a brave beginning, the agent of a noble design. I found the place without having to make inquiry, and a wretched hut it was. The woman was shabby and two ragged children were lying on the floor. I gave her the twenty dollars—I did more, I gave her a part of the money which Perdue had given me. I explained that her husband had worked overtime and that the State, following an old custom, had sent her the wages of his extra labor. She was not a very good-natured woman; she said that the State and the rest of us ought to be ashamed of ourselves for having robbed her of her husband, and she declared that if she ever got money enough she would sue old Conkwright and the sheriff and everybody else. I was glad enough to quit that wretched and depressing scene; and in the cool of the evening I strolled about the town. The business part of the place was mean, but further out there were handsome old residences, pillared and vine-clad. And in front of the most attractive one I halted to gaze at the trees and the shrubbery, dim in the twilight.

A boy came along and I asked him who lived there and he answered: "Judge Conkwright."

"He deserves to live in even a better house," I mused, as I turned away; and just then I was

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clapped upon the shoulder with a "Helloa, my old friend"—the telegraph operator. I shook hands with him, and at once he began to tell me of his affairs. "Getting along all right," he said. "Haven't got quite as much freedom as I used to have, but I reckon it's better for me. Wife thinks so much of me that she's jealous of the boys—don't want me to stay out with them at night. Don't reckon there's anything more exacting than a rag. But I had to have one. Without calico there ain't much real fun in this life. But enough of calico's society is about the enoughest enough a man can fetch up in his mind. Tell you what—I'll run on home and come back, and then you can go with me."

"No, I couldn't think of putting you to so much trouble."

"Won't be any trouble. Simply don't want to surprise her, you know."

"I'll call on you before long, but now I must go to the tavern."

"All right, and if I can get off I'll come over to see you. And I'll tell you what we'll do along about 11 o'clock. We'll go over to Atcherson's store with a lot of fellers and cook some eggs in the top of a paste-board hat box. Ever cook them that way? It's a world beater. Just break the eggs in the lid of the box and put it on the stove and there you are. Finest stuff you ever eat. But while you're eating you mustn't let them tell that jug story. Couldn't eat a bite after that. Well, I leave you here."

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Fearing that the operator's "rag" might fail in the strict enforcement of the regulations that had been thrown about the night-time movements of her husband, that he might break out of the circle of his wife's fondness and call on me at the tavern, I left that place soon after supper and resumed my walk about the town. In some distant place where the land was dry a shower of rain had fallen, for the air was quickened with the coming of that dusty, delicious smell, that reminiscent incense which more than the perfume of flower or shrub takes us back to the lanes and the sweet loitering places of youth. Happiness will not bear a close inspection; to be flawless it must be viewed from a distance—we must look forward to something longed for, or backward to some time remembered; and my happiness on this night was not perfect, for a sense of loneliness curdled it with regret, but here and there, as I walked along, I found myself in an ecstasy—my nerves thrilled one another like crossed wires, electrified. I knew that it might be a long time before I should hear from Guinea, but I was still drunk with the newness of the feeling that she loved me.

Prayer-meeting bells were ringing, and old men and old women came out of the dark shadow of the trees, into the light that burned in front of a church—hearts that with age were slow and heavy, praying for the blessing of an Infinite Mystery. I entered the church and knelt down to pray, for I am not so advanced a thinker as the man who questions the existence of God; but I must admit that my thoughts were far away from the mumblings that I heard about me, far, indeed, from the mutterings of my own lips; and so I went out and sniffed the prayer of nature, the smell of rain that came from far off down the dusty road.

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Early the next morning I went to Conkwright's office, to tell him that for a time I preferred to study in the country. The old man was walking up and down the room, with his hands behind him.

"Did you find that woman?" he asked.

"Yes, and I let no one see me."

"Good. You gave her the twenty dollars, and—is that all you gave her?"

"Why, that was all you told me to give her."

"Yes, I know, but didn't you give her some of your own money? Speak out now. No shilly-shallying with me."

"Well, she was so wretched that I gave her five dollars of my own money."

"You did, eh? The money you borrowed from me, you mean?"

"No, money that old Perdue thinks I earned. He insisted upon my taking twenty-five dollars."

"It's all right, my boy. Yes, it's all right, but you'll have to be more careful. It is noble to give, but it is not wise to look for an opportunity. It is better to give to the young than to the old, for the good we do the youth grows with him into a hallowed memory—stimulates him to help others—while the memory of the aged is fitful. Whenever you see a boy trying to amount to something, help him, for that is a direct good, done to mankind. Now to business. Have you read Blackstone?"

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"Yes, but not thoroughly. I have never owned his book."

"There he is on my desk. I keep him near me. The lawyer who outgrows that book—well, I may be an old fogy on the subject, so I'll say nothing more except to commend the treatise to a lawyer as I would the multiplication table to a student of mathematics. And now let me say that when you have been with me one year we will begin to talk about other matters, the question of money, for instance. Don't be extravagant—don't give money because you don't know what else to do with it—and I will see that you shall not want for anything. Oh, yes, I know you are thinking of getting married, but it won't cost much to keep your wife. We'll fix all that, and if I don't make a lawyer out of you I am much fooled. You are in love and are mighty sappy just at present, but you'll come round all right; yes, sir, all right after a while."

"I think, Judge, that I can study much better out at the old house, and if you have nothing for me to do I should like to spend several days at a time out there."

"Why, is that the way to assist me? What good can you do me by poking off out there in the woods? Well, you may for a while. Three days a week for a time, eh? All right. You are as hard to break in as a steer. What about those stories you told at the General's house. I hear that they were great. But don't let people put you down as a story teller, for when a lawyer gets that reputation, no matter how profound he may be, the public looks upon him as a yarn-spinner, rather than a thinker. You might put them in print, but not under your own name. Bill—came within one of calling you Billy—a great many men succeed in law not because they are bright, but because they are stupid. I never see a jackass that I don't think of a judge—some judges that I know. Well, now, the first and one of the most important things to do is to go over to that tailor and have yourself measured for a suit of clothes. Did I say measured? Surveyed is the word," he added, looking at me from head to foot and then laughing. "Yes, I think that's the word. Well, go on now."

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When the tailor had completed his "survey" I went to the jail, talked for a few moments with Alf and then straightway rode to the General's house. The old man was sitting on the porch, with one foot resting on a pillow, placed upon a chair. "Get down and come right in!" he shouted; and as I came up the steps he motioned me away from him and said: "Don't touch that hoof, if you please. Buttermilk gout, sir. Look out, you'll tip something over on me. It's a fact—every time I drink buttermilk it goes to my foot. Too much acid. How are you, anyway?"

He cautiously reached out his hand and jerked it away when I had merely touched it. "Didn't sleep a wink last night; and every dog in the county came over here to bark. I am very glad you have called; glad that you are too liberal to hold a foolish resentment. And the old folks are gone. 'Od 'zounds, the way things do turn out. The first thing I know I'll swear myself out of the church. It was my pride, sir—but by all the virtues that man has grouped, must we apologize for our pride? Hah, sir! Must I grovel and beg pardon because I honor my own name? I'll see myself blistered first. It wasn't old Lim's fault. Confound it all, it wasn't anybody's fault. Then, sir, must I go crawling around on my belly like a—like a—like an infernal lizard, sir? I hope not. But it will come out all right, I think. After Alf is cleared the old people will come back and all will be well again. What do you want?"

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A negro boy had poked his head out of the hall door and was looking on with a broad grin. "Dinner!" cried the old man. "But is that the way to announce it—grinning like a cat? Come back here. Now what do you want?"

"Dinner is ready, sah," said the boy.

"Well, that's all right. But don't come round here grinning at me. Hand me that stick. Oh, I'm not going to hit you with it. Come, Mr. Hawes. No, I don't want you to help me. I can hobble along best by myself."

Millie was in the dining-room, and she turned to run when she saw me, but the old man hobbled into her way, so she came toward me with reddening face, and held out her hand. "I am glad to see you," she said. "Sit over here, please. That's Chyd's seat and he's so particular."

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The son came in, said that he was pleased to see me, sat down, opened a pamphlet that looked like a medical journal and began to read.

"Mr. Hawes," said the General, "I understand that you have made arrangements to study law with Judge Conkwright. And a most fortunate arrangement, I should think. Smart old fellow, sir; smart, and a good man to have on your side, but a mighty bad man to have against you—half Yankee by parentage and whole Yankee by instinct. Millie, is that cat under the table?"

"I think not, father," the girl answered, after looking to see if the cat were there; but this did not satisfy the old man. "You must know, not think," he said. "There should be no doubt about the matter, for I must tell you that if he touches my foot I'll kill him. A cat would travel ten miles and swim a river—and a cat hates water—to claw a gouty foot. Chyd, just put that book aside if you please."

The young man folded the pamphlet and shoved it into his pocket. "I've struck a new germ theory," he said.

"Yes," replied the General, "and you'll strike a good many more of them as you go on. I should think that you want facts, not theories."

"But theories lead to facts," the young man rejoined. "The theory of to-day may become the scientific truth of to-morrow."

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"And it may also be the scientific error of the day after to-morrow," I remarked.

He looked at me, spoke a word which I did not catch and then was silent, seeming to have forgotten what he had intended to say. I think that the word he uttered was "hah," or something to indicate that he had paid but slight heed to my remark. I did not repeat it, and the talk fell away from the germ theory.

"Now, Mr. Hawes," said the General, "I want you to help yourself just as if you were alone at your own board. It is a pleasure to have you with us, and an additional pleasure to know, sir, that

you are to become a permanent citizen of this county. Men may think themselves wise when they apprentice their sons to a trade, averring that the professions are overcrowded, but that has always been the case, and yet, professional men have ever been the happiest, for they achieve the most, not in the gathering of money, but in the uplifting of mankind. My daughter, you don't appear to be eating anything. I hope that you have not permitted the timely, though unexpected, visit of Mr. Hawes to affect your appetite. Chydister, another piece of this mutton? Most nutritious, I assure you; a fact, however, which is, no doubt, well known to you. Mr. Hawes, I should think that you would prefer to sleep here at night, rather than to stay alone in that old house. You are more than welcome to a room here, sir. And I should like to hear anecdotes of your grandfather, the Captain."

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"I shall be in the country but a part of the time during the week, and my coming and going will be irregular. But for this I should gladly accept your generous offer. As to my grandfather, I must admit that I know but little regarding his life."

"A sad error in your bringing up, sir. In that one particular we Americans are shamefully at fault. A buncombe democracy has insisted that it is not essential to look back, but simply to place stress upon our present force and consequence. That is a self-depreciation, a half-slander of one's self. Of course, it is not just to despise a man who has no ancestry, but it is a crime not to honor him if he has a worthy lineage."

And thus he talked until the rest of us sat back from the table, and then, gripping his cane and getting up, he said that he would like to talk to me privately in the library. Upon entering the room he filled a clay pipe, handed it to me, gave me a lighted match, filled a pipe for himself, and then lay down upon an old horse-hair sofa. I placed a cushion for his foot and he raised up and bowed to me. "I thank you, sir," he said. "I don't believe that Chyd would have thought of that. I believe that he will make of himself one of the finest of physicians, but a man may be a successful doctor and yet a thoughtless and an indifferent companion. You will please put the right construction upon what may appear as an over-frankness on my part, for the fact is I have never regarded you as a stranger; and I feel that what I say to you will go no further."

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He was silent and I nodded to him, waiting for him to continue. He moved his shoulders as if to work himself into an easier position, and then he resumed his talk. "Of my own volition I would not have gone over to Jucklin's house to break that engagement—I would have waited—but my son told me to go, and after I had gone, why, of course, I had to act my part. But it was simply acting, for my heart was not in it. And I tell you, sir, that if old Lim had wiped his bloody hands in my face I would not have struck him. Chydister is proud, but his pride and mine are not of the same sort. With him everything must bear upon his future standing as a physician, and to me that has too much the color of business. I admit that I was grieved to discover that my daughter was in love with Alf. I don't say that he is not morally worthy of her or of any young woman, but he is poor and is indifferently educated, with no prospects save a life of hard work. And I don't believe that I need to apologize for desiring to see my daughter well situated. Now, my son regrets the step which he took and which he urged me to take, and at the earliest moment he will renew the engagement. I think almost as much of Guinea as I do of my own daughter. Although she is a country girl, who has led a most simple life, I hold her a remarkable woman—an original and a thinking woman, sir. And now what I request you to do is this—soften her resentment, if you can. There are matches at the corner of the mantelpiece."

My pipe was out. I lighted it, and did not resume my seat, but stood looking at him.

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"General," said I, "Guinea will never marry your son."

"The devil you say! Pardon me. I didn't mean to be so abrupt. But why do you think she will not marry him?"

"General, it is now your turn to pardon me, sir. She is to be married by a man who worships her, not a scientist, but a man with a heart—she is going to be my wife."

The old man sprang up and in a moment he stood facing me. There was a footstep at the door and Chydister entered the room.

"Go ahead with your emotional oratory, but pardon me while I look for my stethoscope," he said. "I want to see what effect an hour's run will have on the hearts of a hound and an ordinary cur."

"Sir!" cried his father, turning upon him, "this is no time to talk of the hearts of hounds and curs. The hearts of men are at stake."

"That so? What's up?"

"What's up, indeed, sir? This man says that Guinea Jucklin will not marry you."

"Yes, so he told me. Now I almost know that I put that thing right up here."

"Zounds, man, will you listen to me!"

"Yes, sir, go ahead. He says she won't marry me. That's his opinion, undemonstrated—a mere assertion; he has given me no proof."

"Ah, have you any proof, Mr. Hawes?" the old man asked.

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"I have, but it cannot very well be set forth in words; and with much respect for you, General, I must say that I prefer not to illustrate it."

"You see it's rather vague, father. Let me ask if she has said positively that she will be your wife?"

"Her lips may have made no promise beyond a figure of speech, and yet her heart——"

"Ah, more vague than ever," the young man broke in, looking at his father as if he were impatient to get away. "I must have left it somewhere else," he added, and the old General frowned upon him.

"Chydister, if you lose that woman it is your own fault."

"Well, no, I can hardly agree with you there, father. If I lose her it will be the fault of circumstances. Are you done with me?"

"Yes, you can go," said the General. He stooped, reached back for the lounge and laboriously stretched himself upon it. Chyd went out and I remarked that it was time for me to go. The old man made no reply, seeming not to have heard me, but as I turned toward the door he raised up and said:

"I would be a fool, sir, to blame you; and I trust that you will not blame me for hoping that you are mistaken."

He lay down again, and I left him. Millie was standing at the gate when I went out, and she pretended not to see me until I had passed into the road, and then, with the manner of a surprise, she said: "Oh, I didn't think you were going so soon—thought you and father were having an argument. Do you see—see him very often?"

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There was a tremulous tenderness in her voice, and I knew that there were tears in her eyes, and I looked far away down the road, as I stood there with the gate between us.

"I have seen him every day," I answered.

"And does he look wretched and heart-broken?"

"No, he is happy, for he knows that you love him."

She caught her breath with a sob and I looked far away down the road.

"You told him—told him that I did. And I am so thankful to you; I would do anything for you. I dream of him all the time, and I see you with him. How terrible it is, shut up there and the sun is so bright for everyone else. Sometimes I go into the closet and stay there in the dark, for then I am nearer him. When will you see him again?"

"I am going back to town to-morrow."

"Will you please give him this?"

I reached forth my hand and upon my palm she placed a locket.

"I know that if you study law, Mr. Hawes, you will get him out. You are so strong that you can do most anything. Good-bye, and when you write to Guinea, send her my love."

CHAPTER XIX.

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Four weeks passed and heavy were the days with anxiety, for I had received no word from Guinea. I thought of a hundred causes that must have kept her from writing, but, worst of all, I feared that she had written and that the letter had gone astray.

One afternoon, having thrown my book aside, weary of causes, reasonings and developments of law, I sat on a rock near the spring, musing, wondering, when suddenly I sprang to my feet, with Guinea in my mind, with Guinea before me, I thought. But this was only for an instant. A young deer came down the path, gracefully leaping, and my mind flew back to the time when I had first seen her running down that shining strip of hard-beat earth. Yes, it was a deer, and it ran down the brook, and presently I heard the hounds yelping in the woods. I returned to my room and again I strove to study, but the logical phrasing was harsh to me, and I threw down the book. I would fish in the pools that lay along the stream toward the mill. The ground in the yard and about the barn was so dry that I could find no angle worms, and I decided to dig in the damp moss-land near the spring. The hoe struck a hard substance and out came something bright. I stooped to examine it, and at first I thought that it was silver, but it was not—it was mica. I scraped off the moss and the thin strata of earth, and there I found a great bed of the ore. I dug deeper and it came up in chunks, and it was fine and flawless. My reading taught me that it was

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valuable, and I was rejoiced to find that it was on my own land. I got out as much as I could carry—indeed, I filled a trunk with it, and then carefully replaced the moss, smoothed it down and made it look as if it had not been displaced. My blood tingled with excitement and I was afraid that some one might have seen me. I took the trunk to my room and split off thin sheets of the mica, and the more I looked at it the more I was thrilled at the prospect that now lay, not in the future, but under my touch. And I was not long in resolving upon a course to pursue. I remembered that into our neighborhood had come from Nashville, Tenn., a large stove with mica in the doors, and I thought it would be wise to take my trunk to that city and by exhibiting its contents induce some one to buy the mine. I hastened to town, after hiding the trunk, and told Conkwright and Alf that unexpected business called me away for a few days, and then I returned home and hired a man to drive me to the railway station. I was afraid to trust the trunk out of my sight, but I had to let the baggage man take it, but I charged him to be particular with it, telling him that it was full of iron ore. He gave it a jerk and declared that it must be full of lead. When I had come into that community I fancied that the train was on wings, but now it appeared to be crawling. Night came and I was afraid that robbers might assail the train and expose my secret; but at last I reached Nashville, and then came a worry. How was I to find the man who had made the stove? I took my trunk to a hotel, wrapped a chunk of the mica in a handkerchief and set out to look for a stove dealer. I soon found a hardware establishment, and in I walked with the hardened air of business, and asked for the proprietor. A pleasant-looking man came forward, and I asked him what mica was worth. He looked at me sharply and answered that he was not thoroughly informed as to the state of the market, but that he thought it was worth all the way from five to twenty-five dollars a pound. "But mica of the first quality is scarce," said he, and then he asked if I wanted to buy mica.

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"No, sir, I want to sell it. Is this of good quality?"

I unwrapped the handkerchief and his eyes stuck out in astonishment. "Where did you get it?" he asked.

"Off my land in North Carolina."

"Have you very much of it?" he asked, scaling off thin sheets with his knife.

"Tons of it."

"You don't say so! Then you've got a fortune. We are not very large manufacturers and don't use a great deal. How much did you bring with you?"

"Only a trunk full."

"Well, I guess we can take that much. Bring it around."

I did so, and I could scarcely believe that I had correctly caught his words when he offered me five hundred dollars, though now I know that he paid me much less than it was worth. He talked a long time with his partner, and then came back to me with the money, asked my name and a number of other questions. "Young man," said he, "if we had the ready means we would buy that mine, but we haven't. Now, I tell you what you do: Take a sample—this piece—and go at once to Chicago. I know of some capitalists there who are making large investments in the South, and I have no doubt that they will be pleased to make you an offer for your property. Here, I'll write their names on a card. To tell you the truth, we are to some extent interested with them. Now, don't show this sample to anyone else, but go straight to Clarm & Ging, Rookery building, Chicago. Anybody can tell you where it is. Here's the card. We'll telegraph them that you are coming, so you are somewhat in honor bound, you understand, not to go elsewhere—we have in some degree sealed the transaction with a part purchase, you see."

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I walked out of that house, dazed, bewildered with my own luck. And I took passage on the first train for Chicago. If money could clear Alf, he would now be cleared, and proudly I mused over the great difference that I would make between his first and his last trial. But during all this time I was conscious of a heaviness—the silence of Guinea.

The train reached Chicago at morning. And now I was in the midst of a whirl and a roar—a confused babbling at the base of Babel's tower. And as I walked up a street I thought that a tornado had broken loose and that I was in the center of it. I called a hackman, for my reading taught me what to do, and I told him to drive me to the Rookery. He rattled away and came within one of being upset by other vehicles, and I yelled at him to be more particular, but on he went, paying no attention to me. After a while he drew up in front of a building as big as a lopped-off spur of a mountain range; and when I got out I found that the vitals of the hurricane had shifted with me, for the roar and the confusion was worse, was gathering new forces. But no one laughed at me, no one pointed me out, and I really felt quite pleased with myself—a school-teacher, a lawyer's assistant, expected by a capitalist! I went under a marble arch-way, and asked a man if he knew Clarm & Ging, and he pointed to an elevator—I knew what it was—and shouted a number. I got in and was shot to the eighth floor. I knocked at a door, but no one opened it. There was no bell to ring, so I knocked louder and still no one opened the door. This was hardly the courtesy that I expected. But while I was standing there a man came along and went in without knocking. I thought that he must be one of the men I was looking for, and I followed him, but he simply looked round after going in and then went out again without saying anything. I saw a man sitting at a desk, and I handed him the card which the hardware dealer had given me. He looked at it and said: "Yes, you are Hawes, eh? Where's your mica."

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I gave it to him, and he looked at it closely through a microscope. "How deep have you gone?"

"Not more than six inches."

"That so? Much of this size?"

"Train loads, I should think."

"Ah, hah. How much land does it cover?"

"Don't know exactly. Haven't investigated."

And this question set me to thinking. The mine was well on my land, but it might spread out beyond my lines. It was important that I should buy several acres surrounding the stretch of moss, and I decided to do this immediately upon my return home.

"Let's see," said the capitalist. "This is Friday. Mr. Clarm is out of town and will not be back until Monday—has a summer home in St. Jo, Mich., and is over there. It's just across the lake. Suppose we go over there to-morrow morning. Boat leaves at nine. Be a pleasant trip. All right."

He resumed his work as if my acceptance of his proposition was a foreshadowed necessity. "How did you happen to find it?" he asked, without looking up from his work.

"I was digging for angle worms."

He grunted. "Didn't find any worms, did you?"

"No, I don't think I did."

"I know you didn't. Worms and mica don't exist in the same soil. Very rugged?"

"Rocks on each side."

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I was determined to be business-like, not to give him information unless he asked for it; and I sat there, studying him. He was direct and this pleased me, for it bespoke a quick decision. But after a time I grew tired of looking upon his absorption, for his mood was unvarying, and he held one position almost without change, so I began to walk about, looking at the pictures of factories and of mines, hung on the walls. The day was hot and the windows were up, and I looked down on the ant-working industry in the street. How different from the view that lay out of my window in the old log house; but I was resolved to draw no long bow of astonishment, for in a man's surprise is a reflex of his ignorance.

"What business?" the capitalist asked, still without looking up.

"None, you might say. Have taught school, but of late I have employed my time with studying law."

He looked round at me and then resumed his work. A long time passed. I heard his watch snap and then he got up.

"We'll go out and get a bite to eat," he said. "Any particular place?"

"No," I answered, pleased that he should presume that I was acquainted with the eating houses of the town.

We stepped out into the hall and he yelled: "Down!" He shoved me into an elevator among a number of men and women, and though we were all jammed together no one appeared to notice me; but when we got out a boy whistled at a companion and yelled: "Hi, Samson!" Mr. Ging darted out under the arch, and I almost ran over him, when he halted on the sidewalk to talk to a man. They walked along together for quite a distance, nodding and making gestures, and when they separated Ging said to me that he had just bought a subdivision of real estate. At this I appeared to be pleased, but I was not; I was afraid that before the close of the deal he might entangle himself in so many transactions that he could not afford to pay cash for the mica mine. The further we went the faster he walked, and suddenly he darted through a wall, and the swinging doors came back and slapped me in the face. We sat down to a table and Mr. Ging said that I might take whatever I desired, but that he wanted only a cup of coffee and a piece of apple pie. I was hungry, had eaten no breakfast and felt as if I could devour a beef steak as big as a saddle skirt, but I said that coffee and apple pie would do me. He asked me a number of questions concerning the mine, its distance from a railway, condition of the wagon roads, and especially did he want to know whether the local tax assessor made it a point to discriminate against the non-resident property owner. I caught the spirit of his quick utterances, and blew out my words in a splutter, striving to be business-like, but before I could cover all his points he had eaten his pie and was impatiently waiting for me.

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"Want to go round to-night?" he asked, and before I could tell him that I did want to go round, having but a vague idea as to what he meant, he added: "And if I can get off this afternoon I'll take you out to the stock-yards."

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"I would much rather see your finest library," I replied.

"I guess you've got me there; don't know where it is, but I suppose we can find it in the directory."

"I have read of the Art Institute here. You know where that is, I presume."

"Y-e-s—low building over on the lake front. But I've never had time to go into it. Well, suppose we get back to the office."

I raced with him, but he beat me by a neck, being more accustomed to the track; and he shouted "Up!" as he darted under the marble arch. I grabbed him and held him for a moment, told him that I did not care to go up again so soon, that I would stroll about for a time and see him after a while.

"Yes, but you'll come back, eh? I guess we'll take that mine if we can agree upon terms. We own one in Colorado. Don't fail to come back. Up!"

I went out into the center of the maelstrom and laughed at him—a capitalist keeping pace with indigestion, racing against time. Little wonder that he was bald and pinched.

I thought that I would find a leisurely place and slowly eat a dinner, and I did find many places, but none of them was leisurely. I went to a hotel, and there I ate a meal without running the risk of having my chair thrown over, and then I returned to the Rookery. Mr. Ging was lost in his work, and in a room which opened into his apartment two girls were hammering a race on writing machines. I walked into this room, and the girls went on with their work as if I were at home looking over toward the General's house instead of looking down at them. A bell tinkled in Ging's room. One of the girls went to him and I heard him talking rapidly to her, and presently she came back with a pad of paper in her hand, and furiously attacked her machine. Ging rushed out into the hall and both machines stopped, and the girls began to nibble at bon-bons, but a moment later they dashed at their work, for Ging had returned. I went back into his room, and, glancing round, I saw one of the girls look up at the ceiling and then down at the floor. I knew that she was making fun of me, and in my heart I confessed myself her enemy.

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"I'm sorry," said Ging, "but I don't believe I can get off this afternoon. Clarm's being out of town puts double work on me. But we'll go round to-night. You've been here quite often, I suppose."

"Well, not lately," I replied.

"No? Then we can find a good many things to interest you."

I went out again and walked about, but I did not venture far beyond the shadow of the Rookery, for I knew that should I get turned round I would be ashamed to inquire the way back. I saw a man standing on a box selling pens. He had a most fluent use of words, though I could see that he was not educated. He interested his hearers with humorous stories, as if his business were first to entertain the public and then to pick up a living, and for the first time it struck me that book-knowledge did not embrace everything, that people who simply read get but a second-hand experience. We must observe form and recognize the rules which good taste has drawn, but after all the finest form and the most nearly perfect rule is an inborn judgment. The merest accident may thrill a dull man with genius. I knew a young man who was commonplace until he was taken down with a fever, and when he got up his business sense was gone, but he wrote a parody that made this country shout with laughter. Thus I mused as I looked at that fellow selling pens. He was a rascal, no doubt, but I was forced to admire his vivid fancy, his genius.

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When I returned to the Rookery I found Ging waiting for me. "Now," said he, "we'll go out for a while and then eat dinner. Would you mind going out about twelve miles? Train every few minutes. I've got some real estate that I'd like to show you—might cut an important figure in our transaction."

"I don't want it to cut any figure in our transaction," I replied. "I want to sell the mine for money."

"Yes, of course, but you might double your money on the real estate."

"That may be true, but I am not a speculator; and if you are not prepared to pay money, why, it is useless to waste further time."

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"Of course. No time has been wasted and none shall be. You may trust me when it comes to the question of wasting time. I didn't know but you might like a home out at Sweet Myrtle. Beautiful place—gas, water, side-walks, sewers. But if you don't want to go, it's all right. Let me tell you right now that we are prepared to pay cash for your mine. We represent millions in the East. Well, we'll go."

That night we went to a theater, and to me Mr. Ging was a dull companion. He yawned and stretched through Shakspeare's mighty play, while I was in a tingling ecstasy. He said that the fellow could not act, and that may have been true, but to me there was no actor, but a real Hamlet; no stage, but the court at Elsinore. He said that he would call at the hotel in time to catch the boat, and I was glad when he left me to my own thoughts. At 9 o'clock the next morning we went on board a great white boat, so fresh, so full of interest to me that I was in a state of delight, of new expectancy, and when we steamed out into the lake I could scarcely repress a cry of joy so thrilling was the view. I had never seen a large body of water, had striven to picture the majesty of a wave, and now I stood with poetry rolling about me—now a deep-blue elegy, now a limpid lyric, varying in hue with the shifting of a luminous fleece-work, far above. To have been born and brought up amid great scenes were surely a privilege, but to come upon them for the

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first time when the mind is ripe, when the senses are yearning for a new impression, is indeed a blessing. Short were the sixty miles of our journey, it seemed to me, but Ging was bored and impatiently he snapped his watch, and said that we were at least fifteen minutes late. After having lost all view of the land, how strangely novel was the sight of the shore, and to fancy myself in a foreign harbor was the most natural of conceits.

At the wharf we took a carriage and were driven through the town, out by many a dreamy orchard side, up a bluff-banked river to a large frame house, high on a hill. Clarm was walking about in the yard, and with an ease and politeness which I had not expected—having permitted Ging to influence my preconception of his partner's character—he shook hands with me and invited me into the house. The sample of mica was closely inspected, numerous questions were asked, and after a time Mr. Clarm said that it would be well for Mr. Ging to go home with me. I had kept in mind the determination to buy a few more acres of land, and I knew that this might not be an easy transaction if Ging should accompany me, thereby exciting a suspicion in Parker's mind, so I replied that I was not going straightway home, being compelled by other business to stop for a day in Kentucky. "But it is, of course, necessary for Mr. Ging to see the mine, and he can start the day after I leave and reach Purdy on the day I arrive," I added.

They agreed to this, as Ging was the principal in another deal that must be brought to a close; and after declining an invitation to dinner, I took my leave, feeling that I was a liar, it is true, but I thought that my deception was not only pardonable, but, indeed, a commendable piece of fore-sight. I am free to say that a man, in order to protect his commercial interests, must be an easy and a nimble liar; and I do not hold that a man who permits himself to be cheated simply that he may snatch the chance to tell a truth—I say that I could not regard him a prudent husband or a wise father. Divide the last cent with a friend, harden not thy heart against the distressed, but in the warfare of business seek to steal an enemy's advantage. It was with this argument that I sought to appease my conscience as I strolled about the town, but more than once I halted, thinking to tell them the truth. But judgment—permit me to term it judgment—finally influenced me to let the false statement stand.

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Out from the town were numerous lanes, soft with turf, and with orchards on every side. Amid the darkened green I saw the yellowing pear, the red flash of the apple; and from amid the bushes blackberries peeped like the eyes of a deer. At the end of a lane was a deep ravine, one side a grassy slope, the other a terraced vineyard, and up this romantic rent I walked, in a Switzerland, a France. On the green slope was a cottage, with a high fence behind it, and as I drew near I thought that it would be a soothing privilege to enter the house and talk with the humble people who lived therein. Suddenly there came a shout that sent a spurt of blood to my heart—

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"Hike, there, Sam! Hike, there, Bob—hike, there!"

I ran to the fence, grasped the top, drew myself up and looked over into the small inclosure; and there was old Lim Jucklin, down on his knees, beating the ground with his hat. I let myself drop and ran round the gate, opened it without noise and stepped inside. The old man now held one of the chickens by the neck and was putting him into a coop.

"Oh, it would suit you to fight to a finish, wouldn't it? And you may, one of these days, as soon as I hear from down yander. Git in there. Come here, Bob. You've got to go in, too. Caught you on the top-knot, didn't he? Well, you must learn to dodge better. Ain't quite as peart as one of the other Bobs I could tell you about. Now, boys, you are all right, but I want you to understand—well, since Moses hit the rock!" he cried, scrambling to his feet. "Hold on, now, don't you tech me—don't know whether you are Bill or Bill's ghost. By jings, if it ain't Bill, I'm a calf's rennet. Since Moses hit the rock!"

He grabbed me and hung upon me, and I put my arm about him. "Don't tell me nuthin' now, Bill. Don't want to hear a word, for I'm deefer than a horse block."

"You have nothing to fear, Mr. Jucklin. I bring good news. Alf isn't out yet, but he will be. I have other news—"

"But don't tell me. Deefer than a horse-block. What did I do with that d—d handkerchief? Take that back—kiver to kiver. Had it in my hat a minit ago. Sand from this here lake shore gits in a feller's eyes. Ain't got used to it yet. Hope the Lord will excuse me for cussin' like a sailor. Must have got it from them fellers down on the lake shore. Kiver to kiver. Now let us go into the house. Door's round there facin' the holler. Let me go in first; you stand outside. Sand's blowin' up from the lake and gits in their eyes, too. Ain't used to it yet. Come on."

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There were hollyhocks in front of the house and among them I stood waiting for the old man to open the door.

"Susan," he said, as he stepped into the room, "this here world—this one right here—is as full of surprises as a chicken is with—with—I don't know what. Now, don't you take on none, but—come in, Bill."

The old woman started forward with a cry and threw her arms about me. "There now," old Lim protested, wiping his eyes, "don't take on that way. Everything's all right. Set down here now and let's be sensible. That's it. Oh, she's all right, Bill—her folks stood at the stake. Guinea's comin' down stairs."

Toward the stairway I looked, and Guinea stepped down into the room. And oh, the smile on her lips as she came toward me! But she did not hold out her hands—she came close to me, and her bended head almost touched me, but her hands were held behind her, clasped, I could see. "Not yet," she said, looking up with a smile. "But you must not think ill of me, must not be provoked. Let me have my whimsical way until my whole life shall be yours."

"She's talkin' like a book!" the old man cried. "Let her talk like one, Bill. Don't exactly grab her drift as I'd like to, but I know it's all right. Gracious alive, why don't you women folks git him something to eat? And, me, too, for I'm as hungry as the she bear that eat up the children. I wish you'd all set down. Turn him loose, Susan. Ain't nothin' the matter with him—hungry as a wolf, that's all. Now we are gettin' at it." [269]

With the door open and with a cool breeze blowing, with the sweetness of ripening fruit in the air, with the hollyhocks nodding at us, we sat in that modest room, at home in a strange place. I told them all that had befallen me. I gradually led up to the discovery of the mine. "And now," I added, "we go back there, not poor, but rich. There is no telling how many dollars they may give us."

"Not us, Bill," the old man interposed, slowly shaking his head; "not us, but you. It's yours, all yours. You bought the land and all that's on it or under it belongs to you."

"No, Mr. Jucklin, it belongs to you, to Alf and to me. There will be enough for us all, but no matter how little, you and Alf shall share it. I am just beginning fully to realize it—but I know that we are rich. It is necessary for me to get back at once," I added. "I'll have to buy some land from Parker, but I told Clarm & Ging that I was going to stop for a day in Kentucky. I didn't want them to know that I intended to buy more land. It's none of their business, anyway. So I must be in Purdy one day ahead of Ging. I've got money with me and we'll all start this evening." [270]

The old man sadly shook his head. "I can't do it, Bill; can't go back yet. If he comes clear, without a scratch on him, I'll go back, but if he don't I'll never see that state again. So we'll wait right here till after the next trial. Won't settle on anything until then. You go ahead and attend to everything and let me know how it all comes out. I've been scared ever since I left there, afraid that I'd hear something by some chance or other; and I wouldn't let Guinea write to you. Every day I'd tell her 'not yet.' She wanted to, but I wouldn't let her."

"You shall have your own way, for I know that everything will come out right. Conkwright says so, and he knows. How did you happen to find this place?"

The old man laughed. "Well, sir, we got on the train, and when the man asked where we wanted to go I told him we'd go just as far as he did, it made no difference how far that might happen to be; and every time we'd change cars I'd tell the other man the same thing. But finally they got so stuck up that they wouldn't let us get on without tickets, and at Louisville I bought tickets for Chicago. I didn't know what to do when I got to Chicago—didn't know what to do when I got to any place, for that matter; but we poked around, gettin' a bite to eat every once in a while, and slept in the slambangin'est place I ever saw. The lake caught me, and I found out how soon the first boat went out, and we got on her and here we are. When I told these here folks where I was from I braced myself, expectin' to have a fight right there, but I want to tell you that I was never better treated in my life. All the good folks ain't huddled together in one community, I tell you; and this knockin' round has opened my eyes mightily. Why, I rickollect when they sorter looked down on Conkwright because his father wa'n't born in the South. Yes, sir, and they gave me work right off—that is, they call it work, but I call it play—gatherin' fruit. Why, with us, when a feller wanted to rest he'd go out and gather fruit, if he could find any. Yes, sir, and I'm goin' to stay right here till the cat makes her final jump one way or another." [271]

How fondly they listened as I talked about the old place, of well-known trees, of the big rock on the brink of the ravine. I even told them that the General lamented the breaking of the engagement, that he had come as an agent, that his son was at fault. Guinea smiled at this, and I thought that her eyes grew darker.

I learned that my train was not to leave until night. I was glad of this, for it gave me a sweet lingering time; and in the afternoon Guinea and I went down to the river.

"We will get a boat and row up past the island, away up to the beautiful hills," she said. "But can you row?" she asked, with a look of concern.

"I have pulled a boat against a swifter current than this." I answered. "I lived near the bank of a rapid stream."

We got into a graceful boat and skimmed easily over the water. Now it was my time to wonder and to muse over the changes that had come—to dream as I looked at her, as she sat, trailing her hand in the water, her hand, my hand, though she had not let me take it to help her into the boat. With her a swamp would have been attractive, but here we were in a paradise. Boats up and down the river; lovers went by, singing. On one shore the scene was quiet, with easy slopes and with houses here and there; but the other shore was wild with bluffs, with tangled vines and monstrous trees that storms had gnarled and twisted. Here a spring gushed out with a gleeful laugh, and lovers paused to listen, and in its flow the city oarsman cooled his blistered hands. [272]

"Guinea, do you see that high bluff up there among the pine trees?"

"Yes, and isn't it a charming place?"

"I'm glad you think so?"

"Why are you glad of that?"

"Because you—I mean a woman who has had her way—because she may live there. When at last she is tired of that way, and when she has gone to a man with her hands held out, he will take her to a house built on that bluff, a summer home. I'm not joking. Next year there will be a beautiful home up there. Don't you see, the land is for sale? And in the house a man is going to write a history of a woman who had her way and of a man who—well, I hardly know what to say about him, but I am not going to hide his faults nor cover up his weaknesses."

"Are you really in earnest, Mr. Hawes?"

"Yes, I mean every word of it. Wouldn't you—I mean, wouldn't the woman who had persisted in having her way—wouldn't she like a home up there?"

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In her voice was the musical cluck that so often had charmed me. "She would be happy anywhere with the man who had permitted her to have her way, and I know that she would be delighted to live up there. And you—I mean the man—wouldn't have any of the trees cut down, would he?"

"Not one. He would build the house in that open place."

"Charming," she said. "How sweet a religion could be made of a life up there, with the river and the hills and the island—beautiful."

"Guinea, I wish you would tell me something. Did you ever really love—him?"

"When I have come to you as I told you I would come, you will not have to ask me anything."

"But can you give me some idea as to how long I may have to wait? My confidence in you is complete, but you must know that to wait is painful. Suppose that a certain something that you are waiting for—suppose that nothing should come of it? What then?"

"No matter what takes place, I will come to you. I know that it must appear foolish, I know that I am but vague in what I try to make you understand, but—you will wait a while longer, won't you?"

Her voice was so pleading, her manner was so full of distress, that I hastened to tell her that I would wait no matter how long she might deign to hold me off, and that never again could she find cause to reprove my impatience. She thanked me with a smile and with many an endearing word, and onward we went, the boats passing us, the songs of lovers reaching us from above and below. We landed and climbed the bluff, and I selected the exact spot whereon the house was to be; we loitered in the shade and counted the minutes as they flew away like pigeons from a trap, but we could not shoot them and bring them back; so they were gone, and it was soon time for us to go, for the light of the sun was weakening. Down the river we went, singing "Juanita," she rippling the water with her hand, I half-hearted in my rowing, dreamily wishing that the train might leave me.

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Close to me at the door she stood. The old man was outside, waiting to go with me to the railway station. She bowed her head and I kissed her hair.

CHAPTER XX.

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The sun had just gone down, and a man was beating a triangle to announce that it was lodge-night, when I stepped upon the sidewalk in front of Conkwright's office. The old man was locking his door. I spoke to him and he turned about, and, seeing me, merely nodded, threw open the door and bade me go in. "Mighty glad you've got back," he said. "They are going to bring that trial on right away, and it will be none too soon for us, I assure you. Let me open this window. Been about as hot a day as I ever felt. Well, what have you got to say?"

"So much that I scarcely know how to begin."

He grunted. "The prelude to an unimportant story. But, go on."

Long before I was done with my recital he sat with his eyes wide open, seeming to wonder whether my reason had slipped a cog.

"Wonderful," he said. "No, it is not wonderful, nothing is wonderful. The mere fact that a thing happens proves that there is about it no element of the marvelous. It is the strange thing that does not occur. When it does occur it ceases to be strange. And you say he will be here tomorrow? Now, you let me take charge of him as soon as he arrives. If you don't he will not only

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get the mine for nothing, but will go away with your eye teeth. I'll go home to-night and study up this question, and by to-morrow night I'll know more about it than he does. Yes, sir, a good deal more, or at least make him think so. You were long-headed in deciding to slip out there and buy more land, and by the way, Parker is in town. No, sir, there is no telling what may happen. See Parker to-night and meet me here to-morrow morning."

I found Alf reading a letter which Millie had contrived to send him. Under the light of the smoky lamp his face looked sallow and thin, but his eyes were full of happiness. "She's got the noblest spirit that ever suffered, and noble spirits must suffer," he said as he handed me the letter. "See, she begs my forgiveness for having kept me on the gridiron. But doesn't one letter atone for a whole year of broiling? Ah, and you have been broiled, too, haven't you, Bill? Now let them put the balm on us. The Judge tells me that I am soon to be turned out, and I'll come out wiser than I was when I came in, for I have improved my time with reading. Have you heard from the folks?"

I told him my story, and I told it quietly, but it greatly excited him, and time and again he thrust his hands through the iron lattice to grasp me. "So you will go out not only wiser, but a richer man," I said. "You will not have to go into a field and plow in the blistering heat while other men are sitting in the shade. All our trouble has been for the best, and with deep reverence we must acknowledge it. And soon we will go together out to the old place and peacefully smoke our pipes up under the rafters. Well, I have left you the subject for a pleasant dream, and I must go now to look for Parker. As I said to your father, there is no telling how much money we may get, but whatever comes we share."

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"Not if it's very much, Bill. I don't need much; I wouldn't know what to do with it. But if you could only do one thing it would make me the happiest man that ever lived."

"Tell me what it is. It can surely be done."

"Why, if I could only get the old Morton place. It's about three miles from the General's, and it used to belong to his grandfather. One of his aims in life has been to get it back into the family, and if you could get it for me——"

"You shall have it."

"Don't say so, Bill, unless you think there's a chance."

"It's not a chance, but a certainty. You shall have the place. And what a delight it will be to the General to visit his daughter there. Now, don't speculate—let it be settled. Well, I'll see you to-morrow and tell you how it's all to turn out, but have no fears about getting the farm."

I found Parker at the tavern. He told me that I might have a few acres of land down about the spring, but that I would have to pay a little more for it than he had paid. "We can't afford to trade for the mere fun of it," he said. "My father used to do such things and they came mighty nigh having to haul him to the poor house."

I offered him a sum that pleased him, that must, indeed, have delighted him, for he offered to go out and set up a feast of cove oysters and crackers, a great and liberal ceremony in the country; and over the tin plates in a grocery store the transaction was celebrated. I met him again early at morning, and before the day was half-grown I saw our transaction spread upon the records. And at night Ging arrived. I introduced him to Conkwright. "The Judge will represent me," said I, "and I will stand by any agreement he may enter into with you."

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"All right," Ging replied. "How far is it out to the mine?"

"About five miles."

"Better go out to-night. Haven't any time to lose. Get a rig and we'll go out."

"Might as well wait until morning," said the Judge. "We can't do anything to-night."

"I know, but by staying there to-night we'll be there right early in the morning. Get a rig."

They drove away and I went round to the jail to tell Alf that the old Morton place was rapidly coming his way. I slept but little that night and I was nervous the next day, as I sat in the Judge's office waiting for him to return. At 11 o'clock he drove up alone.

"Where is Ging?" I asked as the old man got out of the buggy.

"Gone to the telegraph office. Come in and I'll tell you all about it."

We entered the office and I stood there impatient at his delay, for instead of telling me, he was silent, walking up and down the room with his hands under his coat behind him.

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"Did you say he had gone to the telegraph office?"

"Yes; said he had to communicate with his partner. Think he must have been somewhat startled at my knowledge of mica; but if he should spring the subject on me a week from now he would be still more startled—at my ignorance. In this instance I have been what is termed a case lawyer."

And still I waited and still he continued to walk up and down the room, his hands behind him.

"Communicate with his partner. Did he make an offer?"

"Well, he hunted around in that neighborhood, but his gun hung fire. The truth is I set the price myself. There is no doubt as to the value of the mine—finest in the world, I should think."

"What did you tell him he could have it for?"

"Well, I suppose we could get more for it, but I told him that he might have it for six hundred thousand dollars. I—why, what's wrong with that offer? Isn't it enough?"

"Enough! It is more than I dared to dream!" I cried.

"Ah, hah. And because you don't know anything about mica. It didn't startle him; simply remarked that he would telegraph to his partner. He'll take it. He'll give you a check and I'll send it over to Knoxville, Tenn.—don't want this little bank to handle that amount. What are you going to do with the money?"

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"I'm going to buy the old Morton place for Alf, give the old man as much as I can compel him to take, and I'm going to build a home on a high bluff overlooking the St. Jo river, in Michigan. And I don't know yet what else I may do. It is so overwhelming that my mind is in a tangle. But I am going to give you——"

"I don't charge you anything for my services," he broke in, humorously winking his old eyes. "You are to be my law partner, you know."

"Ah, that was reserved for time to bring about, in the event that I should ever become a lawyer, but that possibility is now removed. I'm not going to study law. The law is very forcible and very logical, but it is too dry for me. I don't believe that I am practical enough for a lawyer. I would rather read poetry and luminous prose than to study rules of civil conduct. I am going to bejewel my house with books and then I am going to live. I heard you say that the poet was the only man who really lives, but he is not—those who worship with him live with him. Yes, I am going to buy old books—I don't like new ones—and in my library I will rule over the kingdoms of the earth. But I am going to give you ten thousand dollars."

"You wouldn't make a very good lawyer, Bill. I suspected it, and now you prove it. My dear fellow, I have no children, and am getting old, therefore I have no use for money. Wait a minute. I believe there is a five thousand dollar mortgage on my house. Well, you may lend me ten thousand, but I don't believe I'll ever pay it back. I can't afford to violate the rule. When a man lends me money it's gone. And that's right, for if I thought I had to pay it back I might dodge you. Yes, sir. As I was driving back to town I came within one of permitting myself to look upon this happening as a strange affair, but it is not; it's perfectly natural. Yes, sir. And as soon as the news spreads around, nearly every man in the community will turn out to hunt for mica, and not a speck of it will be found. A reminder of the imitators that clamor when the clear voice of a genius has been heard. If I keep on fooling with this subject I will regard it as strange, after all. Just think of the ten thousand things that led to the discovery of that mine. Suppose we could trace any occurrence back to its source. Take my sitting here, for instance. Caused, we will say, by a dead cat. My father, a very young fellow at the time, found a dead cat lying on his father's doorsteps, and he threw it over into a neighbor's yard. The neighbor saw him, came over and demanded that he be whipped. He was whipped, according to the good, old religious custom, and he ran away from home, went to many places, came into this state as a clock peddler, fell in love, married, and here I am, sitting here—all caused by a dead cat. My mother was the daughter of a very proud old fellow. She ran away with my father and never again was she received at home. I may have dreamed it, but it seems that I remember my mother holding me in her arms, pointing to an old brick house and telling me that my grandfather lived there. Yes, sir, if we permit our minds to drift that way, everything is strange. Here comes our man."

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Ging stepped in, mopping his face with a handkerchief. "I'll take it," he said, and it seemed to me that the room began to turn round. "Let us fix it up at once," he added. "I have engaged a man to drive me to the station and I want to take the next train."

Evening came. The day had been filled with tremors and whirls, so dazed was I, dreamily listening to details, now startled, now seeming to be far away—shaking hands, signing papers; and now it was all settled, and I, on a horse, rode toward home to seek a night of rest in the country. The moon was full. I heard the sharp clack of hoofs, and, looking back, I saw a man riding as if it were his aim to overtake me. I jogged along slowly and Etheredge came up.

"How are you, Mr. Hawes? I have heard of your wonderful luck and I congratulate you. I intended to see you in town to-night, but learned that you had come out here, so I rode fast to overtake you. I have sold out and will leave here to-morrow morning."

"What! Then you won't be here at the trial?"

"I shall not be needed, sir. Now I am going to tell you something and I hope that in your mind, and in the mind of the public, the good which it will do may in some measure atone for the wrong——"

His horse stumbled, and he did not complete the sentence. I was afraid to say anything, was afraid that eagerness on my part might stir the vagaries of his peculiar mind and drive him into stubborn silence. So I said nothing. He rode close to me, reached over and put his hand on my arm. "Mr. Hawes," he said, leaning toward me, and in the moonlight his face was ghastly, "Mr.

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Hawes, Alf Jucklin did not kill Dan Stuart."

"What!" I cried, bringing my horse to a stand-still and seizing his bridle-rein.

"Let us be perfectly calm now, and I'll tell you all about it. Turn loose my bridle-rein and let us ride on slowly."

Down the moon-whitened road the horses slowly walked. I waited for him to continue. "No, sir, Alf didn't kill him. I found him in the road, after Alf had called me, and I took him into my house and there was not a mark on him, not one. I stripped him and nowhere was his skin broken. Dan was born with organic disease of the heart, and for years I had been treating him. He was sensitive and never spoke of his ailment and I was the only one who knew the extent of it. Two years ago I told him that he was likely to die at any minute, and I repeatedly warned him against fatigue or any sort of agitation. And it was rage that killed him when Alf's pistol fired. The hammer of Dan's pistol caught in his pocket and his failure to get it out threw him into a rage and he died. I told the coroner that he was shot through the breast, and I slyly contrived not to be placed upon my oath. They had Alf's confession, and that was enough. And no one cared to strip the dead man to examine the wound. It was a piece of humbuggery, as all coroners' inquests are, and so the verdict was given. I am a mean man; I acknowledge it—I am narrow and vindictive, but I would have made a confession of the manner of Dan's death rather than to see Alf hanged. I knew that there would be a new trial; I intended to leave the community and I resolved to defer my statement until just before going. That about covers the case, I think."

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"Will you go with me to a justice of the peace, write out your statement and swear to it?" I asked, striving to be calm.

"Certainly. Old Perdue is a justice. We'll go over there."

The moon was still high as I galloped toward town with the statement in my pocket. I went straightway to Conkwright's house and with the door-knocker set every dog in the town to barking.

"Why, what on earth is the matter?" the Judge asked as he opened the door. "Oh, it's you, is it, Bill? I've got a negro here somewhere, but Gabriel might blow a blast in his ear and never stir his wool. Come into the library."

He lighted a lamp, and I handed him the doctor's statement. He read it without the least show of surprise; and, putting the paper into his pocket, he sat down, closed his eyes, and with his thumb and forefinger pressed his eye-lids.

"Etheredge is going to leave in the morning," I said.

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"He ought to be sent to the penitentiary. But let him go. Penitentiary is better off without him. In the morning we will have several of our leading doctors exhume the body to verify the statement. I'll attend to it. Yes, sir. A certain form must be observed. A jury will be impaneled, the statement will be read, and the judge will, in a sort of a charge, declare that the prisoner is innocent. Some things are strange after all. A venomous scoundrel, but let him go. Yes, I'll attend to everything in the morning. You'd better sleep here."

"No, I'm going to the jail and then to the telegraph office."

CHAPTER XXI.

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CONCLUSION.

How soft had been the day, how tender the tone of every voice. The road under the moon was white and from a persimmon tree in an old field came the trill of a mockingbird. Two happy men were riding toward an old home.

"And here is where he fell," said Alf. "I am tempted to get down and pray. Bill, you don't know what it is to be freed from the conviction that you have killed a man. He might not have died then if it had not been for me, but, thank God, I didn't kill him. Yes, here is where I eased him down. I remembered afterward that I had not seen a drop of his blood and I was deeply thankful for it. We can almost see the General's house from here. You saw the old man to-day when he came up and shook hands with me. He hardly knew what he was about, and he said, 'Alf, what's your father doing?' But his eyes were full of tears and he had to wipe them when I told him that I was going to buy the old Morton place. He thinks you are a great man, Bill, and I honor him for it. To-night we will sleep in our room and early to-morrow morning I'm going over to see Millie. Do you think I ought to go to-night? No, I will wait and dream over it."

In the old room we sat and peacefully smoked our pipes. And after I had gone to bed, and

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when I thought Alf was asleep, I heard him talking to himself. No, it was not talk, it was a chant, and it reminded me of his mother. I said nothing and I sank to sleep, and strange, mystic words were in my ears, soothing me down to forgetful slumber.

We were aroused early at morning by the rattle of a wagon at the door. The old people—Guinea had come back. Alf dressed quickly and ran down stairs, and I stuffed my ears that I might hear no sound from below. After a long time, and while I sat looking out of the window, the old man came up.

"By jings, I must have got that dispatch of yourn before you sent it. Mighty glad to see you again. But don't go down stairs yet. Everybody down there is as foolish as a chicken with his neck wrung. I tell you the Lord works things out in his own way. Sometimes we may think that we could run things better, but I don't believe we could! and, thurfore, I say, kiver to kiver. Ah, Lord, what a time we have had. Yes, sir, a time if there ever was one. Alf has jest told me what you intend to do, but if you think that you are goin' to crowd a lot of money off on me you are wrong. Give us this old house and see that we don't need nothin'—but, of course, you'll do that. I thought I'd let 'em fight to a finish up yander, but I didn't. They looked at me so pitiful that I called an old feller that happened to be passin' along and told him that he might have 'em. I've got to have a Sam and a Bob. Old Craighead, that lives about ten miles from here, has some of the finest in the world. Always wanted 'em, but they were so high that I couldn't tip-toe and reach 'em. Reckon you could fix it so I could git a couple?"

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"You shall have as many as you want—all of them."

"I'm a thousand times obleeged to you. Yes, sir; sometimes we think we could run things better than He does, but I don't reckon we could. We seen young Lundsford as we driv along jest now. And I think he'll be over here putty soon, but don't you worry. No, sir, we ain't got nothin' to worry about now. Believe it would push us to scratch up a worry, don't you? By jings, though, I hardly know what to do; I step around here like a blind sheep in a barn, as the feller says. Well, it's gettin' pretty quiet down there now. Alf got away as soon as he could, and has gone over to the General's. Hush a minit. Thought I heard Chyd's voice. Well, I'm going to poke round a little, and it's not worth while to tell you to make yourself at home."

He went out, and I heard him humming a tune as he tramped slowly down the stairs. I took a seat near the window. Voices reached me, and, looking down through the branches of a mulberry tree, I saw Guinea sitting on a bench, and near her stood Chyd Lundsford. In his hand he held a switch and with it he was slowly cutting at a bloom on a vine that grew about the tree. He was talking. Guinea's face was turned upward and her hands were clasped behind her head. I could look down into her eyes, but she did not see me, and I felt a sense of self-reproach at thus watching her, listening for her to speak, and I thought to get up, but my legs refused to move, and I sat there, looking down into her eyes. Her face was pale and her lips, which had seemed to me in bloom with the rich juice of life, were now drawn thin.

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"Of course, I was wrong," he said, "but I'm not the first man that ever did a wrong. And I should think that as a broad-minded and generous woman you could forgive me. I don't think that you can find any man who would take any better care of you than I would. I've got no romance about me, and why should I have? I can just remember seeing the trail of that monster called advancement—that mighty thing called progress, though in the guise of war, and that thing swallowed the romance of this country. I say that I can remember seeing the fading trail, but I know its history and I know that if it did not swallow romance it should have done so. I don't suppose I could ever think as much of any woman as I do of you, and I know that no woman could make my house so bright and cheerful. I was afraid of any complication that might hurt my prospects as a physician, my standing in the opinion of a careful and discriminating public; so, influenced by that sense of self-protection, I broke our engagement. But now I beg of you to renew it."

"On your knees!" she said, without looking at him.

"Now, Guinea, that's ridiculous. I am willing to make all sorts of amends——"

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"On your knees!" she said.

"I see that there is no use to appeal to your reason. I suppose, however, that the way to reason with a woman is to gratify her whim and then appeal to her sense. It is a foolish thing to do, but in order to secure a hearing I will do as you say."

He sank upon his knees. She glanced down at him and then looked up at the sky. He began to talk, but she stopped him with a motion of her hand.

"You have heard the preacher say that we must be born again," she said. "I have been born again—born into the kingdom of love, and I find myself in a rapturous heaven. Get up." He obeyed, and she continued. "And you are so far from this kingdom that I cannot see you—you are off somewhere in the dark, and to me your words are cold. But there is one who stands in the light and I must go to him."

I sprang from my seat and hastened down the stairs. My heart beat fast, and I trembled. I was frightened like a child, like a timid overgrown boy, who is called to the table to sit beside a girl whom he slyly worships; and I ran away—down the path to the spring. I heard her calling me, and I stood there trembling, waiting for a holy spirit that was searching for me; and worship

made me dumb. She came down the path, and, seeing me, hastened toward me with her head bent forward and her hands held out. And I caught her in my arms, swept her off the ground and held her to my beating heart.

And over the stones the water was laughing, and the strip of green moss-land flashed in the sun. I saw the old man walking up the ravine, with his hands behind him, and I caught the faint sound of a tune he was humming. Slowly her arms came from about my neck, and hand in hand we walked toward the house, she in the shining path, I on the green sward; and as we drew near we saw Alf and Millie, standing under a tree, waiting for us.

The End.

Transcriber's Note:

Variations in hyphenated words and inconsistencies in dialect have been retained as they appear in the original publication.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE JUCKLINS: A NOVEL ***

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