

Old Claverel's Daughter

(By Helen Francis Huntington.)

John Evard checked his horses' brisk gait a little just as a straight young calicoed figure stepped from the mill trail into the open road, leading an old gray mule with a bag of meal hanging over his back like paniers. Evard recognized the mule at first glimpse for he had often seen old Pete Claverel's slouching figure on its back.

"So that's the girl Halsey wants to marry," said he under his breath. The girl led her mule to the far side of the road and approached Evard with head erect and eyes gazing straight before her down the green-canopied road, but a moment later the old man drew rein and accosted her pleasantly, after the custom of the country.

"Howdy, Miss Lola," he said, with a keen look at her flushed, handsome face. "Why don't you let your men folks go to mill for you? I was just thinking of your folks as I come along. Do you know that Tate got caught up with just a bit ago?"

The riotous color died out of the girl's face, giving it a creamy pallor of a magnolia petal. "Shorely not!" she exclaimed. "What will be done with him?" "He'll be sent to the chain-gang, sure as his case goes to court," Evard answered grimly.

"My Lord!" she breathed. "Ain't there no way to get him off?" "Yes, there is," Evard replied impressively, "and it rests with you to get him off. Benson can be bribed before the case goes to court and I'll do the bribing if you say the word. It's got to be your word of honor, Lola Claverel, recollect that."

A glow succeeded the ivory pallor of the girl's face and her bright dark eyes narrowed to pools of liquid fire, as the sudden realization of Evard's meaning crashed in upon her strained nerves. The price of her brother's release was the relinquishment of her dearest hopes of her own dull, poverty-stricken life.

"I ain't saying that you're not as good as Halsey when it comes to real worth, Lola," said Evard, in a very kind voice, "for in spite of your pa's doings I've never heard as much as a whisper against you. But there's your folks—they'd always be a drawback to Halsey, who will be a rich man and a notable one, too, if indications count for anything, for he stands the best kind of a chance of getting into politics. He's my only son, you know, Lola, and my heart's set on a good, suitable match for him. Now don't get mad, but look at it sensibly. For your promise to give Halsey the go-by I'll drive right back to town and set Tate free. You see, I set a good deal of confidence in your word, Lola."

She hesitated only because she could not force her shaking voice to utter the thoughts that scorched her throat with shame and anguish, knowing that she must save her brother, at any cost to herself, from the life-long stigma of chain-gang imprisonment.

"Well, Lola, what's got to be done must be done quickly, for every hour counts with Tate. What do you say to my proposition?"

"Go back an' set Tate free!" she said in a husky voice.

"You promise to give up Halsey?"

"Yes, I promise! If you think I would push myself in where my folks is looked down on like the dirt under your feet, you're terribly mistaken," she flung out indignantly. "An' I'll show you that even a daughter of Pete Claverel can keep her promise."

"All right, Lola. I'm mighty sorry if I hurt your feelin's in any way," Evard apologized. "I didn't see any other way of settin' things straight. No offense intended. I hope you'll do well in the future. Good-bye."

Lola did not answer, but stood quite still staring at Evard's receding figure with the old grey mule nibbling at the tender grass at her feet, until the shiny top buggy glinted out of sight under the leafy canopy of early spring. Then she sank down among the sweet shrubs of the roadside and abandoned herself to a passionate outbreak of grief.

Half an hour later when Lola turned in at the broken gate that led to her father's ramshackle domicile, a gaunt, slack-looking woman called to her from the upper fence corner where she stood peering up the road under her yellow, cupped hand.

"They come after Tate jest about the time you left for the mill, honey," said the woman in an anxious voice. "I'm dreadful afraid they've found out about the still. Your pa went to town to see about Tate an' he ain't got back, nuther."

"Don't worry, ma. Tate's safe," the girl announced in a joyous voice. "He'll be home directy."

As she spoke two lurching figures appeared at the bend in the road, the one tall and loosely jointed, the other spare and round shouldered with a fringe of white hair surrounding the rim of his wool hat.

"That's them!" Mrs. Claverel exclaimed in a relieved voice, as she straightened up and fumbled among the folds of her dingy dress for her tobacco. "The Lord be thanked!"

It is not an uncommon thing for a young "Cracker" to set a private distillery along some lonely mountain stream and supply the cautious community with whiskey at a price far below that of the taxed article, thus serving his neighbors and making money for himself at the same time. The ethics of the country do not forbid this phase of law-breaking, on the curious grounds that as the Government taxation system oppresses the poor in many ways, there can be no actual harm in evading the law in this particular instance which is almost the only way to a certain class of mountaineers to make a little money.

"Oh, Tate, was it the still?" the mother whispered as her son drew near.

"Yes, ma, it was. If I ever ketch up with whoever it was that told, I tell you there'll be somethin' doin'." I've a notion it was them mean-spirited Debbses 'that up an' told."

"How come you to set off?" the mother wanted to know, as the three ambled up the path toward the house.

Tate looked up at the girl in the doorway, whose dark, handsome face glowed with a strange light. "I reckon Lola can tell you more about that than I can," said the young man, with a certain embarrassed warmth. "Old man Evard said he let me off on her account."

"Evard!" the mother exclaimed, "Why, I thought he was down on us all on account of Lola an' Halsey." The speaker paused as her daughter fled from the doorway down the garden path toward the friendly seclusion of the thicket where she could cry out her heart in solitude.

"There ain't but one thing that would make old Evard do the like of this for any of us," said Pete Claverel with conviction, "an' that's Lola's promise to give up Halsey. I know in reason that's what she done."

"Did the old man say so, Tate?" asked Mrs. Claverel in an awed voice.

"No, but he might as well 'a' said it. He did say I could thank Lola for gettin' me outen a year at the chain-gang, an' for me to try an' make it up to her in some way."

"Yes," said Pete gloomily, "this business o' yourn has cost your ma an' me terrible dear. If Lola had 'a' married Halsey we'd 'a' had a fine home the rest of our lives instid o' workin' our fingers off in our old age. Now it's either slave like niggers or go to the poor house. All on your account!"

"You was willin' enough for me to run the still," Tate observed sullenly.

"If you'd been smart you wouldn't 'a' got found out, an' when you got ketcht up with you oughter been smart enough to throw over the old man's offer, knowin' Halsey would 'a' got you off on Lola's account. But no, you jest jumped at the first chance of gettin' free, and here we are, as bad off as we ever was!"

"I don't believe but that it'll come out all right," Mrs. Claverel comforted, "cause Halsey won't ax his pa no odds when it comes to marryin'."

"But Lola won't have him if she's done give the old man her promise," said Pete gloomily. "She's just like her grandad Deane, stubborn as a

broke in ardently. "She won't listen to me as long as you hold her to her promise."

"Then," said the father deliberately, "I shall hold her to it till doomsday."

A hard look settled over the son's face and his strong young hands clutched until the knuckles stood out in pale, tense ridges. "If you do, you and I will never be friends again!" he said in a dreadful voice.

"Halsey!" the old man's voice was sharp as steel. He rose and faced his son in tumultuous silence, afraid to trust his violent emotions to take outlet in speech.

"I mean just what I say," Halsey went on in a low, constrained voice. "I'm not a boy to be dictated to in the most important step of my life, but a man able to judge for myself. I want to marry Lola Claverel because I love and honor her above every woman I have ever known."

"Don't you understand that I am doing this for your own good, my boy?" the father broke out in a shaking voice. "I'd willingly give you anything that would make you truly happy, but that miserable marriage would wreck your future completely. You'll be one of the leading men of the country some day. I expect you to take your place in the Legislature. You will meet the best men in the state. Your home will be open to the brainiest men and the loveliest women in Georgia who will expect of your wife all that Lola Claverel lacks. Don't you realize what a dead future Lola Claverel would make of your life?"

"You don't know Lola as I do," said Halsey with ardor. "Even if she is old Pete Claverel's daughter, she's worthy of a place with the best of us. I'll promise you this, father—wait until she has been educated to fill the requirements of my position, then I will make her my wife."

Bitterly disappointed as the father was, he realized unerringly that his son's happiness was at stake, and perhaps also his prospects, for he understood then, for the first time, how deeply Halsey loved the daughter of old Claverel. He hesitated only for a moment. "Very well, my boy," said he submissively. "I will release her from her promise on condition that you persuade her to fit herself to become your wife, in every sense of the word."

That afternoon John Evard stopped at the Claverel hut to interview Lola, who listened to all that he had to say

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of any kind. She had heard that his school was the best. Would he make a place for her on trial? The president detected, under the girl's crude yet gentle demeanor, the fine instincts of some forgotten ancestor, and he believed that association with the young women of his institution, many of them daughters of the finest blood and breeding in Georgia, would do for Lola what many books could not effect, so he made up his mind to make room for her in some way.

"You will have to work very hard, both physically and mentally," he told her warningly. "I am willin' to do any honest kind of work," was Lola's grave answer. "Very well. I will send you to the head matron, who will assign you to your duties. You shall begin studies to-morrow morning. I wish you great success, my friend."

Pete Claverel's daughter worked her way from a primary class to the preparatory department in ten months, by dint of marvelous industry. A few of the most unsubstantial students made her feel her mental position until the others proved their fine breeding and blood by making Lola their constant associate when she



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rock. She'll stick to her word, come what will."

In this surmise Pete was correct, for Lola not only rejected Halsey's suit, but declined to receive any further attentions from him. Astonished and bitterly hurt, the young man withdrew and threw himself into his father's ambitious plans with feverish zeal that delighted the old man. But Pete Claverel had no intention of losing his chance of an affluent old age without a struggle at least; he managed to obtain an interview with Halsey Evard in which he explained his daughter's conduct very painstakingly.

"She never in the world would 'a' give you the go-by if it hadn't been for her promise to your daddy," Pete declared fervently, for she's the kind that keeps her word whether or no, jest like her grandad's folks. Them Deanes was terrible stubborn folks that way. I jest thought I'd tell you the truth so's to give you a chance to git around yer pa in some way," he added confidentially.

Halsey Evard's keen wits discovered the old man's real motive on the instant, and a sudden violent loathing filled his being for the moment. He wondered how he could endure to live in close association with old Pete Claverel with his slack manners and loafing ways, but the thought of Lola put the lover's disgust to rout almost at the same instant. He could not give her up at any cost!

"Thank you for telling me," said Halsey as he rose and field the office door open. "Good-bye."

Halsey locked his office and hurried across the town square to the big store where his father sat balancing his books in the dull private office. "Father I want you to release Lola Claverel from her promise to you," he announced precipitately.

The old man pushed aside his books and studied his son's pale face in alarmed silence for a moment; then he spoke in a low, constrained voice: "That girl won't make a fit wife for you, Halsey," said he. "It ain't that she's poor, but that the stock is bad clear through. Old Pete—"

"She's the only girl in the world I want for my wife," the young man

in proud silence, while her mother sat in a back room dipping snuff with a slatternly neighbor. When Evard told her that she was to forsake her people when she should become Halsey's wife, the girl's head went back superbly and her splendid eyes took flame.

"Anyone that looks down on my folks ain't good enough for me," she answered proudly. "That's my answer, Mr. Evard. You can tell your son, so's to save him the trouble of comin' here for his answer."

Three days later old Pete Claverel lost his drunken balance, just as his mule stepped over the creek bank to ford the stream, and was drowned. His widow declared that she could not endure to live in the old house without him, so she sold the miserable place for the sorry sum of less than two hundred dollars, which she divided equally among her seven shiftless, good natured children, and went to live with a married daughter. Lola's portion of the legacy was exactly twenty dollars. She spent two dollars for a pair of shoes and a gingham bonnet, then she laundered her two calico dresses and what underwear she possessed, and set out upon what was to her a long journey, from Dahlonega to Gainesville, a beautiful little mountain resort in North Georgia, where she had heard, through John Evard, of a very fine seminary for young women.

The teamsters along the road were very kindly disposed toward the lonely traveler, so Lola reached her destination at noon of the second day, very tired and dusty and bewildered, but desperately determined to obtain what she had set out for. As she walked through the seminary grounds in her limp calico dress and dusty brogan shoes, she noticed the pitiful contrast between her threadbare appearance and that of the daintily dressed girls who sauntered about arm-in-arm; but she kept up her courage, and finally she found the president of the institution, who was a big-hearted, fine-grained man of wide experience, and who listened with great interest to the girl's simple story. She wanted ardently to earn an education through honorable work

Table with columns: EIGHTH MONTH 31 DAYS, August, THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY, 1906. It lists the days of the month, the day of the week, the color of vestment, and the feast or saint's day.

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