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n This Paper.

Mary's eyes, set in their smiling round considerable, but it's all been west wrinkles, had winked themselves free of of the Mississippi." tears. She kept one of Martha's hands, and together they walked on, Martha of

a sudden entirely calm.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1910

"Why, Nathan wrote to Judge Scott, sayin' he'd be here to-day an' settle things up," said Mary. "I was over there yesterday, tailorin', an' they told me, knowin' I used to live with you an' all. I promised to give 'em to-day, but I couldn't. When I got up this mornin' an' took my thimble, says I to myself, 'I never can in this world. I've got to go.' So I put a few things into my bag an' struck out over the pastur'. made up my mind I'd ketch ye here at the crossroad, an', by George! I done

Her color was high and her eyes full of light. She looked like a woman who loved the taste of swift adventure. Martha was holding her hand tight as she had when she was a little girl and Mary, then a bigger girl but "working out," used to lead her to school.

"What you got in your bag, Mary?" she asked, chiefly for the delight of talking.

Mary laughed, a happy cackle, with something of chanticleer's triumphant

"Why," said she, "I got some cold tongue an' some bread an' doughnuts an' a pinch of tea. I warrant you never'd ha' thought you'd have to eat."

enterprise. "I never did."

In her turn she laughed. Everything seemed even joyous now that Mary had come. They walked lightly along, picking out old landmarks and exclaiming over the few changes, an old cellar cleared of its birch and alder preparatory to building again, the slaughter of an elder hedge. But as they neared the corner where another step would bring them out upon the row of balm of Gileads and the gate of the old place, Martha, in spite of her inspiriting companion, felt her heart failing. Emotion rose in her throat and choked her. All sorts of inexplicable longings beset her like the waves of a sea, the sense of tears, of an aching worship of long-past days. She saw multitudinous images fleeting, and it seemed to her that she was vainly holding out her hands to them to bid them stay.

"There!" said Mary, tenderly. "Don't you feel that way. It don't do a mite

Martha touched her dress and grasped a fold of it. She held it for a moment, and it seemed as if she were a little girl again and Mary was taking her to school. that she had not expected the grass to for it. be cut, but that vanishing of the path with the feet that had trodden it gave her an incredible pain, yielding to a timid certainty that here was Nathan upon the steps before the open door. One glance showed her that he was not unlike what she had pictured him, only that there was more of him in every way. He was more rotund, his cheeks had a deeper red, and his straddling attitude, hands in his pockets, bespoke the exact degree of masterfulness she had expected to find in him.

"That you, Marthy?" he was calling, with a cordiality that somehow disconcerted her. "Which of you are you, anyway? Well!" he added, as she and Mary reached the steps and paused there, regarding him with a differing spirit in their glances, "if you don't look like old Aunt Mattie l'aine!"

Martha winced a little. The last time she had seen Aunt Mattie was on a morning when the old lady, looking very old indeed, had come to pass the day, and she and Nathan had pilfered her bonnet from the best room and taken turns in Mattie had seemed incredibly ancient to her then, and the picture had stayed with her. She wondered if her own bonnet and her own lined face could possibly be accurate. "It's past laylock time." at that mirth-enriching stage. But Mary speaking while she smiled.

"Well, Nathan, you've been gone quite Been out West the heft o' the window. a Spell. time ?

said Nathan, not averse to

"You ain't turned into a Mormon, have ye?" asked Mary Blake, while Martha breathed, "Why, Mary!" faintly.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Nathan.

"Oh, nothin'," said Mary, with innocence. "I thought you looked kinder like a Mormon, beard an' all. Come, le's we go in an' set down an' talk it over."

She led the way, and Nathan, surprised, turned aside to let her do it. Somehow, because she was so assured, it seemed to be Mary's house instead of his. Presently Martha found herself in the east room, sitting in her mother's little chintz-covered sawing-chair. She put her hand down furtively and stroked the cushion. It seemed to her, for the moment, as if she were touching a fold of her mother's dress as she had held Mary's a moment ago. Nathan had taken Grandfather Irwin's chair by the fireplace. He tipped back in it, and fitted on his glasses, which somehow had the look of being chiefly needed to show how prosperous he was. He had drawn a paper from his pocket, and now he bent it open on his knee.

"I made an inventory before you came," he said. "I thought there was no use our putterin' round over the house together, pickin' out what we'd like an' what we don't like. Now there's the two high-boys.'

Martha was looking at him pathetically. It did not occur to her that she had "No," said Martha, wondering at such not spoken since they had met, and now she rejoined, timidly, "Well." Then it seemed inexcusable that they should have reached business without the decencies of social query, and she added, yet more falteringly, "How's your wife, Nathan?" Nathan stared briefly.

"Oh, she's same as common," he said. "She's had some lumbago— Marthy, what's the matter?"

Martha was swaying in her chair, and

Mary Blake had run to steady her. "You poor creatur"!" said Mary Blake, holding her embraced while she seemed to challenge Nathan with reproachful eyes. 'Like's not she ain't had a mouthful o' vittles to-day." Presently she was supporting her on one side and Nathan on the other, and they had borne her into the parlor where the old horse-hair sofa, defying the ravages of time, inhospitably received her. Mary Blake caught up omething from the hall table-it was Nathan's summer overcoat-rolled it deftly and tucked it under her head. She found feathers somewhere, challenged Nathan for a match, and, burning the feathers, made a horrid smell under Martha's nose. Meantime Nathan had let down the bucket with a clang and Then they had turned in at the gate and brought a glass of water in Uncle Nate's were walking up through the thick grass cider-pitcher found on the kitchen shelf. to the front door. She knew quite well He withdrew it as Mary stretched a hand

he remembered. "No, 'tain't, either, no more'n ever 'twas," said Mary. "The Timminses have been usin' it for their cattle when they're in the upper pastur' ever since you went away. There, Marthy dear,"

she added, "howd" you feel now? Martha sat up, very pale and apologetic. Mary was putting the wisps of hair away from her forehead with a rough hand unused to fondling.

'I'm terribly ashamed,' said Martha. Nathan cleared his throat and looked away. It suddenly came to him that Flodie, his latest grandchild, had Martha's light blue eyes.

"I guess I'll go round and look at the buryin'-ground," he said, casually. "Maybe the fence wants fixin' up. If I should sell, I should set that aside, an' I might as well 'tend to it now. I don't know when I shall be round here again. You lay there an' get your breath."

When he had gone and the room was very still, Martha opened her eyes and looked at Mary sitting by her side in wearing it before the parlor glass. Aunt one of the blurred yellow kitchen chairs. "Hear that bee," she said faintly.

'He must be in the laylocks." "Why, no," said Mary, soothingly, yet

"So 'tis." In a moment she opened Blake, looking straight into Nathan's her eyes again, to say, with a little face, with no sign of fear or favor, was shamefaced laugh, "I must be a terrible poor creatur' to give out like this." Mary was on her feet peering from the

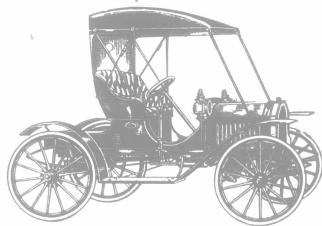
"If I ever see anything like a man!" said she. "Talk about sense! There's owners he had prospered. "I've moved Nathan can't git into that gate. I'll



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