



"Right thar her head 'll come—w'y she'll be Jest like a bird on a branch, a rockin' fo'th and back!"

clouds, looking fearfully back toward the east with her pale face, Creed Carrier was awakened by a sound that sent the cold chills over his firm, healthful, vigorous frame. It was the soft, regular rocking of the little chair. It ceased and began again. Once more, and yet another time, it ceased and began again.

For a moment superstition clutched him. She was dead—she was dead—amongst them, somehow; and she had come to him, his poor, cheated, wayward Bird, and was sitting in the little chair his love had provided for her. Then other ghastly fancies pushed this one aside. Thicker and thicker they crowded upon him, till the cabin was thronged with terrors, and he seemed suffocating among them. At this his strong, sane common sense rose up to repel these horrors; and as the little chair once more began its soft rocking, he stole quietly from the bed, felt his way through the black darkness of the closed room toward the sound, and laid his hand first upon the moving chair-back, then the seat. His fingers closed upon the warm, furry little body of the kitten he had got for Bird against her coming; she had told him she loved a kitten.

"Hit's so much company when"—here he remembered with a stab of pain how she had blushed and looked shyly up at him—"when the men folks is out and a body's all alone."

Now the house seemed unbearable to him. He groped his way to his clothes and began to put them on—hastily, feverishly. The simple routine of dressing held him for a moment; but when he had put on each garment, laced and tied his shoes, fumbled for his hat, found it, set it on his head, and stood, in his humble way, a man equipped, the awful sense of bereavement rushed upon and drowned him. He had dressed himself to go—where? To do—what? Life was at a sick ebb in his soul; it was sweetheart, wife, and child that had gone from him at one stroke; and to the arms of that crea-

ture Gittleston! The fellow's squat form and turgid, dark face with its pale eyes were always before Creed's shrinking mind; it seemed to him that he might die—and that he would gladly do so—from sheer inability to live.

"Bird," he whispered, "my little gal, Bird!"

And upon the deep stillness following the word, as if in answer, a spent, piteous voice cried his name.

"Creed!" it came, shrill with pain and fear; "oh, Creed! Air ye thar? Hit's me, Creed. Hit's Bird. Please lemme in. Oh, I'm so skeered!"

With one stride he was at the door, threw it open, almost misdoubting his senses, and she flew in, drenched with the soaking mountain mist, cold, trembling—a haggard bird indeed! She clung to him frantically, shaking him as much as so slight a thing could shake so great a frame.

"Why didn't ye wait fer me, Creed? What did ye leave me 'long o' them mean folks fer? Them was awful folks! I thought that feller wanted to hit me—afterwards, I's 'fraid he would. I—I wanted to come, but ye looked so—cross at me, an' ye said 'Far-well.'" At that word a sob choked her.

With quiet, contained joy, with native skill, Carrier got off her soaked shoes, put her in the little rocker, wrapped her warm, built up a great, roaring fire till the cabin was full of light and cheer, and made coffee. Her lip yet trembled pitifully, and she gulped and choked suddenly, again and again; but he dealt tactfully with her, soothing and calming her, while scarce able to credit his own bliss.

As he served and tended her, Bird's big black eyes followed him hungrily, pathetically; and as his hand passed her close in some act of service, she snatched and kissed it passionately. Creed's face crimsoned darkly, and a look of pain flashed over it.

"Why, honey—why, honey child! You orn't to do thataway," he murmured. "You pretty child, you, to kiss my ol' rough han'!"

"Oh, Creed!" she cried out, and caught him almost fiercely by the shoulder. "Oh, Creed!" Her eyes went over him jealously, tenderly. "I told ye how mean they was to me—what awful people they was! I jest up an' told you; an' hit's bound to look to you like I only was a tryin' to run away from them! Ye never will know—ye never will believe—that 'twas 'cause I loved you—you—'cause I jest loved ye, and would rather be dead than have to be parted from ye. Creed, Creed, you're the best man in the world! but"—turning her head with feverish impatience—"taint that. That ain't w'y I love you so. You're like mammy, an' pappy an' everything else in the world to me—but that ain't it, neither! I—Creed, I just love you. W'y, I'd rather died fer you than to live in a—in a pure gold house with that—that—"

Bird's face darkened, not only with wrath and longing, but with pain—with sheer suffering. "Thar, thar honey! Thar, thar, Creed's little gal! Don't you never mind that Gittleston feller. He's done gone—he ain't never gwine to tetch a ha'r o' yo' head; he ain't never gwine to so much as set eyes on you. But ye're wrong, Bird, 'bout Creed not understandin'. I know my little gal loves me. I believe now I knowed it

all the time. Here, honey"; and he brought coffee to her, with some dainty bits of hot food, feeding it to her in little mouthfuls.

When at last she was quiet, when she had drunk and eaten, and leaned on his arm—against his breast—she told her story.

"Creed," murmured the childish voice, drowsily, "hit was that man Culp 'at he'ped me. I cried an' carried on so turrible, after you left me, 'at Gittleston an' Miz Culp—w'y, they was ready to knock me down, Creed. They tuck all that jewelry off'n me 'at Gittleston had give me—they plumb drug it from me; but not so quick as I did myself; fer I jest flung it in their faces, fast as I could tear it off. Then, when I kep' a takin' on so turrible, Culp he come up an' he says to 'em: 'You let me take a-holt o' that gal. I can quiet her,' he says. An' he told me, 'Come on; I'm gwine to show ye somethin'.' He tuck me back through the train; an' when we come to the eend—the fur eend—he says to me, 'That's what I've got to show ye, ye fool child—the back door. Now you git out. I'll keep the others off'n ye; you git out an' foller that man o' yours; you'll never git sich another.' An', Creed, I be'n a runnin' ever sence. I knowed—I jest could hardly recollect—where yo' pappy's house—the old Carrier house—stood; an' I be'n a climbin' an' a climbin'—an' so—so skeered—"

The tired voice trailed off; Bird sank into uneasy slumber on Creed's shoulder. A long, catching breath, the clutching at his hand now and again, showed how deep-seated was her distress. Suddenly she started up, and with the trembling lip of a child, complained:

"That womern hurt my finger a takin' one o' them there rings off!" Carrier's kind eyes smiled upon her as a mother's might have done. "Never you mind, honey," and his lips brushed her hair; "never you mind; I'll buy you a plenty o' rings an' sech—reel ones, not truck, like that was."

"I don't want 'em—no, I don't!" she protested. "I don't never want to see a ring ag'in—ner a chain, nor a bres'-pin!"

Creed rocked her softly, in the fullness of content, noting the sweep of lash against her cheek, where the rose was beginning to creep back. Without opening her eyes, she murmured in a drowsy tone:

"One o' them bres'-pins had a green settin' in it. I never seed nothin' so sightly. Reckon you could find one at the sto' 'at had a green settin'—a green settin'?"

Creed laughed silently, and leaned his head upon hers.

"Hit's jest a baby-chile," he murmured; and aloud: "Laws, yes, honey; they's plenty mo' whar that come frum. an' prettier. Green settin's with red around 'em—all a-waitin' fer Creed's baby chile. Sleep now, honey; sleep an' res'. We got to ride over d'rec'ly to Squire Ashe's. But you sleep now, honey!"

"Jennie," said a young lady, turning away from the mirror and addressing a companion, "what would you do if you had a moustache on your lip?" "If I liked him I would keep quiet," was the demure reply.

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