

I reckon it's wicked, but I can't help hopin' they're reapin' the reward of their bad treatment of Joel."

Four weeks passed and yet there was no word from Joel. His mother was very anxious. There had been a railroad accident, she knew, and it was vain to tell her that if any such thing had occurred we would learn it through the newspapers. "It mightn't 'a' been found out," she said.

At last, in the fifth week of his absence, and the last of my stay there, he came.

It was growing dark and we sat on the porch, Mrs. Hutt in one of her still moods, and I thinking of home, wishing Joel would come, that I would have no reason to linger there after my school closed. A little wagon came down the lane.

"Who kin that be?" said Mrs. Hutt. "None of the neighbors has wagons like that."

It stopped at our gate. A man said "Here we are," and jumping down, began helping others out.

"It's Joel," said Mrs. Hutt; "but who kin that be? I wonder if Hiram's wife could 'a' come with him."

They came up the walk, Joel and the woman beside him, the children following.

Mrs. Hutt shook hands with her son and asked, "Is this Hiram's wife?"

"No, mother," replied Joel; "this is my wife."

She stared at him and at the poor woman, who was hiding her face and crying audibly.

"These children will tire more than help you, and I brought you a daughter to kee for you in your age."

Mrs. Hutt was still speechless with astonishment. The woman lifted her head and sobbed out, "Don't you know me Mrs. Hutt?"

"No more'n the face of the dead. Who could I know way out in Iowa?"

"But I didn't always live in Iowa. Look at me and think a while."

"You're not Beny Allen!"

"No, mother," said Joel, "she's Beny Hutt."

I left them then and took the children in to the kitchen fire, for riding from the station in the evening air had chilled them. I put the kettle on for the tea I knew Mrs. Hutt would soon begin to think of, and then went up to my room and left Joel to tell his mother how he found his old love among the prairies.

About two hours after Mrs. Hutt came in, and sitting down on the bed, told me how it had come about.

"Who'd 'a' thought it! I never dreamed of such a thing happenin' as Joel gettin' married, let alone marryin' Beny Allen after all, though I might 'a' knowed he'd 'a' stee'd a bachelor to doomsday before he'd 'a' had anybody else. Bless her heart, she's just like she used to be before that Alf Hawley turned her head. I always knowed she'd come to see it different some time, and she has, poor thing, sure enough." She sighed and paused a while, as though she had occasion to be sad.

"How did Joel find her?"

"Why, in the queerest way in the world. It seems just like it was ordered by Providence, and I reckon it might 'a' been, though I'm sure if the rest had had such wicked feelin's about it as I have, such a blessin' wouldn't 'a' ben sent for anybody's deservin'. But I tell you how it was. When Joel got to Hiram's the children wasn't ready to come. You see their step-mother didn't do the best by them—some step-mothers don't—but I wouldn't say they're all alike. I kind o' thought Hiram's wife wasn't one of the good sort, but I never knowed it for sure till now that Joel tells me they hadn't decent clothes to come home in, though I'm sure they might 'a' had, for Hiram had a plenty to get them with. Beny says she heard she was a real lazy woman, and liked better to run to her neighbors than to take kee of her own house and children. Well, as I was a sayin', they hadn't hardly decent clothes, and she was so busy with her own things she wouldn't take time to 'tend to them. So Joel had to look

after them himself. She told him as he didn't know nothin' about such things he'd better take the children to some sewin' woman and let her get and make them a suit apiece. It isn't a good way of doin', but you see Joel didn't know, and so asked her where he'd go. She told him that on the next street there was a woman lived that done sewin'—she didn't know much about her—she'd only come lately, the woman had, but it was said she was a good hand at plain sewin'. She didn't know her name neither, but there was a sign up, and there wasn't no other sign, and he'd know it by that. So Joel he went off to find the place. He saw the sign, but he went in without stoppin' to read the name. A woman was sewin' in the corner. She riz up and said, "Good-mornin'," and he was beginnin' to tell his errand when all at onst they knew each other for Benny Allen and Joel Hutt. Well, they made it all up somehow—I reckon they don't kee to tell how—and he married her and brought her home with him. And that's how it comes she's here now."

"But where was her husband, and what had she been doin' all the while?"

"Didn't I tell you of all that? It seems to me my head is all mixed up to-night. Why, come to find out, she didn't never marry Alf. Just after they went West her father and mother both died, and it seemed as if the trouble opened her eyes and set her to thinkin', so that she come to see things different, and she wouldn't have Alf at all. She had a hard time of it, though, taking kee of herself among strangers. But she must 'a' done pretty well, for she was as comfortable fixed up as could be, only she was so lonely, poor thing. She says the Lord helped her and keered for her, and she says she isn't punished enough yet for treatin' Joel so. But Joel won't hear to any such talk. You'd think to see him that he'd been the one to blame and Beny'd never done nothin' wrong. And she does seem real good. I'm sure I'm not the one that will ever throw it up to her that she most broke Joel's heart. It was more'n ten years ago, when she was a giddy girl, and what's the use of rakin' it up to fret about now. Yes, she's good; and I'm glad Joel's got her to kee fur him when I'm gone."

The Hutt's are still my friends, and I go there sometimes to see and enjoy their happy comfort. The house—the New House, of course—is surrounded by neat palings. A honey-suckle is making progress over the door, and the borders are bright with flowers from April to October. Beny has dismissed the blue blinds, and in many ways smoothed out the once reigning stiffness. Within the easy-chair, placed in the coziest corner and its cushion covered with bright patch-work of her own piecing, always stands empty unless Mrs. Hutt sits there. She rocks and knits, or goes about the house as freely as its mistress, but feels no burden. Beny and the children are ever ready to serve her.

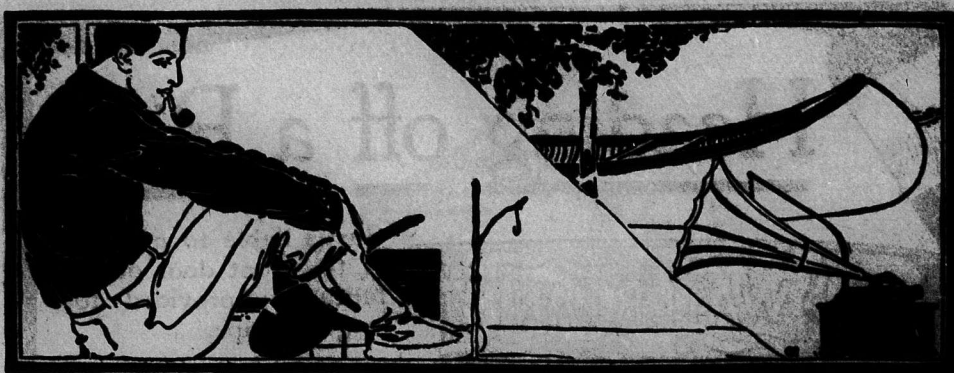
Little Rain.

Sprinkle, sprinkle, little rain,
Patter on the window pane!
Were you frightened up so high
By the frowning of the sky?

When you saw the air turn black,
And you felt your cloud-home crack,
Then you ran away in fright,
Sprinkle, sprinkle, in the night.

And now in the dark you weep,
As down the pane you creep,
And you tremble as you try
To escape the frowning sky.

But my lamp is like the spark
Of a vain hope in the dark.
Till the sky grows bright again
You must sprinkle, little rain.



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