

## Ki Bono.

It was the year after the war that Ki came to us—the same summer, in fact, that the great railway, stretching itself across the country, came through the southern part of the State, and passed directly over the lower end of our meadow lot.

Father was speaking of it yesterday, and he called it a coincidence that the railway and Ki should have come to us together. I suppose it was one of God's coincidences. I have noticed before this that his accidents often come in pairs.

It was in summer, I said, that Ki came, just at haying time. Father was down at the bars when he came along the road and begged for work.

'What's your name?' father asked him.

'Ki,' was the simple answer.

'Ki what?'

'Ki Bono.'

Father laughed. Although he was a farmer, he had been to college, and understood that some former master had named the negro—I was going to tell you that Ki was black, oh, very black—by the Latin phrase, *Cui bono*, probably wondering 'for what good,' possibly, the little pickaninny had come into the world.

'What can you do?' my father continued.

Ki showed his teeth. Such splendid teeth! We girls always admired them. 'I kin pick cotton, massa,' he said.

'Can you mow?'

'Guess so. I's mighty quick to learn.'

So father called out to me. 'Peggy,' said he, 'take this man in and give him some supper. I think he'll do.'

And Ki did do—do a splendid deed that I'm going to tell you about, only that was years after—this last summer, indeed. All that time Ki stayed with us, and there was not one of us but loved him—dear, faithful, patient, trusty old Ki! The tears are in my eyes as I am trying to write it all now.

Ignorant black man and slave though he was, I know that his soul is white like the snow that is coming down so softly upon his grave this sad November afternoon.

It was that same summer, too, as I was saying, that the railway was carried through our meadow. It had been talked about for a long while, but we had hoped it would never come. We always held a kind of grudge against the iron rails for passing so near us and cutting off the prettiest portion of our favorite meadow lot. And we never to this day have grown quite used to the roar of the train and the shriek of the locomotive as it comes rushing by in the night. It always disturbed us all except Ki. Somehow the negro and the railway struck up an intimate and lasting friendship.

Although Ki was intelligent enough about most things, toward the locomotives that went up and down the road he seemed to feel a sort of superstitious awe, looking upon them somewhat as the earlier Indians regarded the first ships that came over the Atlantic.

Almost every evening in all those ten years, if the night was fine, Ki would light his pipe after supper, and go down through the orchard to the meadow-lot, and sit there until the train went by. That was not until ten o'clock, you know. There were two passenger express trains each day, one at morning and one at night. Of course there were plenty of freight trains running at all times.

But I must hurry on to my story, only it seems necessary to tell you all these things first, so that you may understand. And then it is all so sad to think of—that which I have yet to tell you—that I am fain to linger upon the details, putting off as long as possible what is to follow.

It was one hot afternoon last August that

Patty came in from the barn—Patty is my sister Martha. Father always insisted on calling us girls Patty and Peggy. We were old-fashioned farmer's girls, he said, and he liked us to have the old-fashioned country names.

Well, Patty came in and said that there was somebody upon the hay mow asleep. She had heard him snore.

Ki jumped up when Patty told us this. 'It's them dirty tramps,' he cried. He looked upon all tramps—and they were very common on the Brookville pike—with contemptuous disdain. They were always allied in his simple mind with the 'white trash' of his native South.

So, with Ki at our head, and Rover, too, we took up our march for the barn. Ki was very big and strong, and afraid of nothing—at least nothing in human form.

He seized a pitchfork, and climbing the ladder, sprang eagerly into the hay, very much as a terrier dives in among the rats the instant a door is opened for him. Presently we heard his voice. He seemed to be stirring up somebody. 'Come, now, wake up here! What you t'inks? Gwine to lay abed all day? Rouse out, now! Time you was on your trabbels, I reckon.'

There was somebody growling and grumbling in response to this, and then down the ladder, one after another, came four men, unwashed and poorly dressed, as desperate and villainous-looking wretches as you would care to meet.

They glanced at Patty and me sullenly, and muttered something or other, I could not exactly tell what, only it was half profanity. I had Rover by the collar; but it was as much as I could do to hold him back by hand and voice.

Ki came down behind them, and escorted them out to the road, talking to them in his peculiar style all the time.

When he told father at supper about the tramps, he thought they might be men who had committed some crime or other, and were obliged to remain in concealment during the day. It was not until afterward that we thought of connecting them with an outrage that had been committed several days before over on the Central Railway.

The track had been torn up with the evident intention of throwing a passenger train down an embankment. Luckily a freight train came along just before the other, and two lives were lost instead of hundreds.

That evening, after supper, Patty and I went to Content Coleman's. We stayed quite a while; indeed, it was nine o'clock before we arose to go, and then it took us more than half an hour to get fairly started.

The stars were shining brightly, and, as it was somewhat nearer, we concluded, instead of going around by the road and over the hill, to go down the track and across the long railway bridge.

The river was quite wide there, and there was a trestle-work bridge across it, covered for a short distance at the middle. Perhaps it was not the safest course for us to take, crossing in the dark by the narrow plank walk; but we were strong, healthy girls, and did not at the moment think of danger.

There had been a heavy rain recently, and the river was full. We could hear the water rushing and gurgling by as we stepped upon the boards.

We advanced boldly enough until we came to the covered part, which was some forty feet long.

Then we hesitated, and Patty was half inclined to turn back. But I laughed at her, and, taking firm hold of each other's hands, we moved bravely on.

I don't know how it was exactly, but as

we reached the very centre of this part, which was roofed over, almost creeping along in the darkness, Patty and I, with one accord, clasped each other's hands more closely, and a shudder seemed to seize both of us. I think we felt at that moment the presence of some person or persons beside ourselves beneath that covering.

We stood quite still for an instant, and each involuntarily uttered the other's name. Then we hurried on more rapidly and less carefully toward the opening at the other end.

Just as we got there—just as we were stepping out into the starlight again, something occurred that might well have paralyzed hearts far stouter than those of two country girls.

It was Ki's voice that rang out loud and clear and distinct, from the darkness behind us. And his words were so terrible that, for an instant, we sank down helpless, fully catching their meaning, yet unable to stir an inch. This was what he said:

'Run, girls! run for your lives! Git a lantern and stop the train! These yer dirty trampers has torn up the—'

This was all he said. We heard a low curse, and a dull sound, as if a blow had been given, and then the words seemed to fade and gurgle out in an awful groan.

It is three months now since then, and yet last night I awoke from a sound sleep, and heard that groan of Ki's as plainly as I heard it that August night.

I think both of us realized fully the situation—our own danger and that of the train even now due—from the very first. Only we were so terribly frightened, that for a moment we could not move.

What roused us was a shout and an oath from one of the tramps.

'We must ketch them gals!' he cried, 'or they'll spoil everything.'

We heard the sound of heavy boots on the planks, and then I gave a violent jerk at Patty's arm, and away we went, running as we never had run before; and we girls were good runners, you may be sure. Many a race had we had with the Harding boys up and down Sky-Hye Hill—yes, and beat them, too. There was little fear of these men overtaking us.

For a moment or two I expected to be shot at; but it was probable that they had no pistols. And I really believe that after the first fright the thought uppermost in our minds was the ten o'clock express.

We knew that we must stop that at all hazards; and we were praying in our hearts that we might be in time.

Ki had said, 'Get a lantern!' We turned off at the meadow bars and ran up through the orchard. By a special providence, as I cannot but believe, father was in the barn with a light.

We told him the whole story in a half dozen words, and then all three hurried back to the railway and down to the track.

The trainwreckers were nowhere to be seen. Probably, now that the alarm had been given, they had thought it best to hurry away.

The road was straight for a mile or two, and away down the track there, just how near we could not tell, was the glittering headlight. Father advanced towards it swinging the lantern round and round.

It did not seem half a minute—it was not much more than that, really—before the train was upon us.

The whistle shrieked. Oh, would they never stop?

Father kept his place, still swinging the lantern, until the engine was within a few