

## AT TEAGUE POTEET'S.

## A Sketch of the Hog Mountain Range.

BY JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS.

"The folks is porely and puney," Teague replied, "an' the news won't skacely b'ar relatin'. I hain't a-deny-in'," he continued, rubbing his chin and looking keenly at the other, "I hain't a-denyin' but what I'm a huntin' airter you, an' the business I come on hain't got much howdyin' in it. Ef you uv got some place er nuther wher' ever 'body hain't a-cockin' up the' years at us, I'd like to pass some words wi' you."

"Why, of course," exclaimed Woodward, hooking his arm in Teague's. "We'll go to my room. Come! And after we get through, if you don't say that my business with you is more important than your business with me, then I'll agree to carry you to Hog Mountain on my back. Now that's a fair and reasonable proposition. What do you say?"

Woodward spoke with unusual warmth, and there was a glow of boyish frankness in his tone and manners, that Teague found it hard to resist.

"Well, they's thes this much about it," he said; "my business is mighty troublesome, an' yit hit's got to be settled up."

He had put a revolver in his pocket on account of this troublesome business.

"So is mine troublesome," responded Woodward, laughing, and then growing serious. "It has nearly worried me to death."

Presently they reached Woodward's room, which was up a flight of stairs near the corner of Broad and Alabama Streets. It was a very plain apartment, but comfortably furnished, and kept with scrupulous neatness.

"Now, then," said Woodward, when Teague had seated himself, "I'll settle my business, and then you can settle yours." He had seated himself in a chair, but he got up, shook himself, and walked around the room nervously. The lithograph of a popular burlesque actress stared brazenly at him from the mantelpiece. He took this remarkable work of art, folded it across the middle, and threw it into the grate. "I've had more trouble than enough," he went on, "and if I hadn't met you to-day I intended to hunt you up to-morrow."

"In Atlanta?"

"No; on Hog Mountain. Oh, I know the risk," Woodward exclaimed, misinterpreting Teague's look of surprise. "I know all about that, but I was going just the same. Has Miss Sis ever married?" he asked, stopping before Teague and blushing like a girl.

"Not less'n it happened since last Web'day, an' that hain't no ways likely," replied the other, with more interest than he had yet shown. Woodward's embarrassment was more impressive than his words.

"I hardly know how to say it," he continued, "but what I wanted to ask you was this: Suppose I should go up to Hog Mountain some fine morning, and call on you, and say, as the fellow did in the song, 'Old man, old man, give me your daughter,' and you should reply, 'Go upstairs and take her if you want to,' what do you suppose the daughter would say?"

Woodward tried in vain to give an air of banter to his words. Teague leaned forward with his hands upon his knees.

"Do you mean, would Sis marry you?" he asked.

"That is just exactly what I mean," Woodward replied.

The old mountaineer rose and stretched himself, and drew a deep sigh of relief. His horrible suspicion had

no foundation. He need not fly to the mountains with Woodward's blood upon his hands.

"Lemme tell you the honest truth, Cap," he said, placing his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder, "I might 'low she would, an' I might 'low she wouldn't; but I'm orbleege to tell you that I dunno nothin' 'bout that chil' no more'n ef I hadn't a-never seed 'er. Wimmen is mighty kuse."

"Yes," said Woodward "they are curious."

"Some days they er gwine rippitin' aroun' like the woods wuz afire, an' then ag'in they er mopin' an' a-moonin' like ever' minnit wuz a-gwine to be the nex'. I bin a studyin' Sis sence she wan't no bigger'n a skinned rabbit, an' yit I hain't got to A, B, C, let alone a-b ab, u-b ub. When a man lays off for to keep up wi' the wimmen folks, he kin' thes make up his min' that he he'll have to git in a dark corner an' scratch his head many a time when he oughter be a diggin' for his livin'. They'll addle 'im thereckly."

"Well," said Woodward, with an air of determination, "I'm going back with you and hear what Miss Sis has to say. Sit down. Didn't you say you wanted to see me on business?"

"I did start out wi' that idee," said Teague, slipping into a chair and smiling curiously, "but I disremember mostly what 'twuz about. Ever' thing is been a-pesterin' me lately, an' a man that's hard-headed an' long-legged picks up all sorts of foolish notions. I wish you'd take keer this picklebottle, Cap," he continued, drawing a revolver from his coat-tail pocket and placing it on the table. "I uv been afeard ever sence I started out that the blamed thing 'ud go off an' t'er my jacket wron'-sund-out-ers. Gimme a gun, an' you'll gener'ly fin' me somewheres aroun'; but them ar clickety-cluckers is got mos' too many holes in 'em for to suit my eyesight."

Usually, it is a far cry from Atlanta to Hog Mountain, but Teague Poteet and Woodward lacked the disposition of loiterers. They shortened the distance considerably by striking through the country, the old mountaineer remarking that if the big road would take care of itself he would try and take care of himself.

They reached Poteet's one afternoon, creating a great stir among the dogs and geese that were sunning themselves outside the yard. Sis had evidently seen them coming, and was in a measure prepared; but she blushed painfully when Woodward took her hand, and she ran into her father's arms with a little hysterical sob.

"Sis didn't know a blessed word 'bout my gwine off to Atlanta," said Teague awkwardly but gleefully. "Did you, honey?"

Sis looked from one to the other for an explanation. Woodward was smiling the broad, unembarrassed smile of the typical American lover, and Teague was laughing. Suddenly it occurred to her that her father, divining her secret—her sweet, her bitter, her well-guarded secret—had sought Woodward out and begged him to return. The thought filled her with such shame and indignation as only a woman can experience. She seized Teague by the arm—

"Pap, have you been to Atlanta?"

"Yes honey, an' I made 'ar'e to come back."

"Oh, how could you? How dare you do such a thing?" she exclaimed passionately. "I will never forgive you as long as I live—never!"

"Why, honey—"

But she was gone, and neither Teague nor her mother could get a word of explanation from her. Teague coaxed and wheedled, and threatened, and Puss cried and quarrelled; but Sis was obdurate. She shut herself in her room and remained there. Woodward was thoroughly miserable. He felt that he was an interloper in some measure, and yet he was convinced

that he was the victim of a combination of circumstances for which he was in nowise responsible. He had never made any special study of the female mind, because, like most young men of sanguine temperament, he was convinced that he thoroughly understood it; but had not the remotest conception of the tragic element which, in spite of social training or the lack of it, controls and gives strength and potency to feminine emotions. Knowing nothing of this, Woodward knew nothing of women.

The next morning he was stirring early, but he saw nothing of Sis. He saw nothing of her during the morning, and at last, in the bitterness of his disappointment, he saddled his horse, and made preparations to go down the mountain.

"I reckon it hain't no use to ast you to make out your visit," said Teague gloomily. "That's what I says to Puss. I'm a free nigger ef Sis don't beat my time. You'll be erbleege to stop in Gullettsville to-night, an' in case er accidents you thes better tie this on your coat."

The old mountaineer produced a small piece of red woollen string, and looped it in Woodward's button-hole.

"Ef any er the boys run up wi' you an' begin to git limber-jawed," Teague continued, "thes hang your thumb in that kinder keerless like, an' they'll swar by you thereckly. Ef any of 'em asts the news, thes say they's a leak in Sugar Creek. Well, well, well!" he exclaimed, after a little pause; "hit's thes like I tell you. Wimmen folks is mighty kuse."

When Woodward bade Puss goodbye, she looked at him sympathetically and said—

"Sometime when youer passin' by, I'd be mighty thankful ef you 'ud fetch me some macaboy snuff."

The young man, unhappy as he was, was almost ready to accuse Mrs. Poteet of humour, and he rode off with a sort of grim desire to laugh at himself and the rest of the world. The repose of the mountain fretted him; the vague blue mists that seemed to lift the valleys into prominence and carry the hills further away, tantalised him; and the spirit of spring, just touching the great woods with a faint suggestion of green, was a mockery. There was a purpose—a decisiveness—in the stride of his horse that he envied, and yet he was inclined to resent the swift amiability with which the animal moved away.

But it was a wise steed, for when it came upon Sis Poteet standing by the side of the road, it threw up its head and stopped. Woodward lifted his hat, and held it in his hand. She gave him one little glance, and then her eyes drooped.

"I wanted to ask you something," she said, pulling a dead leaf to pieces. Her air of humility was charming. She hesitated a moment, but Woodward was too much astonished to make any reply. "Are you very mad?" she asked with bewitching inconsequence.

"Why should I be mad, Miss Sis? I am glad you have given me the opportunity to ask your pardon for coming here to worry you."

"I wanted to ask you if pap—I mean, if father went to Atlanta to see you," she said, her eyes still bent upon the ground.

"He said he wanted to see me on business," Woodward replied.

"He say anything about me?"

"Not that I remember. He never said anything about his business even," Woodward went on. "I told him about some of my little troubles, and when he found I was coming back here, he seemed to forget all about his own business. I suppose he saw that I would n't be much interested in anybody else's business but my own just then."

Sis lifted her head and looked steadily at Woodward. A little flush appeared in her cheeks, and mounted to her forehead, and then died away.

"Pap doesn't understand c'rythin', and I was afraid he had—" "Why do you look at me so?" she exclaimed, stopping short, and blushing furiously.

"I ask your pardon," said the young man; "I was trying to catch your meaning. You say you were afraid your father—"

"Oh, I am not afraid now. Don't you think the weather is nice?"

Woodward was a little puzzled, but he was not embarrassed. He swung himself off his horse and stood beside her.

"I told your father," he said, drawing very near to the puzzling creature that had so wilfully eluded him—"I told your father that I was coming up here to ask his daughter to marry me. What does the daughter say?"

She looked up in his face. The earnestness she saw there dared and conquered her. Her head drooped lower, and she clasped her hands together. He changed his tactics.

"Is it really true, then, that you hate me?"

"Oh! if you only knew!" she cried, and with that Woodward caught her in his arms.

An hour afterwards, Teague Poteet, sitting in his low piazza, cleaning and oiling his rifle, heard the sound of voices coming from the direction of the Gullettsville road. Presently Sis and Woodward came in sight. They walked slowly along in the warm sunshine, wholly absorbed in each other. Woodward was leading his horse, and that intelligent animal improved the opportunity to nip the fragrant sassafras buds just appearing on the bushes. Teague looked at the two young people from under the brim of his hat and chuckled but when Sis caught sight of him, a little while after, he was rubbing his rifle vigorously, and seemed to be oblivious to the fact that two young people were making love to each other in full view. But Sis blushed all the same, and the blush increased as she approached the house, until Woodward thought in his soul that her rosy shyness was the rarest manifestation of loveliness to be seen in all the wide world. As she hovered a moment at the gate, flushed and smiling, the old Mountaineer turned the brim of his hat back from his eyes and called out with a great pretence of formal hospitality.

"Walk in an' rest yourselves; thes walk right in! Hit's lots too soon in the seasons for the dogs to bite. Looks to me, Cap, like you hain't so might tender with that 'ar boss er your'n. Ef you uv rid 'im down to Gullettsville an' back sence a while ago, he'll be a-needin' feed thereckly. Thes come right in an' make yourselves at home."

Woodward laughed sheepishly, but Sis rushed across the yard, flung her arms around Teague's neck, and fell to crying with a vehemence that would have done credit to the most broken-hearted of damsels. The grizzled old mountaineer gathered the girl to his bosom and stroked her hair gently, as he had done a thousand times before. He looked at Woodward with glistening eyes.

"Don't min' Sis, cap. Sis hain't nothin' but a little bit of a slip of a gal, an' sence the day she could toddle 'roun' an' holler—good news or bad, mad er glad—she's bin a-runnin' an' havin' it out wi' her ole pappy. Wimmen an' gals hain't like we all, Cap; they er mighty kuse. She never pestered wi' Puss much," continued Teague, as his wife came upon the scene, armed with the plaintive air of slouchiness, which is at once the weapon and shield of women who believe that they are martyrs—"she never pestered wi' Puss much, but, cry or laugh, fight or frolic, she allers tack it out on her ole pappy."

Puss asked no questions. She went and stood by Teague, and toyed gently with one of Sis's curls.

"Sis don't take airter none er the Pringles," she said after a while, by way of explanation. "They hain't never bin a day when I couldn't look