

further side of Yellow Old Bald, came upon this girl, weeping passionately, helplessly, from some careless, barbarous unkindness which had brought up afresh in her young stormy heart all the emptiness of her life, and made her lot seem to her intolerable. The two sat the long hours out, pouring forth their souls to each other; Creed's kind eyes full of tenderness and pity for the beautiful, neglected, heart-hungry creature at his side; the girl warming, melting to the first kindness, the first consideration and admiration which had ever been hers. The world was made anew for both man and girl; when suddenly Birdella, glancing in affright at the late sun, leaped to her feet, exclaiming:

"Oh, me! Hit's nigh onto sundown! Pap an' the boys'll be home—an' they hain't a lick struck fer supper! I—oh, I'm most afeard!"

But Creed's voice reassured her—his protecting arm was around her. He walked home with the shrinking girl, helped her with the fire and the supper, and when "pap and the boys" came tramping in later, ravenous and saturnine, quietly took the old man apart and asked him for his daughter to wife. Jephtha Blacklock spat gravely upon the ground and made answer:

"Yes, sir, take her an' welcome. I was a layin' out to wed with Miranda

Creed Carrier had risen before the sun, fed and curried and brushed the horses, lingering long over the little filly's toilet, buckling on the side-saddle, which made his strong hands tremble but to touch, and had taken his way down the roundabout horse trail to Garyville, arriving there several hours before the train was due.

This day, which had been chosen upon his last visit to Birdella as their wedding-day, when he should meet her at Garyville, take her to old Squire Ash's for the marriage, and afterward up the mountain trail to the new cabin—this day, as it happened, some sort of excursion was afoot. The train came in slowly, and more than an hour late, a long string of coaches packed with hilarious humanity. Creed Carrier stood back, confused at the noise and tumult; the drumming of steam from the engine oppressing his ears, the evil smells, the clash and babble of many voices, shrill, crude, insistent. From the line of coaches poured forth girls and women tawdrily dressed in cheap lawns, with strange colored ribbons about their necks and waists, struggling beneath a load of self-consciousness, carrying it off with an air of bravado; men clad in their native butternut jeans, and looking far better than those others besides them, upon whom they gazed with envy, dressed in



"Far'well," he said, using the sad, impressive word of mountain adieu.

Dickert myself; an' they's gin'ally rippets an' family interruptions wher-ever they's stepmothers an' stepd'aters. I'm proud ye want Birdella," and looking long and curiously into Creed's quiet gray eyes, he added: "O' co'se—o' co'se—ever' man's got his own taste—I'm proud ye want Birdella." Upon the unbearably silence which ensued, he spoke again: "How soon?"

"Just as soon as I kin git my place ready fer her. I aim to build a new house. I reckon hit'll take me two months in all."

And in the old man looked curiously at the wooer. After the mountain boy, he said no word; but in his mind the wonder was great, what generation a man need make before bring home a "woman," more than the acquisition was a mule or an ox.

II.

Down in the valley at Garyville, the little narrow-gauge road, the day seemed hot and dusty and the air to the mountain man

cheap "boughten" clothes.

The glare, the heat, the dust, the coal smoke, were like poison to the mountain man; the air, tainted with sulphurous gases, seemed to choke in his lungs; the smeared, red, perspiring faces grieved his eyes. It was all a painful contrast to the clear, clean, sunlit spaces and heavenly quietude of his mountain-top. This was what the valley meant to Creed Carrier.

Presently his bewildered eye descried Birdella coming down the aisle of a coach; and as she walked slowly, among the giggling, vociferating crowd, her lover made out that there were two people with her—a fat, red-faced girl whom, as he drew near, he heard her address as "Miz Culp," and a squat, under-sized man whom the red-faced woman in turn called "Gittleson." And, he knew not why, his heart sank, instead of leaping in his breast as it had done these many weeks at the mere thought of Birdella's presence. He stood at the step of the coach to meet her, watching with the gaze of anxious



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