

his door wide enough to give me a glimpse inside.

"Curiously enough," he went on, "I've been thinking of Aleck all day. I heard yesterday that he was sick again, and it has worried me a good deal. He's pretty feeble now, and I don't know how long he'll last."

He flicked the ashes from his cigar, nursing his knee with the other hand. The leg must have pained him, for I noticed that he lifted it carefully and moved it on one side, as if for greater relief.

"Rheumatics?" I ventured sympathetically.

"No; just gets that way sometimes," he replied carelessly. "But Aleck's got it bad; can hardly walk. Last time I saw him he was about bent double."

Again he relapsed into silence, smoking quietly.

"And you tell me," I said, "that this old slave was loyal to your family after his freedom?"

He hadn't told me anything of the kind; but I had found his keyhole now, and was determined to get inside his door, even if I picked the lock with a skeleton key.

"Aleck!" he cried, rousing himself with a laugh; "well, I should say so! Anybody would be loyal who'd been treated as my father treated Aleck. He took him out of jail and gave him a home, and would have looked after him till he died if the war hadn't broken out. Aleck wasn't raised on our plantation. He was a runaway from North Carolina. There were three of them that got across the river—a man and his wife and Aleck. The slave driver had caught Aleck in our town and had locked him up in the caboose for safe keeping. Then he came to my father to help him catch the other two. But my father wasn't that kind of a man. The old gentleman had curious notions about a good many things. He believed when a slave ran away that the fault was oftener the master's than the negro's. 'They are nothing but children,' he would say, 'and you must treat them like children. Whipping is a poor way to bring anybody up.'"

"So when my father heard about the three runaways he refused to have anything to do with the case. This made the driver anxious."

"Judge," he said—my father had been a judge of the county court for years—"if you'll take the case I'll give you this boy Aleck as a fee. He's worth a thousand dollars."

"Send for him," said my father. "I'll tell you when I see him."

"So they brought him in. He was a big, strong boy, with powerful shoulders, black as a chunk of coal, and had a look about him that made you trust him at first sight. My father believed in him the first moment he saw him."

"What did you run away for, Aleck?" he asked.

"The boy held his head down. 'My mother died, Marster, an' I couldn't stay dar no mo'."

"I'll take him," said my father; "but on condition that the boy wants to live with me."

"This was another one of the old gentleman's notions. He wouldn't have a nigger on the place that he had to watch, nor one that wasn't happy."

"The driver opened his eyes and laughed; but my father meant what he said, and the papers were made out on those terms. The boy was outside in charge of the Sheriff while the papers were being drawn, and when they were signed the driver brought him in and said:

"He's your property, Judge."

"Aleck," father said, "you've heard?"

"Yes, sah."

"The boy stood with tears in his eyes. He thought he was going to get a life sentence. He had never been before a judge before."

"Well, you're my property now, and I've got a proposition to make to you. There's my horse outside hitched to that post. Get on him and ride out to my plantation, two miles from here; anybody'll tell you where it is. Talk to my niggers around the quarters, and then go over to Mr. Shandon's and talk to his niggers—find out from anyone of them what kind of a master I am, and then come back to me here before sundown and tell me if you want to live with me. If you don't want to live

with me you can go free. Do you understand?"

"My father said it all over again. Aleck looked at the driver, then at the Sheriff, and then at my father. Then he crept out of the room, got on the mare, and rode up the pike."

"You've thrown your money away," said the driver, shrugging his shoulders. "You'll never see that nigger again."

"The Sheriff laughed, and they both went out. Father said nothing, and waited. About an hour before sundown back came Aleck. Father always said he never saw a man change so in four hours. He went out crouching like a dog, his face over his shoulder, scared to death, and he came back with his head up and a snap in his eye, looking as if he could whip his weight in wildcats."

"I'll go wid ye, an' thank ye all my life," was all he said.

"Well, it got out around the village, and that night the other two runaways—the man and wife—they were hiding in the town—gave themselves up, and one of our neighbors bought them both and set them to work on a plantation next to ours, and the driver went away happy."

"I was a little fellow then, running around barefooted, but I remember meeting Aleck just as if it were yesterday. He was holding the horse while my father and the overseer stood talking on one side. They were planning his work and where he should sleep. I crept up to look at him. I had heard he was coming and that he was a runaway slave. I thought his back would be bloody and all cut to pieces, and that he'd have chains on him, and I was disappointed because I couldn't see his skin through his shirt and because his hands were free. I must have got too near the mare, for before I knew it he had lifted me out of danger."

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Aleck," he said; "an' what's your name, young marster?"

"Sammy," I said.

"That's the way it began between us, and it's kept on ever since. I call him 'Aleck,' and he calls me 'Sammy'—never anything else, even to-day."

"He calls you 'Sammy'!" I said in astonishment. The familiarity was new to me between master and slave."

"Yes, always. There isn't another person in the world now that calls me 'Sammy.'"

My travelling companion stopped for a moment, cleared his throat, drew a silver match-box from his pocket, relighted his cigar, and continued:

"The overseer put Aleck to plowing the old orchard that lay between the quarters and the house. I sneaked out to watch him as a curious child would, still intent on seeing his wounds. 'Soon as Aleck saw me, he got a board and nailed it on the plow close to the handle for a seat, and tied up the old horse's tail so it wouldn't switch in my face, and put me on it, and I never left that plow till sundown. My father asked Aleck where he had learned that trick, and Aleck told him he used to take his little brother that way before he died."

"After the orchard was plowed Aleck didn't do a thing but look after me. We fished together and went swimming together, and we hunted eggs and trapped rabbits; and when I got older and had a gun Aleck would go along to look after the dogs and cut down the trees when we were out for coons."

"Once I tumbled into a catfish hole by the dam, and he fished me out; and once, while he had crawled in after a woodchuck, a rock slipped and pinned him down, and I ran two miles to get help, and fell in a faint before I could tell them where he was. What Aleck had in those days I had, and what I had he had; and there was no difference till the war broke out."

"I was grown then, and Aleck was six or seven years older. We were on the border line, and one morning the Union soldiers opened fire, and all that was left of the house, barns outbuildings and negro quarters was a heap of ashes."

"That sent me South, of course, feeling pretty ugly and bitter, and I don't know that I've got over it since. My father was too old to go, and he and my mother moved into the village and lived in two rooms over my father's office. The negroes, of course, had to



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