

We were thoroughly interested and puzzled. That a new house should have stood so long empty in a section where so many were anxious to buy or rent was unaccountable. We were very certain that neither Joel Hutt nor anyone else had ever lived there.

"Well," I said, "shall we go on to the other house?"

"Across that deep hollow and up another hill? I don't believe that's the place."

"But where else can we go?"

"Come on, then. It would be hard to come so far and see nobody. And then I want to inquire if this house is haunted," said Mary, who was alternating between amusement and annoyance.

Across the hollow and up the hill we went. The house was an old log one, a story and a half high, and having one wing—a small frame kitchen, which seemed to be a late addition. There was a porch in front, up which honeysuckle had climbed so long ago that its thick stems seemed to support the moss-grown roof as firmly as did the craggy old posts. In the yard stood one of those huge apple-trees whose spreading branches are good for nothing but the shade and snug props to robins' nests. Behind the house were fruit trees which promised bright things for May and good things for harvest. As we approached a woman came out on the porch and blew a tin horn.

"We are in good time for dinner," said Mary; "this long walk has made me hungry enough to enjoy it."

Although we were opening the gate when the woman concluded this dinner-call, she only glanced toward us and hurried into the house.

"Cool that, now wasn't it? I'm afraid we'll have no invitation to help them eat that nice ham I smell."

Some minutes after we knocked a voice, in quaint and measured tones, bade us "come in." On entering we saw the same woman who had blown the horn sitting in the corner knitting. It was the position and occupation she thought best for a reception.

"Good-day," said the woman, still knitting.

"Good-day," I answered. "Does Joel Hutt live here?"

"Yes."

"Is he in?"

"No."

"Is he at home?"

"I reckon he'll be yere soon. I've blown on him for dinner; but he's over in the fur field a-plowin', and if he ain't at the end of his furrow he won't stop till he's done."

"Do you know whether a teacher is engaged for the school?"

"No, we haven't got none yet. You want it?"

"I came to see about it."

"Won't you take cheers and wait till Joel comes?" And at last she rose and pushed two chairs out a little from their places by the wall.

"Did you come fur?"

"About three miles."

"Which way?"

Mary pointed toward the unoccu-

pied house, and said, "That way."

"Whose girls are you?"

"Mrs. Rood's."

"Over by town? Oh, yes, I've heered of her often. I thought mebby you was old man Johnson's daughters, they're school marm's. He lives over on Mill Creek. D'ye know him?"

"No, ma'am."

Just then we heard the horses coming down the road, their chain traces rattling to every measured tramp.

"Joel's comin' now," said Mrs. Hutt, and she hurried to the kitchen and began poking the fire and getting out dishes. Presently we heard Joel come in, and while he washed she explained who we were and what was our errand. Then she came to the door of the sitting-room and said, "You might as well take off your things and stay to dinner," and we immediately untied our hats in ascent to what was intended to be a warm invitation. We followed her to the kitchen where the table was spread. Joel stood behind one of the chairs, and, as we entered, nodded to us and sat down. He was a fine-looking farmer of about thirty-five. As we ate I made known my errand to Joel, and found I could get the school "if the other directors was willin'." Then we talked of the weather and the crops until almost through the meal, when Mary asked: "Who lives in that house over there?"

Joel, to whom the question was addressed, evidently desired to seem not to hear; and, finally, his mother answered, quite shortly in tone and letter, "Nobody."

"Where do you calkilate to board?" said Joel, before another question could be asked.

"I am not acquainted with anyone in the district. How far from here is the school-house?"

"Something less than a mile."

"Do you ever board teachers?"

"Sometimes I used to," said Mrs. Hutt; "but I'm not so smart as I was onst."

"Oh, well, it will be season to look for boarding when I'm sure of the school. When will you let me know?"

"About the last of the week, I reckon," said Joel, as he rose from the table.

Returning home we again passed the empty house.

"If it has a ghost story connected with it the Hutt's don't seem inclined to tell it. And I believe they have some reason for not wanting to talk about it. Didn't you think they avoided it?"

"Yes; but if I live here this spring I will find it all out for you."

"I wouldn't board with those people if I were you. They are so queer, and with only those two old folks you will be so lonesome."

"Everybody is queer; and you know I don't often have time to be lonely when I teach. Then I will come home for Saturdays and Sundays, and talk over the week with you and mother."

We reached home and were refreshing ourselves with rocking-

chairs and apples when the click of the gate latch announced a visitor, Miss Sarah Jane Singell. Sarah Jane don't come often—don't go anywhere often, and consequently is more queer than most people. Her greeting consisted of two or three funny little nods, each accompanied by an unspellable sound that meant "how d'ye do?"

"Good afternoon, Sarah Jane; take this arm-chair."

"Any one will do," said Sarah Jane, as she took the chair and tried to arrange her skirt in such a way that one little fold might be coaxed to touch the floor. To do this required a rather awkward position; but Sarah Jane maintained it throughout her call, and by much pulling and patting managed to have her drapery look tolerably well.

"Are your folks all well, Sarah Jane?"

"Yes'm; you uns all well?"

As the conversation proceeded she said, "Are you a-goin' to teach this summer, Hanner?"

"Perhaps. I've been to apply for a school to-day."

"Where at?"

"Over in Hutt's district. Do you know anything of the place?"

"Oh, yes, lots. My cousin William lives there, and I've been at his house often."

"We were at Hutt's to-day. Do you know them?"

"Yes, I went there once with cousin William's wife to spend the afternoon, and then I've heerd her tell a heap about them. There was four boys of them, but they're all married now but Joel. Hiram, he's livin' out West; John, I s'pose you've seen him. No? Why, he used to come to our house a-courtin' lots of times." Sarah Jane's faded face blushed at the recollection. "But he was given to drinkin'," she continued, in explanation of the fact that his wooing had been unsuccessful. "Sam—" she was going on to tell of the whole family; but being more interested in Joel than Sam, I asked her if she knew anything of the unoccupied house that had so excited our curiosity.

"Yes, that's on Hutt's land. Joel built it."

"Did anyone ever live in it?"

"No; but Joel was to 'a lived in it."

"Why didn't he, then?"

"Well, them that told me said I wasn't to tell; but I reckon I might say as much as that he was to 'a married somebody, and was disappointed."

"Was it anyone we know?"

"I guess I oughtn't to tell."

"Tell us if she married anyone else."

She hesitated a minute, and then nodded in answer, as though she might divulge a secret in that way which her conscience would not let her speak. We were interested, and would have liked to question further; but Sarah Jane reproachfully and penitently told us we "oughtn't to ask her, seein' that she rel'y musn't tell," and after asking for a sleeve-pattern she took her departure, making me

promise never to tell anyone in Hutt's district that she ever told me anything.

"Because you see it wouldn't do, for I promised them that told me-it shouldn't go any farther."

Two weeks after I was teaching the school and boarding with Mrs. Hutt. She "reckoned I wouldn't be much trouble." I looked as though I could wait upon myself. She was very kind, and the five days of each week which I passed with her were not so tiresome as Mary had feared for me. As I saw more of Joel, I learned to respect him exceedingly. He was a good son, a considerate master, merciful to his beasts, and manly and straightforward in all his dealings. I wondered often if the girl who left him for another had found that other so true and worthy. Her name was Robena Allen. I discovered it accidentally. One morning, when Mrs. Hutt was busy preparing for the "hands" who were to come that day and help plant corn, she asked me if I would "mind makin' up the beds and doin' a little sweepin' for her." The sweeping had to be followed by dusting, and as I brushed the books on a home-made table in Joel's room I thoughtlessly looked them over. A "North American Reader" and some other school books with worn, yellow leaves, "The Lives of the Presidents," "History of South America," a book of Indian wars, and a bible, on the blank leaf of which was written, in a large, irregular hand, "Presented to Robena Allen by her friend, Joel Hutt." Robena Allen was her name then. This was the girl for whom the house had been built, for Joel was not the man to make presents to everyone. To him a book like this, with faded pinks and rose-leaves pressed within, expressed no transient feeling, but the hope and disappointment of a lifetime.

I knew her name; but as the time passed, I began to fear I would learn nothing more about "the New House," as the children of the neighborhood called the object of my curiosity. I would not inquire of my pupils, and I made no other acquaintance.

Two months of my term were past when one day a change came to our quiet life. When I came from school I saw Joel sitting in the barn-door, stroking the head of his dog, his head so bent that I passed without being seen. In the house Mrs. Hutt sat in the best room, while in her place in the kitchen a neighbor woman was bustling about preparing supper. A letter had come from the West, telling that Hiram was dead.

The bit of paper gave the bright May-day a sad closing. "It's goin' to be a warm, growin' day," Mrs. Hutt had said to me as I started for school in the morning; and Joel had asked me to observe "what an uncommon lot of cherries he was goin' to have!"

To her, sighing for her first-born, and to him for a playmate brother, the sun's mild setting gave no promise of to-morrow's light and heat. The rays goldened the young leaves and lingered on the floor at the poor



THE FLOCK—SPRING TIME.