

he always took a backward position, in order to see what the rest did before he committed himself to any ritual.

Tom surveyed the network of feet and legs between himself and the bed.

"Sinclair," he said, in a husky, cracking voice, meant to be modulated for the occasion, "hand out the baby."

Sinclair, in spite of all his precaution, thus flashed in the limelight, twisted with alacrity toward the bed.

"The baby, the baby, you say," he was heard to ruminate aloud, after what seemed an unusual amount of groping about.

"Yes, the baby," assured Tom from without. "Do you think we want the cat? The baby there, beside Bedelia."

"Well, Bedelia is here asleep," he drawled, "and the cat is here, but no baby, neither hide nor hair of a baby," he concluded emphatically. "Come and see for yourself."

Tom crowded to the bed, they all crowded there, and then looked at one another in speechless inquiry.

"Perhaps the cat," began young Foster, but at an awful look from Tom he faded into silence.

"Wake Bedelia," said Mrs. Carter, "she must know."

The tired child was shaken, and given time to collect her senses, but in vain all questions; she could remember nothing but lying on the bed with the baby on her arm.

Mrs. Carter, with a quick-drawn breath, began a hurried search.

On the bed, under the bed, coats were lifted, even shaken out, till, last of all someone raised the old, faded wrap in the corner and disclosed the jar of cream, which all believed Ike had carefully taken home. As they drew it forth, the cog slipped into place in Bedelia's memory.

"O, mammy, mammy," she wailed, "I put her in the basket."

The case was clear. Sympathy

mingled with reproach for poor Bedelia. Amusement with apprehension for the safety of the baby, and in every breast there was non-reasoning resentment for Ike Martin.

"Let us have the fastest team in the crowd, in three jerks of a dead lamb's tail," roared Tom, as he pulled a huge fur cap over his head.

No one stopped to argue the merits of the horses. It was expeditiously and tacitly admitted that George McLain's bronchos were wanted, and they hastened to hitch them to the jumper. With a blowing of bits, a snapping of reins, a twisting of buckles, they were ready, and away in the moonlight sped George and Tom after the predatory Ike.

In the house the mother sat silently by the table, her seamed fingers twitching her snowy apron. Alex. Tate had taken up the fiddle, and was hugging it close to his long, dark face. He twisted here and there in a tone so plaintive and low that it seemed he and it were whispering together the secrets of many years. The parson stood again by the stove, where the cracks threw a flickering light over the tall figure, round which the long, black cassock fell, drawn in by its silken girdle. The clear-cut, youthful face began to show signs of weariness after the long day's journey. He still refused the sandwich, the whisky, and the tea. O cautious man, temptation lay not there to-night! Gazing abstractedly on the floor, his eye caught the vibration of a dainty slipper, tied by a satin bow. Now it trembled to the spirit of the music, as it scurried through some wild country dance, now lay still as the fiddle crooned some old song, remembered only in the hearts of God's humbler people.

The parson raised his eyes to the face above. It was Edie McMahon, old Dave's daughter, who, with the girls, some younger, some older, sat together by the sewing machine, a hush upon their usual frivolity. In