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"MOLLY."

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A small clearing on a hillside, sloping up from the little traversed mountain road from the forest, upon whose edge, in the midst of stunted oaks and scraggy pines, stood a rude cabin, such as one comes upon here and there in the remote wilds of West Virginia. The sun, pausing just above the sharp summit of Pinnacle Mountain, threw slant rays across the rugged landscape, which spring was touching up with a thousand soft tints. A great swelling expanse of green, broken at intervals by frowning ledges, rolled off to the low-lying purple mountain ranges, whose summits still swam in sunset light, while their bases were lost in deepest shadow. Over all, a universal hush, the hush which thrills one with a sense of utter isolation and loneliness.

The man and woman who were seated before the cabin door hardly perceived these things. What their eyes saw, doubtless, was the fair promise of the cornfield which stretched along the road for some distance, the white cow with her spotted calf, and the litter of lively pigs which occupied inclosures near the cabin, and—the tiny baby, who lay, blinking and clutching at nothing, across the woman's lap. She was looking down upon the child with a smile upon her face. It was a young and handsome face, but there were shadows in the dark eyes and around the drooping lids, which the smile could not chase away—traces of intense suffering, strange to see in a face so young.

The man, a young and stalwart fellow, shaggy of hair and long of limb, had placed himself upon a log which lay beside the doorstep, and was lost in contemplation of the small atom of embryo manhood upon which his deep-set blue eyes were fixed. He had been grappling for three weeks with the overpowering fact of this child's existence, and had hardly compassed it yet.

"Lord! Molly," he exclaimed, his face broadening into a smile, "jess look at him now! Look at them thar eyes! People says as babies don't know nuthin'. Durned ef that thar young un don't look knowinn'er'n old Jedge Wessminster hisself. Why, I'm mos' afeared on him sometimes, the way he eyes me, ez cunnin' like, ez much ez ter say 'I'm hyar, dad, an' I'm agoin' ter stay, an' you's jess got ter knuckle right down tew it, dad! Lord! look at that thar now!" And the happy sire took one of the baby's small wrinkled paws and laid it across the horny palm of his own big left hand.

"Jess look, Molly. Now you ain't agoin' to tell me ez that thar hand is ever agoin' to handle an axe or a

gun, or—or—" pausing for a climax, "sling down a glass o' whiskey? 'Iaint possible!"

At this juncture, an inquisitive fly lit upon the small eminence in the center of the child's visage destined to do duty as a nose. Hardly had the venturesome insect settled when, without moving a muscle of his solemn countenance, that astonishing infant, with one back-handed gesture brushed him away. The enraptured father burst into a roar of laughter.

"I tole ye so, Molly! I tole ye so! Babies is jess a-puttin' on. They knows a heap morn'n they gits credit fur, you bet!"

Something like a smile here dis-

his wife's words with a look of incredulous delight upon his rough but not uncomely face. It was evidently a new thing for her to speak so plainly, and her husband was not unmindful of the effort it must have cost her, nor ungrateful for the result.

"Don't say no more about it, Molly," he responded, in evident embarrassment. "Them days is past an' gone an' furgotten. Leastwise, I ain't agoin' to think no more about 'em. Women is women, an' hez ter be 'lowed fur. I don't know ez 'twas more'n I cud expect; you a-bein' so porely, an' the old folks a-dyin', an' you a-takin' on it so hard. I don't go fur to say ez I ain't been outed

in her voice in striking contrast to his own rough tones, and although the mountain accent was plainly observable, it was greatly modified. He, himself, ignorant and unsophisticated, full of the half-savage impulses and rude virtues of the region, was quite conscious of the incongruity, and regarded his wife with something of awe mingled with his undemonstrative but ardent passion. He sat thus looking at her now, in a kind of adoring wonder.

"Wall!" he exclaimed at last, "blest ef I kin see how I ever spunked up enough fur ter ax ye, anyhow! Ye see, Molly, 'd allers liked ye—allers; long afore ye ever thought o' goin' down to Richmon'."

The woman moved uneasily, and turned her eyes away from his eager face; but Sandy failed to notice this, and went on with increasing ardor:

"After ye'd gone I missed ye powerful! I used ter go over the mounting to ax after ye whenever I cud git away, an' when they told me how ye were enjoyin' yerself down thar, a-arnin' heaps o' money an' livin' so fine, it mos' set me wild. I war allers expectin' ter hear ez how ye'd got merried, an' I kep a-tellin' myself 'twan't no use; but the more I tole myself, the wuss I got. An' when you come home, Molly, a-lookin' so white an' mizzable like, an' everybody said ye'd die, it—why, it most killed me out, Molly, 'deed it did, I swar!"

Sandy did not often speak of those days of his probation; but, finding Molly in a softened mood—Molly, who had always been so cold and reticent, so full of moods and fancies—he felt emboldened to proceed.

"Lord, Molly, I didn't hev no rest night nor day! Bob'll tell ye how I hung around, an' hung around; an' when ye got a little better an' come out, a-lookin' so white an' peaked, I war all of a trimble. I don't know now how I ever up and axed ye. I reckon I never would a-done it ef it hadn't been fur Bob. He put me up tew it. Sez Bob, 'Marm's afeared as Molly'll go back to Richmon' agin', an' that war more'n I could stand; an' so I axed ye, Molly.'"

Sandy's face was not one adapted to the expression of tender emotion, but there was a perceptible mellowing of the irregular features and rough voice as he went on:

"I axed ye, Molly, an' ye said 'Yes'; an' I ain't never hed no call to be sorry ez I axed ye, an' I hope you ain't nuther—say, Molly?" and the great hand was laid tenderly on her arm.

"No, Sandy," said she, "I ain't had no call to be sorry. You've been good to me; a heap better'n I have been to you."

Truly, Molly was softening. Sandy could hardly credit his own happiness. He ran his fingers through his beard before he answered.

"That's all right, Molly. I laid out to be good to ye, an' I've tried



"Sandy! Husband!" she cried. "Do what ye please with me."

tended the child's uncertain mouth, and something which might be construed into a wink contracted for an instant his small right eye, whereupon the ecstatic father made the welkin ring with loud haw-haws of appreciative mirth.

Molly laughed too, this time. "What a man you are, Sandy! I'm glad you feel so happy, though," she continued, softly, while a flush rose to her cheek and quickly subsided. "I ain't been much comp'ny for ye, but I reckon it'll be different now. Since baby come I feel better, every way, an' I reckon—"

She stopped abruptly and bent low over the child.

Sandy had ceased his contemplation of the boy, and had listened to

more'n wunst, but that's over'n gone; an' now, Molly," he continued, cheerfully, "things is a-lookin' up. Ez soon ez you're strong ag'in, I reckon ye'll be all right. The little un'll keep ye from gittin' lonesome an' down-sperited; now won't he, Molly?"

"Yes, Sandy," said the woman, earnestly, "I begin to feel as if I could be happy—happier than I ever thought of bein'. I'm goin' to begin a new life, Sandy. I'm goin' to be a better wife to ye than—I have been."

Her voice trembled, and she stopped suddenly again, turning her face away.

She was a strangely beautiful creature to be the wife of this brawny mountaineer. There was a softness