

"Yas'm Reckon 't is about that. Kind o' tryin' in the long run Sort o' s'cumvents a critter. Jes' think you're gwine to spar' a dollar or two fer an ap'ion or a pair o' shoes, and it's all gone. But Ed's a dretful pleasant boy, Mis' Calvert knows," she went on soothingly, as if to soften mother's disapproval. "I count Ed as one o' my chiefest mercies; an't a speck like me, with my dretful masterful temper; he's mortal pleasant, Ed is. But I came up to take a little counsel with Mis' Calvert. I ben a-plottin' and a-plannin' these three days and nights. I must contrive to airn a little somethin' myself, or I dunno what we will come to."

"It is a perfect shame," said mother; "have you ever talked to him as decidedly as you ought to about this?"

"Dunno," said Marty; "I ain't much of a hand to jaw, but of Mis' Calvert says so, I'll do it. Think I ought to try to jaw him a little?"

The question was asked with such tremulous eagerness for a negative that mother laughed, and said, "No, I fancy words are useless. So tell me your plans, Marty."

"I'm contrivin' and conjurin' fust off, to get some shingles. Our roof's like a sieve; rain drops through right lively. And then I want some shoes for the chillen agin winter. I ain't fer mutterin', with all my mercies: I could n't be so onthankful. Summer's comin' now, and we'll do fust rate. But it 'pears like I must git somethin' ahead before frost comes. Reckoned mebbe Mis' Calvert would let me wash and iron, this summer, or help Aunt Dolly in the kitchen. Some folks say I'm a fust famby cooker, and I ben trained to wash and iron."

"What could you do with the baby?"

"If Mis' Calvert didn't mind, Ed would shoulder the cradle up in the morning—Ed's sech a pleasant boy—and fetch it home ag'in at night, and Sammy'd rock it. It's sech a marcy I got Sammy! Allers did reckon him a gret mercy! If Mis' Calvert didn't want the cradle in the back kitchen, it could stand in the shed."

"You may come, then, on Monday, and I'll find something for you to do."

"Yas'm. Thank ye, marm, thousand times. I 'spected 't would be jes' so. Mis' Calvert allers so clever to us. It's a dretful marcy to have sech a kind mistes. But I had another plan, too. I was gwine to buy a shote, and fat it, and kill it in the fall for pork. Buy a shote now for two dollars, and ye can sell him bumbys for twelve, if he's right fat. But I got to airn the money to buy him, and I was gwine to airn by havin' a party. Mis' Calvert ever heerd of these new kinds of parties they have over to Squaw Neck? Pay-parties, they call 'em."

"No, Marty, I never have."

"Reel smart notion. Jed's Maria, she gin'a pay-party and made enough to shingle her roof; and Ruth Jake, after Jake died, she fetched her'n up to five dollars over what it cost her to bury Jake. Folks pay twenty-five cents to come in, and gits their supper and dancin' fer that. Then one o' the famby keeps a table in the corner with goodies on it, candy and store-nuts and root-beer, and them that wants 'em comes and buys. Mis' Calvert don't see no harm in it, eh, Mis' Calvert?"

"None at all," said mother, smiling in spite of herself at this novel combination of pleasure and profit.

"Yas'm, glad 'f that, 'cause I reckoned it a reel marcy that somebody thought onto 'em. Reckon we'll have it in a couple of weeks, when the weather's warmer, an before the shotes git scarce. If Ed'll keep good and stiddy till then, we'll have bitful one." And Marty rose to go.

"What a trial he is to you, Marty!"

"No marm, not so much as ye think. He's a dretful pleasant by. I want to tell Mis' Calvert somethin'." And Marty came a little nearer and spoke very gently. "My old mistes warn't soft like Mis' Calvert, but then she was ahn'. But then Mis' Calvert's ahn' mist of the time, too. But my old mistes hadn't got religion, and Mis' Calvert has. My old mitty warn't pious a mite, and I was dead sot on gwine to meetin'. I s'pose I bothered her, for she turned round on me right sudden one day, and says she, 'Go to meetin' to-night, ye hussy, and then hold your tongue about it; if ye ask me ag'in fer a year, I'll have ye whipped.' So I went, glad enough, and I crep' r'ght up by whar the minister stands, so as not to lose a mite, and I had n't sot ther but a little spell when he began to read out of the big gold Bible, and true as ye lives, mistes, every mortal verse was about the Lord's marcy enduring forever. When he'd read it two or three times, says I, 'That's fer ye, Marty, ye poor sinner, that's allers forgittin' the Lord's goodness; and when he'd read it two or three more times, says I, 'Praise the Lord now, Marty, for sendin' ye sech comfort, fer whether ye come

to church ag'in in a year, or never, ye've got somethin' to stand by all yer life and on yer d, in' bed.' And when he'd read it a few times more I got down on my knees, and says I, 'Bran' it in, Lord, so I'll never lose the mark on it,' and on my knees I stayed, prayin' it over and over ag'in, till the minister shet the book. It's ben a dretful comfort to me every way, Mis' Calvert; it makes me feel that if the Lord has such long patience with folks, it ain't fer sech as me to be muttorin' and hectorin'."

The mistress looked up into Marty's eyes with a thoughtful smile, and they smiled back full of trust and sympathy, for divided as they were by every social distinction of birth, fortune, beauty, and culture, they were one in that fellowship which outlasts even death, bound with the sacred tie which binds those who have one Lord and one faith.

The next Monday, and every Monday after, arrived Marty's procession, early and always in the same order: Ed first, head erect, cradle shouldered, feet marching true to the tune he was miraculously whistling. Marty next, radiant with the prospect of a proximate party and ultimate shingles, cuddling the baby as she came. Sammy in the rear, whistling like his father, and straining every nerve to make his ducky-daddles of legs march in time; a futile effort, which had to be supplemented by most unmartial leaps, every few steps.

Marty regarded Sammy as one of her chief mercies, but his life was not unclouded radiance to himself; it vibrated between bliss and woe, and swung from lustrous morn to murky night, or back again, according as that wad of a black-and-tan baby waked or slept. Baby asleep, Sammy was sovereign of the universe; he could buid cob-houses in the smoke-house, dabble in the pond with the ducks, hang over the fence of the pig-pen balanced on his unsusceptible stomach, worm in and out of the delightful intricacies of the woodpile, or roll in the chips with a squad of small idlers. Baby awake, Sammy was a mule on a treadmill. He was not allowed to hold it, for owing to its being such an undefined lump, without any particular projections to seize upon, he had twice let it slip through his arms upon the floor; so it was deposited in the huge wooden cradle near Marty's tubs or ironing table, and he was set to rock it.

Sammy always began with cheerful vigor, resolved to compel slumber to its eyes; he stood up to his work like a man, taking hold of the cradle-top with both hands, and rocking vehemently. Sammy approved of short methods with babies. After half an hour or so of this exercise, baby's eyes growing constantly bigger, and brighter, he grew less sanguine, and made preparations for a longer sojourn. He brought a wooden block to the side of the cradle and sat down to the business, not cheerful, but resolute; pushing the cradle with one hand, and holding in the other a piece of bread or a cold potato, out of which he took small, slow, consolatory bites. But the smallest, most infrequent nibbles will finally consume the very largest potato, and this source of comfort exhausted, and another half-hour having dragged away, and baby's eyes still staring with superhuman vivacity, Sammy wheeled about with his side to the cradle, leaned against the leg of the ironing table in deep depression of spirits, seeking to beguile the weary time by counting the dishes on the dresser or the flies on the ceiling: while at intervals of a few seconds he bestowed such wrathful, sidewise thwacks with his knee on the cradle, as made the whole huge structure tremble, and its gelatinous occupant quiver.

But in the last stages of the conflict, Sammy left all hope behind, and became an image of the profoundest dejection. Turning his back on the cradle in disgust too deep for words, he would lean his elbows on the table and his head in his hands; with his bare foot he loathingly kicked up the rocker behind him, while one jig-tune after another came gurgling melodiously out of his melancholy mouth to the expressive words of "Diddledy, diddledy, diddledy, didy," and the big tears rolled down unchecked. Sammy was too far gone to wipe them away. Meantime the complacent baby gazed wily at its rocking dome, the flies buzzed, the clock ticked, the tears fell, the jig-tunes went endlessly on, till Sammy's head drooped, and the "Diddledy, didy" grew faint, and fainter, and failed, and the poor little drudge was on the very verge of blessed oblivion, when an imperious wail from the baby recalled him to life and labor once more.

"Come now, Sammy," Marty would say encouragingly, every day, when matters came to the worst, "rock away like a gent'lum. Sech a marcy ye got that cradle! S'pose ye had to lug him, like I lugged our Phibusheth gwine on two year! Mammy's tryin' to airn shoes for ye, and can't do it nohow, if ye don't nuss the baby!