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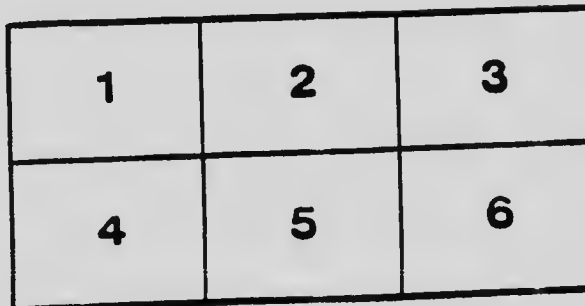
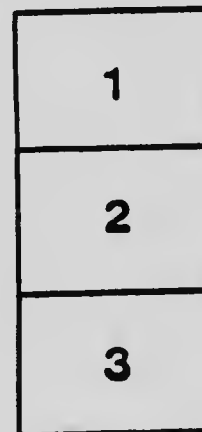
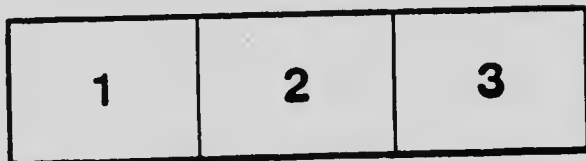
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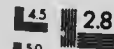
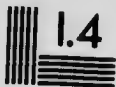
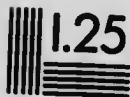
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# THE SMILING ROAD



BY  
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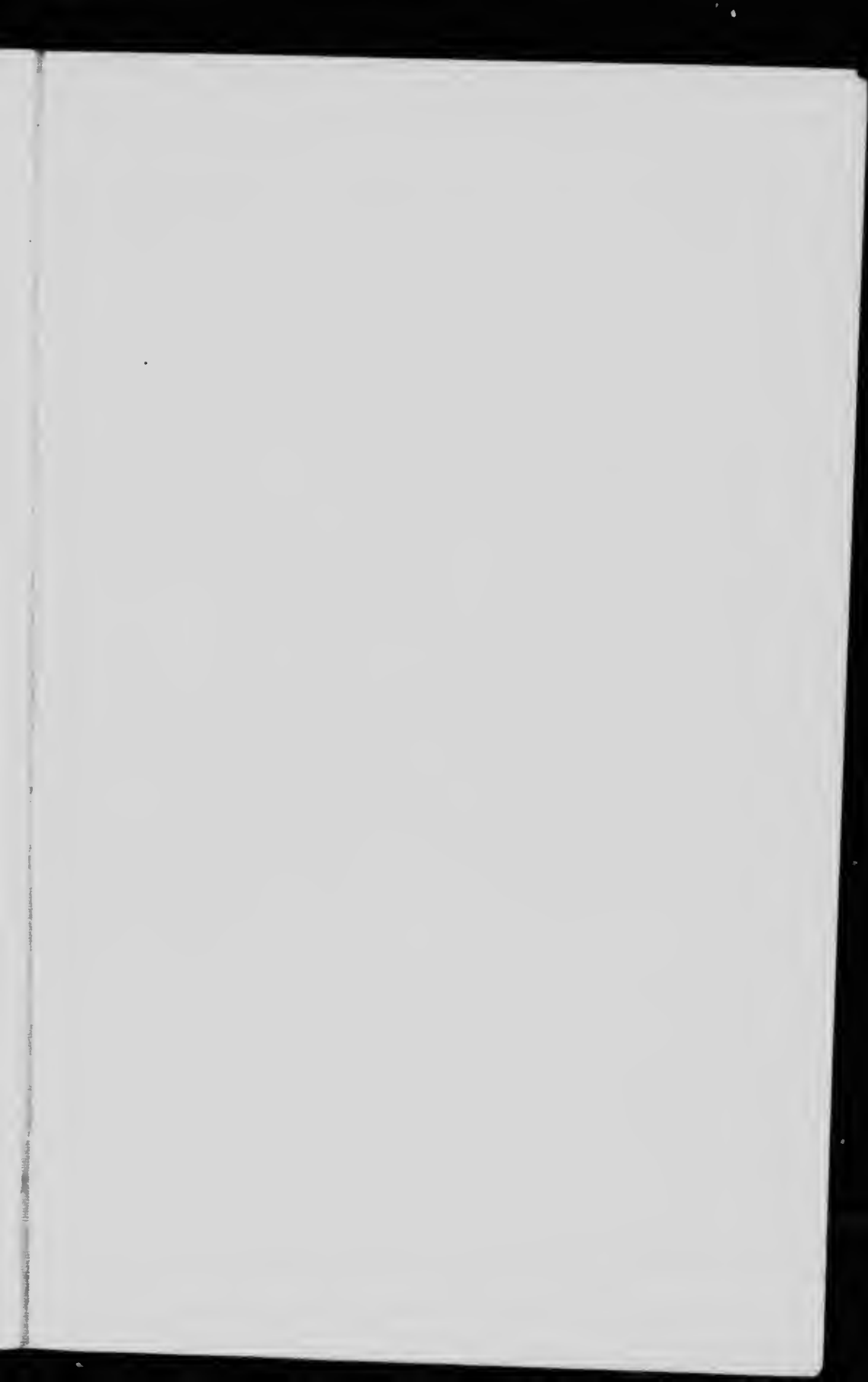




W. J. ...









“Where you going to live now, Cousin Bert?”

*Frontispiece*

# The Smiling Road

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANK VER BECK

Toronto  
McLeod & Allen  
Publishers



# The Smiling Road

BY

HANNA RION

Author of "The Garden in the Wilderness"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANK VER BECK

Toronto

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TO

**George W. Fager**

WHO BROUGHT SUNSHINE  
TO ONE WHO DWELT ON  
THE SMILING ROAD

F

11

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It is spring on the country road—the road that begins at the marsh.

In the marsh tufts of grass uplifted by the late frost are like an archipelago of fairy islands. The unambitious water contents itself with the poetical pastime of mirroring the Narcissus-sky.

The flutes and viols of frogs sound unceasingly the notes of spring.

Leaving the marsh the road makes a bend by birches of silver and poplars of jade. Like a strand of gold it winds under canopy of white, pink, and pale rose, of cherry, peach, and apple blossoms. Through the fruit tree boughs glimpse patches of gardens where tulips burn and hyacinths nod. Behind the flowers, half hidden by vines, are simple homes—homes which bespeak a refuge from the jangles of commerce. Above the roof-tops great pines and hemlocks sway against a background of mountains—mountains whose buttresses hold the world at bay.

The road saunters leisurely down, and ever down the hill, until it pauses to quench its thirst at a violet-bordered brook.

And this is a tale of the life of the people who live on this strand of gold.

F

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## THE SMILING ROAD

### I

“LADY” TREVELYAN was hanging out the week’s wash. On the line behind her in the shadow swayed the “royal purple” gown.

“Frequent airing makes things last longer—that is, if you’re careful not to let the sun fade ’em. Turning often ’s good for clothes, too, then both sides gets worn even,” she had just explained to the neighbor across the fence, who was also doing Monday services on the clothesline.

“It’s sure wonderful how your royal purple lasts; seems like it’s jes’ as fresh as it were ten year ago,” admired Mrs. Silver between barks and whining pleadings from the hound which ran panting on his trolley from chicken-house to barn, stopping each time he passed his mistress for a futile leap and howl for liberty.

Above the women’s heads the fruit trees stretched rural-like over the fence, gesticulating with their blossom-decked arms in floral gossip. Through the interstices of the boughs the sun dappled the damp arms of the women, making them to glisten.

Lady Trevelyan was over thirty, and a woman after that age is a human manuscript! On her face life had written strange contradictions. An open, candid eye looked out in kindness over a shifty mouth—a strange blue mouth, which had the appearance of being berry-stained or bruised. Her weather-beaten skin had not known soothing cosmetics nor softening powder; she had lived exposed to glare of sun and gusts of a wind which blew always in this funnel-like road between the mountains. Her autumn-leaf hair was piled unceremoniously on her head, more for disposal than adornment, in a design suggesting a Chinese pagoda.

Mrs. Silver, her neighbor, was a fat, peevish example of a woman deprived of a past. Her husband had absorbed all the past, and she had to be content to live in the departed war-time glories of her lord. She was laboriously occupied attending to the present, while keeping an eye on the future, which latter did not interest Mr. Silver, save as a pleasant vista ending in a white monument whereon would be inscribed his valorous deeds as a hero.

Mrs. Silver petulantly envied Lady Trevelyan her past and her thinness. Lady Trevelyan envied Mrs. Silver a stationary husband and her avoirdupois, so they were friends.

A quick step on the uneven stones of the long walk leading through Mrs. Silver's front vegetable garden caused both women to straighten,

clothespins in mid-air. A small man of boyish face came toward them with a dancing gait, which had that resiliency of knee evidenced by the chorus girl in so-called military marches.

"Good-morning, Mr. Locke, and how's the new wife taking it now?" Mrs. Silver greeted him cheerily.

"She's taking on something awful and that 'fraid of tramps she can't get no rest." Mr. Locke dislodged a quid of tobacco with violence. "That's what I stopped in for," he added without enlightenment.

"Ain't you working to-day, Mr. Locke?" inquired Lady Trevelyan. "I hope you ain't mashed nothing."

A day of idleness among the few male denizens of the road (excepting the restful Mr. Silver) generally meant an injury at the shipyards.

"No'm, 'tain't that; it's Beatrice. She thought she heard somebody on the roof last night and she's that nervous to-day she wouldn't hear to being left alone, and she made me come to ask Mrs. Silver here if I couldn't buy that hound for protection against tramps and burglars."

"Lord! Mr. Locke," Mrs. Silver's tone reflected the stupendous impossibility of the suggestion, "Mr. Silver wouldn't part with that dog for gold. 'Course it howls a lot, but we're use to that, and we'd be so lonesome-like without it. That dog's a real comfort to my husband."

Mr. Locke took a consoling bit of tobacco from



his pocket as he munched out: "I'm sure sorry you won't part with it. I don't know what to do about Beatrice," he added with masculine helplessness when dealing with feminine nervousness.

"Mr. Locke, you just leave that to me." Lady Trevelyan was pulling down her sleeves. "I've had more experience than you; you just go on to the shipyard and I'll take some roots and flowers down to Beatrice and talk to her comforting and teach her how to make pie. Men don't know how to deal with women nohow," she laughed with superiority to Mrs. Silver.

Lady Trevelyan hurried through the rest of her clothes-hanging, rushed about the garden with a trowel, digging up plants, then looked undecidedly upon the dress which was dancing on the line.

"It'll cheer her just to have a sight of the royal purple, and she'll feel the compliment I'm a-paying her to dress up," she decided, rushing upon the airing garment and snatching it from the line. A great bunch of lilacs completing her comfort-giving burdens, she hurried down the winding road toward the little house tucked under the hill.

Beatrice was leaning over the gate looking up the road for Locke's return. Her neglected blonded hair floated in greenish-gold wisps; her pretty, over-sophisticated eyes had a frightened look. She turned and stared morbidly at the mountains, so freshly green and purple-shadowed. She feared those mountains—she hated and

feared all Nature. She even shrank from the breeze as from a visible distasteful touch.

"God! but I'm scared," she whispered to her inner self. "I wish there'd be an earthquake, cyclone, or something—something that would make a noise. This silence deafens me—it roars inside worse than a fire, and I hear myself think, think, think. All you do is think in the country—think all the things the city makes you forget."

She didn't notice the woman approaching, neither did she respond to the bright "Good-morning, Mrs. Locke."

She sullenly turned to go inside the house, but Lady Trevelyan was not to be squelched. "I've brought you some flowers, and roots. I'll show you how to plant 'em. You've a real nice place to make a flower bed by this south window. My! but the ground looks rich. Ain't these lilacs just sweet?"

"I hate flowers," snapped Beatrice without turning her head.

"Now! is that so? Well, I never. But that's 'cause you've never raised none maybe. It's raising things makes you like 'em. Now, Lord Trevelyan was just like you, he didn't like flowers neether, but just for painting. He sure could paint Jack roses, and as for his hollyhocks—they'd fool the bees. My husban' were an oilist, Mrs. Locke, I s'pose you've heard of him."

No response.

"Flowers is so comforting," Lady Trevelyan

babbled on, "they don't never contradict you or be stubborn or tell tales. Where do you keep your hoe and spade?"

"I don't know," the impassive Beatrice looked up the road. "I don't see what's keeping Bert so long."

"He's gone on to the shipyard. I sent him along," Lady Trevelyan stated with authority, "saying as I'd come down and see how you're getting along. When a person's lonely it's women-folks they needs, not men."

"Humph!" Beatrice sniffed. "Did he get that dog?"

"No'm, he didn't," acknowledged her visitor. Beatrice shivered.

"I'm so afraid of tramps." It was the first human note she had made.

"Tramps? Shucks!" Lady Trevelyan's turn had come to sniff. "What is tramps?—just men."

The two eyed each other over the word "men."

"Were you out here admiring your view, Mrs. Locke? It's certainly a fine one. My husband painted those mountains so natural you could tell just where it was took from."

"View?" snarled Beatrice, ignoring the painter. "I hate it, I hate everything here. It's driving me crazy. Those mountains rest on me—crush me," she clasped her unspoiled hands over her breast. "You don't know," she went

on, "I'm used to noise and people—lots of them—I was a fool to leave it all."

The older woman looked shocked; she laid the flowers down in the shade and smoothed her skirt down vacantly.

"I hope you ain't thinking of—of leaving, Mrs. Locke. It's a terrible thing to be left. I knows—not what I've been left in the way I speak of, but you see Lord 'Trevelyan's out West making his fortune, and I've been waiting and missing him go on ten years now—and I know what it means. Of course he writes often, but what is letters? I says to myself."

A whining tune broke through the chattering of the little brook which fell over its stones just below the house. A wheezy old organ, too suggestive of pneumonia for the city streets, had been relegated to the brightening of life along the country by-ways. It was playing a dance-hall tune. Beatrice listened and was transfigured. The listless eyes burned with a restless glitter; the blood rushed to the loose, full lips; her hands smoothed down the shabby hair, as she whistled a gay accompaniment to the coarse ditty.

Turning to her caller she threw back her head, laughing shrilly:

"That's something like it—*that's* life."

## II

THE sun was setting in dazzling glitter behind the far Catskills. Deep Prussian blue shadows veiled the trees of the nearby mountains. The sun's rays glinted in accentuated disks through the needled openings of the pines, tinting the face of Lady Trevelyan with the deep lights and brilliant shadows of a copper vessel.

As she climbed the hill she noticed the robins everywhere about arranging the opening scenes of their domestic dramas. Some were fighting duels with rivals on the pine-carpeted ground, others were scolding raucously from treetop, while still others were serenading their won mates from crest of hemlock by limpid love-promises sung in the prophetic rhythm of cradle songs.

An oriole's assertive notes gripped the air like a vice for a few seconds. He seemed to flash out of the sunset, carrying some of its gold away with him. No other bird so emphasized the presence of spring as he.

A strange and beautiful blend of odors pulsed in the fitful spring air.

Lady Trevelyan noticed the vague fragrance of shy wood-flowers pushing valiantly through de-

cayed leaves. Every wild thing was commemorating with song or perfume the great carnival of spring resurrection.

Still the pervading beauty did not thrill the woman. She had made a failure of the day; Beatrice had not been won by flowers, convinced by common sense, nor diverted by sympathy. Lady Trevelyan saw huddled before her inner eye the condensation of Monday's as well as Tuesday's labors to be done on the morrow.

Before her tramped the village husbands, returning through the road from the shipyard. No eye was lifted to reflect the sun's splendor, no nostril quivered responsively to the subtle mysteries of forest incense. They plodded silently up the hill, eyes stolidly riveted to earth, carrying their empty dinner boxes as if they were leaden weighted. Weary muscles, dulled sensibilities, unambitious thought, shackled both mind and body.

Behind Lady Trevelyan sounded the quick springiness of hurrying feet. An Italian contingent from the army of toil were swinging merrily homeward from the railroad tracks. Some were burdened by great boxes of spaghetti on their shoulders, yet they carried them blithely and moved buoyantly. They chattered as gayly as if returning from a saint's day *fiesta* in their native Sicily. One sang a tarantel' his feet keeping time, his body swaying rhythmally. His voice had that inexplicable difference of timbre from

the American—the beautiful semi-falsetto of the southern clime larynx.

They swung past the more deliberate steps of the woman, politely bidding her good-evening. They also greeted the ponderous figure of Mrs. Fay, seated on the stone curb in front of her house. She screwed her mouth into a contemptuous return. As Lady Trevelyan came abreast of Mrs. Fay's great body, she hoisted herself to a standing position.

“ Good-avening to ye, an' where have ye been all drissed in the riyil raimint? An' it's a reckless ye're gettin' with yer finery, I'm thinkin', wearing it of a Monday. It'll niver last to bless the eyes of the King that bey.”

Lady Trevelyan's blue lips smiled over her carelessly arranged teeth, and the inner twinge did not show in her voice as she replied: “ It's Locke's Beatrice I've been spending the day cheering up. She's got the blues that bad—hankering after the city.”

“ An' phwat do she be wantin' of the city with Bert her husband by her? Whin Tim were aloive—the saints comfort him—I seys, seys I, ‘ ef me man goes to the wild woods thire I go an' am contint.’ It's somethin' fierce the frea an' aisy notions of wives these days. I've always said ye got all ye desarved, Libby Trevelyan. Yis-sir, whin a 'ooman l'aves a man go to the far Pis-cific an' don't tag along with him, she desarves no pity.”

Libby Trevelyan was framing a defense, when Mrs. Fay directed another missile in the shape of: "I s'pose you've been gittin' a letter be-times?"

"Oh, yes, a lovely letter, Mrs. Fay." Libby's mouth twitched and shifted. "He's that glad he didn't let me go 'long with him to them rough mining camps—there's no ladies ner nothin' fe-male within miles, and he's getting awful rich. I s'pose I won't be enjoying my freedom much longer now. Reginald's apt to drop in on me 'most any day. He's planning that we'll travel and see the world."

Mrs. Fay's shoulders humped a spasmodic dis-belief.

"Yer grandfather be sayin' roun' as how there ain't no letters—he's a-sayin', too, as how ye don' kno' no more about yer Reg'nal' thin he knows about that foive hundred yer man relave him of."

"Grandpa's getting real old and childish," Libby replied feelingly. "I humors him all I can. I hope your rheumatism is getting better, Mrs. Fay." Lady Trevelyan was a diplomatist.

"Ah, it's sufferin' tirrible I be—tirrible; the pain be somethin' fierce," the old lady's tone had changed to the ecstatic whine attuned to the wake she was preparing to hold over her ailments, but her audience had fled.

On every side were signs and sounds indicating the approach of the supper hour, but in the road



children continued to throw sand in each other's hair, pretending not to hear the cracked voice of their mother, shrieking:

"Bob, Vi-lit, Ruby, don't you let me have to call you agin. *Har-ree!*"

The sound of frizzling lard spitting in the pan came from behind the mother—a general flavor of hot grease obliterated the odor of lilacs. The children continued to play. A man's voice yelled:

"Bob, Harry, Ruby, Vi-lit, come here this minute or I'll give you what you're lookin' fer."

Bob, Harry, Ruby, and Violet harkened and began to edge mincingly toward the house, calculating just how far they could avoid collision with paternal authority. The father thwarted their strategy, however, by shifting as the children moved, and by a dexterous swiftness met their final desperate rush, grabbing Bob, Harry, Ruby, and Violet each in turn, playing a tattoo of different tones upon their small posteriors with a rapidity and resoundingness only equaled by the howls which followed.

Libby had unconsciously loitered to witness this conclusion, and now she hastened on, noticing meantime the figure of Mr. Stone zigzagging down the road. She had prophesied the condition of his return to Mrs. Silver that morning. "He has on his spree pants," she had declared, for it was indeed true that Mr. Stone was arrayed in the breeches of an ancient style which he donned

when feeling a thirst approaching, relying on their extreme tightness to prevent staggering.

Down the road behind him slowly struggled his scrawny wife, her shoulder sagged out of shape by the weight of the heavy bucket of water she carried. The Stones had no well, and all water had to be brought from neighbors' yards.

"And she expecting, too; it's a shame," thought Libby. "He 'd die sooner than demean himself by carrying a drop for her."

Mrs. Stone saluted Libby with a smile disclosing a dark void. Where there were children coming as fast as they did in the Stone household there was no money to waste on false teeth.

Libby turned in at her gate, the hound announcing her return by the distinctive bark of the uneducated country dog.

Overhead in the fruit boughs the birds alone celebrated the beauty of this perfect May twilight.

### III

MANDA STONE'S arm revolved as she laboriously drew the bucket of water from the well. Just as she filled her pail a gust of wind loosened the deflowered petals from the cherry trees, flecking with tiny shallops the surface of this miniature sea. Manda peevishly skimmed them off with her hand. Taking a great breath to brace herself for the load, she lifted the pail and started limpingly down the road.

The day had begun in bitterness—an early morning row with her dyspeptic, headachy husband, still mottled her thoughts with acrimony. All the ground before her was blanched with the drifts of May snow. The hum-hum-humming of maddened bees droned continuously. Ever and again before her dipped and careened a destinationless butterfly. Its drunken flight reminded her of Stone, and she shuddered.

Pausing for breath she set her pail down, readjusting the shawl over her maternal abnormalities.

A sow was rooting around the corner of the fence under an apple tree. Nine winsome little pig satellites followed her every revolution. If she stopped to nuzzle a root her children rushed



Manda Stone gazed as one fascinated upon this sordid domestic scene.

*Page 15*



upon their breakfast, robbing her of a few mouthfuls of milk with loud smackings of delight. Goaded beyond endurance by the piglets' importunities, the old mother stolidly lay down upon her stomach and the children's pabulum. The babies, with thwarted appetites, rooted vainly under her sides, grunting savage protestations. After several reproving snorts the mother calmly shut her small eyes and slept.

Manda Stone gazed as one fascinated upon this sordid domestic scene. The longer she looked the stranger grew her expression. Suddenly the vacuous mouth opened, a sinister smile flashed like a torch before the gape of a cavern. In her eyes burned an illumination which transfigured the miserable face.

In the eyes of a poet that expression would have meant inspiration; in a painter it would have been the presage of a great work of art. In Manda Stone it was the birth of an idea—a vision of revenge, a mode of harassing Stone.

She did not realize that the illumination of her eyes was the reflected gloriousness of suddenly reinstated self—Manda was still too much of a human shackle to recognize an effort for liberty when it came. She only realized the miracle of revenge, over which her mouth grinned maliciously.

But with a new buoyancy, bred of unsuspected emancipation, she lifted the bucket as if it held vapor. The nondescript children squatted about

the kitchen door, hurrying to get out of their mother's reach, were astounded by the smile she flashed them. The mangy dog slinking away to hide behind the stove gave one corner-eye glance at her face, and, feeling the psychologic change, swayed from his waist in ingratiating motions as he came forward again, actually daring to nose her arm.

Manda smoothed his head with the new pleasantry bred of waspish thoughts, and, noticing the baby of a little over a year nodding on the floor, picked her up and seating herself began rocking back and forth. Her eyes unfocused on her surroundings still glittered with the light of a martyr, inventor, lover, poet, or rebellious wife.

Lady Trevelyan thought she was dreaming as she stopped short in her ironing to listen again.

"Sakes alive! if that ain't Mandy Stone a-singing. Listen, Granny, ain't that music coming from Stone's?"

Granny listened and corroborated the unbelievable.

"Well, if that don't beat all! If Mandy Stone still has the heart to sing it's sure a lesson to all of us that we ain't got nothing to grumble about," Libby declared as she thumped the iron back on the stove.

Granny tacked another strip of rag carpet, then asked:

"Kin you catch the words, Libby? Maybe

Mandy's got religion an' it's a hymn what's comforting her in her sorrows."

Libby rushed to the door to hear more clearly, her hand sea-shelled behind her ear.

"Well, I hope I'm an Indian," she gasped in bewilderment, "if she ain't a-singin' just as lively as a cricket: 'This Little Pig Went to Market'!"



#### IV

It was ten in the forenoon, but Beatrice was not yet dressed; a slatternly pink silk wrapper trimmed with tawdry lace swung unhooked from her shoulders. The unbrushed greenish hair fell in tousled stringiness. To the admiring man who was preparing her breakfast over the rusty stove the girl's ribald beauty seemed pure loveliness.

"Why do you all call her 'Lady' Trevelyan?" Beatrice continued their conversation.

"She called herself that, and we all fell into the habit, first in fun, then I reckon we kept it up from habit," Locke replied, chunking the fire.

"Did she ever have a real *husband*?" Beatrice mouthed "husband" with a sort of disreputable reverence.

"Oh, yes, I guess he was *that* all right enough. Now, you see it all come about through the Pan-American. Grandpa Tucker saved money and he took Libby up to Buffalo to see the sights. This Trevelyan was some fellow what they met at the fair. Grandpa makes friends easy, and I reckon Trevelyan made up to him, helped 'em round and such, and maybe the old man talked confidential and told him about his money in the bank and

how that Libby was to be his heiress. That's all guesswork, though—all we actually knows is that when they come back Libby brought a husband 'long with her. Grandpa Tucker tells everybody that Libby's man is a Englisher and a painter—not a house painter, a picture artist."

"What did he look like?" It was a woman's natural first wonder.

"Slick looking. Was educated, I reckon—read books and always dressed up, no over-halls for him—shall I turn your egg, Beatrice?"

"No—but was he a good-looker?"

"I s'pose so. Libby thought so, anyway. Had them long-lashed sad eyes what makes women nutty. Draw up to the table now, honey, the coffee's b'iled."

"Well, go on; I can listen an' all. How long did he stick to that blue-moutheed terror?"

"Lib ain't pretty, but she has a good heart," defended Locke, "and she deserved better than to marry a skin. He only stayed about three months, and all them months he was pouring ta'k into the old man's ears about fortunes he could make for them both in the copper mines out West, if he only had a little money to start with. He didn't do no work—took a few pictures in oil round here of the views, and just smoked, and strutted round, and played pool in the barber shop down in the town. He finally got Libby to tackle her grandfather, and the old man was always putty in her hands. She got the five hundred off

grandpa—he took it out of the bank, and Trevelyan lit out for parts unknown.”

“ But she says she gets lovely letters from him,” Beatrice crumbled her words out, her mouth full of toast.

“ Maybe she do. She says so, and maybe she do, but it don’t seem likely,” Bert ruminated. “ I hopes she do, but nobody ain’t never seen them letters but Libby.”

“ Lord! I think she got him cheap. Five hundred to be married to *that* scarecrow for three months. I’d have charged five thousand! ”

Bert didn’t reply. He lighted his pipe and smoked, watching the dainty eating of Beatrice with loving pride.

“ Tell me some more,” she urged. “ Gee! he was a great one—he was.”

“ Well, he sure was slick,” Locke confessed. “ He just pumped Libby full of lies. He told as how he was the son of a English lord, and as soon ’s he mended his fortunes he was coming back to take her to his estates on the tother side, and present her at Court.”

“ Gosh! wasn’t he a peach! Wish I’d a-known him.” Beatrice stretched octopus-like, smiling enigmatically.

“ No sooner did Libby begin to suspect the truth,” Locke resumed, “ than she began calling herself Lady Trevelyan, to kind of spunk up, and keep the neighbors from questioning her.”

“ She looks like a Lady—I don’t think,” Bea-

trice snickered. "It's as good as the *New York Weekly*; go on, Bert," she encouraged.

"Well, then, Libby bought some goods to make the dress to be presented at Court and showed it to all the road-folks to make 'em green with envy—that's the 'royal purple.'"

Beatrice was convulsed with merriment.

"Golly! he was a swell one—fooled them to the limit. Royal purple! Oh, Lord!" she roared, as she wiped her mouth and lolled back from the completed breakfast.

Locke gathered the dishes, and piled them on the rear of the table, then, going behind Beatrice, he haltingly began:

"Well, darling, you can get along without me to-day, can't you? You know I've got to be making something. I'll sure lose my job if I ain't steadier."

He massed her hair appealingly with his rough, toil-scarred hands. Beatrice's mouth pushed out to a pout, an ugly expression darkened her eyes.

"Go on if you want to." Her tone was persecuted indifference. "You never said I'd have to spend my days all alone. If I'd known it was going to be so lonesome I'd never——"

"Don't say that, honey," Locke interrupted. "I've got to work for you. Where's the money coming from?"

"*Money!*" her voice held an unutterable contempt for making money instead of having it. "Well, go ahead to your old shipyard," she

yawned, "of course, if I get as lonesome and nervous as I've done—I don't want to threaten you, but I warn you, Bert, I'll have to go down to New York for a visit."

Locke quailed as before a lash. He jerked her head back with rough entreaty, kissing her repeatedly, desperately on the lips.

"Don't say that, Beatrice, don't say it, darlin', I won't go to-day anyhow. What do you want to do? I'll do anything you like. We'll have a picnic to-day. How would you like me to fix a lunch and we'll go up on the mountain and spend the day?"

"*Mountain? Hell!*" she drawled. "It's that I want to get away from. Say, let's go over to town, and we'll take in the vaudeville show, and afterwards we can have a swell dinner at Klaferty's joint with all the fixings!"

## V

LADY TREVELYAN, Minister-at-Large, was going over to see how John Northern was getting along.

Mr. Northern was the father of Bob, Violet, Ruby, Harry, and a baby of a year's age. A spike had gone through his foot at the shipyard, consequently he was laid off.

Libby Trevelyan carried a bunch of ruby radishes in lieu of a visiting card. John was sitting in the bedroom, foot propped on a neighboring chair.

"Come right in, Libby," he cried, delighted at the diversion of a call. "Now, this is real kind of you to come over. Vi-lit, give the lady a chair. Bob, tie your shoe-laces."

"They's broke, pa."

"Tie 'em anyway. Where's my switch? These children jes' take advantage of their pa being laid up. Harry, take them matting straws out of baby's mouth. Ma-ri-ah!"

Maria, his wife, bustled up from the basement, where she had been doing her perennially belated wash, drying her water-shriveled hands on her apron as she came.

"Well, now, this is kind of you, Libby," she

simpered. "John's so lonesome like with nothing to do but mind the children, 'buse the dog, and thinkin'."

"Don't mention it." Lady Trevelyan settled down comfortably. "Is your foot hurt bad, John?"

"Maria, unwrap this foot and show it to Libby," the invalid commanded.

Libby appreciated the compliment and duly inspected the distinguished member, with many ejaculations of: "My lands!" "Gracious goodness, ain't it awful?" "I hope you ain't going to have gangrene set in." "It looks mighty like proud flesh to me."

John absorbed the sympathy greedily, telling in reply all the worst the doctor had said, carefully omitting the hopeful.

"Have you tried bacon fat yet?" the visitor inquired professionally.

"No'm. So long as I'm payin' the doctor, I reckon I might as well not try no home remedies. Maria, show Libby that wash the doctor left. It sure has a curing smell."

Lady Trevelyan inspected the bottle critically, reading all the directions, then held it to her nose thoughtfully.

"I believes I detects wintergreen. Smell it, Maria."

Mrs. Northern whiffed. "No, it don't smell like wintergreen to me. I believe it's got jimson into it. Smell it once, John."

“Lemme smell it, pa,” shouted Harry, who was being pushed aside by Bob, whose nose itched for a chance. A flick of the whip cleared a space around the father as he announced:

“Tain’t no use a-guessing. Them doctors ’s got all kinds of new-fangled pizens common folks don’t know nothing about. Show Libby that ’intment, Maria. And if you children don’t behave yourselfs and keep out of grown folks’ business I’ll lick the whole bunch of you. Vi-lit, don’t you hear Nigger scratching at that door? Let that dog in.”

Maria bustled about nervously—pulling out a drawer, opening a wall closet, looked under the bureau, then ransacked the next room. She returned announcing in a voice of consternation:

“My goodness, John, I don’t know what under the sun done become of that ’intment. Harry, what did you do with your pa’s ’intment?”

“Gee! haw!—I ain’t had it.—Git up,” Harry proceeded with his driving of a chair-horse.

“Vi-lit, I knows you’s had your pa’s ’intment. You’ll git a licking. Tell the truth now, quick.”

“No, ma, I ain’t,” Violet whimpered.

“Where’s that baby?” John shouted. “Lord, I can’t keep track of these children. Ruby, hunt the baby. Where could that child have crawled to? Bob, pull up your stockings and git off that floor. Be a man.”

Bob was flattened on the floor, his head under the bed.



“ Ma, jes’ look at baby,” he giggled, his head reappearing, “ she’s eatin’ pa’s ’intment.”

“ My land a-living!” Maria got down on all-fours, and dragged forth the infant. “ Well, ain’t she a mess? and maybe it’s pizen too. It’ll kill the child, I know. John Northern, look at your child.”

“ Come to father, baby. Did it try to eat papa’s ’intment? Bless its mouth. Ain’t it a sight? Brin<sub>c</sub> rag, Maria, and do tuck in your waist. Gosh! but you’re looking sloppy. Can’t do washing and keep dressed up, though, can you, Libby? Papa’s angel looks like a little nigge<sub>r</sub>. What do you think can be in that ’intment? ”

He dandled the smeared baby up and down. Lady Trevelyan puckered her brows with nose tense against the ointment. John awaited her verdict breathlessly.

“ Well, I wouldn’t swear to it, John Northern, no, I wouldn’t take oath on it,” Libby held him in suspense, “ but between you and me I believes this ’intment ain’t nothing but *skunk ile*.”

John shouted with glee.

“ Maria, come here. What did I tell you? Lord! ain’t that funny? Libby here says just what I said. She says she believes this ain’t nothing but plain *skunk ile*.”

“ Now, ain’t that comical? ” Maria was dazed by the coincidence. “ Here, Lamby, let mother wash your little face.”

Maria scrubbed while the baby put a stop to

conversation for the time. The father's eye roamed over his offspring.

"Vi-lit, take that hair ribbon out of your mouth. What are you a-thinkin'? Money don't grow on trees to buy ribbon to be sucked. Bob, if you don't tie them shoe-laces I'll give you a touch of this," he brandished the long stick. "I got Maria to place my chair right between these two doors so I kin reach 'em whichever way they runs out," he explained to Libby, who was rising to go.

"Well, I hope you'll continue to improve, John, and I trust your foot won't go bad on you. If there's anything I can do, just let me know."

Maria accompanied their caller to the door.

"We've sure had a pleasant call, Libby; you've done cheered John up a sight." Then she added: "Has you heard - Locke's Beatrice is taking it now?"

"Yes, I hears how she's more content than she was. Bert's bought her a grammyphone."

"Is that so? Well, now ain't that nice? A grammyphone would cheer most anything up. John's always threatenin' to get one for me and the children, but now that his foot's gone bad on him, looks like we won't be able to afford no luxuries fer a spell. Come over again, Libby, you does John a sight of good."

Lady Trevelyan walked home dreamily.

"What a happy family," she thought almost enviously.

## VI

GRANDMA TUCKER was sewing carpet rags as usual. All the garments of the household after spending their allotted time on backs were transferred to the floor, where they further served the feet.

There was a chill in the kitchen even on this sunny May day. The cellar built into the back hill, uncemented, and opening off the downstairs rooms, caused a dampness which always penetrated the entire house. Yet Mrs. Tucker was a hale, rosy old woman, and her husband, though nearing the nineties, was rugged and stronger than most men of seventy. Never had they slept in a properly ventilated room. Winter and summer the windows of their bedroom remained sealed, while a smoky lamp turned low consumed the little oxygen and vitiated the air with fumes.

Perhaps spending so much of the day in the out-of-doors had been their salvation, for until recent years Granny had been as industrious as her husband in tirelessly wringing a living from their few acres of soil.

Grandpa Tucker has just entered the kitchen, his market basket on his arm.

“What did you git, Abram?” The old lady was still keen about the things of this life.

“I brought 'em back.” The old man deposited his cane and basket on the table. “Eggs ain't bringing but thirty-four cents to-day. I'll wait a day or two fer the market to go up to thirty-five.”

A penny! Yet it was by awaiting the higher pulsations of the market, penny by penny, that this old man had been able to make and save money.

And this old patriarch had walked to market a mile away and returned with his wares on the gamble for a cent. Was it not the same spirit which had led him to chance his five hundred dollars on Trevelyan's promise of riches in copper mines? How many miles had those old legs tramped with burdens of eggs, vegetables, and fruit, to save five hundred dollars? Yet it was not the monetary loss which had soured his soul—it was the fact he had been made a fool of and his neighbors knew it. That thought bowed the shoulders which age and toil had failed to bend.

As Granny put the eggs carefully back in the cellar, Lady Trevelyan came in humming gayly, the pleasant glow of her recent visit to the Northerns' still surcharging her being.

Granny eagerly asked for particulars; the exact location of the wound, its size, what John said, what Maria said, and how the children behaved.

It is of such enormous shredding of trivialities

that their lives consist. The great questions of the day do not interest them—they do not take the newspapers. World events only reach them circuitously by word of mouth, and cause less stir than a neighbor's chicken having the gapes, or a stranger passing through the road.

“ Now, wouldn't it be awful if John would have one of his fits, when he's disabled, and no room to throw it in? ” Granny Tucker suggested gloomily.

“ Well, I never once thought of that. ” Libby's eyes distended. “ What would poor Maria do?—and she'd have to own up to it, too. ”

John Northern was afflicted with fits, which had an eccentric irregularity. Sometimes he had “ warnings ” of their approach,—he then showed every consideration of his family by retiring to the woods, where they could occur without endangering any of the children. Again they seized him suddenly. A skilled carpenter, he could retain no permanent position after his secret got out, or had been demonstrated. Contractors did not care for a man who was apt to fall from a scantling, or have an inopportune fit on a roof.

Northern had once been employed on the railroad beds, but a series of fits in mid-track held up an express and delayed traffic for an hour. Maria, his wife, only acknowledged the seizures which occurred at home.

Libby rushed over to discuss with Mrs. Silver the dread possibilities of John having one of his

“ spells ” before his foot was healed. Mrs. Silver desisted from her hoeing, and gazed at the Northerns' house with a new interest.

“ Did he look fitty? ” she hopefully inquired.

“ No'm, he didn't,” Libby had to acknowledge. “ Was just acting as natural as a Plymouth Rock rooster, and minding the children. He do dote on them children of his'n. It's mighty funny none of 'em don't take after their pa in fits.”

“ Of coarse, Harry ain't what you'd call right bright,” Mrs. Silver suggested.

“ No, but he ain't so simple as to be a real idjet like Stone's Simon.”

“ Vi-lit's back 's sorter crooked, and she complains a mighty heap about it,” Mrs. Silver further reminded Libby.

“ Yes, I know that, but after all, the Lord's been mighty kind not to fill 'em all as full of fits as a automobile.”

Mrs. Silver wiped her streaming forehead as she replied: “ Well, it's nice they've such a big family when they both loves children so. Just listen now. Shut up, Smith! ” (This to the hound.) “ My stars, don't it do your heart good to hear 'em! John suttently kin play.”

Drifting across the road came the strains of the “ Merry Widow ” waltz, played on the harmonica. Accompanying it were the shrill trebles of Harry, Ruby, Violet, and Bob, while even Maria, hanging out the large wash in the front yard, added her gay soprano.

“It most makes a body envious.” Mrs. Silver heaved a fat, childless sigh, as she threatened the dog with a stick to keep him silent.

In the summit of the tallest hemlock on the ridge a great brown thrush was shattering the air with cadences borrowed from every other bird.

“Wet! Wet! Wet year!” he mimicked the Kentucky cardinal.

“Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will,” he laughed, then fell into cadenzas of such perplexing harmonies they seemed the condensation of every other bird’s most beautiful motif. On his notes rippled through his tone rosary of colors:

“Oh! the pink of the peach-bough,  
The white of the cherry tree,  
The purple of the violet,  
The red of the columbine,  
The blue of the hepatica,  
The green of the poplar,  
The gold of the sunshine,  
The brown of my love-mate.”

Of all the inhabitants of the road, the hound alone heard the thrush.

His eyes became suffused with a strange unrest, his feet fretted for the fields, and in his heart was an aching void—he longed for something, something as sweet and intangible as love.

Suddenly he sat on his haunches, lifting his head to the blue. Drowning both thrush and harmonica came a wail of puzzled despair.

## VII

SPRAWLED over the porches and scattered throughout all the dooryards were roses, old-fashioned and new, and all were in bloom, for it was June—the second week of June.

Lady Trevelyan stopped long before her Dorothy Perkins, as she came in from picking the peas for her grandfather to carry to market.

“ Ain’t that bush a sight? ” she asked herself. “ If Reginald were here he’d certainly paint ’em, and I bet they’d look as natural as a chromo. Now, ain’t they just like a young girl?—a innocent, unknown-of-man young girl. They’s so much less knowing, these Dorothy Perkinses, than that there crimson Rambler. Somehow that Rambler reminds me of Locke’s Beatrice,” she thought in inward whisper to herself. “ It ain’t what you’d call real modest, but you can’t keep your eyes off it. It looks pretty enough all red and flaming now, but its flowers is going to be gray and ugly in a week, and then you’ll begin to find out how milljewed and unhealthy it is.

“ Even after the Dorothy gets through a-blooming she’s always pretty, and she looks like a lady even when she ain’t dressed in nothing but her leaves. I s’pose I’m sorter like that old-fashioned



rose of Granny's over there. It ain't got much style, and it ain't got much color, ner sweetness, but it tries to bloom steady—a rose here and there all summer long, but nobody don't seem to notice it. Everybody looks at the crimson Rambler and the Dorothy Perkins, but after they and all the June roses done blooming that poor old rose goes on a-doing its best, but the hollyhocks rises up and hides it in front and the weeds choke in from behind, and nobody but the Lord and insects takes notice on it."

A June breeze was blowing. It was the kind of breeze that blows back your youth to you. It carries strange secrets in its currents—time-old secrets which have never yet been really understood by man, only wistfully felt.

It suddenly blows back irrelevant scenes; a flashed memory of a long-forgotten face; a careless word heard years before in passing a stranger in the street; a sunset in a foreign land; the evening you awaited the coming of your first love. Strange mystic vapor!—holding in its meshes the disconnected fragments of a life.

Such a breeze made the first theosophist. Some vibrant creature, swept by its phantasmagorical breath, pulsed backward along its currents to its ancient source.

And this breeze blew across hundreds of roses, and pilfered the old-fashioned pinks of their sweetness, adding the potency of perfume to its already limitless magic.

Libby Trevelyan was in its toils, though it took no tangible form in her thought. She had had no beautiful youth to be blown back; her youth had only been the same as her maturity—work and economy, yet different after all, for it had held a dream, the dream of a man some day. The minor details of the dream were a home of her own, and many patch-quilts, and a great cellar full of preserves and canned vegetables, and a baby or two.

The man had come, and having reaped her small harvest of charms, had gone. Yet her faith in men was not destroyed, not even her faith in Trevelyan—strange, constant creatures as women are to their hopes.

Vaguely the dream came back as of old. The wind sang on; it played wantonly about the sad blue lips, kissing her mockingly; it toyed provocatively with the tightly screwed, heavy auburn hair, drifting it across her eyes; it ensnared her with perfumes, and whispered delicious lies.

She felt a sudden pang, a yearning throb in her breasts—her poor flattened breasts; an unwonted color flushed her freckled cheeks.

A step on the road! She listened, tense with a nameless expectancy. A buoyant step sounded, turning the bend by the marsh. Libby's head jerked forward, eyes straining, breath quickened.

It was only Mr. Stanley, the well-known peddler of patent medicines, come for his periodical round of the road.

With a great sigh of relaxation Libby shook herself.

“ Lord, what a fool I am! I’d a-taken oath that was Reginald’s step. Ain’t I never going to learn no sense? Ain’t I never going to quit expectin’? ”

“ Libby! ” her grandfather’s querulous falsetto called. “ Git a move onter you. Do you think I’m going to wait all day fer them peas? What you standin’ there wastin’ time fer? ”

## VIII

It was an epoch when the patent medicine vender made his visit to the road. Every duty could be set aside, even housecleaning could be neglected for the time. All aches, pains, imaginary ills, and hoped-for disease came throbbing to the front.

After a call on the Northerns and Stones the agent was now turning in at the Tuckers' gate. Libby rushed to the adjoining fence.

"Come over once, here's the medicine man," she shrieked to Mrs. Silver. The fact was Libby wanted to see what her neighbor would purchase.

Mrs. Silver flung her apron off as a mode of beautifying herself, and waddled excitedly past Mr. Silver, who was sunning, smoking, and musing on the past. Smith, the hound, was straining in vain attempts to get loose to pay his respects to the agent.

The parlor blinds had been opened, the Bible and Libby's postcard album were unceremoniously dumped on the floor to make room for the medicine satchel.

"Good-morning, Mr. Stanley." Mrs. Silver bowed grandiloquently to the well-dressed gentleman. "What was you saying you sold Mrs. Northern, sir?"

"Some of this ointment, Mrs.—Mrs.—" he cleared his throat over the forgotten name. "Guaranteed to cure bunions, corns, snake-bite, stone-bruises, cuts, sore eyes, dandruff, scurvy, chapped hands, chilblains, frost-bites, eczema, *and* INJURED MEMBERS," he wound up with dramatic emphasis.

The three women gaped in admiration. They sat, each on the extremest edge of their chairs; somehow they couldn't feel at ease in a room dedicated solely to funerals, weddings, and the extraordinary.

Granny Tucker begged to be permitted to hold a box of the ointment in her own hands, wondering meantime which ailment she might permit its magic to exorcise.

"Well, I swan!" Mrs. Silver ejaculated because she could not properly cope with such a repertoire of delightful afflictions. Libby rose with solemn mien to inspect the miracle-worker over Granny's shoulder.

Yet this was not the thrall of the new. These women had heard this same list of delectable horrors recounted by the same agent, to say nothing of others, for many years, yet it never failed to awe and thrill them.

"Did Mrs. Northern say just what use she was going to put it to?" Libby questioned the bland gentleman, who was mopping the sweat of his brow on a wondrous grass-green handkerchief, which Granny was coveting for her rag carpet.

“ She asked me to have a look at her husband’s foot.” The agent adjusted his creased trousers tenderly over his knees. “ It isn’t healing like it ought to, and I prescribed that they just throw the doctor’s concoction out of the window, or feed it to the chickens, and effect an instantaneous cure with this elegant, unfailing, soothing, and simple remedy.”

“ Well, ain’t it a blessing you come along? ” Mrs. Silver gazed upon the medicine man as the direct agent of Providence.

“ And all the money they’s been wasting on that doctor at a dollar a visit, and here’s this ’intment at fifty cents would have cured him straight off if you’d only come along sooner, sir.” Libby’s eyes almost chided the dilatory foot-saver.

“ I’ll take a box of that there ointment,” Mrs. Silver decided with remarkable celerity. “ Mr. Silver’s an easygoing man, but he’s troubled with corns jes’ as bad as if he was a tramp. He got ’em marching through Georgy,” she explained to the agent, “ and he ain’t never got rid of ’em.”

“ And has you brought my bottle of peppermint in sperrits? ” Granny meekly queried, turning over and over the box of ointment longingly.

“ Yes, ma’am! you may be sure I didn’t forget it.” The agent proudly produced the bottle. Granny Tucker had for years taken her daily little dose of this mild stimulant, for what purpose even Granny herself didn’t know.

"It warms the vitals up so," she never failed to mention, half apologetically, before enjoying her daily potion.

"And that tonic for grandpa," Libby reminded him. The agent held out a funereal bottle with promptitude.

Mrs. Silver arrested the tonic as it was being reached for by Granny, holding it up to the light to examine critically its inky contents.

"Could I smell it once?"

A pocket corkscrew was produced instantly, as the agent intoned:

"Kidney trouble, dyspepsia, hemorrhage of the lungs, mental fatigue, rheumatism, stomach disorder, nerve strain, summer complaint, *and* GENERAL DEBILITY."

Mrs. Silver was won by the sheer music of the terms.

"I'll take a bottle of that for Mr. Silver. He's been poorly ever since his confinement in that Rebel prison. He's troubled with most all them symptoms," she declared with unblushing pride.

"Is it safe for female folks to take too?" Libby inquired modestly.

"To be sure, to be sure. Look right on the label, Miss—Lady Trevelyan—'Friend to man, woman, and beast,' printed right there in black and white. Makes you as skittish as a young heifer."

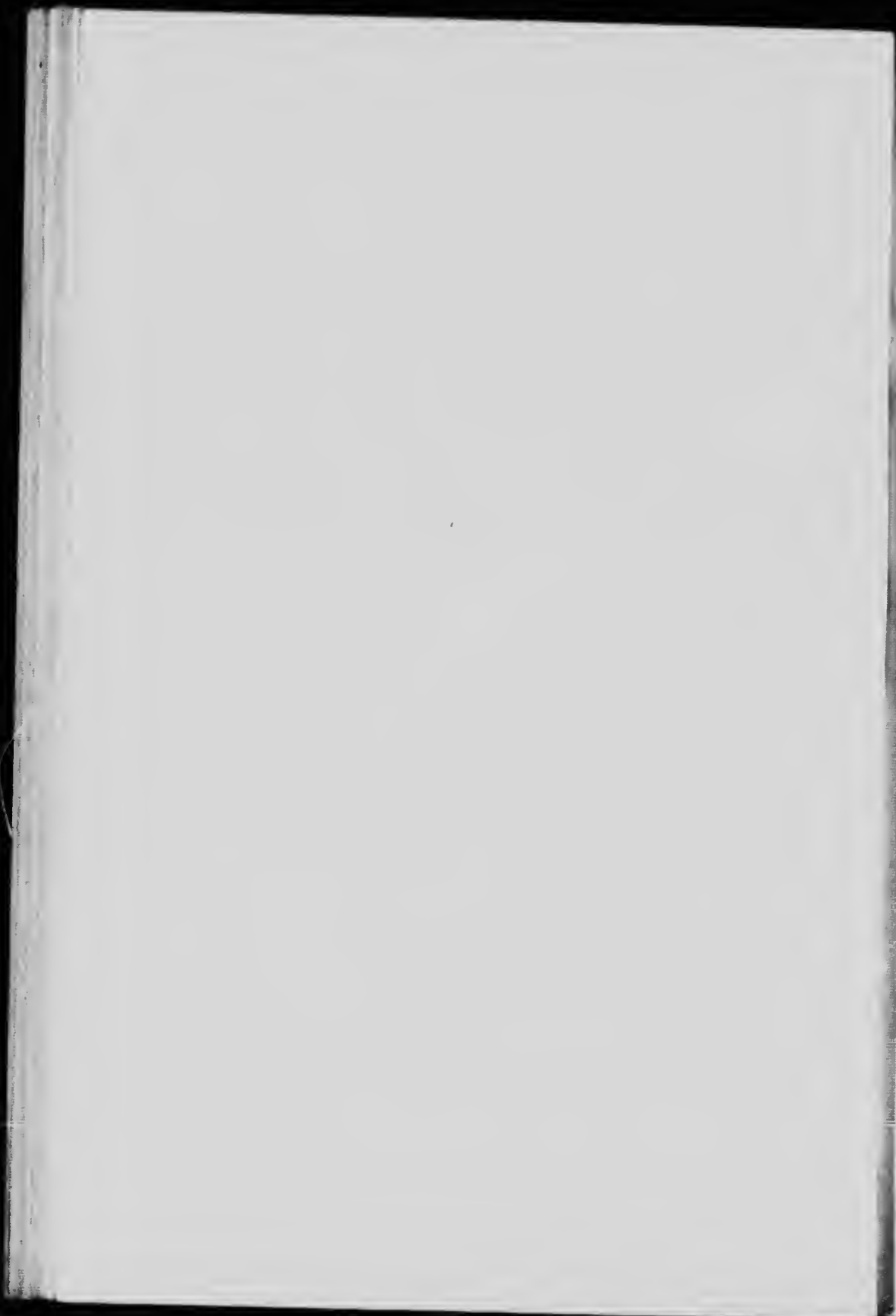
Oh! this man was delightful. Mrs. Silver



“Is it safe for female folks to take, too?”

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wished she were a young heifer, grazing on the flowery fields of youth. She sighed again over her commonplace past.

Libby rushed off to search for her purse, but left the door open so she might not miss a word.

As she re-entered, breathless from her descent of the stairs, Mr. Stanley was saying by way of climaxing farewell:

“ And I presume all you ladies will have a box of these pleasant and relieving pills. Just the time of year the body needs housecleaning after the spring housecleaning is out of the way. Painless. Pleasant. Powerful.”

He held out the three boxes they had all been secretly awaiting, and which they never failed to buy. The purchases had taken all their spare cash, but what of that? In no other way could the money have been expended so satisfactorily. Each had that glow of contentment which comes when the last tooth is filled and the dentist says you need not return for six months. They were fortified against all possible and improbable ills.

Then, too, the handsome agent brought with him some strange flavor of the outside world. His jaunty walk, suave speech, and careless elegance of manner would be unconsciously reflected in the women's tone and air, and an added perkiness in the tilt of their heads, all the rest of the day.

The medicine man had gone half-way down the Tucker walk when it occurred to Granny they had failed to inquire what Mrs. Stone had bought. Lady Trevelyan, more fleet of foot than her elders, was delegated to catch him before he got out of the gate. She returned panting:

“ Six—bottles—of—soothing—syrup.”

The older women exchanged significant glances, and Granny smiled knowingly as she said:

“ Thinking of the new baby’s comfort a-fore it comes.”

“ Manda’s a good mother,” Mrs. Silver eulogized.

“ And I thought just in time,” Libby added, “ to tell the gentleman to stop in to see Locke’s Beatrice. It’ll cheer her up to see somebody from the city, and maybe he’s got the thing that’ll cure what’s ailing her.”

A cloud darkened Mrs. Silver’s face; she wished she had been the one to think of sending him to Beatrice, it would have eased her conscience for having refused the hound.

“ Gimme a little sip of that peppermint, Libby. Let’s see if it’s as warmin’ as the old.” Granny was back in the kitchen sorting her rags preparatory to beginning a new ball and resuming ordinary life. “ It’s so upsettin’ havin’ callers and all this excitement,” she peevishly fretted, disguising her keen enjoyment of the day’s interruption.

Libby poured out the peppermint-in-spirits ab-

stractedly as the breeze filled the kitchen with the spice of roses. "His walk and his eyes do put me so in mind of Reginald somehow," she thought.

Feeling a sudden emptiness of spirit she took a little sip of the nectar for the cheering and warming of her own "vitals."

## IX

THE breezes of the day grew steadily to a great wind which swept down from the mountains each night. It rose and fell in the pines with the sound of the sea. Through its chimerical surf thronged the music of actual water. The swollen brook now thundered torrentially in riverlike importance over its stones and could be heard at a great distance—a perpetual undertone gurgling beneath the fitful surge and beat of the wind.

The rusty hinges of the shutters croaked out their old wives' tales.

Stray limbs of trees screeched against rooftops.

From the ground all the wee creatures of the night chirped their mysteries.

Through the winking tree boughs glimmered the modest lights of lamp-lit homes—lights of topaz set in a green and black mosaic.

Above the silver road stretched the highway of the gods. On limitless Milky Way, and on little earthly road shone alike the impartial moon.

Lady Trevelyan pulled in her shutters without one glance outward or upward. Why should one notice the obvious? Was not the night a regular recurrence? It was only meant for sleep—not

waking dreaming. The sky had always been there, therefore it deserved no attention. It held no astronomical nor poetical significance to her. What connection could there be between her gingham life and the star-embroidered tapestry of infinity? The moon was only the thing which made or unmade crops. The "dark of the moon" held more potency than its light—it at least had a niche in their conversation and prognostications.

Slamming her shutters, she put down the window-sash and was mechanically disrobing, thinking absently of the bread which was rising, not the moon, when a rap sounded on the kitchen door. It was after ten, and on the road a rap at that hour meant sickness, tragedy, or death. Libby raised the window, calling out to know who was there.

Mr. Stone replied with a request that Lady Trevelyan would hurry over; the baby had arrived unexpectedly with only "Mrs. Fay to midwife it." The road knew it could count on Libby in emergency.

When she arrived at the Stones' Mrs. Fay was administering the birth bath, murmuring ecstatically: "The spittin' amage of his pa. Glory bey to Pater, an' he kin kick loike a steer he kin, the blissed lamb." (Mrs. Fay had buried six children of her own.)

Every window was closed against the balmy fragrance of the June night's wind. The fetid

odor of stale breath and physical uncleanness would have staggered the sanitary nose, but Libby did not notice it as she hurried toward the bed.

Manda Stone's emaciated body was so flat it scarcely made a perceptible shape under the piled patch-quilts. Her eyes shone preternaturally in the dim gloom of the room, outshining the smoky lamp which was focused on the body of the new heir. Manda didn't speak to Libby; she probably didn't see her. Libby mumbled a few unnecessary things about "pain," "how she was getting along," "could she make her more comfortable," but as they remained unnoticed, she tiptoed over to look at the baby while she and Mrs. Fay whispered feminine things together.

Mr. Stone could be heard quieting the fretting next youngest child in the adjoining room.

The baby now robed, Mrs. Fay bustled over to the bed.

"Mandy, the baby bey all riddy fer its foist faist on earth."

Manda's eyes were staring far beyond Mrs. Fay.

"Libby Trevelyan, ye ain't niver had no children," Mrs. Fay reproached, "but in case you do—yer own man bein' returned frum furreign parts—don't you listen ter thim new-fangled idees of docters who bey fer refusin' the balm Providence sinds the leytle wans, by starvin' of the lambs fer a doiy or more."

Mrs. Fay having finished her oration, laid the baby beside its mother. Still Manda made no response of movement or word. Not a look did she bestow on the child; babies were not the novelty they had once been to her.

"You ain't sick, is you, Mandy?" Libby anxiously inquired.

"I ain't going to nuss my baby," Manda's eyes glittered strangely as she made this triumphant announcement. Mr. Stone just then entered the room.

Mrs. Fay threw her hands up toward the ceiling, though the gesture was intended for high heaven.

"Lasten ter yer wife—lasten ter her blasphemy! An' her blissed wid quarrts an' quarrts of the loife-savin' milk. In the name of the saints, what's iver come over the 'ooman?"

Mr. Stone drew near to investigate.

"What is it, Mandy?" he asked suspiciously.

"I ain't goin' to nuss that baby," Manda reiterated with thudding finality. Her hearers were speechless.

Mr. Stone was the first to recover, aided by a rising fury against his wife.

"I don't want to hear no more of sich foolishness. Nuss that child this minute!"

"I ain't a-going to nuss that baby." Manda's voice was the empty tone of a child repeating a phrase learned by heart.

"What are you thinking about, woman? I



ain't got no money to throw away on cow's milk when you've got a plenty." Stone fluttered internally with rage.

"I ain't going to nuss it. I'm going to feed it on the bottle." Manda's grim determination filled the two women who had retired to a far corner with terror.

With a fearful oath Stone declared he would smash every bottle brought in the house. Mrs. Fay's heart throbbed with a vague sympathy for the mother; she came over and patted the hard, large-knuckled hand of Manda's which was tensely closed on the top of the quilt.

"What bey the trrouble, chile? What bey yer raison fer daynyin' the leytle wan its natteral roight?"

Manda, a little touched by the tone vouchsafed: "It makes your back ache to nuss."

"But s'pose the baby takes sick," Libby suggested.

"Then Stone can get the doctor."

This was too much for the furious Stone; he gave Manda a look of hatred, of the variety which can only exist between husband and wife, and with oaths choking his throat he went out, slamming the door.

The two women sat down, limply helpless before such sinful stubbornness. Mrs. Fay mentally resurrected all her buried six. She relived their babyhoods. How she had dreaded weaning the blessed angels—they then ceased to be a part of

her. Her comprehension stood paralyzed before the determination of the woman in bed to willfully deprive herself of this precious tie.

Libby's mind incarnated her imaginary babies—the children that had never come to her. She tried to think what it would mean to hold a baby to her poor flat breasts, to know that mite a part of her very own self, and—Reginald. She quivered as she thought of what she might give from her own body—that which meant life and strength to her child. Unknowingly she pressed her arms to her breast, passionately hugging to her childless heart the babe of her conjuring.

A great peace had fallen over Manda Stone; she had sprung her long-contemplated revenge. She had refused to give the only thing on earth which she absolutely possessed, solely and personally—the milk of her breasts. It was the one thing Stone could not control; he could make her fetch water until her back broke, he could make her bear innumerable children which neither desired; he could make her scrub, sew, and wash; he could strike her when drunk, but he couldn't make her give her one precious possession if she chose to withhold it.

With the deep respiration of one dropping a burden Manda turned her face away from the child, and fell into the sweet sleep of the liberated serf.

Her expression was that of the peaceful old sow.

## X

MANDA STONE, having made one step in the direction of freedom, became emboldened to make a still greater one, and that without asking Stone's permission. Stone was too drunk each night now to have been asked.

At last he felt the glory of excuse for drinking—had he not been defied before two women? Each time the memory of his humiliation on the night of the baby's birth recurred he snarled an oath and dimmed the memory.

It was to Lady Trevelyan Manda confided her plan. Libby was importuned to broach the subject to Mrs. Northern. Proud of the importance of her commission, Lady Trevelyan hurried across the road.

Maria Northern was cleaning out her cistern, to get ahead of "dog-days." That a cistern cleaned in dog-days would cause a canine odor to permeate the water the rest of the year was a firm belief on the road. Maria was so engrossed she did not hear Libby's approach. When Libby spoke her name beside her Maria gave a piercing shriek.

"Merciful Heavens, what a shock you give me! I thought sure it were a ghost."

Libby and Maria bent double with subsequent laughter over the fright. This was the sort of joke they could thoroughly enjoy. When their mirth had subsided Libby conveyed the intelligence that Mrs. Stone wondered if Mrs. Northern would let her Violet mind the new baby before and after school hours for fifty cents a week.

Violet had not gone to school that day; she, with Bob, Ruby, Harry, and the baby, were standing in a circle about the entertaining cistern. Mrs. Northern was both complimented and perturbed by the message.

To refuse anything requested on the road often led to long-cherished feuds. Neighbors became "miffed" over trifles—as the years passed the original cause of the grievance might be forgotten, but the grudge was carried to the grave. The fifty cents a week was alluring.

"It would pay her insurance and leave thirty-five cents a week for shoe-leather," Maria argued with herself aloud. "And that means a lot with so many little feet to keep covered."

Bare feet were not fashionable on the road. Parents regarded it as a visible proof of their inability to properly clothe their children, and so the children were deprived of the health-giving earth.

"Vi-lit ain't real well. I don't see what ails the child; she complains so much of her back, and she's always going out and setting on the grass.

What symptom do you think that signifies, Libby? "

Lady Trevelyan pondered hard on the unnaturalness of sitting on the grass.

" Maybe it's hay-fever she be a-getting," she suggested.

Maria sighed:

" I'm always fearing some of them children will take after their pa, and Vi-lit acts so queer. I'm expecting most any time she'll be took with a spell."

" I wouldn't mention it before her; it might set her a-thinking and bring it on," Libby protested in lowered tone, not realizing she was voicing the theory of mental suggestion.

" Shucks! the child don't understand; she's too dumb," Maria declared. " Run off and play, Vi-lit. Don't be standing round with your mouth open trying to swallow what your elders is a-saying."

Violet ran around the corner, only to creep back unnoticed in a few minutes.

" Well, I'll talk it over with John when he comes home. John sets such store by them children I don't know whether he could make up his mind to hire one out so soon, and Vi-lit 's so little for her age—who'd believe that child was twelve goin' on thirteen? I'm fearful 'fraid she'll be took with fits—she acts that queer."

Violet's eyes were dilating with the grand possibilities of her symptoms as recounted by her

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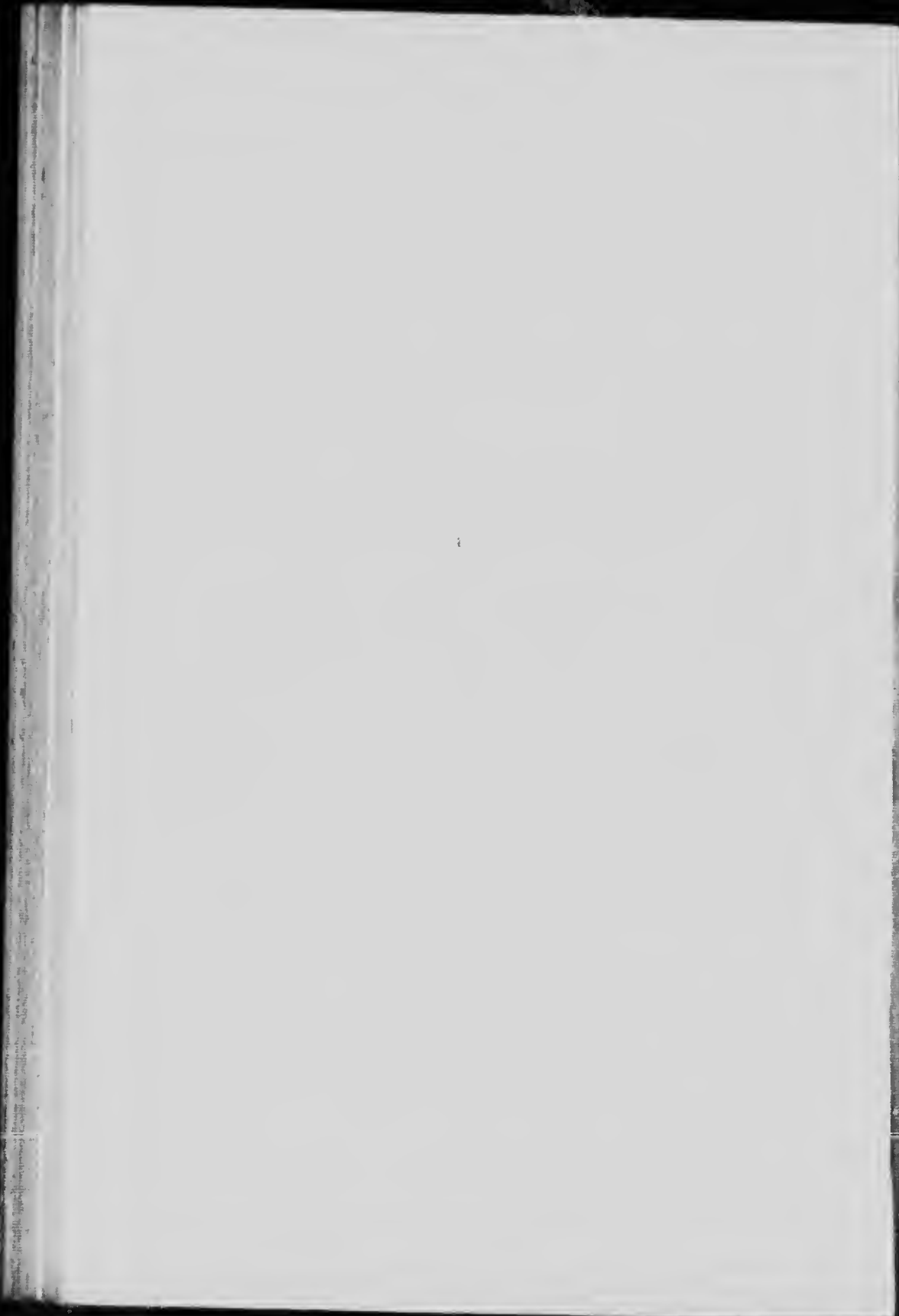
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“Simon.”



mother; she suddenly became a person of great interest to herself.

"Maybe I'm going to have a fit—look at me once—my ina says so, so there," she bragged to Stone's Simon. Simon was engrossed in some weird performance of his own; he paid no attention.

"You ain't never going to have fits; you ain't got sense enough." Violet stuck out her tongue at him.

"G'wan. Lemme lone," Simon snarled in the tone of his father, as he reeled away from his annoy, zigzagging toward the daisied fields.

Hour after hour he daily wandered over the hills playing an old fife, staggering round and round in erratic circles, in heaven knows what chaotic hallucinations. He could scarcely speak plainly and seldom lucidly, yet when he fided the music was quite sane, and wholly in tune. He had the gift of improvising, too—photographing musically the notes of birds, the threnodies of wind, the secrets of whispering water.

He often marched all day, forgetting to return home for food. Trailing him by the strange strains, his mother sought him at bedtime in field or wood. Manda Stone did not think him an idiot.

"Simon don't seem crazy," she had once explained to Lady Trevelyan. "Simon was just born drunk. Look at him now—don't he walk like his father?"



It was true. Simon's first baby steps were staggers. He was so nearly nothing mentally his parents had not even thought it worth while to name him, calling him simply "babe" until he was seven or eight years old. He had returned from the neighboring village one day calling himself "Simon." The name was accepted by his parents. The Stones had never heard of Simple Simon, and knew not the appropriateness of the name bestowed by some more versed villager.

"Mother Goose" was a literary treasure undreamed of by the children of the road. Fairies did not dwell there either—they preferred the ferny depths, and the company of birds, in the pines of the ridge. The children had no imagination—unless Simon's distorted obsessions came under that head. Their games held no glamor of the make-believe. If they had ever gone to the haunted brushwood by the brook, or to the sentient shadows of the pines, who knows what secrets the fairies might not have whispered. But they preferred running back and forth across the road, dodging the infrequent automobiles, harassing the ragman's horse, or hitting stray dogs with stones.

The little girls' time was generally taken up with the care of smaller children. If they played, it was only a dull echo of their mothers' life,—for example, washing out rags in a basin in imitation of their mothers' everlasting toil over wash-tubs. Let the little girl beware, however, of show-

ing too great an efficiency at this game—it meant a quick promotion from the pretended to the real.

The boys' favorite game was hitting each other with sticks and then fleeing from retaliation—or making loud, unrhythmical noises by beating upon discarded tin pails. Especially keen was their enjoyment of the latter, if they knew it to be annoying to neighbors.

Maliciousness took the place of normal fun; degeneracy followed the loss of healthful games; cruelty was bred of a lack of imagination; fear of spirits replaced the love of sprites.

Oh! for one missionary fairy on the road.

## XI

LADY TREVELYAN, unable to settle down to the prose of the day until the all-absorbing question of Violet's servitude was settled, potted about among her flowers, treading on a ground embroidered by fallen rose petals.

The prodigality of flowers on every side was like the blare of a great orchestra of color. The heaven's blue seemed pale after gazing on the metallic blue of the larkspur. Tossed back and forth by every whimsey of the breeze, the Canterbury bells chimed—miniature chimes attuned only to the ear of a butterfly or bee. The fox-gloves, now in their last gaunt stage, leaned in the grotesque attitudes of floral towers of Pisa. And amidst this fulfillment of beauty were rich prophecies of coming glory in the hairy pendulous buds of the poppies, the pointed noses of hollyhocks.

Libby, looking up from her flowers, gazed over at the figure of Mr. Silver, and coveted his great gift of rest. What a day to lure the thoughts away from the ought-to-be-done.

Mr. Silver sat ruminating in the sun-flecked shadows before the woodshed. He possessed the almost lost art of musing. As Mrs. Silver said,

he was "an easygoing man." He had been easygoing ever since the war, which was never over to him—it flavored every conversation and gave point by its past violence of action to all present inaction.

His favorite text was: "I shall go softly all the days of my life." This text did not, however, extend to his wife. Mr. Silver's musings were made possible by the extreme energy of Mrs. Silver. Not a stroke of work would he do in the vegetable garden; he mused on the philosophy of work while Mrs. Silver hoed the vegetables.

On the contrary, he took a most vital interest in his, as yet, uninhabited plot in the cemetery. Each Saturday, with military precision, he pushed the lawn mower a mile to the small square in the white city, where he kept the grass in a state of perpetual expectation, while he dreamed on the white shaft which would some day arrest the eye of the passer-by, telling the stranger of the glories of the dead soldier.

His walk—when he walked—was a military march; it almost made audible the tone of a drum. With great condescension Mr. Silver made a march to the village each Monday to fetch the town laundry to Mrs. Silver—then mused until Friday on past glories and a future heavenly reward. On Friday he returned to the paucid present long enough to make a counter-march, returning the laundry to its owners. His federal feelings were so intense he always made it a point

to wear " a leetle touch of blue," and rumor had it that even when he went to bed he insisted on being arrayed in something blue, probably to fortify his patriotism against the vagaries of disloyal dreams.

Laying his " shattered health " to his confinement in a " Rebel " prison, it would seem he would have protected all living creatures against the known and tested horrors of being a prisoner. But in fulfilling the strange law which makes one creature retaliate by meting out his own former sufferings to another, Mr. Silver took a strange psychological satisfaction in watching the hound strain on his chain; its wistful appeals day and night for liberty were lulling music to the jailer's ears.

So Mr. Silver sat to-day basking in the June air, abstractedly watching the hound with satisfaction while he smilingly relived the battle of the Appomattox. Mrs. Silver was straining over an unoiled wringer, battling with her fat, unwieldy arms to turn the handle.

A figure in cheap, rustling silk was climbing the road. A hat of the prevailing eclipsing style shadowed her brilliantly reddened cheeks. Her mouth rose, fell, and gaped in the mechanical gyrations of chewing gum.

Mr. Silver deserted the ranks long enough to raise his eyes, narrowing them to the slit of attempted identification.

" Libby," he called out, having failed to recog-

nize the figure, "who's that girl that jes' passed?"

Libby left her flowers to rush over and set his curiosity at rest.

"It's Locke's Beatrice," she confided in low tones, as though she feared the disappearing figure had long-distance hearing.

"And what is she doing dressed up and gallivanting this time of the morning?" Mr. Silver added to his natural profundity of voice the petulance of manly indignation. "Morning's made fer women to work in. Ain't she got nothing to keep her busy at home?"

Libby suggested maybe Beatrice was going over to town to buy something.

"More finery, I suppose." Mr. Silver spat disgustedly. "The young women of these days don't make their salt. It takes all a man kin earn to keep 'em fitted out in frills and feathers, and it's *them* kind of women that wants to vote!"

Mr. Silver, like all the other men on the road, had decided notions on woman's suffrage, though other burning questions of the day failed to ignite them. Also, like some other men, he selected the lowest type of woman as an excuse for his denunciations of women.

Libby had never thought about voting, she knew nothing of politics nor of the great struggle of her sex for equality; she therefore passively bowed her head in vacuous ignorance to Mr. Silver's arraignment.

Mr. Silver had time to read, and he prided himself on being the best informed man on the road. Mrs. Silver, with no time for such diversions, was very proud of the oracular utterances of her husband. Mr. Silver now quoted the Bible to bolster his ideas on the lowliness of woman's state. He drew splendid lessons from the chickens about the yard, pointing out to Libby the hen's very evident subjection to the cock. He flicked a bit of tobacco off his vest of blue, and settled himself for an extended tirade on what the world was coming to if the women weren't "held down," when Libby spied Mrs. Northern giving Harry a farewell cuff before starting across the road.

Mrs. Northern paused mid-road to gaze disapprovingly at the back of Beatrice until it disappeared at the bend of the marsh. Her first words reflected her last impression.

"Poor Locke," she sighed to Libby. "He sure didn't git no gold ring in his prize box. Ain't it strange what kind of women ropes in nice lads like Bert Locke, and there's so many steady girls right here in the country goin' to waste. But men'll go to the city and take up with somebody that don't even know if they ever had a ma."

Libby was reluctant to criticise Beatrice, and as for Locke, had not Libby herself been a victim to the city's output of masculine charms?

"I hear she goes over to The Point most every day, now it's opened," Mrs. Northern declared

in disgusted tone. The Point was a place of terrific boredom disguised by crude forms of entertainment—merry-go-rounds, moving-pictures, Ferris wheels, dance halls, and a man who was advertised as being able to “sing to beat the band.” But, who knows—perhaps the place was a godsend to farmers’ wives, deadened by abnormal toil. To women of colorless lives it gave glimpses of blessed spheres of levity.

An unwritten law prevailed on the road, however, that The Point was only to be patronized on Saturdays after the chores of the week were finished, or on special occasions at night. To be seen going there early in the day, especially at the beginning of the week, was a scandal.

“You may be sure she ain’t goin’ there fer no good.” Mrs. Northern’s lips pursed with the self-righteousness of the mother of Ruby, Violet, Harry, Bob, and a baby.

“Beatrice is mighty lonesome,” Libby weakly defended. “She’s use to the clatter of the city.”

Libby sighed as she defended, for she too had heard disquieting rumors of Beatrice, and it was becoming generally known that Locke’s credit was getting very low at the village stores. She changed the subject deftly by inquiring as to Mrs. Northern’s decision about Violet. The inquiry took the bung out the barrel of Mrs. Northern’s maternal sentimentalism.

“I discussed it with John last night,” the mother replied in melancholy tones, “and John



said as how Vi-lit's back was so weak, and she's so little fer her age, he didn't hardly know what to say. He and me went in to look at her in bed. There she laid beside Harry, Ruby, and Bob, looking so white and pitiful-like I just felt I couldn't have the heart to hire that child out to work." Mrs. Northern's handkerchief here became eloquent, absorbing her sniffles. "I knows I'm an impatient mother at times, Libby Trevelyan, but when you've got so many little ones about, always gittin' under your heels when you's carrying a kittle of b'ilin water, or wanting their noses blowed when you's hanging out clothes, or gittin' hurt when the pie's a-burning, it ain't no wonder I fergits myself and gits out of patience. I knows I hits them children a mighty lot, but I don't mean nothing—it's jes' to relieve my feelings. John jes' dotes on the little things. He'd work his toenails off to save one of 'em from harm. John's a good man, Libby Trevelyan, if I do say it, and he's never been arrested. John's got a soft heart, and he jes' stood there crying like a baby beside me last night, looking down on little Vi-lit.

"Says he: 'Maria, think how that chile done wash dishes fer you.' I knows I tells Vi-lit she's trifling, but when I thought how the child had washed dishes ever since she was knee-high to a mosquito, I jes' sobbed. Says John, says he: 'Think how she's toted them babies around.' 'Yes,' says I. Says he: 'Think how she's put

'em to sleep every night.' 'Yes,' says I, 'and washed and combed 'em, too,'—seemed like my heart bu'st right there, Libby——"

Both Mrs. Northern and Libby were weeping violently now.

"Don't take on so, Maria," Libby sobbed, "I'll 'splain to Mandy how you feels; she won't get miffed."

Mrs. Northern mopped the retiring flood, and struggled to recover composure.

"No, Libby, don't trouble yourself. John's a good neighbor, and he says as how he couldn't refuse nothing nobody on the road asks, and so long as Mrs. Stone done set her heart on having Vi-lit it ain't in John Northern to say no. And say what you will, Libby, fifty cents is fifty cents, and shoe-leather ain't picked off rose bushes."

## XII

THE children of the Sicilians, living around the bend, were lonely. They were aliens. Every day at school the salutation of: "Hey! look at de Dagoes!" accentuated that fact. They winced, and wincing wished they too were Americans.

What did they know of their land's splendid history?—that little island battlefield of the ancients. It had made them Sicilians, which, being translated into American made them Dagoes, which, being translated by American boys, made them to be spat upon.

Many had been their out-of-school efforts to make friends with the Northern and Stone children. Timorously appearing from around the bend, they diffidently stood aloof, watching the road progeny batting a ball with a stick.

Eventually, inevitably, both bat and ball were aimed at a Sicilian target. The targets dodged and then edged closer to the amalgamation of Stone and Northern, who, ignoring them, devoted their jaded interest to finding out how much misery they could confer on each other by the aid of a large ash-pile.

When civil war had just been declared between Northerns—blinded and choking, and Stones—

ashen-haired and oathful, the eldest Sicilian, a boy of nine, rushed into the breach, diverting foes by the loud boast:

“ We’ve got a new babee at de house! ”

“ That ain’t nawthin’,” sneered Harry Northern, exuding gritty coal, “ everybody has that.”

“ But she was drop from de engine,” the little Ferrara announced in awed tones.

This arrested and held attention. “ Engine? What you mean? ” Even the lethargic Stones were interested.

“ Me brudder, she drop by de engine,” the Ferrara emphasized. “ Engine she goin’ lika hell, an’ me fader he ketch her (me brudder), ketch her jus’ so. Say he, ‘ Jee-sy God! Me tak dissa babee home to Baldisarro—datta me, an’ Asunta—datta her, my sister, and Tony and Steve, to make a nice chile to play wid.’ ”

This was nearer a fairy story than the children of the road had ever before listened to. They did not know just how to receive it.

“ G’wan! ” snarled a Northern.

“ I don’t believe there’s nawthin’ into it, do you? ” whispered an ash-covered Stone.

“ How you find? ” the Sicilian inquired generally.

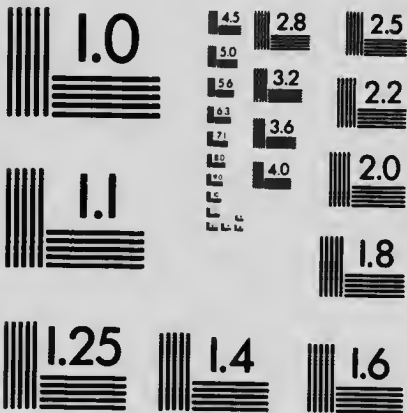
“ *Found?* What you talking ’bout? ” The amalgamation was stumped.

“ Where your farder find you? ” The young Ferrara’s question grew ever more befuddling. No answer forthcoming he hastened to explain



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matters: " Now, me farder she work on de track, an' she dig, dig, an' den she 'most strike something wid her—what you call him?—de thing she dig wid?—an' she stop *so*, an' say, ' What de hell dis? ' an' me cousin she run up an' say, ' It look lika de head,' an' me farder she looka ag'in an' she dig soft, soft, an' she dig her all loose, an' who you thinka she is?—She is *me*—Baldisarro! "

The mouths of Stone and Northern hung open.

" An' Asunta—her dere—you know why she so small? Asunta her come down de rain pipe, de *leetle* rain pipe on de house, an' she all done up *so*, an' me mudder an' me farder she both pull hard to getta Asunta loose, an' she fit so tight in datta pipe, she never grow big lika me."

A light began to reach the Northerns; a glimmer illumined the Stones. The heads of the amalgamation bent together; whisperings were followed by gross snickers.

" You mean *born*," Ruby laughed contemptuously.

" An' you're a liar," summed up Harry.

Baldisarro swelled and flushed with indignation.

" Me no liar," he shrieked. " Me mudder say so. Me farder say so. He know all truf 'bout all de things. Me no liar. I fighta you if you say datta."

" Mama," screamed Ruby, " make the Dagoes go home. They're goin' to hit us."

Harry was backing off behind the ash-pile before the Etna eyes of Baldisarro.

Mrs. Northern came bustling to the door, righteous rage filling her.

"Come right straight into the house, children; haven't I told you to have nothing to do with them dirty Ginnies? Get right straight off home, you——" her voice paused like a rasping saw caught by a wood-knot. Her ears had caught a sound of footsteps, her eyes saw a black cutaway coat swinging down the road.

She shambled indoors to tidy up and make a search for her purse. Baldisarro, grasping Asunta's hand, passed the elegantly dressed man blindly, fighting with all his young strength against the tears that would push over his long dark eyelashes.

The man's lips curled with disdain as he eyed the pair of aliens—they meant no grist for his mill. With a jaunty whistle he sped up the Northern steps. His suave politeness, always freshly shaven face, his "store-bought" teeth, his starched shirt, molded the ideal of masculine charms in several feminine minds on the road.

Mrs. Northern felt sure "Lionel," the hero of *The True Lady's Magazine* story she was surreptitiously reading, looked just as the insurance man did. Mrs. Stone gazed on him admiringly and longingly each week. After each visit she found herself reiterating inwardly, "Stone is not the man for me."



The first question the agent put, after dog and children had been partially quelled by Mrs. Northern, was an inquiry about the husband's injured foot. Mrs. Northern, brushing aside the children, who stood with fingers in mouth staring at the gentleman's watch chain and other grandeurs, told of the miraculous cure effected by the patent medicine man's ointment.

The gentleman, patting Ruby's uncombed head patronizingly, clanged out deep-toned anathemas on the medical profession.

"Yes," he continued booming, "it's from the money wrung from you hard-working, industrious ladies that the doctors' automobiles are bought. They can ride in style as long as you ladies bend your backs over wash-tubs, and send for him in a hurry every time your little ones run splinters in their fingers, or there's a small accident at the shipyard. If that same amount could be saved—by seeking relief in good old home remedies and reliable patented medicines—if, I say, that same amount could be saved and expended in an endowment or paid-up policy, you ladies would spend your old age comfortably speeding around in automobiles yourselves. By the way, have you talked over that little matter of endowment with Mr. Northern?"

"Yes, sir, but he ain't quite ready to take it up yet. You see, with Harry's ten cents a week, and Vi-lit's fifteen cents, it's about all we can carry right now, but I'd like you to tell me again

about what you said the rate on little Robert would be."

"Let's see, now what did you say Master Robert's age is?"

"That's he on your left, sir—Robert's goin' on eight."

"Fine large boy, Robert, for your age—want to be insured, little man? Well, now, we'll give you a lovely little policy for one hundred and fifty-five for the trifling sum of five cents a week. If Robert dies in six months from the time of the beginning of policy, of course you cannot expect to get more than one hundred and fifty dollars, but should he live for a year after, you could collect the entire one hundred and fifty-five."

Mrs. Northern's mind and eye rambled over Robert trying to thoroughly understand this sum of life's valuation. Finally it penetrated her intelligence; if she could pull Robert through the latter half of the year, he would bring five dollars more.

The agent was content to let her consider the matter another week, but time was flying and he had many calls to make; he hintingly brought out his book and pen. Maria's pocket gave up the purse, and the sad little books containing the records of the parental gamble on the death of the offspring. The agent passed out to saunter aimlessly as a stranger enjoying the landscape, with one eye cocked for the signal from Mrs. Stone that the coast was clear.

Stone did not approve of insurance. Mandy had secretly taken out a policy on his life, in accordance with the advice of a gypsy who foretold a rich harvest from the husband's speedy demise. It had needed much cunning on Mandy's part to accomplish this five years ago. The agent was her accomplice and strategist. It necessitated prolonged interest in, and wifely uneasiness because of, Stone's imaginary ailments, and real ones caused by inebriety. This affectionate anxiety on Mandy's part knew no abatement until Stone consented to an examination by a physician.

The agent and Mandy enjoyed the tie of secret triumph which made them to both gloat and tremble.

A kitchen towel fluttered carelessly from a window as if to shed crumbs, quickened the stranger's interest from the abstract to the concrete, and he exchanged his dreamy expression for the ingratiating one of business, as he flitted blithely up the Stones' terrace.

There was a new baby in the house; the agent was as pleased over a new baby as a certain President. He appraised it as a butcher might a lamb led to the slaughter, prodding it with blunted forefinger, making strange unhuman sounds supposed to kindle interest in the crude newborn. Mandy smiled cavernously, proudly certifying to the beneficial qualities of cow's milk.

"I jes' puts a few drops of the medicine man's syrup in the bottle every time I feeds Herod and

I 'clare he's the best baby I ever had—just sleeps most of the time; ain't no trouble 'tall."

The insurance agent was so interested nothing would do but he must be permitted to see the miracle-working bottle. Having inspected its outside thoroughly he carelessly put it under his nose. His expression became saddened. The chances were against him. A baby fed on laudanum would probably never need one of those "lovely little policies." Raking in the shekels due him on Stone and the children he passed out to levy on the neighboring houses.

Every week this vulture made his sinister rounds, bringing always with him the thought of death. Strange it is that those whose lives hold the least of joy and brightness shadow their small bit of sunshine by perpetual play in the lottery where death holds the stakes.

With small respect for the insurance agent an oriole swooped past his face, sounding her fife. It was answered by the twitterings of eager little throats in a bassinet swung in the pear tree. Their mother's music foretold a feast.

As the agent passed through the Tucker yard, he ignored the r bins in Libby's potato patch. They did not notice him either. With ears cocked to the ground they listened, suddenly plunging a bill to pull forth a long, luscious worm for the hungry brood drowsing in the pine tree on the ridge.

Nearby a little post wren and his wee brown

wife were excitedly plucking off dead twigs. They worked in unison, spilling over with song and love. Only one twig out of ten did they succeed in afterward landing in the hole in Mrs. Stone's clothes-pole, but each failure was followed by an avalanche of song, and a renewal of effort.

Everywhere in the air were the evidences of life—love, the perpetuation of species, the sacred joyous labor for the young. No thought of gun, pitfalls set by men, cold, or accident, blemished the song of these creatures of wing—glorifiers of the present. They sang not of gain by loss of birdling. They chirped of no hope of a future heaven. They were merely making a paradise of to-day.

### XIII

LIBBY TREVELYAN stood beside her poppy bed. Red, white, purple, pink, salmon, rose, they swayed drowsily, rhythmically. Maddened bees staggered on wing from one opiate-laden center to another, maniacally fighting aside their kindred. Golden with pollen they wallowed drunkenly about the concave sides of the petals, loosening the intangibly held blossoms, which shattered, dropping the roistering bees, while the petals sailed off on the breeze pretending to be butterflies.

Libby was almost hypnotized; she even swayed a little. During the ten minutes of her pause beside the blossoms, half the glory of the bed had scattered to air and ground—the silken beauty it took months to perfect. As usual, her thoughts found a suggestion in the poppies of Reginald.

She thought of the longings and hopes which had filled her girlhood—hopes which she dreamed blossoming womanhood would fulfill. Then came the bee who sipped, and sipping shattered her youth, and shattering it flitted—whither? Ah! the brief season of love and—

A step beside her scattered the last petal of thought and she looked into the face of a woman

from the neighboring town, a woman who was getting up a soap club for the Ladies' Aid Society.

"What do you get this time?" It was so hard for Lady Trevelyan to transpose suddenly to thoughts of soap.

"I'm aiming to take the kind that gives the plush rocker. Granny hones so for one to set in by the window."

The delegate of the Ladies' Aid brought out an alluring list of near-silver table adornments, ironing boards, center tables, lamps—in fact, almost anything even the most fastidious mind on the road could desire. After long search the plush rocker was really found, although one would think it might take a lifetime of scrubbing to use up the necessary soap in order to obtain the called-for number of wrappers.

Quite undaunted by the vision of sud-foamy breakers on the shores of time, Libby bravely put her name down, and got rid of the intruder.

"What was I thinking about Reginald?—something about poppies." She concentrated her gaze on the deflowered seed pods, but they suggested nothing but the sterner business of life. The pleasant vagaries refused to return; she remembered the many awaiting tasks indoors.

As she neared the house Mrs. Northern's little Ruby came trotting up the path with a basket on her arm. Robbie ran behind. Ruby explained

her visit in one large mouthful of quickly evacuated words:

"I'm sellin' all-day-suckers to save the heathen, Lady Trevelyan, and they ain't but a penny apiece, and they're awf'ly good, and we was all given five cents apiece in Sunday School to see how much we could make, and ma made these all-day-suckers for me, and I've sole three already."

"What are they like?" Libby inquired.

"Some folks calls 'em 'lolly-pops.' You see they's candy made on a stick an' if you don't suck too hard they'll last all day long. Suck up, Robbie!—show the lady how they works."

The traveling salesman for the heathen produced the demonstrating sticky stick from a pocket and gave a loudly musical illustration. Libby went for her purse, but a misgiving occurring during her absence, she asked before purchasing:

"They don't loosen the teeth, do they?"

"No'm, not ef you're careful," Ruby assured her. "It did pull out one of Robert's to start with," she postscripted truthfully, "but it was ready to come anyhow, and it saved pa the trouble of tyin' a string to the door knob."

The children having departed with three more pennies to save the heathen, Libby got down to business, taking up the rag carpet, a white stick protruding from her lips. The deep rumble, which can only be produced by the glass carriage,



associated solely with weddings and funerals, thundered on the road.

"Quick, Granny, quick!" she called. "I can't get up in time. Run to the door to see where that carriage is going."

Granny jumped up, balls flying in every direction, basket overturned.

"It's a Van Elkin team," the old lady breathlessly reported. "It ain't stopping nowheres on the road. Mrs. Silver's a-runnin' to her gate. She'll be able to follow it."

Libby threw the "sucker" on the table, yanked the carpet up, flung it in a heap, snatched her sunbonnet from the hook, and dashed through the gate in the adjoining fence in hot pursuit of Mrs. Silver. Her neighbor was moving with the alacrity of an excited hippopotamus. Without time for more than half-uttered ejaculations and speculations, the two sped together to the top of the hill that gave a view as far as the brook.

The carriage had evidently stopped in front of Bert Locke's, and was even now turning round to ascend the road. By the time it reached them Mrs. Northern, hands white with flour from an interrupted pie, Mrs. Stone and Violet, the baby Herod drooping in her arms, were all upon the scene.

The driver slowed up ready for the fusillade of questions.

"It's Bert Locke. Head hurt at shipyard. Doctors from over the crick goin' to operate this

afternoon." He shot his news with bang and precision.

The air was filled with waving arms, groans, excited questions for particulars.

"Don't know nawthin' more. Does any of you know where Mrs. Locke is? She ain't to home. Locke's alone. Some of you ladies better go down. Time to help out." He heartlessly clucked to his horses, signifying himself as drained of information.

The women whispered, wailed, denounced Beatrice, offered to go to the rescue, speculated, and vainly craved details.

Mrs. Fay, with an ear cocked for disturbance, came hobbling along, face expressioned to the resignation befitting a calamitous occasion, mind sadly attuned to hopes that something really dreadful had happened. Back and forth she rocked as she came, a full-rigged vessel in a gale. The motion painted ruminations on trouble.

"An' who's daid, er kilt, er smashed, er gone to glory?" she cried before reaching the group.

Libby, Mrs. Silver, Mrs. Northern, Mrs. Stone, and Violet all screamed out at once, in different recklessly selected phrases, the tremendous information. Mrs. Fay centered on all replies, selecting fragments from the conglomeration. Her body was now tossed on giant waves. Brogue fairly clogged speech.

"Ah! it's his cranium he's cracked, is it? Merciful Hivens! an' the shameless crittur, struttin'

the straits!" She was almost wrecked by her own indignation. Recovering her equilibrium she resumed:

"Will I remimbers the toime Tim were afflicted—somethin' crosswais of his replevin. Ah! it was somethin' tirrible, it were, an' me a-hang-in' over him noight an' doiy, not stoppin' fer a sip of tey, an' whin I lost me foist-born, arrah—ah——"

She rocked too violently for further words to solidify. Mrs. Northern was almost tempted to brag of John's fits. She simmered the temptation down to mere moanings of the time "the twins was born dead." "And I've always been a changed woman since my little Ida died," she declared almost defiantly.

"Yes, Mrs. Northern, you've certainly been on the bum ever since little Ida died," Mrs. Silver generously acknowledged, to make quick way for details of Mr. Silver's dazzling, many-hued afflictions achieved in that Rebel prison.

Mrs. Stone then modestly reminded them she had fainted twice when her upper teeth had all been pulled, but she was ruthlessly eclipsed by an "op-per-rraa-tion" Mrs. Fay confided in the whispers of pain-darkened mystery.

Libby slipped away unnoticed. She hastened home, for she well knew Granny would by this time be driven to an extra dose of peppermint in spirits. She would then hurry down to Locke. She could calculate on another hour before the

women would exhaust their storehouse of past illnesses.

“ Well, don’t it beat all,” Granny sighed, “ how everything happens at once? I’m that flustered with the soap lady, them all-day-suckers, and now Bert Locke bein’ took down!”

Libby, rolling a white apron under her arm preparatory to making a quick cut, unobserved, through the back fields, stopped long enough to reply:

“ And town folks think nawthin’ ever happens in the country!”

## XIV

It was midnight. The doctors had operated that afternoon, and Locke was now wrapt in an abstruse haze of unconsciousness.

Sitting by his bed, half-dazed, wholly frightened, and fearfully conscientious, was a fellow lodge member. He had been delegated to sit up with Locke; he had been intrusted with a sheet of paper on which the old doctor had written directions and times for the administration of medicine.

The lamp had been placed on the floor, to avoid a glare on the patient's face. The man stooped, holding the sheet under the light, reading down, reading up, reading from the middle both ways, though he knew it was yet some time before another dose was due.

After a sigh-full, motionless rest, he held the paper to the light again, as if expecting a change in its directions. Crinkling brows, he reread with moving lips and the over-concentration of the dull.

On the little stoop outside, not ten feet from him, stood Beatrice. She looked up to the mountains—for the first time without fear. The full moon shone insolently, ferreting out all the inner

nooks of forest and mountain ravine; the shadows shifted as if to keep hidden some secret recesses from the searchlight rays. The poplars trembled sensuously under the impassioned fullness of the lunar ogling. The brook hurried to the shadows behind the next hill, fearful lest its secrets too would be discovered if it did not dissemble in empty chatterings.

The road, a living silver snake, stretched and curled itself amorously, seeking individual favor in the eye of the all-embracing moon.

To Beatrice, accustomed to an acceleration of feeling at night, the surroundings made their first appeal. She did not feel afraid—why? She had not the usual mad desire, bred of day-glare, to seek safety in noise and excitement.

The crickets and tree-frogs shrilly twanged their monotonous inanities. She found herself mentally leaning on, and almost breathing with, their meaningless repetitions. Far beyond, brimming the horizon, like tops of fairer continents over the earth rim, the Catskills felt their way creepingly into the concentrated eye. Beatrice wished, for the first time in years, that she might be different—wondered what she might have been, had she had the country before, not after, it was too late.

How she had hated it all!—those superior mountains, that gossiping little brook, that cruelly smiling road. Now that she looked on them all with the eye of farewell, she saw them

in their reality,—great, beautiful, friendly. She saw them more nearly as they were than any of those who had spent their blind lives on the road. She would look back on this night in after years and laugh—the night when she had for a few minutes felt “as a little child.”

Long she stood, her thoughts not consecutive. She became a mere pulsating mosaic of the night, one with the distant, incessant, baying of the hound.

The watcher called her to assist in rousing Bert for the medicine.

Beatrice was wrenched from the universal back to the personal. She re-entered the humid, sad-odored room—the room that had been their parlor. It was now converted into a hospital ward. Locke called her name from the dim distances of mental wanderings; a temporary flood of remorse surcharged her as she stooped, lifting him in her arms. She lured and cajoled him to swallow.

Locke had given her his honest boyish love; he remained true even in his unconsciousness. She could not comprehend loyalty, therefore she admired and revered it the more. He wouldn't know he had lost her, she argued inwardly, he might even die believing in her; she didn't want to see death; she couldn't endure watching pain; this was her chance.

She laid him down gently; she rested her head beside his shaven, bandaged one, whispering God

knows what contrite excuse in his hearingless ear. Passing her hand—her pretty, unspoiled, useless hand, over his eyes, she drew the soft fingers down his features as the blind do to impress the outlines on memory.

Then she rose with a little shiver, turning from him without one look. Out in the kitchen she sought a pencil, turned up the light, and scrawled in very slanting hand a few staccato lines. Folding it without rereading she slipped it into an envelope and addressed: "Lady Trevelyan"—a smile over the "Lady."

Carrying the lamp into the bedroom that had been hers and Bert's, she held it aloft, taking a last inventory of all its cheap, familiar accessories. It flashed on the unmade bed, the still head-indented pillows; it flooded the opened closet door, revealing Bert's oil-stiffened overalls hanging beside her tawdry old pink silk wrapper; it shone on his great soil-heavy shoes, gawkily standing beside her misshapen, high-heeled, frivolous slippers. It was all so ugly, so sordid—why did she yearn toward it, at this, the end? With a rippling shrug she took down the fruit-laden hat, pinning it on without a glance in the mirror, blew out the lamp, and felt her way back to the kitchen, which in a moment grew unfamiliar.

Her hand could grasp no intimate object; the shapes of things had queer and unknown contour. She groped her way, a stranger. A deadly fright



seized her feet; they avoided a step that might sink to a bottomless mystery. Frigid perspiration drenched her panic-stricken body; her fluttering hands wept.

The home had disowned her—it knew her not.

Suddenly a greater fear of the unseen behind her impelled her to flee forward; round and round she circled as noiseless of foot and swift as a cat. She was as one lost in a nightmare; her eyes tightly closed, she repeatedly passed the door of her bedroom flooded with moonlight. Exhausted with terror, her stuttering footsteps stumbled suddenly over a sill; she recognized it as the door.

Not daring to open her eyes, whimpering weakly, she crawled on hands and knees toward the felt direction of the window. With a feline leap she cleared it, falling to the little flower bed below—the bed Libby had planted. The crushed flowers pillowed her fall. With hysterical laughter and tears of relief Beatrice sped up the silver road as one pursued—not a look back, scarcely a look forward.

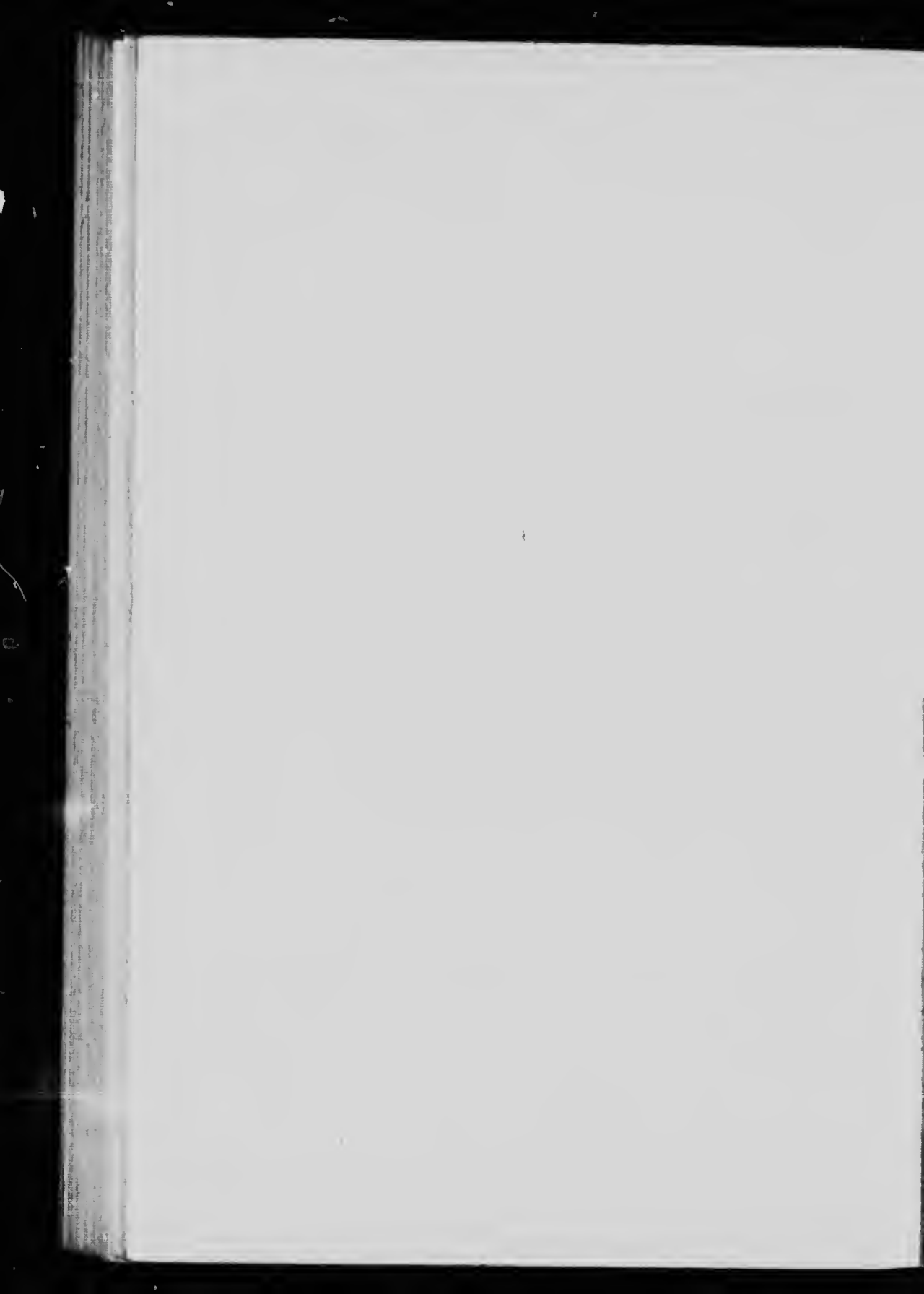
Turning the bend at the top of the hill she came within the immediate radius of the hound's lament. She paused, breathing aloud: "Poor fool! why doesn't he snap his chain?"

The hound, sitting with head lifted, making no effort for liberty, implored assistance from the heedless, flitting moon. Creature of impulse, Beatrice swept within the Silvers' gate. Avoiding the



"Now, fool, you too are free."

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clattering stones she ran across the garden, crushing lettuce and beans, and pushed through the sibilant corn.

Pouncing upon the hound, absorbed in voicing sorrow, she with one deft touch loosened his fetters almost before he realized her presence. Her other hand gripping his collar she quickly made her way back to the gate, quieting him with repetitions of soft dog-language. Once in the road she loosened her hold.

“ Now, fool, you too are free.”

The hound looked vaguely at his liberator without menace or gratitude. He gazed long and wonderingly at her form until it vanished by the marsh. He stared helplessly up the unfamiliar road. He stared down the moon-bleached hill. His tail puzzled, then quivering, drooped between his haunches. Dejectedly he sped within the Silver gate, down the stone walk, through the garden, back toward the woodhouse.

Nosing his loosened fetters worriedly, imploringly, he sat down beside his dragging chain. Fixing his melancholy eyes reproachfully on the face of the moon he bewailed his fate to his friend the mountain—the mountain that alone echoed a sympathy and comprehension.

## XV

LIBBY had voluntarily taken the position of day nurse, only relinquishing her patient to the care of the shifting lodge members when bedtime drove her home.

When occasion necessitated, Libby could be as lying as statistics.

Fortunately, she felt the distinction between the lie that is told to injure or maliciously deceive, and the disguising of truth for the comfort of another. Since that morning when she had found the note on the kitchen table, Libby had lied ceaselessly and gloatingly.

Beatrice had written: "I've gone away. If Bert is going to die, don't tell him. If he lives, wait till he's well. Lying won't hurt you, as you know. If I get sorry, tell Bert maybe I'll come back on the Powell some night. But not to count on me. Forget me. I ain't worth fretting over. Sorry to look like a quitter."

To the neighbors Libby declared Beatrice to have been called home by a dying mother, which lightened but little the criticism on a wife deserting a possibly dying husband. It fooled but few.

When Bert groped his way back to consciousness his first mental reach was for Beatrice.

Libby assured him Beatrice, too, was ill and unable to come to him. He then quickly insisted that Lady Trevelyan should hurry to the other bedside.

Libby, laden with rugged messages of affectionate solicitude, was forced to retire to the supposed presence of Beatrice. After standing, staring out on the hot fields, seeing nothing, and fighting back silly lumps which would form in her throat, Libby tried to imagine what she would say under like conditions to Reginald, and carried that back to Bert.

"It's just fretting over me's made her sick," Bert declared. "You wouldn't think it," he added shyly, "but Beatrice is mighty tender-hearted. It scares her to see a fly suffer."

"Yes, she's sure tender-hearted," Libby echoed as she tidied up the room.

"Does she suffer much pain?" Bert knew his Beatrice's horror of pain.

"No, she just seems too weak to move much. I think it acts like malaria," Libby diagnosed.

"Does she have chills?" Bert craved symptoms.

"Yes, right smart chilly," Libby romanced as she straightened the bedclothes.

"My mother's patch-quilts is kept in the bottom drawer in our room," Bert suggested.

"I've found 'em," said Libby, "she's got two on her now."

"Gosh! and it's July, ain't it?" Bert

impressed. He could scarcely bear the sheet covering him. His interest in every phase of Beatrice's symptoms took his attention off his own. Never did sick man complain less.

Toward evening of one very sultry day his fever grew alarmingly. His mind tossed on the waves of heat and he talked of, and to, Beatrice unceasingly.

"Beatrice, honey, just as soon as I get well I'll make it all right. A man hadn't ought to test a woman," he moaned.

Libby had listened often to these self-reproaches; she had learned many things when Bert talked in delirium.

"I didn't have enough faith—that's it," he sighed.

The whistle of the shipyard just then cleft the air; it sounded its half-past five shriek of release. Its tone pierced even the walls of unconsciousness. Its relentless command over mind and body still exerted its power.

Locke thought it the seven o'clock summons of morning, and he believed himself late. Before Libby could move he leaped out of bed to answer the whistle. With unseeing eyes he made straight for the bedroom. Going to the closet he grasped the stiffened overalls, struggling to put on the uniform of obedience.

Terrified and impotent, Libby strove in vain to guide him back to bed.

"It isn't morning, Bert, it's evening; it's time

to rest—time to go to bed; ” she tried to penetrate the barrier of fever, to master the language of its delusions.

“ Here’s Beatrice in this bed waiting for you,” she cried in desperation. “ Won’t you lie down beside her? She’s sick, you know—mustn’t be worried.”

Gently she led the tottering form to the long unused bed; sneakingly she drew off the overalls; tenderly she pushed him down. With a sigh of exhaustion he closed his eyes, holding tight to Libby’s hand, thinking it that of Beatrice.

“ Darlin’——” he whispered.

The natural setback resulting from the automatic action of trained body to whistle, happily postponed a too sudden realization of the truth. It was not for many days that Locke even realized he was in his old bedroom. Assured by the doctor of the patient’s safe embarkment toward recovery, Libby, at the end of her rope of subterfuge, answered his first look of inquiry by handing him Beatrice’s note.

Fortified with set phrases for surprise, incredulity, with words of linsey-woolsey for daily use in endless discussion of the trivial, these people have no verbal artillery with which to meet real tragedy. Therefore, they play the rôle even as our greatest actors, guided by astute playwrights—they remain silent.

For Libby it was as if some great obstacle in



her life had been dynamited. The atmosphere was cleared of Beatrice. The shattered condition of Locke's sensibilities scarcely disturbed her, pendulum though her sympathies naturally were. Her long disguise of truth was not referred to by Bert. His shock was unnoticed in words by her.

Instead of throwing him back into a fever he was sped on to recovery. An agony of impatience seized him to make ready for her possible return. He must regain health and strength.

The weeks of nursing had not been all mere nursing. Libby had unearthed a wealth of dirt and disorder in the house unbelievable to exist later than the original state of chaos. And the pursuit and routing of dirt constitutes the most absorbing battle of such feminine lives. To evolve cleanliness and precision out of the pandemonium left by Beatrice was the Bunker Hill of Libby's life.

The weeks had been ones of alternate anxiety and bliss. She had never before had a man to "do" for. Reginald had been as evanescent as a cloud, as phantom as a poppy, as extraneous as the ether.

He had never condescended to illness. So she had not known the delicious sense of attending, soothing, waiting on, mothering a man. She had had so little in common with Reginald, except tawdry youth. There were few things they could discuss equally. He could say and do, she could only wonder and admire.

With Bert, soil of the same earth, she mingled chemically and harmoniously. Neither was superior. With Beatrice erased, Libby came into her full estate. She reminisced of Reginald while brewing dainty concoctions for Bert. Bert spoke tenderly of a present—not departed—Beatrice with an ever-defending admiration of imaginary qualities, while taking in with masculine appreciation the sweet odored cleanliness of the house.

Libby jealously met and dismissed all feminine inquirers at the back door, preciously guarding her one opportunity for individual supremacy. Bert fretted for health, yet basked in the sun of a tender care such as he had never before experienced.

Libby found herself revealing the foolish secret make-believes of her inner life to Bert. Bert confessed to her a love of the soil, his yearning to be a farmer. He told how the spring got into his blood each year, almost maddening him as he mechanically continued building canal boats. He had been ashamed of these feelings when with Beatrice.

Libby begged, even confiscated, vegetables from her grandfather's garden to fetch Bert. He ate, thrived, and voiced his plan to some day have a truck and fruit farm of his own. Libby, temporarily forgetting it was to be shared with the returned and reconstructed Beatrice, broke in with:

“ Yes, and I'll raise flowers on all the part you don't need for vegetables.”

“ And we’ll have cows and horses,” Bert hastened to add, not noting the incongruity of things.

“ And sheep,” Libby begged.

“ And pigs,” Bert was almost flushed with the delightful vision. “ Beatrice loves bacon.”

“ Yes, and Reginald painted ’em once just as natural as life.”

Before they realized it they had pencil and paper, and Libby was sitting beside him on the bed, snatching the stub from his hand one minute, only to have to release it the next.

Bert drew “ Beatrice’s own room.”

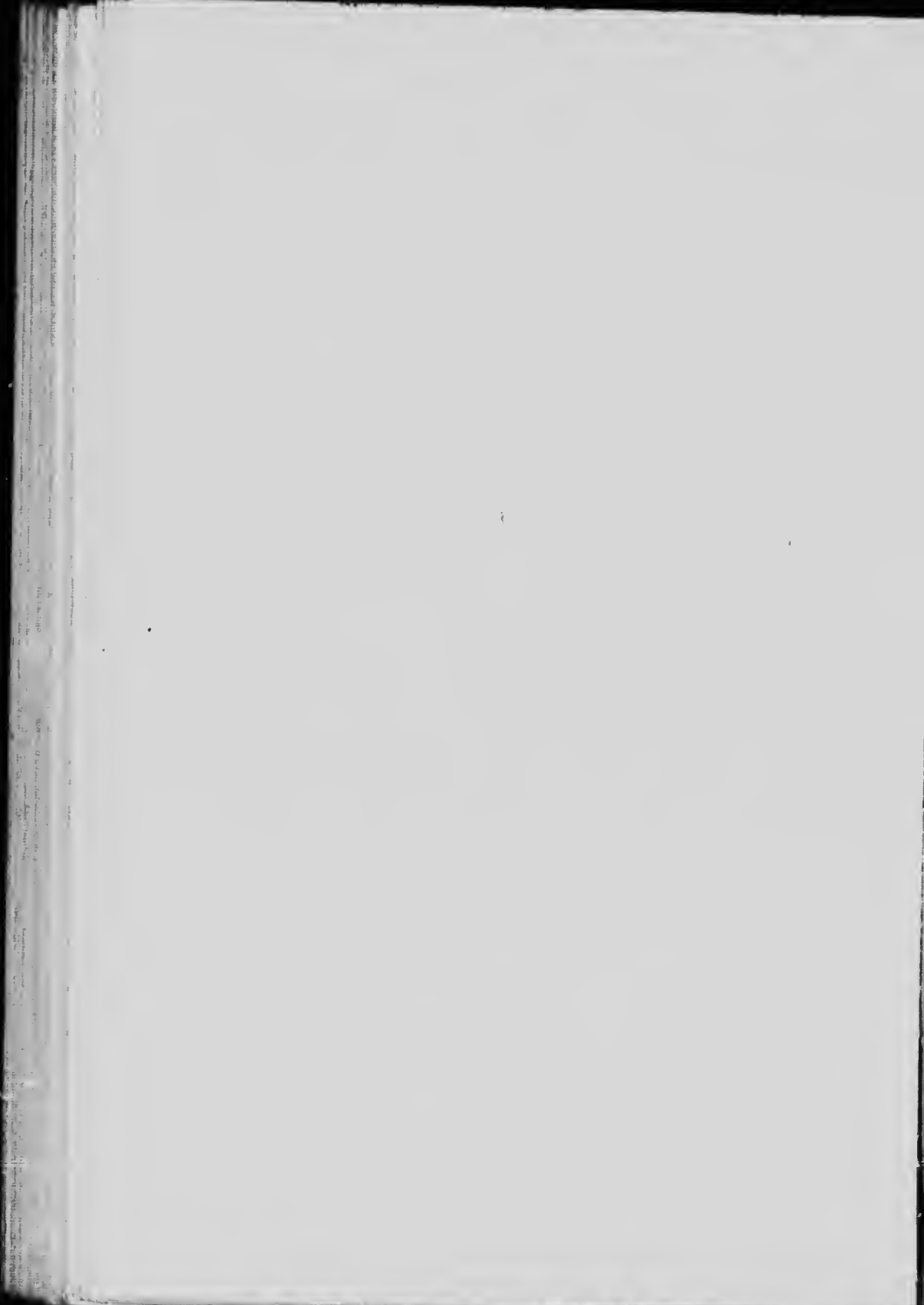
Libby pressed the lead down upon an imaginary hill adjacent to the house and “ Reginald’s studio ” shaped itself crookedly.

So the doctor found them. He smiled quizzically as he felt the patient’s pulse. “ Well, I guess he won’t be needing a nurse much longer at this rate, Lady Trevelyan; I think you’ll be free in about a week.”

Libby did not answer. With the plan crumpled in her hand she quickly left the room. With tightened lips she put the complex drawing of intermingled dreams and ideals into the kitchen stove.



Poor hay this year.



## XVI

ONE day late in August when the drought had brought the grass of Grandpa Tucker's small hay-field to premature sereness, the old patriarch, armed with ponderous scythe, swung and swayed on his pivot waist in that most trying of all physical labor.

Down before his blade fell vagrant golden-rod heavy with pluming buds. Down fell the procrastinating daisies, giving one last wide-eyed stare of supplication to their god, the sun.

The Queen Anne Lace parasols tilting and coquetting were suddenly folded by the relentless scythe. Wild asters burred with buds nestled down to die beside the despised butter and eggs, while under and over all was the thatch of grass.

"Poor hay this year," the old man panted. "Dang them daisies," he gasped between giant swoops of blade. "Nawthin' but weeds these days."

He was right; that which makes beauty and poems for the dreamer makes but poor food for cattle.

Unseen by the old man, immediately behind him, swung another scythe, soundlessly keeping time with his own.

The shadow of a sable wing rested over him—the old man thought the sun had passed under a cloud.

The scythe grew heavier and heavier, fast as the patriarch might sway and swing, the Great Reaper was overtaking him.

In the democracy of death, Queen Anne's Lace, golden-rod, aster, daisy, and man lay side by side, prone on the unfastidious bosom of the maternal earth.

## XVII

"IT looks like rain, Libby," Grandma Tucker prognosticated from her seat by the window, as dark curtains of September mist were drawn across the distant heights of the Catskills. "Hadn't you better go to the cemetery and fetch the sheaf of wheat off Abram's grave?"

"Maybe I better; it do look lowering," Libby reported after a glance to the west.

"The rain would spoil it," said Granny, "and 'tain't no use being wasteful—Abram would be the first to say it, and we could use that sheaf fer me, when I goes."

"That's so," Libby agreed, seeing no use in being shocked by the natural if somewhat grewsome economy.

"In the meantime it'll do just as much good right on the wall over there." Granny looked over toward the silver coffin plate, mounted on black cloth elaborately framed in glistening newness. It was placed where she could lift her eyes from her sewing to frequently read:

"Abram Tucker, 89 years and 10 months."

The afternoon was waning and the mistiness of sky lent an impressionalism of indistinct outline to even familiar things—an effect precious to the artist's eye but depressing to the masses.



Along the roadside a violet cloud of asters lay like a shadowy fog. The yellow fire of the golden-rod, burning more intensely in the dimness of general tone, seemed to have flared upward, igniting maple, birch, and poplar, in whose leaves one for the first time noted incipient flame.

The marsh was now a great stretch of purple fire-weed. As Libby made the bend by its sluggish waters she came in sight of the slowly walking Locke. With intuition she recalled that this was the last day of the *Mary Powell's* summer run. With a quick sympathy she realized the tolling of hope in Locke's heart as he made this, his last, tryst with Beatrice. Her heart had ached as she had watched his faithful, futile trips down to the waterside each evening during the past month.

Exercising the proprietorship of an ex-nurse, she greeted him with inquiries and admonishings as to health, and shyly suggested that she and Granny were rather lonely now that Grandpa had gone, and why didn't he drop in now and then to cheer them up a bit.

"Do you know, Bert, we're kind o' cousins anyway?" She was glad to give the desired continued intimacy the chaperonage of a past intermingling of blood.

"Is that so?" he inquired in surprise. "How do you reckon it?" Bert was not indisposed to relationship with his nurse.

"Grandma's got a great memcry for such

things, and she was a-saying only the other day as how your mother's brother were the second husband of grandpa's aunt Josephine's daughter."

"Go on! Is that so? Well, I never! So we're cousins or something or other. I ain't sorry, are you, Libby?" Locke eyed her lonesomely, adding: "I'm related to most everybody in the whole country, but I'd rather be your kin than most any other's."

It was the nearest thing to a compliment he had ever paid her.

"Git out!" she laughed deprecatingly with nervous elation.

"It do take funerals to bring out relations, don't it, Libby? Now, I never knew Grandpa Tucker had so many kin folks till he up and died. Seems like most everybody in the country was related enough to ride."

"Yes, he sure had a fine showing in his procession," Libby acknowledged with pride.

Almost all the inhabitants of the road were related, except Mrs. Fay, who, as she expressed it, moved from "Europe" too late to get caught in the general mix-up.

Mr. and Mrs. Northern were first cousins. John Northern and Manda Stone's parents had been related in some weird way. Manda Stone was a grandniece of Mrs. Silver. Mr. Silver was hazily related to Mr. Stone. Bert Locke was indiscriminately connected with them all.

Royalty itself could not boast of greater inter-marriage than these families on the road, and in fact all families of the adjacent village, nor probably could the European potentates have supplied more brilliant essays on the results to be achieved by interfusion of the same blood generation after generation.

However, in the case of Bert and Libby, blessed be Aunt Josephine's daughter's second husband! She supplied the balm which now soothed Bert's deserted heart.

"I might even call you 'Cousin Libby' if I wanted to." He longed to voice the connection, thereby establishing it in sound.

"Yes, you could," she assured him, "and it's what I was hoping," she added with an unusual color.

At the village post-office their roads parted. Libby then made the one reference to the cause of his journey in a quick, nervous, "Good luck to you, Cousin Bert."

He did not answer, but his eyes thanked her.

When she reached the cemetery the first figure she noticed was that of Mr. Silver. He was happily employed in his Saturday labor, pushing the lawn mower with insolent strength over the long-cheated sod of his plot.

His satisfaction was augmented by many exultant glances over toward the Tucker lot. There the green had been so recently cleft that it still

seemed to bleed from the red wound in its upturned earth.

Libby, having rescued the sheath, consented to wait until Mr. Silver "trimmed his edges."

Together they returned home, Libby holding the wheat carefully, the old man pushing his lawn mower sturdily before him, to the sound of an invisible drum.

Staggering rapidly behind came Stone's idiotic Simon. In gurgles and sputterings of speech he told of having been all day at the butcher's; it was slaughtering day.

"Whack! Whack!" he shrieked, gesticulating at his throat. "Whack! and the blood just squirted. *Gee-ee!*" his voice trailed and quivered in the ecstasy of memory. Stumbling past them he reeled ahead; drawing out his fife he piped a rippling elegy of glee on the memory of the calf. He whirled past the laborers returning from the shipyards—husbands plodding homeward, silent and soddenly weary.

When Libby Trevelyan and Mr. Silver made the bend of the road by the purple marsh they met the Italians—songfully happy, apparently care-free. With an aster behind one ear and a sprig of golden-rod behind the other, a fair Sicilian, showing unmistakable traces of the Greek, swung jauntily along, dreaming of the wondrous cart he could buy with his many saved American dollars when he returned to his own sunny land. What great event or episode should he commemo-

rate on his cart? Should he have the painter depict in glowing tints the incident of the Athenian captive at the Syracuse mines, who was snatched from chains and laden with distinctions because of his timely quotation from the beloved poet Euripides? He discussed it in musical Sicilian with a comrade. The other, a swarthy youth of an ancestry dating perhaps to an early invasion of the Moors, suggested that his friend should signalize the sacrifice of the child to Saturn—the propitiation of Neptune by Himilicon. Another spoke of his favorite theme—the rape of Europa. The future owner of the cart could not decide; he should discuss it on his return with his uncle, the public story-teller—"the contastorie"—of Prizzi. Yes, he should abide by his uncle's ancient opinion.

Lagging behind the others, seeking privacy for his mood, came one of a sad, homesick eye. His song in trailing minor diffused itself strangely through the pines of this alien land. He saw not the pines, nor his comrades; he was singing to a wife, patiently awaiting his return in the village of Resuttano, deep in the mountain fastnesses of his far-off island home.

Libby, more impressionable than most of her kind, nodded to the Italian's greeting, saying in low tones to Mr. Silver: "It's hard to believe them Italy men are so wicked."

"I don't trust 'em," the old soldier sniffed, as he cast an eye suspiciously behind. "Stick a

knife in you if you turn your back. I don't see what the Government's thinking on letting all them niggers in. They're taking all the jobs from honest white men. They're a good-for-nothing lazy nation—the I-talians."

"Well, I kind o' feels sorry for 'em." Libby clung to an impression. "They deserves a lot of credit for being so cheerful, when they's only heathens."

## XVIII

FEELING as if everyone looked upon his tense, pale face with sneer or pity, Locke slunk his way along the dock, pausing at last in the shadows of a warehouse. From here he could see the *Powell* when she reached the wharf and all who disembarked from her.

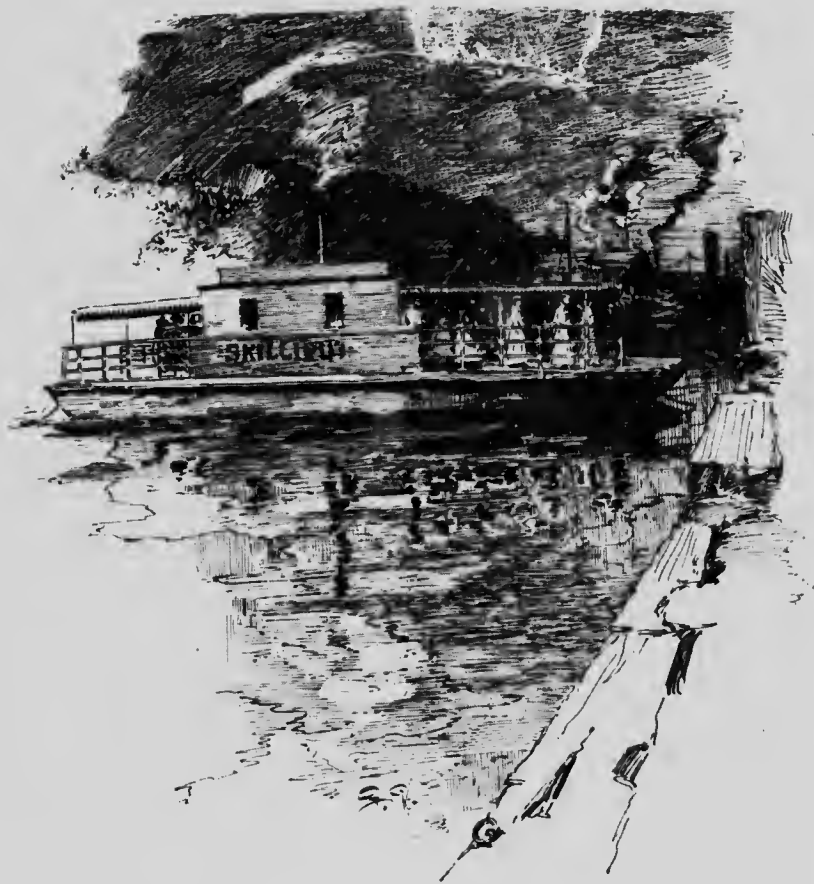
He had become a familiar figure to the long-shoremen and dock loiterers during these past weeks.

From his hidden corner he could hear the careless chatter of the occupants of a few petulant automobiles. Fussy busses from uptown hotels backed noisily up to the wharf.

Gayly beribboned children, hopping first on one foot, then the other, danced perilously near the edge of the dock as they restlessly awaited the return of a parent. Bert kept a protective eye on them while nurses flirted with bus-drivers.

Street urchins in bathing tights mounted the tall piles along the shore, poised a moment, then cut the dusk like falling meteors, down into the sullen brown water.

Back and forth on its chain plodded the tortoise-shaped "skilliput" ferry. It had held to



It had held to its beaten track for two centuries, through  
the Rondout creek.

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its beaten track for two centuries, through the Rondout creek, ignorant of, and unambitious for, the sea.

A deep-throated tone of salutation from the breakwater announced the *Mary Powell's* entrance to the creek. Bert thrilled miserably. He staked so much on this evening. All these weeks he had taken his nightly disappointment philosophically, but his fatalism told him if Beatrice failed to return on this last summer trip of the boat it meant he had lost her forever.

The great white hulk nestled to the wharf; ropes were thrown out, gang-planks were creaking.

Nervously he filled his pipe, then pressed a hand over the sensitive spot so recently healed. It throbbed violently.

The passengers were disembarking now. Gay returners from the metropolis; sun-tanned revelers from the seashore. Banter and greetings sounded on all sides. Automobiles fitfully coughed up breath for a start. Children were snatched to maternal bosoms. Buses creaked with important salesmen.

Locke's eye riveted with gimlet piercingness on each face as it passed over the gang-plank. Suddenly he was seized with a palsy of hope. In the background of the crowd, just pressing through the maw of the ship, was a fruit-covered hat. His eyes fastened with burning fascination on its Beatrice-like gayety. It wriggled through the

crowd, connecting itself with a body as it reached the plank.

Forgetting his indisposition to be seen, forgetting his fellow-creatures—everything, he pushed, fought his way toward the figure. The fruit-laden hat came ashore. "Beatrice," he cried, stretching forth hungry hands, just as the unknown wearing it was grabbed to the arms of a great, hulking teamster.

Harried and shoved about, Locke crept out of the way of the rattling trunks now being rushed ashore. With their first rumbling passage he knew his vigil to be at an end. All passengers were on land.

Dazed and sick with despair, unable to accept finality, he stood staring vacantly for a long time.

Suddenly he shook himself and made his way toward the corner saloon. No, he would not have it there; he didn't care to joke or talk with his fellow-men; laughter hurt his head; he would have the stuff in a flask.

Like one in a dream he stepped aboard the old chain ferry. Like a somnambulist he climbed the steep hill on the other shore. Slowly, like a blind old man, he threaded his way uncertainly through the familiar village, making for the outskirts and the little winding road.

The rain falling hesitatingly heretofore, now fell emphatically, but Locke heeded it not.

Reaching the foot of the hill he climbed to his

door, groped for the keyhole, and entered his silent, empty home.

There were no sounds but those of water—brook and rain.

With what foolish tenderness had he spent the day straightening and cleaning the house. He laughed mirthlessly as he put the match to the lamp.

Holding it up, as Beatrice had once done, he took a bitter inventory of the room. His eye fell on the table. He laughed long and terribly as he noted the extra plate set beside his own. He had tried to bribe the fates, with his certainty. The lamp shone through the open door of the bedroom upon the pink silk wrapper which he had laid over the bottom of the bed, ready for Beatrice after her tiresome trip. The sight of it brought the climax to irony.

A sudden revulsion of feeling enveloped him as a vision—the vision of himself as a fool. Every emotion ever entertained for Beatrice was violently reversed. A flame of excoriating fury, searing the very channels that had held thoughts of her, raged through his being.

“Dam’ her!” he snarled, filling a glass half full from the flask in his pocket.

## XIX

POSTED on telegraph poles along the road, and through the near village, announcements of the sale of Bert Locke's household properties flapped in the breeze.

The first dalliance with debt had begun during Beatrice's insistence that she should not be left alone—alone with the mountains. The expenses of his illness were not altogether covered by the "sick annuity" he drew from his lodge. Subsequent loss of time from work during his convalescence aggravated money matters.

The first move of a furniture firm, from whom he had gotten some of his furnishing on the installment plan, had been a signal to all his other creditors to pounce fast and relentlessly.

Libby, knowing how critically the auction crowd of women would peer into every cranny of the house, went down to Locke's to make things clean, as well as to assist him in sorting out his wares.

As she helped in the disorganization of Bert's home she could not but reflect on the imaginary home he and she had built on paper. In recalling the plan it was an expurgated edition; the studio on the hill for Reginald became vague to nothingness; the special room for Beatrice was not there.

In cleaning up, Libby lingered long over the drawer full of wonderful, many-colored, intricately-designed patch-quilts.

"You don't have to sell your mother's quilts, do you, Bert?"

"Yes, everything goes. No picking and choosing. I'll never need them no more nohow," he added colorlessly.

Libby determined inwardly to buy them if they didn't go too high.

"Run out in the yard and get your garden tools into one batch, Bert," she commanded to get him out of the way. No sooner had he left than she ran to the closet, snatched down the pink wrapper, gathered up some slippers from underneath, grabbed a discarded hat of Beatrice's, and tumbled forth the contents of the upper bureau drawer.

"Men don't think of such things," she defended Bert, as she hastily made the assortment into a bundle. "I ain't going to have all them women clawing over and whispering 'bout them things. They wouldn't bring nawthin' nohow. Granny can use some of 'em for carpet rags. The rest I'll burn. How'd I feel if I was dead and folks giggled and fingered my royal purple at a sale?"

She threw her coat over the bundle and was carelessly arranging pots and pans into alluring groups when Locke returned to the kitchen.

"Where you going to live now, Cousin Bert?"

Libby asked, her back turned as she placed the gramophone in the place of honor.

“ I ain’t thought on it,” he replied abstractedly as he wearily sat down by the stove. The stove shone dazzlingly from the valedictory polish recently administered by Libby.

“ Had you thought on boarding somewhere? ” Libby decided the volume entitled “ Dewey, Our National Hero,” was a fit associate for the gramophone.

“ I ain’t thought on nawthin’.” Bert smoked on gloomily.

“ Granny’s been thinking ’bout advertising for a man to board with her—seems so lonesome-like without no man around.”

Libby placed the picture called “ Pharaoh’s Horses ” in prominent proximity to the gramophone.

Bert was enveloped in a fog of smoke.

“ There’s a real nice, sunny bedroom going to waste upstairs at Granny’s.”

She fastidiously selected a shaving mug with “ Think of Me ” inscribed upon it to sit beside a mustache cup which implored the drinker to “ Love the Giver.”

“ Granny’s talking ’bout asking three dollars a week for board and lodging,” she carelessly continued, as she took from the wall a remark on the Creator worked in worsted.

Suddenly two arms were about her; she felt a quick, tobacco-laden breath on her cheek, and—

no, it could not be—yes, it was—Bert had kissed her.

Libby's arid lips grew more blue, then a sudden rush of blood flooded them, spreading to her hair. Her eyes were dimmed by a glistening moisture.

Bert stood behind her, abashed, ashamed.

Her womanly tact grasped the gratitude, the sudden unthinking impulse of the man at a loss for words—in need of expression, action. She turned, spanning the awkwardness of the gulf by intuition. Taking his hand naturally and without embarrassment, she said in a perfectly steady voice:

“Thank you for consenting, Bert. Granny'll be glad. You'll come to us to-night. Haven't we got the best right to you—ain't I—er—your cousin?”

“Lord!” Bert laughed. “I'd clean forgot Aunt Josephine!”



## XX

GRANNY TUCKER seldom fretted over her age.

Hers was the peace bred of a vista back through useful years; the contentment in sitting still, born of stiffened knees and wearied muscles. A window from which she could look out upon the passing and labor of others, the easy, dreamy stitching of carpet rags, were ordinarily quite enough to satisfy her serene spirit.

But to-day she fretted; she was really impatient of her infirmities.

She had even started to suggest to Libby once or twice during the morning that she thought she might be able to attend the auction. But Libby was so preoccupied plunging through the morning's work, she neglected to notice that Grandma Tucker was still resident on this earth.

In every other household on the road the same abnormal excitement held sway.

Harry, Ruby, and Bob Northern had all been roundly slapped—yes, slapped repeatedly by the irascible mother who was trying to compress a whole day's work into an hour and a half.

John, of course, had stayed at home to attend the auction, and being dressed up, he could do nothing but sit where he blocked the passage of

his wife. Nigger, the dog, developed new strategy for getting between the legs, when he was not standing petrified in mid-door, or tied in a Gordian knot pursuing a flea immediately before the kitchen stove.

Ruby, Bob, and Harry kept asking in different exasperating tones:

“What you goin’ to buy at the auction, ma?”

“Nawthin’!” snapped ma, as a half-dried plate crashed to the floor.

“Ain’t you goin’ to git that grammophone, pa?”

“I don’t know—O dam’!” said pa, cutting himself as he tried to trim the saw-tooth edge of his cuff.

“But you said you were,” Harry insisted.

“Yes, you did,” echoed Bob, while Ruby whimpered:

“You promised to git it, didn’t he, ma?”

“Git out of here, every one of you, you drive me plumb crazy,” shrieked Mrs. Northern as, with her apron, she shooed them out like chickens, slamming and locking the door on their whimperings.

“Pick that baby up off the floor, John Northern. My sakes, I’ve scrubbed and dressed him, and there he is playing in the coal scuttle.”

Without rising from his chair John mildly implored: “Come to father, babe.” Bribingly: “Father wants to show his little one something.” Interrogatively: “Didn’t you hear father calling

you, Jonathan? ” Culminatingly: “ If you don’t come here this minute I’ll lick the life out of you.”

While listening to Jonathan’s cries Mrs. Fay next door was enacting strange acrobatics as she struggled into a corset bought in slimmer days, and worn only on such occasions as weddings, wakes, and “ roups.”

In the next house Manda Stone was giving Violet a lesson in brewing.

“ Haven’t I told you I won’t have my tea boiled? ”

“ Yas’m.”

“ Haven’t I told you to put the water on to boil in the tin pot, put the tea in the brown teapot, then pour the boiling water over it? ”

“ Yas’m.”

“ Then tell me how I told you to do it.”

“ Well, now, you put the tea in the tin pot, put the water on it, set her on the stove, an’ let her bile.”

Mrs. Stone’s mouth writhed. She wished for a fleeting second that Violet was flesh of her flesh. Oh, to strike her—strike her hard.

“ You don’t do anything of the kind,” she foamed. “ If I have to tell you ag’in I’ll—I’ll make your mother beat you.”

Once more she shrieked directions at the quailing Violet, and once more Violet reiterated:

“ You put the tea in the water, set her on the stove, an’ let her bile.”

Mrs. Stone, walking up to her, using a finger to drive the words in, screamed:

“Put the tea in the teapot, put the water in the tin pot, let it boil, then pour the boiling water over the tea that’s in the teapot.”

Light dawned on Violet.

“But won’t she bu’st?”

Mrs. Stone almost struck her; fury glued the words in her throat.

“I should think she’d bu’st for fair,” persisted Violet.

“You ain’t hired to think. You ain’t worth five cents a week. *You shan’t go to the auction!*” It was the voice of doom to a week’s accumulation of hope in Violet’s breast. “Take this bucket and fetch me some water.” Mrs. Stone knew how to punish.

As Violet hunched, lugging the heavy pail from the well down the road, she sobbed aloud, whether over the lost auction or her aching back she did not know.

Across the road Mr. Silver was shaving with great military majesty and deliberation. His blue army coat, cleaned and brushed, lay over the back of a chair.

Mrs. Silver was trying to dress and keep an eye on the road at the same time, while she remorsed aloud:

“If I’d a-let Bert Locke have that hound Beatrice might have stayed to home.”

“Ain’t you through harping on that yet?”

drawled Mr. Silver, drawing down his ponderous upper lip to meet the razor.

“No, I ain’t, and I’ll feel guilty-like till the end of my days. I don’t see what good that dog does you nohow, Mr. Silver.”

“Don’t you?” provokingly queried Mr. Silver. “Women oughtn’t to strain their minds too hard.”

“Bert would ‘a’ paid fer him, too,” his wife persisted.

“Well, why didn’t you sell Smith if you’re so anxious to make money?” Mr. Silver sneered from the midst of a lather, which gave him the appearance of frothing at the mouth.

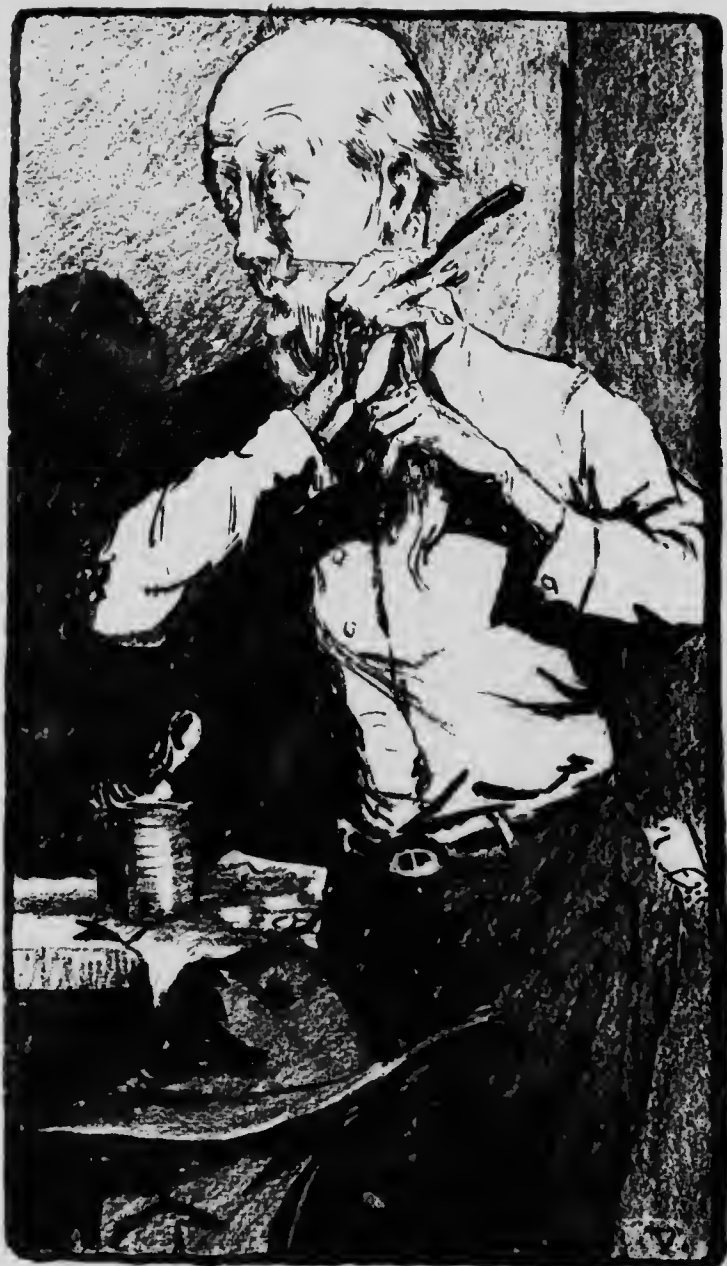
“It wasn’t the money, and you know it, Mr. Silver. I jes’ feels like it was me refusin’ that hound brought all Bert’s trouble on to him.”

“The woman wasn’t worth keepin’ nohow—good riddance. But if it makes you happy to have something to fuss at—fuss on,” Mr. Silver encouraged.

Mrs. Silver could have maintained serenity had she not at that moment stuck her finger on the pin in the remote middle of her back.

The hound, feeling the general excitement charging the air, kept up a quick staccato bark, which was answered by every dog within a mile.

Buggies were beginning to rattle past, bringing folks from over the mountain. Wagons filled with whole families rumbled down the hill. Vil-



"Ain't you through harping on that yet?" drawled  
Mr. Silver.

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lagers, dressed in their best, hurried by on foot, carrying purses ostentatiously.

Poor Granny! She couldn't sew, she couldn't sit still. Out to the porch she went for a larger view—back to the chair, to rest.

“ Libby,” she sighed at last, “ I guess I'll have to take my peppermint a leetle earlier to-day.”

But Libby did not hear; she was half-way down the hill, arrayed in the royal purple.



## XXI

ALL day long stragglers from the scene of battle made their way back up the hill, carrying their spoils home with them. The large majority, however, even after their monetary ammunition was spent, remained to see the finish.

Granny Tucker wiped her specks a hundred times in order to see more clearly what trophies the passers-by were carrying.

It was one of the longest days of her long life.

She met Libby at the gate on her return at five in the afternoon, and insisted on helping to carry a part of the load of patch-quilts—Libby's only purchases.

“Don't ask me a question, Granny, till I gets in the house. I never spent such a day in my life!” Libby fell with a thud in the kitchen rocker, loosening her royal purple as she heaved: “My Lord!”

She then sank into an exasperating, loaded silence that almost drove her grandmother to the point of screaming. Finally, the old lady exclaimed more sharply than was her custom:

“Can't you find your tongue, girl?”

“Well, to begin with——” started Libby. “I don't know where to start. Lands! so much done happened.”

“ Was there much of a crowd? ” asked Granny, pretending to have forgotten the throng she had watched going up and down the road.

“ Crowd! ” Libby was off. “ It were the biggest jam I ever did see. There wasn’t stuff enough to go round, and Mrs. Fay and the Northerns ain’t speaking, and Mandy Stone made a sight of herself bidding for a set of Bert’s mother’s old false teeth against a woman from back of the moun’tain, and as for John Northern—well, Granny, you’d never believe it! ”

Libby lapsed into another tense silence.

“ What’s the trouble’ tween the Northerns and Mrs. Fay? ” Poor Granny’s hands were fidgeting in her lap. Why didn’t Libby go on without having to be spurred?

“ Well, you see, ” she started, trying to marshal facts into line, “ Mrs. Fay had made up her mind to have Bert’s grammyphone, and John had promised Maria he’d sure get it for her, and Mrs. Fay she took her seat right by it, and kept her hand right on it like she owned it. And the auctioneer seemed to take pleasure in putting off auctioning that grammyphone, and Mrs. Fay missed all the things out in the back yard because she seemed to think if she got up and let go the grammyphone a minute she’d lose it, and she had set her heart on that wheelbarrow something awful.

“ ’Long towards half-past three, after ’most everything else had been put up, the auctioneer

called out, 'What is I offered for this elegant and soothing instrument?' and John Northern just recklessly started the ball by calling out 'twenty-five cents,' and Mrs. Fay raised him a cent, and he offered seventy-five, and she seventy-six, and there they kept it up for near onto a half hour, Mrs. Fay never going up more than a cent, and by that time 'most everybody else had spent all their cash and nobody bid against them. John got tired when they'd reached three dollars and one cent, and he up and cried out 'five dollars!'

"That nearly knocked the wind out of Mrs. Fay, and after she got it back enough to yell out her cent she began to boil, and she got so mad she jumped up and ran over to John Northern and shook her fist at him and threw up as how he'd shot a cat of hers five years ago, and she knowed he'd done it, and he said as how he hadn't, and Mrs. Fay said as how he had the worst children in the country, and John got so mad at that his face got purple, and he said they weren't, and he said it were a good thing Mrs. Fay's children hadn't lived to grow up if they took after her.

"My Lord! Granny, I never see a madder hornet than Mrs. Fay. She looked like a balloon about to bu'st. She gave one puff and made a rush at John Northern, and Granny you'll never believe it, *but*—John just suddenly seem to melt onto that floor, and then he began to squirm and jerk—my soul! if one of his fits didn't ketch him

right then and there!—right in the middle of Bert's parlor!

“The women all screamed and made for the door, and the children fell down and yelled, and the auctioneer and the men had to hold John down, he was flying about on that floor like a merry-go-round, and Mrs. Northern was crying and wailing and saying as how Mrs. Fay done killed her John, *and* Granny, there stood Ruby, Harry, Bob, and the baby, just grinning fit to kill at their pa's fit!

“Mrs. Fay went out in the backyard and was haranguing a crowd of some folks what took her part, and she was still there going off like an alarm clock, when John come to.

“The minute he opened his eyes he just seemed to know everything, and he raised up on one elbow and said just as quiet as if nawthin' had ever happened: ‘Six dollars.’

“Everybody was that flabbergasted they couldn't say nawthin', and the auctioneer, still down on his knees by John's side, just said: ‘Gone at six dollars!’”

## XXII

EARLY in the morning following the auction Mrs. Fay took her seat on the front porch crowning the heights of her terrace.

She did not read; she didn't know how to read.

She had not irresistibly gone outdoors because of the remarkable winsomeness of the day.

Her eyes did not even read the obituary of the season writ in letters of fire along the borders of the road.

She did not notice the first chickadee who, returning from his brushwood retreat of summer, now came dancing into the highroad gayer than an autumn leaf. He perched on her lilac, chirping his message of imperishable optimism; Mrs. Fay heard him not.

Neither did she notice the poplars jingling their bangles of gold in the abandon of dance to the music of wind; nor the partially denuded birches, shyly dipping their meager, spangled draperies to modestly hide their glistening white limbs.

It cannot be recorded that any of these noticed Mrs. Fay either.

Nature never converses with humans unsolicited. She is telepathically reciprocal. Blind to the unseeing. Dumb save in the presence of poets. Arrogantly insensate to the brutish. But those who

seek her with humble, adoring hearts, reverent eyes, ears attuned, are enveloped in her opened arms; permitted to surmise the mysteries; hear the music of the subliminal.

Mrs. Fay was sitting guard over her neighbors. She knew them. She knew Mrs. Stone's first desire would be to run over to talk to Mrs. Northern of the events of the day before. She knew Mrs. Northern yearned to hear sympathy expressed by Libby; even hoped Mrs. Silver might vouchsafe a visit of gossip.

Manda Stone had indeed hurried through her ironing in order to rush over to the Northern's, where all the delightful variations could be played on the theme of "She said," "He said," "They say." But scarcely had Manda gotten around the corner of her house before she felt, rather than saw, the battery of Mrs. Fay's eye leveled upon her. With one startled upward glance of verification she guiltily fell to weeding a neglected bed of starveling flowers.

Mrs. Northern, waiting in vain impatience for Libby's expected call, decided to go across the way with an offering of late beans. She had reached the steps of her terrace before she was brought up with a jerk. The revolving gun of Mrs. Fay's eye transfixed her. The beans were cooked for Harry's, Ruby's, and Bob's dinner.

Mrs. Silver was perishing to hear the aftermath of the auction from headquarters—the Northern

household, but after one outward glance she dared not brave the Hibernian artillery.

The four women, champing their bits, based mutual hopes on the natural hunger which must necessarily overtake Mrs. Fay at noon. Around twelve, eight eyes began reconnoitering for signs of the enemy's weakening. They only beheld Mrs. Fay reach into a capacious pocket filled with enough food-ammunition to withstand a siege.

Mrs. Fay munched her sandwiches and fruit with grim deliberation.

Never had there happened a more thwarted day on the road. Not one opportunity afforded to pick the bones of the day's before events; not a chance for utterance of the spiteful things seething for expression.

The men returning at night received the pent-up feminine vitriol.

John Northern placidly absorbed Maria's acidity—his victory still filled him with magnificent kindness. It also inspired him. In the gathering dusk after supper, without a word to the irascible Maria, he carried something in his arms to his front porch, placing it carefully upon a chair.

Suddenly the road sat up and took notice.

"The Wearing of the Green" pealed forth from the gramophone, flooding the twilight with defiant, mocking tones.

Mrs. Fay's ears twitched to the first blast. It was more than mortal—"European" mortal—

could bear. Derricking her stiffened limbs to upright position she lurched indoors, slamming and locking the door against the taunting notes of the lost treasure.

The Hibernian battery removed, the enemy charged the jade Gossip.



## XXIII

BERT LOCKE was cozily settled at Grandma Tucker's.

It was the inauguration of a new era of interest in the life of Lady Trevelyan. There was now a little flutter of expectation adjacent to the hour of six.

A man to look forward to as the closing chapter of a day lent a climax of recompense to even the dullest routine. Grandpa Tucker had early in married life worked out, in fact Granny had once described him as being "chuck full of day's works," but during the latter years, since Libby had made her orphaned home with her grandparents, Grandpa had devoted his entire time to the cultivation of his home soil. He had therefore added no piquancy to the evening by a return after the day's absence.

Libby now found an extra inspiration for devising new methods of disguising familiar food, in the hearty appetite Bert brought to bear on the evening meal. She thrilled under his praise of her good cooking to Mrs. Silver.

About five she now shed the nondescript things worn during the day and freshened herself generally. Her hair, of great length and thickness,

was no longer skinned back so tightly as to draw the corners of her eyebrows upward. Unconsciously she emulated Beatrice's looser, more fluffy fashion of coiffure.

What pleasant evenings they spent, she and Granny and Bert. Bert generally brought home a little news from the shipyard, and though not a great talker himself he provided themes on which she and Granny could improvise at length.

It was so comforting, thought Libby, to see him sitting in Grandpa's armchair smoking, and looking for all the world like a contented old tomcat.

Libby had made him carpet slippers, and as soon as he had washed his face and hands at the kitchen pump she held the slippers ready for him to slip on. His silent smile thanked her, sending a warm flush of pleasure to her heart.

On Sundays Bert helped with the dinner. He loved to cook, and to convince skeptical Granny he even made a pie entirely unassisted. This elevated him permanently to the ranks of the great. He often sawed wood for them at twilight, while Libby washed the dishes, and he even fetched water from the well—an unheard-of bit of masculine condescension.

Apparently purged of regret for Beatrice, he never referred to her in words or looks, settling down with the air of a man who had not only auctioned his past, but moreover had burned the bridges in front of him.

It is no wonder, then, when the postmistress handed the mail to Lady Trevelyan one October afternoon and she saw an envelope addressed to Bert in a very slanting hand that she felt the shock of one whose whole comfortable life-structure had been suddenly set swaying by an earthquake. She recognized the writing instantly. Before her rose the memory of a note. The letters of Locke's name wriggled before her eyes; they grew green, then red, then blurred unintelligibly. The very envelope seemed to parch the fingers.

Libby passed well-known villagers without seeing them, starting a rumor that Lady Trevelyan was either miffed or getting powerful high and mighty. She walked slowly, dragging her feet like a shackled convict. She felt a sudden sense of melancholy in the season, as the crisp air blown over the marsh sent a premature frost through her.

Bert came home in unusually good spirits. He had that day received a small raise in connection with a temporary transfer from canal boat building to making some repairs on the large Hudson river ferry. It meant a new scene of action, new associates, and the elation bred of even this small metamorphosis of monotony made itself evident in the brisk whistle of a popular tune. He washed up with vigor and violence, then turned about to reach for the slippers, which he now expected as a matter of course.

Libby was not there to offer them. She stood

by the window dully staring out on nothing, while the supper potatoes filled the air with a charred odor. Bert's animal spirits prevented his noticing Libby's preoccupation and lack of appetite during the meal. He chatted gayly about any and every thing, giving the commonest trivialities the glamor lent by happiness. Whistling low he contentedly sat by, enjoying his pipe while Libby silently washed the dishes.

When the lamp was lighted he even read aloud to her and Granny from a New York paper purchased on the ferry. As Libby stood by her window at bedtime, sadly listening to the wind's minor through the Æolian boughs of the almost stripped trees, her lips were compressed to a thin blue line. She drew the letter from her breast.

"I couldn't give it to him to-night when he's so happy." She shivered in the wind. "God knows I couldn't spoil it all."

She vaguely wished the wind would seize the letter, carrying it out of the world.

"No telling what Beatrice has written to make him miserable."

Deep in her heart she crushed the thought that perhaps the letter contained tidings of a return.

She could not sleep; chilled feet, hot head, caused her to toss and shiver. Everything took on the distorted shape lent by the over-visualizing night.

The eons of hours dragged on to hoary dawn.

At the first gray rift of light she moaned aloud in propitiation of the angel of sleep:

“ I promise to give it to him to-morrow.”

Relief of determination—weariness of the vanquished fighter, closed her eyes. She fell into a moaning, dream-harassed slumber.

## XXIV

THE next afternoon Bert turned in at the Tucker gate, a package under his arm.

Libby, with the letter ready for delivery in her apron-pocket, was arrested by the roguish expression of his eyes.

He put the package behind his back saying, "Guess."

Libby guessed everything from band-box to beehive.

Bert's enjoyment waxed hotter as she hit further and further from the bull's-eye, until he could postpone the greater delight of her reception of the surprise no longer.

He gravely handed it over. She had expected something of moderate weight, and when she took the package its unexpected heaviness carried it with a terrific bang to the floor.

"Whatever in the land can it be, Bert Locke?" Libby stood back in mock consternation. "It ain't no bomb, is it?"

Bert, digging his hands in his pockets like a boy, almost jiggled with delight. It was something he had heard Libby yearn for; his first surplus salary had gone for its purchase—wouldn't she be tickled!

Granny, attracted by the fearful thud, came hobbling into the kitchen, exclaiming: "I thought a cannon had went off. Whatever was that noise?"

Libby, unable to restrain curiosity longer, jerked the string off—there before her lay her heart's desire—waffle-irons!

"Well, Bert Locke, if you ain't the beatenest man!"

She rose from a close inspection of the treasure; arms akimbo, she looked ecstatically first at the irons, then at the donor.

Granny's toothless old mouth chuckled with equal pleasure.

"Can't you say thank you, Libby? Guess the girl's too plumb pleased to remember she's got no manners, Bert."

Bert and Libby swam in each other's eyes in comprehension of the vast unsaid.

"If them waffle-irons don't take me back." Granny was the only one who could talk. "I ain't had no waffles since Abram and me took our weddin' journey. It were to Phillydelphy we went. My stars! but that's the place for waffles. Waffles and catfish; that's what we had fer our first dinner together. It do take me back." She sighed for the Abram of sixty-five years gone.

Of course they would use them that very night. What did the other commonplace supper matter now? But it developed no one knew the receipt for waffles. What was to be done? Libby told

Granny to scald and scrub the irons, while she would run over to a neighbor's to hunt a receipt. Gracious! wasn't it heaven to tell Mrs. Northern she, Libby, owned a pair of real waffle-irons? Where was the gramophone now? Eclipsed utterly.

Of course Mrs. Northern had no receipt—Libby knew she wouldn't; neither had Mrs. Stone. But they both had ill-concealed envy, which was better than a receipt. Mrs. Silver proved to be the source of help. She found it in an old cook-book—there it was in black and white, only it did suggest the valuable addition of a little cold rice, and Libby was unprepared. The question of its omission was argued at length. Mr. Silver pronounced it to be his opinion that they would be lighter for the loss.

Libby called back a promise to bring them both a taste as she skipped girlishly through the fence.

Granny sifted flour, Libby beat the eggs, Bert fetched milk, baking powder, and salt, then hurried out to gather chips for the making of the hottest of hot fires. And how merrily they laughed over their awkwardness in flopping the irons, and O! there was Libby's finger burnt—no matter—hand over a little soda quick, Granny! and now Bert had a blister—but what did that matter?—keep the chips a-coming!

Granny, her eyes shining stars, happily munched with her gums the hot, crisp, buttery



waffles, recalling between every mouthful "Philadelphly" and a stalwart young Abram.

Bert, whistling, baked for Libby; Libby, a song under her breath, baked for Bert. Granny, who was resting, declared she was "ready to bu'st"—couldn't hold another if she was to "be hung."

Just as Libby songfully stooped to pick up some more chips to poke under the far lid the letter fell from her apron pocket to the floor. She gave a gasp. The song ceased in mid-note. Something whispered in her ear: "Rake it up with the chips, quick; put it in the stove, and it's all over."

She stooped, rose stiffly, caught her breath. A swift kick of the foot sent the letter far under the stove.

It was Bert's turn to bake for Libby. She declared she could eat no more; the waffles had lost their flavor; a weight, not of indigestion, bore down on Libby's breast.

Bert retired to bed early, declaring he "felt like a stuffed owl." He had just blown out the light and gotten in bed when Libby called softly at his door to know if she might come in. She had rescued the letter, and determined to hand it over now. She could not face another sleepless night.

"Why, Libby, what is it?" Bert raised on an elbow in anxiety. "You ain't sick, is you?"

"No, not exactly. I just come to——" Why did the words clog?—what paralyzed the hand

at her breast? It had all seemed so simple in her room, so much simpler than facing ghost hours, clanking their shackled feet through the black night. "I just come to—how's that burn you got, Bert?" She had let the moment slip—procrastination bound her tight in its white-hot chains.

"It hurts right smart," he acknowledged, flattered by her solicitude, realizing pain hitherto unnoticed.

"I—I come to see if I couldn't do it up in grease for you."

"Well, I don't care if you do."

A quick exit for rag and salve, then Libby sat tremblingly on the side of the bed just as she had in the old days of his illness.

The finger was held in the moon rays, an unsteady finger and moist. Bert sighed contentedly under the tender bandaging, regretting the lack of other blisters.

"I'm mighty happy over that waffle-iron, Bert." It was easier to voice gratitude alone with the donor in the moonlight. "You're the thoughtfulest man I ever knew." Her voice was scarce above a breath.

"More than——" he stopped before the unsayable name.

"Yes," Libby's mouth formed soundlessly.

Bert reached up the free arm. Libby felt its burning on her shoulder; she was drawn down to a rough, unshaven cheek, which grazed her

face, setting her blood to racing tumultuously down her spine in hot, then cold.

"I don't miss Beatrice no more, Lib," he whispered.

With a sob she was free—out of the room, face down on her own bed.

A hand at her thumping heart brought the accusing sound of the crinkle of a crushed undelivered letter.

## XXV

THE doctor's automobile stood in front of the Northerns'.

Harry, Ruby, Bob, and the youngest were pastured out in neighbors' yards.

John Northern, having hurriedly brought a nurse, hastily summoned the doctor, disposed of the children, now had time to realize how very badly he himself felt.

It was surely coming on—the Nameless, the Dreaded. He could not distract attention from, or bring worry to Maria, by having *it* right in the house while she was in the very midst of child-birth pangs.

John bore an old grudge against the Nameless, for inappropriateness of choice of visitation. The grudge dated from a maimed memory of his wedding day. It seemed a jealous thing—the Dreaded; why should it rush to claim attention, when another deserved it all—the mother of the expected child?

These thoughts jostled each other in John's ringing head as he stealthily tiptoed, a little unsteadily, through the kitchen out of the back door. His eyes had the fixity of mathematical calculation. On his clenched features was writ a sum

of time and distance. Consulting his symptoms he attempted to compute if the depths of the pines could be reached before the Nameless claimed its own. Symptoms urged acceleration. Stumbling, lunging, feet entangling in the gnarled eccentricities of rhododendron, the goaded body fought toward the great shadows of the silent wood. The bloodshot eyes implored a clear space; they found a spot made ready by a soft, thick mattress of fern.

Quietly the victim laid himself down to receive the visitation of the Dreaded. His mind surged outside the quiescent, resigned body.

"By the time it's over I guess Maria'll be through, too. Maybe I'll have another little son." His sentimentalism struggled for survival.

He lifted on one elbow to take note of surrounding trees, edging this way, then that, nestling to the center of the fern bed that he might not thrash against jagged pine trunks.

"Hope I don't hurt myself much. When Maria sees marks there's no foolin' her."

It was coming now, approaching with feet of thunder.

"Mustn't worry, Maria;" was he entreating the Dreaded? He tried to summon another thought. What was it? Something about a doctor. Why shouldn't Maria be worried? Who said anything about a little son? Somebody mentioned ether; they must be clamping the funnel over his mouth—or was it Maria's—or was it

his—or was it——? The Nameless had arrived. . . .

A thin, curious tone threaded the shadows—a Pan-like tone.

Wild things heard and answered.

Again it sounded—a far whispered reply of mountain. Then note became notes; tone grew, weaving itself into melody—weird, untutored thought in tone. But the melody held true, though it twisted and curled into erratic cadences. The melody soared, searching the tree-tops; it sank, ferreting brushwood; it jeered, imitating the wind till seized by wind it was carried off to the clouds.

Staggering through self-made paths, as devious as the labyrinthine melody, Stone's Simon came piping his roundelay.

With eyes half closed, nodding pate, his body swayed in idiotic rhapsody. On swirled the notes, as fretted as pine boughs in gale.

Suddenly the pipe screeched off key—screeched and stopped.

Simon's eyes, wide and colorless, fixed on the figure before him, which writhed first on face, then back. Simon's mouth twitched, too, grinning, loosening its hold on eclipsed life.

Slowly his feet regained motion, motion timed to the writhe. Faster the feet shifted, the mouth twisted uttering the guttural glee of a delighted monkey. Incessantly chattering, his feet fell to dancing in ever-narrowing circle about the figure.

He moved as one in an enchantment of obsessed joy.

Suddenly the white eyes fixed on red—blood stains where the man's teeth had just loosened hold on his arm. The blood danced before Simon's gaze. His chattering ceased for a yell of demoniacal rapture.

The vision of a calf displaced the man. He (Simon) grew to the butcher.

Out flashed a long knife.

“Whack, whack!” he shrieked. “Moo-oo-oo,” he moaned, as straight for the throat he aimed.

The man writhed more slowly, then only twitched, then lay quivering—motionless.

Simon, still grasping his knife, wielded it now as baton. The fife found his lips again; one hand fingered while the other beat bladed time for an exultant, triumphant march.

Feet staggering for steadiness, pate nodding to rhythm, Simon marched slowly in military directness back through the shadows of pine.

The sun set in greatest glory of copper and purple. Through the branches rays reached, covering the body with a mantle of splendor. A shy, nimble-footed rabbit slipped forth in the twilight, springing over the once human form fearlessly. They knew the unmenacing quality of death. Over John Northern's body in the dipping branches a chipmunk scampered calling to its mate.

Suddenly the rabbit hopped to cover; the chip-

munk sank to silence, diving within a knot-hole. It meant the approach of life and danger.

The old black dog had tracked his master. Sniffing him questioningly, he nosed John's quiescent body; he licked the stained hand, the unresisting, drawn face.

A sudden fear-fraught whinny and the tail drooped to mourning. The dog turned homeward—an impotent, loving, useless old dog, whimpering wordless appeals for human aid.



## XXVI

VIOLET was dandling the fretting baby Herod by the kitchen window when the martial strains of Simon's fife approached.

Manda Stone, taking in clothes off the line, looked carelessly at her staggering son, then fixed startled eyes upon him. The stiff garment dropped from her grasp; she made a rush for the boy, snatching something from his hand—a red-stained, damp something.

Violet only saw the quick movement of Mrs. Stone, and the look of terror upon the woman's face.

Manda came into the kitchen, one hand concealed beneath her apron. Oblivious of Violet's presence her eyes were fixed on tragedy.

She rushed upon the kitchen stove, fumbled the lids to lift as if deciding to put something under them, changed her mind, flew out in the yard, almost ran down to the back of the lot, only to turn about as soon as the fence was reached to rush back indoors. Violet heard her go into the front room, open a drawer, close it, open again, then the footsteps hurried into the hall. Now they were mounting the stairs.

Violet's curiosity thoroughly aroused, she laid

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The eye shifted rapidly, blinking to conquer the darkness.



Herod in the cradle, gagging him quickly with a sugar teat. Silently and stealthily the small feet crept the stairs. Mrs. Stone had pulled a ladder to the hole in the ceiling, opening to the garret. The dragged hem of her skirt was just disappearing in the hole as Violet reached the top stair.

Catlike the child touched foot to the ladder, ascending until she could reach one eye over the brink of the garret. The eye shifted rapidly, blinking to conquer the darkness; guided by the shuffling sound of Manda stepping from rafter to rafter the eye fastened on her form, advancing, retreating, circling, bending, under the sloping roof confines. At last the figure paused. The woman reached up toward the chimney, ramming something with force between it and the shingles.

The eye dropped below the garret level just in time, for Manda quickly looked behind as if fearing the eyes of all humanity were upon her.

When Mrs. Stone weakly returned to the kitchen to fall exhausted into a chair, the little nurse was stupidly sitting by the window, trying to induce Herod to listen to the strains of his brother's fife outside.

It was Violet who, after the supper "panny cakes" had long grown soggy, became thoroughly alarmed at her father's absence. In spite of the nurse's vigilance she gained access to her mother's room and whispered a fear. Maria Nor-

them, helpless to assist, and affrighted in turn, sped Violet over to Lady Trevelyan.

Strange, there rose no connection in Violet's mind between Mrs. Stone's performances and her father's absence—or was it strange? She was only twelve, and her mind was sluggish, and her body smitten by the taint of the Nameless.

Libby, hearing Violet's communication, at once feared John had been seized somewhere with one of his spells. This suspicion was whispered to Bert. He lighted the old tin lantern of Grandpa Tucker's and started out on his quest.

Nigger, the old dog, after repeated and un-availing attempts to attract the notice of the Northern family to his distress, now centered all his energies upon Locke. Barking, whining, running ahead, running back, he implored the lantern to follow him to the depths of the silent wood.

It was nearly midnight before the formalities of coroner and undertaker were completed.

Libby it was who told the cheerful lies which lulled the wearied wife to peaceful, trusting sleep. She was too busy soft-pedaling the maternal end of the house to get the children to bed, only having time now and again to poke her head in at the kitchen door to say a bright word of assurance or make a feeble joke attuned to stupid young heads.

Ruby, Harry, and Bob sat strangely motionless and silent, frightened, though they knew not at what. It had not occurred to them to even feel

sleepy. Violet's eye held them rigidly to quiescent, unquestioning nothingness. Violet sensed fatality in some uncanny manner. With a sudden growth to motherly dignity she turned down the sleeves which had been rolled up when washing the supper dishes. With a pathetic desire for the proper reception of the tragic, she methodically took each little brother and sister in turn, washing their faces, combing and brushing their hair. She then replaced each child in a chair and commanded with her eyes that they stay where placed.

They sat in line, clean hands meekly folded, smoothed heads upright, eyes staring upon the unknown hour of midnight.

A shuffling of heavy feet in the front hall. Men carried a burden in a basket-coffin to the lighted void of the parlor. The shuffling feet, the hushed voices, sifted through the closed door of the kitchen.

A sudden spasm of fear, or realization, smote little Bob. Forgetting Violet's control, forgetting everything but the inexplicable agony of an intuition, a single low wail came from him, as he made a dive, crouching behind the kitchen stove like a wounded animal. It was a signal to the other children to weep affrightedly.

The undertaker's assistant entered the room. The odor of hair lotion overcame that of stale "panny cakes." He also reeked of chemicals—strange chemicals that battle with decay. Smirk-

ing ingratiatingly he unctuously approached the helpless ones.

“ My dear children,” his voice had the sonorousness of the vault, “ the Lord hath sent a heavy affliction upon this house.” His hands reached toward them—vulture-like claws. “ But the Lord’s will be done; you must all bear up under the chastening. Your dear father——”

At this moment Libby burst into the room and saw the look in the dilated eyes of the four paralyzed children.

“ No, you don’t,” she stopped the soothsayer with one furious look. “ You leave them children to me. This is my business. O! you lambs, come to your Aunt Libby. Don’t let him frighten you, darlings.”

With only two arms, she managed to fold all the fatherless bairns to her harbor-heart.

## XXVII

SUSPICION of the murderer's identity hovered all the next day, settling at last with the violence of circumstantial evidence on the despised Italians.

It was well known that they sometimes made the shorter cut through the woods on returning home from the railroad tracks. It was proven that on the preceding afternoon one Italian had been seen coming home before the others and he had turned off at the brook, disappearing into the pines. And the wound—was it not just such a one as might be inflicted by a stiletto?

At dusk, following the day of John Northern's death, while some of the Italians were occupied in their fall cleaning of vegetable gardens, some banking their celery, others in the backyard contentedly washing out their flannel shirts at tubs, children playing about, women indoors preparing supper, the officers of the law arrived.

With so limited a knowledge of English, the Italians, not meaning to lie, often gave false or misleading replies to the questions fired at them with suspicion, vituperation, and oaths. When catechized about how they had returned home the afternoon before they replied "by the road." It



was a set phrase they had learned. When questioned as to weapons they vigorously denied ever carrying any, and neither did they to their work. It is one of the first things an Italian learns, not to dare to do, in this country.

When a roughly conducted search of each man followed the officer brought forth from the pocket of one fair Sicilian an extraordinary knife. The owner could not explain that it had only been used for trimming the dried leaves from his celery. The gloating of the officer in having, beyond a doubt, found the guilty one, made its utterance in vile epithets hurled at the trembling, dazed Sicilian.

It was a queer knife of most ancient pattern—probably an heirloom. The handle of cunningly carved wood curled up at one end. When closed, the keen, though time-scarred blade lay so deeply hidden one would not have suspected its presence. Its possessor was the visionary—the nephew of the great public story-teller of Prizzi—he who had dreamed and sung of a gayly painted cart.

Not even knowing of what he was accused—unless it were the crime of carrying the knife—he waved his arms out from his lips, denoting hopelessness. Unresistingly he permitted them to fasten the handcuffs.

The women leaned far out the windows, chattering shrilly; the children stood silent, wide-eyed, frozen with fear; the men muttered in under-

tones, protesting, their voices breaking now and then to fierce falsetto; arms waved violently, fingers snapped.

The prisoner was led off. . . .

That night Simon roamed the fields; conscienceless as thistledown, as irresponsibly blown hither, thither.

He blinked up at the stars, then fastened eyes upon the mounting moon. A weird improvisation bred of lunar light seeped from the fife. One listening to it could see the fairies tripping the moss; moon ray sprites dancing from flower to flower.

Now the strains shifted; the fife hummed low—the tone of a chilled tree-frog, bidding the season adieu. It sounded the last frosty call of a doomed katydid. It moored a dying calf's appeal to its slayer. . . .

The Sicilian lay on a board—not bed, shut from the moon in a cell. Each time he turned his troubled body the wood gave forth—not a screech, but a wail, a wail composed of the mingled memory of all the agony of crushed and bruised hearts it had supported. It intoned the despair of the sensitive innocent—the groan of the guilty.

The prisoner's eyes roamed over and over the walls. How far away seemed that land of his birth, how vaguely unreal the dreams of his painted cart.

He shuddered as the memory of a girl's dark eyes came to him; the eyes looked for a moment

accusingly—then lifted to smile invitingly upon his rival.

He thought of America as some great merciless juggernaut, rolling, crushing down upon him. Who was he, a poor Sicilian, to hold her at bay? He had no powerful friends. He knew nothing of her law.

The sudden realization of the impotence of a human being shut from the heart-throbbing world shivered his courage. The isolation of bars; the power of men over man, brought a sob from his breast.

Then even the power to suffer was lost—that was worn threadbare; the emotions can only descend to the depths, after that is passivity, dull and deadly.

Mechanically his eyes counted the bricks of the wall. First, sixteen layers of brick painted a dirty yellow—painted the color of crime. Then his eyes mounted, counting the layers of white—white, the color of hope. Unintelligible to him, scrawled on their blanched surface, were the protests and curses of the hopeless.

His eyes rested longingly, beseechingly upon the bricks of white, while his lips quivered a prayer to Mary, Mother of Christ.

## XXVIII

LIBBY was delegated to break the news to Mrs. Northern of John's death—withholding, of course, the true circumstances of the calamity. He had passed away in one of his spells—that was all. Mrs. Northern, weak and prostrated from the birth of her child, gave way utterly at first to the abandon of elemental emotion.

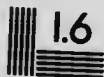
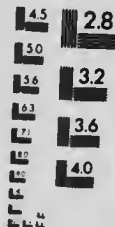
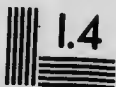
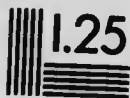
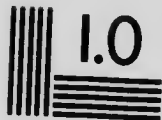
The thought succeeding the first woe and terror of death was a regret, a censure. John was not insured.

“ He was just that 'shamed of his spells,” she told Libby, “ he couldn't bring himself to tell the insurance doctor the truth, and see what's it's done to me and the children. He could have had a accident policy and kept his mouth shut about his seizures. What in the world is goin' to become of them poor little children and me? His funeral will take all the money I've got into the bank, 'cause of course, Libby, you must see to it that John has a fine casket. I ain't goin' to have the neighbors a-saying as how I stinted John when he was dead and done fer. And John did love a good line of glass carriages. I reckon I could afford six—that's thirty dollars gone right there. And how about the set pieces? ”



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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Libby had settled that matter with the undertaker. Of course, the latter had insisted Mr. Northern should have a neat wreath or a handsome cross costing, well, say, ten dollars. He was looking out for his commission. Libby had withered him with a look.

“Ten dollars? Cow-foot! I reckon as how with all the daa-liahs in my garden, and the chrysanthemums on the road, John Northern don't have to look to no florist for his trimmings.”

So Libby patted Maria's hand and assured her the question of flowers was all arranged; then she hurried out to the kitchen to help the little cook.

Violet had not returned to the Stones' since the day of the tragedy; she cooked all the meals for the Northern household with the precision of a feelingless machine; she washed and dressed the children, kept the smallest quiet, and devised crude forms of amusement for Harry, Ruby, and Bob. When her brood were safely in bed and the household slept, the sleepless little mother crept noiselessly down to the parlor.

There she stood like a specter in the pallid moonlight, stood beside the still, unnatural figure that had once been her father. She felt no fear. Already she knew the kinship of death. Like one acquainting themselves with a land to which they soon expect to go, she scanned the mask before her as if she would penetrate the secrets her forerunner to that realm had discovered. Not a tear had she shed, though she, more than all the other

children, had loved her father. She, more than all the others, had inherited his constitution, his tendencies, his temperament. She, more than the others, was his victim.

When the hour of the funeral arrived, Violet marshaled her little brood, dressed in their very best, into the front glass carriage. She held her head high and firm in her rôle of chief mourner.

Mrs. Fay alone, of all the road, was conspicuous by her absence. And how she now regretted the affair of the gramophone—she who loved a funeral above all else—even above a row. Like an exile she sat behind her tilted shutters, greedily absorbing what comfort she could with her eyes, talking meantime aloud to herself, bemoaning her hard luck.

Libby Trevelyan came in for her share in the denunciations. Mrs. Fay had heard of the acquisition of waffle-irons. She also knew that she alone of all the near neighbors on the road had not been consulted for a receipt. It was a direct slight. It signified Libby's partisanship with the Northerners.

Mrs. Fay had to abandon the abuse of Libby, for the pallbearers were now struggling out under their burden. Her eye appraised the casket in its passing.

"Didn't cost a pinny over fifty dollars," she sneered into the face of her only audience, the cat who sat on the window-sill.

"An' not a set piece. Glory bea—the stingy



'ooman—jus' plain old home-raised—Arrah! flowers he cud a-picked anny doiy he were aloive."

"Six glass kerraiages! Two kerry-alls! Four surreys! Three buggies! Poor man, it's a foine escort he be havin'! An' no insurance. She'll be glad to be sellin' of the grammyphone now, I bea thinkin'—glad to be sellin' it fer half the price."

She rocked herself back and forth smiling grimly as her eye followed the last mud-stained buggy until it turned the bend by the marsh.

## XXIX

WHEN Libby looked out of the window the next morning while dressing she found her garden all glistening.

The nasturtiums the day before had glowed with a seemingly inextinguishable fire; filled with an optimism more befitting a southern zone, they had shown hundreds of taper-like buds ready to ignite at the touch of a sunbeam—now alas! all their incipient flame was snuffed. The dahlias hung blackened heads on broken necks. The morning-glory's trumpets were hushed.

Libby's eyes passed quickly over the gelatinous condition of her flowers; her eyes roamed gleaningly toward the apple trees, down over the unstacked corn, to the still undug potatoes. The flowers had served their purpose; they had almost sated the eyes with beauty; they could now be spared.

There is a clarion call to energy in the first frost—it sounds the fanfare of harvest.

Both Libby and Bert had the air of having heard the summons when they met at breakfast. A restless activity pervaded them, a hunger for the out-of-doors, a pleading for their share in this opening chapter of the season's new book.

Bert longed to desert the ferry to-day; one word from Libby would rivet his indecision. But she was not of the stuff that enjoys tempting the man from duty. Bert voiced the longing timidly; he felt the meaninglessness of the frost on the ferry; he plead with his eyes for his share in the great event. But Libby ignored his tendencies; she only filled his dinner-pail with a double share of good things, guided by a sense of her own sharpened appetite.

She walked to the gate with him; watched him until the bend of the road claimed him, still adamant to the last look of entreaty telegraphed her from the marsh borders.

The minute he had disappeared she regretted not having tempted him to truancy. The frost lost half its potency faced alone. Too many things beckoned to be done; she could decide on none—Bert would have directed action.

She fretted over accomplishing the commonplace—why had dishes to be washed on such a day?—sweeping was irrelevant. From the first elation of morning she passed to fretful impatience. Libby even inwardly criticised Bert for lack of spirit in not having remained at home. He hadn't the farmer-heart.

Granny provoked her by constant references to the day before. The funeral was effaced in Libby's mind by the frost. She refused to look back—all her impulses sped forward.

Somehow she repeatedly found herself looking

toward the gate, expecting a vindication of her inconsistencies.

At about the hundredth look she beheld Bert swinging down the road. Victory—hers and the frost's—surged over her. Yet she met him with a pretended severity, which melted hopelessly before his boyish: "Couldn't stand it, Lib," called out before he met her. "Begged for a half holiday. Here I am to be bossed."

Libby's delight shone naked. Where should they begin? Bert was hunting the ladder; his thoughts flew appleward. Together they mounted, picked, and chattered.

"I bet we're having more fun than Adam and Eve did," laughed Bert.

"I always thought maybe all the trouble came because that apple was green," Libby declared, offering a juicy bite to Bert from a sample red pippin. My! she thought, what a contrast to picking apples with her grandfather—somber, silent old grandfather. This wasn't work: this was play.

The ground was still a ruddy, unhealed wound over Grandpa Tucker, but he was as dead as Julius Cæsar, and more generally forgotten. Yet how the old man had fretted, hurried, and slaved, doing each day the endless chores he believed he alone could accomplish. How necessary—nay, even indispensable—he had thought himself. Now he only served to draw a contrast! Already young enthusiasm and brawn could more than

fill the gap he had left, fill it to running over.

Toward evening Libby begged to scatter from apples to corn. Bert had not made a corn shock since his boyhood, but how quickly it all came back to him again. He shed the years in a minute, and worked with the joy of an architect developing a masterpiece. Libby declared he could make three shocks while grandpa would have made one.

Granny had come out to watch him, a shawl thrown over the old bent shoulders. She heard Libby's comparison and smiled a little sadly. What a brave thing is youth (her thoughts ran), what a capable, tireless, hopeful, vain thing. Frost only whetted youth's strength and spirits; it held no sinister warning to the young.

The workers did not notice either Granny's presence or her retiring. The old woman wandered back into the house, and stopped before a frame on the wall:

"Abram Tucker, 89 years and 10 months. The old folks plant, the young reap," she sighed, "and the planter is forgotten by the harvesters."

### XXX

As Mrs. Northern returned to health, and neighbors dropped in to see her, it was inevitable that the facts concerning John's death should be disclosed by some visitor.

The thought of murder threw her into a pandemonium of hysteria, and through her uncontrolled wailings glimmerings of truth reached the children. It smote Violet with peculiar violence. Overstrained by her unnatural duties—compassing the work of an adult with the incompetent muscles of diseased immaturity, she seemed to wither under the blow.

All sympathy was directed toward Maria; no one except Libby ever thought of Violet. Unobserved, uncomforted, the child kept stolidly to her duties. She could scarcely stand as she washed the dishes; her back felt as though it would fold when she tugged to lift the heavy second child; her shoulder sagged as much as Manda Stone's, from hauling the pails of water. Not once did she complain.

She heard her mother's constant bewailing of her father's selfishness and thoughtlessness in not having carried some insurance. The omission was unpardonable; it blighted all recollection of his affection for his family.

Violet was straightening her mother's room during a call from Mrs. Silver. Mrs. Silver replied to Maria's criticisms of John:

"Yes, if it had been any of the children you'd a-gotten something, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, they's insured, all but the three littlest. Vi-lit fer three hundred and eighty dollars—she's the most; Harry fer two hundred and eighty, and Bob fer one hundred and fifty-five. Not that I could spare none of 'em, but if the Lord had to take somebody it do seem like he might a-spared John to work fer his family."

Mrs. Silver sighed her sympathy.

"I reckon there ain't nothin' to do now but take in washin'." Maria was going to demean that occupation, but she stopped abruptly, remembering it to be her caller's own profession.

Violet had stood still ever since her mother's mention of her name. Her eyes dilated with a sudden revelation.

Alive she was worth nothing, dead she was worth three hundred and eighty dollars!

It seemed a fabulous fortune. She straightened her back with a sense of new valuation. From that moment she did not spare herself. She slaved all day; writhed all night.

Libby ran over as frequently as she could to lend a hand, her heart yearning toward the silent, pale child. She brought Maria tidings of the violence of feeling against the Italians. The air was filled with threats; of burning their

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“Why, lamb, whatever’s the matter?”



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shacks; of running them out of town; of car and feathers. The Italian children had been stoned on the street by the village boys.

Violet heard, and felt no particular sympathy. Yet in her mind a worry had begun to ferment—especially at night when she lay tossing. The memory of Mrs. Stone's peculiar behavior on the afternoon of her father's death recurred with ever-increasing vividness. Her fear of Mrs. Stone had closed her lips. The inability to reason logically made it difficult for the child to reach any definite suspicion. Only a dull, persistent thought began to suggest some connection between Simon and her father.

Then, too, in her ignorance she feared in some way she might involve herself if she spoke of it to anyone—and most of all she feared Manda Stone. No her lips must be locked until it was too late for Mrs. Stone to hurt her. Silently Violet plodded through October; silently, doggedly into November.

Not once did her mother notice the change in the child.

One night during the second week of November, as Libby was closing the shutters at bedtime, she saw a little figure coming slowly down the garden path. Hurrying downstairs she unlatched the kitchen door. Violet stood before her, tottering.

"Why, lamb, whatever's the matter? Anyone sick?" She caught the child in her arms. Vio-

let's eyes closed; the colorless lids looked as if they might never open again.

Libby drew her on her lap. Violet reached up an arm weakly, pulling Libby's face down to her own.

"Simon—he done it," she whispered. "Tell 'em to go look between the chimney and the shingles in Stone's garret. *She* stuck somethin' there. I'm so 'fraid of her, but she can't hurt me now. Simon's ma knows the Italy-man didn't do it." She paused for lack of breath. Her eyes already looked vacant; they wandered past Libby.

"You don't bile the tea—jes' bile the water."

What could the child be talking about? She patted the thin shoulders soothingly.

"Ma won't have to take in washin'."

Libby's throat ached with a stricture.

"My back's about done hurtin', I reckon," Violet gasped.

What ailed the child? Libby folded her more closely to her breast.

"Violet, is you sick, honey?" she asked, her lips pressed to the damp forehead.

Violet sat up quite suddenly, looking Libby glitteringly in the eye, while a crooked smile distorted her gray face.

"No'm, I'm well now. I'm worth three hundred and eighty dollars!"

## XXXI

THE sequence of tragic events took their toll of Libby. Following the passing of Violet and the revelations of that night Libby went to bed ill of body, shattered in nerves. She trembled at the nibbling of a mouse, quailed at the whining of wind. And searing her brain was the thought of the still undelivered letter locked in her bureau drawer.

The Northern affairs had for the time effaced the ache of conscience, but now that she lay restlessly helpless it accused her night and day. In the dark hours, to the accompaniment of the hound's baying, she planned a hundred ways of leading up to the deliverance of the letter. She rehearsed aloud imaginary conversations in which Bert gave her an opening which she seized valiantly, eloquently framing justifiable excuses, unassailable explanations.

But at this point the monologue-dialogue always took a distressing turn. The pretended Bert refused to smilingly assure her it was all right—he quite understood. Instead, the image of Locke grew potentially until he hovered over her, a menacing judge, unforgiving, critical, withering. So it happened when the real Bert, finding Libby's

door ajar, stopped to brightly inquire about her health, in Libby's guilty eagerness to be natural she became wholly unnatural, and answered in a tone which sounded ungrateful, and even snappish.

Bert felt rebuffed, and during his breakfast searched himself for the cause. Libby suspected him of something—quickly his conscience named the "something." He swore at his conscience, and sought eagerly for a more comfortable triviality on which to lay the blame.

That evening he hesitatingly bobbed his head slightly within her door, making further inquiries which sounded neither solicitous nor sincere. He could have kicked himself for the tone.

Libby's face was turned to the wall, only the mass of tangled auburn hair was visible. She did not vouchsafe any reply. . . . Oh! if she could only speak of the letter now and have it over. Why couldn't she just tell him to look in the bureau drawer and find it for himself? What did it matter if he did hate her forever? She declared to herself that she quite hated him.

Bert ventured a little more of his body within the door—what long, wonderful hair Libby had.

"You ain't sleep, is you, Libby?" His voice was little more than a husky whisper.

"No, I ain't," Libby cried, "and I don't never expect to sleep no more. Don't bother yourself about me, Bert Locke. It don't matter how *I* is."

This was so utterly unlike Libby, Bert was quite stunned. He felt the embarrassment of being in the presence of a stranger and suddenly realized himself as intruding in a woman's bedroom. Slinking away he sighed: "Libby's sure got it in for me."

He sat down to his dinner with Granny in silence, his brows puckered.

When the invalid was able to sit up Granny insisted they would cheer Libby by adjourning to her room for the evenings.

Bert, not daring the presumption of smoking in a sick room, sat miserably uncomfortable, trying in vain to find occupation for his hands. As soon as a silence occurred he preoccupiedly dived into his tobacco pocket, but as his hand touched the pipe he remembered his surroundings and awkwardly shuffled one leg over the other.

The strata of silence grew between them, and neither knew how to tunnel through. At times Libby would look appealingly at his diverted face, but she quickly imagined she saw written thereon a suspicion of her, and her lips contracted to a stern violet line, as her eyes fell to her lap.

Bert gazed at the old photograph of Libby's mother framed in sea-shells over the bed, then he studied the ugly convolutions of the wall-paper, wriggling his eyes over each quirk until they edged gingerly over the outline of preposterous flowers down to Libby's face. Poising for a moment on the rigid mouth, the downcast lids, his

eyes were withdrawn with a wince, while he inwardly swore at his conscience to "shut up." Granny said the little that was said—gentle wordy druellings about nothing in particular. Neither Bert nor Libby heard a syllable.

When Granny suddenly mentioned Bert's name he jumped as if Gabriel's alarm clock had struck the hour of judgment.

The evenings were interminable, and full of torture for both Libby and Bert. Yet Libby fretted during the dull day for night's approach.

Her days were now spent sitting idly by the window, staring out on the procession of days passing in review before her.

Mrs. Northern and Mrs. Silver were her only callers. Mrs. Fay still hugged the slight received from Libby. The old woman was lonely, and would have been glad to superintend the nursing of her neighbor, had she not daily indignantly reminded herself that she had *not* been requested to lend a receipt for waffles.

Manda Stone swore vengeance on both Libby and Bert—had it not been for them the Italy-man could have rotted in prison. If Libby had kept her mouth shut, and Bert had 'tended to his own business, the authorities would never have known of the knife in the garret, and her Simon could have fifeed on the hills to the end of his days. Now she would lose him—shortly the asylum for the criminal insane would close its doors on both Simon and fife.

Mrs. Northern came over in double mourning to tell Libby of her plans for moving.

"That house is alive with ghosts," she declared, her eyes staring from the midst of the black veil she had proudly donned just to exhibit to the invalid. "I wakes up in the night hearin' John callin' fer help, an' Nigger jes' howls fer fear. An' I hears Vi-lit a-clangin' the pots an' pans in the kitchen in the dead of night. There's that many sperrits in the house there ain't no room fer live folks—though I hopes you won't breathe a word of it, Libby Trevelyan, 'cause it'll hurt the sale of the house. It's sure luck John was took in the woods, an' Vi-lit over here; ef they had both passed away under my roof I couldn't hire nobody to live under it."

Libby shivered a little uneasily.

"Yes, they do say you might as well burn a spook house and be done with it," she replied.

"That's the truth—ef it gits out," Maria continued. "I hears John a-snoopin' round the children's beds at night—John did dote on them children so, looks like he can't keep away from 'em. Seems like I oughtn't to judge him havin' little Vi-lit to keep him company in the tother world, while I've still got Ruby, Harry, Bob, an' the two babies, but I does miss Vi-lit that bad! Looks like I got ten times as much to do now that child's gone. And Nigger!—he jes' pines fer Vi-lit."

"I s'pose you're going to take Nigger 'long with you when you moves?" Libby feelingly in-



quired from the depth of a knowledge of the inhuman customs of the countryside.

"Nigger? Why, my lord, Libby, that dog jes' seems like one of my own children. I'd just as soon think of leavin' Ruby behind! Nigger was give to me the week Vi-let was born, an' them two growed up together like twins."

The next afternoon after this visit as Libby sat at her window the first swirl of snow descended. It came fitfully, as though it had almost forgotten its old methods. There was not sufficient to hide the road—it only caused the scene to have the quivering quality of a cinematograph picture.

Through the flakes Libby looked upon the wagons heaped with the hodge-podge of the Northerners' household goods. Piled high, in view of the neighbors, they proclaimed shamelessly all the secrets their owners had tried to dissemble—the secrets of dirt, breakage, cheapness. The wagons at last jiggled off through the snow; scarred table-legs drunkenly bowed adieu to the road, stained bed-quilts waved ribald farewells.

Then a surrey drew up to the Northern steps. Mrs. Northern—a pyramid of black—appeared, carrying a baby in each arm; clinging to her skirts were Harry and Ruby. Bob, bringing up the rear, staggered along with the gramophone. It was too precious to be sent on the wagons.

Libby felt sure she discerned a form behind Mrs. Fay's parlor blinds. But she could not see the look of defeated fury in the old woman's eyes.

Behind the procession, dejectedly, questioningly, humbly, walked Nigger.

Mrs. Northern entered the surrey without losing either baby. The gramophone was then carefully placed at her feet. Harry, Bob, and Ruby having all mounted to positions, Libby leaned forward to see who would lift Nigger. He stood beside the carriage step wistfully awaiting an invitation. Not once did Mrs. Northern's eyes turn in his direction—the children's eyes and hers were set on the house in the city across the Rondout, where John's and Violet's ghosts would not know where to find them.

The surrey started, it moved slowly forward.

Nigger stood motionless, with the training to obedience, making no effort to follow uninvited. His tail was still hopeful and wagged feebly. He might yet receive the signal to trot behind. But the wheels rumbled on, no face looked back.

He wasn't just a dog—he was an *old* dog, and old dogs are only permitted by families that have had them since they were young dogs—families with whom they have suffered and grown old.

Nigger was old and stiff, and only good for idle unbiting barking. Who would want him now? Yet there was no extremity of poverty, hunger, and cruelty he would not have endured had it come with, or from, that family of which he thought himself a part. He could not accept the fact of their desertion. So stunned was he an automobile could have run him down. He heard

nothing, saw nothing, but the wheels of a retreating surrey. His tail grew less brave, it sagged a little, yet his ears remained cocked for the possible far summons of a whistle.

Libby knew the moment the surrey turned the bend near the marsh by Nigger's tail—it fell as if struck to earth by a blow. The dog shivered as though the snow had touched him for the first time. Without a whine or a howl he accepted his doom. Turning, he looked at the closed, silent house, then he looked up the road whence all he loved had disappeared, then with a droop in every part of his body he silently turned toward the pines over the ridge.

Libby rose, forgetting all weakness, to rush out into the storm. She clattered down the steps and flew out the front door, calling his name—but it was too late.

With head almost dragging the ground, bowed with sudden infirmity, over the crest of the hill in the snow, Nigger had gone—gone knowing himself at last for what he was—an old, stray dog.

## XXXII

MRS. SILVER flung a shawl over her head and ambled over in the dusk to discuss the moving with her next-door neighbors. She found Libby seated in a chair by the kitchen stove incoherently weeping.

"Well! what in heaven ails the girl? Oughtn't you to be in bed, Libby?"

"I don't know what's took her, I can't get a word out of her," Granny sighed querulously. "She ain't able to walk yet, an' here she started out the front door in the storm with nawthin' on."

Libby wept on. No word of explanation would she give these two. Was she going to get herself laughed at for a soft-hearted simpleton? Dogs were dogs to both her grandmother and Mrs. Silver.

Mrs. Silver tried diversion by a description of some of the grandeurs she had heard of the house in the city to which the Northerners were moving.

"She say as how she's going to have runnin' water an' settin' tubs."

"I hope she'll scald herself the first time she washes clothes," Libby sobbed vindictively.

Mrs. Silver and Granny stared at each other with blank expressions. Granny shook her head

sadly. Mrs. Silver ignored Libby's sudden dementia by addressing her next remark exclusively to Granny in lower tone.

"She say as how she's goin' to hire a woman to look after the children and she's goin' out to do hotel scrubbin'. I reckon how with Vi-lit's insurance and one fifty a day she'll be makin' out mighty well."

"I hopes she'll grow poorer and poorer every day of her life," Libby cried, "and when she's old I hope her children will all desert her."

Mrs. Silver clasped her hands over her mountainous waist, in resignation.

"She says it's a real bright house—nearly new. That's a blessin'. Maria's such a nervous woman and given to seein' things."

"I hopes she'll wake up every night and see ghosts—I hope she'll be ha'nted by a sperrit-dog howling, howling, howling."

Mrs. Silver rose from her chair and edged toward the window.

"I see that good-fer-nothin' old dog of theirs goin' up over the hill. I reckon he went to the pines thinkin' he'd find John Northern a-layin' there still."

Mrs. Silver had not kindled to the pathos of Nigger—the howls of her hound had deafened her to the silent suffering of an animal.

"I'd kinder thought they'd a-taken Nigger 'long," Granny interpolated. "He seemed mighty fond of the children."

“ I hopes one of the children will be bit by the first mad-dog what comes along, and I hopes she'll bite the rest of the family.—Oh! I hopes they'll all die of hydryphoby,” Libby shrieked between convulsions of sobs.

“ Well, Libby Trevelyan, it's a good thing we know you're sick and not yourself,” Granny declared, “ or I'd clean declare you'd gone stark mad. I never heard nobody talk so on-Christian-like in my born days.”

Mrs. Silver rocked her head from side to side in horror as she commented: “ Why, I always thought you and Maria Northern was real good friends, Libby. Of course, I knows Maria has said she didn't believe you ever got any of them letters from Lord Tre——”

“ Don't you ever mention Maria Northern's name to me again.” Libby uncovered her face, displaying flaming eyes between swollen lids. “ I hate her. She ain't no friend of mine. I wouldn't own her for a friend. I ain't got no friends on this road. There's Manda Stone—what remembrance has she got of anything I ever did for her? Just because I done my duty about telling on Simon. And Mrs. Fay—a-backbiting of me every minute. I wish to God I could go clean away where I'd never see none of 'em again. I'm that sick of the whole lot.”

Mrs. Silver's mouth curled at one corner sarcastically, her eyes kindled.

“ Is you castin' any reflections on me, too,

Libby Trevelyan? If you got anything against me, out with it. Of course, I've always took up fer you, when many's the time I've heard folks say as how you don't know what the truth is."

"I don't need none of your taking up for," snapped Libby.

"Well, of course, I ain't pressin' my friendship where it ain't wanted, ner appreciated," Mrs. Silver replied with loftiness. "But I must say I calls it ungrateful, after the way in which I done tried to shut people's mouths since they's begun to whisper about you and Bert Locke being mighty free and easy fer two people what's got live husbands and wives."

"You stop right there!" Libby jumped from her chair, her hands clenched. "Don't you ner no one else dare ever speak a breath against Bert Locke. Lie about me as much as you all please, but don't you dare fling your dirt at him. There ain't a man in Kingdom Come what's above him. I'd slap anybody's face, I don't care who they be, if they'd dare say he had designs on me—*me*? Why, he wouldn't look at me—he's so above me. He knows I ain't fit to be trusted. He hates me, I tell you, he——" she stopped short. Her eyes fell on Bert Locke standing stock still in the doorway.

The dinner-pail fell to the floor from his suddenly palsied hand.

### XXXIII

LIBBY flew to her room and locked the door.

Bert went slowly to his, and sat down blankly on the edge of his bed. He did not notice the summons of Granny, reiterated plaintively on the stairs, to the supper that was growing cold. Libby responded behind locked door that she couldn't eat anything. Finally Bert took out a pencil; after many dips in his mouth he scrawled:

"FRIEND LIBBY:—

"I want to talk to you. I have got something to tell you.

"BERT."

He gave a whistle like the escape of steam, and went out into the hall to put his note under Libby's door. In the middle of the unlighted corridor he bumped into Libby herself. A ray of moon shone on a white slip of paper in her hand. They stood motionless, then Bert laughed nervously:

"Looks like we're both playing postman, Lib."

"I was just going to—to put a little note under your door."

"So was I—that is, under yours. S'pose we just exchange. Shall we go to your room to read 'em?"

Libby led the way back to her light. Libby with



trembling fingers unfolded Bert's note. Bert held his slip of paper under the lamp on one side and read:

"FRIEND BERT:—

"I want to see you. I got to tell you something what is on my mind.

"Respectfully,

"LIBBY."

"Well, I swan!" he declared.

"Ain't it strange?" Libby was awed by the coincidence.

"Looks like we'd have to draw straws," Bert suggested.

"I'd rather have mine over first," she begged.

"No, I couldn't listen, Lib, till I frees my mind. Let's set down—and try not to be too hard on me," he pleaded.

"Me hard on you? Why, Bert Locke, what right have I to—me what's been deceiving you so long?"

Bert thought she referred to the letters from Reginald, and he assured her he didn't "hold that against" her. Libby looked bewildered. Bert continued:

"I've got to tell it like it wasn't me, but some other fellow, and it wa'nt the Bert Locke you know now, Libby. Seems to me we are a lot of different people at different times of our lives."

"Yes, it sure does," she replied feelingly. "You done things and it seems like somebody else must a-done it."

"Just so," he agreed. "Well, I'm telling you a story, 'bout a young man what didn't have none of the notions I got now, and I think he was the biggest duffer ever lived. Well, now—Libby, if I could smoke seems like the words would come easier—well, now, this here duffer I'm a-speaking of, he buffeted round a mighty lot, and he didn't have no home, ner nothing—his parents being dead and—and——"

"Go on, Bert, smoke all you please, and I'm a-understanding and I ain't thinking nawthin'."

"This duffer, he didn't have nothing to be true to—he didn't have no home ner nobody cared 'bout him 'specially—oh, hell! Lib, I ain't no good at telling a story that-a-way, the truth is I was just like the rest of 'em. I went to the city, and like a green fool I wanted to see the sights. I went places I wouldn't even tell you about, and at one of them places I met Beatrice—yes, I've got to tell you the truth. She was so young and pretty and she seemed innocent-like in among the rest of the hardened old ones, and she told a pitiful tale 'bout being fooled by a man and how she wanted to be a good girl, and the thoughts of her mother 'most killed her, and what a good wife she'd a-made some man if that devil hadn't destroyed her, and I believed it all. From feeling sorry for her—she was that young and pretty—well, I thought I loved her—I reckon I did love her, Lib, but not in the way I do——"

"Well, as I was saying, I went to see her often,

and it was always the same story about her wrongs and how she wanted to be a good girl, so I finally said, ' Well, look a-here, if I go back to my home in the country and gets a job in the shipyard and take you far away from your old companions, will you go? ' I guess she was took back some by my seriousness, but she was game when I called her bluff, and she said yep, she'd go. Then I told her as how I loved her, but I didn't think it would be fair to neether one of us if I married her hot off the gridale. How'd I know, says I, she'd stick more than a week, and leave me a laughing stock . . . my neighbors, and how'd I know, says I, she'd really be content away from dance halls and all such, and places I ain't going to even tell you 'bout, Lib.

" Then, too, I said it weren't fair for her to be tied to me, if she found she didn't like it, so I says, ' Try it for a spell, Beatrice, and if you are as good as you thinks you be, and you want to live the simple life, why we'll be spliced by a parson on the sly and nobody'll know we weren't married all along.' "

Bert paused, not daring to look in Libby's direction, puffing his pipe furiously.

" I know'd all that ever since your ravings in your misery while you was sick, Bert," Libby said very gently.

" Hully Gee! " Bert gave a long whistle. " Gimmeny Crickets! " he gave another. " Lord, if a woman don't take the cake! " He filled his

pipe afresh. "Well, you're a peach, Libby Trevelyan. There ain't another woman in this world could have held her tongue. You knew this and never piped to nobody! Golly! but you're the stuff!"

"I'd a-snatched my tongue out first, Bert Locke. You don't know me. I ain't never laid it against you," she added demurely.

"Whew!" Bert blew smoke six feet. "You never can tell how the cat's going to jump with a woman!"

"Is you still pining for her, Bert?" Libby put the question timorously.

"Me? Pine nothing! Lib, you've clean cured all that. What I'm pining for is——"

"Bert," Libby hastily interrupted, "would you be glad if she was to write and say she was going to come back to you?"

"Lord! I'd make tracks if she did. She'll never fool me again."

"But supposing she said she loved you."

"When a man's loving somebody else it don't——"

"But supposing she had written you——"

"Supposing nothing. I wouldn't read it."

"Well, she did write—here it is." Libby drew forth the letter from her bosom.

Bert stared at the envelope, petrified by amazement.

Disjointedly Libby partially wept, partially told in words the story of her long deception. Bert

received her confession jubilantly. If Libby had not been jealous of Beatrice, he told himself, she would never have delayed the letter so long. Thus interpreting her behavior, he felt singularly happy.

“Let’s burn it without reading it,” he suggested holding it toward the lamp. Bert wondered if it were not the wiser way—goodness knows what Beatrice might say.

“No, you don’t!” Libby’s hand flew out; her womanly curiosity was not to be cheated. “If you won’t read it, I will,” she declared with determination.

“Well, if you insist——” Bert was not elated. “We’ll read it together, then.”

Libby tore the envelope open—the envelope that had so often parched her fingers.

Spreading the letter on the table under the lamp, their heads almost touching, they read.

## XXXIV

"DEAR BERT, don't get scared. I'm not coming back and I'm not going to threaten any trouble" [the letter ran]. "I heard from somebody, no matter who, that you got well. I'm sorry I looked like a quitter, but I couldn't stand it any longer. I want you to thank 'Lady' Trevelyan for the service she did me, the day she sent Mr. Stanley, the patent medicine seller, down to see me. He is my steady now and he is a dandy.

"He was too smart for the road. I've got him a nice political job in the 9th ward where I've got a pull. So the ladies on the road will have to get their pills from somebody else now, because I ain't going to let ~~him~~ waste his talents peddling medicine round the country no more.

"Now I'm not through, the best is coming. Read on. You know you said old Mr. Tucker made friends easy—he sure did. He talked too much, too. He oughtn't to tell his business to everybody what comes along. He made a mistake when he told Mr. Stanley all about his savings, investments, etc., and his *heirress* Libby, and about his intended trip to the Fair. He made a mistake but he certainly picked out a slick one to tell it to that time. Mr. Stanley has a brother, and that brother is as slick as him. The brother was all primed and waiting at the Buffalo Exposition. Stanley, my present gentleman friend, was there too, in the background, waiting to point out the right dubs to his brother.

"It was all cut and dried. You see, Stanley's brother needed some cash to buy an interest in an east side dance hall, where he could make easy money. The fact that he had a wife and children didn't make no difference to him. He's given to travel—kinder restless man, and his family wouldn't think nothing of his being away a few months. Lord! that man has been to South America and England and Texas. So he could easily spend a month or two skylarking with a country girl, without raising any suspicions, and he would do anything for money.

"He was all primed too about the *heiress'* romantic notions and he sure played his part to perfection. *Lord Trevelyan!* What a joke! *Royal Purple!* I can see it now—skimp skirt, narrow shoulders and all.

"It took longer than he had calculated on to wring the old man, and he did feel sold when he only got \$500 for his pains, but it helped. With that little start he went right on prospering till he had a swell saloon. And if you will believe it, his saloon was an old hang-out of mine. To think I knew Lord Trevelyan all the time, and didn't suspicion it! Gee, what a funny world. But I'm not one to pipe on a pal. He has been decent to me, saved me from being arrested once, and I ain't going to squeal on him now, so you won't find out from me what corner he is to be found on.

"He certainly can paint. His saloon is full of the swellest things all done by himself. It's a bright family. I wouldn't never have written this letter but I've got some gratitude, though you maybe don't think so, and your friend Libby did try to be good to me in her stupid way. It seems pretty tough for her to spend all her life pining for and waiting for a man who isn't her husband.

"You can tell her you have found out he's dead or anything you please. And the lovely letters she received from Lord Trevelyan! Well, when it comes to lying she ain't so worse.

"And now no more from me. I'm back at the old game and I don't miss the mountains, but gosh, Bert, all kiddin' aside, I did do you dirt. You are a good fellow and I hope you will strike a straight woman some day.

"Your well wisher,

"BEATRICE."

Libby and Bert had not read the letter through without pauses. They formed no words, only inarticulate sounds came from their staggered lips. Bert sat with knotted face, perspiration dripping from his brow. Libby had the wide stare of one falling from a great height.

A well-behaved mystery is rather comforting.

Reginald vaguely filling the distance, the nebula of romance about him, had formed the background of her life. She had long lost the assurance of his return; she had even, during the past months, acknowledged to herself the undesirableness of such an event. But that the one dramatic puzzle of her existence should be solved—so sordidly solved—shattered her for the minute.

Slowly she recovered from her fall and suddenly realized Bert's presence beside her. He was looking at her with a gaze from which all mask had fallen. Her eyes could not meet the naked truth she saw there—the truth she had longed to see, yet at this moment would have perversely eluded. Leaning forward Bert took her pale face in both his hands, forcing her eyes to meet the demand in his own.

She looked, and as she looked, the real meaning of her release and his surged through her. She met his oncoming lips with the content and happiness of one who is at last willingly possessed.

It was their second kiss. Through each thrilled a memory of the first.



## XXXV

GRANNY'S age had given her a philosophy which met things without censure or judgment.

Youth reforms; age accepts.

She read the letter and smiled her presage of the future. She was not shocked, as Libby and Bert had feared, nor did she overwhelm them with questions. Slowly the leavening of her quietude spread through the excitement of the two young people, transfusing it with relief.

"What you goin' to do about it, Libby?" Granny eventually asked with a practical eye toward the public—the road.

"I ain't never going to let on the truth, if that's what you mean, Granny. Lies seem 'bout the only things that ever did fit Reginald's case, and I guess I've told so many I can slip in one more without the Lord paying no particular attention. I'm jes' going to say I'm a widder, and I dare anybody to prove I ain't."

Bert chuckled with amusement as he asked:

"Can't you fix up a tale to fit me? Seems like you've got more of a knack at that kind of a thing than me."

"Why, you've gotten a di-vorce, to be sure," Libby laughed. "That's too simple to take no cred:<sup>t</sup> for. And you can be mighty stuck up about

it—getting the first di-vorce on the road. And, Granny, you've got to do the spreading of the news, not too sudden-like, making me first a widder, and di-vorcing Bert about a month from now. I'm going into mourning next week, I am."

Granny looked the balky horse, and made no reply.

"You've got it to do, Granny, you're the only one left in this house what's got any friends on the road."

"Why don't you jes' leave things like they be? What's the good of all this here widder and di-vorce business?" asked Granny, wishing she might shirk the job allotted her.

Libby and Bert looked at each other with the mutual expression of "You tell."

"Well, now, the truth is," stuttered Bert, "Lib and me——" (Libby was as red as a rose.) "Well, Granny, to tell the truth, you'll have to help us out, if you want me for a grandson."

"Lands-a-livin'! you an' Libby ain't never thinkin' on gittin' married!" Granny pretended the greatest amazement. "An' Libby ten years older than you ef she's a day."

Bert looked at Libby. He did not feel her lack of beauty nor her greater years. He realized vaguely the interest and charm lent by her life experience. She baffled and fascinated his straightforwardness.

“ And ten years more sense,” he declared, with a genuineness of admiration that filled Libby with a delicious pride.

The next few days were very busy ones. Libby purchased dye. She and Granny ripped and boiled and dyed and dried. And Libby sang the livelong day. Then she and Granny cut and basted, stitched and fitted, while Libby chatted merrily of plans. Bert longed for the life of a farmer; she had money—the money Grandpa Tucker had left her; he should have a farm anywhere he wanted it—north, south, east, or west. She still felt bitterly toward the road, and welcomed the thought of getting far from it.

Granny sewed silently. She did not always listen. She thought of Abram—not the Abram of the latter years. Death had removed the Abram of infirmity and restored the lover of her youth. She thought of their beginning life together in this little home; the planning of the garden. They had planted their love and youth here together. She did not cast any shadow on the plans Libby voiced. Deep within her she brooded on the treasures of memory.

“ Of course you’ll go with us, Granny. No matter where we be, there’ll be your home, too,” said Libby.

“ I’ll go,” Granny answered. But she knew she could never know another *home*.

As they sat there they listened with accustomed

ears to the faint music of Simon's fife. It was blown to them on frosty winds from the fields where he staggered over the tawny, frozen hills.

A carriage drew up to the Stones'. Two men went into the house.

Presently Mrs. Stone came out, a shawl drawn about her sagged shoulders and her head. She dragged her feet heavily in the direction of the music. She returned, Simon dancing and staggering before her, piping a tune of delirious joy. Piping he entered the house; piping he emerged again. The two men appeared, Mrs. Stone following, her apron pressed to her eyes, her shoulders heaving under the shawl.

Simon leaped into the carriage, with happy gurglings and sputterings. He had not ridden often. Not once did he glance at his mother. He clucked to the horses, and joggled on the seat, impatient to be off. The men got in. The horses started.

Replacing his fife to lips, Simon blew a carol of irresponsible glee. The notes laughed and twittered the glad farewell of the son to the mother who bore him. Manda Stone clamped her hands over her ears, stumbling into the house.

Libby and her grandmother sat pale and silent and still, listening.

The deserted hills received Simon's last shrill peal, echoing it in a weird wail of farewell—farewell to their idiot minstrel.

“They’re takin’ Simon to the Asylum,” whispered Granny.

Libby could say nothing. A tear dropped on her newly-dyed royal purple, staining her widow’s weeds.

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## XXXVI

It is spring again on the road. The crocus had prophesied it a month ago in Libby's garden. But the arbutus whispered it even earlier in the bosky shadows of the great mountain forests, while the hepatica spread the news along the hedgerows; the violets breathed it on the brook-banks, and the brook in turn carried the glad tidings to the still chilly creek.

The robins have returned. The song sparrow is to be heard in all his variety of beauteous song. The bluebird and the oriole paint the air in passing.

Up the winding road—the sunset gilded road, come the Italians straggling silently. They add no note to the glad spring carol. Their song has been hushed. You could not tell them from tired American toilers. Behind the others walks the once radiant Sicilian—he who is fair as a Greek—he who once sang his dreams of a painted cart and a bride. Furtively he walks, and in his eyes are the shadows of memories of bricks painted the color of crime.

Down the road zigzags Stone; his face more bloated, his eye sinister and bleared. Manda, his wife, sees his coming from the kitchen window. She shivers and vaguely wonders about the mis-

erable future. She sees before her ten years more at least of babies—"Gifts of God," born of parental drunkenness and lust, maternal loathing and cowardice.

Around the bend by the marsh come a man and a woman. The woman hangs tenderly, proudly, on the man's arm. Bert and Libby are returning from across the creek. One look at their faces tells us they have just been married.

The sunset reflected in Libby's face irradiates it, and surrounds her auburn hair with a nimbus. Bert, looking at her, wonders how anyone could have ever thought her plain. His rugged face is a-blaze with happiness, as he presses Libby's arm to him in a spasm of loving mastery.

"Don't the road look beautiful, Bert?" Libby's voice is tremulous with multiple emotions. "Seems like I never seen it before."

"Yes, it does look good, and the mountains—I was just noticing them; I didn't ever see them looking so high and—and——"

"Mysterious like?"

"Yes, that's it. It's sure as nice around here as most any place I've ever seen——"

"Do you sometimes feel like it's a shame to leave it after all, Bert?—It kind of seems to belong to us and we to it?"

"Yes, I have been a-thinking about the same thing. 'Course a farm would be nice, but we could buy that piece of land behind the old home place, and I'm sure if Grandpa Tucker made such a good

living out of that plot, we ought to be able to manage pretty fine with just a few acres more."

"Oh! Bert, I've been wishing and hoping for that. Poor Granny, she's been right miserable at the thought of leaving, though she's tried not to show it. She's pretty old to be pulling up roots, you know, and making a new start."

At this very time Granny was hobbling slowly about the old garden. She looked up with her glazed eyes at the apple-boughs heavy with pink-ing buds. She remembered when she and Abram had planted mere switches where now the long row of trees shadowed the lane. And that grape arbor over there—how long ago the strong young Abram went to the mountains for those cedar posts.

It would be hard to leave it all—even the mountains. The mountains had grown dim to her fading vision; she had not looked at them often when her sight was good—life was too full of work then.

"But now I'm restin' out," she thought, "seems like me and them mountains are sort of kin."

She looked at them again. Suddenly she felt four arms about her.

"Kiss me, Granny, it's all over, we've gone and done it," Libby declared proudly.

"Yes, we're parsoned, and I tell you he tied a hard knot," Bert laughed.

"And we're not going away after all, Granny——"



“ No,” Bert interrupted, “ we’ve been talking it over, and we’ve decided we’ll just stick to the old road like you and grandpa.”

Granny was too happy to speak; she was not used to expressing joy. Silently she put an arm through each of the young ones, as she looked up to the everlasting hills. As they neared the house she murmured: “ I’m right glad.”

At the kitchen door stood Mrs. Silver, her fat face and small eyes full of good wishes.

“ The cat’s out the bag, Libby—Granny couldn’t keep the secret of what you and Bert intentioned, and a weddin’s ’bout the best time I knows of to drop old differences. Here’s a cake I made fer you and Bert.”

Libby felt she loved everything—even Mrs. Silver. She reached her arms and included as much of Mrs. Silver’s avoirdupois and cake as she could in a hug.

“ Come right in, Mrs. Silver, and I’ll run over and get Mr. Silver, and we’ll all have a grand wedding supper. Guess what it’s going to be? ”

“ Chicken? ” Mrs. Silver ventured.

“ Nop—catfish and waffles! just the very same Granny had in Phillydelphy on her wedding tower.”

While Libby ran over to fetch Mr. Silver, Bert went upstairs to his room. His head was reeling with the delight of everything; he needed to be alone, to get accustomed to his happiness. He sat on the edge of his bed, and as he did so he noticed

on the foot a pile of patch-quilts—the patch-quilts made by his mother—the ones he thought lost by the auction.

A flood of loving gratitude dimmed his eyes as he fumbled the card attached and read: “Wedding present to my husband, from Libby Locke.”

“Lord, make me worthy,” he said as if to a near-felt Presence. . . .

Libby was brandishing the waffle-irons when Bert came downstairs. He walked up to her, and right before Granny and Mrs. Silver and Mr. Silver, gave her a resounding kiss.

While they were munching the steaming waffles and frizzling catfish, a great hub-bub sounded outside.

Tin-pans, drums, cat-calls, yells, and songs all intermingled in one deafening pandemonium.

“A ‘Skimilton’!” cried Libby.

“Our Skimilton,” corrected Bert.

The news of the marriage had gotten out; the village youths, and Bert’s shipyard associates, were gathered outside in what constitutes the wedding serenade in the country.

Cymbals clashed, tin-pans crashed, drums throbbed, voices screamed, and above all vibrated the baying of the hound.

One sound alone was missing—there was no piping of Simon’s fife.

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