

STUDY OF A DIALECT EMPLOYED
BY THE PEOPLE OF THE KENTUCKY MOUNTAINS
AND PRESENTED THROUGH A GROUP OF
ORIGINAL SHORT STORIES

by

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FOREWORD

My purpose in this series of stories of the Kentucky mountain district is not only to show differences in the diction, manners, and customs of those who have lived in the foot-hills of the Appalachian Mountains apart from the rest of the world to a very great extent until recently, but also to make the reader realize that anyone might so have developed had his family for generations back been reared under similar circumstances.

The setting for all of these stories is in that section of the state that is known as the "Moonshine, feudin' country". Although killings and shootings are quite frequent, the majority of the inhabitants are not thus engaged. In one of the so-called "bloody counties" while I was there, seven were shot and killed within one small area. Out of one of these killings developed a feud which is still being waged in the county seat town; three have been shot and two wounded in 1940. Upon asking the judge of this county if nothing could be done to curb the number of killings, he replied, "Yes. If we could ever get a death sentence, that would help. We did bring in a jury once from another county, but

they, too, were afraid to pronounce a death sentence."

It is not advisable to publish direct material concerning this section of Kentucky as the people are very sensitive and think that one is either "slandering or making fun" of them. One of the Mission workers in another county wrote directly of her experiences; some of the better educated "natives" read the book and made such a protest that the book was necessarily withdrawn from circulation. As a result of the ill-feeling engendered by this book, the Mission work was greatly hampered. A very similar reaction took place in the foot-hills of Tennessee because of the book, "School House in the Foot-Hills", the author of which was a "native" of that very section.

The above explanation accounts for my choosing the short story as the vehicle of expression for the experiences garnered both first and second-hand in the Kentucky foot-hill country. The following stories are told in simple diction as it does not seem fitting to adopt anything like a sophisticated style to describe the life of simplicity which most of these mountaineers live, although, at times, it borders on the intensely dramatic.

I carried on this study while teaching and associating with the people themselves. My notes on the dialect and customs of the "natives" are accurate as they were taken on

the spot, and later the dialect list and stories were checked by a teacher who has lived in the same valley for over twelve years. It is hoped that this series of short stories will contribute to the knowledge of early American dialect which still persists in the Kentucky mountain region. Also, it is desired that the stories will have a sociological value in helping the reader understand the peculiar people that are native to that region. Whether or not these tales have good technique as short stories will have to be determined by critics of that form.

Indebtedness is acknowledged to Miss Ada Rice, Professor of English, for helpful advice and guidance, and to Mrs. Charles Blanchard, a teacher in a Mountain Mission School for reading and checking the stories for dialect forms and naturalness of expression.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

Last year I was given the opportunity of participating in a living drama that had for its stage a narrow, secluded valley in the foot-hill country of Kentucky. It was necessary to step backward for a period of from fifty to seventy-five years in time because the social, the cultural, and the home life in that section have, for the most part, remained static throughout the years.

My first night in the mountains was spent in an ancient cabin - one of the poorest, built of planks, with a warped shingle roof that leaked like a sieve. That first night I had the novel experience of sleeping on a shuck mattress that rustled every time I moved, and of being awakened by the gnawing of rats overhead. The family had been very generous, assigning me one entire room while they all slept in the "front room", I know not how. It was yet starlight the next morning when I was aroused by the "chunks-chunks" noise of a churn and the prattle of children's voices. I arose, shivering in that little "lean-to" bedroom, and dressed in the dark, also a new experience.

I was glad to join the family around the fireplace in the front room as soon as possible. The meagerness of the

furnishings of this tenant-farmer's home struck a chord of pity in my heart. The floors were of rough planks with no coverings. The furniture was home-made except the beds and the stove in the kitchen. Two or three delapidated splint-bottom chairs were supplemented by a bench on one side of the table. (See the story, "Waters of Marah".)

We had hot bread, fresh "mountain butter" that resembled thick whipped cream, gravy, and bitter chicory coffee for our breakfast that had been prepared by the dim light of a coal oil lantern. The food all tasted good on that snappy winter morning. The men and boys sat down at the "first table"; and I, as company, was seated with them. The mother and girls waited table. The dearth of dishes and table service was very apparent. However, if one had a knife, he shouldn't complain as some one else needed the fork or spoon. I was grateful for having both a fork and spoon. (See the story, "To the Victor".)

Breakfast being over, we sat around the fireplace, waiting for daylight. I learned that this was the general custom in the mountains especially if there were any place to go - and that morning there was to be a "Mount'in Meetin'" in a cabin just across the creek. After hours, it seemed to me, the mists cleared out of the gulches for a gloriously bright winter day. It was necessary to walk a foot-log and

wade through a corn-stubble field to reach the "Meetin'"; so I pulled on my boots and followed the children to this cabin where another new experience awaited me. As we approached the yard with a "paling" (picket) fence around it, I thought that most of the congregation were on the outside. This proved to be true. When we entered one room of the cabin in which three families lived, I was horrified to see that the seats were made of fence rails of that three-cornered, sharp variety, resting on blocks or stumps of wood. Being a visitor, I was given one of the few chairs. Only two preachers were present; five are usually required for a "big Meetin'" or a "Free-for-All Meetin'" or a "Buryin'". (See the story, "Maman".)

The congregation was a "moving" one. The women who were cooking in the kitchen came at intervals and stood in the doorway, with flour still on their hands - perhaps to get a glimpse of the new "Missionary". Dogs and children came and went through the outside door; others changed about in the room at will. One preacher led the singing of a hymn with interminable verses; then the other one "preached himself out of breath" in a very high key. It was difficult for me to understand him as he broke each sentence into fragments by uttering the expression, "W'y, yee". When the next preacher continued the sermon, he punctuated his phrase

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by phrase colloquy with "ah". While the first preacher rested, he sat by the fireplace and chewed and spat; for the mountain preachers live no differently from the others in the neighborhood, chewing tobace, drinking corn liquor, and being sociable with the boys. One old fellow with a dark, bristly mustache chewed and spat into the fireplace with accuracy all during the service, saying "Amen!" in between expectorations. Out of courtesy to me, I was asked to say something. Accordingly, I invited them to come over to the cabin where I was staying for Sunday School in the afternoon, not knowing that the mountain preachers talk "agin" the Mission Sunday Schools. However, that afternoon I had about thirty crowded on the front porch where I was teacher for the entire crowd, ranging in ages from babes-in-arm to old grandmothers. (See the story, "High Tide".)

Unique experiences awaited me every day from the time of the bumpy ride in a jolt-wagon up the creek-bed until I made my exit from the hill country by the same rough route. There was the Sunday that a terrific mountain storm hit us as we were traveling the trail around "Long Mountain". (See the story, "High Tide".) Then came my first Mountain Singing School held in the Mission Chapel with families coming for miles either to join in or listen. (See the story, "To the Victor".) There was the day that they buried Sam Burget

up on the hillside near the Mission. The mountain folk have no undertaker; they make their own shrouds, coffins, and rough boxes. After a person dies, they have all-night services with much preaching and singing of mournful songs. (See the story, "Mammon".) At my first "Buryin'" I was again shocked to see the coffin that was shaped like a wainwright case deposited on the ground where it rested during the entire service. While the singing and preaching progressed, men were still digging the grave; others were sawing boards for the vault; and still others were hammering on the rough box. There were no flowers or anything to soften the proceedings. At the close of the service which is supposed to last until the grave is ready, to my complete surprise, I noticed that some of the strong men took off the coffin lid and then raised the coffin straight up at an angle with the corpse in its white shroud exposed to full view. They did this in order to have a picture taken of the corpse with the chief mourners on either side, as was the custom. (See the stories, "Mammon" and "Waters of Marah".)

Every Sunday I passed directly in front of the old weather-beaten "Meetin' House" (church) that caused so much concern both before and after it was "cut-in-two". At first I wished I might have access to the building as poor as it was because it was larger than the tobacco-stripping shed

in which I held my Sunday School most of the time. Afterwards, when I learned of the ill-feeling connected with the "Meetin' House", I was glad I had not tried to secure it. One Sunday, I was surprised to see the front part of the church sawed off. That night it was mysteriously burned. The family on one side of the "Meetin' House" blamed the family on the other side; an old feud was renewed with the packing of guns, threatenings, and the "shootin' up" of the house where I visited every Sunday. Guns were kept by front doors; the place was guarded night and day; the young man there who was threatened was sent away under protest. Unlike the story, "Meetin' House Feud", no officers were called; the mystery was never solved; and the usual way of settling a dispute in the mountains was employed - that of leaving the affair to be worked out of itself. Up to the time I left the valley no blood had been shed. Soon afterwards came the destructive "High Tide" (flood) that washed away property of both parties in the feud, thus diverting their minds from the feud. In spite of that, however, old grudges were revived and new suspicions were created that no doubt will cause division and strife for years to come; for the mountaineers never forget injuries. (See the stories: "High Tide", "To the Victor", and "Meetin' House Feud".) The idea of using United States government officials to solve the

mystery was suggested by the actual happening in this same valley of the stealing of government gasoline on the "Road Project" and the report that finger-prints would be taken to locate the thief.

I have tried to incorporate in these short stories the average mode of living although I visited in homes from the poorest to the better type of house that had weather-boarding and plastering. There were three of the latter in the valley. The majority of the dwellings were of the stripped plank variety - in truth, merely cabins. The log cabin which is much warmer was a rarity in that section. The cabins are built entirely of lumber sawed at their own saw-mills. As the shingles warp out of shape very soon in that rainy, damp climate, many of the cabins are roofed with tin now. The cabins are not built on solid or continuous foundations but on stones or piles set at intervals. This means cold floors in the winter. Of course, that open space makes an excellent home for the many cats and dogs, and sometimes, pigs, which means fleas are common. This space under the floor is often utilized for a storage place for wood, kindling, and coal which is easily obtained in sacks and wheel barrows from exposed coal ledges or banks. (See the stories: "Waters of Marah" and "To the Victor".)

One of the poorest types of cabins was described by one

of my pupils from another valley. At first I thought the description a clever fabrication, so I checked the veracity of the letter which follows:

I live on Southfork of Quicksand on a branch called Jones's Branch. I am going to describe my home there. We live in a two-room windowless cabin made of poplar logs with the cracks filled with mud. We have two horses. My pap is a hog raiser, so we have plenty of meat. Our house faces the south with part of a porch, the other part rotted off. We have a high palling for protection of mad dogs and a silver horse shoe to keep away the haints, and we have a barn. We have plenty of squirrels, so we go huntin'. We have plenty of rattlesnakes, and I killed one in the kitchen while I was cooking. You see, I have to cook while I am not in school 'case my mother has been dead nine years.

The descriptions of pieces of property are different from those in states where roads are laid out in section lines. The following description of a tract of land published in a Kentucky county paper gave me the idea for the boundary dispute in the story, "Meetin' House Feud".

Beginning at a water fall or (gate) near a holly bush, in the line of Newton Drake; thence to the top of Sand Ridge; thence running with the center of the ridge and Newt Drake's line to a line of C. F. Horton; thence with the fence and center of the ridge round 'the head of the hollow' and down the ridge to a set stone; thence a south course and with the branch to a Chestnut tree at Hiram's Branch; thence with the branch to the beginning.

Each day I kept an account of happenings and observations. One might wonder what would occur of interest when one was bottled up in a valley where there were no trains,

highways for cars, stores such as we "outlanders" know them, no place of amusement except the "Jimmy Barn" (road house), no telephones, and very few radios. To us at the Mission, little incidents were important - the growling of the lumber truck that jolted over rocks going up the creek-bed; the gathering in of the mules and mountaineers on "Sales Days"; the planning and carrying out of the Singing School; the night the chicken thieves stole all the chickens from the Mission; the blue smoke by day and the reddish glare by night of the tobacco-beds' burnin'; the search for the thirty-five varieties of wild flowers from the first appearance of the Trailing Arbutus to the May Apple and Kentucky Jack-in-the-Pulpit; events at school such as scrub day and visits from our 4-H Director; the day our girls won first in the County Contest with their butter-making demonstration; "High Tides" that meant flood vacations and a time to "get caught up" with work; letters from the outside world when the "mail boy" (postman on mule) came; also occasional visitors from the outside; trips to the seven "cut-stations", one notable week-end trip to another county; hunting for clay by the creek and watching the dexterous feat of a man and mule "breaking up" for the first time a steep hillside for a corn crop; going to "Workin's" in the spring time; visiting the sick, holding services on Sundays; planning for the gradua-

tion exercises and the last day of school dinner; in fact, living as full and busy a life as any city person. To me, there was drama in the happenings of every day in the foothill country.

The inspiration for parts of the stories, "Mannon", "High Tide", and "Aunt Lillie and the Racer", was given to me by the mother of two of my pupils who walked four miles from another county every day to the Mission School. During "Dogwood winter", that chilly spell that always comes when the Dogwoods bloom (so say the mountaineers), I had the opportunity of going home with these girls. Our journey up-creek led over a triple divide, the source of three creeks. When we reached the top of the divide, we walked through a woods of huge Beech trees adorned with lichens. Ground moss and the great sword ferns (bracken) made the way pleasant. The girls found some "mountain tea", the shrub from which the flavor for Teaberry gum is obtained; also I must sample some Sassafras and chew some Slippery Elm. Leaving the summit after climbing a rail fence, we went down a gully which was supposed to be a County Road, crossed little branches of orange-colored water stained from the sulphur rocks, passed coal banks interspersed with sulphur and topped by shale that made it impossible to mine the coal as "slips" (land-slides) occur, and thus entered another valley. As the path

along the creek had been washed out, we waded water part way crossed two high foot-logs, and finally arrived at their commodious cabin after a two-hour walk. I was grateful for a splint-bottom chair, a drink of well water, and an open grate fire. As is the custom in many mountain homes, the outside door was left open for mere light and air until too chilly for comfort. For this reason, I always wore woollen clothes when visiting in the mountain homes. That night their unusually soft feather-bed felt luxurious to tired, aching limbs, but the trip was worth all the effort; so events proved.

It was during these two days when a mountain storm and resulting "High Tide" shut us in, that "America", the mother, told me of true happenings in the hills that I recorded post haste in notes to use later in the stories: "High Tide", "Hannon", and "Aunt Lillie and the Racer". Monday morning, six o'clock found us on our long journey back to the Mission. The "High Tide" had made it necessary for us to build two bridges and go a round-about way, skirting the hills to negotiate our journey. Great cataracts of water were shooting down steep inclines in a noisy manner. The Kentucky cardinals were singing; the vivid coloring of rock, tree, and bush had been conjured forth by the rain; the rapids in the creek almost shouted to us as we neared them. Yes, the

long trip was worth all the effort in spite of the fact that I was almost too tired to teach that day. Yet, those girls and others made the same journey back and forth every day. After that experience, I knew that those pupils deserved to pass in their subjects even if they failed in some things.

Aside from my own experiences, I have endeavored to incorporate in this series of stories the following: (1) Outstanding characteristics of the people, and (2) Characteristics of speech that are indigenous to that section.

Outstanding Characteristics of the People

The isolation and struggle for existence usually bring out the cruder phases of life. However, the mountaineer is inherently polite. When company is present, the husband addresses his wife as "Missus", and she "Misters" him. They are hospitable, and when it comes to "leave-taking" of one another, they invite one back several times. They are very sympathetic in times of sickness and death. The sick room is often crowded with people, especially on Sundays. It is the only way they have of showing their concern as they have no telephones for inquiring of the sick person; neither are there any florist shops to deliver flowers. In fact, they never have flowers at their funerals or buryin's. In times of sickness sometimes their superstitions are expressed by

point in the soil and the plow from tumbling down hill. Very often the mule must be headed straight up the mountain in order to drive the plow point into the rocky soil for a fresh start. There is very little level land or "bottoms" for cultivation; hence it is highly prized. That is one reason the mountaineers fight the extension of the government road up the valley as it means they must give up their garden spots or tobacco patches. (See the story, "Uncle Jed's Last Stand.") However, two families can farm in Kentucky where only one could in some level states; for one man can own one side of the hill, and another family can farm the other side. Women and girls help manipulate the hand-planters to plant corn. As soon as school "turns out" in the spring, every high school girl must necessarily get out and hoe in the fields of corn and tobacco; they expect to do so and make large sunbonnets to wear so that they may preserve their "white" complexions, a mark of beauty that has persisted since Civil War days. (See the story, "Aunt Lillie and the Racer")

"Quick-on-the-trigger" tempers are common in the hills. I had one boy in my classes with an explosive temper that I tried to help him overcome. He could have been "bright" had he not chewed tobacco, smoked, and drunk liquor at the age of twelve. His growth was stunted by reason of this. He

hanging a horseshoe over the foot of the sick person's bed.

There are many maladies in this mountain region, and as there is only one elderly doctor in this particular county, medical aid is scarce. One elderly mid-wife delivers the babies; she is called a "granny woman". The dreadful eye disease, Trachoma, is quite prevalent in the hills. Recently an appropriation was made to help combat this disease in Kentucky, but I doubt if help penetrates as far as this section of the mountains. The mountain children take little notice of hurts, being stoical in nature. Also, many times the parents of large families are so pre-occupied with the many cares and chores of living that they pay little attention to minor hurts and wounds that become so easily infected in this region. For this reason large mountain sores are common. The stock remedy is a "fat meat poultice" or a "bread and milk poultice". (See the story, "Waters of Marsh".)

There is a streak of stubbornness bred into the boys and girls and men and women of the mountains. They must necessarily possess an unusual "stick-to-it-iveness" to combat rough, stony fields and plow land that sets on edge, with a stubborn mule that has to be guided with the voice; for the plow handles are all that one person can manage when half the time he has to be below the plow to keep the

could tell in minute detail how they made corn liquor. He was always irritated when I referred to the foot-hills as mountains. "W'y, these ain't mount'ins!" he would protest; "they's jist plain ol' hills." In spite of his temper and faults, he had good qualities, possessing a high tenor voice that fitted perfectly the old English Ballads that he loved to sing. One of the girls would chord on the old wheezy organ and he would sing, "Barbara Allen" perfectly.

When it comes to money matters, the mountaineers are naturally suspicious of one's intentions. They often drive sharp bargains. Those who fortunately have considerable possessions often use their positions as a means of selfishly advancing themselves instead of being concerned about the poorer fellow. Even the ones that are better educated, ones whom we would expect to be leaders, are often as implacable as the poorest of the poor in their natures. But perhaps, that is true of human nature in general. (See the story, "Hectin' House Feud".) Along with these traits of character, we should include the mountaineer's trait of refusing to testify against anyone, all sticking together, right or wrong, partly because of fear and partly because of tradition and training. (See the story, "To the Victor".) The observers never consider that they become "accomplices to the crime" if they do not report the case to officials. (See the

story, "Hostin' House Poud".) Also, another idea that prevails is - "It's all right, just so you don't get caught." The crime is in being caught and sent to jail. Very often they study the Law in order to see how to evade it - or to see how to "best" the other fellow, no matter if it is by trickery. (See the story, "To the Victor".)

Characteristics of Speech that are Indigenous

When the Mission School started about twelve years ago, the old Shakespearean pronunciation of "beastes, nestes, postes, and vestes or wastes" was quite common for the words "beasts, nests, posts, and vests". They still persist; even two of my high school students always pronounced "beasts" as "beastes". It was so quaint that I fear I was not diligent in trying to correct them. The word "pieded" for "spotted" is also dated from the time of Shakespeare.

Farther back from the viewpoint of time, another word that has persisted in preserving itself is the word "hit", used instead of and alternately with "it". "Hit" was perfectly good English in the time of Tyndale in the sixteenth century as he used "hit" for "it" in his translation of the Bible. The people in the mountain region seem to use "hit" and "it" interchangeably as it suits their fancy - or perhaps whichever term is more easily pronounced. From my ob-

servation, they use "it" as an elision of "hit"; for they pronounce "it" very distinctly. Most Americans usually elide "it" to "ut" or simply "'t".

At first I could find no explanation for the word "gin" with a soft "g", used in this section of the foot-hill country instead of "chore", and the expression "ginnin' 'round" meaning "choring around". Then I discovered the word "gin" in the Bible, meaning "trap". No doubt, trapping or visiting traps was a very definite part of the chores in pioneering times; therefore, "ginning" came to be used for "trapping", and the word "gin" became established in their minds with chores and has been handed down by word of mouth ever since the earliest settlements in America.

The term "High Tide", used to designate a flood or high waters has undoubtedly been carried down in the vocabulary of these mountain folk from the time when their forefathers lived near the ocean either in this country or in England. The original meaning of "creek" is an inlet in the sea; it is pronounced in this section of the foot-hills as "creek" with the long "e" sound and not "erick" as in Southern Indiana and other states. It was perfectly proper in England to call the high waters in the inlet of the sea a "high tide" because that is just what it was. This, to me, is the only possible explanation of this "philological curiosity".

The terms "holp" and "holpen" for "help" may have persisted from the time of Chaucer. The older people use these terms very consistently although the younger ones who have attended Mission School or other high schools have it trained out of them, but they will almost invariably elide "help" to "he'p". "Chancet" for "chance" and "oneet" for "once" are two other early American dialect forms. The use of "wonderful" instead of "very" - as: "The room was wonderful dirty" - surely must be a carry-over from the seventeenth century, used in the sense of "enough to excite surprise".

Two other old forms are found in the words "displeasure" and "disremember". These are used as verb forms in a negative sense.

Many of the dialect forms are merely mispronunciation but they are important enough to be mentioned from the fact that their spelling has been affected by the persistent mispronunciation. They insist on spelling "window" as "winder" because that is the way it is pronounced.

At the close of each story is an annotated list of unusual expressions or words that are used in the stories. Alternative expressions are also listed. Many of the mispronunciations are not listed as the pages would be overloaded with numbers. A complete alphabetical list of dialect forms, however, is placed at the end of the book for

the purpose of showing the way the mountain folk pronounce the words and even substitute different words to convey the same meaning.

Perhaps it would be easier for the teachers in the Mission School if they could use the mountain vernacular in teaching; for sometimes, it is difficult to use words of the right connotation for the mountaineer children as their experience with the outside world is so limited. Some of them have never been to a real town. It is almost impossible to teach geography to some. One teacher was patiently trying to locate the country of Holland for her class, telling them it was across the Atlantic Ocean, near France, etc. One little boy said disgustedly, "Tell us, Teacher, is it up or down?" The only phraseology that he understood in regards to directions was "up-creek" and "down-creek".

Very often - in fact, most of the time, I felt that I was in a school room, learning instead of teaching. I entered into the lives of the people so intensely that I could never shake off the feeling that I was an actor in a drama, the other actors of which were utterly oblivious of anything unusual happening. Then when it was all over, and I literally stepped from that stage back into the "civilized" surroundings to which I had been accustomed for years, it took me awhile to shake off the "make-believe" world and re-adjust.

I wonder what might have happened had I stayed for a longer period of time. Would all have seemed as commonplace as it did to the natives of that little section of creek-country in the foot-hills of the Appalachians? Perhaps, I, too, might have said what one woman did as the truck-load of people went bumping down-creek over rocks after the last-day-of-school exercises. I was lamenting the fact that the tarpaulin over our heads to protect us from the rain kept us from enjoying the scenery. Said she, "Aw, they hain't nothin' to look at - jist some ole willer trees."

But to me come memories of the white, cone-shaped "candles" of bloom on the "Buckeyes", resplendent against the dark green leaves; the hillsides a-bloom with wild geraniums, blackberry blossoms, and mountain honeysuckle; and the nists nestling in the gulches. All these treasures and many more are locked in memory's store-house along with the willow thickets which I last saw on my exit from the foot-hill country.

UNCLE JED'S LAST STAND

"Drap them rock, yah young 'Scall'yun!"¹ Uncle Jed's fiery tones foreboded evil. "Drap 'em, I sez, 'tother side the garden gate!"

I hesitated with my hand on the unloading lever of the truck, staring into unfriendly eyes at the other end of the shotgun. Uncle Jed's face was a brick-red and he was snorting.

"Best be quick, Boss," warned my helper, Duel Bryce. "Cain't trust his trigger finger whin he's on a rampage."

My fears were confirmed. Uncle Jed's threats "agin the gov'mint" were being translated into action now that the rock for the new road was being hauled in. My frequent chats with him at his well curb had revealed intense opposition to the building of the government road up the valley. The crucial time for my dealing with him had arrived. I was prepared to do so by strategy rather than authority, fearing that taking him to jail so soon after his recent severe illness would mean homicide.

"O.K., Duel, I'll dump the rock," I declared loudly for Uncle Jed's benefit. "Go back and tell them to hold off with that second truck load."

"I'll unload, Uncle Jed," I promised as he still held the bead on me, "but first, I want to get a drink of that good well water. I've been thinking about it all morning." I flashed him my friendliest smile as I jumped from the truck.

"Durn -- ifen yuh didn't wa'k fur the gov'mint, I'd call yer my friend.-- Drink all yuh want, Son. Time was whin I could a-offered yuh a drink with some strength to hit. Then days we made our own licker an' fit² the revenooers; didn't we, Betsy?" He fondled his old shotgun. "An' we kin war agin even of all the olduns that stood shoulder to shoulder fur our rights is dead an' buried -- an' the younguns is too yaller to take a stand agin the gov'mint men. Many's the time we fooled 'em ---"

Uncle Jed was now breathing more easily, but he still clung doggedly to his gun as if on guard. Realizing time was my most valuable asset in dealing with Uncle Jed, I urged him on, wondering if he included me with the men he had outwitted.

"Wal, the gov'mint uster send revenooers out hyer in the hills to ketch us stilling," related Uncle Jed with gusto - "but by cracky, they never doneer. I ricollect one party close call. Prudy 'n me hed the still goin' full-blast out in the ol' smokehouse whin Pete, our leastun⁴ who wuz fishin' down-creek runned in to warn us.⁵

'Douse water on the fire,' I tells Prudy. 'Fete, git Hammer to sneek up the ridge an' give three calls on the cowhorn. Prudy, don't fergit to make a stir 'bout ne ho'p-in' yuh with the meat. I'll tend to the revenooer.'

With that, I satters down to the barnlot by the creek, callin' the pigs -- 'Soy-see; Soy-see'. Then I calls the cows, 'Ke-bossie; Ke-bossie!' I 'bout hed a stampede 'round me 'caise we never wasted corn on no animals less⁶ a revenooer was about. The pigs most gins'ly lived on the meat⁷ an' the cows pastered on the hillsides.

Wal, up comes the stranger.

'I see, yore a man of business,' sez he.

'Yep, reckon so,' sez I.

'Heard yuh raised a lot uv corn,' sez he.

'Reckon hit takes a passel to feed these hyer reeters!' sez I.

'Heard yuh sold milk in jugs,' sez he, pickin' up one by the barn, takin' out the cork, an' a-sniffin' at hit. 'What kind uv milk do yuh sell?'

'Sar milk,' I answers. 'He likes hit strong 'round hyer.'

Wal, that revenooer seed he warn't gittin' nothar talkin'; so he starts lockin' 'round.

'What's that smoke doin', comin' from that shed?' he

inguires suspicious-like.

Jist then, Prudy starts yellin' --- 'Jed! Oh, Jed-i-di-ah, come hyer an' he'p me smoke these hans!' That wuz oncet I wuz glad to hear her voice.

'Shet up,' I hollers. 'I got company.'

'Oh, that's all right; go right ahead an' he'p her,' sez he, startin' torard that stillhouse.

Fur a minute I wuz stumped. Then Hamner let loose with that cowhorn up on the p'int uv the ridge. Now hit bellered that day! The wind wuz jist right to carry hit plain.

'Come on,' sez I. 'Some person's in trouble, shore uz you're borned. They needs us wuzer'n Prudy.'

I tore out up the holler, that revcnooer keepin' at my heels. Whin we got a safe distance away, I drapped on a log, an' we both puffed an' blowed.

When I ketched my breath, I sez, 'I'm afcered I made a mistake. How many times did that thing beller?'

'Three times,' sez he, 'with a lectle sep'rate note at the end.'

'Dadburn it!' sez I. 'That means they found the hoss that wuz lost up to Wildman's. I thought hit war four calls an' that 'd mean - Come to oncet.'

'I'm glad hit warn't four, fur I need yore help mysse'f

in a bad way,' sez the gov'mint man, kinda sly. 'As man to man, kin yuh tell me how to make lickin?'

'Shore,' I answers. 'Ain't no man-person in these hyer hills but knows how to make hit.'

'Is that so!' sez he, su'prized-like.

'Yep, we got a neighborhood still. I uses hit fur a spell; then my brother Jim, he runs it; then he passes hit on to Mass; Toby takes his turn to stillin' next; an' then Moxy --- Trouble is - they don't allus takes their own turn. Sometimes, I's yem⁸in' fur a drink, but whin I goes to run that still, it ain't thar.'

'Do yuh have it now?' he axed eager-like. 'I'd like to see hit work.'

'Shore I do -- lesson some rascal's borry'd hit. Foller me,' sez I raisin' up an' gittin' my wind fur a long run."

Uncle Jed laid his gun down on the wellcurb, laughing heartily. 'Yuh'd never reckon thar wuz sich a born-fool on yarth; now, would ye, a-thinkin' I'd show him our still! "

The thought that I, too, might be a "born-fool" in my method of dealing with Uncle Jed flashed through my consciousness. However, my interest in his story was too great to interrupt him then; besides, he'd be more pliable after a good laugh. My appeal was formulated in my mind; all I

had to do was to await an opening to present it.

Uncle Jed's cheeks became flushed as he proceeded.

'I shore led that revenoocor a wild-geese chase, in an' cut one holler after 'nother; up one hill an' down 'tother; in circles, over logs an' bresh, fin'lly windin' up at a ol' shed fixed up fur jist sich a time.

'Got to be real kearful on 'count these hyer gov'mint men,' I whispered, an' he seemed tickled pink. Uv course, whin I opened the door, the shack was empty.

'Jist uz I thought,' sez I -- 'That sneakin' Wildman boy that cain't git enough lickar 'z taken hit. Come on; we gotta find him,' I yelled, startin' off agin double-quick.

To make a long story short, uz my mummy uster say, I kep' that revenoocor chasin' frum one place to 'nother -- an' allus nary person hed that still. Fin'lly, I seed he hed enough, but I was goin' to put the finishin' teches on.

'Stranger,' sez I, 'mighty sorry I cain't show yuh how to make lickar, but ifen yuh want a drink, I'll take yer up to Mandy's; she sells Moonshine.'

Whin we reaches Mandy's, she was sittin' on her bed; wa'n't no cheer big enough to hold her. She offers the stranger a drink frum the jugs under her bed. They 'z painted white on the outside to look like they hed milk in 'em. Then the revenoocor done what we wanted him to do --

He arrests Mandy.

'All right,' Mandy sez, 'I'll go to jail with yer ifen yuh'll help me offen this hyer bed.'

Wal, siree, that revenooer tugged an' pulled an' heaved till he fin'illy gits Mandy to her feet. Then she lumbers to the door, a-makin' the planks squeak with every step. I wisht yuh could a seed the look on that feller's face whin he discivers they's no way to push er pull Mandy through that door; hit war jist natchally too narrer fur her. He wuz so wore out, he give up.

'Looks like a leetle whopped dog,' sez Mandy uz he ske-daddled down the hillside. Her laugh shore shook that cabin. We never seed that gov'mint feller agin --"

Uncle Jed paused. The chance to test my powers of persuasion on Uncle Jed had arrived. But I waited a split second too long. My ear caught the roar of a motor.

"Could the boys have disobeyed orders about that second truck load of rock!" I wondered.

"What's that?" Uncle Jed's keen ear had also discerned the sound. He clutched his gun.

"Hold on, Uncle Jed, I've got to talk to you ---" I interposed.

"No time now, Son. Them thar gov'mint fellers 'z comin' ter take rock 'cross my garden patch -- an' they ain't

got no right. I paid fur this hyer place, an' hit's mine. Betsy 'n me is gonter stand agin 'em to the last ditch jist like the hull ¹⁰ neighborhood uster. We'll show 'em."

With a wild look, he rushed down the garden path much too swiftly for his age and strength towards what he thought was a new truck load of enemies. I heard him shout, "Come on, yo lousy louts --"

Then an airplane motor droned overhead. That was what we had heard instead of the second truck.

"Thank God," I breathed as I pursued him. "I'll have a chance yot to influence his actions."

His heart must have failed him; for I saw him stagger at the gate, then recover himself, and point old Betsy directly at the empty driver's seat of my truck. There was a loud report. Uncle Jed turned triumphantly to me.

"We got 'em, Son. ¹¹ We got 'em!" Then he sank to the ground.

Even before I reached his side, I knew that Uncle Jed had taken his last stand "agin the gov'mint".

1. 'Scall'yun - rascalion or rascal
2. fit - fought
3. war - fight
4. leastin - youngest child
5. runned - ran (cf. knowed - knew; catched - caught, etc.)
6. lessen - unless
7. nast - nuts that fall from the Hickory, Walnut, Beech,

8. yearnin' - yearning or longing for
9. offen - off (cf. ifen - if and outen - out)
10. hull - whole
11. son - used prolifically to denote person, place, or thing
(A favorite expression: "Son, I ain't done.")

WATERS OF MARAH

"They could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter." -Exodus 15:23

Lizzie Horich of Bear Branch, noted for her fiery temper, tall, spare, and red-haired, stood near the door of the "lean-to" kitchen, buttoning the heavy overcoat up to her chin. Her rasping voice cut the air as she turned with a jerk to poke another stick of wood into the firebox of the range and adjust a damper.

"You two younguns quit postofficin'¹² --an' hurry with them taters. Ifen Cham'er ever gits back with the corn meal, we'll want supper. I gotta milk now. Yore pappy said he'd be back, come sundown, but he ain't. Fool-trip over to the Mission anyways."

The metallic twang of Lizzie's voice utterly silenced the girlish chatter. But Mary Lou's eyes still glowed star-like, and Sarah's legs were rhythmic pendulums under the table as they hurried with the peeling.

The chill wind invaded the entire room with the opening of the door. Lizzie slammed it as quickly as she had opened it.

"Heckon I'll have to go outen the front door. Mary Lou, yuh kin fry them taters an' cut the side-meat fur the

skillet. I won't be gone no longer than hit takes to pull down the fodder from the barnloft, an' milk. Sarah, mind the baby, ¹³ an' ifen Cham'er comes in, send him down to Doty's to git a mite more lamp oil. Yore pappy started 'bout tse this mornin' to walk over to the Mission; so he taken the lantern."

With the click of the latch, Sarah fairly bounced to the opposite side of the table. In a twinkling she was up on the rude bench, pointing to the picture of a doll on a page of a catalogue pasted on the wall along with newspapers and Sunday School quarterlies that served as a wall-paper for the kitchen.

"Hit's that one, I want fur Chris'mus, Mary Lou. See, the one with the curly hair an' the pink dress. Wal, I wouldn't be displeas'd ¹⁴ ifen her dress wuzn't so purty, but her hair orta be all golden an' curly jist like that." Sarah flung back her own stringy dark hair from her forehead so that she could peer more intently at the picture of the coveted doll in the fast-darkening room.

"Sarah." Mary Lou's voice was like the soft wind whispering ¹⁵ in the pines. "We'd better not talk 'bout that play-dolly anymore, leastways, not whin Mom kin hear us."

The glow from the fire that Mary Lou was stirring revealed a double-hunger in her immature, pinched face; for

it told of frustrated longings and a patient acceptance of her role as "little mother" to the younger ones while Lizzie took her share of the outdoor toil.

"But, Mary Lou, whin I eat, I purely¹⁶ enjoy looking into her eyes; hit seems like she's a-talkin' to me. I'm skeered I cain't hold my tongue." Sarah's voice quivered.

Mary Lou let the heavy iron skillet clatter to the stove. "I'm giving' yuh warnin' fur yer own good, Sarah. Hit'd pleasure Mom to paste a piece uv writin' ur a poke¹⁷ on top uv that doll-picture ifen we keep gabbin' 'bout it. Yuh don't keer fur her to spile¹⁸ yore play-dolly; do yuh?"

"W'y, no." Sarah rubbed her greasy checked-flannel dress with moist hands. "No!" Fright choked her voice. "You don't reckon she'd do hit --"

"Shore uz yore borned, she would. Sarah, you disremember how Mom tore up Cham'er's airplane 'casen he stopped hoein' corn to fly hit, an' how she said she'd w'ar him out with a hickory¹⁹ ifen he made ary other un.²⁰ An' maybe you disremember²⁰ whin she hung my play-dolly on a nail so high I couldn't tip²¹ hit, an' how I broke her whin I tried to git her a-loose." A note of bitterness crept into Mary Lou's tone. "I can't figger out what's the matter with Mom. I 'low she don't even know hit's gittin' clos't to Chris'mus."

"Shore, she knows hit, Mary Lou. Whin we'z down to

the store jist 'tother day, she took account uv the fire-cracker sign an' pooched out her lip, an' said kinda ²²plagued-like, 'Hyer 'tis most Chris'mus time agin.' 'An' then her face got as red uz fire."

"But we don't dast say ary thing 'bout Chris'mus nur 'bout that play-dolly. Tell yuh whut, Sarah," Mary Lou continued in a comforting way, "let's wait till our heads ²³is hid under the counterpin tonight, 'n then we kin whisper 'bout yore play-dolly."

Dessie Lee, the baby, whimpered as Mary Lou cut the last thick slice of side-meat and hung the remaining chunk on the hook back of the range, a device for keeping it safe from the rats. Both the girls raced for the baby's crib by the fireplace in the front room. As was the case in most mountain homes, the baby was the center of attraction when she was awake. This time Mary Lou reached the baby first.

"Better crawl under the porch, Sarah, an' fetch a chunk uv coal fur the grate," admonished the elder. "The fire's pret nigh ²⁴out, an' Mom'll cut a shine ²⁵caisen she wants to wash Dessie Lee atter ²⁶supper. You'd help her by settin' the box of baby clothes on the mantel-piece to warm."

"Hit's dreadful cold to ring a ring atter that coal, Mary Lou," protested Sarah indignantly. "Mom said fur me ²⁷

to mind Dessie Lee -an' I'm goin' to have the sweet leetle
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 ole woman whin I git back."

The split-bottom chair that Mary Lou was using in lieu of a rocker was low and loose from constant use. It lent itself admirably to the rocking movement, responding with a "bunka-bunka" noise as the front and back legs alternately hit the floor resoundingly. Dessie Lee seemed to love the rocking. Her reddish-brown hair curled like a halo around her head in the firelight.

"Bless hit's leetle heart; Dessie Lee, yore hairs shore look like the curls on Mom's leetle dead sister." Carrying the baby on one arm, Mary Lou took down from the mantel the glass-covered snap-shot of a home-made coffin containing a wax-like figure. She held it close to the fire in order to see again her Aunt Norah whom she wished might have lived. The girl with the eager face beside the coffin was her mother. Mary Lou sighed. "I ricollect oncet, Dessie Lee, how Mom showed me a bunch uv yaller curls that her mammy hed cut offen A'nt Norah's head. She looks like --"

A sudden squeal from near the front porch caused Mary Lou to replace the picture on the mantel quickly. "Sarah, take yorese'f outen thet porch!" She smelt burning potatoes. "Sarah!" she shouted as she dashed to the stove still

holding the diminutive Dessie Lee. Snatching a darkened dishrag to life the cover, she stirred the potatoes vigorously with a battered fork. The cold was creeping in through the cracks of the board walls.

"That Sarah's natch'lliy got her foot catched ²⁹ agin comin' up them stump steps." Mary Lou hastened to cuddle the baby down in the crib. "Don't cry, Dessie Lee. Sister's got to he'p Sarah."

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As Lizzie entered the low-ceilinged kitchen with her bucket of steaming milk during a lull in the storm, she was tired, cold, and frankly irritated. She smelt burning potatoes; the baby was crying; and no one was to be seen except the cat that was trying to reach the cut meat in the skillet.

"Them keerless younguns! I wisht I could make two outen myself. The Law sakes! The grate fire's plumb ³⁰ petered out. The baby'll ketch cold. Hush up, Dessie Lee!" Lizzie fumbled with the buttons of her coat as she called, "Oh, Mary Lou! Sarah! Whut in tarnation's become uv them gals?"

She opened the door of the "lean-to" bedroom, but only an icy breath of air greeted her, reminding her that she must watch the cans of fruit put in the bedding box to

prevent their freezing. Warming her hands, preparatory to taking the baby, Lizzie felt more like weakening than she had for many a month. Her physical strength was at a low ebb. She was tired of holding the managing reins that her easy-going husband had long ago relinquished to her, but she didn't dare give them up. As a young woman, Lizzie had been lively and "jealous" to get along. Her bitter disappointment in not being able to realize her ambition with Henry had caused her to encase her feelings in flint-iron that gave off sparks if struck. She was now handicapped by a rapidly developing goiter that affected her in such a way that she could not be calm. It had alchemized her gay, laughing voice of youth into this metallic rasp. Dead hope had engulfed her soul in "waters of Marah" until they were making bitter the lives of those around her. Yet underneath it all, there was an undercurrent of longing she could not fathom.

"I wisht I didn't keer so -'bout the younguns!" she muttered to herself as she took the child in her arms. "Bless hits leetle bones! I orts bathe yuh now, Lover." This process always brought Lizzie a derived pleasure; for to her, a laughing, well-fed baby in a clean bed epitomized her "lost dreams".

Her ears caught a murmur of voices down the branch-

path. Lizzie shook herself mentally - "Time to get things moving for supper". No matter what the task was at hand, she never wanted her children to go hungry. The latch was soon lifted, and Rags, the new dog, bounded in followed by Henry with the two girls clinging to his arms. They never did that way with her. Irritation took possession of Lizzie.

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"Got back; did yuh? Most give ye out a-comin'.

Cha'mer ain't got back frum mill; don't know whut he aims fur us to use fur bread tonight. Mary Lou, watch them taters. Sarah, quit yore snivelin'. I declare; looks like yuh'd be glad yore pap's back. Come hyer an' take Dessie Lee."

Lizzie did not notice how Sarah winced as she sat down in the chair; she was too much engrossed with the delayed supper. The look of anticipation on Henry's face, as of one who has been in a far country and whose mind is filled with new wonders, gradually faded. He dropped one large sack to the floor and handed Lizzie the meal bag that was always replenished on Saturdays. "I packed the meal up frum Mammy's, Lizzie. Cha'mer's bin ginnin'³² around down thar tonight on 'count a sick hoss --"

The scowl on Lizzie's face deepened. "Allus somethin' happenin' to take Cha'mer whin we need him hyer to home.

lifen yore no-'count, sorry brother'd quit runnin' places --³³
 She moved into the kitchen with a jerk, finishing her oom-
 plaint to Mary Lou who worked in silence, straining the
 milk and then sifting the meal into a large oval, wooden
 mixing bowl for the evening's bread.

With a great sigh of weariness Henry sank down on the
 bench by the fire-place. The old, baffled, crushed-down
 look had completely supplanted the eager one of a few
 minutes previous.

Sarah looked at her father through tears. "Pappy,
 air yuh kinda wore out?"

"Reekon I be a leetle grain tared," admitted Henry.³⁴
 He never expected any sympathy but was always ready to
 give it to his children. "Whut yuh feelin' so bad about,
 Sary?"

"I hurt my ankle whin I'se tryin' to pack a chunk uv
 coal frum way back under the porch."

"Concern it all! That's too bad, Sugar," Henry con-
 soled her. "Want I should tell yuh 'bout whut I seed over
 to the Mission today? Wal, I wuz right well tickled to
 git thar jist uz they's eatin' breakfast in a room 'bout
 as big as this whole cabin. Then whilst I wuz gittin'
 warn by the kitchen stove, I ketched a sight uv the room
 whar the leasuns has their play-pretties --an' whut ye
 reckon? I seed two boxes uv play-dollies, biguns too;³⁵

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pret nigh like the picture uv the beegun on the wall in the kitchen."

"Ssh, Pappy!" Sarah placed a still grimy finger to her lips. "Dontcha reckon yuh'd better hunt fur that chunk uv coal I lost out yander by the steps? Looket the fire."

"Why, shore, Sis; I'll fotch a sack uv coal frum the shed though I don't feel much work-brickle." I thought³⁷ yuh'd be pleased to hear 'bout the play-dollies."

Sarah visualized the doll that must be in the sack on the floor as she held the baby and unconsciously listened to the scraping and stirring in the kitchen. When Henry came in with the sack of coal, she smiled up at him.

"You look like Santy Claus's picture, Pappy," she suggested bashfully. "Whut yuh got in yore pack?"

"I'm too tared out to feel like Santy, but I done³⁸ fetched somepin fur yore mom an' all uv yuh in the bag on the floor. Reckon yuh kin all go to Sunday School to-morrer -that is, ifen yore mom says so."

"An' see Miss Orpha!" Sarah's eyes shone. "Reckon³⁹ yuh kin go too, Dessie Lee, ifen yore a pretty baby."

Lizzie's voice from the kitchen broke in --"Better ye be a-washin', Mr. Norich. Yuh mought be hongry atter sich a long fool trip."

"Ireckon I won't hev to eat with a 'coming stomach',⁴⁰ Lizzie, but the folks to the Mission wropped me up a snack

to eat afore I started back. They wuz some light bread but hit warn't store bread. Reekon they got a fair cook over thar."

"Corn pone's good enough fur us- that is, ifen yuh ever git ready to eat hit. Mary Lou, pour some milk fur Sarah -not that; hit's blinky.⁴¹ Hyer, Sarah, hand me the baby. The taters is scorched, but I cain't be hyer a-cookin' an' out milkin' at the same time."

"Now, Lizzie, I'm most allus home at chore time. You won't mind whin yuh see yore brought-on⁴² coat."

"Time enough to burst the bag⁴³ attter supper. Set down, Sarah."

"Hit wuz shore enough a fact whut the Sunday School missionary said 'bout their goods," Henry volunteered as he sat on a bench under the few panes of glass supplemented by rags and tin that served as a window. "You kin git ary thing yuh need over thar. Takes right smart spell to walk it though. Mud's deep down to Nigger Branch this time uv year; most gin'ly froze up. Turkey Ridge 's uz slick⁴⁴ uz greased lightnin' on 'count so much rainin'. Do yuh recollect,⁴⁵ Sand Ridge, Sarah? They said a wild cat jumped on the back uv the teacher as she wuz ridin' up the p'int uv the ridge⁴⁶ an' clawed her dreadful afore she could git help."

In the excitement Sarah had forgotten to look at the beloved doll. "Not Miss Orpha!" she gasped.

"No, a new teacher over thar fur the Free School. She didn't know whut to do. It jumped frum a tree onto her shoulders. Don't know whut she would a done ifen ⁴⁷ Kie Hollon hadn't happened along an' poked the whelp off an' shot it."

The girls sat motionless with eyes wide open. Their trance-like gaze was broken by Lizzie's raucous voice. "See thar, I told yuh gals not to be foolin' 'round up thar on the p'int attar sundown; thet's whin the wild cats 'll git yuh. Mary Lou, whyn't yuh eatin'? Cain't live on the wind. An' I declare, Sarah, yuh ain't et a bite."

With flushed faces the girls resumed eating while Lizzie turned to her husband. "Mary Lou axed to climb up to the p'int uv the ridge this evenin' to git some holly to decorate with -jist like yuh could prettify ⁴⁸ these ol' walls with the paper all chawed up by the mice an' rats! Seems like Doty could a fixed this sorry cabin ⁴⁹ so hit wouldn't leak this winter. He 'n Tillie fixes their roof an' wallpapers their own houses. We pay 'em rent enough fur a leetle fixin'."

"Yuh don't understand, Mom," interposed Mary Lou in a pained tone. "I wanted to git the holly fur our Sunday School missionary."

"Thar yuh go -allus wantin' to give 'em somepin; in the summer, allus getherin' flar-pots fur 'em. ⁵⁰ Whut do yuh think you'll git out uv doin' things like that? They kin talk a lot, but jist whut they doin' to he'p us pore fo'ks?"

"Reckon yuh'll change yore mind, Lizzie, whin yuh see whut a budget ⁵¹ uv things I got over thar with Cha'mer's money. Hit's real brought-on stuff, too; though uv course fur that price hit's not new." Henry rose to go back to the grate fire in the front room that also served as the main bedroom. Lizzie reluctantly gave up her plaint.

"Mary Lou, poke a stick of wood in the stove to heat the dish water. Put hit in the dish pan. I want the water in the kittle to wash the baby."

Sarah limped behind her mother; she shivered a little as she stepped up into the main part of the cabin. Her ankle was stiff now, but it didn't hurt if she sat still. She perched on the edge of the bed where she could watch every move made by Henry who had the bag on the bed.

"Hyer, I'll jist dump hit all on the bed; 'reckon hit's all wrinkled by now, but I had to press hit tight to git hit all in." Henry untied the mouth of the burlap sack. All was silence except the wind tearing at the loose, hand-hewn shingles. Both Sarah and Mary Lou were watching with anxious expectancy for a doll to come forth with the clothes.

"Let me," interjected Lizzie after laying the sleeping baby in her crib. "Roll the sack back, Mary Lou, on that side. --Thari-- Wal, yuh did git me a coat -fust one fur ten year. Cain't say uz I like the color, but hit's warm-lookin'."

"Put it on, Mom, please. That green color's pretti-
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ful" sighed Mary Lou.

"Don't go so good with red hairs; orta bin brown." On went the coat with the customary jerk. "Button's off-guess I kin put one on offen the sleeve. How'd yuh ever guess my size, Henry?"

"The cook over to the Mission tried hit on." He
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paused. "I'm proud yuh like yore coat, Lizzie."

Her face had smoothed out to a remarkable degree while her fingers were pressing the wrinkles from the coat, but not a hint of gratefulness showed in her terse tones. "Hit'll do fur the places I go; maybe w'er hit to
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a buryin' ur two this winter."

"But wuzn't we gittin' the new clothes, so's we kin go to Sunday School tomorrer?" Sarah's voice was tremulous. "I wanted Miss Orpha to see Dessie Lee."

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"Too fur to pack a baby. Look hyer, Sary, thar's a real good pair uv mittens fur yuh; reckon they'll keep yore hands frum choppin' so. Mary Lou, hyer's a sweater

yuh kin wear on top uv yore dress. Hit'll keep yuh warm whilst yuh work in that cold kitchen. An' Sarah, hyer's a coat jist about yore size. Come an' try hit on. Whut yuh a-settin' thar fur? Now, jist stand still. I'll have to hem it up. The fur collar makes hit real snug. An' the dark brown color won't show the dirt. Whut's the matter with yuh; don't yuh like hit?"

Sarah's lip was trembling. She knew now that there was no doll in the sack. "I wish it'd bin red, or else bin a ---"

"Wal, yuh'll have to be satisfied. I'm proud of this blanket fur Dessie Lee --but didn't yuh git nothin' fur Cha'mer?"

"He told me he'd rather go along next time an' git him some britches ³⁶ -ifen we kin scrape up enough corn to trade fur 'em,"

"Lawdy! Hit's time you's gittin' to the dishes, Mary Lou. Fix the fire an' he'p me hang these things on the nails on the doars. We gotta git to bed, so's we kin git up early enough to churn. I like fresh butter fur my breakfast."

"An' can't we go to Sunday School, Mom?" persisted Sarah. "They're going to give out presents to every family --". The thought of the two boxes of dolls still lingered in her mind.

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"Jist whut do yuh expect to git, Sarah?" Lizzie's voice out through the child's consciousness until, off-guard, she answered.

"Hit might be a play-dolly ----"

"Wal, yuh needn't expect hit then. Shore enough play-dollies don't grow on Chris'mus trees 'round hyer - leastways not fur us. Might uz well dry up ⁵⁷ an' go to bed; yuh look peaked. ⁵⁸ I'll he'p Mary Lou with the dishes afore I wash Dessie Lee."

It was bitter cold in the "lean-to" bedroom. The rough board floor scratched Sarah's feet, but the renewed pain in her ankle obliterated all other sensations. In the excitement, she hadn't found an opportunity to tell her mother of the accident, but had borne the pain stoically. Now snuggled down in the featherbed, she decided to wait and tell Mary Lou when she came to bed. But fatigue claimed its victim; and when Mary Lou retired, the darkness hid the tear-stained face on the next pillow.

It was Sunday afternoon. Although the sun was shining, the cold pierced through Mary Lou's "brought-on" sweater as she hurried over the rocks and up the slippery bank of Bear Branch. Her progress was slowed when she

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reached the corn-stubble field that was soft from thawing. She knew that Lizzie would not want her to go out of her way to get Chalmer at her grandma's, but she felt she needed his help.

Upon entering the dark, smoky cabin, Mary Lou could not see her grandmother for an instant, but she heard her exclamation of surprise.

"Mary Lou! What's the matter, Child? Yore plumb out uv breath. Set down an' rest a nite. Cha'mer went on over to the school house. He jist swore yuh'd all go 'case yore maw hed a new coat." Molly wiped the last dish with the same cloth with which she washed the dishes; she then turned to Mary Lou. "Now, tell me, Child, who's sick?"

"Sarah hurt her ankle last night, Grandma, but she didn't tell Mom; an' hit's swelled up somepin fierce today. Mom put a fat-meat poultice on it, but that don't do no good. An', Grandma, Sarah talks so flighty. She's bin craving ⁵⁹ a play-dolly fur Chris'mus so bad that she 's jist 'bout sick anyway, an' Mom's bin so cross with her. I'm goin' over to the Missionary Sunday School now to see ifen I kin git her a play-dolly. I come past hyer to git Cha'mer. I'll hurry an' ketch him on the way."

"Mary Lou, hit's too late fur yuh to go all that way by yorese'f. Then yuh ricollect last year how disapp'int-ed yore maw wuz in the present she got. Seems like she

orta know that them missionaries gives to seven Sunday Schools at Chris'mus time; they can't pleasure every person. Now, I shore wuz proud uv my towel; hit's over on the fire-board ⁶⁰ now. I've never washed hit yit; it's sich a purty pink."

"Grandma, why wuz it Mom stomped on the things in the yard and tore the books to pieces? I never could understand 'bout that."

"Mary Lou, yore maw wuz a spit-fire gal. I knew hit war a mistake fur Henry to take her; they don't team up; don't pull together; hit's hard on both uv 'em, but it's the worst on you younguns. I never talked this way to yuh afore, Mary Lou, but you're old enough to know some things. I couldn't figger out either 'bout that stomping business, whether Lizzie done hit jist to spite Henry ur whether she jist had to blow off steam."

"Mom swore she'd never go to Sunday School again, but I kinda think she wanted to go today 'caise she had her new coat. I wisht yuh'd go up home, Grandma, and do somethin' fur Sarah."

"Did yore maw send fur me?"

"W'y, no; I didn't tell her I wuz comin' down hyer." ⁶¹

"Then I cain't go, dear child, caisen yore maw give orders fur me not to ever come on the place -but I'd go

'long with yuh to Sunday School ifen I could walk that fur. Tell yuh whut I'll do -you jist stay hyer, an' I'll make yuh a real nice corn-cob play-dolly fur Sarah, an' you kin take it to her."

"But, Grandma, she wants a real brought-on doll with golden curls; an' Sunday School's the only place I know whar to git ary one. I shore got to go; thar's the sound uv wagon wheels; reckon I kin git a ride."

However, Mary Lou did not get the expected ride, for the wagon turned off at the Branch; thus it happened that Mary Lou was the last one to arrive at the blackened board shack, set up on stilts, that served as a schoolroom for the Free School. It was now used on Sundays for "Free-for-⁶²all" meetings and the Mission Sunday School. Usually out in the yard was a crowd of men and boys who scorned to go inside unless there was something unusual such as a funeral preachin' or a singing school or special program.

This Sunday afternoon Chalmer Norich was the only one outside. He looked disappointed when he saw Mary Lou alone. "Hi, Mary Lou. Whut's keepin' the rest? I bin waiting' fur yuh a long time. I thought fur shore that Mom'd come now she's got her coat."

"Sarah hurt her ankle an' she's wonderful ⁶³ bad off. ⁶⁴
Oh, Cha'mer, they's singin'. Have I missed much?"

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"They jist brung up the meetin', Mary Lou. The house's so pack-jam full that I don't know uz yuh kin git in, ur see ary thing ⁶⁶ ifen yuh do crowd in to the back. I could boost yuh through a winder next to the side-hill. They're clos't to the ground."

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"Oh, I'm 'shamed to do thet, Cha'mer." Bashfulness temporarily overcame her determination.

"Then yuh'll have to go home. Hit's too cold out hyer lessen yuh had on a heavy coat."

Mary Lou's tenacity of purpose once more asserted itself. "But, Cha'mer one ur 'tother 's got to be inside to git Sarah's present. Yuh know how she's bin hankerin' ⁶⁸ fur a play-dolly. Do yuh reckon I could git her one?"

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"I hope yuh kin, Mary Lou. Tell yuh what -I'll boost yuh through the winder right up on the platform; then you'll be right clos't to the presents. I reckon I'd better go home right away; yuh kin come home along with the Clarks. Come on an' let me he'p you up in the winder."

Mary Lou's unusual mode of entrance to a public gathering was truly a heroic act in this neighborhood where no one was ever allowed to forget an embarrassing incident. The moment in which her feet were trying to make contact with the floor seemed an eternity of time; then she felt reassuring arms gently assisting her to the

floor. Miss Orpha, who had been reading the Christmas story, had seen her plight and silenced the suppressed titters by saying, "Needy ones in Christ's day were even let down from the roof into His presence. We are here to honor this same Christ's birthday today. In His estimation there is always room for one more."

Thus comforted, Mary Lou found herself sitting on a stool by an improvised manger in the front of the room. In the hay was a store doll, a large one, almost like the one on their kitchen wall, but it had no golden curls under the white veil which was wrapped around its head and body. Mary Lou gazed and gazed at it with a fascinated look, forgetting her embarrassment and the rude remarks of the Partin twins. In her eyes came a wistful yearning. This doll was to represent the Christ child, she knew -not for a gift, but perhaps there were others. Then she saw the packages in the other corner. They were all small; none of them were large enough to contain a doll such as this one. Mary Lou, with downcast eyes, was oblivious to all that was being said until suddenly she realized that Miss Orpha was behind her, asking her to rise and explaining to the congregation, "We are going to have a little Christmas tableau. Junella, who was to be Mary, the Mother of Christ, has not come; so I'm going to ask Mary Lou to take

her place." The teacher put a sky-blue robe around Mary Lou and a darker blue veil over her head.

"Mr. Brown, our new worker at the Mission will sing the 'Shepherd's Song'. Then the children here in front will sing the Christmas songs I have taught them."

A hush fell on the audience. Mary Lou now bent over the doll with increased adoration. "Peace on Earth" sang the children as their last song, but there was no peace in Mary Lou's heart.

Then Miss Orpha was saying -- "As God gave us the most precious gift on Christmas day, we like to give gifts of love and kindness, and also some remembrance for each of you. The gifts are not so costly; however, we have done our best to remember every family in the neighborhood who have attended Sunday School during the year."

As the packages were distributed, Mary Lou's heart contracted. There were no dolls this year. Surely her father had not been mistaken about the dolls he had seen. Perhaps someone else at the Mission got them. Well if so, then she didn't want anything. She felt all tight inside - "Two boxes full; she thought bitterly "and they couldn't have one doll." Suddenly she felt afraid of herself, afraid if Miss Orpha gave her a package with a towel in it and some scrap books that she would throw them on the floor

and stamp on them as her mother had done the Christmas before. "She couldn't! She wouldn't be like her mother! Miss Orpha had been so kind -and here she was still wearing the beautiful robe, representing the Mother of Christ." Something snapped, it seemed inside of her; all rebellion fled, and the hot, scalding tears fell on the edge of the manger.

No one noticed Mary Lou, for the assembly broke up in visiting as the presents were given out, and she was surrounded by unheeding folks. Nothing remained for her but to go the way she had come. Laying the robe and veil over the manger with a little caress, she wriggled through the window by means of the stool, glad that she was not hampered with a package. She didn't want to see anyone; her one idea was to escape the notice of the groups of laughing, talking folks that were scattering in every direction up and down the creeks and over the hills. There was considerable haste as no one wished to be out after dark. Already the dense shadows were stalking through the valleys eager to capture the last rays of the sun on the highest mountain. Mary Lou ran towards a huge boulder and crouched behind it; she felt that she just couldn't go home with the Clarks. Besides, there was no reason to hurry now -no present to take.

Mary Lou could see no one on the path as she started to pull her benumbed figure towards home. The mud seemed deeper than when she came, and the fog from Clear Creek enveloped her in the semi-darkness, chilling every fiber of her being and confusing her. She must watch carefully for the path where the streams forked, or she would lose her way. Thoughts of the wildcat that had jumped on the teacher's back spurred her tired feet as she plowed through the sloppy trail cut deep with the mules' tracks.

Surely it was time that she was approaching the old deserted cabin where the trail dipped, but the path was not going down; it was mounting higher all the time. Mary Lou stopped, suddenly realizing that she was lost. What trail had she taken? If she were going up Lost Mountain, there were no houses until she descended to Nigger Branch; then she'd be farther from home than she was from the school house. If this were the trail to the Mission, then she was going in the opposite direction from which she had come. She was standing in water now; it was seeping into her shoes. There must be a spring there, but she didn't remember that there was any spring up Lost Mountain. She pressed closer to the mountainside. Slipping, she grabbed at some rocks, but her hands gathered only the bracken that grew all winter in such secluded spots. Her fall was

stayed but she was soaked. A sob escaped from her tight lips; she wished she were at her grandmother's where she could cry and cry. Then her grandmother would say, "There now, you'll feel better." Mary Lou cringed from the idea of going home to the expected scolding; for double blame would now be heaped upon her. Here it was Christmas Eve, and all her brave efforts for her sister had failed. Nevertheless, she must at least get back to Sarah.

Turning around with new determination, in spite of her chattering teeth, Mary Lou started back down the trail. In avoiding the pool of water from the spring, she went too close to the edge. She felt herself slipping over the mountainside at the same time that she heard the splash of horses' hoofs down the trail. Digging her hands and feet into the wet loose gravel, she bravely worked herself back up to the path just as the horses reached the spring. Mary Lou gave a cry; a flashlight shone in her face as the riders halted. Half-comprehendingly, she heard the cheerful voice of Miss Orpha in startled surprise, "Why, it's Mary Lou! My but you're wet, Child."

Though there was very little room to dismount, Miss Orpha was quickly off her horse, handing the reins to her cousin. As she wiped the mud and tears from Mary Lou's face, she went on in a soothing tone. "I missed you when

we were handing out the presents, but I sent the package with the Clarks. How does it happen that you are way up here alone? I thought that you lived in the opposite direction."

"Why, yes," quavered Mary Lou, "but I reckon I jist got lost in the fog -an' I slipped offen the bank hyer, -- Miss Orpha, this Christmas I 'lowed to make you a holly-wreath like I seen by the picture of the play-dolly that's pasted up in our kitchen -the one that Sarah wants so bad. But I couldn't git ⁷⁰ you the wreath -an' I couldn't git her the doll -and I came the wrong way and --" She shook with cold, anguish in her voice.

"We must turn around, somehow, Arliss, and take her home. She'll have chills and fever if we don't. I somehow felt that my work for the day was not over. I'm glad you're along."

A few minutes later on the horse in front of Miss Orpha with the blue robe again wrapped around her, Mary Lou told of Sarah's accident and her one wish at this Christmas time. With skillful questioning, the entire story was drawn from her by the sympathetic, dark-eyed mission-worker with the ready smile and understanding heart. "And you say, the doll must have golden curls. Well, Mary Lou, this doll of mine has absolutely no hair -

and do you know, we might cut off some of our hair to put on it, but your hair is black, and so's mine, and so is my cousin's. Why didn't we have curly, blonde hair? It would be so much fun to give some hair for a doll to help a poor little sick girl."

Again that memory of her mother fingering golden curls floated into Mary Lou's mind -and how carefully she had placed them back in the faded blue satin-covered box that the children were forbidden to touch. There had been something like a tear on her mother's cheek as she had almost furtively placed the box high on the shelf in the bedroom where the roof did not leak. A daring inspiration suddenly took possession of Mary Lou, but just as suddenly it was supplanted by the old hopeless feeling. She realized that she could not carry out the idea, and she dare not ask her mother. Still, she knew where there were more than enough golden curls for Sarah's doll.

That Christmas Eve a light burned in the Norwich cabin long after the suffering Sarah had been administered to and soothed to sleep -long after a lone stocking had been hung by the fireplace. When Miss Orpha had suggested that Sarah hang it up, Lizzie had snorted. However, after the Mission

worker had handed the doll to Lizzie in such a gracious manner, apologizing for the lack of hair but hoping that it might bring happiness to one more child at Christmas, Lizzie almost miraculously caught her spirit. It seemed that the mantle of charity in Miss Orpha's life was extended to cover Lizzie Norich's flint-encased heart, melting a part of the flint with the glow.

An hour later, Lizzie was sitting in front of the fire with the doll in her lap. She was sewing and pasting a golden curl on the doll's head while Mary Lou heated the poker for her mother to use in "freshening up" the next curl that was to be sacrificed from the treasured box. There were real tears in Lizzie's eyes this time; she could no more understand their meaning than Mary Lou who stood in awe before her mother. Her own heart was aching with a sweet ache. There was joy in Mary Lou's heart; her mother had said she could invite her grandmother to come up for Christmas dinner the next day. There was good-will in Mary Lou's heart. Her mother was placing the idol of her heart on the altar of Mother love. There was peace in Mary Lou's heart; her mother did care; she had spoken her name kindly.

The song of the afternoon rang again in her ears -

"Peace on earth; Good-will to men." She bowed her head reverently. The waters of Marsh were at last becoming sweet.

"The Lord showed to him a tree (Christ's love) which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." -Exodus 15:25

12. postoff icin' - gossiping or idling
13. mind the baby - care for the baby
14. displeasured - displeased (cf. pleased - pleased)
15. play-dolly - store doll (cf. play-party - toy)
16. purely - surely or whole-heartedly
17. poke - paper sack
18. sp'ile - spoil
19. w'ar him out with a hickory - whip him hard
20. disremember - forget
21. tip it - touch it
22. poched out her lip - puckered up her lip
23. counterpin (or coverlid) - bedspread
24. pret nigh (or purt nigh) - almost or very near
25. out a shine - act excitedly; show disturbance
26. atter - after
27. ring a ring - go round and round
28. sweet leetle ole woman - sweet baby girl
29. catched - caught
30. petered out - gone out or given out
31. a-comin' - coming (The prefix "a" is often used with verb.)
32. ginnin' (soft "g") - choring or doing chores
33. runnin' places - going places
34. leetle grain tared - a little tired
35. play-pretties (or play-parties) - toys
36. beegun - big one
37. work-brickle - eager for work; lively
38. fetched (or fatched) - brought
39. pretty baby - good baby
40. smack - lunch
41. blinky - sour or turning sour (in regard to milk)
42. brought-on - manufactured or brought from town
43. burst the bag - divide the contents
44. slick - slippery
45. ricollect (or ric'lect) - remember

46. p'int uv the ridge - point or top of the ridge
47. ifen - if (cf. outen - out ; offen - off)
48. prettify - decorate
49. sorry cabin - a cabin full of holes
50. flar-pets - bouquets
51. budget - a parcel or number of things
52. prettiful - beautiful
53. proud - glad
54. buryin' - funeral
55. pack - carry
56. britches - trousers
57. dry up - keep still
58. look peaked - look sick or pale
59. craving - desiring or wishing for
60. fire-board - mantel over fireplace
61. hyer - here
62. Free-for-all meetings - meetings open to all preachers
63. wonderful - very; extremely (wonderful dirty- very dirty)
64. bad off - very sick
65. brung - brought (brung up the meetin'-started services)
66. ary thing - any thing
67. 'shamed - embarrassed
68. hankerin' - longing for
69. clos't - close
70. git - get (cf. pin - pen ; hin - hen, etc.)

TO THE VICTOR

Tragedy stalked into the little mountain "Free School" at the fork of Nigger Branch and Troublesome Creek that sultry August afternoon. Miss Olive, the new teacher from Mason City, the county-seat town, had no way of knowing that the stage was even then being set for the most dramatic episode in her life; she only knew that the heat was insufferable. It seemed that the hot rocks and boulders of the three mountain-sides were literally bombarding the little frame school building with all the stored-up heat of the long summer. The leaves on the Service Berry tree outside the window hung inert and lifeless. As Olive surveyed her little band of pupils, she thought that they looked like drooping plants in spite of their hardy constitutions. Everyone had been extremely thirsty; there had been an almost constant stream of children back and forth to the water bucket with the gourd dipper. Much to the delight of Polly, the eldest in the school, she had been allowed to draw as many pails of fresh water as she wished.

The minutes drudged slowly and heavily along as Miss Olive made a farcical attempt at imparting knowledge to the beginning class. Just before recess time she noticed

that little Carolyn Atkins' face was ashen as she begged to go home. Miss Olive laid the child gently on a bench and bathed her temples. "I'll take you home, Carrie, just as soon as it's recess time. You can't walk, feeling like this. I'll take you on my pony, Black Hawk." Carolyn smiled weakly at that promise and seemed better. But when recess time came, nearly the entire school had succumbed to some strange malady. After dismissing them, Miss Olive hastily lifted Carolyn and started to the shed for her pony. Pausing at the door, she could scarcely believe her eyes. "Minner" was sprawled on the well-platform; Kurt was doubled up on the steps; Golden was humped over on the ground; everyone but Polly was groaning or moaning.

What could she do? Here was not only one to care for, but the entire school. In dismay, Olive Kindley almost gave way to her own feeling of tiredness and futility. Perhaps after all it had been a mistake for her to undertake teaching in so remote a section of the hill country. Her mother had warned her, but the picture painted in glowing words by Raymond Owens, her best college friend, of the need here in his former home community had lured her on. In a flash the responsibility of these lives overwhelmed her. She remembered the teacher over on Holly Creek who had left the children just as a "High Tide" was rising.

She must rally her wits and not desert her pupils. She must discover the source of the illness.

"Children," Olive's voice was pleading. "What have you been doing to make yourselves ill? I told you to stay out of the slimy pools in the creek-bed. You know they poison you in August. Did you go down there?"

A groaning chorus of "No's" reassured her on that point.

"Did any of you eat Indian Turnip root?"

Again that chorus of negation.

"My dear children, you must tell me what happened. Don't you see I must know in order to doctor you rightly? This is serious."

Olive recognized the inbred trait of these mountaineer children in standing by each other, right or wrong. It was hard to force confessions from them. She had learned this when the eggs had been smashed on the side of the school house, but that incident had not been so menacing; no lives had been endangered then.

"Help me to know what to do," she prayed inwardly, her heart going out to the suffering children. Suddenly she remembered the excessive drinking. "It must be the water." She herself had drunk only milk from her thermos bottle.

"Miss Olive, lookit!" Cross-eyed, freckled-faced Polly, the tomboy of the school pointed to "Minner" and Kurt. In spite of their agony they were throwing rocks at each other. "Could they be the offenders?" Almost miraculously her mind devised a test.

"Polly, you don't look sick; will you get me a dipper of water from the well? Hurry!" Olive caught her breath as she sat on the edge of the platform with the moaning Carolyn. It was really a daring and perhaps far-fetched scheme, but it might work if she carried it through under pressure. She took the dipper of water. All eyes were fixed on Miss Olive.

"Children, unless you tell me what has caused this sickness and who is to blame, I am going to be forced to drink this water to find out whether or not the water is poisoned. I have no other way of determining this since no one will talk." She looked directly at Polly. Silence reigned. Polly remained impassive. "All right." Miss Olive raised the dipper to her lips. Little Carolyn roused herself. "Oh, Miss Olive, please don't. You don't have to die too."

"But I must. I am responsible for you children; I can't let you perish. If I drink this and am ill, we can get at the cause of this illness and know how to doctor you

children. You are forcing me to do this because you won't talk."

"Minner" on the edge of the platform gave a great groan -- "No, Teacher, you can't drink hit - yuh mustn't die 'caise Dorse said 'at he goin' to marry with yuh ifen he had to go through hell 'n high water to do hit - an' now ifen yuh die, he'll blame me - oh!"

"Blame you for what 'Minner'?" Olive's voice was grave. She saw that it was a great struggle for him to confess, but his love for her shone out of his eyes.

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"The buck-eyes - I he'ped put 'em in the well; never knowed they'd spile the water. Dorse said a feller'd die ifen he et 'em. Oh, don't drink that."

Olive rose and sent a searching look around the group. "But you said you didn't do it alone, 'Minner'. I'll have to drink the water anyway if the other person doesn't confess so that we will really have proof for this." She looked straight at Kurt. "Now, which shall it be? Shall I drink this; or will someone else talk?"

Again the dipper was raised to her lips. Kurt Owens straightened up and threw a look of hate at "Minner". Well, by jiminy, I'll 'fess up, but I ain't savin' Miss Olive's life fer yore ol' freckle-face bud - 'caise she's goin' to marry my Uncle Raymond - even ef I'm dead and cain't go to

the weddin'. Miss - Miss Olive, I put some buck-eyes in the well, too - an' no one else 'ceptin' us done hit." He rolled over with great effort and added through gritted teeth, "But I ain't going to tell why we done hit."

Polly Merrill could have told why, but she stood white-faced and silent, her crossed-eye resting on the well while the other gazed at Miss Olive's shining black hair. Polly adored the new teacher who was so beautiful and kind; yet Polly could not behave herself. Her coltish nature asserted itself time and again. In spite of this, she was a great helper, for she could endure much work and hardship for her fourteen years. And she loved to ride and go on errands for the teacher and the Mission folks down-creek. A happy thought now counteracted an almost irresistible desire to confess how she had dared the two boys to put the buck-eyes in the well.

"Miss Olive, ortn't I to ride Black Hawk down to the Mission to git Missus Kannard an' some medicine?"

Relief spread over Olive's face. She dismissed the feeling that she should put the thumb-screws on Polly to determine her share in the guilt. The need was for help now that they knew the source of the malady. Accordingly, Olive sent the eager Polly on her way with careful instructions, little realizing how significant her short trip to

the Mission would prove to be.

With almost unbearable anxiety Olive organized an improvised hospital inside the school-room, making cold compresses from some cloth she had purchased for curtains. Her tenseness relaxed somewhat when she heard the faint clatter of horse's hoofs striking the flinty rocks of the creek bed. Her hopes fell as she ascertained that the rider was approaching from up-creek; it was not Mrs. Kannard. Suddenly the sounds ceased as though the rider were leaving the creek, and a horse's whinny floated to them from below the rise of ground.

Kurt recognized the sound. "That's Uncle Raymond's boss, Miss Olive. He's comin' fer me. Said he'd come out and show us his new star --- Hi, Uncle Ray."

The tall, stalwart form of Raymond Owens practically filled the doorway. The twinkle in his clear, blue eyes changed to a puzzled expression. "What's this? A hospital? I thought I was coming to a school. Kurt, old boy, this is the first time I ever saw you down and out. Olive, what can I do to help? What's happened?"

"One question at a time, please. you can see that all of the children are ill - that is, except Polly. I sent her to the Mission for medicine and help. For awhile I was mortally afraid we'd have a mass funeral here on Troublesome,

but the nausea seems to be passing. I believe that with proper treatment the children will be all right though it may be necessary to declare a little vacation."

The children's faces brightened at the prospect.

Raymond's voice showed his approval at the turn of events.

"Fine! Fine! That will fit in with my plans for --- someone that I had when I started over here today." He paused slightly in embarrassment. "But Miss Olive, you never answered my second question as to what happened here."

"I think we'd better have Kurt and "Minner" explain, Mr. Owens." Olive's eyes shone mischievously. "I wouldn't want to tell on anyone."

"Aw, go ahead an' tell 'im, Miss Olive," admonished Kurt.. "'Twon't be a soul ⁷² on Nigger Branch an' Trouble-
some but what'll know it 'fore Polly gits through blabbin'."

"Now, just lie still, Kurt - an you, to, 'Minner' - you need to save your strength. Well, Mr. Owens, you see it was like this. Everyone was so thirsty this hot afternoon that the pupils all drank an unusual amount of water which had been contaminated, we found out, by some buckeyes that the children dropped into the well while playing. By recess time everyone was doubled up. Carolyn is the worst."

Olive was interrupted by the noise of resounding hoofs down the creek. "I was intending to ask you take Carolyn

home, but you'd better wait for the medicine now; for I believe that help is coming from the Mission. You might hand me that wash basin over there on the desk."

Then for the third time that afternoon, the unexpected happened. From where Olive sat she could see that the rider dismounting was not Mrs. Kannard from the Mission but Dorse Davis. She felt as though she were caught in a net. True she had been friendly to Dorse just as she had been to all the young folks on Nigger Branch and Troublesome; little had she dreamed of his boast until this afternoon; for all her thoughts had been for the clean-cut, generous Raymond. He had seemed to her like a straight pine on a hill-top, with a large horizon. She knew that he stood for justice in this mountain district, but to one like Dorse Davis, he represented the "Law" and was to be hated and evaded in every way possible. Now, the two opponents were going to meet here. Intuitively, Olive knew that a contest of wits would result and she wondered what part she could play in it. Dorse was coming swiftly towards the door. Inside, Raymond Owens turned with the basin and was in the act of handing it to Olive when the bulky form of Dorse darkened the doorway as he loudly declared his purpose.

"I'm coming to your rescue, Miss Olive. Folly told me

all about the trouble up hyer --? Dorse broke off abruptly as his black, snapping eyes caught the full picture of the two working with the children. "H -m - reckon you all don't need my help ⁷³ --" He was plainly nonplussed.

Olive was quick to interpose. "Oh, yes, we do - we need all the help we can get. The children are still quite weak and will need to be taken home." Her smile melted his hostility. "You are acquainted with Raymond Owens?"

"Howdy, Ray; uster know yuh 'fore you took to follerin' the Law. I bin a-studin' it some myself lately."

"So? I noticed you several times in the courthouse at Mason City the past month. Well, it's a better way to pass the time waiting for your mail sacks than the way "Tuck" used to." Raymond withdrew to the corner of the room near Kurt, hoping that Mrs. Kannard would arrive soon.

"I ain't aimin' to lose a good payin' job the way he done," retorted Dorse pointedly. "Whin I gits me a little more saved up, I'm plannin' to build a right smart new house up to Pine Ridge whar yore fo'ks lost that air timber land." Turning with a sudden thought to Olive, Dorse did not notice the deep flush mount to Raymond Owen's cheek and brow. "Miss Olive, I brung yore mail on up hyer fer you - 'lowed as how hit'd save yuh a trip to the Post Office. How'd you like fur me to bring hit up regul'r to

you?"

Before Olive could formulate a reply, "Minner" stirred and sat up. "Why cain't I bring hit, Dorse?"

Dorse chuckled as at a good joke. "'Minner', I never knowed yer to be still so long in yore life. W'y, I most fergot yuh wuz hyer. We'll see 'bout who brings the mail, hey, Buddie?" With a triumphant ring in his sonorous voice, he easily lifted his small half-brother to his shoulder. "Miss Olive, Mammy sent yer a special invite fer supper Thursday night - you know 'fore Singin' School at the Mission." Turning to Raymond with his eyes boring like steel points, Dorse inquired with sffrontery, "You comin' to Singin' School, too, Ray -- or air yuh too busy with yore new 'shootin' star'? Them kind don't shine fer long 'round these parts - leastways, they didn't 'round yore paw's lumber mill up to Pine Ridge."

With fists clenched behind him, Raymond fought off the desire to retaliate, replying in a tense tone, "Yes, Dorse, I expect to come to Singing School when it doesn't interfere with business."

Olive's apprehension diminished as she heard the approach of the horses from the Mission. She helped Golden to her feet. "I believe you'd better take Golden, too, Mr. Davis. Her mother will doctor her. And tell your mother

I'll plan to come up for supper some evening as soon as I possibly can."

Mrs. Kannard made her entrance with a basket of medical supplies soon after Dorse left. The children began to groan again. The forthcoming peppermint and castor oil had to be administered by all three adults. Polly was in her element, here, there, and everywhere, teasing and asking questions.

"I know why you come to the school house," she boldly asserted to Raymond. "Saw ole Man Banks on my way to the Mission. He said you's comin' out t' see 'bout puttin' insurance on the school house here - what do you do that fur? Ol' Dorse Davis said hit war a money-making scheme an' yore pap would hear 'bout it come next election time."

Mrs. Kannard turned to Polly reprovingly, "Polly, you know very little about such matters. Come here and hold Kurt's nose."

But Polly's pent-up information that she had acquired on her way to the Mission was not to be dammed up so easily. Her words rushed on like a rapid mountain stream after a sudden storm.

"I knows what other folks says - an' you know, too, what A'nt Bet Tuck said 'bout that fire insurance that

ol' Mr. Owens had on his lumber mill an' fine house up to

Fine Ridge 'fore they burned. Mammy says she's a sharper at the Law --"

"Polly," Raymond's voice was commanding, "It would be better for you to watch what you repeat - and how you repeat it."

"I'd say you had," cut in Kurt, "my Uncle Raymond's got a star -- an' he'll ----"

"Umph! That! Ole Dorse says that's 'bout the best joke he's heard - an!".

Olive realized that she must get Polly out and away from the other children. Upon making a hurried inventory of plans, she suggested, "Polly, how would you like to take the two Shockey children home on Black Hawk now? You can just leave the pony at the Mission and go on home. I'll get him later on." The puzzling situations were developing so rapidly that Olive felt that she must have the steadying influence of Mrs. Kannard in getting her bearings once more. "No more school this week, children," she announced.

"You look tired, Olive," suggested Raymond as the last two scholars left with Mrs. Kannard. "Are you sure you want to walk to the mission? It might not be such a good idea, leaving my horse here in case a sudden storm should come tonight; and I must get back to Mason City tonight."

"I feel the need of a long walk and a long talk, Raymond"

Olive locked the door, dropping the key in her small handbag. "I'm locking all my troubles away now for two days. Don't you wish you could do that, too?"

"Olive," his tone was grave. "I might as well tell you first as last that I'm afraid there is real trouble ahead. As a matter of fact, I did come out to take an inventory of the school for the purpose of including it in the "Blanket County Insurance" plan for all county property. I think the plan is a good one and economical too even if my own father was instrumental in putting it into effect. As his deputy, I am making the valuation. I have just come from Clear Fork school. But, Olive, you can see what a stir even this little legal matter is going to make here where suspicion and prejudice are rampant."

"There are all your altruistic motives and plans, Sir Galahad, that you had last spring when you argued me into taking this school? You said I could be such a help in this community, and now --" She broke off with a little note of despair, not finding words nor courage to express the fear that she was the fulcrum for forces that might bring about the destruction of Raymond's future plans.

"Olive, please I know you're weary unto death -- I did have those dreams - and I still do - and I still hope they will be supplemented in a very real way in the future with

an ideal country home up on Pine Ridge at our old place --".

"Dorse Davis seems to want that place, too." Again words were futile.

"Just so he doesn't want the girl I do -- Olive, I must have more time to talk to you when you are not so tired." He glanced quickly around, surveying the sky. "The way those thunder-heads are collecting over towards Simpsonville makes me think I'll not get to stay as long as I'd like to this evenin'. Mrs. Kannard's a brick to ask us to come."

The walk was all too short to the bungalow Mission House that the mountaineers considered a mansion in that section along Troublesome Creek. Olive did not have an opportunity to express her fears to Raymond then nor after their arrival; for all workers were occupied with duties that had to be completed an hour earlier. The mountaineers would begin to appear about dusk as they went by "sun-time". Olive lent a hand with the evening meal which was scarcely over before the first arrivals presented themselves.

Before the last group of singers had arrived with their lanterns and coats, dark clouds were rolling over the sky presaging a pouring rain. All was in readiness for the singing teacher; the fees had been collected; the new books handed out; and the twenty or more young men who had enroll-

ed in good faith "That if they didn't learn to sing the square notes their money would be refunded" were seated on the front benches in the little chapel of the Mission School. Olive and Raymond were among the group of observers that were permitted to sit in the back of the chapel to listen. Dorse who had entered late stood glumly near the door with a predilection for going so that he might escape the jeers of his cronies concerning Raymond's taking his girl. The minutes dragged on with desultory chatting, but still no singing teacher appeared. "He must have been caught in the High Tide over by Simpsonville" was the general agreement. Mr. Kannard, the well-liked Head of the Mission, suggested that they sing anyway. Who would lead? No one volunteered; the silence was awkward; then Miss Olive was called to the organ, an old wheezy affair with only one pedal in working order. It was after this, as a matter of policy, that she remarked, "If a motion is in order, I move that our temporary leader of the singing be Mr. Dorse Davis." Everyone assented, for they knew that young Dorse was a good singer and that he loved to lead them in their mountain "ballads."⁷⁴ Raymond noticed how Dorse's face beamed with satisfaction as he consulted at length with Olive before choosing his numbers. He wondered at Olive's encouraging Dorse's friendship, not knowing that she was afraid to

do anything but keep his good-will at that time. After three songs had been intoned, Raymond Owens, with a slightly puzzled expression on his face, left much to the delight of "Hinner" who was seated on the front bench worshipfully watching his big brother and his beloved school teacher.

Before Dorse Davis left the chapel room that night, he obtained Olive's consent to come to the Davis home early the next evening for supper after which the entire family planned to come to Singing School. When Mrs. Kannard told her that night that Raymond had left word that he would come back the next afternoon, she was fearful that he would not understand her. Had she known of future events she would have left a note for him. No one could foresee that he too would be delayed the next day by an order to bring two blood-hounds from Simpsonville.

Consequently, the next afternoon, Olive's mind was troubled on her leisurely tramp up the creek, now refulgent with new motion and life from the rain of the previous night. The path at first led along a slippery cliff; drops of rain were still nestled inside the rosettes of mullein; and the blackberry leaves were shining as they had not done since spring. Disentangling herself from the briers near a wire fence, she stooped preparatory to emerging into a corn-field on a little strip of bottom land. Here, she en-

countered Polly with her hands full of blue and white clay. Her freckled face was clownish with blue and white dabs. Olive greeted her enthusiastically.

"Oh, Polly, I didn't know there was real modeling clay near here."

"W'y, yes'm, Miss Olive, you know someun's of us use this hyer white clay mixed with water to whitewash our fire-place bricks in the summer-time. I shapes flar-pots outen this hyer blue clay an' let 'em dry in the sun so's I kin put colored leaves in 'em in the fall."

"Polly, I know lots of things I can show you how to make from clay --"

"Oh, won't yer stop at ur place now - an' jist stay while we ain't havin' school? Cain't yer, Miss Olive?"

"No, Polly," Olive shook her head, wishing she could remain at the tumble-down cabin with the kitchen propped up by a pole and help Polly's widowed mother but knowing that she must not voice any longing or emotion to Polly. "I'm bound for a place much farther up the creek, but perhaps, tomorrow --".

Polly's eager expression faded into a sulky one. Then in a moment her face lighted up with a brilliant look as though she had made a sudden discovery. "Oh, I know, you're goin' up to Dorse's folks; ain't yer? You'll have a pleasur-

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able time up thar. They shore do cook a heap fer comp'ny, but ol' A'nt Bet, she jist makes 'em scrimp along somethin' fierce whin they's by theirselves; she sez hit's plumb keerless not to use the meat rinds to make gravy with whin they's nobody thar. But they's got things fixed up right smart in their cabin, Mammy says. They got two houses an' tao fireplaces, an' they's got a rocking cheer - an' they got the pootiest coverlid⁷⁵ fer comp'ny that Dorse's mammy made 'fore she died. I's allus kinda skeered to go in thar even whin they's holdin' meetin' 'caise they say A'nt Bet Tuck kin lay a spell on yuh ifen she don't like yuh --- Oh, but she cain't help but like you, Miss Olive, an' I'd shore like to go in one uv the houses whilst⁷⁶ you's thar. Do yuh think I could?"

"Why, yes," Olive found herself replying in mountain vernacular. "Do come up if I'm there tomorrow. And say, Polly, have you heard how any of the children are by now - that is, except Kurt and Minner? They were at Singing School last night, but none of the others was."

"Ho'm, I don't know 'bout the 'tothers, but never did I hear sich fightin' an' wild-cat squallin' an' fist-bustin' as them two wuz doin' out behind the Mission last night.⁷⁷ Thar's shore to be a fracas atween them thar two younguns. Kurt called Minner a smotch-eyed pole cat. Minner says

jist whut Dorse wants him to. An' Dorse says whut his A'nt Bet Tuck wants him to - Howsomever, Dorse is plenty smart hisse'f. He sez that Raymond's pappy's lined up with an insurance comp'ny that pays him a lot fer insurin' these hyer schools an' then the tax-payers got ter pay fur hit. Last night whin all the Singin' School fellers went out to smoke, Dorse's tellin' 'em 'bout hit; he said he wouldn't be a bit su'prised to hear tell o' some of the schools burnin' in this county now --".

"Polly!" Miss Olive's stern voice silenced her for a moment. "You must not repeat all you hear; you'll get into serious trouble one of these days."

"Not so yuh could notice it. I know who to talk to. Guess you'd hear all this up to Dorse's anyway. He gave me a new half-dollar. See? He's a purty ⁷⁸ nice feller, I think; don't you?"

Olive was glad when Polly left her. She walked on up-creek more briskly, turning over in her mind the new information. Dorse's bluffing talk revealed intense enmity towards Raymond. She felt that she was making a mistake in fulfilling her promise and wished that she had sent a note to the Davis cabin, postponing her visit so that she could see Raymond when he would arrive that afternoon at the Mission.

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As Olive approached the low, rambling structure of the Davis home, with the usual foundation of stones set at intervals, she could tell that it boasted two rooms or "houses" connected with a run-way. In addition there was a "lean-to"⁷⁹ kitchen with blue wood smoke curling up from its chimney to mingle with the blueness of the sky. Back over the mountains she could see a dark, sinister mass of thunder heads. More rain was on the way. Upon approaching the paling fence around the yard, Olive noticed that there was glass in the windows of the Davis cabin and that vines sheltered one side of the porch. "Summer roses" or zinnias were still blooming in a bed near the porch being protected from the chickens by blackberry briars being criss-crossed around them. The yard had been swept and altogether, there was an air about the place of being ready for company. Young Dorse and an old wrinkled lady dressed in a faded though clean blue dress were seated in splint-bottom chairs on the porch. Upon noticing Olive, Dorse whispered something to "A'nt Bet Tuck", as she was known, and started down the path to greet Olive.

"Howdy, Miss Olive; thought yuh'd ride yur pony or I'd a come fer yer. Mammy's in the kitchen startin' supper. Come on up hyer an' meet my a'nt. A'nt Betty, this is my - our school teacher, Miss Olive."

Aunt Betty Tuck pulled her pipe from between toothless gums and looked searchingly at Olive with the blackest, most penetrating eyes that she had ever seen. "I'm proud to know yer, Miss. Pull off yer hat and take a cheer. Laws-a-massy, ain't she pooty? Dorse, you'se right - but Lawsee she cain't hold a candle ⁸⁰ to the 'Belle o' Cup Creek'."

"That's what they uster call An't Betty when she wuz a girl up in Southern Injiany," volunteered Dorse.

Aunt Bet chuckled; then with a smack of her snuff-browned wrinkled lips, she continued her colloquy. "Mighty nice change in weather - I'm allus smotherin' whin hits so infernal hot. Cain't git uster the heat seems like. How'd yer like hit up hyer in the mountin's? Sun says as hain't raised in 'em that they feels all choked up, but I know ifen I lived in the flat kintry, I'd be pinin' fer the mount'ins. Now, whin Tuck 'n I fust moved hyer from Souther Injiany, we felt right to hum."

Dorse tried to head her off in her story but when he saw it was useless, he rose, saying that he must go after a lantern down at Crebbs as they would need it to take to Singing School that evening. Olive listened with half an ear to the recital of Aunt Bet Tuck's journeyings. When Dorse rode down the creek on his roan, the thread of her

pioneering experiences was broken with the remark, "That Dorse shore's goin' to make folks set up an' take notice one o' these days; he shore kin save his money; got Davis blood in him - an' they allus gits whut they set out to git."

Aunt Bet paused as though she expected a response from Olive, who was saved this embarrassment by the sudden appearance of Minner with a pail of crawdads.

"Pshaw, Miss Olive, I tho't I'd be hyer whin yuh come; went fishin' fer crawdads - wish hit wuz spring so's I could catch shore-'nuf fish - I'm goin' to feed these to ole Tony."

"Who's old Tony?" inquired Olive with a smile of amusement.

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"That's my ole houn' dog - I got him locked up at the barn 'cause he chases the chickens. I likes to hear him scrunch the shells. Come on out an' watch him, Miss Olive." With that, Minner began to pull the legs off the live crawdads.

Olive was glad to excuse herself and follow the bare-foot boy along the beaten path past the open well and across a little branch of fresh-flowing water out to the big tobacco barn that was also used for the stock. Glancing around in the dim light, Olive saw that there were two lanterns hanging on pegs by the stalls. And Dorse had gone

for a third - it was an unusual thing for a mountain home to possess three lanterns. Minner was eager to show her his pet coon and the two pigs he was raising. Time raced by and when Olive heard the click and splash of horses' hoofs down-creek and knew that Dorse was returning, she wished she were not in the barn to encounter him.

"Would you take me up-creek to your craw-dad hole you 've been telling me about?" Olive adroitly inquired of the boy.

Minner assented with alacrity, and they went out the opposite door and down the rise of ground towards the creek, being completely out of view in a few moments. On the way back to the cabin in response to the ringing of the old dinner bell that was mounted on a pole, they passed through the barn. Involuntarily Olive's eyes sought the third lantern that Dorse must have brought. There was only one left on its peg.

Minner ushered Olive into the "lean-to" kitchen where his mother and three half-sisters were completing preparations for the evening meal. Corn-bread that looked really delicious was resting on the open oven door. Mrs. Davis relinquished the stirring of the ham gravy to one of the girls and came forward, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Hyer's Miss Olive, Mammy --Gosh, ain't we goin' to

have no pie?" The hungry boy made an excursion to the table.

Olive liked the soft-spoken Mother who was surprisingly young-looking. The question popped into Olive's mind, "How could this sweet little lady marry the burly Dorse who scarcely looked up when she was introduced to him?" Out of thin air came the answer - "The Davis's ellus gits what they set out to git." She looked around to see if A'nt Bet Tuck in a corner by the fireplace had spoken. But she was busy supping strong tea from a saucer. Olive could scarcely repress a shudder as Dorse called them to supper.

Olive could never become accustomed to being seated at the "First table" with the men-folks, as company, while the girls and women waited on them. She prevailed on Mrs. Davis to sit down with her, but no sooner did they start to pass the food than she was up to pour the bitter chicory coffee and out the pie that had been safely hidden in the bedroom. Young Dorse took the lead in the conversation and seemed plainly embarrassed when his father told the usual "company joke", how he ate with a "coming stossach".

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Olive only halfway heard the conversation; her mind was busy trying to figure out the motive of Dorse's deception concerning the lantern. The one that was now hanging on the hook above the table was undoubtedly the one taken from the

bern. Dorse switched the conversation to the Singing School, saying that they would start early so that they could "foot it" together before it grew dark. Accordingly, after the "second-table" had eaten, they left Aunt Bet Tuck by the fireplace still imbibing her tea. Olive wondered if this were a gesture against the apparently extravagant supper or merely a habit of hers. A heavy sense of impending fate dogged her mind until they were well on their way to the Mission.

As they progressed down-creek, other families joined them with their lanterns, coats, and singing books. Olive felt that she had stepped back into the pages of a history book for fifty years. They were a merry group but with such a diversity of temperaments. Yet even in the very youngest, she could sense that implacability and stubbornness, bred by the hardships of the hill-country life. It was strange, she thought that when a social occasion presented itself even enemies would apparently drop grudges to partake in the "gathering". It was all rather stimulating to Olive who looked forward to helping these, her people now - they must be her people if she made a success with them as their teacher. For awhile she walked along silently with the girls; then she roused herself with a mental shake to ask them questions and draw them out as to their interests, for

few of the mountain girls were of the loquacious type that Polly was. As they neared the Mission, Olive found herself anticipating seeing Raymond Owens again with an emotion that was at leash's end. She sensed that the sentiment of the entire community was just then against him and that she must be very careful what she said on the subject of school insurance. She determined to make some excuse for not returning to the Davis home that night, especially if Raymond were staying at the mission.

Upon their arrival at the Mission, Olive hastily mounted the wooden steps at the side-hill, leading to the kitchen door of the Mission House, only to be informed by the cook that Mrs. Kannard had been called over on "Shootin' Fork" to care for a sick baby - and that Raymond Owens had not come.

"Thank you, Mary Ellen, for telling me. I believe I'll just stay here this evening for awhile."

Olive had no sooner voiced her desire than Polly came bounding in to summon her to play the organ over at the chapel. With a sigh, Olive acquiesced finding a welcoming committee of all of her school pupils who had insisted on occupying the front seat. Dorse had just led them in singing the notes of the old favorite hymn, "How Beautiful Heaven Must Be", and they were just starting to sing the words

when Raymond Owens stepped inside the door. His boots were wet, and his olive-drab uniform was bespattered with mud; he held his hat and riding quirt in one hand; his face was very serious as he raised his other hand for attention. It was then that his glance caught Olive's, and in it there was a sternness that sent a chill through her. She had been feeling heavy of heart in the stifling room packed so close that the effluvia of unwashed bodies seemed doubly offensive to her own fastidiousness. With the entrance of Raymond, her oppression had lifted; she determined to speak to him at any cost, but there was a quality displayed in his searching look that seemed to put up a barrier between them. The next instant he was speaking quickly and firmly.

"I've just come from Simpsonville; there's been another cloud-burst on the divide; the gulches up that way are impassable by now. You'll not be in any danger here unless those clouds are swept in from the north although I'll have to hurry to beat it to the ford myself on my way to Mason City. I thought I'd tell you so that you could watch those clouds." With that, he turned abruptly and was gone.

The spirit of festivity died out in the group. Dorse whispered a few words to Mr. Kannard, handed him the singing book and disappeared out of the door as quick as a shot. There was a general hum and a movement to go that was check-

ed by Mr. Kannard.

"I want to say just a word that may save some lives. These buildings are forty feet above the level of the creek; most of your homes are just a few feet above the creek bank - or else you have gulches and low places to pass through in getting to your homes. It would seem best for the women and children to stay here under any circumstance, especially so if those clouds work over this way. Dorse has gone to see about his aunt who stayed at home; others of you will have to go, but the rest of you are welcome to stay at the Mission tonight. Miss Olive, will you help care for the children while I go after Mary Ellen?"

As the majority of the men and most of the older boys hurried out, it was with difficulty that the others were restrained from going. Olive took this opportunity to explain further to the mothers about the illness of the children; she found them amenable. She had no opportunity to slip over to the Mission House to see if Raymond had left any message for her. She had just succeeded in getting the children interested in a game when Polly rushed in with a frightened look on her face; her breath was short for once.

"The school house is on fire - no, not this'un - the
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Free School -up the creek - yuh cain't get across the

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creek now - 'caise there's a turrrible High Tide comin' down. Mr. Kannard says yuh'd best not try to go home now."

There was a hub-bub of confusion. The rumble of the storm and the roar of the flood-waters could be heard. Perhaps the rain that was coming would quench the flames at their school. Some of the women were determined to try "to make it home" to see about their chickens and live stock. Mrs. Davis was especially worried about Aunt Bet Tuck. Olive was glad when Mary Ellen appeared followed by Mr. Kannard.

"Now, remember," he admonished, "that it's safer here than anywhere else, for it seems that those clouds are sweeping this way."

Olive and several of the girls followed Mr. Kannard anxiously down the incline as far as it was safe to go. The crowd had been halted by the dirty, swirling flood-waters that came rushing from their source where the angry clouds had hurled them at the intersection of three mountain ranges. The storm had cut across the mountains in the opposite direction, but the results of it were now being felt down the three creeks especially on Troublesome where the waters had gathered momentum as they dashed along over the rocky creek bed forming rapids at precipices. There were two glares in the sky, one up-creek to the right from

the burning school; another to the left over Spring Mountain where a constant play of sheet lightning was accompanied by a rumble. But it seemed that the rain would not come soon enough to save the school building. Olive had heard of these sudden floods or "high tides" and had often witnessed the swelling of the rivers near Mason City as a result of a series of them on various tributaries. Now, she realized what it really meant. Raymond had not gone any too soon to get across the creek; for now not even a sure-footed mule could ford it. Across the flood-waters and up the creek at the forks, the flames were rapidly taking their toll. Olive's heart sank within her as she heard the incriminating remarks concerning Ray Owens and his dad's insurance scheme. She was surprised to see moving figures about the fire. Mr. Kannard told her that three men on mules whose homes were on that side had gotten across before the crest of the high tide had come. Just then, silhouetted against the sky by the flames there appeared a figure on a horse up the trail back of the school site.

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"Looker up thar on the mount'in at that thar hoss an' rider!" exclaimed someone excitedly. "That's him; that's the feller that done hit!" Olive's heart contracted, for she recognized the familiar figure of Raymond Owens who had no doubt seen the glare and as a duty, had come back across

the hill to investigate.

"Looks like he's comin' right on down to the school - but cain't tell."

"Shore looks like Ray Owens - an' he's got a couple of houn's with him, by gravy."

"Looks bad fer him an' his pappy - ⁸⁶ third fire in the past three years."

"Insurance shore must be a temptation." Old Dorse spat contemptuously. "Now, don't eny uv you young bucks try to swim that thar creek; fur yuh'll shore be carried down stream; 'tain't no use to try onless yuh goes clean ⁸⁷ up above my place an' then hit all depends; you'd have to go to the top uv the ridge on this side uv the creek to travel at all 'caise in two places, you'd be cut off frum the trail an' hit's powerful dangerous at night."

"You're right, Dorse," acquiesced the young men who had essayed to cross.

"Shore - the three boys over thar 'll deal with Ray Owens."

A few drops of rain were falling as Olive turned to go back to the Mission Chapel, sick with dread and apprehension. She felt as though she and Raymond were puppets on the stage of Chance and that "Fate" was pulling the strings. Yet she would never mistrust Raymond.

The crowd gradually straggled back to the Mission, glad that the storm had passed around. Those whose homes were on the opposite side of Troublesome would necessarily have to spend the night there, for the foot-logs were either covered or had been swept away. When all had returned except Dorse and the three who had crossed, they tried to sing again, but the songs sounded so dismal even to their own ears, they all preferred to stop and talk. Olive went to the Mission House and would have liked to remain there, but when old Dorse pronounced the going up-stream as being safe, they came for her as their company. "What was the matter with her will?" she asked herself. "Why didn't she refuse?" "If Mrs. Kannard were only there to have managed an excuse for her!" As it was, she murmured something about being too tired but they only laughed and said "Guess we'll all git rested." Olive found herself stumbling along with the rest of the crowd, far from happy, feeling that this life was too strenuous for her. They could hear the baying of a hound in the distance.

"Sounds like some houn's treed a coon," suggested Winner who walked near Olive and Polly. The two youngsters were in high glee.

"Guess ol' Ray cain't track hisse'f 'ith those ol' houn's," offered Polly.

"So soon do the children reflect their elders!" thought Olive. "And they actually believe it all." The whole diabolical scheme flashed through her mind - it was a plan to catch Raymond in incriminating evidence, sweep him from the picture, and then --- a sacking laugh seemed to float to her ears accompanied by the declaration, "The Davis's allus gits whut they sets out to git." Olive struggled mentally; she would not be caught in the web of circumstances without a struggle; there must be a way of proving that Raymond was innocent though she had no doubt but what his arrest would follow. The guilty person must be located, but "How to do it?" "How to do it?" kept ringing in her ears like a tom-tom.

As they slushed up the creek, bidding the various ones good-night, the reverberating roar of the stream seemed to personify events as they had rushed into Olive's life. With apparent imperturbability, the others did not seem to sense the tragedy that was being enacted. But underneath surface calm Olive knew that there lay "quick-on-the-trigger" tempers and explosive violence waiting only the touch of fire or finger.

Upon arrival at the Davis home, Aunt Bet Tuck met them at the door. She was fully dressed. "Shore was a gully-washer up on the mountin's. Good thing Dorse come home to take keer of the stock - ur I nought've tried hit myse'f.

Seemed a powerful long time you bin gittin' home. You
 wearried ³⁸ me."

"Why didn't Dorse set up with ye?" inquired Mrs. Davis.

"Oh, he slipped into the creek an' got hiss'f wet; he had to go to bed to let his clo'es dry."

All accepted the explanation without comment. But long after Olive had generously been given one room all to herself, she found herself wondering just where Dorse fell in the creek. Only sleep stopped the contriving of her mind to pierce the mystery of who it was that actually set fire to the Free School that night so soon after both Raymond and Dorse had left the Singing School. Dorse had a perfect alibi - but had he? He had used deceit about the lantern; could he not have done the same in this case?

Olive did not waken the next morning until the sun was shining in her face. She knew how early the mountaineers arose and wondered why they had permitted her to sleep; for she knew it was customary for all, from the youngest to the oldest, company or no company, to be out of bed by peep of day and be on hand for the breakfast of biscuit and gravy and strong coffee. Whatever unusual it was that had prompted them not to call her, she was grateful for it. She glanced outside at the bright day; it was no time to have such a heavy heart. However, after she had dressed and

had subsequently gone outside to the wash-bench by the well and dashed some cold water on her face and arms, she felt she had washed away some of the fears of the previous night. She was more cheerful than she dreamed she could be after the sweet-faced little Mrs. Davis gave her a breakfast somewhat different from the usual one served. No one else was in the kitchen. Dorse had gone with the mail and had taken Minner along - only Mrs. Davis pronounced the name "Maynard" as it should be. She said that Dorse had suggested that Olive remain until he returned from Mason City with the mail so that they would know what the County Superintendent said about the school. There seemed to be nothing unusual in this request. Olive assented and purposed in her mind that she would use most of the day in calling on families up the little pinched gulches to discover children that needed to be in school. It was with difficulty, however, that she broke away from Aunt Bet Tuck who was bent on showing her the famous coverlid, woven by young Dorse's mother for company, that had never been used because "no one important enough had ever come". Dorse was to have it as a wedding present if he got the right girl. It was a rare piece of work and Olive praised it generously; then excused herself, telling Mrs. Davis that she would be absent most of the day.

The purple shadows were lengthening as Olive emerged from the creek-path up the rise of ground to the barn from her afternoon calling trip. Hearing voices within, she avoided going through the run-way of the barn and tried to negotiate her way around it. Stepping on the slippery bank of the little branch that flowed nearby, she lost her footing and sat down suddenly with her head against the building. From within issued the shrill voice of Aunt Bet Tuck.

"For the law's sake, Dorse, why did ye go to Lawyer Morse? He kin take skin offen a 'gator! I thought I told ye to git that warrant fer Ray Owen's arrest! I don't know who's got a better right to do hit than you, accordin' to law. -- I'm afeared ye got things in a mess --."

"I didn't git 'em in a mess, A'nt Bet -- How'd I know that that thar high tide'd keep me frum comin' back across Troublesome to the Singin' School as I aimed to? An' whoever'd a thought Ray Owens'd have them houn' dawgs along 'ith him an' use 'em to foller me clean up hyer --"

"Dorse Davis, you listen to me -- You jist got skeered - an' hurried too much - Thar ain't no one thinks you done hit, but thar's a heap o' them that suspects Ray Owens. Kie Hollon and the two Taulbees that wuz with Ray whin he comes bustin' in hyer last night, they don't blame you none. Kie said today that they jist stuck to Ray last

night to see how fur he'd carry his plans. I shore fooled 'em last night. Beside, whar ye crossed the creek last night - could a meant that any one of four people up Coon Holler could a done hit - an' hyer ye go givin' yours'f away by talkin' to that Sharper Morse. How much money did he git frum ye?" Aunt Bet's voice was stinging. Olive held her breath at Dorse's confession, which came reluctantly.

"Most all uv my savin's, A'nt Bet, but I figgered it'd be wuth hit, not ter be brung in court."

"But how'r ye aimin' on gittin' that thar scalaway of an Owens outen the way? Why didn't yuh go ahead an' put him behind the bars as we aimed ter do? Thar ain't no up-standin' gal like Miss Olive'd ever have a thing to do with a jail-bird." Her voice was vitrolic. --"an' now, you show yorese'f a fit subject fer a place like that - jist 'cause yer lost yur head. Gawd, why wuzn't I borned a man! Thin I cu'd a seen this hyer thing through. You ain't got the brains of a horned toad --"

As A'nt Bet Tuck continued on her bitter tirade, Olive slid around in the oppositedirection and regaining her feet, ran with all her might, bent low under the bank until she was a safe distance from the barn. She paused to catch her breath and brush off the dirt; she must not be seen approach- ing from this direction. It would be better to take an

excursion up on the hill and come in from the front of the house. She found her knees trembling from something more than the hurried climb up into the wooded section. Sitting down on a moss-encrusted log, she drew her first long breath and dropped her head into her hands. Her suspicions in regard to Dorse were confirmed. He would go any length "to beat the other feller" in order to gain his ends because back of him was a mind versed in treachery and deceit. Even then, perhaps he and A'nt Bet Tuck were trying to piece together their plan for "jailing" Raymond to get him out of the way so Dorse would have free sailing in court-ning her. Under those circumstances, she would have to resign from teaching the school; she would not be subjected to Dorse's attention. She recalled Raymond's searching look; perhaps already she had allowed her friendliness to Dorse to bring a rift in Raymond's trust. She must talk to Raymond; now that the flood had run down, she would go to town and make every effort to see him and impart the information she had acquired by accident.

With this decision, she resumed her detour, only to meet Polly who had been roaming about the hills and insisted on going with her to the Davis's. Polly took the floor with her tales so that Olive was spared the ordeal of talking much to Dorse at that time except to ask about the place

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decided upon for the Free School. He said that Mr. Kannard had offered the use of one of the basement rooms in the Mission School and that the County Superintendent was making arrangements for seats to be sent out in a few days from the County Seat. When Olive mentioned the fact that she wished to go in town to see her mother during those few days, Dorse was quite possessive in making arrangements for her much to Polly's disgust as it would keep her teacher from visiting her next. She was somewhat placated by Dorse's offering her a quarter if she would go bring Olive's pony from the Mission so that Olive could ride in to Mason City with Dorse the next morning.

The remainder of the day and evening was a nightmare to Olive, for she could not trust Aunt Bet Tuck nor Dorse. She remained in the kitchen as much as possible, talking to Mrs. Davis and the girls who were always busy at churning or sewing when they came in from the field-work. There was no Singing School that night. As they gathered around the fireplace, Olive's mind was busy conjecturing whether or not Dorse and Aunt Bet were planning to execute their former designs of having Raymond arrested. From Dorse's cheerful mein, she deduced the fact that they had an alternative plan to bring further disgrace on Raymond. But Olive kept up her share in the conversation, showing them how to

play some indoor games. No doubt but what the Mother and the girls and Minner still held the utmost confidence in Dorse.

The next morning the fog was curling up like smoke
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from the "bottoms" as their horses "clopped" down-creek. Cabins, cliffs, and wooded hillsides were all obscured alike by the dank white curtain that was so chilling to Olive. She was glad that conversation was not expected on a ride like that. Dorse seemed exceedingly light-hearted, yodeling and singing "Barbara Allen" until Olive shivered inwardly. By the time they had reached Mason City the sun had done its best to warm Olive, but that inward coldness was intensified by their encountering at the edge of town, Raymond and his father on their horses. Raymond gave them a curt nod in response to Dorse's hearty "Howdy". Dorse seemed highly gratified as he accompanied Olive to her home and promised to call and let Olive know when the seats were installed and school would start again. Even before Dorse had taken his departure, Olive knew that she must interview Lawyer Morse herself now that there was no chance of seeing Raymond. Her mother was glad to hear of the story in detail, but Olive knew that she must not worry her with the acute problem before her. Very shortly, she explained to her mother that she must call on the County Superintendent at

the court house.

When Olive found herself at the entrance of the old stone Court House at the door of which so many quarrels had taken place and where old Uncle Moberly had recently been shot when he got in the way of a bullet, she hesitated. Would it be possible to secure justice where money talked so loudly to the officers installed within? She knew now they all hated Raymond and his father because they would not accept bribes and how a "smear" campaign had been whispered about concerning the new insurance plan; for it not only saved the county money but cut down some of the grafters' incomes. She hoped that Dorse had not as yet secured the warrant for Raymond's arrest. She was not clear in her own mind what she would or could do to prevent the issuing of the warrant, but prevent it, she must.

When Olive's timid knock was answered by a deep-throated voice that bade her enter, she opened the door upon Lawyer Morse and another client who was standing at the window with his back to the lawyer. Olive gave a start - it was Dorse Davis. When he turned, his face revealed a most unhappy expression. Evidently, he was wishing he could confer with Aunt Bet Tuck at that time. This gave Olive courage. Why not fight fire with fire? There was everything to gain; she was fighting for Raymond, and she

would have to let Dorse know just how he stood in her thoughts. Here they had a witness. Lawyer Morse knew that Dorse was guilty or he would not have offered the bribe money. With a heroic effort born for the minute, Olive decided that she would take the offensive and offer no quarter.

"Howdy, Mr. Davis; no, don't go. What I have to say concerns you as well as myself and others. No, thank you, Mr. Morse, I'll just stand." She refused to be seated, for she remembered reading somewhere that the person standing always had the advantage in an argument.

"It'll not take me long to say what I've got to say. I have heard - it doesn't matter how - that there is to be or has been issued a warrant for the arrest of Raymond Owens for the burning of the Free School on Troublesome where I have been teaching. I happen to know that Raymond Owens had nothing to do with it. Also, I know that a certain young man who left Singing School that night set fire to a pile of debris he had placed in it the afternoon before when he went down the creek supposedly to borrow a lantern."

Dorse's face paled as she went firmly on. "I also happen to know that the family, for the most part, of this young man have utmost confidence in him; and that anything

to the contrary that would be revealed would literally break their hearts. I would not want this young man to be ruined, but I would like to have your advice, Mr. Morse, as to the correct path to pursue in teaching this young man that he must have respect for the rights of others and the law - and that he must not rely on the law of force to grasp what he wishes. I have it within my power to have him arrested on evidence that I did not willingly collect or even try to, but I do not wish to ruin this young man's chances for future success if he has learned his lesson. I realize that if he hasn't, he may resort to a gun to take the life of one or more parties concerned in this, but somehow, I have always had enough confidence in his ability to think for himself, to believe that he will not be so foolhardy; for shooting will settle nothing and just bring unhappiness to three families." Olive looked directly at Lawyer Morse and Dorse Davis, realizing that they both knew of whom she was speaking as plainly as if she had pointed to Dorse and said, "Thou art the man".

"Perhaps you could advise me as to the proper course to pursue, both of you I mean; or would you like to have time to think it over and give me your decision at an early date? I'll be at call any time."

Olive paused; never in her life had she made such a

long speech. Would it work? Had she appealed to the best that there was in Dorse - or would he resort to violence and shoot both her and Raymond? She could not know; she could only hope that reason would predominate over the old method of shooting it out. If so, she felt that her short stay in the community on Troublesome Creek might be for good after all. She had never known Lawyer Morse to be without a reply before but his breath was coming shortly. Dorse was now red in the face, but he managed to choke out his thoughts.

"I understand yuh, Miss Olive. I'll tell Lawyer Morse whut I think, and he kin let yer know later."

The lawyer nodded. Olive managed to walk firmly and commandingly to the door and out of the Court House. She had risked all. Would it be for victory or defeat? "To the victor", an old school motto flashed through her thoughts. Yes, to the victor -- belonged the spoils". With that she bolstered up her sinking courage on her walk home.

That night Olive's mother had gone to her night-nursing job, and Olive was enjoying a respite from work although her mind was filled with torturing thoughts. Suppose that Dorse had met Raymond and his father on the return trip and the temptation to use his gun had conquered! It was time for Lawyer Morse to report. Just as she had replenished

the fire for perhaps the fourth time and swept the hearth, she heard rapid footsteps approach the door. She tensed herself, smoothed her hair, and threw back her shoulders, assuming as bold a front as she could in order to receive Lawyer Morse and his decision. With the opening of the door, her stiffness crumpled; for there stood Raymond Owens with that little quizzical smile that he always met her with, as a fellow-student, the previous year when they had been such pals.

"Raymond - I didn't think it was you." Tears came to her eyes. "But, I'm so glad it is. I was expecting --"

"Yes, I know, dear." He was inside the door. "Your were expecting a rather important message --- Well, I am the one to deliver it to you, personally. Let's sit down."

"You mean that Lawyer Morse told you of - of my visit?" Her voice trembled.

"Yes, and I think it's about the bravest thing I've heard of for a long time; best of all, it got results." He took her hands. "I want to ask your forgiveness for doubting you, Clive. I guess I was just - just plain jealous. I can't blame Dorse for wanting my girl. Honey, don't cry! Laugh! You see, you have done more for the community than we dared think. You have kept Dorse's respect even in his utter defeat. He's decided to go to Southern Indiana and

start a new life. His withdrawal will clear up all doubts, but yet save his family from utter mistrust of him."

"And you - you --" Again that old school motto flashed through her mind; a twinkle crept into her eyes. "you, as the Victor will--".

His smile answered hers. "Will claim the spoils; and this time, it is the richest treasure in the whole county. Olive, we'll be victors together; we'll win back that lovely wooded hillside for our future home, and we'll fight hand in hand for all that is just and honorable for our people in the hills. It won't be long until they'll recognize us as their friends, and that takes in dear old Dad who has stood by me in this crisis and who has never lost his faith in the development of the hill country even when his enemies burned his lumber mills."

From her refuge in his arms Olive brushed away another tear.

"And pray for whom is that tear shed, my sweet?" asked Raymond in mock gallantry.

With an almost guilty smile, she whispered, "For Dorset it is such a bitter pill for him to swallow - but mostly for Minner or Maynard, I should say - He was so sure I would marry Dorset."

For the first time, Olive had the opportunity of con-

riding in Raymond all the hopes and fears that had been planted in her breast because of the confession of Kurt and Mimer that last afternoon in the Free School that now lay in ashes on the the fork of Nigger Branch and Troublesome Creek. The curtain was now descending on the drama that had its incitement at that moment, and Olive's breast was filled with complete satisfaction.

"To the Victor", laughed Raymond as his lips claimed hers.

71. buck-eyes - the nuts from the Buckeye or Horse Chestnut
72. a soul - a person
73. hblp (or holpen) - help (cf. he'p - help)
74. ballats - ballads
75. coverlid (or counterpin) - bedspread
76. whilst - while
77. atween - between
78. party (or poety) - pretty (cf. play-party - toy)
79. lean-to (sometimes corrupted to "lin-ter") - a room with a sloping roof added to a cabin
80. cain't hold a candle to - can't compete with
81. ole - a term of endearment (My ole pony - My nice pony.)
82. coming stomach - growing appetite
83. Free School - public school
84. High Tide - high waters or flood (cf. Introductory Essay)
85. mount'in - mountain (They don't use "mounting".)
86. pappy - father (used by and for older men)
87. go clean up - go clear up or all the way
88. wearried - worried (You wearry me - You worry me)
89. afeared (or afeered) - afraid
90. ther - there
91. bottoms - low, level land bordering the creeks

MEETIN' HOUSE FEUD

Preacher Newton guided his white mule around the deepest mudhole in the descent to Buck Creek, never losing his dignity nor composure. His mule could ford as deep a stream as any mule in the mountains. This Sunday afternoon the water ran with unusual rapidity, but "Snow" kept her footing. Safely up on the other bank, Preacher Newton let his mule rest while he focussed his attention on the object of his journey - a long-neglected "Meetin' House".⁹² It was a weathered, blackened board structure with a tin roof and a high foundation of sturdy piles set deep in the ground so close to the junction of Buck Creek and Possum Branch that at "High Tide" the water ran beneath the floor. The windows were planked up now, and the board steps were rickety. An outsider would never guess by the appearance of the building the original purpose for which it was built.

⁹³
A puzzled look crept over Preacher Newton's face. Taking off his hat, he ran his fingers through his thin gray hair in contemplation. The erection of this, the only church house for miles, had been the last community enterprise that he could remember - and the last public

meeting for worship four years ago had gotten out of bounds and ended in a shooting scrape. No one had been killed, but ever since that day, the building had been a source of trouble and contention in this mountain neighborhood, especially between America Plummer and Amanda Drake. Ever since America's husband had been wounded in that "meetin' house fracas", the church house had been a "hateful" object to her to be endured. She had tirelessly endeavored to get Amanda's consent to its being moved to a different location. Amanda was just as determined that the Meetin' House that her dead husband had built and preached in should remain where he had placed it. Only two original members of the church were living, Amanda Drake and Preacher Newton. She did the dictating; he was merely the voice. As such, he was to confer this afternoon with Bryce and America Plummer, "Murky" for short, whose residence was adjacent to the Meetin' House.

When Preacher Newton halloed outside the fence of the Plummer yard, there was no response except from two shaggy dogs that bounded down the cement walk, the only one of its kind that side of the County Seat, sixteen miles away. Another "Hello" only increased the barking of the dogs. He turned his attention across the road to the Plummer store and Post office, half expecting to see "Murky"

waiting on a customer.

"Lookin' fur someone, Preacher?" A voice from behind startled him out of his reverie. He turned in surprise to see Tup Watkins of Meetin' House Hill.

"Why yes. You don't know where Bryce and Murky are; do you, Tup?"

"Didn't you see 'em go down the creek past yore place this mornin' 'bout the time the train blowed? I heerd they wuz goin' down to the County Seat to git Reece Hollon. 'Member Reece; dontcha, Preacher?"

"Why yes; he's that orphan boy Bryce bailed out o' jail and took to work fur him. He seemed real devoted to Bryce and Murky; then he ups an' runs away --" Preacher Newton checked himself. It was not wise to talk very freely to Tup Watkins of Meetin' House Hill though it was often advantageous to learn the current gossip from one so ideally located to keep a check on the movements of those who lived in this narrow valley where there were neither roads, telephones, newspapers, nor radios.

Tup Watkins smiled broadly; it was his policy to be friendly to everyone - even to Preacher Newton whom he disliked heartily. He could learn so much more in that way.

"Don'tcha reckon, Preacher, that Murky sent that jail-bird outen here fur some purpose; happened right after he's

in that shootin' scrape with Press at 'lection time in this very Meetin' House - I do, an' I says they's bringing him back fur no good. I says, 'Look out whin Press comes up agin him ----'

"You yammer too much, Tup Watkins," warned Preacher Newton, but Tup caught the gleam of interest in his eyes.

"Jist thought you'd like to know Murky and Bryce's gittin' all the help they kin. Yist' day, they had a surveyor feller out here a-drivin' stakes all up an' down an' around the Meetin' House. The main line o' stakes come up to pret nigh four feet of the front steps." Tup leaned indolently against the door of the Plummer store and spat tobacco juice at random.

"Frum whut p'int did they measure, Tup?" Preacher Newton was plainly concerned.

"Cain't tell, Preacher. Whin I come up, they pulls the stakes out quicker'n yuh could say, 'Seat'". Tup felt he could now fish for another bit of information. "I heerd you'uns wuz go'n' to move the Meetin' House 'way frum Murky's front door. Shore would tickle her ifen yuh did."

"You heared wrong then, Tup Watkins. Better take keer how you go messin' in other folks' affairs." Preacher Newton was obviously ruffled. He found it difficult to maintain his dignity as he set his mule in motion. There

was only one thing that he could do in order to accomplish the purpose of this trip on which Amanda Drake had dispatched him. The first alternative, talking to the Plummers, was impossible now that Bryce and Murky had gone so far as to call in an outsider to aid them in their schemes. Besides, the Preacher's "fightin' dander" was up. If Bryce and Murky Plummer thought they'd take the question of the boundary to law, he'd "show 'em" they didn't have a leg to stand on. No one could disprove that the ground underneath the Meetin' House belonged to him and Amanda Drake alone. He had the deed for it in his pocket along with a notice that Amanda had composed and written out for him to use in case the Plummers did not agree to her terms. Amanda's idea of calling a "Free-for-all" Meetin' was the only solution left now, he felt. In that way they could swing the neighborhood's sentiment in their favor. Murky wouldn't dare "buck" the entire country-side; neither could she "best" Amanda's plan if they stayed up all night thinking.

Preacher Newton guided Snow around the Meetin' House to the steps after he had observed the marks of disturbance in the soil near the side of the building, realizing that every action was being observed by Tup. So much the better to have Tup on hand to spread the news about the

"Free-for-all Meetin'" the next afternoon. He drew forth from his pocket the written notice and a hammer and nails. Quickly posting Amanda's notice, he urged his mule back across Buck Creek and soon disappeared behind a clump of willows. Tup noticed that when he reached the ford that was visible, he turned in the direction of Amanda Drake's home instead of his own. With a smile of satisfaction, Tup lost no time in reading the notice. As he started up Possum Branch to disseminate the "fresh news", Tup was in his element. Things were moving on Buck Creek and Possum Branch. He felt it in the air. Just wouldn't Murky be "riled"? He never had like her since she threatened to have him jailed because he stole her eggs and exchanged them at the store for tobacco. He decided it might be a good thing to inspect his "ole" shot-gun up home. He had noticed that Murky kept hers in the store when Bryce was gone to the County Seat.

Before Bryce Plummer and his wife and young Reece Hollon, their ward, had reached their home that Sunday evening, they had been informed of the "Free-for-all Meetin'" to be held the next afternoon. A shudder went through America's slight frame. She could still see in her memory Bryce lying on the floor wounded at the last "Free-for-all" Preaching four years ago. When they were

alone that night, the stalwart Bryce assured her that nothing could forward their plans any more than this meeting -- if they managed it just right. He would attend, and she could keep the store open the next afternoon.

Accordingly, the next day as entire families arrived at the Meetin' House, America watched nervously from the store window for the arrival of Amanda Drake who would be sitting flat in a wagon bed on a huge pillow because of her great weight. If she appeared, America was ready at a minute's notice to lock up and go over to the meeting. Otherwise, she felt sure that Bryce could handle Preacher Newton; also, an official from the County Seat was to be there. She knew that Bryce's offer would be generous; that there should be no trouble unless it was started by their cousin, Press Plummer, who had recently moved back on his father's place directly across Possum Branch. He seemed determined to pick up the gauntlet of the old family misunderstanding since he had quit work and taken to drinking. He and Tup Watkins were entirely "too thick". America did not trust either one; they were "sorry" fellows; and laziness irked her as nothing else could. She was a wiry little body, able to stand more work than two ordinary women. Although America Plummer was better educated than the average in the valley, her learning had only made her

dissatisfied with her lot; it had not given her a vision of how she could help the less fortunate. Instead she had longed to move to town to a better environment, but Bryce's appointment as Postmaster and his success in making money through his tenant-farmers held them there. Frustrated in the hope of moving away, America became obsessed with the idea of improving the place so that when their daughter should come home from college, their mode of living would not be a disgrace to her. To that end, she had accomplished the addition of the walks and the better type furnishings in the house, as well as having gas piped from an old gas well over the hill. But with each new improvement, she and her neighbors had become just a little more widely separated; for their plank cabins and meager furnishings could never be otherwise. She did not realize how resentful Bryce's tenant-farmers were because he did not mend their leaky roofs and add necessary outbuildings. The last ambition that had possessed Americas was the removal of the old, blackened Meetin' House that obstructed their view down the valley. Her plan for the effecting of this had been blocked at every turn by Amanda Drake, not openly but under cover. America herself had recently hit upon a perfectly fair, legal, indisputable way of ridding herself of an "eye-sore" that had been practically in their front

yard ever since she and Bryce were married. She feared only one thing in the working out of her scheme; it was the machinations of the "green-eyed" monster of jealousy.

America's thoughts were halted by the chanting, undulating strains of the favorite song of the hills, "Shake Hands with Mother up There". She quickly moved to the platform in front of the store. There was not a person outside the church - surely an unusual occurrence for that neighborhood. It was time for the mail-boy from the County Seat with the written report from the Recorder. As the last wailing notes from the church died away, she was convinced that Amanda had decided to leave the execution of her purpose to the Preacher. She could visualize Preacher Newton wiping his eyes as he arose to speak.

That was exactly what Preacher Newton was doing. He was glad that someone had called for the song that was the "stand-by of funeral preachin's" as it gave him his cue for starting the business part of the meeting. The presence of the official had made him undecided as to how to proceed. As he rose with great solemnity, there was a tenseness in the air as well as one of expectancy. Many had been the rumors that Murky had said the Mestin' House must be moved and that Mandy was just as determined that it should not be. Preacher Newton opened the meeting with

the same nasal twang that he used in sermonizing while the crowd listened avidly to his remarks. Even Tup Watkins of Meetin' House Hill desisted in voicing his opinions to Press Plummer and others of his ilk that were lounging near the windows where some of the planks had been removed.

"Ah yes, my friends," Preacher Newton intoned, "many of yore mothers air up there in the buryin' ground on Meetin' House Hill; they've been carried from this sacred spot to their last - uh - resting place - and ah - friends and neighbors, we expect to shake hands with our mothers 'Up Thar'." He pointed upwards. Little Addie Coleman sobbed aloud; for her mother had been the last one to be buried in the neighbor hood. Preacher Newton felt reassured. As Preacher Newton went on in a more business-like tone, he noted the scowl on Bryce's face. "You all know the purpose of this meetin' that concerns every person in this hyer valley. A question has come up 'bout the ground on which this hyer Meetin' House sets, this hyer church that was built fur us by our beloved Brother Drake who is now resting up thar on the hill. He sacrificed to buy this plot o' ground ata big price for the express purpose of givin' you folks a place to hold meetin's. There's bin considerable - ah - talk 'bout movin' it away from the spot where Preacher Drake an' your mannys and pappys built

hit. Now, I cal'late, the only fair way is to find out what you'uns right hyer in this neighborhood wishes. O' course the charter members has the final say-so. I might state that the kin-folks of our deceased Brother Drake has expressed theirselves as wishin' the Meetin' House to stay where he put hit, ah- with the help of yore pappys and mammys. We'd be proud to hear frum Uncle Henry Walters - how he feels 'bout moving the Meetin' House away."

Before Uncle Henry could edge his way through the crowd, Bryce Plummer shot to the front like a plummet. "Preacher, I object agin' any further proceedin's till I give yer my ideas. It's my property - an' yours, Preacher, that's in question - an' it ain't fair fur 'tothers to decide --"

There was a hum of disapproval at this statement, Uncle Henry leading in a high-pitched voice, "'Tis fair! We old 'uns worked fur to build this hyer Meetin' House - an' we likes to have hit right hyer fur our buryin's---"

Uncle Henry's voice was drowned in Bryce's vociferous one, "Uncle Henry, I ain't aimin' to take yore church 'way frum yer. But we think it'd be a heap nicer place fur the church house up by the buryin' ground on Meetin' House Hill. Now, I'm offering' to donate a strip o' ground bigger'n this 'un the church is settin' on - an' I'll help

you tear the house down and move it up there.

Several older people protested that they could never climb the hill. Tup volunteered the information that the moving was being done to please Murky; why should she have all the say about their Meetin' House? This had its effect on those near him.

"Listen, friends and neighbors," persisted Bryce plummer. "Ain't I allus tried to help you in bad times? I was mighty proud to keep some of you'uns from starvin' by givin' yer groceries when you got pinched. I'm not tryin' to get ahead of you'uns. What I want 's my own rights. I've had a surveyor out here - and accordin' to his measurin', four feet of ground at the front of this church belongs fair an' square to me and Murky. The line from Possum Branch Bend to the steps of the church falls four feet short of givin' me my land 'cordin' to the deed. The Meetin' House is settin' on my land. Now, you can't move the house 'tother way - or you'll back hit up in the creek, and a High Tide 'd take it out shore. So, I think I'm offerin' you all the best way out. You kin have a fair strip o' land up on Meetin' House Hill fur the church - an' I'll take this ground offen yore hands."

Bryce's offer was on the surface very reasonable, but the motive back of it was mistrusted. It was true that

Bryce and Murky had given food to various families of the neighborhood, but when it came to disturbing one of the traditional land-marks, doubt and suspicion arose in the minds of many. The reaction was intensified by the remarks from those who held personal grudges or were envious of the Plummer's wealth, as America had feared.

"Land up ther's so rocky, Bryce can't raise nothin' on hit," commented Press Plummer with a leer. "He shore knows how to cheat one in a land deal. Look how he slickered Pappy outen his garden spot."

"Nary other person 'cept this surveyor feller thinks Bryce owns them four feet. Money makes some folks talk the way Bryce wants 'em to."

"Bryce's the richest man on this creek; what does he crave them four feet fur anyway?"

Preacher Newton realized that the situation called for quick action. He wanted no uproar. He doubted the veracity of Bryce, but the fact remained that the descriptions of pieces of property in the mountains showed that the boundaries went according to creeks, mountain ridges, trees, and even waterfalls. If Possum Branch had changed its course four feet, which undoubtedly was the case, then the deed was correct and Bryce's claim was perfectly legal. Who but Murky Plummer would have thought of that? It seem-

ed that the Plummers had out-witted him and Amanda after all. If only he could talk to Mandy now! A sudden inspiration caused Preacher Newton's face to shine with confidence; it was remarkable how calm and composed he became. With a bland tone, he took up the procedure of the meeting, and as the murmurs subsided with the expectancy that he would now call for a vote, to everyone's surprise he made the following announcement:

"The purpose of this hyer meetin' has been fulfilled. I think us charter members know whut to do. I now wishes to ask fur some real husky fellers to work on this hyer Meetin' House tomorrer mornin'. Who kin come an' bring his tools?" Preacher Newton's indirect way of taking the vote showed very plainly that the people of the neighborhood were not in favor of moving the church; for only two of the Hoe boys and Tup Watkins offered to come, not that Tup intended to work on anything to please Murky, but he must be there for policy's sake.

Bryce Plummer smiled genially, promising that he and Reece would help tear down the building preparatory to its erection on the new site which he and the surveyor would now mark out. He hurried out to tell the waiting Murky how wonderfully their plan was working out. With a sigh of relief that there had been no shooting, America returned

to the interior of the little store and Post Office to wait on expected customers. But the consternation of the people was so great that few entered the store. Instead, they gathered in little knots to discuss the sudden turn of affairs. America sensed the hostility of those who did call for mail or made a purchase, but her sense of happiness and triumph at that moment eclipsed any doubt as to the success of the enterprise. The people would become reconciled to the change after a reasonable passage of time, she felt sure.

Bryce and America Plummer retired that night after a jubilation over the turn of events. Bryce hoped that they would soon get the church moved as the site would be an ideal place for him to "burn his tobacco bed" that spring, but America was planning to plant flowers and strawberries there. Reece Hollon remained alone by the fireplace for some time, glumly reviewing an incident of the evening. Taking a short excursion about the place after milking, he had run into Tup Watkins carrying a shot-gun, coming down Possum Branch towards Buck Creek. Tup was very talkative, telling Reece how Preacher Newton had called him a "jail-bird" and was "agin' him". Reece's slow-working mind did not discern that Tup was merely trying to engage Reece's thoughts so that he would not inquire

about his own presence there at that time of night with a gun. Reece did not know that Tup had then gone home with a self-satisfied grin on his face, having ascertained that Preacher Newton had gone up to Mandy's after the "Free-for-all" and had stayed long enough to obtain orders for a month. Tup had also learned that Press's truck had a full tank of gasoline and had concluded that Press must be getting ready to go somewhere as soon as the creek ran down enough so that the engine could clear the water.

Very early the next morning, America saw Tup Watkins moving slowly down Buck Creek towards the Preacher's and the new stretch of grading that was being done by the United States government for the first road that would open up this little valley. She remembered that this was her "Emancipation Day". Miracles did not often happen there, but surely the moving of the Meetin' House was one. She didn't dare believe it could be true even yet. Bryce had laughed at her fears that morning when he left to go to the County Seat to get the papers that the Recorder had failed to send. After her husband had gone, word came that the "mail-boy" was sick; accordingly Reece was dispatched with the mail. Thus America was left alone to see that the important work of tearing down the church was accomplished. Preacher Newton and Tup Watkins were the first

to arrive at the store.

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"Howdy, Murky," greeted the Preacher affably.

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"Lowed as how we might borrow yore saw and crowbar to help along the work."

As America opened the tool shed a short distance from the Meetin' House, she noticed that Press Plummer and several of the neighbors from up-creek had gathered near the church with their tools. Apparently Bryce's and her plan was progressing smoothly after all. She decided that she would make the workers a hot drink for their lunch. When she assured the preacher that Bryce intended to be back by early afternoon to help, he had replied with a twinkle in his eye.

"That's jist fine, Murky. We kin make a right smart showin' on the work this mornin'."

That morning as America went about her work first at the house, then again over at the store to wait on a customer, her mind was full of plans. During the course of the morning a rather disturbing occurrence had been reported to her by one of the men who came to the well for a drink.

"Tup Watkins wuz a-sayin' somebody stole gasoline from the Road Workers' tank down-creek, an' that the gov'mint's goin' to send out some fellers to git finger-

prints of all of us'uns on the creek."

America had responded with feigned unconcern, "You can't believe half of what Tup says. How are you coming along with the taking down of the roof? Do you have it about all off? Seems to me you're making enough noise."

"The roof's not off yit. Preacher Newton's the boss, you know, an' he says we're goin' to do the work in sections. My job's bin sawin' the tin roof off back 'bout four feet. So, I wuz makin' all that rumpus. I'd best be gittin' to work agin."

America noticed that what the worker had said was true. "It's a mighty queer way to take down a building," she said half aloud to herself as she went to the store to get some coffee to boil for the men. "But then Preacher Newton never was any hand to boss practical work. Bryce shouldn't have gone off, today of all days. He would know how to manage the roof in at least two sections."

At noon when America went to take the men a pot of steaming coffee, they had all disappeared. A feeling of suspicion took hold of her. Bryce should not have been so confident all was well. She looked aghast at the butchering way they had started to tear down the church. The front part of the Meetin' House had been sawed off even with the line where the surveyor's stakes had been driven.

The tin from the roof, and the boards, and steps had been placed inside the remainder of the structure. The entire end of the building was open and exposed to the weather.

America watched anxiously for Bryce and Reece that evening. No one had come back to finish taking down the building. A firm conviction seized her mind that this was Preacher Newton's scheme for pleasing Mandy Drake. Who else but Mandy would have thought of such a scurvy trick! The Preacher did not intend to remove the rest of the building. There it stood all the more "hateful" and ugly to her, a "cut-in-two" church that would do no one any good. Now it would probably never be used for anything but elections which were always times of drinking, gambling, and shooting. She recognized that Preacher Newton had satisfied the law, but he had not yielded one inch in his implacable nature. She feared the consequences when Bryce should return and see the utter defeat of their plans. His explosive temper was not to be reckoned with. Again she shuddered as she recalled the memory of him lying on the floor of the Meetin' House with blood over his shirt. She locked the store and waited by the front door of their home as the sun retreated behind Meetin' House Hill. When Reece returned alone that night, he found her still by the front door, gun in hand.

"Where's Bryce?" queried America anxiously.

"Bad luck, Miz Plummer. Bryce's leg got hurt when his hoss pitched forward an' throwed him. Doc's taken him to the hospital."

"But, Reece, of all times, we need him now. Preacher Newton didn't move the church house. He had only four feet in front sawed off just for spite-work. Mandy's to blame, I know - an' there's more trouble afoot. Just awhile ago someone came sneakin' around here between the store and that big tree. I shot at him, Reece. I must have been nervous with everybody gone; I just couldn't help it. Don't folks know they should keep away from government postoffices anyway! We'll have to keep guard tonight, I'm afraid." America paused for breath.

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"Don't wearry yore se'f, Miz Plummer. Everything'll be all right jist so that Tup Watkins don' show his face. I don't like him. When he yammers ¹⁰³ so, I wanna whale away an' lambast him so hard, he'll hold his tongue a spell - trouble is he makes me so mad I say what I ortn't to."

"Oh, Reece, are you going to act unwisely so that you'll have to leave again?"

"No, Miz Plummer, I won't say nothin' ifen I have to bite my tongue off - but I don't like that Tup Watkins. I'll finish the chores now. Did yuh milk yit?"

"No. I didn't dare leave this front door after I shot at the man-person that was foolin' around the store. Did you notice anything or anybody as you came past the Meetin' House?"

"I passed Press. He wuz comin' long smokin' a cigarette. Whin I told him 'bout Bryce not bein' able to ride on his hoss, he offered to take his truck an' go in after him. Reekon he'd jist had a drink or he wouldn't acted so friendly." Reece turned to go out the frontdoor to get his horse.

"Press couldn't go after anyone. He never has any gas in his truck. Well, I'll get you a bite ¹⁰⁴ of supper before you milk, Reece." America moved in the opposite direction from Reece going down the long hall towards the well to get a fresh pail of water. She noticed a reddish glare in the sky that reflected on the mountainside; it was much lighter out than it had been. "Surely no one was burning a tobacco bed this early in the season," she thought.

As she set the bucket down by the well curb, Reece came hurtling from the front of the house. "Miz Plummer, the church house is on fire. Where's the gun? It's going up in smoke so fast; it's goin' to catch the tool shed on fire; and, if the wind raises, hit'll take the

whole place. Quick - Shoot! Shoot for help!"

"Gun's by the front door!" gasped America. "You shoot - a lot of times! Hurry! Oh, my God, what will we do? They didn't want the Meetin' House moved - will they help save my place? Someone's trying to burn us out." She rushed around the house panic-stricken. She could hear Reece shooting.

The fire was gaining rapid headway; it seemed that the entire interior had been saturated with explosive material - so quickly was it being consumed. Sparks were darting towards the tool shed. She rallied her strength.

"Here, Reece, I'll take that gun now; you get the tools out of the shed before it catches afire - and we'll have to get some wet gunny sacks for the roof of the house. Oh, why doesn't someone come to help? Why do we have to live in such a country anyway? If Bryce were only here!"

Running towards the shed for sacks, she shot the gun as rapidly as she could. Then back at the well, she worked the windlass frantically, drawing water and emptying it in a tub to wet the sacks. "Would Reece never get through at the tool shed!" She put the gun inside the kitchen door, and grabbing as many wet sacks as she could carry, she stumbled around the house into the full glare of the fire. Figures were now gathering from out the

darkness. The first person that she met was Press.

"Oh, Press," she pleaded, "Please help save our house. Don't think about the bad things between you and Bryce now."

"Sure, li'le cousin; I'll he'p li'le cousin. Always did like li'le Murky." Press had had just enough drink to make him obliging if one humored him.

"Well, then, Cousin, please climb up this trellis and put these wet sacks on the front porch shingles."

"Here, lemme do it," offered Tup Watkins who appeared almost simultaneously with Preacher Newton.

"One of you go help Reece get the tools out of the shed - and, for pity's sake, let the horses and cow out in the pasture." More folks were coming now. "Wet sacks in tub by well." America's knees suddenly refused to hold her up, and she sank to the ground as Press's young wife came up with the baby in her arms. It was the first time she had been in Murky's yard.

There was a terrific crash as the entire tin roof crumpled and smashed down toward the "creek-side" of the church. Sparks shot with increasing intensity over the buildings. All were now engaged in fighting out the little fires that were kindled by the sparks. America roused up with the crash and began to moan. "They'll think I did it. Before God, I didn't! You folks know I wouldn't risk burn-

in' my whole place just to --" She again sank into unconsciousness, and the neighbor women managed to get her to the couch on the front porch.

Just before the last flames died down into smoldering embers, almost as many people were at the Meetin' House site as had been at the "Free-for-all" meeting the previous day. Many and daring were the suggestions concerning the origin of the fire. Some insisted on going after the blood hounds; others thought it was a judgment for their "giving up meetin's on Sunday". Preacher Newton listened much, but said little; his mind was busy conjecturing as to the guilty person. Coming around to the "creek-side" of the building where the tin roof had been hurled, he suddenly noticed under the edge of the crumpled mass, a battered, dented, burned tin pail; it was different from those usually used for water in the Meetin' House. How could it have come there! Assuring himself that no curious person was watching him, he quickly secured a pole with which he edged the bucket from under the tin roof and down into the water. When it was cool enough to handle, he carefully put it in one of the burlap sacks he had been using to beat out flames with and attached it to the saddle on "Snow" that he had tethered under the willows down the creek some distance from the church house site.

After this discovery, Preacher Newton determined that he would be the last one to leave, but it was a long wait; for it seemed that others had decided to do the same. Once, he made a move to talk to America, but she was surrounded by excited women. Upon finding no further evidence, he hurried home to examine carefully the indented trademark on the pail in order to solve the mystery as to who burned the Meetin' House.

Preacher Newton was not the only one "conjecturin'" that night. America's mind was especially active, after Reece had reported an incident of the evening to her and Bessie, Bryce's sister, who was to stay with them until Bryce should return.

"I'd jist climbed up the ladder on 'tother side of the tool shed to see if'n the roof had quit smokin'. Jist as I stuck my head over the edge of the roof, I saw Preacher Newton a-draggin' somethin' kinda bulky outen the burned timbers an' take hit down to the creek. He didn't go right home then, but he jist kep' hangin' around till the last 'un had gone."

Strong suspicion seized America's mind. It was intensified the next morning when she saw Tap Watkins stirring around the charred timbers of the burned building with a long pole and poking in the bushes along the creek. She

remembered that Tup and the Preacher had appeared at the fire together.

That day Bryce's sister, Bessie, was so nervous that she could imagine many things. But there was no imagination about the sudden entrance of little Vernon Roe about noon all breathless with a piece of paper which he poked into her hand without a word and then dashed down in the declivity of the creek and disappeared. Bessie took it to America in the store who immediately locked up and went to call Reece in from the field.

When they were inside the house, America drew the blinds and, standing in the center of the front room, read the note:

"We'uns don't want to git mixed up in any fudin', but we know that the Preacher sent Press up to Mandy's this mornin' - Press is packin' a gun an' accusin' the feller that stays with you'uns of burnin' the Meetin' House. Right smart lot o' folks thinks as how you'uns had something to do with the burnin'. (This ain't who you think it is a-writin'.)"

"Reece," ejaculated America before he had time to comment, "I can't let you go on doing the outside work wí th Press and Tup both carrying guns; they had them in the store this morning when they came in together. I was so excited I handed Tup the wrong kind of tobacco, and when

I asked them if they had much luck hunting, Tup grinned and said, "We got to tree our game first, Miz Plummer." I don't blame you for not liking that Tup Watkins, Reece, but whatever they say to you, you've got to keep your mouth closed, at least till Bryce gets home. Those two fellows are in cahoots with Preacher Newton and Mandy. I can't figure out why Press should take such an active interest in church affairs unless it's just to spite Bryce."

"I heerd him say once that he'd like to have that old Meetin' House to start up a saloon in," explained Reece.

A new fear gripped America's heart. The land still belonged to Amanda Drake and Preacher Newton. Would they now retaliate by permitting Press to build a saloon there? In that case she would go personally to Mandy and protest.

Bessie's quavering voice brought America's thoughts back to present difficulties. "If it's not safe fur Reece to work outside in the field, maybe he could sleep in the daytime and then guard at night. I rolled the bed ¹⁰⁵ all last night'fraid they'd set the house afire. 'Leastways, I'd feel safer with a man inside.

Reece protested, "But, Miz Plummer, ifen I hide out, hit'll look like I'm guilty - like the note says they's suspicionin' me. I ain't afeared uv ary person. I ain't afeared to face 'em."

However, in response to America's plea that it was for their sakes, Reece promised to stay in until Bryce should return. That afternoon America left one gun by the front door for Bessie who vowed she was too nervous to shoot; she took the other gun to the store. The afternoon dragged on; all day but very few had come past the store or stopped; then they seemed in a hurry to complete their purchases, saying very little. Accordingly, America was glad to welcome two friends of Bryce's, officials from the County Seat, about the middle of the afternoon. They brought the message from Bryce that he would be able to come home in a day or so.

"Bryce wanted me to inquire about the moving of the church," commented Grimes, the elder, "Looks like it had been moved for good. That's about all we've been hearing of to-day is the 'cut-in-two', burned-up Meetin' House. Do you suppose our services might be needed in connection with that affair, Mrs. Plummer, as well as finger-printing folks?"

"I wish I had the authority to enlist your help. It's a big worry having folks accusing us of burning the church - especially with Bryce gone. I don't think Preacher Newton 'll ever ask an officer to help him. He usually takes

things in his own hands and you don't know what to expect. What luck have you had in getting folks' finger-prints?"

"There are just two who have evaded us so far - that young fellow up on the hill - Tup - somebody, and this man just below you."

"Oh, you mean Tup Watkins and Press Plummer - Now, I see why they disappeared up-creek this morning," explained America. Her eyes shone excitedly. "Fellows, I believe I can help you out. I think I have two objects from which you might get their finger-prints. Here's a pack of cigarettes that Tup handled and here's a letter Press stamped and mailed after the mail-boy was gone. Would they do any good?"

"Would they do any good, Mrs. Plummer! We'll have to appoint you our assistant-deputy for this. I think we can call our day's work completed, Dawson, as soon as we examine this truck down the road a little more."

"That truck belongs to Press," volunteered America. "He usually can't keep enough gas in it to go to town since he took to drinking; so they travel mostly by mule."

"Hmm, that's queer!" remarked Dawson. "When I investigated awhile ago, the tank was almost full. Better look into this; hadn't we, Grimes?"

As the officers left the store, America decided that she must see Amanda Drake and appeal to her not to let Press have the church house site for a saloon. If he were as lawless as he seemed to be lately, there would be a continual disturbance right under their noses. Perhaps that was the clever but dreadful scheme - if they couldn't burn them out - to drive her and Bryce from the neighborhood. When America locked up the store and went to the house for supper, she met a white-faced Bessie who told how Tup and Press had been standing at the pasture bars with their guns when she went after the cow. Evidently, they were "laying" for Reece.

A few minutes later while they were seated at the supper table, Tup and Press came past "shooting-up"¹⁰⁶ the place, laughing and talking boisterously. America extinguished the light and hurried to a peep-hole in the front room. She could easily hear Press bragging loudly.

"Guess we gave the Law the slip that time, eh, Tup? You know what - I'm shore gonna git hold of that piece o' dirt the Meetin' House stood on jist to spite Murky 'n Bryce. Come on over an' have a drink, Tup. Ole woman's gone."

So - Press was expecting trouble over the Meetin' House site when Bryce should return and had sent his wife

and baby out of harm's way! When America returned to the supper table, she announced her determination of going up to Amanda Drake's that night. Before she could don her riding outfit, Preacher Newton rode up to the front gate and "halloed" ¹⁰⁷ with great authority. America shooed Reece up the back stairs, stationed Bessie at the peep-hole with a gun and then cautiously opened the front door.

"Murky, I wants to ax' ¹⁰⁸ you a question," demanded Preacher Newton.

"All right, but you'll have to come inside. Down Rambler! Down Jim!"

America quieted the dogs as Preacher Newton dismounted and tethered "Snow". America noticed that he carried something bulky in a burlap sack as he stepped on the porch. The Preacher could not remember when he had been in such a nicely furnished house; and for a moment, he stood just a little abashed.

"Now, Murky, you know how concerned I am over the burnin' of our one and only Meetin' House. I have looked at the question frum all sides --" He cleared his throat. "I 'm not blamin' Bryce, fur I think he r'ally thought as how we wuz intendin' to move the Meetin' House. You see, Murky, that wuz jest my way o' findin' out what folkses wanted. I does the best I kin to please my neighbors.

Now, the night of the fire I wuz doin' some figgerin' on my own - an' I found somethin' which I took keer of. As I wuz plenty busy in town today takin' keer of some legal matters, I couldn't git hyer any sooner. Now, I got jist one question to ax yer."

America had opened her mouth several times to interrupt. Now, she hastened to interpose. "Preacher, if you're trying to place blame on me, you'd just better --" Her eyes flashed fire.

"Now, Murky, how do you account fur this hyer bucket of yours bein' in the Meetin' House the night of the fire? I fished it out from under the tin roof where it was stuck between a j'ist and the tin." He produced the bucket and showed her the indented advertising.

America was totally unprepared for such a question. She had not missed the pail; her mind was in confusion.

"Come! Come! Don't look so scared - what yuh got to say? Ain't this yore bucket?"

"It is - or was," admitted America. "We used it to mix bran for the calf."

"And jist who did this mixin'? queried Preacher Newton with a self-satisfied smirk on his face.

"Why, Reece cares for it when Bryce is away."

"Then more'n likely Reece knows jist how this hyer

pail happened to be in the Meetin' House the night hit burned; don't you think so, Murky?"

"No, I don't, Preacher Newton. I remember now that I fed the calf myself early that evenin' ¹⁰⁹ as Reece was late getting back from carrying the mail. Someone wanted me at the store, and I carried this pail with me over there and put it on the platform of the store. That's the last I had it, and Reece never had it afterwards."

"But maybe you know how hit got into the Meetin' House. 'Twas full o' gasoline, no doubt, to make sich a force as to pitch it onto a j'ist."

"I don't know anything about that pail after I set it on the platform of the store, but I have an idea that the fellow that was divilin' ¹¹⁰ around the store early in the evening might know something about it. I shot at him. That person couldn't have been you; could it, Preacher? I don't see a bullet hole in your hat, but you might have changed your hat."

Preacher Newton almost lost his self-control; his face flushed. He stammered a little. "Wal, now, Murky that turns thing 'round a leetle. I wa'n't figgering on any-thing like that happenin'. I guess I jist cal'lated afore I knew all the fac's in the case. But I'm 'fraid there's a heap of others that suspect Reece too, bein' as they

don't trust him 'cause he's bin in jail. If'n I wuz you, I'd send him outen the country. I'm jist a leetle afraid there's goin' to be trouble that me nor you can't take keer of." He began to back towards the door. "You kin keep the pail fur evidence, Murky, an' if'n there's any-thing I can do to help you, I'd be proud to do hit."

"You can't do much now, Preacher, but you could have if you'd have brought this pail to me in the first place. Now, you've either told - or let Press and Tup talk all over the country-side to stir folks up against Reece. Maybe you can do something for me though. I planned to go up to see Amanda to ask her not to sell the church house grounds to Press for a saloon. I want a decent place to live."

"You should a though o' that before, Murky --" He considered rapidly. "Jist how bad do you an' Bryce want that saloon to stay out o' here? Bad enough to pay Mandy an' me - the first price on that strip of ground - say, \$350.00?"

"And surely that's not all you want, Preacher Newton?" Sarcasm heightened her voice.

"No, that's not all. Mandy an' I thought that since Bryce had already staked out a place up on Meetin' House Hill fur a new buildin', that we might as well go ahead

and build up thar - that is, if you'd still agree to give us the land."

"Bryce'll never give in to a deal like that, Preacher."

"I figgered you wore the britches this time - I've got a deed fur this plot o' ground, not includin' yore four feet, right here in my pocket. Hit's made out to Press Plummer-- fur him to use as he wishes - that is, onless you can beat his price. All hit lacks is Mandy's signature, an' she'll sign 'caisen she's the one that fixed it up with Press. Now, Murky, I'll give yer til tomorrer mornin' to make up yore mind. I 'low Bryce'll agree with yer. Good-night - an' I hope yuh take my advice about gettin' Reece outen this part of the country."

This time when the dogs barked at the departing "Snow", America did not quiet them. She was not defeated yet, even if Preacher Newton thought so. With determination written on her face, she called Bessie and Reece. "I haven't time to tell you everything now, but I've got to go up to Mandy's right away; tomorrow will be too late. You'd better watch very closely, both of you - and whatever you do, don't go outside. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"I'll saddle your horse," volunteered Reece.

"Better not - it won't take me long. If only Bryce

were here?"

America chose not to travel the creek-bed but started up the less-frequented trail, up over the treacherous hillside where a mule had slid off in a High Tide and hurtled to its death; then down and across a mushy field to emerge on a bridle path around "Big Mountain". Not many traveled this path any more; she thought she heard horses' hoofs splashing in the creek down below her. There was just enough star-light for her to discern the outline of the mountains, but she did not appreciate their grandeur. Her mind was occupied with the perplexing problem of approaching Mandy; then if she would fail in this appeal, what should she do?

It had been over a year since she had talked to Mandy Drake. She wondered why it was that each family lived so much to itself. Why couldn't they be friendlier? She felt that she would really like to be sociable. Thus, in a better frame of mind than she had enjoyed for some time, America approached the Drake cabin. She "helloed" outside; soon a lamp was lighted; a head protruded from a half-opened door; and a voice asked who was "ailin'".¹¹¹ America knew that it was not customary to arouse anyone from sleep at so late an hour unless someone was ill and needed help badly. To Amanda, her reason for coming

would appear utterly selfish, she knew. Yet she dismounted, determined to appeal to Amanda's sense of obligation to the young people of the valley, as a former Preacher's wife. Amanda was waiting at the door.

"It's just Murky Plummer, and there's no one sick except Bryce and he's in the hospital, but I do have a very special problem I need your help on, Mandy."

"Wal, spit 'er out quick - 'caise hit's cold standing here."

Amanda was not going to ask her to come in. She would have to proceed at a disadvantage; her words came tumbling out in a disorganized way as she realized the futility of the appeal. She tried to arouse Mandy's sense of fairness, asking her how she would like to have a saloon in her own front yard.

"Seems to me, Murky Plummer, that you'un's is allus gittin' in a mess of some kind-er-other," was Amanda's tart response. "I stays home hyer in my own part of the kintry, an' you never hears of any rumpus up hyer. Seems like some-thin's allus happenin' down yore part o' the creek. Anyways, hit's yore kinfolks that's a-buyin' the ground an' you kin talk to them. I'm goin' to bed; I'm most froze." With that, Mandy slammed the door on a defeated Murky.

The trail homeward seemed twice as long to America. She found it hard to fight off sleep as she was already numb with chill and despair. Surely, there was some way of getting out of such a hateful neighborhood. She felt that Mandy and the Preacher were using this bludgeon over their heads because of envy to force them to pay for a new Meet-in' House or leave the country. She and Bryce would be glad to help build a decent place of worship if Amanda had shown even a little of the spirit of generosity. Thus engrossed in her thoughts, she was startled to see a light in the barn as her horse topped the "rise" nearest their store. There was also a light in the upstairs window. Could Bryce have come home? Her heart almost sang for joy. He would know what to do. She urged her horse to a little more rapid pace, but the slippery path forbade much haste. Was it her imagination that she thought she saw several people approach and enter the barn?

As her horse neared the hitching post in front of the house, she could hear coarse voices within the barn. Her heart contracted; she remembered the Preacher's warning. Did the gang have Reece? She threw the reins over the hitching post. She must first investigate to see who was in the house.

Bessie met her, gun in hand, at the front door.

"Oh, Murky, I shot, but it didn't do a bit of good. You see, someone rides up near the barn an' whistles jist like Bryce does - an' Reece thinks he's come home. He went out an' when I see a lot uv fellers grab him, I shot, but I was afraid of hittin' Reece; so I was just a-standin' hyer prayin' for you or Bryce or someone. What'll we do? Do you think they'll kill him?"

"Oh, no; we mustn't let them. Bessie, my trip to Mandy's was a failure, and - now, this fracas - my mind is in a whirl. I don't know what to do. Merciful Heavens! Do you suppose they're going to burn the barn, too! Did Reece take Bryce's gun?"

"No; hyer 'tis." Bessie's voice was quivering.

"Then, you've just got to shoot some more, Bessie. We'll go 'round to the back of the barn and up into the loft from the outside. Then, we'll get in a place where we can see the gang and not hit Reece; then we've got to pepper it to 'em. We can't let them kill Reece and burn us out! Bessie, stop that shaking! Do you hear me? We've got to do it!"

From their vantage point in the loft, the two women could see Tup and Press holding Reece's arms as he stood on a box with his hands tied behind his back. Another member of the gang was placing a halter-rope around Reece's

neck. Several others were ready to assist.

Press was speaking. "Reece Hollon - you claim yer don't know who set fire to the Meetin' House, but you bin actin' so sneakin' - hidin' behind petticoats, that these hyer buddies o' mine know yer done hit. All we want's yore name to this paper we got writ up. Tup, you kin read hit."

Tup read slowly, "I, the undersigned, does confess that I set fire to the Meetin' House on Buck Creek and Possum Branch, the night of March 15th. I do hereby promise to leave this part of the kintry an' never come back. Signed - (Reece Hollon). Thar now, Reece, all we need's yore name er else we'll jist hist ye up. 'Cause you're goin' to leave this hyer place one way or 'tother." There was a triumphant leer on Tup's face as he waved the paper under Reece's nose. "Who's got a pencil fur him to sign this with?"

"Hurry up an' say what yer goin' to say, Reece Hollon, afore I put this hyer blindfold on yuh," commanded Press.

America gave Bessie the signal to get ready as they heard Reece reply. "Fellas, I won't sign that there paper. I never set fire to the Meetin' House ---" He was cut short by Tup.

"Can't believe a jail-bird anyway; string him up, boys;

good riddance of bad rubbish."

There was a general shout of derision that was silenced by a fusillade of shots from the barn loft. The frightened mob stampeded towards the big door where they were halted by a stentorian command.

"Stay where you are, everyone - those below and those above that were shooting. You're covered and there's no use trying to escape. Take the noose from that fellow's neck. What did you do to the women? They're gone. Bryce, who is this young man they're making so free with?"

At the mention of Bryce's name, Murky and Bessie peered down through the opening in the loft with frightened looks on their faces. With a little scream Murky started down the inclined board but collapsed and rolled to the feet of the officials and Bryce. Bessie took her time about descending.

"There's my wife. Thank goodness, Murky, you're safe." Bryce took her in his arms, laying aside the crutch he was using.

The officer that was talking was a new-comer to the community. Everyone seemed to shrink into insignificance before his commanding presence. "Press Plummer, you are under arrest; and you, too, Tap Watkins. Preacher Newton,

come on in here. I want you as a witness."

"I didn't burn the Meetin' House, Preacher," whimpered Tup. "I jist throwed gasoline on the planks, an' set the bucket o' gas by the openin'. I - I meant to go back 'bout mid-night an' set hit on fire to git even with Murky thar fur shootin' at me - but atter I wuz home, I got skeered an' sot my mind not to go near that Meetin' House. But it wa'n't no time till I heard shootin' and I looked out an' shore enough the Meetin' House war on fire. But I didn't do hit, Mister; honest, I didn't light the fuse to the bucket o' gas."

"We'll let you tell that to the court," replied the officer as he slipped handcuffs on Tup Watkins of Meetin' House Hill. "You next, Buddie. He secured Press's wrists with another pair of handcuffs.

"W'y, Officer, you can't - arrest me," stuttered Press. "I ain't never set fire to nothin'."

"Don't be so sure o' that, Press," interrupted Reece. "Didn't you throw that cigarette stub you'z smokin' that evenin' into the Meetin' House?"

Press hesitated before replying, "I - I disremember - I don't know nothin' about the burnin'."

"In this case, you don't have to," roared the officer.

"I'm not arresting you for causing any fire nor for this pernicious neck-tie party, but I am arresting you for tampering with United States property and the stealing of United States gas to the extent of thirty gallons."

Press's face fell. The officer went on. "You thought you'd run away today, so we couldn't get your finger-prints; but we got them and also this other young man's." He indicated Tup. "He is involved also."

"So, it wuz you, Tup, you skunk, that stole gas from my truck!" growled Press.

"That'll be enough out of you two. I'm turning you over to Dawson and Grimes who collected the evidence. The rest of you'd better go to your homes now, but I'm warning you. You'll have to learn that you can't ignore the law. When you know of a violation of the law and do not report it, you are an accomplice to the crime, just as though you had actually committed it. That seems to be a hard thing for some of you to learn. The preacher did well to report the trouble here tonight. He made a flying trip."

"Wal, Officer, I sees whar you're right, but hit's the first time I ever felt that way," agreed Preacher Newton. "I tried to do the straightenin' out of this hyer affair myself till hit got out o' bounds; then I felt I couldn't let the innocent suffer. But I never could a made it to

the County Seat if'n yore truck hadn't a-happened along."

As the crowd dispersed, the three officers started to escort Tap and Press to the truck a quarter of a mile down stream. Bryce, who had been conferring with America, halted them. "Wait a minute, Officer. This one young man, Press Plummer, is my cousin, an' I feel it my bounden duty to offer bail for him on account of his wife and baby."

"No, Bryce, I can't do that," replied Press. "I'll take what's comin' to me, but you won't ever see me nor my family in these hyer mount'ins after I gits out o' jail. An' say - Preacher, that Meetin' House deal's off."

America's heart almost thumped out of her body. She knew now that she would have her flower garden - and she and Bryce would help build a new church up on Meetin' House Hill.

As Bryce moved slowly towards the house on his crutch, America clung to his free arm, softly crying. On his other side, Bessie was trying to help her brother.

"I'll never shoot another gun as long as I live, " declared Bessie, "not even in a Meetin' House feud."

92. Meetin' House (or Church House) - church
 93. Preacher - a term prefacing the name of a preacher
 94. train blowed - train whistled
 95. outen - out of or out (cf. offen - off; ifen - if)
 96. tickle her - please her
 97. cal'late - figure or calculate
 98. pinched - financially embarrassed
 99. mail-boy - a mail carrier, no matter how old
 100. howdy - the greeting invariably used in the mountains
 101. 'lowed - allowed; supposed; thought
 102. wearried yore se'f - worried yourself
 103. yammers - talks constantly
 104. bite (of supper) - a little supper
 105. rolled the bed - tossed about on the bed
 106. "shooting up" - shooting guns into the air around a building, usually a church
 107. halloed - shouted or called from a safe distance instead of knocking on the door
 108. ax - ask
 109. evenin' - afternoon; any time after the noonday meal even if at 11:00 a.m.
 110. divilin' or devilin' - fooling around; wasting time
 111. ailing or ailin' - sick or not feeling well

AUNT LILLIE AND THE RACER

I hate snakes. If it hadn't been for that fact, I should have missed the most interesting story I have ever heard. Aunt Lillie had sent me into the garden for some lettuce and onions, only she called them "unerns". What with stopping to breathe in the glory of the hillsides clothed with the flowering, creamy white dogwoods and the flaming red-buds, I'm afraid I forgot the lowly lettuce bed as I stood with pan and knife in hand, listening to the everveescent melody of a Kentucky cardinal in the peach tree near the barn. My attention was forced back to earth, as it were, by the lithe, sinuous movement of a snake down the row of onions. My one and only impulse was to flee, and run I did to the side-porch where Aunt Lillie and Uncle Amos were shelling corn for the meal sack as Saturday was always "Mill Day". I didn't stop till I was safe on the porch, still grasping the pan and knife.

Uncle Amos was chuckling. "For the Law's sake, Janie, yuh make me think of yur Aunt Lillie here whin she war a gal. Betcha 'twas a leetle ole garter snake that sent yuh a-bouncin' in hyer; now warn't hit?"

I caught my breath rather shamefacedly. "Yes, I'll

have to admit that it was a snake. But I hate snakes. I can't stand them; they give me the creeps and shivers all over."

"Wal, wal," soothed Uncle Amos in his understanding way, "I don't blame yuh none fer the way yuh feel 'bout snakes; a city gal ain't never had the chance¹¹² to l'arn about snakes." I appreciated this generosity from Uncle Amos. He and Aunt Lillie were true blue, through and through, and were doing all they could to help me gain my way back to health.

There was a twinkle in Uncle Amos' eyes as he looked directly at Aunt Lillie before proceeding. I noticed that she was smiling in anticipation of his next remark.

"As I wuz sayin' - I don't blame you, Janie, fer feelin' so offish-like 'bout er snake - but thar's one thing I niver could understan' wuz how ary a gal borned an' raised¹¹³ in these hyer hills, could act jis' the very same identercal way yuh done now." Uncle Amos finished shelling the last ear of corn, tied the sack, and threw it over his shoulder, preparatory to mounting old Sal, his docile mule tied to the garden palings. He again looked at Aunt Lillie affectionately as he paused at the step.

"Yore Aunt Lillie don't like to talk 'bout hit, Janie, but I 'low if yuh tease her enough, she might tell yer how

she got cuored o' runnin' ever time she saw a snake whin she'z a gal."

"Go on with ye, Amos; the idee - you bringin' all that up agin -- W'y, w'y --" Aunt Lillie caught her breath. ¹¹⁴
 "You ol' vagerant, come back hyer an' kiss me; don't yer ric'lect hit's bin jest thirty year ago today that I got my curin' - an' that I got you in the bargain, snake an' all --". With that, they both set to laughing in remembrance, I was to learn later, of their unusual wedding day.

With a hearty smack for his wife, Uncle Amos took his leave with the caution. "Now, I know yuh'd best tell Janie how to git shet uv her offish feelin' 'bout snakes, Lillie. ---- An', Janie, ifen she don't tell hit right, whin I git back frum mill, I'll shore set yer straight."

My curiosity was whetted to a fine edge. What did snakes have to do with this precious old couple getting married thirty years ago? I would have promised anything in order to have the privilege of hearing this, another one of Aunt Lillie's tales of the hill country - only this time it would be of herself.

"Please, Aunt Lillie," I began -- but she halted me with the assurance that she would tell me all as soon as we had picked the lettuce and onions so that we could be preparing them for dinner. Aunt Lillie was a very practical

woman; yet she was to reveal that underneath the surface lay a romantic nature not very often expressed openly. As she sat in a low splint-bottom chair in the kitchen with a pan in her lap and one on the floor, her hands and eyes kept at the task in hand, only pausing at the most dramatic points in the story. And although I was skinning onions, I confess that not all the tears were elicited by them; for Aunt Lillie's story moved me alternately from tears to hearty laughter.

"It was a day jist 'bout like this 'un - all sunshiny an' springy an' spicy frum the smell of currant blossoms in the garden row." Aunt Lillie commenced in the rich, mellow, accented tones of one satisfied with life and well-versed in the art of story-telling. "But I'd got out o' bed on the wrong side, I reckon, that mornin' 'cause I didn't half-way relish the freshness in the air atter the spring rains. I had a downright mean feelin'. I know now why I hed hit. For five year I had carried an unforgivin' spirit torards the one that wanted to be my best friend - and Janie, I r'allly orter whisper this - hit wuz about snakes. Ary soul never knowed all thea five year why Amos an' I busted up. I wuz that stubborn', I never would tell Mammy er the girls - nur show I wuz a-pinin' fur Amos.

"Wal, thet mornin' all wuz bustle an' hurry 't home as hit wuz the day of the Big Workin' ¹¹⁶ to the Tooley's over on Cup Creek. I ric'lect how flushed Sophie wuz whin she's bakin' her cake an' we teased her 'bout her tall, bean-pole, Eben Teters. Sadie wuz 'bout as bad whilst she's workin' on her corn 'salat' ¹¹⁷ that nary a soul could make as tasty as her. They'd kinder got uster payin' no 'tention to me 'cause I wuz fast gittin' in the class of old maids. In spite uv my heavy heart I felt as young as them; I wuz only twenty-one, an' my hair still curled as purty as whin I wuz sixteen. I'd worn my bonnet in the fields so's my complexion wasn't 'brown like so many married women my age with a family of three chillern. But still, that day, I'd be a misfit at the workin'. Every man my age 'd bin married 'ceptin' Amos - an' I knew he wouldn't be to the Workin'. I musta bin weakenin; fer I had sent my little cousin over to the Anderson's to tell 'em about the Workin', hopin' I'd heer somethin' as to whar Amos had gone. Sam told me whin he got back that Amos woz still away with the 'Snake Feller'."

"Oh, you mean a naturalist or a zoologist?" I eagerly inquired. "Where did he come from?"

"I don't know 'bout the 'zoo' part," answered Aunt Lillie, "but he wuz frum New York, an' wuz some kind of an

'ologist - but to us'ns 'round hyer, he wuz jest a plain 'Snake Feller'. Leastways, Amos 'z jis' tickled pink to git to show him whar all the snakes is over these hyer mount'ins. An' so's they wuz off somewhar huntin' more snakes, Sam said. I guess that wuz one resson I felt so beat that mornin'; fur I allus counted on seein' Amos at the Workin's an' Meetin's over to Wolf Pen - but you betcha I never let him know I wuz lookin'. Hit allus seemed to do me good jis' to git a peek at him. I wuz gladder'n he ever knew that he never got married, but I'd bin too high an' mighty ¹¹⁸ to give up my boast that he'd be the last man on Jasper Creek that I'd marry - ur even speak to.

"So that mornin' after Mammy an' the gals'd dressed up in their purtiest dresses an' calico aperns an' bonnets, an' had all the vittles packed in a box fer my brother John to take on ol' 'Sorry', I decided to carry out my excuse fer not goin' to the Workin'. I knew ifen I said I wuz sick that Mam'd stay with me - an' I wanted to be alone. So, I brung out my new dress which I had purposely left unfinished at the neck. I told 'em all to go ahead, that I'd come on after I sewed the braid on my dress; 'twouldn't be long. No one wuz displeasur'd ¹¹⁹ at this; so I set down to sew on the braid an' listened to the clatter of hoofs and laughin' and jokin' they'e all doin' on a day that orter

bring to life any heart that wuz dead. I kep' pretendin' I wuz sewin' till I wuz mighty shore that nary one'd be comin' back fer somethin' they'd forgot. Then I throwed the hateful dress over the back uv the chair an' slid to the floor, not even waitin' to git thar to make a big moan - Warn't that silly Janie? But, yuh see, I'd bin holdin' in fer five year - an' I declare if thar warn't a 'High Tide' of tears shed right thar on that ol' pine floor that day, thar never will be. Hit wuz a storm shore enough in my breast, but hit had to be all settled right then an' thar; fer I knowed I jist couldn't go on much longer the way I felt. Whin I wuz plumb wore out a-bawlin', I felt so little I could a crawled through a knot-hole, an' ifen Amos hed a bin thar, I'd a shore asked his furgiv'ness - But he wuz away huntin' snakes. With that idee, I kinda stiffened agin - an' thought - 'Snakes, yes; he liked his ol' snakes better'n he did me; ifen he hadn't he'd leastwise tried to make up with me.' I didn't ric'lect jis' then how I hed give him orders not to try to speak to me ur I'd marry the fust man I seed. Oh, Janie, whut fools young gals is - An' men is 'bout as big fools; fer Amos taken me at my word; he never did speak to me."

Aunt Lillie brushed the last of the lettuce into the pan and rose to go to the water pail. Taking out the gourd

dipper, she handed the pail to me. "You kin git some fresh water, Janie, an' then I'll tell yer the rest." I would have carried a tubful of water to have the privilege of hearing the quarrel and the reconciliation. I knew that Aunt Lillie hated to tell me what had caused their quarrel that the years had dwarfed into insignificance. Had Uncle Amos been present, no doubt all the "King's horses" couldn't have dragged it from her.

"Thank ye, Janie; yuh kin peel these hyer taters while I sift the meal and cut the meat. Like's not, I'd better stir up a cake ¹²⁰ while I'm at it -- Oh, yes - whar wuz we? Yes - Snakes! I wuz mortally afraid of 'em, jest like you air. Not because I didn't see lots of 'em. I'd saw the Milk Snake that had drunk the cream offen Gran'ma Turner's crocks o' milk fur three weeks afore ¹²¹ they got him. He wuz a big feller, all gray with brown splotches on him. Then thar wuz that ol' Bull Snake that I seed swallowin' an egg out in the barn. I wuz so scared I couldn't move. He raired up an' then bore down an' crushed that egg inside of him; then he seed ¹²² me, an' he 'cried'; that wuz whin I skedaddled."

"Why, what do you mean, Aunt Lillie, that the Bull Snake 'cried'?" I asked finding myself interested in snakes more than I ever thought I could be.

"They do hit; they kin hiss so loud and long that hit sounds jest like you's puttin' a red-hot iron in water. That skeered me so bad, I never could abide a snake. But thar's one Sunday quite a spell after I'd promised to marry Amos that I got a worse horrified feelin' concernin' ¹²³ snakes. Amos had takened me down the creek to the old Wild-man place an' showed me the cabin he wuz fixin' up fur us ter live in. I'll tell yuh whar ¹²⁴ this place is, Janie. You recollect the gulch we crossed jest as we come to Jasper Creek whar thar's part of a chimney standin' besides a big hole in the ground? That's hit, the only cabin that ever ¹²⁵ hed a basement under it on the hull of this creek. I never did like that place; hit ellus looked so 'snaky' to me - an' to think, I wuz goin' to hev to live thar; it jest broke my heart 'cause I'd kinda bragged aroun' about a new cabin on that pretty knoll of ground up near his folks, whar yuh could see a heap o' things down the valley. Myer, all yuh had to look at wuz a side-hill, an' an ol' gulch that'd fill with water at any 'High Tide' an' drown all one's chickens. Besides hit war fair to the wind. ¹²⁶

"Amos wuz nineteen an' wonderful handy with tools; so he'd started to fix the roof that's fallin' in. He'z as proud as a peacock whin he tuk me in to look over the new home whar we wuz to nest down. He'd kep' hit fer a surprise

fur quite a spell, he said. Well, I held in, not knowin' whut to say, but all the time boilin' inside - till he showed me the basement. Whilst we stood thar lookin' down them crumbly dirt steps into the blackness, I wuz shiverin' all over.

'That a place fur snakes!' I said scairt-like. 'You know I jist cain't stand snakes.'

'Not a chance in a thousand!' He laughed at me.

'Thin whut's that I see movin' over yander?' I asked fer shore as fate I seed somethin' movin'.

'Nothin', I reckon, Honey. I'll see.' Amos lighted a match an' stepped part way down the steps. By the light of his match that sputtered out right quick I seen a whole nestful of snakes, an' old un with 'bout thirty little snakes.

'Come back up hyer; they's rattle snakes,' I yelled.

'Oh, no, Lillie; them's jest garter snakes; I'll hev 'em killed in no time,' he said so calm an' easy-goin', jist like he allus is.

'You come back up hyer, Amos Anderson, or you'll wish yuh had. I'm not waitin' in this snake-house fer yuh to kill ary snake. I'm goin'--' Fur some reason 'r tother I looked up at the rafters that wuz exposed - an' thar hangin' frum one wuz a pided Chicken Snake; some calls

'em house snakes - Wal, Janie, this 'un raired up his head in a S loop an' whirred its tail. With one unearthly yell, I lit out'n thar an' up that gulch, screamin' till I wuz plumb wore out an' had to set down on a rock. I never keered to see Amos the rest of my life. But jist as I caught my breath, thar stood Amos right in front of me, so tall an' jist a-laughin' fit to kill. That made me mad - an' whin I say mad, I mean I wuz "crazy" mad. I riz up white-lipped, I don't doubt, an' I laid down the law - Oh, Janie, I wuz jist a gal an' didn't know how silly an' rash I wuz actin', never knowin' how empty life'd be them five year.

"I said kinda freezin'-like, 'Amos Anderson, I got somethin' to say tu yer an' I'll spit er out p'int blang. Our weddin' is called off; I'll niver in the wide worl' live with snakes ur in a snake-house like thet. You got no more consideration fer my feelin's than a stone. I never want to speak to yer agin - an' ifen you dast to speak to me, I'll marry the fust feller I meet up with'.

"Amos couldn't believe I wuz right serious. He give a little laugh an' tuk hold of my arm to help me up, so's we could go home. An' then I cut a shine! I don't know what possessed me - I struck his arm away. That hurt him; he looked kinder beat, put on his hat, an' said sorta low.

'Ifen that's the way you feel, Lillie, all right, but --'.

'Thar's no butts to hit. My mind's sot,' an' with that I commenced to run home up the trail along Big Mountain. I never looked back. I desan't. But many's the time I wisht I had. But I wuz too proud an' I wouldn't let nothin' change my mind. My paw allus said I wuz so strong-headed he never could conquer me by whoppin' me - so, hit shore enough did take a right smart to change my feelin's. In spite of all my high an' mighty way of actin', Janie, the world wuz all topsy-turvy to me, an' hit never got right side-up till thirty year ago today.

"Atter I had my cry out that day of the Big Workin', I washed my face an' finished my dress. Hit wuz red trimmed in white braid an' buttons. Whin I tried it on, it kinda made me hanker ¹²⁹ to go to the Workin' ¹³⁰ attar all; so I decides they'd shore need me to make the gravy; fer that wuz allus my job. I knowed I couldn't eat a bite myse'f. Decidin' to go changed the hull course o' my life. I sometimes wonder whar I'd be anyway ifen I hadn't decided to go to that Workin'.

"I felt kinder ashamed of myself as I tuck to the trail round Big Mountain. So I decided I'd gather a flar-pot of wild posies fer the table as an excuse fer

gittin' thar so late. The Sweet Williams and Snake-flowers wuz bloomin' mighty thick over the hillsides, big patches of light blue an' crimson - an' besides I knew whar thar wuz lots o' May Apples growin' on the top of a bluff jist afore you come to the place whar Amos had planned fer us to live. The ol' cabin'd burned down two years afore that though. I didn't much like to git offen ¹³¹ the trail for fear of snakes, but I jist had to have some reason fer bein' delayed. So, I scrambles up the side er great beeg ¹³² rock, holdin' on to a grape-vine. If I'd a known that high up above me wuz more snakes than you could shake a stick at, I'd a swung outer thar right then on that grape-vine. But I didn't know nothin' 'bout how way up on the mountain side war Amos an' that Snake Feller; they's havin' the times ur their lives watchin' a Black Racer swallerin' a Ribbon Snake. The Snake Feller hed taken a picture uv them snakes, an' then Amos wuzn't satisfied with the monstrous big King Snake he'd already caught; he sets out to git that big black Racer.

"Now, Janie, jis' think - thar wuz I right below that thar ledge all innocent of any danger - an thar's Amos up above atter a snake, but pshaw, he couldn't move fast enough fer that ol' Racer. Hit 'threw up' that Ribbon Snake, an shot out in the air 'bout sixty feet an' lit on

the bushes jist above my head. That Racer wuz goin' so fast, it didn't stop thar but kep' right on comin' down the mountin' side 'eaise they kin git powerful speedy whin they's goin' over rough places. I saw hit headed to'rd me a consid'able piece up the bluff. With a screech yuh could've heerd a mile, I starts slidin' down that hill in front uv that big Racer, throwin' my flars ever' which way. I grabbed my grape-vine an' swung offen the top of that big rock an' lit flat in the trail. I didn't know that Racer wuz runnin' frum Amos; I thought for shore hit wuz chasin' me, an' I ric'lected all the stories that'd bin told about Racers wroppin themselves around yore arm an' squeezin' it purt nigh off. Course they don't, but I thought they done hit. Wal, I landed, headin' the right way, that is I mean to'rd the workin' ur I'd a gone back home. All I'z a-thinkin' of then wuz to git away frum that Racer. I started runnin' down the trail so fast-like, my hairs all come down; I'd lost my bonnet somewhar's up on the side of the mountin'. Thar I wuz runnin' an' yellin' till I could hear three echoes, an' I wuz goin' down the same trail a lot faster 'n I had run up hit five years afore whin I wuz runnin' frum Amos.

"Jist on this side of the gulch up the side-hill wuz a powerful big rock that cut off from view ary person that

might be comin' down the gulch. So jist afore I got to
 that rock, a pycert ¹³³ idee popped into my head - I'd jump
 quick to one side up that gulch; that'd shore fool Mr.
 Racer as he'd go straight ahead down the trail. I tell
 you I wuz needin' to get somewhar mighty quick; all my
 breath 's goin' out in them powerful screeches. I hadn't
 had time to look 'round ceptin' once to see that snake
 follerin' me. He might be right on my heels then, I
 thought. With one mighty try, I races even with the rock
 and gives a jump sideways - an' I lands smack dab up agin'
 Amos who wuz holdin' the biggest King Snake I ever seed in
 my life. I rally don't know whether hit war the snake ur
 the sight of Amos so unexpected that caused me to keel
 over. All I know wuz that everything turned black before
 my eyes, an' I pitched forr'ard ¹³⁴ an' fainted dead away
 right thar - An' it wuz in Amos's arms though I didn't
 know a thing about it. You see, Janie, he'd heerd my
 un'arthly yellis an' he knew hit war little 'fraidy-cat'
 Lillie Rhodes that wuz screamin'. He figgered out 'bout
 the Racer chasin' me even afore he could git down the
 mountainside to the gulch.

"Whin the sunlight started comin' to my eyes agin, I
 felt Amos's arms around me; an' I didn't want to 'come to',
ever. So, I jist kep' on a-faintin'. He wuz sayin' over

and over - 'Lillie, Lillie - I kin speak to yuh now 'caise you can't h'ar me. Oh, Lillie, Honey; how I love you!'

"Purty quick up comes that 'Snake Feller', an' I knowed I'd have to come to life ur he'd see I wuz foolin' - So, I opened my eyes. An' I looked right up into Amos's eyes - an' whut I seed in 'em mighty nigh made me faint agin - 'caise I knowed then that he still loved me.

'Thank ye, Amos,' I sez, 'fur savin' me frum that ol' racer; hit almost had me tuckered out.'

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"I wanted to say, 'Oh, Amos, I love you, too,' but thar wuz that Snake Feller almost to us with some more snakes.

"He'p me up, Amos Honey,' I sez as sweet as I know how - an' I tell you, Janie, thar ain't no word to describe the look o' joy that spread over Amos' face, But he jist couldn't seem to be able to say a thing.

"I kep' breshin' the dirt offen my new dress an' tryin' to tuck my curls back 'ehind my years. All a sudden I seed that big King Snake at my feet; so I kinda jumped to one side an' grabbed Amos' arm an' clung to hit, a-sayin' in a pleading tone, 'Oh, Amos, I'm so skeered another Racer'll chase me, won't yuh go 'long with me over to the Workin'?' I says this reel quick-like afore the stranger gits to us.

'Do you mean hit, Lillie?' he says scarce believin' his ears.

'Shore I mean hit, Honey,' I sez.

"Jist then the stranger come up even with us; Amos sez reale proud-like, 'Mr. Mattison, I want yuh to meet a frien' of mine, Miss Lillie Rhodes; she's axed me to go with her over to a Workin'; so ifen you'd take the snakes on over home, I'd be much obleeged to you.'

"You needn't make any guess-work about hit, Janie, whin yuh surmise that that thar walk wuz Heaven on earth. Amos acted like he wanted to pick me up an' carry me; an' I kep' on actin' kinda weak 'cause it felt so good to have him hold on to my arm. I kep' sayin' to myself - 'Lillie, you little fool, watch y'r mouth; be keerful whut ye say.' I declare to you, I'd l'arned my lesson 'bout speakin' before I thought. An' you know, I felt so grateful to thet Racer fur chasin' me into Amos' arms that I jist started to feel kinda friendly to 'rd snakes.

"We shore had a lot o' explainin' to do to each other. Whin we got to the p'int uv the ridge, we set down on a rock - that's whar we taken yer on that picnic, Janie. Wal, thar's whar Amos tol' me something that made even me ashamed of the way I'd acted about the house five years before. He told me that he picked that place on purpose

so's I'd be clos't home an' wouldn't git homesick; then I told him how I'd pined fur a new cabin up on the knoll near his folks, thinkin' he'd like it thar.

"I'd plumb fergot to go back attar my bonnet; so my face got all flushed afore we reached the Tooley's. By the time we'd slid down the steep hillside to Cup Creek Amos ventured to pick me up an' pack me across. 'Outer the way of them little green water-snakes,' he said laughin'. You kin reckon that we got to the Tooley's too late fer me to make the gravy fer that workin'.

"Whin we got clos't to the yard, we could see that all the men 'd stopped workin', but thar wuz the framework uv the new little cain that would take the place of the burned-up summer kitchen. The feller's shore bin doin' some hustlin' to git it up in the mornin'. Settin' out on the front porch wuz John Upencamp, Dud Stoochman, 'Red' Corn, an' some other sorry ¹³⁶ fellers that allus quit workin' fust to smoke. I could feel 'em lookin' a hole through me. Out by the shed we seen Sam Chance an' Charley Ferguson who never smoked ur dranked like the rest uv the fellers. They'd finished haulin' a load of lumber up-creek from the mill an' wuz feedin' their mules."

"Do you mean to say, Aunt Lillie," I interrupted her, "that they build a house in one day at a working?"

"Yes, Janie, at a Big Workin' they kin put up the frame an' sidin' of a cabin; thin hit don't take much time to put in the one ur two winders an' one door an' the steps. Most allus a Workin' is jis' to clear some timber land an' burn the brush, or gather in a crop fer some'uns that's sick. The women does the cookin' while the men works, but they take things cooked, too. This Workin' wuz at a busy time, but the little house the Tooley's used as a summer kitchen hed jist burned down - so this 'un might be called a special Workin'.

"Hit looked like the hull neighborhood hed gathered in. They'd built a wind-break out by two apple trees an' fixed up some boards on saw-horses fur tables. Some of the women wuz still unpackin' boxes, an' pokes, an' baskets of vittles. The gals that wuz work-brickie ¹³⁷ done the fetchin' of the things frum the house. Thar wuz Carolyn Morgan, Mary Singleton, Mandy Beck, an' Laura Colgate. But out by the new house some uv the younger fry had coupled up. I ric'lect seein' Hanner Winsted and her beau, John Wildman, startin' out on a walk down the holler. An' thar wuz Pussy Collins an' her feller we teased her 'bout so much 'caise his name wuz Tom Catt ---"

I could not repress my laughter at this strange combination of names. Aunt Lillie joined in my amusement.

"'Twas laughable even if we wuz used to the names all uv our lives. I disremember whether or not hit war the names that caised them to break up or not --- Lawsee, I'll have to hurry this hyer story ur Amos'll be back an' I don't keer about him havin' to finish hit. You could see chillern of all ages scattered over the hillside playin' Hide-an'-Seek whin we come up --"

"But what about you and Uncle Amos?" I queried impatiently.

"I'm comin' to that - I didn't want Amos to leave me noway an' go off with the men even ifen they wuz all lookin' white-eyed¹³⁸ at us. I knowed they wuz jist bustin' with cuor'os'ty; so I decided I'd give 'em somethin' more to talk about. So I sez, 'Come on, Amos; let's git the water frum the spring for the dinner; guess that's about all there's left fur us to do.' So we hunted up Maw an' Aunt Marthie Tooley - ever'body called her 'Aunt Marthie' 'cause she's allus so good to he'p ary one in the country round about.

"Maw looked like the world had come to an end whin she saw us, an' she whispered, 'Wuz that whut ye wuz up to whin yuh stayed to home?' I jist looked wise, an' Amos an' I got the water bucket an' started to the spring."

"Wal, that wuz the first su'prise but thar wuz more to

foller. Whin they rung the big dinner bell that wuz mounted on a pole, an' everybody gethered round the tables, we all hed the su'prise uv our lives. Preacher Green Campbell wuz thar at the head of the tables to say the blessin', we all thought - but jis' then as the crowd got kinda hushed up, out o' the house come Aunt Marthie's oldest gal, Tillie Belle Tooley, all dressed up in a white dimity dress an' right beside her wuz Rice Russell in his Sunday clo'es. Folks shore enough did ketch their breath. Hit war a weddin'. At fust I started to have that all-gone feelin' like I'd had at all the weddin's them past five years. Thin all of a sudden I ric'lected - thar wuz Amos right beside me. I looked at him an' wondered whut he wuz thinkin' 'bout. He had his hand inside his shirt pocket a-fumblin' with some wallet ur other.

"Preacher Green Campbell raised his hand fer 'tention as ev'r'body 'n his brother wuz a-buzzin'. Yuh couldn't hardly blame 'em. The Preacher explained 'bout the su'prise an' how they'd bin buildin' the house fer the newly-weds - An' that they'd all cooked the Weddin' dinner, all unbeknownst to theirselves. So, the joke wuz on the hull crowd. Then he draws out his little black book an' clears his throat an' starts to read the ceremony we'd heerd so many times. - 'Do you, Tillie Belle Tooley, take

this man to be yore lawful wedded husband ----' To me the words kinda faded out - an' in my own mind I wuz a-hearin' it read --' Do you, Lillie Marier Rhodes, take this man, meanin' Amos who wuz by me, to be yore lawful wedded husband --' I come back to earth jest afore Preacher Campbell tied the knot; jist as he's askin' if ary person objected to their gittin' married. I seed Amos openin' up his wallet an' drawin' out a paper. I thought he wuz gettin' ready to read some objection 'r other - but he didn't. He showed hit to me an' whispered reel low, 'Lillie, do yuh ri'lect this hyer?' I give the paper one look - hit war our marriage license. Amos had packed ¹³⁹ it with him all them five years. He'd never give up hopes.

'Yes, Amos, I ric'lect,' I says. 'Is hit any good now?'

'As fur as I know,' he sez.

"Back of us, Billy Tolbert and Tude Wingate wuz bettin' each other they'd be the fust to kiss the bride -- 'Bout that time the words of the Preacher come clear to our ears, 'I pronounce yer man an' wife. An' now 'fore you all starts kissin' the bride, I wuz a-wonderin' ifen they's ary other couple here that's prepared to git hitched ¹⁴⁰ up fur life. If so, will they please step forrard afore we sez the blessin' an' commence to partake of this hyer

bountiful table. Now, don't be bashful; step right up.'

"Whatever on 'erth made Preacher Green Campbell say that?' I thought- 'How could he know that we had our marriage license?' I looked at my mussed-up dress an' at Amos' field clothes. Then I ventured to look up in his face, an' thar he's lookin' straight at me with a questionin' look in his eyes. I felt like I never wanted him to leave my side agin; so whin he tuk my hand and says, 'Come on, Lillie, an'I'll stand atween yuh an' all the snakes in the world all the rest uv our lives,' I nods. I couldn't hev said a word to save my life jis' then. So, out we steps the hull length of them thar tables. I don't know whut they all said then; though I heerd a lot about it atterwards. I didn't even know that Maw fainted and Aunt Marthie had to take her place at passin' things. All I could think of wuz - 'I wish I had my flar-pot of posies 'at I throwed away on the hill-side; at an outdoor weddin' looks like the bride orter have some blossoms. But my hand wuz snuggled safe in Amos' hand, an' I don't think we acted near as uncomf'able as Tillie Belle an' Rice done in their Sunday Clo'es. My sisters, Sophie an' Sadie, told me atterwards that they never seed me look any pootier; my cheeks wuz so pink; an' my hair curlin' down over my shoulders made me look like a gal agin. Atter I got up thar, I forgot how

I looked. I allus wanted to enjoy my own weddin' as much as the crowd that'd come to see it - an' I tell you, I done hit. I put my whole soul into the 'I do' part. Pappy said he thought I could a bin heard way up on Big Mountain.

"Amos' and my weddin' wuz the second su'prize - but the third one came whin our ceremony 's over 'fore the jubilation an' eatin' begun. Amos asked Preacher Green Campbell to make another announcement - an' everybody shor clapped whin he give hit.

'Folkses,' he said big an' loud, 'hyer's another important announcement fer yuh all. You air all given an invite over to the new home site of Mr. an' Mrs. Amos Anderson a week frum today fer another Big Workin' to put up a new cabin fer 'em. That'll be up on that knoll near Amos's paw's place we call Shady Knoll. An' now, we will ask the blessin' on these two couples an' the food that waits before us.'

"His last words pleased the younguns an' everybody 'ceptin' Hanner Winsted an' John Collins 'cause they'd stayed down in the Holler makin' love an' missed both o' the weddin's; they thought they's gittin' thar fer the second table, but thar's room fer everybody at the first table. They all had the time uv their lives teasin' Amos an' me. But so long as they didn't know the reason fer our quittin' and the reason fer our makin' up, we felt we could

take hit all tolerably good-natur'd." Aunt Lillie sighed as she finished her narrative.

"Thank you, Aunt Lillie," I said, "for confiding in me; aren't you afraid I'll tell some one about it though?"

"No, Honey," Her voice was low and freighted with memories. "So many of 'em's moved away ur died since thin; hit don't matter none; an' besides all our chillern knows about it."

"But tell me, Aunt Lillie, did you quit hating snakes?" I persisted.

"Who wouldn't whin they's the means uv givin' me sich a fine man as Amos? An' then besides atter we's married, Amos larned me to know the snakes that'd pizen yuh. An' he explained whut a lot of good snakes do in eaten rats an' varmints that r'ern our crops, till I looks upon a snake now as one of God's creatures put hyer fer a purpose".

A loud "Whoa" outside interrupted us. It was Uncle Amos back from the mill.

"He's jist giving' us warnin' in case we'z cryin' an' wants to wash our faces," Aunt Lillie said with a laugh. "Hurry, Janie, let's git the dinner all on the table 'fore he gits in; an' don't yuh want to run out an' pick some blossoms fer the table?"

I was glad that Aunt Lillie sent me out of the house.

I wanted so much to weep and laugh at the same time. Not often is there such romance and tenderness in a couple at their age. God bless them. Then besides when I stepped on the porch softly and to the door, there in the kitchen, the part of the house that was their first home, stood Uncle Amos with his arms around Aunt Lillie - and she was saying, "Amos, you ole vagerant, but I like hit -- I'll allus like hit." Then Uncle Amos saw me out of the corner of his eye.

"Come on in, Janie. Yes, this is our Weddin' Day, an' I wish I could take you 'long tu uz big a Workin' as we had that day - Say, did Lillie hyer tell hit to you right?"

"Yes, Uncle Amos, I'm sure she did, and I understand about the snakes."

"But I cal'late she never showed you the weddin' present that that thar Snake Feller sent us; did she?"

I shook my head in the negative.

"Wal, come on in the front room, Janie, an' you too, Lillie." He put one arm around me and one around Aunt Lillie and led us into the front room to a book-case he had made. He clicked a door to one side, revealing a recess with a glass case in which was a stuffed King Snake as realistic as any museum piece with its thirty white rings shining in relief against its black background; its glittering eyes

were almost too realistic for me.

"You don't mean that - that --" I stammered and paused.

"Yes, Janie, that's the critter that done the trick. Hit's the very snake that I'z a-carryin' whin Lillie run inter me an' fainted," chuckled Uncle Amos, "But we'd rather keep him right hyer outen sight 'cause nary ¹⁴² other person'd understand how much he means to us."

Aunt Lillie was wiping her eyes; she seemed to gather herself together with a little jerk. "Come on you two; don't yer know thar's a weddin' dinner waitin' fer us?"

"And this time," I reminded her, "We've got the blossoms that you missed having thirty years ago, Aunt Lillie, because of the Racer."

"But ifen hit hadn't bin fer that ole Racer," she retorted. "I wouldn't a hed Amos -- "The posies'd bin all I'd a had."

"To-day, yuh got us both, Lillie," boomed out Uncle Amos's mellow voice as we settled ourselves at the table. "Shall we thank the Lord for all His marcyful kindness to us?"

MALBON

The quilting party at Aunt Susan Morgan's was thrown into consternation by the arrival of "Little" ¹⁴³ Sennie Frits with news that was to shake the neighborhood on Shootin' Fork from center to circumference. The six women sat motionless, all quilting halted for that afternoon. They all knew that only a gigantic upheaval would impel slow-moving Sammy Frits to such extraordinary activity.

Sammy was coatless and hatless. His first gasping words were puzzling. "They - found him - they unknived his skeleton - with part uv the clo'es still thar. The way his body's a-restin', the road workers sez hit looked like he'd tried to git out ---"

"What air yo talkin' 'bout, Sennie Frits?" demanded Aunt Susan who had risen from her chair near the door. "Git out uv what? -- Whose body? -- Out with it!"

"I'm doin' my best," choked out Sennie, still red in the face from such unusual exertion. "Hit's up to the ol' coal man (mine) ¹⁴⁴ whar they uster raise coal ¹⁴⁵ - on yore place, Miz Hardison, clos't ter the p'int uv the hill whar the gov'mint's puttin' the new road. The road-boss blasted inter that big slip ¹⁴⁶ that shot up the mouth of the mine

'bout ten y'ar ago. He doner to see ifen they needs blow up the hole or fill hit in. Wal, the blastin' this afternoon ripped open that ol' man. Sin Blodgett seed the skeleton fast, but the Boss wouldn't 'low 'em to tip¹⁴⁷ hit till the Korner could git out frum town. They kep' diggin' up whut was left uv sum rusted-out tin cans, an' a jug, an' a coal oil can - 'Twas kinda like the remains uv a grocery store ---"

All eyes turned instinctively to Maria Hardison whose customary look of fear had intensified at this last statement. Her eyes closed as though to shut out the gruesome sight of the dead man. Her reaction was not to be wondered at, considering all the tragedies that had been enacted in her life, leaving an imprint of suffering on her face minus the bitterness that also might have been a residue of Life's rebuffs. Her friends maintained a silence freighted with pity, as Sammie Fritz embellished the story.

"Thar's other things back in the hole, but they's feared to ventur' in. Atter the Korner comes an' they finds out who the body is - ifen they kin - then they's goin' to do a lot more s'archin' ter see ifen thar's sum buried gold. Some uv the fellers thought hit mought be that bank robber they never found - but Uncle Lem Banks 'pinions that thar slip which 'z the biggest one on Turkey Ridge happened jist afore that bank robbery over ter Parkersville. An' he orter know

'caise he allus ric'lists dates an' things like that. Ther's lots o' other ideas 'bout who 'tis, but they wants ev'ry person that kin git thar to come up an' see the corpse so's to find out who 'tis. I'm bound fur Happy Keller an' Davis Creek to tell fo'ks up thar."

The six women remained spell-bound for an instant after Sarnie Fritz left. Then Maria Hardison gave a groan and hid her face in her hands. She was whispering - "Do yer reckon hit's Jim?"

The other five women caught the word - "Jim". Aunt Susan Morgan's face showed great concern as she motioned the others to silence before she spoke.

"I 'pinion we'd better not quilt anymore today; mebbe some uv yer want ter go right on up to the mine now, bein' as hit's past the turn uv day. ¹⁴⁸ I cain't walk that fur myse'f."

Maria Hardison wiped her eyes and straightened up. She seemed very frail, but there was a flush of excitement mounting to her cheeks that used to be pink before the wrinkles of age predominated. Her expression betrayed the fact that she was gritting her few teeth to impart courage to her own heart.

"I've got ter go, even if I hov to wade the mud to git thar. Would hit pleasure ary one to go with me?"

Maria sent a searching glance around the group, scarcely expecting that any one could accompany her on the tiresome trip. There was Laura Lee with her large family to be cared for, her baby asleep on the bed. Haley Warwick was too old and crippled though she still did beautiful quilting. Polly Jones had an invalid boy that held her at home most of the time. Prudy Wildman might go if it weren't for fear of her husband beating her should supper be late. They all looked at each other questioningly and shook their heads sorrowfully. A pitiful hint of a smile caused Maria Hardison's lips to quiver.

"I was kinde afeared nary one could go. I'll jist start on; no doubt, plenty uv fo'ks up-creek'll be goin', an' I'll hev comp'ny. I'll jist take my shawl; thank yer, Susan." Her hands trembled as she placed the shawl over her grayed hair that was always neat. They watched her climb the incline from the yard to the completed section of the new road with an alacrity that would have shamed a city dweller always accustomed to flat pavement.

"I hope she gits a ride up the creek," sighed Aunt Susan. "I kinder think one o' the Beck boys nought take her part way. She'll hev to go right through their yard an' 'count the bridle -path's tore up."

"Do yuh think hit could be Jim Hardison's body, Aunt

Susan?" asked Prudy Wildman. "That all happened afore we come hyer, but I heared hit talked a-plenty."

"Hit nought be at that," put in Mahaley Marick in her high cracked voice. "An' I wisht to the good Lor' it was. Dore Marier has jist fretted horse'f inter a shadder over that no-'count coward uv a husband that allus did love the almighty dollar better'n he loved her. Mysc'f, now, I'd crave ter know ifen he's dead, so's I wouldn't live in dread uv him comin' back an' murderin' me in my bed. Ifen I'd bin Marier, I'd never bided ¹⁴⁹ hyer all these y'ar ¹⁵⁰ waitin' for sich a sorry feller. I'd a gone with the chillern like they axed her to. Laws sake, Susan, I plumb forgot ryse'f. Prudy was axin' yer what yuh thought."

"That's all right, Mahaley; yuh lived up clos't ter the Hardison's whin they wint through all them bad times. Yuh kin tell Prudy 'bout hit, or somebody else will - an' ifen that's Jim, I feel like we ort not talk 'bout hit in front uv Marier 'cause she'll feel bad 'nuf as 'tis."

Mahaley's bright blue eyes scintillated in their wrinkled sockets as she screwed up one corner of her mouth.

"Ifen that's Jim Hardison, he shere got his wish 'bout bein' buried 'ithout ary coffin - but hyer, I'm startin' at the wrong end uv the story. I'll no doubt tell yer some facts that nary one of you'uns know, but I nought us well

spit 'em out now, bein' as this 's all stirred up agin. 'An 'sides, hit'll pleasure yuh to know 'em."

"I'm right glad yuh kin help set us straight on some things, Haley," affirmed Polly Jones. "I allus wondered whut made Jim act the way he done at his own son's buryin'."

"Wal, yuh'll know why whin I git through. Jim Hardison allus did displeasure me with worshippin' the almighty dollar. Yuh'd think nary man-person ¹⁵⁰ in these hyer hills'd ever see nuf uv 'em to blast their lives, but hit war ¹⁵¹ done with Jim. I tol' my niece, Nancy Singer, that was keepin' comp'ny ¹⁵² with Thad whin he died, that I never seed two man-persons in one family that war so opposite as Jim and his son, Thad. Thad taken after Marier's fo'ks, bein' so good; he'd work day in an' day out ¹⁵³ in his pappy's 'baccer patch an' not git a cint. He'd start to work come sun-up, so's he could git over the patch afore the end of the week; then he'd slip 'way to Petersburg to 'arn ¹⁵⁴ a few pennies uv his own. Thad gin'ally turned his money over to Marier without lettin' Jim know 'bout hit. Nancy said that Thad cal'lated, when he come twenty-one, he'd jist bust loose from home an' start out on his own. But afore that time, he felt hit war his bounden duty to stay home for his Mammy's sake. Might nigh all uv yuh have seed the pitcher ¹⁵⁵ of Thad in his coffin - what a long-sufferin', kindly face

he had! Allus seemed to me that the corners uv his mouth was curled up in a smile though he warn't the laughin', jok-in' kind. He seemed to git more joy by helpin' ¹⁵⁶ other fo'ks than Jim ever done outen hearin' his dollars. Jim brought a hed a bag o' gold, but Thad hed a heart uv gold, an' Preacher Campbell sez that's what counts." Mahaley paused to wipe her eyes with the corner of her apron. "That was what counted with Nancy, too, pore gal."

"The beginnin' uv the hull trouble was that winter uv the big snow an' freeze - I disremember whether hit war ten or twelve y'ar back. The creek was froze solid; the snow kep' packin' in, one right attar 'tether till we hed a right nice road all up an' down this hyer creek. I think the younguns hed the time uv thur ¹⁵⁷ lives with thur sleds an' sleighin' parties. Nancy was stayin' with me that winter, an' Thad'd come down to talk to her in the evenin's attar his gin time. ¹⁵⁸

"One night he seemed all broke up 'bout somethin'. We couldn't git him to talk fur quite a spell. Then, he told Nancy an' me that he was up agin the hardest thing in his life. He hed allus tried ter be a good son an' mind his pappy, but they's somethin' Jim wanted him ter do that he jis' couldn't even ef hit made things worse fur Marier an' the younguns. The new wholesale fellers was comin' out frum

town to foreclose on Jim's grocery stock, an' he wuz on a
¹⁵⁹
 high hoss, revin' an' swearin' that they'd never disfur-
¹⁶⁰
 nish his store, that he'd allus paid his honest debts, an'
 they could wait till he sold his next 'baccer crap. Thad
¹⁶¹
 said his pappy musta whickered out uv Marier how much she
 had of Thad's money an' wuz tryin' to force her to hand it
 over. When Nancy tol' Thad she'd rather have him without
 a penny than to hev somepun happen to him, I ric'lect how
 Thad straightened up an' said, 'Nancy, afore God, I wants
 ter do whut's right, but I'm goin' to hang on to whut I've
 saved fur you 'n me to git married on in May right attter my
 birthday. Pappy ain't got no claim on that. I don't think
 he'll do no harm; he's jis' blowin' off steam, I 'pinion.'

"Whin Thad 'z gone, I set an' done a lot o' thinkin'.
¹⁶²
 I wuzn't so shore that Jim Hardison wouldn't do no harm.
 I know how a gussen kin git thur heart so set on this worl's
¹⁶³
 goods that they does wonderful mean things jis' fur a
 trifle. I e'en heard uv one woman sellin' her baby fur a
 quarter. Preacher Campbell called hit 'Mammon'; he 'splain-
 ed that meant lovin' money more 'n ary other thing. Allus
 attter that, I called Jim, 'Ol' Mammon', in my mind.

¹⁶⁴
 "Wal, that night I stayed up to keep a far goin', be-
 in' hit war so cold. I didn't keer to hev my lectle store
 uv taters an' fruit to sp'ile. I'd kinder dozed off whin I

was waked up rale queek by the 'squeak - squeak' uv the runners uv a sled goin' down-creek. I listened to hear the younguns a-laughin' an' hollerin' as they most gin'ally done, but I didn't hear nothin'. I puzzled some 'bout hit. Then in 'bout 'nother hour, I heard the same noise. Bein' as I didn't hev no lamp lit, I looks outen a crack in the front, an' ther's plenty 'raf moonlight fur me to make out hit war Jim Hardison's team; he was walkin' 'long by the sled that was shore loaded down with somepun. Atter I hed climbed inter bed besides Nancy who was sleepin' sound, hit didn't seem no time till I heard the same creaky singin' uv them sled runners an' the jinglin' uv the gears. ¹⁶⁵ Thinks I, that Jim ain't up to no good. Hit's a won'ner ¹⁶⁶ he'd ever git that work-brickie to haul things at night 'caise he most gin'ally has Tad do sich heavy work.'

"Long 'bout daybreak, whin I was shore sleepin' the sleep uv the Jest, I was half-awoaked outen my wits by a poundin' at the door. I wropped ¹⁶⁷ a bed-quilt 'round me an' pulled open the door. Ther stood Marier ¹⁶⁸ 'ith three uv her leastuns, a-shiverin' an' blue from the cold.

'Laws sakes, Marier,' I sez. 'Come in.'

"All she could do whin I get her in by the far'place was to cry fur a spell. Then she sez, 'Haley! Haley! Hit's Thad - Him 'n his pappy got inter hit, the fust time I ever

seen Thad go agin his pappy - but I don't blame Thad none.
 Jim ordered him, 'r ¹⁷⁰ own son, ter take the groceries 'way
 an' hide 'em frum them wholesale fellers. Thad wouldn't
 budge an inch ter do hit - said it'd be stealin'. Then Jim
 grabbed up a gun - Oh, Marier, I never seed him act that way
 afore. He driv Thad right out in the snow 'ithout ary
 chaneet to git a extry coat. Thad didn't go 'cause he was a
 coward, Haley; he never was the boy ter cause any trouble
 fur his mummy, so he jist sez Good-by, an' goes out. I kind-
 er thought he'd come down hyer whin he never come back fur
 his coat.'

" 'No, Marier,' I tel' her. 'He was down hyer, come
¹⁷¹ dusty dark but he ain't never come back since then.'

" Nancy was up 'bout that time. 'What's happen'd ter
 Thad, Miz Hardison?' she axed kinder skeered-like .

" 'I don' know, Nancy; he ain't bin home since 'bout
 tin last night. Jim ain't bin thar either; he went out
 right attar Thad. He tel' me not ter stir outen the house,
 but I jis' couldn't stand hit up thar a mite longer, Haley.'

" 'My Law!' thinks I. 'She don' even know that Jim's
¹⁷² bin movin' his plunder outen the store inter the hills
 somewhar in order to sliker them fellers frum town outen
 some money.' I felt so bad fur Marier that I sez rale porky
 like -- 'Now, Marier, I'm goin' to stir up the fer an' git

yer an' the younguns a bite o' breakfas' afore yuh go back home. Thad'll be all right, him raised right hyer in the hills; he knows how to take keer hisse'f. 'Sides, hit war-n't no blizzarë last night; yuh could see jist uz plain uz day.'

"Marier brightened up a bit at that idee, an' we all hed a right nice meal, but I could see she was still mighty wearried over both Jim an' Thad. Jist afore she left, she pulled me over to one side uv the room whilst Nancy was playin' with the chillern by the far'place; she slips a lootle bag to me an' whispers, 'Maley, won't yer help me out? This is Thad's money he's saved to git married on. I'm feared Jim'll git hit, some way 'r 'tother. Won't yer keep hit fur him 'n Nancy?'

"I tol' Marier I'd be glad ter do hit, but she seemed skeered to go home by herse'f; so Nancy offered to go 'long with her. I'd never in the creation a let her ifen I'd any idee what was goin' ter happen. Nancy was kinder encourag-ed, thinkin' that her 'n Thad could git married afore May. She went off so happy, hummin' a tune, expectin' as shore uz could be that she'd see Thad at my place whin she got back. 'Tell him to wait, A'nt Malcy, ifen he gits hyer fust afore I git back,' sez Nancy with the last smile I ever seed on her face.

"Whin they come clos't to the Hardison place, Nancy tol' me atterwards, they seen some men comin', carryin' some person in atween 'em. Hit war Thad. You all know 'bout how he'd tripped hisse'f on a snag an' fell, hittin' his head on a rock, knockin' him unconscious, an' how he was froze till he was almost stiff 'fore Lafe Peters found him. Hit war wonderful hard on Nancy 'cause they wouldn't let her stay at Hardison's. Ifen they hed, mebbe they wouldn't a made the mistake uv warmin' Thad up too qacek by bringin' him in right in front uv the far'place. Course, whin he come to, he was sufferin' torments. You'd a thought that whin Jim come in 'bout an hour atter that, he'd a bin softened, him you might say bein' the murderer uv his own son. But hit seemed like that thar war nothin' that 'd tech Jim's heart. Hit seemed like the ol' Mick hisse'f hed the reins on Jim an' wouldn't say 'Whoa'. Marier tol' me that whin Thad begged his pappy to git a doctor to come ease his pain, Jim refused p'int blang, ¹⁷³ sayin' that he hed brung hit all on hisse'f by not mindin' his pappy. 'Sides Jim said he didn't have ary dollar to pay a doctor. Thad kep' pleadin', sayin' fur 'em to use his money he'd saved. Jim cussed an' said he'd hev to see the money in his hand fact. Marier war holpless though she war prayin' that them wholesale fellers would come frum town so's she could git word to the doctor -

'caison she wouldn't trust Thad's money with her own husband. Hit seemed like Jim stayed right clos't to the house jist to plague Thad an' not give Marier a chance ter speak to him alone. Jim wouldn't let ary a body in. Nancy hed gone back oncet to see.

"Wal, I was plain sot on Nancy seein' Thad alone - ifen ¹⁷⁴ hit looked like he wuz pressin' his dyin' piller; so I tak-on her up to the Hardison's agin as soon us I thought hit war best. Nancy wuz brave. 'I got ter see him jis' oncet more an' talk to him,' she sez, 'Aunt Moley, if he be bad off, but they won't let me.'

"'We'll see 'bout hit,' I sez with my mouth all screwed ¹⁷⁵ up the way I does whin I'm purely stubborn.

"Whin we set feet inside that door, I knowed that I couldn't do no soft-pedalin' with Jim. He looked like the devil. I didn't keer what he done - I was goin' ter see that them two young fo'ks that loved the 'tother better 'n life would git to ^{be} alone a leetle while.

"I sez rale firm-like, 'Jim Hardison, how come yore sled doz' know how ter stay home at night 'stid o' runnin' round an' keepin' yore neighbors awake all times o' night? Jim --' sez I --

"Jist then them fellers frum town rides up - an' I gits my cue - I sez, 'Jim Hardison, do yer want I should talk to

then thar wholesalers? They jist rid up by yore store.' He
 snarled ¹⁷⁶ at me an' giv' me a look that could a cut through
 granite. Then he ris ¹⁷⁷ up outen his cha'r an' left 'ithout
 sayin' a word.

"Nancy waz a-kneelin' 'side the bed, holdin' Thad's
 hand an' puttin' her face agin his that didn't nowise look
 nateral; she waz whisperin' to him. I could see hit war
 all Thad could do ter be still long enough ta listen to her.
 Marier whispered to me she's afear'd he'd soon be outen his
 head agin - an' could I slip out an' send word someways fur
 a doctor, nobbe by the fellers frum town. I cal'lated I'd
 ketch them wholesalers ifen I hed to bust a hanc-string ter
 do hit.

"I sez to Nancy, 'I'n goin' on a piece now - an' you'd
 best git through talkin' to Thad now an' let him rest.' I
 didn't want her ta see him go off into a crazy spell, but I
 hed to git down the creek bed whar I nought ketch them fel-
 lers frum town. I got outen the yard an' down the side-hill
 queek enough ter see Jim lockin' up the store an' sayin'
 with a smile on his face, 'Yore shore welcome to all that's
 left in the store, gen'leman.' An' I knowed that thar war-
 n't a swidgeon uv nothin' in hit. He hed let 'em look in
 ter see. Thar waz a high 'n mighty look on Jim's face, but
 he didn't glimpse me as I dodged behin' a big ol' Sycamore

tree an' ranned down the dreen behind a thicket. Then, I rased like a deer to head off them non-persons.

"Wal, whin I flags 'em down, I guess I was jist about ter bust - I felt that hurt inside to think uv the lives uv Nancy 'n Thad havin' ter be ruind by a mean ol' coot like 'Ol' Harmon' -- So I ups an' tells them fellers what I knowed Jin hed done 'ith his groceries, but most uv all, I begs 'em to hurry an' git the doctor fur Thad. They seemed reale nice an' said they didn't aim to do nothin' 'bout the groceries ifen Jin hed bin he'pin' pore fo'ks git through the hard winter.

" 'H-m, sez I - 'thet'd be the last thing he'd do; they wouldn't ary soul trade with him lessen they hed to. Yuh needn't lose no sleep 'bout Jin not havin' the nancy. More 'n likely he's got a bag o' gold stored somewhar 'bout hyer. I'd law ¹⁷⁹ him - that's what I'd do.'

"I reckon I did go a leetle too fur 'caise I r'ally don' think they aimed on takin' hit to law afore I talked to 'em." Mahaley stopped talking; her voice was quavering as she continued. "I couldn't see what was comin' jist frum them few words. They lost me my niece, Nancy, though she sez whin she 's a-goin' - 'Don't feel so brake up, A'nt Kaley. I don't want ter live. I want to go whar Thad is. Nothin' in this ol' worl do look good to me nohow.' "

The women at the quilting party were weeping copiously at past memories. The mountain women though inured to hardship and suffering were at heart sympathetic and expected to share their neighbors' bereavements. Aunt Susan patted Mahaley gently on the back as she cautioned her old friend not to thus blame herself overmuch.

"Hebbe, yuh never knowed jist how much to blame I was," maintained Mahaley stoutly, "but I couldn't know it until hit war too late. A lot uv this'll su'prize yo, but hit'd bin on my mind so long, it'll do me good to unload it. You fo'k never knowed how at the last when I was up to Hardison's with Marier an' the doctor come to help pore Thad in his dyin' hour, Jim was right thar, too. He looked us pale us a sheet when he axed, 'Who sent for this hyer doctor?'

"I wasn't goin' ter hev Marier blamed; so I sez, 'I done hit, Jim Hardison.'

'All right then,' he growled. 'Yuh kin pay fur his trip.'

"Wal, I stood up to Jim jist us stiff, an' I blurts out 'Jim Hardison, I'll hev yuh know that I'll pay fur the doctor, but you'll do the payin' fur the murder uv yore son.'

"I was glad that Jim went outen the house. The doctor was busy with pore Thad. I called in Nancy from the kitchen. We was so glad that the doctor could ease Thad's last min-

utes. Marier was like a loettle skeered rabbit; seemed like she couldn't give Thad up; she hed got ter dependin' on him so complete. She whispered to me jist us Thad breathed his last, 'Look, he's smilin' like he allus done whin he come in the door hyer at home and seed me waitin' fur him.'

"Hit warn't till a long time atterwards that I knowed how Marier wanted to git Thad a brought-on ¹⁸⁰ coffin, one with a satin linin' an' a silver plate, but Jim wouldn't no-ways hear to hit. That was whin he said a board box was too good fur most persons - an' whin he died, he didn't keer whether ur not he hed a coffin at all; what was the difference! You know whin we all set up with Thad's corpse how Jim never come in fur the preachin' atall. I was hopin' that his heart wuz meltin' a loettle by then, but hit warn't. I never hearded the young fellers sing any better 'n they done that night, Prudy. Hit 'd a teched ary puseon's heart but Jim's to listen to 'em sing, 'Whar is my Wand'rin Boy Tonight?' That song didn't 'fect Jim none. Polly, you ric'lect how he taken the pennies offen Thad's eyes afore the funeral an' pocketed 'em. Hit was Nancy that got the preacher to tilt the coffin up on end at the last uv the buryin' service an' take hers 'n Thad's pitcher together. But hit didn't look like my Nancy 'cause thar wuzn't no smile on her face. I guess pret nigh ever' buryin'.

we've hed the last ten y'ar, they taken the pitcher uv the corpse thet same way."

As Haley paused to dip some snuff, Laura Lee rose from the quilting frame and wrapped up her baby, preparatory to going.

"I'll hev to hurry my story; thar's one more thing I got ter tell yer. I ne'er could figger out why hit had ter be - that the bullet Jim Hardison aimed at my head should a missed me an' hit pore Nancy."

Laura Lee stopped dead-still in the doorway; the others halted in their preparations for going. Aunt Susan ejaculated, "You! He aimed to kill yer? Why, Haley, we never knowed --"

"No," went on Haley in a subdued voice, "Nary one, not even Marier, knowed that Jim planned ter shoot me, so's tu hinder me frum testifyin' agin him in court. Yuh see, atter Thad's buryin', Jim war arrested an' the time fur his trial wuz sot; he'd bin accused er stealin' the goods thet rightfully belonged to the wholesale comp'ny. I found out thet 'Ol' Memmon' wuz blamin' me fur hit all; he tol' Marier ifen I'd kep' my mouth shet, th ar wouldn't a bin no trial, an' moreover, he wuz goin' to see thet my mouth wuz shet afore the trial come off."

Aunt Susan could maintain silence no longer. "Haley,

yuh shore wuz brave ter keep all them things secret fur Marier's sake. I don' know how yuh done hit. I kin ric'lect how yuh an' Nancy come to church thet night o' the meetin' whin she got shot. She wuz so sad-lockin'. An' I ric'lect, too, how Jim Hardison come in an' stood at the back fur a spell. I seed his eyes travelin' up an' down the sides uv the the Meetin' House jis' like he 'z a jedgin' distance. Hit war at the time Preacher Campbell wuz sayin', 'The wages uv sin is death; sin allus gits hits wages one way 'r tother an' no mistake 'bout hit!' Jim gived the Preacher sich a nasty look, I wuz kinder afeared fur him. The next thing I knowed I heard Jim outside - yuh couldn't mistake his voice. He wuz sayin', 'Come on, boys; let's shoot up the meetin'. Then pore Nancy screamed an' fell over on top uv ye, Haley. But we allus thought hit war a stray bullet; thet's whint the fellers all tol' the officer atterwards."

"No, Susan," Haley's voice was broken - "Thet thar bullet war meant fur my head. Jis' afore hit war fired, I dropped the ol' pocketbook in which I hed Thad's money to pay his doctor bill, an' I re'ched over reel quick, like I uster nove - an' the bullet hit Nancy's head 'stid o' mine. I ne'er keered tu tell ary one 'bout hit 'fore today. Ev'ry puson knowed Jim felt guilty some way 'r 'tother; otherwise,
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he wouldn't a lit out the minute Nancy died at the horsepi'l

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whar we taken her.

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"Hit seemed so quare at the time that Jim was so willin' fur Marier ter go to Petersburg with me; so's we could be near Nancy. Hit didn't seem like 'Ol' Hammon'. Wal after Nancy died an' we got home an' found out that Jim hed skipped the kintry 'ithout leavin' Marier nur the younguns anny money, I knowed he war a gailty soul. Still, I no'er could figger out whar Jim'd likely go - him that allus bragged that nothin' this side o' Jodg'mint could drag him outen the hills uv Kentucky. But fur ten y'ar they've s'arched these hyer hills fur 'im an' they ain't found 'im. Hit's jis' likely that this skeleton is Jim. I no'er cal' lated he wint ter the city - an' someways, I warn't afeared he'd come back an' bother me. Now, with Marier, hit war diff'rent. She was jis' like a lost soul without Jim ter boss her ur Thad ter counsel her. After I paid the doctor outen Thad's money, I gived her the balance ¹⁸⁴ to start up her fust store - but Law! ifen I hadn't acted as clerk most uv the time, she'd let some uv 'em like ol' Hon Massey beat the sor offen her! I 'pinion ¹⁸⁵ we done rale well to git sich a heap o' money fur Marier's strip uv hillside land they's taken fur the new road. Nowsome'er ifen this skeleton turns out ter be Jim, he's boum' ter hev his gold stor-ed in thar somewhar, an' how's Marier go'n' ter git hit?

'Caison, yuh see the mine they jis' blowed open is on the piece uv ground that Marier let go.

"Yuh see, why I think hit's Jim is this - He taken his groceries that winter night in the direction uv that ol' man --- Laws sakes! The thought jis' struck me why Jim was so willin' ter let Marier go with me to Petersburg whin Nancy was in the hospit'1. Jim was proppin' up that ol' mine a-fixin' hit ter live in to escape the Law an' he didn't keor to be bothered. He already hed his groceries thar an' a lamp. Marier was so befuddled she no'er missed ary thing, but I shore did. Jim shore thought he'd be safe thar; fur yuh know how skeered ary one's bin ter go in a worked-out mine since leetle Bonnie Drayton wandered inter one an' all they could find o' him was a piece of red sweater in the slip. Jim musta hed this mine propped up safe-like 'caise he warn't a puser to play fast an' loose with chances, but hit looks like ol' Nick ketched up with Jim shore stuff -- ifen this is his skeleton. Hebbe I orta gone 'long 'ith Marier. I allus stood by her, but I hurt my hip so bad atter I come down hyer to my da'ters, I cain't hobble that fur noways. -- Wal that's shore us fate all I know 'bout hit", concluded Mahaley as the women lingered to hear the last of the story. "I wight we hed telephones out hyer, so's we could git news faster, but I 'spects yore Johnnie

that works on the road 'll soon be hyer, Susan. So, I'll jis' stay on' set a spell ifen yuh don' mind."

Laura Lee reluctantly set out with Prudy Wildman up tortuous, rock-strewn Davis Creek while Polly Jones limped painfully up Happy Holler.

Mahaley Norick helped Aunt Susan pull the ropes that the quilting frames, containing the cherished log-cabin quilt, up to the ceiling of the front room. Nothing was said until they had gone to the kitchen. Then Aunt Susan rather shamefacedly wiped her eyes and placed her arm around Mahaley's spare form. "Oh, Haley, ain't hit awful whin we don't understan' each other in this life! I got ter ax yer to forgive me. All the time I bin thinkin' yuh wuz right smart ¹⁸⁶ bossy, a-buttin' inter Marier's affairs - an' yuh jic' done hit as a duty 'cause yuh felt ter blame concernin' the trial an' the shootin'. I see hit so plain now - an' Haley, I'm glad yuh told it all. I don't know but whut yuh bin through more 'n Marier has."

"Oh, no, I hain't, Susan, 'cause I could stand more 'n she could. I wuz jis' borned thetaway, I reckon. -- Do yuh cal'late she'll give him a buryin' ifen hit's Jim?"

Their conjecturings were halted by the approach of a wagon. As the mule team halted near the kitchen door, Johnnie Morgan jumped from the end-gate and strode into the cabin, with an aroused look on his face, exclaiming as he

came. "Manny - an' Haley, too; you heared uv the mine bein' blowed open an' our findin' the skeleton?"

"Yes, Son; whut else yuh know 'bout hit?" inquired Aunt Susan eagerly.

"Wal, the Korner come out jist uz Miz Hardison got thar; one uv the Beck boys gived her a lift part way - an' she axed him, the Korner, I mean, ifen she could be the fust one to see whut thar wuz ter see whin they turned the body over. But afore they porceeded, the Korner hed ter be told who she wuz, an' somep'm 'bout Jim disappearin'; 'caise he's new in these parts. Fust, he showed Miz Hardison the piles uv cans an' sacks - whut's left uv 'em. She said the big jug looked like their lasses jug they uster keep in the store.

"Then, the Korner hed ter make the crowd stand back - though thar's some uv 'em in trees an' on rocks, tryin' to git a peck at the corpse whin the Korner 'd turn him over. Miz Hardison sez, 'Be rale keerful; fur ifen hit's Jim, I craves to give him a decent buryin' - an' I claim his body an' all the 'fects.' I didn't know whut made her say that then. But whin they turns his head ur whut wuz left uv it, an' the body 'nuf so's she could see, she jis' give one holler - 'JIM! Hit's him, hyer so clos't all the time!' "

"But, Johnnie, how could Marier be so shore with jis' one look - that hit war Jim?" queried his mother. "I could-

n't; could you, Haley?"

Mahaley shook her head.

"I'll tell yer then," responded Johnnie, watching the look of amazement on the faces of the women. "She saw his gold teeth in his upper jaw; ever' blessed one uv 'em was kivered with gold."

"Gold teeth! My Law!" exclaimed Aunt Susan. "Jim was so close-mouthed - an' with that long upper lip, too, I don't know uz I ever seed them gold teeth."

"I seen 'em once," affirmed Mahaley Harick excitedly, "t het time Jim smirked at me whin the wholesalers come out; that's us shore us day 'n night. Jim was jist the kind to pleasure hisse'f by puttin' gold in his mouth. He must a hed it dene that summer he 's 'way over to Winslow workin' fur a minin' company."

"Jist hold on - that's not all." Johnnie held up his hand. "Whin Marier claimed the 'fects on his body, she showed she knowed Jim mighty well; fur whin they got his body turned over, ther clutched in his hand was a bag uv gold that he'd hoarded all them y'er afore he runned away an' hid in the mine. It 'pears like whin he heard the rumble uv the slip a-cosin', he takes time ter grab his gold afore he runs ter git out. But he didn't make 'er - maybe he would ifen he hadn't turned to git his gold."

"I'm proud fur Marier's sake that she got the gold,"
breathed Aunt Susan who was the first to regain her voice.
"She'll git ter build her a new house up by the school in
town like she's wanted ter do -- now, that she 's quit wait-
in' fur Jin."

"Wal, hit pleasures me a heap, too," ejaculated Haley,
"jis' ter know that 'Ol' Mannon' fetched up with hisse'f
at last. ----- But I 'pinion he'll git the biggest baryin'
yah ever seed on Shootin' Fork!"

143. "Little" (Sammie Fritz) - Junior in age; son of "Big"
Sammie Fritz (the elder)
144. man - mine (cf. far - fire)
145. raise coal - mine coal
146. a slip - landslide
147. tip - touch
148. turn uv day - noon; any time from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00pm
149. bided - lived or stayed
150. man-person - man (woman-person - woman)
151. hit war - it was (cf. wuz - was)
152. keepin' comp'ny - courting or going together
153. day in an' day out - early and late every day
154. 'arn - earn (cf. 'arth - earth)
155. pitcher - picture
156. holpen (Chaucerian expression) - help
157. thur - their (cf. ur - our)
158. gin time - chore time (gin- soft "g" - means snare
or trap in King James Version of Bible, 1611)
159. high hoss - angry
160. disfurnish - take what doesn't belong to one
161. whickered - cheated
162. shore - sure
163. wonderful mean (or won'nerful) - very wicked
164. a far - a fire
165. gears - harness
166. won'ner - wonder

167. wropped - wrapped
168. 'ith - with (cf. 'long - along)
169. leastuns - least or youngest ones
170. 'r (or "ur") - or ("ur" - our)
171. dusty dark - dusk
172. plunder - possessions; originally, "booty" or "spoil"
173. p'int blang (or poin' blank) - point blank; straight out
174. p ress his dyin' piller - dying with his head on a pillow
175. purely stubborn - surely stubborn; unadulterated
176. snurled - snarled
177. riz - rose
178. dreen - drain or little gulch
179. law him - sue him in court; have a trial
180. brought-on - manufactured or bought in town
181. horesepit'l - hospital
182. taken her - took her
183. quare - queer
184. gived her the balance - gave her the balance
185. 'pinion - give my opinion
186. right smart - rather
187. 'fects - effects; personal possessions on the body

HIGH TIDE

The unexpected mountain storm descended with the rapidity of an avalanche, blotting out the spring sunshine and hurtling great limbs from trees above the trail, pelting us with hail and drenching us to the skin. My first impulse was to hug the nearest tree, but the old mountaineer and his wife urged me to keep moving towards a deserted cabin that stood near a fork in the trail.

As we stood dripping and shivering within our refuge, I noticed a table and a bench. The fireplace was intact, and there was wood on the hearth.

"Ollie, did yer know this is Hon's House?" inquired Grandpa Paxton of his almost exhausted wife whose hands I was rubbing.

"Hon's House! Bless my soul, I never wished ter set foot inside uv this place. Hit brings back sorrows I can scarce stand."

"Now, Ollie, we shore couldn't a made it to Perry's - That's our son," he explained to me. "Hearken to the wind. This chimney's still a right good un, an' Rufe left some wood hyer frum last fall's 'baccer strippin' work. He won't be displeasured ifen we build a far to dry off by."

While the fire was being kindled and I was loosening

Grandma Paxton's coat and making her comfortable on the bench, my mind recalled the mournful tone that was used by the women of the neighborhood when they mentioned either "Ben's House" or "Nate's House". I longed to know the particulars of the story connected with the two houses.

As if in answer to my thoughts, Grandpa Paxton said in a reminiscent tone, "I reckon ifen I wuz to write a story 'bout Nate's House, I'd call hit, 'High Tide'; fur he come in on a High Tide an' he went out on a High Tide."

"Grandpa Paxton," I ventured, "it's more than idle curiosity that prompts me to ask you to tell me more about these two houses you've just mentioned. Since I am to be one of you, I'd like to know of the hardships and sorrows and struggles that are the lot of so many in this valley. It seems that each has his share - Isn't that right, Grandma? Would it be too hard on you to hear again the tragic story?"

"Nay, no'n, I don't think so, bein' as yah put hit that way, Miss Willene. I allus sez that Pappy 'n me hyer 'preciates t'other one better whin we gits ter thinkin' uv pore Ben an' Nate. So 'head, Pappy, an' tell her while I rest. I 'm a leetle grain tared."

"As I sez afore," resumed the old mountaineer while the storm still raged without, "Nate come in on a High Tide. He wuz a stranger in this valley, drifting in on a raft down

the river whin thar wern't no roads. He wuz a real Kentuckian, same uz Henry Clay. Whin the raft stopped at 'Three P'int¹⁸⁹'s', a sort uv Jimmy Barn, Nate left his luggage an' footed it on up hyer to Martin's though the goin' was awful sorry. Hit mought a bin some other cabin he reached in the dusty dark, but it jist happened ter be Martin's.

"At that time, John Martin hed two grown gals, 'Bee an' Ben' we called 'em though thar reale names was Beatrice an' Lillian. They both uv 'em worked right smart in hocin' the corn an' 'baccer, but John needed a hired man 'round whin he wint off tradin' hosses¹⁹¹ as his boys wuz still leetluns.¹⁹² Bee wuz the workin'est gal yuh ever seed, but Ben liked ter be a lady. She could a bin, too, with her fair skin an' golden curly ha'rs.¹⁹³ I think hit war her own mawwy called her 'Nancy-o'er-the-Ground' - yuh know, Ollie, them lacey white blossoms on slender-like stems that has thar leaves all flat on the ground ter make a carpet fur the flars to dance over; leastways, they look like they 'z dancin' whin they blow in a breeze. Miss, Willene,¹⁹⁴ ifen yuh hain't saw them 'Nancy-o'er-the-Ground' flars, you watch fur 'em this spring back behind this hyer cabin. Thar's some uv Ben's own wild flars she started growin' in the fence corners.

"Wal, seemed like that spring Ben taken more uv an in-t'rest in out-door work, an' Bee done a lot uv the cookin'.

I ric'lect at the Workin' whin we cleared the new patch uv ground fur the extry 'baccer plants fur John, thet Ben managed ter be clos't to Nate at nealtipe. Nate was the liveli est, jokin'est feller then times. He could win ary person's heart the way he talked. He jis' knowed how ter pleasure a body till yah couldn't help but like him. He was rale tidy too; allus hed his dark hair redded out ¹⁹⁵ an' his britches tacked inter his boots in a neat way. He was a good hand; didn't drink nut eess nur chaw. ¹⁹⁶ Not ary a body dast ax him any pasonal questions. We couldn't figger him out. He'd go to Mountain Meetin' an' set ther on' weep like a baby whin the preachers 'd preach 'bout Heaven like they done so much - but attterwards ifen any young buck got fresh ter displeasure Nate 'bout hit, he'd knock 'em out. I allus ¹⁹⁷ noticed that his dark eyes was remarkable clear and stiddy. He come honest by the respect uv ev'ry pason in the valley. The boys kinder joner'd ¹⁹⁸ him at fust 'caisen he never pack- ed a gun ¹⁹⁹ like all the rest uv 'em done. He'd jis' say a-jokin'-like, that he could move faster 'n ary ole bullet.

"How could John Martin expect ter keep both uv his gals with a han'some feller like Nate 'round? Whin the blue smoke uv the 'baccer bed-burnin's ²⁰⁰ curled up to'ard the pines on the ridge, an' the Trailin' Arbutus was venturin' out under the Laurel bushes, Ben an' Nate taken their

chancest rale often ter explore up to the 'Indian Post Office' then cueri'us rocks with slots an' holes in 'em on top o' nigh ridge. Yuh'll hev ter explore up thar, too, Miss Wil-lens. The leetluns went along 'caise Hete most allus gether-
 ed a budget ²⁰¹ uv pipecane ²⁰² ter make 'em whistles an' ladders an' popguns; sometimes, he used slippery Elm fur the whistles. No wonder the younguns was daft 'bout Hete - an' so was Ean.

"Well, they never fooled Molly; that was Ean's nanny; she hed good sense. She knowed that the dresses she 's makin' fur Ean would be fur a weddin' instid uv school. John Mar-tin wanted his gals ter go to the Mission High School, come fall; that was why he hed more ground cleared an' put in two 'baccor beds so's they'd fetch a good price. John was gone
 off hoss-tradin' so much that Molly Martin pret nigh ²⁰³ hed the manag'mint uv the place though she never war the kind
 ter crave to 'w'ax the britches'. ²⁰⁴ Whin John was to home, he done the bossin' an' hed all the final say-so. So whin Ean an' Hete azed him ifen they could git married that fall, he humored Ean as he allus done. Besides he hed unbounden
²⁰⁵ confidence in Hete an' liked him as a son.

"Dee 'lowed Ean war wonderful foolish not ter wait till they could hev a brand-new cabin, but Ean seemed to be so a-fear'd somethin'd happen to part 'em. The hull neighborhood was su'prized whin the ol' fo'ks built a cabin down-creek

clos't to the Mission an' turned over the home place ter
 Ben an' Mate. They wint to housekeepin' right down thar on
 the bottom. The cabin wv two houses uster stand by the
 stump wv that big Chestnut that the blight ²⁰⁶ killed. Yuh
 could see hit ifen the rain warn't pourin' so, Miss Willene.
 I'll jis' fix the far. ²⁰⁷ Air yuh all right, Ollie?"
²⁰⁸

"Seems like some fo'ks' lives air jist like terday;
 the sun comes out bright in the mornin' fur a spell; then
 the thick thunderclouds rolls in an' blots out all the
 spring they ever had in their lives. Ben's an' Mate's life
 together was like that. The fust three y'ar yuh never seed
 sich a happy pair. They 'got on' too. Whin lectle Ed come
 Mate jis' 'bout busted hirse'f ter save enough to buy thur
 place. Ben worked too, but she warn't near the help-mate
 that Bee would a bin. 'Bout all she could manage was kee-
 in' ²⁰⁹ far the house an' boy an' raisin' a few biddies. But
 she allus found time to plant the prettiest flars, so she
 could hev a flar-pot ²¹⁰ somenhar in the cabin. Ben warn't
^{2 11} sorry; she could cook us good a meal us yuh ever tasted,
 but she jist wouldn't bust herse'f ter do outdoor work.
 Seemed like Ben depended a lot on Bee an' her nanny to help
 her in camnin' times - an' shore 'nuff they never failed
 her. Ben kep' lectle Ed us neat us a pin; she purely wor-
 shipped him 'cause he was party us a pitcher 'ith Ben's

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curly hair an' Kate's dark eyes; sich a pycort youngun, too; everybody's pet. Whin Ed was toddlin' 'round, Ben hed him outen her flar garden a lot. An' she jist loved ter take him to the Mission Sunday School whar she got chart-pitchers to frame fur the front house ²¹³ that she hed papered rale purty with samples uv wallpaper. Hit wuz the cheeriest place I ever seed. Some uv the gals war jealous uv Ben fur havin' sich a nice home an' not havin' ter work in the fields. Most uv 'em hed ter plow up thair own gardens an' he'p right smart a-plantin' the corn 'ith the hand-planters - not ter mention the hoein'.

Kate never expected Ben ter he'p him with the outdoor work, but he druv hisse'f so hard, he wuz gittin' thin. I noticed he didn't laugh nar joke near so much, but I 'pinioned he wuz jist settlin' down fur a right good solid middle-age. Most uv us hed plumb fargot ta wonder whar Kate come from an' who his fo'ks wuz. Mary pason hed any reason ter doubt him; he wuz a good neighbor, an' wuz provin' hisse'f ter be a good husband an' father. We never thought to question ifen his rale name wuz Richardson, an' no news ²¹⁴ ever reached our years to the contrary; fur we hed no newspapers nar telephones - ur roads ter speak uv; an' uv course no radios nar autos. Kate wuz so proud uv leetle Ed that he hed to ²¹⁵ meet

him in meetin's an' he never wanted ter go

to mill lessen he taken the boy in front uv him on ole ²¹⁶
 Rambler. No more chillern come to their home; an' uz time
 wint on, Nate an' Ben jis' elung more 'n more to the boy.
 They'd a hed him sp'iled rotten ifen he'd bin the sp'illin'
 kind. Each un was so pleased ter hev Ed with 'em that
 they kinder got to quar'lin' ²¹⁷ over thur own son - not bad
 but not good either.

'Nary un 'd think that two parents could git jealous uv
 t'other un; but hit seemed like that taken place with Ben
 an' Nate. Hit wouldn't a ha rpened ifen they'd hed more
 leetl'uns. One Sat'day - that's Mill Day 'round hyer -
 N ate 'lowed he'd take leetle Ed with 'in to the mill. Ben
 was purely stubborn 'bout keepin' him with her; said she
 wanted ter try on a shirt she 's makin' him fur Sunday. But
 she didn't r'ally need the baby fur that. She taken him out
 in the flar garden. Leetle Ed jis' loved flars, Ben said.
 He'd not pick ary un ²¹⁸ lessen Ben told him he could, but
 he'd jist run up an' down the path an' stroke some uv the
 flars an' laugh an' chatter. That's what made hit so bad.
 That mornin' leetle Ed ventured quite a piece further up
 inter one uv the fence corners. Ben said she heard the
 buzz uv the rattles, but afore she could git to the baby,
 the rattler hed got the boy.
 " Ben was allus right helpless ²¹⁹ whin hit come to hurt-

in' ary pason. She didn't have the heart ter cut 'round that bite an' draw out the blood; so she grabs the baby an' runs, hollerin' down to Tolbert's cabin. Bill was gone to mill, too; an' Millie was down-creek ter the Mission Sales Day, so thar was precious time lost. Whin she got up to ol' Dan Tooley's, she was out uv breath an' the p'ison was be-ginnin' to 'fect the baby.

"The biggest Tolbert boy catched Kate uz he 's takin' his turn to the mill, ²²⁰ but by the time he got home an' hunt-ed up Han an' the boy, hit war too late. Seemed ter me thar couldn't a bin a worse way fur the leetle feller to go. Han kop' moenin', 'Ifen I'd only let him gone with Kate.' Kate never said a word, but his teeth war set, an' his eyes war hard.

"Atter the buryin', you never seed Han nor Kate at the Meetin's anny more. Bee wint up ter stay with 'em fur a spell, an' she done all the work. Han gived up an' went to bed, sayin' she wanted ter press her dyin' piller. ²²¹ Remorse was eatin' at her heart till she couldn't furgive herse'f - An' the quare part uv hit war - Kate seemed ter disremember he'd ever loved Han. Bee said she hed ter do all the talkin' 'caisen Han would jis' moan an' wouldn't eat wint she cooked fur her. Kate hadn't said scarce a word since the buryin', an' he wint about as silent as a grave. Both uv 'em was

clean bankrupt. Bee said ifen ary un hed thought 'bout t'other un, they nought a-pulled together to git theirsels outen th e deep well uv grief ter the daylight uv understandin'.

"As it wuz, one day attter Nate hed sot 'round most all day with his head in his hands, Bee seed him take down his sickle an' go out in the backyard whar all the flars wuz sich a purtful sight with all colors uv the rainbow mixed up. Wouldn't ary pason a done what Nate done lessen they'z pure crazy with grief. He laid ev'ry blessed ²²² flar an' bush flat with his sickle. Then he wint down the road, kinder staggorin' like he wuz dizzy. He wint to'ard the Jimmy Barn whar he fust left his luggage whin he come in on the raft at that High Tide 'bout four years afore. Even the hard-hearted Tim Wingate didn't keer ²²³ to give Nate his fust drink, bein' us he knowed him fur a church-goin', up-standin' man. Nate seemed sot ter drown his grief in lick-²²⁴ or, so the boys said. 'Bout dusky dark he hed clem passed out.

²²⁵
"At that same identicorl time, Bee said, Ben seemed ter come to life an' wanted ter go out on the back porch. Bee tried ter keep Ben frum seein' the wilted flars, but she couldn't. It would a bin better ifen Nate hed piled the flars up an' burned 'em. Whin Ben seed them flars a-layin'

low, she runned out to 'em uz pale uz a sheet, ²²⁶ an' gived a moan, pickin' up some uv the blossoms that was still a-live on the bushes. She pressed 'em to her throat like she thought they'd take away the stabbin' pain that was 'most chokin' her life out. Nary person knows what that pain 'z like till the one till the one they loves best is takned fran 'em. Whin Han fell along the rock path, Bee got her up onto the porch an' warched ²²⁷ her with cold water till Han come to ²²⁸ an' could get to bed agin. Then Bee sent fur her mummy, Molly Martin. Mate never come home that night nor the next - not fur three days an' nights.

"John Martin wint ter hunt fur him on the the third day an' he found him down by the creek, tyin' some logs togeth-er, makin' a raft - an' ther wasn't enough water in that creek to float a play-pretty ²²⁹ boat to the river. The lickker hed set him crazy. He told John that they was callin' him to come to court, an' he'd have ter go. He made ²³⁰ mention uv a man by the name uv Drayton; said he couldn't b'ar ter see him layin' ther without ary puseon to help him; he'd got ter git back up the river. John knowed Mate war ²³¹ cuten his head; so he never said a word 'bout his ravin' then. He taken Mate ter his own home an' helped him to sober up, talkin' to him like a pappy an' beggin' him to ketch holt uv hiss'ef. Hit seemed like Mate got a leetle

grip on hisse'f, but hit didn't last longer 'n a June frost. Nate got ter goin' to the Jinny Barn reg'lar, an' whin he got drunk, he'd go down by the creek an' work on his raft. John could noways do a thing with him. Oncet whin Nate was sober, John axed him kinda cautious-like ifen he ever knowed a man by the name uv 'Drayton'. As soon as he mentioned the name, John knowed he'd made a mistake; fur Nate got the wildest look an' re'ched ²³² to his hip fur a gun - 'course he never carried none. He axed John in a hoarse voice whoever named that name to him.

'Why, you done hit whin yuh 's a-drinkin',' John sez.

'Did yuh ever tell Sam ur ary un else?' Nate axed.

'No,' answered John.

'Fur God's sake, keep me frum drinkin',' pleaded Nate, a-breathin' easier.

"John tried ever' way he knowed ter help Nate, but he failed. 'Bout that time, Nate started treatin' Sam in a rough way. At last she 's so grief-stricken that she taken hit us somethin' that was comin' to her. But attar so long a time she got ter thinkin' how Nate had cut down all her flars, the only thing that could a brung peace ter her soul.

'Sides she got wearried a-stayin' by herse'f so much an' a-²³³ havin' ter tend the garden an' chickens an' pigs an' even ²³⁴ the bec-gums that Nate neglected so much. Howsomever,

hevin' to work so much made Man quit punyin' 'round so
 much. But she never gothered any more flax-pots fur the
 house nor fixed up her hairs; ²³⁵ jist wore the same ol' dress
 'round. She ne'er spoke a word to Nate, an' whin he 's
 sober, he ne'er spoke a word to her. But he shore made up
 fur hit whin he war drunk. He let her know a good many
 times he shore us the worl' blamed her fur their boy's
 death. That hurt her dreadful at fust - till she 'lowed
 she hed takened enough punishment; then hit made her bitter.
 She tol' Bee an' Molly how she was goin' ter try to bring
 Nate to his senses, an' this is how hit war.

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"Man fixed up a place ter cook in the front house
 an' she moved a bed in the kitchen. She divided the cookin'
 pots an' dishes an' the bed clo'es an' che'rs, ²³⁸ then she
 leaves his clo'es in the front house, an' she takes her'n ²³⁹
 to the kitchen. That was whin Nate was away on a drunk.
 Whin he come home, she told him that she was through takin'
 punishment frum him; that she war makin' her own livin'
 anyway; an' that ifen he couldn't straighten up an' quit
 drinkin', he'd hev ter live alone. Nate hed bin sich a
 noble feller, she 'lowed he'd refuse ifen he hed the least
 grain uv love left fur her. But he'd bin destin' up on
 corn-licker; ²⁴⁰ hit war still burnin' in his veins, so he
 taken her at her word. He said ifen she felt that way,

they'd divide up the land an' the two 'baccor beds. He let her hev her choice uv the fields. She said she'd take the hill-side patch uv ground an' the fur ter'baccor bed; that's the one yah see up hyer as yah leave this house. Rufe uses hit now. Ean axed fur the garden an' the backyard. She said she war a leetle nasty ²⁴² whin she choosed the hillside; she told Nate the reason she taken hit wuz 'caise ²⁴³ a drunk man night fall down ²⁴⁴ a hillside. That made Nate won'erful ²⁴⁵ mad.. He got a hammer an' nails an' steeples, an' he fast-ened up the door frum his part inter the runway that connect ed the two houses. He swore that he'd never speak ter Ean us long us he lived. An' ifen ther war any makin'-up, she'd havee ter be the fast un to do hit. Ean told him that she never aimed ter speak to him lessen he showed a change uv heart an' life an' let the drink alone.

"Eran then on, hit war mighty sorry goin' ²⁴⁷ fur both Ean an' Nate. He lived by hisse'f, an' Ean lived by horse'f. Hit shamed her fo'ks most ter death; they begged her to move back home. She said 'No'; that she wuz needed ther mighty bad sometimes ur Nate'd starve ter death. She'd slip vittles in on his table; then she'd git his clo'es an' wash an' patch 'em. She'd even go ter the Mission sales an' buy him clo'es jist the same us if they war on speakin' terms. Ean made good with her crops whin his failed ur was washed ²⁴⁸

out with a High Tide. Ben never planted a flax 'cause she knowed that Hate hated 'em. She'd see him tramp on 'em, an' even go outen his way to crush the purty wild things on the hills in the spring. I cain't tell yer all that Ben wint through with.

"At first they was the talk uv the neighborhood. The young fellers'd bet on which un'd speak fust, but they fell in love an' got married an' hed families uv their own - still Hate an' Ben Richardson had never spoke to t'other. Two or three times hit looked like they'd shorely speak. Whin Bee was married, Hate fatched Ben to the weddin' on his mule, bein' us her'n was lame. But they come an' wint, never sayin' a word. 'Twas the same way with 'em whin Ben's mummy died - in goin' to her buryin'. Wal, fo'ks jist quit expectin' 'em to make-up. Ther'd bin 'bout three ur four mountain preachers 'sides the Mission workers hed done ther best to p'acify ³⁴⁹ 'em, but they all failed. Seemed like that dark stream uv misunderstandin' betwixt 'em got wider 'n deeper us time wint on. He war like a strong oak on one bank reachin' out hits branches to 'rds a slender willer thet's bendin' his way fram t'other bank, but allus ther's that stream twixt 'em. Only way that oak could reach that willer was fur a High Tide ter take 'em both out to meet. That war the way with Ben an' Hate -- but hyer, I'm gittin'

way ahead uv my story.

"Air yuh both warm enough? Seems like the clouds is
 liftin' a mite. Hit may fair up ²⁵⁰ by the time I git through
 tellin' yuh how Ben's House happened ter git up hyer on the
 hill. Wal, Nate changed complete in his actions. I some-
 times wondered why he acted so jumpy at times. He'd bin
 writin' fur papers from the outside ²⁵¹ we larned atterwards.
 Nate never joked nor laughed whin he was sober which wuzn't
 very much uv the time. One night he was missin' from the
 valley, an' he never come back fur five y'ar. ²⁵² At fust, Ben
 kep' lookin' fur him; she wouldn't go home to her pappy's.
 Then at the end uv three y'ar whin the road was to come
 through hyer, she hed ter move her house; so she hed hit
 brung up hyer clos'ter to Leetle Ed's grave. She left
 Nate's House stand - jist in case, he'd ever come back, she
 said, an' ever so often she'd clean hit up fur him.

"Atter Ben got settled up hyer, she started ter raise
 all kinds uv flars agin in the backyard - an' 'specially
 'round Leetle Ed's grave. They's allus a great big patch
 uv 'Nancy-over-the-Ground' an' wild Sweet Williams out ther;
 yuh jist watch fur 'em this spring. Sumner afore last Nate
 come back. This time he rede in on a gov'mint road truck
 in new brought-on clo'es. He looked pale like he'd bin
 sick a long time. Ever' person in the valley felt bad fur

him, an' they felt chere that he an' Ben'd make up. Nary person knowed then why they didn't doer, but Ben an' her pappy.

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"John Martin hed takened pains ter find out why Nate wint away then five y'ar. He done hit by knowin' the name uv'Drayton'. He l'arned that 'Drayton' was the name uv a man that Nate hed shot by accident. Drayton didn't die right off, but Nate felt so bad 'bout hit, he left his home county an' changed his name. Atter that he never packed a gun. Still he couldn't git over the sight uv Drayton layin' thar 'ith blood on him. That was why he writ fur the newspapers an' was so worrit that he drinked more'n ever attar he got started. He was the kind that jist couldn't b'ar ter have his conscience hurt him; the idee uv killin' a man hanted him. That's why, whin he read in the papers 'bout some uv Drayton's fo'ks, he writ to 'em. Atter he heard frum them that Drayton had died within a month uv the shoot in', Nate wint back an' give hisse'f up to the Law. Whin John told all this to Ben, looked like she orta understood that not all uv Nate's ugly actions was becaise uv her. Dat she failed ter see hit. She couldn't stand the thought uv a jail-bird any more'n she could a drunkard; so she held off. She knowed Nate was a-wishin' she'd say the fust word. Ben masta bin wonderful stubborn to hold out egin

Hate so long. He seemed more like the old Hate we uster know so long ago since he had that load offen his mind. Yah could hear him whistlin' at his work, an' he started ter goin' to Mount'in Meetin's agin. Ever oncet in awhile he'd slip inter Nan's field an' work fur her whin she's at her pappy's ur to the Mission Sales Day. Hit war allus attar that she'd send Hate somepun like an extry nice pod uv grapes ²⁵⁵ ur some roastin' years ²⁵⁶ by Joe Bob - that was Bee's biggest ²⁵⁷ boy that stayed with Nan a lot. Joe Bob kep' repeatin' wnat the t'other un'd say, an' hit war havin' its effect on both uv 'em.

"Whin Fourth o' July come 'round, an' they's havin' a big Sale Day an' dinner to the Mission, Hate rode 'long on his mule sides Nan's an' Joe Bob's mule. Most ary pason thar thought'd they'd made up, but they never spoke to t'other un. Joe Bob wint 'long home 'ith Hate ²⁵⁸ that evenin'; ²⁵⁹ an' he said that Nan hummed a tune on the way up-creek an' Hate whistled hit soft-like. Hit war the church song, 'Some day, some day, we'll understand.'

"Jist attar supper that night, Hate was settin' on the perch steps, Joe Bob said, whin his head kinder fell to one side. He couldn't talk but he motioned with one hand to'ards Nan's House. Her light was burnin'. Joe Bob runned up the hill an' got her. She quit eatin' an' left her

dishes standin', an' gathered some medicine an' cloths. Whin they got back down ter Nate's House, he couldn't use his left leg nor arm. She an' Joe Bob got Nate inter the house an' on the bed. She rubbed Nate with liniment an' heated cloths an' put on him, an' done all she could. Hit commenced ter rain so hard that she couldn't send Joe Bob to her pappy's ur Bee's fur help. Come daybreak, she said, she'd wake Joe Bob up to go get some one ifen he'd go ter sleep. Joe Bob said he sot in a cheer ²⁶⁰ fur a long time whilst Ben wuz by Nate's bed, talkin' soft-like ter him, tellin' him whut all hed happened then five y'ar he was gone. Nate kep' clingin' to her hand with his good un. She kep' encouragin' him 'bout gittin' well; she said she jist knowed he would.

"Joe Bob reckoned he muster dozed off to sleep 'caison the next thing he knowed Ben roused him up, sayin' he must go fur help.

'I jist feel like ther's goin' ter be 'nother High Tide,' she said. 'Hit's bin lightnin' an' thunderin' some-pun fierce up-creek. Hit's mid-night now, an' it's bin ramin' stiddy all night. I'm skeered this ol' house that sets so low'll be taken out. We'll have ter git help so us we kin git Nate outen hyer an' up to my house. But I'm most afeared I've waited too long.'

"Ean was right. That Fourth o' July at midnight, ther was a cloudburst up to the head uv Rock Creek, the only one ther ever was before ar since. Hit come so quick ther was no warnin' fur most fo'ks - a wall uv water forty foot high come tearin' down that gulch, takin' ever thing afore it - houses, barns, hosses, cows, chickens, trees, an' logs. Hit warshed out whole patches uv corn, taters, an' 'baccoer in the bottoms. Furdur²⁶¹ down-creek the waters spread out more, but seemed like right hyer whar the two creeks meet, ther wuzn't a chanceet fur Kate's House nur then that was in hit. Nate didn't seem ter feel no danger, Joe Bob said, till they heard the swful roar. Then his eyes spoke an' he motioned²⁶² with his one good hand fur Ean an' Joe Bob ter save thair-²⁶³sel's. Ean shook her head though she aimed²⁶⁴ ter git Joe Bob on a mule, but ther wuzn't no time. That wall uv water taken the house right up an' floated it on top some way. Ther hit war - goin' down-c reek with the lamp still a-burnin'. Some uv 'em up on Sand Ridge seed hit, but they could-n't do nothin'.

"Joe Bob said atterwards that Ean didn't act sheered whin the water started comin' in under the door. She broke out a winder rale queek on the fur side an' made Joe Bob git up inter it.

'Now,' sez she, 'whin we git to a place whar yuh kin

grab the limb uv a tree, I'll help yuh. Yuh kin save yore-
 ce'f, an' maybe kin git help fur us.' But Ben knowed that
 her'n Nate wouldn't need no help whin that cabin wint ter
 pieces.

"Fur a wonder, the High Tide carried Nate's House a-
 crest the creek whar hit catched ²⁶⁵ fur a minute on a rock
 ledge with a big limb uv a Sycamore hangin' over hit. Ben
 got Joe Bob out on that limb.

'Climb high an' hold tight, Joe Bob,' cried Ben. 'Toll
 'em I couldn't leave Nate alone - now that we've jist made
 up.'

"Hit all happened so cweck, Ben didn't have time ter
 say no more, fur jist then Nate's House tore away an went
 floatin' down on the High Tide. Joe Bob said the last he
 seen uv 'em, Ben was throwin' her arms 'round Nate. They
 found 'em that way, an' buried 'em so, right by lectle Ed's
 grave up in the next buryin' ground yuh come to."

The old mountaineer paused to wipe away the tears; then
 he resumed, " 'Bout fifty war drowned in that High Tide
 that Nate an' Ben wint out on, but our lives wuz spared. Our
 son, Perry, broke a hole in the loft an' got us all up thar.
 Then whin he seed the water wuz goin' ter git us up thar,
 he broke through the roof. Atter we got on the roof, the
 cabin wouldn't float above the waters till he pushed some

rock offen the chimney thet wuz holdin' the cabin down. Then hit floated a leetle ways till hit caught on a ledge whar some postes ²⁶⁶ held it so'z hit didn't go ter pieces like Nate's House."

Grandpa Paxton walked to the door and opened it carefully. "Ollie, the rain's passed cleam by. We'll be gittin' on down to Perry's."

I looked out. My first mountain storm was over, and the sun was shining..

"Miss Willene, do yer want tuh walk 'long with us?" inquired Grandma Paxton as I buttoned her coat.

"If you don't mind, I'll go with you just as far as the next buryin' ground," I replied. "I'd like to see Ben's and Nate's and little Ed's graves."

I wanted to be alone to ponder the words of wisdom spoken by the old mountaineer in relating the poignant story of Ben and Nate who were so young - with life still before them - but who let Fate carry them to the opposite banks of the dark stream of misunderstanding until only a "High Tide" could sweep the grief and bitterness out of their hearts and unite th em in death.

188. lectle grain tared - little grain tired; little tired
 189. Jinny Barn - road house
 190. the goin' was awful sorry - trip was difficult
 191. hosses - horses
 192. leetlung - little ones
 193. ha'rs - hairs (common use of the plural form; comb ha'm)
 194. flars - flowers
 195. redded out - smoothed out or the tangles combed out
 (A reddin' out comb is an ordinary comb.)
 196. cuss nur chew - curse nor chew tobacco
 197. stiddy - steady
 198. kinder jamer'd - rather joked or teased him
 199. packed a gun - carried a gun or had it on his person
 200. 'baccar-bed burnin's - the bring of brush and logs on
 the place where seeds will be
 planted and the hot-bed made.
 201. budget - a parcel or number of things
 202. pipecane - hollow reeds that grow in low places
 203. pret nigh - almost
 204. w'ar the britches - wear the pants; boss
 205. unbounden confidence - unlimited faith
 206. botton - flat land
 207. blight - disease of the trees
 208. jis' fix the far - replenish the fire
 209. biddies - chickens or hens (doodles - little chickens)
 210. flar-pot - bouquet of flowers
 211. sorry - lazy or shiftless
 212. pycert (pcart) youngun - bright or intelligent child
 213. front house - front room
 214. years - ears
 215. nuss him - nurse or hold him
 216. ole - used prolifically as a term of endearment
 (ol' - old)
 217. quar'lin' - bickering or fussing (They never say "fuss")
 218. ary one - any one
 219. helpless - helpless
 220. take turn to the mill - take corn to the mill to be
 ground into meal on Mill-Day
 221. wanted to press her dyin' piller - wanted to die
 222. ever' blessed flar - every living flower
 223. didn't keer to - didn't wish or desire to
 224. dusty dark - dusk
 225. identicerl (identerc'l) - identical or similar
 226. pale us a sheet - white as a sheet
 227. warshed - washed (used for "bathed")
 228. come to - revived; came to life
 229. play-pretty boat - toy boat
 230. made mention - mentioned

231. outen his head - "out of his head"; delirious; raving
 232. re'ched - reached
 233. tend the garden (gayrdin) - cultivate or hoe the garden
 234. bee-gums - bee hives
 235. punyin' 'round - complaining or not feeling well
 236. fixed up her ha'rs - combed her hair in a becoming way
 237. front house - front room in a cabin
 238. cha'rs (or cheers) - chairs
 239. her'n - her own
 240. corn licker - moonshine; liquor distilled from corn mash
 241. 'baccor beds - hot beds for raising tobacco plants which
 are transplanted to the fields; seeds usu-
 ally planted in February
 242. a leetle nasty - a little vindictive in spirit
 243. 'caise (or 'caisen) - because (pronounced "kaisen")
 244. fall down (fall dan) - overbalance
 245. won'erful mad - very angry (They say that a child is
 "mad" when he cries.)
 246. steeples - staples
 247. sorry goin' - difficult traveling
 248. warched out with a High Tide - swept away with a flood
 249. p'acify 'em - make peace between them
 250. fair up - clear up (in regard to weather)
 251. the outside - outside the valley ("outlanders"; those
 from outside the valley)
 252. five y'ar - five years (plural form not used)
 253. didn't deer - didn't do it (used prolifically)
 254. takened pains - took pains; used care; did it carefully
 255. pod uv grapes - bunch of grapes
 256. roastin' years - ears of corn for roasting or boiling
 257. biggest boy - oldest boy
 258. 'long 'ith Mate - in company with Mate
 259. evenin' - afternoon
 260. cheer (alternate expression, "cha'r") - chair
 261. funder - farther (used often)
 262. ter (alternate expression, "tuh") - to
 263. thursel's - themselves
 264. aimed - intended
 265. catched - caught
 266. postes - posts (Shakespearian - cf. Introductory Essay)
 (nestec - nests; beastes - beasts)

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF DIALECT FORMS

A

- 'a' (or 'a) - have (would a gone- would have gone)
(1658-1898)*
- a-bawlin' - crying or weeping (verbs with the prefix of
"a" have been recorded in writings between the
following dates, 1523-1858)
- a-fishin' - fishing
- a-huntin' - hunting (In Thoreau's writing: "went a moose-
hunting")
- a-laughin' - laughing
- a-workin' - working
- acrost - across (used in Mass. Historical Society writing,
1179; in Louisville, Ky. Mag. 1872)
- afore - before (Used in "King Lear", Shakespeare - "If
your diligence be not speedy, I shall be there afore
you.")
- afeared (afeered) - afraid (Anglo-Saxon: afered) Chaucer:
"Of his visage, childred were sore aferd")
Shakespeare: "Henry IV" - "Ha, art thou not horribly
afeard?"
- agin - again (agin him - against him)
- aholt - hold (recorded in writings as late as 1872)
- ailin' - sick; ill
- aim to - intend to
- ain't (contraction of the early form "airn't" - are not) -
are not or am not (ain't gonna - am not going to;
cf. hain't)
- air - are (recorded in Maryland Historical Mag. 1777)
- a little while back - a little while ago (cf. "back")
(Bar. 1848)**
- all-gone feeling - feeling as though one would faint or
die
- all-overish - feeling that permeated whole being (1833-
1899)
- allowed - thought; believed (1823-1898) (cf. "'lowed")
- allus - always
- an' - and

* Inclusive dates that occur in this list in parenthesis mean that the expression preceding the dates has been found in writings between those dates, showing their ancient usage.

** The term "Bar. 1848" means that the dialect expression was listed by Bartlett in his book "Americanisms", published in 1848.

an't - aunt
 a-pinin' - longing (cf. "pinin'")
 a-purpose - on purpose (1835-1880)
 argufy - argue (Bar. 1848)
 'arn - earn
 arrer - arrow
 'arth - earth (cf. un'arthly - unearthly)
 ary - any (ary un - any one; "Is there ary ax?")
 (Bar. 1848)
 atter - after
 atter all - after all
 atterwards - afterwards
 atween - between ('tween - between; sometimes "betwixt")
 ax (or axe) - ask (Anglo-Saxon: axian) (1789 - 1838 in
 U.S. writings) Wycliff's Translation of the Bible:
 "Pilate axide him, Art thou Kyng of Jewis?"
 axed - asked
 axin' - asking (Bar. 1848)

B

'baccor - tobacco
 'baccor bed - hot bed for growing tobacco plants
 'baccor-bed burnin's - burning of logs on the location of
 the 'baccor-bed in order to kill the weeds, warm the
 soil, and provide ashes as a fertilizer
 back (ten y'ar back) - ago; ten years ago
 bad, feel bad - ill (Bar. 1848)
 bad off - very sick
 balance - remainder (Bar. 1848)
 ballats - ballads (song-ballats - song ballads)
 b'ar - bear, either noun or verb
 bawlin' (a-bawlin') - crying or weeping
 beastes - beasts (Shakespearean usage)
 beat (felt beat) - felt defeated; nonplussed
 bee gum - bee hive (originally a gum tree that housed
 bees; hives made from sections of gum trees)
 (Bar. 1848)
 befuddled - confused
 beholden - indebted (1835-1878)
 bellered - bellowed or yelled; made a loud noise
 belly - stomach
 best (used as a verb) - to outwit the other person
 betwixt - between (cf. atween)
 biddie - hen or chicken (from 1601) (cf. Doodle - little
 chicken)
 bided - lived or remained
 big - large (The northern expression is large; the
 southern, big)

- big (opposed to "little") - the elder as opposed to the younger
- biggest boy - oldest boy
- big meetin' - large meeting or congregation (1857-on)
- big workin' - an unusually large gathering of mountaineers for the accomplishing of some large task, such as building a cabin)
- bile (or rizen) - boil clothes
- bit - a little ("wait a bit - wait a little while") (Bar. 1848)
- bite (of supper) - a little supper
- blabbin' - talking without restraint
- bless hits lectle heart (or bones) - a term of endearment for baby
- blight - disease of trees caused by fungus (1611-on)
- blinds - shades
- blinky - sour or turning sour, in regard to milk
- blow - whistle ("Hear a train blow - Hear a train whistle")
- blowed - blew (current in England until the 19th century) (Bar. 1848)
- blurts out - ejaculates without thought
- bob wire - barb wire
- bolster - double pillow
- born days - one's life time ("never seed sichin all my born days" - never saw such in my lifetime) (1637-on) (Bar. 1848)
- borned - born
- bossy - calf (Bar. 1848)
- bottoms - low, flat land near creek banks usually (Bar. 1848)
- bracken - fern, usually refers to female species
- branch - tributaries of creeks
- break up land - first plowing of virgin soil (1636-on)
- bresh - brush (burned the bresh piles - burned the piles of twigs and small limbs left from clearing the land)
- breshed - brushed; using hands or a broom to brush off dirt from clothes, table or floor. They don't brush hair; they "red" it out with "a reddin'-out" comb. (cf. "reddin'")
- brickle - brittle (cf. work-brickle - eager for work)
- bright - quick-witted (a bright child - an intelligent child) (cf. peert)
- britches - trousers (originally breeches) (Bar. 1848)
- broke up - grieved; heart-broken; comfortless
- brought-on (goods) - manufactured or brought from town
- brung - brought
- brung up the meetin' - start services
- buck (the countryside) (verb) - oppose the whole neighborhood

bucket - pail
 buck-eyes - nuts from the Duckeye or Horse Chestnut
 bud - brother
 budget - parcel or a number of things
 buggers - lies
 bumps (or "bumps all over or goose bumps") - goose flesh
 burst the bag - divide the contents in the bag
 buryin' - a funeral (1681-on)
 buryin' ground - cemetery (Filson in "Kentucke" - "A
 buryin' ground belonging to a Meetin' House.")
 bustin' - breaking (Bar. 1848)
 bust loose - break loose

C

cain't - can't
 cain't hold a candle to - can't compete with
 'caise or 'caisen (kasen) - because
 calico bush - mountain laurel
 cal'late - calculate; figure; expected (Bar. 1848)
 came the creek-way - travelled in the creek
 caps - popcorn
 catched - caught
 'ceptin' - excepting
 cha'r - chair (alternate expression - cheer)
 chaw - chew (1834 - Carruther's "Kentuckian" - "the par-
 son's chaw-tobacco") (Bar. 1848)
 chawed up - chewed up (Bar. 1848)
 chopped (hands) - chapped or chafed hands
 chuck full - full to the brim; completely full (Bar. 1848)
 church house - the church building
 churching (a person) - holding a church trial to expel him
 from the church
 civer (kiver) - cover
 clean (ad. Anglo Saxon - cloene) - clear; entirely (clean
 over the fence - clear over the fence)
 clean up by - clear up by
 clearing - open place in the timber made by cutting down
 trees (Bar. 1848)
 clo'es - clothes
 clos't - close; near
 clos'ter - closer; nearer
 coal oil (lamp oil) - kerosene
 come honest by it - inherited it
 come to - revived; recovered consciousness
 come up by - come past
 coming stomach - growing appetite
 comf'able - comfortable
 concern - concern

corn licker - liquor or drink made from corn mash
 corn meal - meal ground at their own meals every Will Day
 corn-pone - corn bread
 'ecunt - account (no-'count - no account)
 eraves - desires greatly; longs for
 craving - desiring
 crawls (baby crawls) - creeps
 creek - larger streams fed by the branches
 creek-way - in the creek-bed
 crunch (scrunch) - chew with violence (Bar. 1848) (Used
 in "Piers, the Ploughman")
 enore - cure
 euores'ty - curiosity
 euss - curss
 cut a shine - act excitedly; cut capers (Bar. 1848)
 cut-in-two - cut into two pieces

D

daft - crazy
 dan - down
 dast - dare
 day in an' day out - early and late every day
 devilin' (divilin') - fooling around
 did doer - did it
 didn't doer - didn't do it
 didn't grow off right
 didn't keer to give him his fust drink - didn't desire to
 disfurnish - take something you need or that doesn't
 belong to you
 displeasure - displease (verb) - listed as obsolete in
 Webster
 disremember - forget or choose to forget (Bar. 1848)
 done - did
 done come - came (Bar. 1848)
 done did it - did it (Bar. 1848)
 doner - did it (I ain't doner - I didn't do it)
 don't aim to - do not intend to
 dontcha - don't you
 doodles - little chickens
 destin' up on corn licker - drinking a lot of Moonshine
 douse - throw on
 down-creek - down the course of the stream
 drap - drop
 dreadful cold - unusually cold
 dreen - a drain or little gulch (noun)
 dreen - drain (verb)
 dranked - drank
 driv - drove

dry up - keep still
 dusty dark - dusk
 dyin' bed - the bed on which one dies
 dyin' piller - the pillow on which one's head is resting
 when he is dying) (cf. "Press yore dyin' piller")

E

eech - itch
 e'en-most - almost (Bar. 1848)
 enny - any
 er snake - a snake
 et - ate
 evenin' - afternoon; after the noon meal even if it is at
 11 a.m.
 ever' - every (ever' puson - every person)

F

fac's - facts
 fair to the sun (or wind) - exposed to the sun or wind
 fair-up - clear up, in regards to weather
 far - fire
 farplace - fireplace
 fast-like - rapid
 feared (afeared) - afraid
 feel bad about it - am sorry about it
 'fects - effects or possessions on a body
 feller - fellow
 felt beat - vanquished or defeated
 'fess - confess
 fetch (fotch) - bring (Bar. 1848)
 fetch thur guts - make them sick
 fliestiest - liveliest
 figger - figure (cf. cal'late - calculate)
 final say-so - final or last decision
 fin'lly - finally
 fireboard - mantel piece over the fireplace
 fist-bustin' - boxing or fighting with the fists
 fit - fought
 fitten company - suitable company
 fit to kill - ready to die (laughed fit to kill - laughed
 till he was ready to die)
 five y'ar - five years (no plural form; "y'ar" for both
 singular and plural)
 fixed up her ha'rs - combed and curled her hair
 fixin's - embellishments or trimmings (Bar. 1848)
 flag 'em down - signal to stop them (Bar. 1848)
 flar-pot - bouquet
 flars - flowers

flustered - confused; agitated (Bar. 1848)
 fly around - hurry around
 fodder - corn stalks
 follers - follows
 follers the Law - studies the law or is an officer
 foot it - walk (used from the time of Shakespeare)
 footlog - log placed across a stream to serve as a budge
 fount'in - fountain
 Free-for-all Meetin' - a meeting open to all Faiths
 Free-for-all Preachin' - preachers
 Free School - public school
 fretted herse'f - agitated herself
 Friday week - a week from Friday
 full blast - full capacity
 fur (fer) - for
 fur - far
 funder - farther

G

gab - idle talk
 gal - girl
 garden (gayrden) - garden plot inclosed in a picket fence
 to keep out the pigs as they run loose - tend the
 gayrden - hoe the garden
 gatherin' - an assembly of folk
 'gator - alligator
 gave out - wore out (His shoes gave out - wore out)
 gears - harness
 gether - gather
 gin'ally - generally
 ginnin' 'round - choring around (1611-King James Version
 of Bible; gynne - 15th century in Esop's Fables)
 gin-time - chore time (cf. introductory essay)
 git - get
 gived - gave
 gived up - surrendered
 give one the 'go-by' - leave one in the lurch (Bar. 1848)
 give out meetin' - announce meeting or service
 give yuh out comin' - had given up your coming
 go-by (verb) - go past
 go-by (noun) - rejection
 goings on - behavior - in a bad sense (Bar. 1848)
 goin' wuz awful sorry - journey or traveling was very
 difficult
 goose bumps (or bumps all over) - goose flesh
 got along - succeeded (1830-1896)
 got on - advanced
 got outer bed on the wrong side - got up feeling badly

gotta - must; got to
 gov'mint - government
 granny scrape - child birth
 granny woman - midwife
 grate fire - fire in the grate of the fireplace
 ground-land (plot o' ground or patch uv ground - piece of
 land)
 growed - grew
 grow off right - develop properly
 grunter - hog
 gunnin' - shootin'

H

hain't - have not
 haint - a ghost (hainted him - hounded him)
 half attar two - 2:30 or half past two
 halloed - called from a safe distance instead of knocking
 at door
 hanker - long for or desire (Bar. 1848)
 hankerchers - handkerchieves
 ha'rs - hair (no singular form used)
 head of the holler - at the beginning of the hollow or
 gulch
 head uv the creek - source of the creek
 hear a train blow - hear train whistle
 heard (heerd) - heard
 hearken - listen
 hed - had
 he'p - help (used by younger ones) (cf. "help")
 her'n - her own
 hev - have
 hickory - switch from the Hickory tree (cf. "W'ar him out
 'ith a hickory - whip hard)
 high an' mighty - proud and contemptuous
 high hoss - angry
 High Tide - flood or high waters (cf. Introductory Essay)
 hin - hen (cf. biddy - hen)
 h'ist ye up - hoist or raise you up
 his'n - his own
 hit - it (hit war - it was)
 hitched up - get married
 hogged the others out - crowded the others out
 holler - hollow; depression between hills; gulch
 help (holpen) - help (Terms used by older folk) Chaucerian
 (Bar. 1848)
 holpless - helpless (right holpless - very helpless)
 help-mate - wife; companion
 holt - hold

hongry - hungry
 horsepit'l - hospital
 hoss - horse
 house - room (front house - front room)
 howdy - the greeting used invariably in the mountains
 howsomever - however (Bar. 1848)
 hull - whole (Bar. 1848)
 hunk - chink or part of a whole (Bar. 1848)
 hustlin' - hurrying
 hyer - here

I

ideas - ideas
 identerc'l (identicerl) - identical or the same
 ifen - if
 Indian Turnip - Jack-in-the-Pulpit
 inerns (unerns) - onions
 inter - into
 'ith - with

J

jail-bird - a prisoner
 jedge - judge (alternate of "cal'late" - calculate)
 judgin' distance - measuring with the eye
 j'ine - join
 Jinny Barn - road house
 jis' fix the far - replenish the fire
 jist (jis') - just
 j'ist - joist used in building
 joner'd - joked

K

keel over - fell over
 keepin' comp'ny - courting (Bar. 1848)
 keer - care
 keerful - careful
 keerless - careless
 ketch - catch
 ketch cold - take a cold
 ketch holt uv - catch hold of
 ketch larnin' - become educated; learn something
 killings - murders
 kilt him dead - killed him
 kin (verb) - can
 kin (noun) - relative
 kinda (kinder) - rather
 kinder joner'd him - rather teased or joked him
 kinder wore out - rather exhausted (Bar. 1848)
 kiver - cover (kiver for a bed - quilt)

knock long and lonesome 'round his heart - expression of
 appeal to a lover
 knoll - a rise of ground

L

lam - beat soundly (Bar. 1848)
 lamp oil - kerosene
 larned atterwards - learned afterwards
 larnin' - learning
 laughin' fit to kill - laughed until ready to die
 Law him - sue him at law; have him arrested and tried in
 court
 Lawsee - corruption of Lawdy
 lay a spell on yuh - hypnotize you
 lean-to (lin-ter) - addition to a cabin, with a sloping
 roof
 least grain uv love - smallest amount of love
 leastun - smallest or youngest child
 leastways (leastwise) - at least
 leetle - little
 leetle grain tared - a little tired
 leetle uns - little ones or children
 lenne - let me
 lessen - unless
 let on - disclosed or betrayed a knowledge of (Bar. 1848)
 let me die at home and in my right mind - a common saying
 licker - whiskey
 like pulling his eye teeth - an action that hurts
 tremendously
 lit out - started fast
 Little (opposed to "Big", meaning the elder) - Junior, the
 son
 loft - attic
 'long 'ith - along with
 lookit - look at it or them
 look peaked - look sick or pale
 loose (a-loose) - to untie (got him a-loose - released
 him)
 loose child - illegitimate child
 'low - allow; think
 'lowed - allowed; thought (cf. "'pinioned")

M

mad - angry (used to describe a child when he cries)
 made mention - mentioned
 mail-boy - the person who carries the mail usually on a
 mule; he may be either young or old
 mammy (mommy) - mother

man-person - man
 marcyful - merciful
 mast - nuts that fall from the Hickory, Walnut, Beech,
 Chestnuts, etc.
 May Apple - a flower with a white blossom under an
 umbrella leaf (Bar. 1848)
 mean - mischievous when applied to a child
 Meetin' - a congregation (Bar. 1848)
 Meetin' House - the house or place of meeting
 met up with - overtook (Bar. 1848)
 mighty - very (mighty proud - very glad)
 mighty - large (1848 - "We went over a mighty mountain;
 we were eight days a-goin'". Dictionary of American
 English)
 mighty - to a great degree (Bar. 1848)
 might nigh - very near
 mighty nigh no - almost none
 Mill - the saw mill that has a hopper to grind meal also
 Mill Day - usually on Saturdays; the day the Saw Mill
 engine is running an old steam engine to furnish
 power for grinding)
 mind the baby - look after the baby; care for it
 mite - very small amount
 moan - a sobbing sound
 mought - might
 mount'in - mountain (They do not say "mountings")
 mussed-up dress - wrinkled and soiled
 musta (muster) - must have

N

Nancy-over-the-Ground - a fragile blossom as described in
 "High Tide"
 narrer - narrow
 nary un - neither; no one (Bar. 1848)
 nasty bisness - ugly business
 natchally - naturally
 nateral - natural
 natur' - nature
 no'er - never
 nest down - settle down
 nestes - nests (Shakespearean) (cf. Introductory Essay)
 nigh - near (cf. pret nigh - very near; almost)
 niver - never
 no-'count - no good to work (cf. "sorry" - lazy)
 'nother - another
 not ter stir outen the house - not to go outside
 nowhar - nowhere
 'nuf - enough
 muss the baby - nurse or hold the baby

O

offen - off
 offish - distant, unapproachable (Bar. 1848)
 offish-like - unfriendly
 ol' - old
 ol' fo'ks - parents
 ole - a term of endearment (My ole pony - my nice pony)
 oncet - once
 onderstand - understand
 orter - ought to
 ortn't - ought not to
 our'n - our own; ours (Bar. 1848)
 outen - out of
 outen his head - delirious
 outlander - a stranger that comes into the valley
 out of fix - upset (Bar. 1848)
 out of sorts - disturbed (Bar. 1848)
 outside (the outside) - outside the valley; the rest of
 the world

P

p'acify 'em - make peace between them
 pack - carry
 pains (taken pains with) - being very particular with
 pale uz a sheet - white as a sheet
 paling (fence) - picket fence
 pappy - father (used by and for older men)
 paster'd - pastured; put the stock on the hillsides
 peaked - sickly (Bar. 1848)
 'pears - appears; looks like
 peert (pyeert) - lively; pert; bright (Bar. 1848)
 petered out - gone out or worn out
 piece uv writin' - a note
 pided - spotted (Shakespearean usage)
 pin - pen (pig pin)
 pinched - financially embarrassed
 pinin' (a-pinin') - longing
 p'int - point
 p'int blang (poin' blank) - point blank; straight out
 p'int uv the ridge - the point or top of the ridge
 pipe cane - a hollow reed that grows in low places; hollow
 reed used for making pipe stems
 pitched for'ard - fell forward
 pitcher - picture
 pizen - poison
 plague him - cause mental suffering
 planks - boards
 play-purty - toy

pleasurable (adj.) - enjoyable
 pleasure one (verb) - to please one
 plumb - entirely
 plumb wore out - completely worn out
 plunder - possessions; booty
 plot o' ground - piece of land
 pod uv grapes - bunch of grapes
 poke - paper sack or bag (Bar. 1848)
 pooch out lips - pucker up lips
 pore - poor
 postes - posts (Shakespearean usage)
 post-officin' - idling or gossiping
 powerful - great; very (Bar. 1848)
 Preacher - the term that prefaces the names of all who
 preach
 press yore dyin' piller - rest on your pillow while you
 die
 pret night (purt nigh) - very near; almost
 prettiful - beautiful
 prettify - decorate
 pretty - good (pretty boy - good boy)
 pretty meetin' - a good meetin'
 protracted meeting - an extended meeting over several
 weeks (Bar. 1848)
 proud - glad (proud to meet yuh - glad to meet you)
 punyin' 'round - sick but not so bad
 purely enjoyed it - surely enjoyed it
 purty (pooty) - rather (purty queek - rather quick)
 pusion - person
 put out - offended or inconvenienced

Q

quare - queer
 quar'l at - scold (never use "fuss")
 queek - quick

R

'r (ur) - or (cf. ur - out)
 raired - raised up; reared
 raise coal - mine coal
 rale (rael) - real
 re'ched - reached
 reckon - think; suppose (Bar. 1848)
 redded out ha'rs - combed out or smoothed out the tangles
 reddin'-out comb - an ordinary comb
 renched - rinsed (clothes) (Bar. 1848)
 revenooers - tax collectors
 ric'lect (ricollect) - remember
 rid - rode

right holpless - very helpless
 right smart showin' - very fine accomplishment
 right well tickled - very well pleased
 r'ile - roil; make angry; stir up (Bar. 1848)
 ring a ring - go round and round
 risen - boil
 rizen (b'ile) - boil
 roastin' years - roasting ears (of corn); green corn
 rolled the bed - tossed about on the bed
 ruint - ruined
 rumpus - disturbance
 runned - ran
 runnin' placed - going places
 runway - shed between two houses or barns

S

salat - salad; relish (bean salat, common in the hills)
 Sales Day - Saturdays at the Mission basement clothes are
 given out for produce brought in by the mountaineers;
 cash can be paid also; boxes of clothes are sent in
 from all over the United States; the very needy ones
 are supplied if they cannot bring produce
 sar - sour
 s'arched - searched
 sartin - certain (Bar. 1848)
 Sarvice Berry (Service Berry) - a cross between a cran-
 berry and black currant (Bar. 1848)
 say-so - opinion or decision
 scrimp - to be niggardly
 'scall'yun - rascal or rascal
 seed (seen) - saw
 set (sot) - sat
 set a spell - sit a little while (Bar. 1848) (Anglo Saxon -
 spelian)
 set it down - write
 Set you acrost the creek on a mule - take you across on a
 mule
 sez - said
 shadder - shadow
 'shamed - embarrassed
 shan't - shall not
 shanty - poor dwelling (Bar. 1848)
 shet - shut
 shet up (shut up) - close your mouth; hold one's tongue
 (Bar. 1848)
 shore - sure
 shot 'im dead - killed him
 showin' - accomplishment (a right smart showin' on the
 workin' - a splendid accomplishment on the work)

shucked - husked (corn)
 sich - such
 skeered - scared; afraid
 skipped the kintry - fled out of the state
 slick - slippery (Bar. 1848)
 slicker'n greased lightnin' - almost impossible to climb
 such a slippery hill
 slip - landslide (landslip - Bar. 1848)
 slush - mixture of water, mud, and snow (Bar. 1848)
 smack dab - accurately; exactly as aimed
 smoke-house * a house for smoking meat by burning Hickory
 wood
 'smotch-eyed polecat - worst epithet possible
 snack - lunch
 snarl (snurl) - a curling of the lips in contempt
 snag - a projecting root
 sorry - lazy; no good
 sorry house - a house full of holes (sorry goin' - hard
 traveling)
 sorta (sorter) - rather
 sottin' - sitting
 soul - a person
 sp'ile - spoil
 stay all night - expression used at parting instead of
 "Come again"
 steeple - staple
 stid - instead
 stiddy - steady
 still house - distillery
 stillin' - making liquor; distilling
 stir outhouse - go outside the house
 stir up a cake - mix a cake
 stomach it - eat with pleasure
 stompin' - stamping with feet
 straight-right - (set yer straight - correct any mistake)
 strowed all over - scattered all around
 suzz - sirs (Bar. 1848)
 sweet leetle ole woman - sweet baby girl

T

take turn to the mill - take corn to the mill to be ground
 take up books - school time
 taken - took (sometimes "takened")
 talked a-plenty - discussed a lot
 tarred (tared) - tired
 tasty salat - tart relish; very good-tasting salad
 taters - potatoes
 team up - match up; suit each other; work together
 agreeably
 tech - touch

techin' - touching ("I ain't a-techin' uv it", a familiar
 expression)
 tell'd - told (Bar. 1848)
 tend the gayrden - hoe or cultivate the garden
 thanky ma'am - thank you, madam
 thar - there
 thet - that
 this un - this one
 throwed - threw
 throwed up (threw up) - regurgitated
 thur - their
 thursel's - themselves
 tickled - pleased
 tickled pink - pleased beyond measure
 tight - close; parsimonious (Bar. 1848)
 timbers - large pieces of lumber used for the framework
 of a cabin
 tip it - touch it
 'tis - it is
 toll'able - fair
 toll'ably - rather
 tomorrer - tomorrow
 too big fur his britches - haughty (Bar. 1848)
 took account uv - noticed
 too thick - too friendly
 to'rds - towards
 t'other un - the other one
 train blowed - train whistled
 treed a coon - ran the coon up into a tree
 try (a mighty try) - effort (a great effort)
 tuckered out - tired out (Bar. 1848)
 turns out - lets out; dismisses (school turns out)
 turn uv day - about noon; anytime between 11:00 a.m. and
 2:00 p.m.
 'twixt - between
 'twon't - it will not

U

un - one
 un'arthly - unearthly
 unbeknown - not knowing (used as early as "Piers, the
 Ploughman")
 unbunden - unlimited
 uncomf'able - uncomfortable
 unerns (inerns) - onions
 unknivered - uncovered
 upaday (upaden - Anglo Saxon - to lift up) - an expression
 addressed to a child on lifting it up
 up-creek - up the creek, towards the source

ur ('r) - or (also "ur" - our)
 uster could - could formerly (Bar. 1848)
 us uns - us
 ut - it (often used)
 uv - of
 uz - as

V

vagerant - a tramp (used since Civil War days)
 ventur' in - to run a risk; to expose to hazard

W

wal - well
 walk-log (foot-log) - a log placed across a stream for a
 bridge
 wa'n't - was not; were not
 wanta (wanter) - want to
 war - to fight
 w'ar - wear
 w'ar her out with a hickory - whip hard with a hickory
 switch
 w'ar the britches - be the boss
 ware (war) - was (negative - warn't) (alternative - hit
 war - it wuz) (1681 in the "Huntington Record" -
 "Indians ware seen the next morning a-drinkin' of
 the rum.")
 warsh - wash or bathe
 warsh away - be swept away with a flood
 weakenin' - losing strength or determination
 wearry - worry (Yuh wearry me - you wearry me)
 week (Friday week) - a week from Friday
 westcots (westes) - Civil War knit vests
 whale away - thrash; hit resoundingly
 whar - where
 whickered - cheated
 whilst - while
 whin - when
 white-eyed - with distended eyes from overwork or
 amazement
 white-lipped - with all the blood drained from the face
 whopped (whooped) - whipped
 whut - what
 winder - window (at first they would not believe it could
 be "window")
 wint - went
 wisht - wished
 woman-person - woman
 wonderful - very (It was wonderful dirty - It was very
 dirty.)

won'ner - wonder
 won'nerful - wonderful
 wore out - tired out (cf. plumb wore out)
 work-brickle - eager for work
 work him white-eyed - work him till exhausted
 Workin' - a gathering of the neighbors to clear land or
 put up a cabin
 workin'est - most industrious; ability to work hard and
 long
 wrong side (got out on the wrong side of the bed) - arose
 in a bad mood
 wu'k - work
 wuz - was
 w'y yes - a very common response in the affirmative

X

Y

yaller - yellow
 yammer - talk constantly
 yander - yonder
 yan hill - nearest hill
 y'ar - year or years
 years - ears
 yenning - longing for; desiring
 yep, yes, ya - the breath is drawn in with a gasp at the
 close of the pronunciation of these terms
 yer (to yer) - you (to you) Used objectively
 yore - your
 younguns - children
 you 'uns all come - everyone come
 yuh (ye) - you, used nominatively