

That Old-Time Child, Roberta eBook

That Old-Time Child, Roberta

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Page 1

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THAT OLD-TIME CHILD, ROBERTA

Her Home-Life on the Farm

by

SOPHIE FOX SEA

Louisville

Printed by John P. Morton and Company

1892



[Illustration: "Must I look so when I die? Boo-oo!" "I'll cross my heart, Lil Missus, 'twuz dem drefful men dat sed 'Boo-oo!'"]

*To my revered and beloved friend,
Mrs. Preston Pope,
I dedicate this child's story. It was she whose love of
children first suggested it, and whose words of
kind appreciation and encouragement have
been to me "As apples of gold in
pictures of silver."*

Roberta Marsden, or Lil Missus, as the negroes called her, for the opening of my story dates back several years before the Civil War began, lived on a country place in Kentucky. She was a beautiful child, and despite a few foibles that all flesh is heir to, such a really lovable one that she was fairly worshiped by mother, aunt and uncle, and every one of the negroes, from old Caleb, the testy and ancient coachman, to the veriest pickaninny, who thought it a great feat to catch hold with grimy fingers to the fluttering strings of the little girl's white apron when she came among them at Christmas and on other occasions to distribute sweets and more substantial tokens.

It was a great wonder that the child was not utterly spoiled. But it seemed that her nature reflected the love lavished on her as a mirror the face that looks into it.



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Aunt Betsy declared she did not have one selfish bone in her whole body.

I think the reason of that was, there were so many about her looking to her for comfort in some way, that when little more than a baby in years she fell into the habit of thinking of and caring for others almost as a woman would.

Aunt Betsy was a rheumatic, and always ailing, and the child could not remember the time when her beautiful, patient mamma was not very, very sad. Although she smiled often on her little daughter, it seemed as if there were tears right behind the smiles, just like rain-drops shining through the rays of the sun. And when she crept close to her at night she could feel the long lashes sweep her cheek, and they were so often wet.

The negroes on the place, especially the older ones, would grumble out their aches and pains to the child, as if they thought she had the gift of healing. And indeed she had, in her way.

For when old Squire split his foot open with an ax, they lived so far in the country they couldn't get a physician every time it needed attention, and her kind, brave mamma undertook to dress the wound herself every morning. She would let the deft little fingers squeeze a sponge full of tepid water over the cut as many times as it was necessary, then hold the scissors and bandages, and help in other ways. And old Squire said the tender, compassionate little face "ho'ped 'im as much as Miss July did."

Those that need sympathy intuitively know where to get it. It's just like the flowers reaching out for sun and dew.

I expect the city children who read this story feel very sorry for Roberta because she lived in the country. But they needn't be, for she was never lonely and scarcely ever idle. The older negroes on the place said she was like "ole missus" (that was her grandmother) in her ways. And among other things they told about the old lady, to show how stirring she was and what a manager, was her method of arousing the household to their duties in the beginning of the week: "Wake up! wake up! I say. To-day's Monday, to-morrow's Tuesday, next day's Wednesday, next day's Thursday, then comes Friday, and Saturday will be here before you know it, and nothing done."

Roberta didn't belong to any "mite society" nor the "little busy bees," where city children are trained to think of and help the poor, and she didn't wear the badge of the "Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals," as many children do nowadays. Indeed I don't expect she ever heard there was such a society. But she was instrumental nevertheless in doing a great deal of real practical good. O, how her eyes did flash when she saw animals mistreated. She made beds for the cats and beds for the dogs; and when any of the milkers struck the cows while they were milking them, if she was near about, she would say, "Mamma says good milkers are always gentle with the cows, for they won't give down their milk unless you treat them kindly. And anybody can



tell by the quantity of milk you get whether you are good to them or not. If I was a cow I wouldn't give down my milk if you struck me and hollered at me.”



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So she made the cruel milkers ashamed of themselves often. And she practically established a foundling asylum for little motherless lambs and calves; raised them herself on the bottle just like they were babies.

“O, you tootsey weetsy darlin’,” I’ve heard her say to a bright-eyed, gentle lamb, her especial delight. The little creature would run to her and bleat by way of telling her it was hungry, and when she had fed it it would rub its pretty head against her knee and look love at her, just as I have seen babies look love at their mothers.

And, my! how she did fuss over the little negro children when they were sick! It just kept her busy bringing them gourds of fresh water from the spring and watching the well ones to see that they didn’t purloin the dainties she brought the sick. She actually learned how to sew, making clothes for the pickaninnies.

And you just ought to have seen her when any of the fathers and mothers whipped their children severely. She would fly down to the cabin, tear the pickaninnies away and trot them up to the big house, and pet them until they were willing to take another whipping to get the good things she gave them.

“She’s jes de very spi’t ob her par,” old Squire would say on those occasions; “Dat’s jest de way hees eyes useter flash out at Mis Betsy when she cum ‘twix’ him an Mis July.”

O, I wish I could make the little children who read this story see, as I have seen it, the country place where Roberta Marsden was raised.

On either side fields of golden-tasseled corn, rustling in the breeze and shimmering in the sunlight, many of the stalks so entwined with morning-glories, pink, white, blue, and variegated, one could almost believe fairies had been there and arrayed the yellow silken-haired corn babies for some festival, so crowned and garlanded they were. In front of the house were wooded slopes, where the birds sang their love songs and chattered noisily in bird language all the day long. Those woodlands might have been called a primeval forest, for the trees were truly there in the earliest memory of the oldest living resident of the county.

It used to puzzle me to understand how the birds knew when it was time to wake up and begin their matin songs, for it was so like night there. Roberta, who was an early riser and withal a child of poetic imagination, used to say “that the fairies woke them up.” She declared she saw a little glittering thing, with wings and wand of silver, alight on the tops of the trees and peep through at the Darbys and Joans of the bird tribe. And she was sure it must have told them it was time to wake up; for soon would begin a low twitter that swelled louder and louder, as bird after bird joined in until every family of birds was represented. From the back porch of the house could be seen a range of blue misty hills, that Roberta called brides. They were often enveloped in white filmy

folds, like bridal veils, and one might catch glimpses of the river from there also gliding along between banks of green.



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A giant's great glittering eye she called that; the trees on the hills above the giant's brows, and the ferns and grasses growing on either bank were upper and lower lashes. With a little encouragement Roberta would have been a genuine poet.

But Aunt Betsy took such a literal view of things, she was constantly saying to Mrs. Marsden:

"That child's imagination will get away with her, Julia, if you don't check it. It will, indeed."

And she had a way of making the child repeat over and over again descriptions of things that had struck her fancy, and cutting here and there until the description didn't seem applicable at all to the places she had seen.

"I feel just like the old woman in Mother Goose, Auntie," Roberta would say, her eyes full of vexed tears, "when she woke up on the king's highway and found her petticoats were cut off."

"But truth is truth, child," said Aunt Betsy.

Aunt Betsy's intensely realistic temperament could not understand that fine, exquisite perception God had given the little girl, which enabled her to see beauty that others, differently organized, would never see, nor, believe was there.

The house, where four generations of Mrs. Marsden's family had lived, was home-like, but quaint and unpretentious. It had a very solid look and was in thorough repair, for the family were thrifty and well-to-do always. Luxuriant vines of the Virginia creeper grew on the sides of the house and around the pillars of the porches. Wandering tendrils hung from the eaves and crept in the second-story windows. There was a wild-brier rose there that had been planted by Mrs. Marsden's grandmother. It partook somewhat of the nature of the old lady; nothing could keep it from doing its duty. It filled the air with fragrance in its season, and was a mass of delicate pink flower cups.

Inside of the old house were many little nooks, and each nook haunted by the spirit of some legendary story. As is the case in all houses where successive generations of the same family have lived and died, ghostly visitants came at certain times, so the negroes said, rang bells softly at dead of night, tipped across the floor with but the echo of a step, jostled medicine bottles together and did many curious things. Roberta, brave as she was and sensible as she was, would actually cover up her head with the bedclothes, and nearly smother for fear she would hear the bells and ghostly steps.

Mam' Sara was the only one of the negroes who didn't believe in ghosts. "No, indeed, honey," she would say to Roberta, "daid fo'ks don' never cum bak. If they gits ter



Heaven, they don' wan'er, and if they gits ter de udder place they can't. The devil won' never let 'em git away frum him, kase he's wuk so hard ter git 'em."

The part of the house of most interest to Roberta was the parlor, where were stored the heir-looms of the family, a spinet with all the ivory worn off the keys, two pier-glasses with brass claws for feet, and a clock so tall and big she actually hid in it once when she was playing "hide and go seek" with some little visitors, who said they had seen a clock "larger."



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Roberta was a very amiable child, but old Squire said she “wuz techus erbout sum things.” And the old clock must have been one of the things.

The chairs were brought from Virginia on the backs of mules, and the covers on them embroidered by the little girl's grandmother. The same busy hands that superintended the manufacture of those piles of linen sheets stored away in the presses above stairs, and the counterpanes woven with the American eagle in the center, bunches of hollyhocks and sweet pea in the corners, and trumpet vines running along the edges.

The paper on the walls of the parlor was a curiosity. It was imported from England many, many years before Roberta's mother was born, because her grandfather saw a room somewhere, I think in Baltimore, that had similar paper, and he took such a fancy to it he ordered some from the same place. The paper was wrought in great panels, with life-size figures of orientals in the center. They were terrible looking men, the children thought. They had swarthy skins and beards down to their waists, and fierce eyes that flashed out beneath their turbans with a fe-fo-fi-fum look.

Those fierce eyes were the cause of no little alarm, I can assure you, when darkness swooped down upon Roberta and Polly and Dilsy, playing Lady-come-to-see in the old parlor in childlike unconsciousness of the passage of time. Polly, the imp, would always insist upon singing “Lady Jane Grey,” as they tiptoed backward out of the room. They did not dare to look away, for fear those terrible men would fly at them when they were not looking and throttle them with their long, bony fingers, so they joined hands and sung as they tiptoed backward:

Lady Jane Grey, she went to church for to pray;
She went to the stile and there rested awhile;
She went to the door and there rested a little more;
She went up the aisle and there rested awhile;
She looked up; she looked down;
She saw a corpse lie on the ground;
She said to the sexton, must I look so
When I die? Boo, boo!

Now when they came to the last part it was always Polly who stretched open her eyes till they looked like an owl's great round eyes, and jumped at Roberta and Dilsy and hollered “Boo, boo!” Although they knew it was coming they were awfully scared, and would break loose and run, screaming like mad things, into the sitting-room, really believing the orientals were after them. They had made believe it so many times, and Polly had said so many times, “I'll cross my heart, Lil Missus, 'twuz dem drefful men dat sed 'boo-oo'; I seed thar lips muven; you don' ketch me in thar no mo',” they had come to really believe it. They had heard the story of the children who played wolf, and a wolf did sure enough come and devour them. As many times as they had played Lady Jane

Grey they were always worse scared the last time than ever before. The sitting-room was a cozy place when they got there, panting for breath after their fright in the parlor.



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In one of the deep window recesses Roberta had set up her entire doll family to housekeeping. She was very fond of her dolls. The mother instinct in her was developed very early. She had wax dolls and china dolls and rag dolls. Mrs. Marsden painted features on the rag dolls, and they looked very natural. There was Miss Prim and Miss Slim, Mrs. Jolly and Mrs. Folly, Miss Snappy and Miss Happy, named from their different expressions. Roberta had the quaintest way of talking to her dolls. She had caught some of Aunt Betsy's old-time ideas:

"Straighter, my dears, straighter. One's spine should never touch the back of a chair," and, "Don't rest your elbows on the table while you are eating; my great-grandmother used to keep cushions stuffed with pins to slip under the children's elbows," *etc.*

Her favorite dolls were the figures cut out of the fashion plates of Godey's Lady's Book. She was an artist with her fingers, if there was a pair of scissors in them. So she took sheets of different colored tissue-paper, cut dresses, and fitted them nicely on her dolls. Each doll had a variety.

I believe she thought her dolls looked cosier at the dinner-table than anywhere else, and she kept them sitting there a great deal. Sometimes Polly, who seemed born to make trouble, would roll her eyes at the dolls and say, "You iz de greeded' things. Whar iz you gwiner to put it?"

Then, of course, Roberta would feel obliged to take some notice of their sitting at the table so long: "Come, get down now, dears. Little ladies should *not* appear greedy."

Roberta was very much like some mothers of real children, who will wink at what their little ones do at one time, and, if a neighbor drops in at another, who is not of the same way of thinking, scold the poor children for doing those very things they had winked at before. But Roberta did not have it in her heart to scold anybody much, not even that impish Polly, who would go around after she had provoked her little mistress beyond endurance, sniffing and singing in a dolorous tone,

Whar she goes en how she fars,
Nobody knows en nobody kyars.

and invariably wind up by getting the very playthings she wanted from Roberta as a peace offering.

I must not forget to tell you about Roberta's Sunday School for little negro children. If the child didn't always keep perfect order and make the headway she would have liked, it wasn't because she didn't try. Her whole heart was in the work. She really was very intelligent, and Aunt Betsy said, "If there was such a thing as anybody being born in this world a Christian, she believed Roberta was." I think she must have had the germ of object teaching—that is the fad now—in her nature, she could paint such vivid mental



pictures to convey an idea. Once she was telling Polly about God's punishment of sinners, and Polly said, "Lawdy, Lil Missus, I feel dem blazes creepen' all over me dis minit." She had a great deal to contend with, almost as much as Mrs. Marsden had, in getting the older negroes to come in to prayers. Nine times out of ten, when she rang the bell for them Sunday morning, Squire would put his head in the door and say:



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“Mis July, dat deviles hoss dun played me dat same trick ergin. He dun lade down in de mud en roll ober en ober. ’T will take me clar up ter de time to start ter chech ter git dat mud orf him, en hard wurk at dat. Dat hoss knows ez well when Sad-day night comes ez you duz. Jes’ de way he dun las’ week when I hetch him in de plow: lay down en groan lak he sick enuff ter die, ter keep fum worken’; en half hour arfter I turn him luse frolerken lak er colt—jes’ kicken’ up his heels, I kin tell you.”

“Why not drive some of the others, Uncle Squire, so you can come in to prayers?”

“I dun turn em all out, en dey’s gorn, de Lord unly knows whar. If I’d unly know’d it en time now. But I’ll show ’im—I’ll show ’im. I gwiner be mity solid wid ’im, en mebbe heel larn arfter while dat he aint his own master.”

At other times it was a mule.

“Mis July, dat mule dun tore down dat rock fence ergin. I bounter fix it or de stock will git out en go orf, you knows dat ez well az I duz. Dat mule’s yours, en you kin do what you please wid him, but ef he ’longter me I’d sell him de fus chance I git. Dat mule nuff ter mek er man strike hees gran-daddy.”

Now, it was a well-known fact that Mrs. Marsden had tried several times to sell the mule, and old Squire had always declared “the mule was the most valuable animal on the place, and it was just giving him away to sell him at the price offered.”

Polly was Squire’s granddaughter, and inherited his want of reverence for sacred things. She was very, very trying, especially on one occasion I will tell you about.

Roberta gathered the children together, took her Catechism and primer, and went down to the summer-house. She noticed that Polly’s expression was sulky, and that she was rolling her eyes at Dilsy. But Polly was always tormenting Dilsy. Dilsy was a little hunchback negro, that everybody but Polly felt sorry for and tried to turn the soft side of life to.

Roberta was not much discouraged by Polly’s actions, still she knew it was a great deal pleasanter to teach her when she was in a good humor, and concluded to resort to a strategy to mollify her.

The child was a close observer of nature, and knew how indispensable to germinate seed was a mellow, rightly prepared soil, and what service sunshine and timely rainfalls were to growing crops. So she intuitively drew an analogy in her childish way between the soil the plow-man turns over and the human heart.

Now, if there was one thing that Polly delighted in more than another it was the game of “Chick-a-mie, chick-a-mie, craney-crow.”



So the children joined hands and moved around and around in a circle, singing:

“Chick-a-mie, chick-a-mie, craney-crow,
Went to the well to wash my toe,
When I got back my chickens was gone.
What o’clock is it, old Buzzard?”

Then they would fly around looking for the chickens. At least all of them but Polly would. Polly always took the part of old Buzzard, so she could flop down in Dilsy’s seat, although she knew she would have to get right up.



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Somehow, that evening Roberta's strategy did not seem to have accomplished its object, judging from Polly's expression. Still she hoped for the best. Polly was the biggest, so she always begun with her.

"Who made you, Polly?"

No answer immediately; then,

"Dunno fur sarten, spec' 't wuz Gord."

A lump gathered in the child's throat. Her bump of reverence was so largely developed it distressed her to see a want of it in others; she said "it hurt her feelings."

She passed it by, however, and ventured on another.

"What else did God make?"

"Dunno fur sarten, never seed 'im wuken'."

"For shame, Polly! God made all things. Say 'God made all things.'"

"No, never. Never made Dilsy thar. Dilsy nuffin' but er scrap he throw'd erway when he got fru cutten' out de grow'd-up ones."

"For shame, Polly! Don't you know everybody has to be little and grow up."

"No, never! Adam and Eve wuz born'd grow'd up."

"Well, that was because they were the first people on earth, and there was nobody to be papa and mamma for 'em, and take care of 'em, when they were little."

"Dat's like Dilsy thar. Dilsy never had no daddy."

"Well, Polly, you haven't answered my question yet. Say 'God made all things.'"

"No, never! God never made mammy's twins—no mo' dan he made Dilsy thar. Dey iz prezak like dem monkeys I seed de time I went en town ter de circus."

Now Polly was not an impartial judge of the twins, for she had been installed as their nurse, and she hated to nurse.

"For shame, Polly! Those nice little babies. And then, besides, as God made all things, he made monkeys too, of course."

"No, never! You can't make me berleeve dat. Gord nerver wase hees valerbel time maken' monkeys."



That was the “last straw that broke the camel’s back.” After trying so hard to be patient, and especially as she knew it was nothing but pure contrariness in Polly, for only the Sunday before she had answered every question correctly, and added some pious interpolations exceedingly gratifying to her young teacher.

So she got up, went to her refractory pupil, and lifted her forefinger by way of giving emphasis to her words.

But Polly, recognizing that her little mistress’s temperature was rising, felt a proportionate rise in her own, rolled her eyes till nothing but the whites were visible, and stuck her lower lip out.

It would be impossible to conceive of a creature uglier or more aggravating looking than Polly, when she did that way.

In a flash, down came Roberta’s little soft pink palm on her cheek.

Mrs. Marsden happened to be passing on her way to the quarters to visit a sick servant, and witnessed the performance. She was amused, but worried too, that Roberta had allowed herself to be so provoked, for it almost made a farce of the whole thing; and she knew how much in earnest her little daughter really was. The child’s flushed cheeks and flashing eyes brought back, O so vividly! another face and another pair of flashing orbs so like hers. There were tears in Mrs. Marsden’s eyes when she went in the summer-house and took her seat on the bench that circled around it.



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“Did you strike Polly, daughter?”

“Yes ’em, Mamma.”

“What did you strike her for, daughter?”

“She wouldn’t say her lesson, Mamma, and she knew it all the time. And she rolled her eyes at me so, and stuck out her lip and looked so ugly, I just couldn’t help it, that’s all.”

“I am sorry, daughter, that you gave way to your temper so. For remember, you are only the sower that plants the seed, and God takes care of all the rest. If you really try to teach Polly, and she won’t be taught, you mustn’t make a personal thing of it, but just leave it with God. Then, again, daughter, unless you practice self-control, teaching others is a farce. I know Polly has been very trying, indeed. But I want you to show a real forgiving spirit, as one should always show when one is working for the Master. I want you to tell Polly you are sorry you struck her. For you are sorry, I know—I see it in your face.”

A kind of staccato snuffle was heard in the direction of Polly.

Roberta gave another look at the surly, unprepossessing countenance, then said, in a low voice:

“I will, Mamma, if you will let me hide my face in your lap while I am saying it.”

“But why hide your face in my lap, daughter?”

“Because—because—Mamma—I am afraid—if she looks at me as she did before, that I will slap her again. I don’t believe I could keep from it this evening; I am all out of sorts.”

Afterwards that observation of Polly’s, “Dilsy never had no daddy,” caused Roberta no little thought. Really, she was no better off than Dilsy, she reasoned, for of course the child did not take in the full significance of the imp’s meaning. Nobody ever told her that her papa was dead. Indeed she had been taught to pray for him every night. She felt sure he was living. But, where? Why did he not come home and pet her, like other little girls’ papas she knew—pet her, and make her beautiful, sad mother smile sometimes. For it seemed to the child that she grew sadder and sadder all the time. There was nobody she could talk to about him, for her mamma’s eyes filled with tears at any chance allusion to him. Aunt Betsy nearly snapped her head off when she asked her a question, and Uncle Squire, chatty as he was upon every other subject, would squint his eyes in a knowing way, puff out his cheeks, and answer, “Lay o’ers ter ketch meddlers.” Yes, there was one person she was sure she could coax into telling her why her papa never came home to see them all, and that was dear, good Mam’ Sarah, the weaver. When Aunt Betsy scolded Mam’ Sarah, she would get down on the floor by Aunt Betsy and hug her tight around the knees and say, “God love you, Mistiss,” to show her she

wasn't mad at her for scolding her. That was "religion," mamma said. Aunt Betsy would cry, and say:

"Get up, Sarah, you make me ashamed of myself."

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Yes, she would go to Mam' Sarah at the loom-house. It was considered a great treat by Roberta to go down to the loom-house. That was where the wool, cotton, and flax was carded, spun, and wove, then manufactured into winter and summer clothes for the negroes on the place. Yard upon yard of beautiful red and black flannel, blue and brown linseys, and blue and white striped cottonades, for the women, jeans for the men, and that coarse fabric called tow-linen made from the refuse of flax. The wonderful counterpanes, I have mentioned before, were manufactured there and the linen for sheets and towels. Let me tell you something curious while I am on the subject of the loom-house: Roberta's grandmother raised silk-worms in the room adjoining. She fed them on mulberry leaves. Mam' Sarah told Roberta they made a noise like wind while they were feeding. Those worms spun fluffy balls of silk, called cocoons, that the old lady reeled her silk thread from. She had all the silk thread and embroidery floss she needed.

There were no silk-worms raised in Roberta's time, and the room was given up to other uses.

There was kept the huge iron mortar where the grains of corn were crushed to make the delicious hominy Kentuckians are so fond of. When rightly prepared each grain stands out like the beautiful white-plumed corn captains and colonels that dance up so gaily over beds of live coals. There were made also the tallow dips, almost the only light used in the old days on the farms in Kentucky. Pieces of cotton wick were cut the required length and fastened at regular intervals to sticks of wood. One of the rows of wicks was dipped in the melted tallow, taken out and suspended over a vessel to drip. Then another was dipped, and another, till the same process was gone through with all. That was repeated many times before the wicks held enough tallow to be used for candles. An improved method was to run the wicks through tin molds, the required size and shape, and fasten them at one end with a knot; then pour in the melted tallow, and set the molds aside for the tallow to harden. The candles were put in brass, silver, and bronze candlesticks, accompanied by quaint little waiters that held snuffers, used to nip off the charred wick, as the tallow melted away from it. Very primitive that, compared with the brilliant luminaries we have now.

Well, there were hanks of different colored yarns and strings of red peppers hanging from the ceiling of the loom-house. Great beams ran through, called "warping bars," where the various warp threads were measured and cut for the loom. There were scutchens for dressing flax, carding combs, spinning wheels, and the great wooden loom with shafts reaching almost to the ceiling.

It was prime fun for Roberta to go down to the loom-house in the long winter evenings, and, sitting down before the open fire-place, help Polly and the others card the wool in long, smooth "curls," and pile them in even layers, ready for the spinner.



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It required deft fingers, too, to gather together all the bits of wool caught on the many sharp teeth of the carding comb, and that, by working the two parts of the comb up and down, like a see-saw, then turning them over and smoothing the rolls with the back.

Those were busy days on the farms in old Kentucky, and happy days, besides. The very best days for many, both white and black. That afternoon I will tell you about especially, Mam' Sarah had a bright-colored rag carpet in the loom. There she sat, her eyes fixed intently on the pattern before her, shuttles carrying the black, red, and orange filling flying in and out under her deft, busy fingers. Many a strip of that gay filling had the little girl cut, sewed, and wrapped. Mam' Sarah raised her eyes and smiled at the child, but didn't stop working.

"Don't it tire you Mam' Sarah?" Roberta once compassionately asked.

"No, indeed, honey! Pear-lak I got sumfin' in my elbers en sumfin' in my knees that keeps on goen, sumfin' like springs. I never gits tired. I likes it."

That was the secret, Mam' Sarah liked it. One can keep on forever when one "likes it." "A merry heart goes all the day, a sad one tires in a mile."

Roberta climbed upon a stool and sat there watching Mam' Sarah. She was a nice person to watch. She had such kind eyes and such a pleasant mouth. Roberta thought Mam' Sarah's mouth was just made to say "honey." Just like a "prune" and "prism" mouth I've read of somewhere. Her skin was the color of coffee, with a little cream in it. She always wore a head-handkerchief, generally white, and one similar, folded over the bosom of her dress. Mam' Sarah was very tall, and she had the best lap in the world to coddle down in, Roberta thought.

[Illustration: *Mam' Sarah*. "Sumfin' in my elbers en knees keeps on goen. I never gits tired—I likes it."]

Presently Mam' Sarah took her foot off the treadle, went to the fire-place, lit her pipe, returned to her seat and puffed away in peaceful silence. Roberta waited for her to get through, for she knew how dearly she loved her pipe. After a little Mam' Sarah laid her pipe aside and looked at the child.

"What's de matter, honey?" she asked. "Your putty eyes full of tears. Ennybody hurt your feelens?"

The touch of sympathy coming at that tender moment, like a rose-leaf upon a full vessel of water, caused the pent-up emotion to overflow.

Roberta climbed in Mam' Sarah's lap, put her head down on her shoulder and sobbed like her heart would burst. The old woman caressed the golden head, and droned out a



quaint lullaby, accompanying it with a kind of swaying motion of her body as though soothing an infant to slumber:

“Who’s dis, who’s dis, er coddlen down here?

I spec dis iz black mammy’s gyurl;

Her skin so white iz mammy’s delite.

And her long golden ha’r in kyurl.

Shoo-oo-oo, shoo-oo-oo—

Rest, white chile, rest, on black mammy’s breast.



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“Who’s dis, who ’s dis, er coddlen down here,
Wid her eyes full of greeven’ tears?
Fru de chink of the do’, let de lite po’,
De shadders, my little gyurl skeers.
Shoo-oo-oo, shoo-oo-oo—
Rest, white chile, rest, on black mammy’s breast.

“This iz the way I useter nuss you when you wuz er baby. You wuz warken’ about fo’ you know’d who your mammy wuz. You see, your mar wuz so troubled after your par went erway, she didnen’ take no entres’ in enny thing much; po’ thing! po’ thing! You’d axel cum enter this wurl’ with out a rag ter your back, if I hadnen’ hunted up sum baby cloze your mar wo’, en git em ready.”

“What made my papa go away, Mam’ Sarah?” asked the child, quickly.

“I dunno fur sarten, honey, wot did make him go erway. You see, he wuzen’ lak our fo’ks. Cum from the Norf. Pear-lak he cudnen’ take ter our ways, sumhow. Mars Robert was razed in town, en he didnen’ lak it out here in the country. I heered him say he wuz so tired of the country, hee’d be glad never ter see another blade of grass grow. Mis Betsy tho’t that was orful. He wuz allers arfter your mar ter sell all of us, en sell the place en go Norf with him ter live. Sumhow he didnen’ lak culured peepel ter wate on him. Jes lak hees sister, who cum down here to visit Mis July, en bro’t her little gal with her. When enny of us wud go ni the child, shee’d draw bak en say, ‘och-y,’ jes lak our black skins wuz nasty. She seed Judy with her hans en the biskit do’, and she wuden’ eat the biskits. She said the blak rubbed orf in ’em. Shee’d never heered of worfles ’til she cum out here, en she wuden’ tech ’em, cors she tho’t we made the holes in em with our fingers. Yer mar felt mity bad cors de chile wuden’ eat nuffin’, for she wuz a po’ little wite-face thing ennyhow.

“Well, you wanten know erbout your par en your mar. It ain’ nuffin’ but natchel, en I’ll tell you the best I know how. One day I wuz cleneen’ your mar’s room. Your par en your mar wuz en de setten’ room, en I heered him say:

“‘It’s only a qeshun of er little time, en they’ll all be free. Sell ’em now wile you kin en put the money en your pocket. Ef you wate, they’ll be er dead loss ter you. You made one fulis mistake en not selling Squire; don’t make another.’

“Lemme tell you wot he mean by that, honey. Squire’s mammy, Free Fanny, cum down here fum the city, en tried ter buy Squire fum yer mar. She orfered her er big price fur Squire; she wuz rich, en mity keen ter git her unly son. But Squire, he jes’ went on so, got down on his knees ter your mar en begged her not to sell him ter his mammy. Axel cried, en got your mar ter cryen’, en Mis Betsy en Mars Charley. You never seed enny thin’ lak et. En your mar tole Free Fanny she wud leave it with Squire, en do jes’ ez he

sed. Yer par wuz jes' out-dun. Pear-lak he cuden' git over your mar payen' mo' tenshun
ter Squire then ter him.



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"I nerver know'd why Squire didn't want your mar ter sell him ter hees own mammy. It looked unnatchel. Free Fanny, that's hees mammy, wuz mity rich, en owned six colored people hersef. Shee's liven' yet en the city, en when she dies Squire will get her money.

"Well, when yer par sed that, your mar sed:

"I cuden' sell them ef I wanten; you know that, Robert, en I don' wanten.'

"Then your par, he spoke up sharp:

"It's nonsense, it's wuss than nonsense fur the liven' ter be so bound by the dead. Sarcumstances are allers changen'. I say you've got no rite ter think of everbody fo' you duz me. En its jes' cum ter this pass, you've got ter chuse twixt them en me. You've got ter sell 'em en sell this place en go with me, war I kin make the liven' I wuz eddiketed for, or I'll brake luse mysef, en go. I can't stan' this life no longer.'

"Then your mar sed:

"I wud be miserbel, Robert, ef I broke my father's will. It would kill me, I do believe. Besides, I wuden' sell em, ef I didn' have er cent ter buy er crust of braid with, even ef I wuzen' boun' by the will. En ez fur sellen' this place, war I wuz born'd en raze, I never spec' ter. I wan'er live en die rite here. Besides, there's Aunt Betsy. She wud never consent ter go away fum here, en I cuden' leave her by hersef.'

"Yer par git up then, en slam the do, 'en I never heerd no mo'. 'Twuz the fus' out-en-out quarrel they ever had; but they had menny er one arfter that. Pear-lak one led ter ernuther; en thar wuz nobody ter take hold en help. Mis Betsy wud pitch in en say things that made 'em madder en madder. Well, one mawnen' early, Squire went ter the stable ter feed, en he sed Mars Robert dun took the horses en buggy, en er wagin fur hees trunk, en gorn. Erbout dinner time the men cum bak with the buggy en wagin, but no Mars Robert. Fum that day ter this he never cum bak."

"Did he never write to mamma?" asked the child, her cheeks burning.

"I berleeve he did, unct; sent her sum money or sumfin'. I heered Mis Betsy say, 'Put it en bank fur your unborn'd chile,' en your mar sed, 'I don' want it; I have enuff.'

"Tempers iz er mity bad thing, honey," continued Mam' Sarah. "Now, I don' mean that nasty sperit that makes er dog snap hees teef at you, cors your mar en par never had no temper lak dat, chile. Mo' lak spile chillen, that dun had ther way so long they cuden' give in, speshly your par. If your par hadn' gorn so fur erway, your mar en him wud made up when you cum. Chillens teeches fo'ks er heep. But you see, honey, they never had no chance ter make up. My ole man en me haz menny ups en downs. Sumhow, when he gits sick, or I haz ter do sumfin' fur him, I furgit erbout bein' mad at him.



“Pear-lak, ter me, honey, en I’ve stidded on it er heep, the mo’ you do fur fo’ks the better you laks ’em. ’Twud bin the same with your mar en your par, ef your par hadn’ gorn so fur away. When you marry, honey, you marry one of the nabor boys.”



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"I never mean to marry anybody," said Roberta, getting down from Mam' Sarah's lap, and shaking out the creases in her muslin dress. She was a dainty creature. "I am going to be an old maid and take care of mamma. May be I can make her laugh and sing, after a while, like Aunt Betsy says she used to. I'll never leave her, never, never. And then there's Aunt Betsy to take care of, and you, and Aunt Judy and all."

"Bless your sweet mouf. But we've gotter die fo' long, honey, en be put erway in the cold groun' fur the wurms ter make meals of; sum of us cheaten' the grave rite now. What iz you gwiner do then, honey?"

"Then," said the child, and her face was sober indeed, "when that comes to pass I shall be very, very sorry for a long time; but I will try to make others happy, as mamma does, and may be that will comfort me a little. I will get all the little girls together, like me, that haven't got any papas and mammas, and all the little hunchback darkies like Dilsy, and all the sorrowful people like mamma, and I'll love 'em and take care of 'em until the angel comes for us, the angel that God sends."

Thus the years rolled by until the war came. Peaceful, happy years they were to Roberta on the old farm; golden years, in which the child's character grew and strengthened, with no unkindly influence to warp it, and her nature, it seemed, became more responsive all the time to the love that was lavished upon her.

Mam' Sarah told Roberta that she was going down to the tobacco fields, early Sad-day morning, July 4, '63, and Roberta coaxed her mamma to let she and Polly and Dilsy go with her. Although Federal cannon were planted along the bluff overlooking Green River, their presence occasioned no especial uneasiness, nor suspicion of impending warfare. Mrs. Marsden as well as everybody else had grown accustomed to them. Almost during the entire civil war that point was thought important on account of the bridge; army stores were constantly shipped South that way.

So the three children started off, merry as larks, with their trusty companion.

On either side of the turnpike road were green fields flushed with light. The morning air stirred about them, redolent in sweet scents and attuned with the many voices of summer. They heard the drowsy hum of bees; and butterflies were there, thick as motes in the midday sun. Roberta's observant, nature-loving eyes roved delightedly from one point to another of the sunny landscape, while she repeated gaily to Mam' Sarah a little couplet. The child's memory was stored with quaint rhymes:

"A country lane between fields of clover
Rippling in sunshine over and over.
There the whirl of gay revelrie,
Butterflies waltzing mad with glee,
Honey-bees, powdered in dust of gold,

Chassezing around like gay knights of old,
Clad in silken doublet and hose;
Lookout, lookout, if you tread on their toes.”

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Suddenly Polly broke away, pulled up an iron-weed growing on the road-side, and fell to whipping a large purple thistle. Her thirst grew; she left the thistle and fell to whipping the rank grass. Then was heard an angry buzz, as the assaulted bees swarmed out of their defenses and literally stormed her.

They settled all over her. Head, face, bare feet and legs were attacked all at once. They stung her terribly. The death of their comrade was summarily avenged. She rent the air with her cries, and backed toward Mam' Sarah, fighting them off as she went from different parts of her body. Mam' Sarah covered up her retreat as well as she could, saying:

"I natchel hate ter see fo'ks in trubble, but I ain' er bit sorry fur you. I never seed ennybody fo' that wuz allers on the war-paf. Them bees haden' dun nuffin' ter you. They is prezak lak humans. Ef you let 'em erlone you won't hear from 'em; but fite 'em en they'll fite you back, ever time."

At the same time that Mam' Sarah and Roberta were fussing over Polly, a line of glittering points were coming up the rise near the bend of the river. A column of Confederate soldiers appeared, marching shoulder to shoulder, their arms shining in the morning sun. On they came, crossing the fields with the springing step of hope and the steady step of high, dauntless courage, making directly for the works the Federals had thrown up and protected with the bodies of felled trees.

Well-nigh impregnable, those works, from their vast advantage of position, but in their line of march it was the policy of their leaders to fight every thing of like nature that came in the way, to hide, if possible, their real weakness in numbers. So they were told to take those works, and take them they would. Knowing not the hesitancy of doubt, nor the trammels of fear, what recked they of danger or of death, as they sprung to their work?

Alas! the awful death-trap that caught them, held them, while that deadly fusilade opened upon them, reddened with their warm, young blood the soil of their native State—mowed them down, ruthlessly, those hapless Kentuckians. For ruthless it ever seems, when youth and hope and glorious promise are offered in vain. At last they fell back, the living; what flesh and blood could do otherwise? Fell back, but undismayed, and fighting stubbornly inch by inch, as they bore off their wounded. O, those darlings of old Kentucky! whose light went out on that July morning nearly thirty years ago, those eager souls that God sealed with His eternal peace ere aught had ruffled them, other than the zest of a hurdle-race or quail hunt on their native bluegrass; many of them scarce passed the mile-stones of boyhood, fresh from the classroom and tender home circle. Yet, they plunged into the awful fire of that needless sacrifice, like veterans, to whom the smoke and crash of charging squadrons is a pastime.



No braver souls than they ever perished; none more loyal to the land that gave them birth. Well may Kentucky embalm their worth in enduring tablets of brass and marble. Let her see to it that she keeps their memory green in her heart, for they loved her with a love passing the love of woman.



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When Mam' Sarah heard the firing she caught hold of Roberta's hand and started to run, calling on the others to follow. She heard voices shouting to her, in reality the voices of the negroes who had gone down to the tobacco fields, calling to her to turn back. But, in her excitement she thought they were war cries, and ran as fast as she could away from them.

"Let's go to the play-house under the hill, Mam' Sarah," said quick-witted Roberta.

That play-house was a rocky recess, once the bed of some subterranean stream, and protected from view by a sycamore's gnarled, knotted branches extending down, and hung with matted wild grape tendrils. Mam' Sarah had often gone down there and spread her linen on the grass to bleach, and she generally took the children along for company. That's how they happened to find out the rocky recess or cave, for it ran under the hill a considerable distance. They hadn't been in there long before a shadow darkened the entrance to the recess. A figure crept toward them with the muzzle of a gun pointing straight at them.

"O, don't shoot!" they cried in terror.

"I won't," responded a boyish voice, and when their tears subsided they saw it was a mere lad, wounded and bleeding.

"Are you much hurt?" asked Roberta.

"O, no; just a scratch."

His chin fell on his chest. A dry sob burst from him.

"I wish now I had been killed with the rest of 'em."

"Have you got a mother?" Roberta asked.

"Yes, I've got a mother; but what will she say when I tell her I left Bert lying yonder in that death-trap? That's what's the matter. I wanted to find Bert and take him away with me. I hunted for him all along among those trees, and I got cut off from our boys. I think I must have lost my head, for I forgot which way they went."

"Who is Bert?" asked Roberta.

"Bert was my brother, and the best boy that ever lived. Curse them!" he cried, shaking his clenched fist; "curse the Yankees. What right have they on Kentucky soil, anyhow?"

"O, don't curse them," said the child; "my papa is a Yankee."



“Is he?” He stopped short and looked at her with a kind of pity. “I am sorry for you, that’s all; sorry from my heart. I’d rather be a negro trader.”

“I’m sorry too,” said Roberta. There was a droop about the corners of her mouth. “But don’t you worry about your brother. Mam’ Sarah and me will find him and do all we can for him.”

“Will you?” said the hoy eagerly; “will you, really? O! that will be too kind for any thing. I can never forget it, never.”

“But how am I to know him? Is he like you?”

“Yes, he is like me; we were twins; but ten million times better looking. He looked like an angel, as he is, as he is.”

Great throes convulsed his chest in his efforts to control himself.

“I don’t want to be a baby, but I was never away from Bert a day in my life. Say, I can tell you how to know him. He has a picture of mother and a Testament in his pocket, with his name written on the fly-leaf, ‘Albert Kurl.’”



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“Well, we will find him,” said Roberta.

There was a whispered consultation between the three, Mam’ Sarah, Roberta and the soldier. It seemed entirely satisfactory. And then Mam’ Sarah told Roberta they must hurry home on account of her mammy. “We kin cum back, honey, en find him.”

And come back they did. They found him and washed the blood away from the poor mangled features, straightening out the twisted limbs as well as they could. Roberta took charge of the little pocket Bible with his name written on the fly-leaf, and the picture of his mother, such a stately, beautiful lady. Albert Kurl’s body was not the only one they looked for. Mam’ Sarah’s tears fell like rain, as she went from one to another searching for curly-haired Mars Charley, the little boy she nursed. She would have known him, she was sure, no matter how he looked. But, thank God, he was not there. She remembered so well the morning he rode off on his prancing horse, with the bands playing Dixie.

“Charlie,” called Aunt Betsy, “take this Bible with you.”

“O Auntie,” laughed the merry young fellow, “I can’t, but I’ll promise to say, ‘Now I lay me down to sleep’ every night.”

“O, what duz make fo’ks git so mad with ech other?” said Mam’ Sarah. “It will all cum rite, if they’ll only hol’ back en trust God.”

Just before tea, Roberta ran down to uncle Squire’s cabin, on the hill back of the spring-house. She told him she had a secret for his ears alone, made him look under the bed, the cup-board, chairs, and every place, to be sure there were no eaves-droppers. Then she sat down on a stool and slid it along towards him. He edged his chair a little closer towards her, so by the time she began her communication their heads almost touched. It was comical to see the old man’s various facial expressions while the child talked. He would squint his eyes like he was trying to sight something away ahead of him, puffed out his cheeks till they resembled an inflated bellows. Finally, slapped his thigh vigorously, blurting out, “You iz er sharp one, Lil Misus, you won’ never ’go fru er thicket en pick up er ‘oop-pole’, he-he-he.”

“Can you manage it for me, Uncle Squire?” asked the child anxiously.

“Ob cose I kin, Lil Misus, ob cose I kin. Squire’s your man.”

“O, you dear, good, Uncle Squire,” cried the delighted child. “I feel like hugging you.”

The old man twisted around in his seat and went through his facial pantomimes again, pretty much on the principle of a dog wagging his tail when he is fed.



Roberta was feeding him with the daintiest of food, the nectar of the gods to all of us, old and young, high and low.

Although it was July, there was a bed of glowing embers on the stone hearth, where Uncle Squire was cooking his supper. He liked the independence of it. A pot of steaming coffee stood close beside the fire, slices of middling meat were broiling on the coals, and an ash cake slowly browning. He nodded his head toward them, on hospitable thoughts intent.



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“Iz you hongry, Lil Missus?”

“Well, I believe I am, rather, Uncle Squire, and your supper looks nice, but I think I will save myself for Aunt Judy’s waffles. I took her a basketful of fresh eggs, and she promised me some waffles and scrambled eggs. You know I adore waffles and scrambled eggs, Uncle Squire.”

Suddenly the child burst into a ringing peal of laughter. Something very funny was evidently suggested by the eggs.

“O, Uncle Squire,” she cried, “did I tell you how I got the best of Jemimy at last?”

“Iz dat de hen dat’s been so bobstreperous, you bin tellen’ me erbout, Lil Missus?”

“The very same, Uncle Squire. O ’twas nice, the way I managed her yesterday. I let all of the good hens out, and I said, ‘Jemimy, you’ve got to stay in. You haven’t been doing your duty lately at all. I am just ashamed of you. You will ruin your reputation. People will stop coming here to get your eggs to set with.’ Aunt Betsy says, ‘Jemimy, A bird that can sing, and wont sing, ought to be made to sing, and I am going to do my duty by you. I am just going to keep you in here until you get in the habit, the habit, you hear, Jemimy, of laying one egg a day.’ You know, Uncle Squire, habit is every thing. Jemimy cackled, just like she was going right at it. But I said, ‘No, Jemimy, you’ve fooled me before.’ Then she ruffled up her feathers and flew around, determined to get out. I was firm with her, Uncle Squire, and wouldn’t let her out. This evening I went there and found two beautiful eggs, fresh laid, in her nest.”

“You iz er sharp one, Lil Missus; I allers sed it. Who’d s’poze now you cud make dat hen underston’ lak er human creeter, dat she gotter turn over er new leaf en do better. Pear-lak, sum chillen’s born’d en de wurl’ now-er-days wid ez much sense ez grow’d-up fo’ks.”

As they sat there a rumble of thunder was heard. Roberta listened intently: “‘Tater wagens, Uncle Squire, *big* ’tater wagens, rumbling over the bridge.”

“Yes, Lil Missus, it’s comen’. En de stormier ’tis, en de darker ’tis, de better fur him en me.”

That night about nine o’clock Mrs. Marsden heard a low but distinct rap on the shutters of the sitting-room window opening on the porch. She happened to be there alone. It startled her for an instant, but she soon recovered composure and asked:

“Who is it?”

“A friend,” was the reply.



“What do you want”

“Shelter for a few hours, a bite to eat, and—I will tell you more anon.”

“These are dreadful times, and I am not in the habit of taking strangers in at this hour of the night.”

“All right,” said he on the outside; then added with the glibness of a Fourth of July stump speaker, “that is, if you can reconcile it with your conscience to turn the cold shoulder on a fellow being in the desperate strait I am in.”

“Where did you come from?” was next asked.



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“From those who are wandering up and down the earth, seeking how they may devour me.”

“Where are you going to?”

“Destination unknown. Depends somewhat on yourself.”

Without another word, Mrs. Marsden turned the lamp down low, and hurried towards the front hall door.

“Take a light with you, Julia,” called Aunt Betsy, from the bed-room adjoining.

“Not for the world, Auntie.”

Her acute ear had caught the tramp of horses' hoofs coming through the avenue. When she opened the door, a tall man dressed in the Federal uniform stood outside, his hair disheveled by wind, and face shining with dashes of rain. She locked and bolted the door after him, and led the way to the dining-room, where Roberta sat playing “checkers” with a boyish-looking soldier, also dressed in Federal uniform.

“Give this gentleman some cake and wine, dear,” she said to Roberta, “and entertain him until I return; and you,” to the other soldier, “go outside for a little; Squire will show you where to go.”

Her surmises were correct. Heavy spurred boot-heels crossed the porch floor; there was a thundering knock with the butt-end of a riding-whip on the outside of the door.

Inwardly quaking, and strengthening herself with silent prayer, she opened the door. A squad of Federal soldiers stood before her. One of them lifted his hat, and said courteously:

“We have come with authority from headquarters to search your house, Madam; we understand you are harboring rebels.”

“You are at liberty to search my house,” she answered in a clear, penetrating voice. “You will find some women and children, and one of your cloth, here.”

They searched sitting-room, bed-room, and passed into the dining-room; saw a brother Federal there partaking of light refreshments; were pleasantly accosted by him, and told he belonged to Company G, of Colonel M.'s Michigan volunteers; had been sick and was out on furlough at the house of a friend. One of them, a social kind of fellow, lingered on the threshold, amused at the badinage passing between the soldier and the beautiful child.



“Oh, no, you are not a rebel,” the soldier was saying, “you can’t make me believe that; you’ve got too honest a face to be a rebel. Now, just confess you are glad of the drubbing our boys gave ’em this morning.”

“No, I’m not glad;” said Roberta, her eyes were filling with tears and her lips quivering, “I’m just as sorry as I can be.”

“Well, then, I’ll tell you what I expect the trouble is. You’ve got a sweetheart among them; and if I was you, I’d trade him off for a Union sweetheart right away.”

“I don’t want any sweetheart at all; but if I wanted one I wouldn’t have a Yankee.” Her eyes flashed and her cheeks crimsoned.

“Why not?” continued her tormentor. “They are lots nicer than the rebels; have more to eat, and wear better clothes. Besides, didn’t the rebels steal your mamma’s best horses, the last time they passed this way, and leave her nothing but two starved, broken-down nags in their place? Didn’t they, now?”



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“Yes,” the child was reluctantly forced to admit. Suddenly her face brightened; she almost trembled with eagerness. “Who stole my mamma’s negroes, I wonder; every one of them but Mam’ Sarah, and Aunt Judy, and Uncle Squire, and Polly and Dilsy—every one; who did that?”

That sally provoked such a peal of laughter and put everybody in such a good humor, possibly the search was not prosecuted as vigorously as it might have been otherwise.

The next morning about sunrise two Federal soldiers sat on their horses before Mrs. Marsden’s front door. The family were assembled on the porch. They were always early risers, and their being up a little earlier than usual would have caused no comment. Possibly the leave-taking might have seemed a little queer to prying eyes.

“Take care of my gun,” the youngest-looking of the soldiers whispered to Roberta, “and if I live, I’ll come back before long and get it.”

“Will you?” said the child, delightedly. “Then I’ll take care of it, sure.” An instant afterwards added, with the serio-comic imitation of the fire of older tongues, so common at that time, “They will have to walk over my dead body before they take it from me.”

As the soldiers rode through the avenue the murkiness overhead cleared, and shafts of clear gold fell earthward; each blade of grass sparkled like a diamond, and tiny globules hung from the leaves of the trees, reflecting countless dazzling prisms of light. A lark started up from the high grass of the meadow, and soared aloft, dropping soft trills and quavers and clear, fresh warbles from his happy little throat. Just outside of the avenue gate they met a line of milch-cows en route for the “cuppen.” They moved swiftly as though there was purpose in their movements, and glanced about with eager eyes. Slender streams of milk flowed from their swollen teats, and marked their passage along the road-side. In barnyards near calves were waiting, frantic to get at those same swollen teats. The black boy who had them in charge opened the avenue gate for them, then stood and looked after the soldiers, the very embodiment of shrewd, impish humor. Hands burrowing in his pockets; his body, from the waist up, thrown back; his mouth stretched in a broad grin, and indeed every feature replete with fun. When they passed out of ear-shot, he put his thumb on the end of his nose, and bawled out: “It’s all in my eye, Betty Martin,” and wound up by turning somersaults on the grass by the roadside.

Later on the sun glared like a great ball of brass. Anon a light breeze sprung up with a breath of moisture in it.

“That’s good,” said the oldest soldier, taking off his cap and baring his forehead to it; “that’s good. ’Twill make more bearable the rays of yonder heater.”



Their bodies were refreshed and spirits hopeful in proportion. They did not converse much; seemed to be taken up with noting the country, as though comparing it with some memoranda retained in recollection only. They were evidently strangers to that locality, for they relied for direction upon milestones and the sign-posts that appeared at intersecting roads. At last, when they had passed over about ten miles, they came to an Irishman beating rock by the roadside.



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The oldest of the travelers was accustomed to read the countenance, for he was bred a lawyer, and gave up a large practice in criminal courts to join the army. He observed a shrewdness in the Irishman's countenance that he thought might possibly be of service; but it was a delicate matter to get at in those times, when one might well be afraid often of the members of one's own household.

"Good morning," he finally said.

"Good morning to ye," the Irishman responded without raising his eyes from his rock pile.

"Have you heard the news?" was next asked.

"Faith, an' so much of it flies here and there, if a mon lets all of it roost, 'twill stale his pace of mind like the thaving crows stale his corn."

"What I mean is, the fight yesterday at Green River bridge. Ar'n't you glad of the drubbing our boys gave the rebels? There's many a mother's son of them lying in those green bottom lands there, that the morning's reveille will never awaken more."

The face of the youngest soldier was turned away. His eyelashes were wet, and his teeth gnawed his under lip. Once he drew his coat sleeve across his eyes, and once he looked as if the conversation had become unbearable, almost.

"Weel, an' when it comes to that, I am the last man to be glad at the death of a sinner, an' I take it, many a sinner handed in his checks there yistiddy."

After a few general remarks the soldiers rode on. When they had gone about three hundred yards they stopped, held a brief consultation, and finally returned. The oldest man, who seemed to be the speaker, said:

"We have been struck with your answers to our questions, and have come back to confide to you our situation and ask your aid. We are not," he continued, "what we seem to be."

"If ye are not what ye seem to be, what are ye?"

"We are escaped rebel prisoners trying to make our way south. At least I am, and that young fellow there was in this fight yesterday and got cut off from his command. We believe you are a friend to our cause, and we must have your advice and aid, for we are here without knowledge of people or country."

"Well," said the Irishman, "if ye are decaving me the sin is all yer own. If ye be honest an' true men, follow my advice and all will be well. I live just two miles up the road, the first white frame house on the left hand side of the road, with a barn in front of it. The



country is full of spies, an' you must be careful. Just ye ride up where I live, get off your horses and go in. Make my wife take the horses to the stable and feed 'em. Then order your dinner, an' when you've eaten it, drive the wimmen and children out of the house and raise the divil ginerilly."

The soldiers went on, and the Irishman resumed his work. In less than an hour a neighbor rode up in hot haste, told him the Yankees had taken possession of his house and driven wife and children into the road.



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"Ye say they have?" responded he, laying down his hammer and serenely lighting his pipe.

"Yes, yes! come on and do something for your family."

"Holy saints and angels, defend us! What kin I do? It's not me all by meself, neighbor, that kin whip out the whole Yankee army. Gineril Lee an' Stonewall Jackson have been thrying it for some time, an' faith, if they can't, how kin I?"

The dismayed messenger returned to report to the excited wife and children that the husband and father would do nothing for them. Again and again was a messenger sent, but to no purpose. The Irishman sat and plied his hammer to his rocks in serene quiet.

About four in the afternoon a rockaway drove up, stopped a few yards away, and a lady got out, accompanied by a little girl, and approached the man at the rock-pile. They were Mrs. Marsden and Roberta.

"May I ask," said the lady hesitatingly, "if two soldiers dressed in Federal uniform have passed here this morning; and how long since? The reason I ask is this, a flying rumor has reached me that two soldiers wearing the Federal uniform were arrested not far from here and carried to headquarters as Confederate spies."

"Faith, an' the shoe is on the other foot intirely, madam. It's meself that's been arristed, or it amounts to about the same thing. Them same soldiers you ax about have taken possession of my house, driv my wife an' childers out of doors, and raised the devil ginerilly."

"O! I am so sorry to hear it," answered Mrs. Marsden. Then noticing a sly twinkle in the man's eyes, utterly out of keeping with his words, the quick-witted woman instantly caught on to the "cue."

"O! Mr. McGarvy!" she cried, "for you are Mr. McGarvy, ar'n't you? I might have known you would have helped them to carry out the blind, if they came anywhere near you; but I thought they were going a different way."

She added, admiration kindling her features as she looked at him, "I don't believe there is another man in Kentucky, sharp enough to conceive of such a blind, or self-sacrificing enough to carry it out, and may God bless you."

She turned away, her beautiful eyes filled with tears.

At sundown Mr. McGarvy hitched his horse to his cart, lit his pipe, and jolted slowly homeward. His wife and children were still in the road, and the soldiers still had possession of the house.



“I would not have believed it, Jim McGarvy,” cried his wife, her bosom panting with rage, “not if the Holy Mither of God had tould me.”

“Have they hurt you, Rosy, darlint?”

“Not them, Jim McGarvy. They have been civil spoke enough. It’s you that’s hurt me—you that have gone back on the wife of your bosom an’ your own flesh an’ blood.”

“Whisht, Rosy, darlint, whisht.” He got as close to her as circumstances would allow.

“Them soldiers are our own boys, who are trying to make their way south, I’ve jis’ had them do all that for a blind, jis’ for a blind, the poor fellers. Sure, an’ you know, Rosy, darlint, that Jim McGarvy is a spotted man, an’ the very first one in these parts that the inimy would go for.”



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Wondrous the transformation.

“Is that throe?” she cried, with beaming face, forgetting already the day’s worry, “are they rally our own boys? Sure, an’ it’s a dolt I am, not to know what the tallest one meant when he whispered to me:

“When the South is free, I am for Jim McGarvy for any office he wants.”

“Whisht, Rosy, darlint, birds of the air carry tidings; but come along now and get us a hot supper, and a good one too to stay our stomachs, for I’ve got to carry the boys further on their way to-night, the holy Mither of God bless ’em!”

Now I am going to tell you how Roberta kept her promise about taking care of the soldier boy’s gun. Not many weeks after that memorable Fourth, Squire came home in great excitement, saying the soldiers were searching every house for contraband articles, and soon would be at theirs.

“I should be very sorry,” said Mrs. Marsden, “to have to give up the suit of gray jeans I’ve made for Charlie and the dear boy’s boots.”

“You won’t have to give them up, mamma,” responded Roberta, who had lain awake night after night, planning what she should do in the event the soldiers came after them. Now what do you suppose she did? Pushed boots and clothes to the very bottom of the flour-barrel under the flour. Not even our own Yankee Bligh could have detected their whereabouts. Then she dressed the gun up in baby clothes, with long white robe and cloak and pretty baby cap; tied a veil over the cap. When she was through, it really looked very much like a baby. She gave the gun to Polly, and told her to walk up and down the porch with it and sing a lullaby. Polly didn’t like counterfeit babies any more than she liked real babies.

“Lawdy! Lawdy! Lawdy!” said Polly, “iz you rite sho’, Lil Missus, thar ain’ nuffin’ in it that’s gwiner blow my head orf?”

“Right sure, Polly. Uncle Squire cleaned it out yesterday.”

“O, Lawdy, Lawdy, Lawdy! I dunno howter ketch on ter de creeter, nohow. I’d redder nuss real live babies, I wud.”

“Be a good girl, Polly. Take hold this way. Now sing:

“Dear little baby, shut your eyes,
Stars are shining in the skies;
Soon an angel will at you peep,
Whisper to you while you sleep.
Dear little baby, what do you hear?”



Mamma's voice, sweet and clear.
Why, mamma's the angel, baby dear."

"I dunno it; I never heered it."

"Be a good girl, Polly, and I will give you my new China tea-set."

"I don' like cheeny dishes, caze I have ter wash 'em when dey gets dirty. I'd redder eat orf chips en frow 'em erway."

"Well, then, I'll give you the pretty colored paper dolls I cut out of Godey's Lady's Book; any thing, just so you make believe it's a real live baby. Sing this, then:

"Folks, won't you go? Folks, won't you go?
Folks, won't you go to see the monkey show?"



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“You know it, Polly; I heard you singing it yesterday.”

(The soldiers were coming up the avenue.)

“The royal tiger will be there,
The ring-tailed monkey
And the polar bear;
The royal tiger will be there,” *etc.*

“I’ll cross my heart, I dunno it. I natchelly ’spize babies, ennyhow. If I wuz er blue-gum nigger, I’d bite ’em,” said Polly, showing her teeth viciously.

“Well, then,” said Roberta in desperation, “I’ll give you my red sash that you think so pretty; I will indeed.”

That did the work; Polly’s love of finery was intense. She began to sing in a surly tone, that straightened out as visions suggested by the song flitted before her. The circus was her delight.

If the soldiers, in passing, noticed the incongruous lullaby, they made no comment. Possibly, they were not family men.

They went through the house; pushed their bayonets in the mattresses, lifted them up and looked underneath; searched every nook and corner below stairs, then tramped up. Roberta called to Polly:

“Is the baby asleep, Polly?”

“No; yes. Lawdy, Lawdy! I’ze gwiner drap it, sho’; it’s sliden’.”

Roberta looked through the window at the counterfeit baby; she flew out on the porch, took it away from the awkward nurse, saying:

“You will never make a nurse, Polly; there’s no use trying to teach you;” carried it in and laid it on the dismantled bed, just in time to prevent the drapery from slipping off and exposing the shining metal. She darkened the room, and sat there patting it and singing to it till the search was over and the soldiers gone. Then the child put her head in her mamma’s lap, and sobbed from pure nervousness. But she had kept her promise, the loyal little soul. In years to come, she made and kept another promise, that the first one led to, as links in a chain.

In the muddy back yard Polly was strutting, proud as a peacock, in her scarlet sash. The ends swept the ground, and she glanced back over her shoulder at them every step. Roberta burst out laughing, Polly looked so ridiculous.



“O, Mamma!” she said, “do call Polly in and sing to her about—

“The little girl that was so vain,
Strutting up a dirty lane,
With mamma’s best dress for a train,
O, fie, fie, fie! O, fie, fie, fie!
She’d better sweep cob-webs from the sky;
She’d better bake, she’d better stew,
She’d better knit, she’d better sew;
O, fie, fie, fie! O, fie, fie, fie!
The little girl put her finger in her eye,
Looked down at her shoe, and said ‘boo-oo.’”

Now I am going to tell you how the soldier boy kept his promise.



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Old Squire had loaded a wagon with pumpkins, golden-brown russet apples, and splendid potatoes to take into town, a few miles off. He promised to give the children a lift as far as the forks of the road. Roberta coaxed Aunt Judy to fix her a nice lunch. They wanted to gather wild grapes and nuts in the woods and have a tea-party besides. Aunt Judy fried her some spiced apple turnovers, made beaten biscuits, crisp and brown, split them while they were hot, buttered them, and put thin slices of pink ham between. Then she got at least one half of an iced white mountain cake, left from Sunday, and packed that in with the other things. Little did Roberta suspect who would eat that lunch, and think it the best lunch ever eaten.

It was good; Aunt Judy knew all about fixing lunches. She was a great “Camp-meeting” woman.

Roberta took up the basket and flew out to the wood-pile, where Uncle Squire was cutting wood. He saw her coming, and called out:

“Look out, honey! chips iz mity keerless things, you never know when they gwiner fly at you, like some fo’ks I knows.”

“Old man,” called Judy from the kitchen, “that ash-hopper is plum dry. Don’ forgit ter put some water in it fo’ you goze.”

“Dat ash-hopper allers iz dry. It’s like me since Mars Charlie’s bin gorn. Judy,” he called out again, with a mighty bravado of voice, “I am got no time ter be fillin’ dat ash-hopper fo’ I goze, you knows dat.”

“I can wait, Uncle Squire,” said the child, always willing to make peace at any cost to her own convenience.

“‘Twon’ take no mo’ dan er minit to fill it up, honey, I got de water ready. I jes’ wanter show her I wuzen’ gwiner be bullied inter it.”

The children thought it was prime fun to be jostled along in the wagon with the pumpkins and potatoes. Inconveniences in youth are diversions only. One seeks them.

If the children who read this story have never seen our glorious Kentucky woods in October, they can have but faint idea of its beauty. It is just like some vast cathedral—aisle upon aisle opening before one, columned and gorgeous beyond description, in infinite variety of tint, shaded from blood-red to pink, from orange to tawny yellow, from golden russet-brown to more delicate wood-colors.

Under foot is a tessellated floor, mosaiced with the same gorgeous colors. From every quarter is wafted herby odors. Here and there one comes to trees whose leaves are all a vivid glowing crimson. You can’t imagine any thing more beautiful when the light shines through them. Through openings in the columned aisles one sees fields steeped

in golden glamour, where float feathery tufts of down. There also linger a few late golden-rods, and butterflies with limbs chilled by the crisp air.



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Later on those same meadows are enveloped morn and eve in veils of floating white mist; the golden-rod is gone; the butterflies lie in their shroud; but grape-vines are loaded with rich purple clusters, ripened by the frost. The beautiful persimmon trees glow with luscious fruit. Roberta's mother used to gather the persimmon apples and pack them away in glass jars, in alternate layers of fruit and sugar. They are as nice as dates. Wherever you turn the ground is covered with nuts—hickories, walnuts, and chestnuts. You can hear them “drop” every few seconds. Sometimes I think our Kentucky woods were made for children.

That afternoon I am going to tell you about, when the forks of the road were reached, Squire lifted the children down, cautioning them against lingering too late, mounted his wagon and was about starting when there appeared a little ahead two horsemen riding abreast and coming directly toward the children. They were dressed in gray, and sat their horses with the air of “Charlie has come to his own again,” softly singing snatches of “My Old Kentucky Home.” Roberta could hardly believe her eyes.

“O, Uncle Squire, it's the rebels, it's the rebels!”

“Yes, it's 'pintly dem,” he answered, a broad grin overspreading his face.

When they came up with the children they drew rein, and one of them reached out his hand to Roberta. It was the soldier boy.

“Have you come for your gun?” asked she.

[Illustration: “Have you come for your gun?” the child asked. “Yes, and to see you,” was the reply.]

“Yes, and to see you.”

The child had no coquetry in her nature, else would have noticed the earnest look in the boy's brown eyes that accompanied his significantly spoken words. As it was, she only smiled and said:

“Well, I kept it for you; and are you as hungry as you were that night?”

“Well, yes, I reckon so. Soldiers generally are; at least our boys are. But why do you ask? I wanted you to forget how many beat biscuits I ate.”

“Because I've got a nice lunch here that I will give you. Aunt Judy fixed it up for me to have a tea party in the woods.”

“Who were you going to have at your tea party—Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox?”



“No, indeed,” said the child, a fine scorn kindling her features; “no, indeed. We were going to have General Morgan and Uncle Charlie and you. Of course it was make-believe. That’s the way we play, but we like it ever so much.”

“Well, if I take your chicken fixings you can’t have any tea party.”

“O yes, I can. I can just make-believe some hungry soldier has come along and eaten it all up.”

“There is no make-believe about that,” laughed the soldier; “that’s real.”

There was a smothered sound in the direction of Polly. The boy turned toward her, evidently seeing her for the first time.

“What’s the matter with you, tar baby?”



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“I wuz gwiner tell you erbout de time de Union sojer stole Miss Betsy’s bee-hives, en he wuz dat hongry he pitch en ter de honey fo’ de bees got out, en one git en hees frote en stung him; Lawdy, how he hollered! But I won’t, cors you called me tar baby.”

“I beg your pardon, I meant no offense. I just have an unfortunate habit of calling things by their names. I am like the hungry old lady who sung:

“Alack-alack, alack-alack!
A dinner’s a dinner, a snack’s a snack.
I can call them none other, alack-alack!”

“But I think I have gotten the gist of your story from the preamble; so am not inconsolable. Anyhow,” he turned to Roberta, “if you wait here a little you can have a sure-enough General Morgan and Uncle Charlie at your tea party. They are just behind. Only, if they are as hungry as I am, I don’t know how they will like that make-believe part.”

Away ran the child to Squire that she might tell him Uncle Charlie was just behind, and urge him forward to meet him. The soldier looked after her with a rueful expression.

“Le roi est mort; vive le roi!” he said—(“The king is dead; live the king!”) My little sweetheart is a gem, if she did go back on me for Uncle Charlie.”

While Lewie Kurl talked with Roberta the animal he rode seemed laboring under strange excitement. She looked back at the horses in old Squire’s wagon, neighed joyously and with spirit. Absorbed in his conversation, Lewie let the reins fall loosely about the mare’s neck. In an instant she turned and made for the wagon. Then began a pantomimic show of affectionate demonstrations. The old comrades of the stable and meadow kissed and caressed each other fondly. It required a firm hold upon the reins to separate them. When Lewie rejoined his companion his mare tossed her mane angrily at the turn affairs had taken. Little shivers of dissatisfaction ran over her. She continued to look back and neigh, almost viciously, and one of the horses in old Squire’s wagon responded in like manner.

Back again to the bluegrass,
Horse and rider too;
Back again to the old haunts,
Comrades tried and true.
Forgot, the weary marches;
Forgot, the hunger and cold.
Back again to the bluegrass,
And hearts whose worth is gold.



As old Squire and the children moved on a squad of soldiers mounted the crest of the hill, then halted. They met right there a man in citizen's clothes, on horseback, with a pair of fat saddle-bags swung across the pommel of his saddle. The men in gray surrounded him instantly; one seized hold of his bridle-rein, another made threatening demonstrations toward his saddle-bags.

"O, Uncle Squire," cried Roberta, "that's Mr. Shanks, that's Sallie's dear grandpapa! O, my heart just trembles for him. I hope they won't do any thing to him."

"Yes, dat's him. He dun kotch up wid at las'. He gwiner be paid back fur all hees meanness at las'."



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“Where are you going?” asked he who held the bridle-rein.

“Home, to my family.”

“What have you got in your saddle-bags?” was next asked.

“Nothing but a calico dress for my wife.”

“Well, hand it out; I know a ‘print’ when I see it,” responded he who had made the threatening demonstrations towards the saddle-bags—was even then diving in them.

“O, Uncle Squire,” cried Roberta, “won’t they give the calico dress back to him? Poor Mrs. Shanks needs it awfully. The one she has on is all faded, and her elbows are out.”

“If he’s gotter calicer dress en thar fur her,” grunted old Squire, “‘twill be de fus’. I heered her say he never give her de rappens ob her finger, en dat she wuden min’ hees whippen’ her ef hee’d unly provide fur her.”

He who was diving in Mr. Shanks’ saddle-bags, drew thence a long slip of white paper with something printed on it in black letters. He cleared his throat, and read aloud the following:

“Fellow-citizens, I took up arms for my country in the War of 1812, and were it not for the infirmities of age, would be again in the saddle, to drive that notorious horse-thief and scoundrel, John Morgan, from the State.”

“You would, hey?” said the soldier. “Well, wait here a little, and see what General Morgan says about that.”

A dust was even then arising ahead, and in a few moments a squad of Confederates dashed up. The foremost one, a soldierly looking-man, with a pair of keen, humorous eyes, halted beside the group on the hill-side.

“What are you detaining this gentleman for?” he asked, in a clear, ringing voice; “we are not making war on citizens.”

“Well; but, General, just see this circular,” handing him one.

General Morgan took it, glanced over it, then with a shrug of his shoulders and a “pshaw!” dropped it to the ground, and rode on. The vidette followed him.

“Well; but, General, what must we do with the prisoner?”

“Do?” responded the General, “Do? Why, turn him loose. He is nothing but a little constable.”



Up to the moment Roberta heard the circular read, her sympathies were all with Mr. Shanks, the poor man looked so terribly frightened. He had started out with his circulars, not knowing the Confederates were within a hundred miles; and he expected every moment to have a bullet put through his brain, or be swung up to the nearest limb. When she heard the circular read, the wind veered from another quarter altogether.

As the soldiers rode off, the released prisoner came swiftly towards Squire and the children.

"I wish you would let me empty these drotted things under them 'taters an' apples, thar," he said.

Roberta came forward before Squire could reply.

"No, indeed, you can't put those dreadful things in our wagon. No, indeed. I heard what you said about my Uncle Charlie, just the dearest and best man on this earth."



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"I never said nothing about your Uncle Charlie," said Mr. Shanks, recognizing the child.

"Well, you said it about General Morgan, and that's the same thing. My Uncle Charlie is one of his captains, and I think General Morgan is the bestest man that ever lived not to do something awful to you. If I was you, I would turn over a new leaf, and stop writing bad things about people, your neighbors, too; and the Bible says, 'Love your neighbors as yourself.' Mamma read it to me last night."

Who was that dashing towards them in a cloud of dust? Dust whitening his long, unkempt beard; whitening his brown, curly locks; belted all around with pistols and knives; teeth glistening through his tawny mustache; radiant, positively radiant with joy, as he leaped from his panting horse, and fairly crushed the startled child in his arms? She screamed aloud in nervous terror.

"O, you goosey!" said he, "don't you know Uncle Charlie?"

The next minute he had sprung on to the wagon wheel, squeezed old Squire's hand until the bones snapped, and snatched up a hatful of russets, craunching one of them between his white teeth, stopping after each bite to ask questions about everybody at home. Well, I reckon there were never three happier children than the three who returned home that afternoon, with the tall soldier walking beside them, leading his horse, and eating russet apples as fast as ever he could. Old Squire jolted slowly along behind, grinning from ear to ear.

Uncle Charlie wouldn't sleep in the house that night, but wrapped himself in his blanket and laid down on the ground under a great elm tree in the corner of the yard, with his faithful horse close by. Mrs. Marsden and Roberta watched from an upper porch, and old Squire by the avenue gate.

At least Roberta thought she watched, but next morning mamma told her with tears in her eyes that Uncle Charlie was gone, that somebody had given him away. Uncle Squire heard the Federals coming, and told him, and he barely had time to escape.

In February of '64 old Squire came out from town one afternoon strutting, as Aunt Judy said, for all the world just "lak er turkey goberler." He made six consecutive trips to the sitting-room, carrying one stick of wood each time as a pretext, before he caught Roberta's eye. When he finally succeeded, he beckoned mysteriously to her, and she got right up and followed him from the room. He led her out of ear-shot of the others before he told her what he wanted.

"Lil Missus, how's it happen dat you never axes me no mo' whar your par is?"

"Because, Uncle Squire, I am afraid you will tell me 'lay o'ers to catch meddlers."



“I neber sed erlong wid dat, honey, ‘en you’d be de fus’ one caught.’ Well, if I never sect dat, thar’s nuffin’ sartin erbout who I means when I sez ‘lay o’ers ter ketch meddlers’; you musen jump et conclugeons, honey. Ennyhow, you ax me ergin, en see what I’ll say dis time.”



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She asked him, her eager eyes uplifted to his face, her small hands clasped, wondering and hope bursting into instant full dawn. A way hope has of doing in youth.

The old man went through his accustomed facial pantomime, slapped himself on the thigh, and blurted out:

“In town wid de Unions. He is Kyurnel Robert Marsden now.”

“Who told you, Uncle Squire?” Her eyes were filled with sudden gathered tears, and her scarlet lips trembled.

“Jim, dat is Kyurnel Tadlock’s man, telled me. He seed him en know’d him. But he is mity sick, honey, mity sick.”

“O, Uncle Squire,” cried the delighted child, “won’t mamma go right straight in town and take me?”

“Well, now, dat’s er gray hoss ob ernuther color. Mebbe she mout, en mebbe she mouten.”

The child’s countenance fell, her sensitive nature touched. Already a womanly intuition, wonderful in one so childlike and ignorant of the world’s ways, begun to stir faintly.

“If mamma can’t leave Aunt Betsy, don’t you reckon she will let me go with you in town to see him, Uncle Squire?”

“You en your mar fur dat, honey. But Squire’s your man.”

That night after Aunt Betsy had been given her medicine and tucked away, the child climbed to her mamma’s lap and cuddled down to her. Instinctively she wanted the magnetism of touch to help her. And then, with her warm breath playing about her mamma’s cheek, and her little hand nestling in hers, she told her what Squire had heard. Mrs. Marsden was not especially startled. She had suffered so much it seemed to her sometimes that her feelings were numb.

“Aren’t you going in town to see him, Mamma?” the child asked.

“Me! Oh, no; I couldn’t. You don’t know what you ask, darling.” Tears gathered in the beautiful sad eyes.

“Then, may I go, Mamma? May I? Squire will take good care of me.”

The mother-arms tightened around the childish form. An unwonted jealousy sprung up in the mother-heart. Hitherto she had had her all to herself.



“Would you leave me, darling,” she asked, “my one comfort? Suppose he should take you away from me, and carry you off where I could seldom see you, what would become of me?”

The child looked up in the beautiful, agitated face with surprise.

“He would never do that. Mamma, never. In the first place, nobody on earth *could* take me away from my darling mamma. Then he wouldn’t take me away if he could. That would be too mean for any thing, and Squire says my papa is a splendid gentleman.”

Mrs. Marsden made no reply to this. She sat gazing dreamily into the glowing fire. Splendid? Yes, that was what she thought him before the hard feeling came between them. She recalled his eyes, glowing—tender. Her little daughter had them exactly. Those ardent glances had so bewitched her she could have followed them to the ends of the earth.



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“Suppose he should die, poor papa, all by himself? Squire says he is very, very sick.”

“God forbid!” cried Mrs. Marsden, “God forbid.”

“If papa has come all the way down to Kentucky,” continued Roberta, “I don’t believe he came down here just to fight us, I don’t indeed. It looks to me more like he is hunting for somebody. And who should that somebody be but my own darling mamma?”

“It isn’t probable he is hunting me, darling. It has been ten long years since he went away. He knows where the old place is. He could have found me easily enough.”

“Well, but may be he wasn’t exactly sure about you wanting him to come. He might have wanted ever so bad to come himself, and yet been afraid *you* didn’t want him. I wouldn’t go where I wasn’t sure I was wanted,” continued the child, a fine scorn curving her lips, “no, not for any thing.”

How much she looked like her father when she said that.

“May I go, Mamma?” she coaxed again. “Say yes, dear Mamma. You don’t know how I’ve longed to have a papa like other little girls.”

Then the sorely tried heart gave a great leap and got way beyond self.

“Yes, you may go, darling,” she cried; “and may the God of the pure in heart watch over you and bring you back safely to your lonely mother.”

The child cuddled down again to her.

“What must I tell him for you, Mamma?” she asked.

Mrs. Marsden started. She had not expected that.

“Send him kind message, Mamma, just like your own sweet self. You are so good to everybody, and he is your little daughter’s papa, and you love him dearly, don’t you, dear Mamma?”

Then the woman-heart gave a great leap and reached out to that other heart the child was pleading for, and it seemed as if they touched, although miles separated them, and pride lay prostrate.

“I have erred,” she reasoned dumbly, “erred in the sight of God and man. I have been hard, hard. What right have I to hold him to so strict an account? By my own contrition and unutterable yearning to behold his face, will I judge him, and naught else, the husband of my youth, once the delight of my eyes.”



Then, having gone thus far, she could stop at nothing. Her eyes shone, varying emotions chased over her beautiful face, her whole nature unbent, tender, as when she stood in that room in the old days and heard the benediction that pronounced them man and wife.

“O, you dear child!” she cried, “surely God has put in your little hands the gift of healing. Tell him, tell him, your Father, that for ten long years, the string has been on the outside of the latch for him. Tell him”—then, utterly unable to say more, she bowed her head and wept. Roberta clung to her and caressed her. That phase of her mother’s character touched her unspeakably, young as she was. She never forgot it. It was a revelation of how blessed a possession is the heart that is incapable of cherishing resentment.



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“O, you darling mother!” she cried, “I don’t believe God’s angels are any sweeter than you.”

When Roberta and old Squire reached the house where they had been told Colonel Marsden was lying sick they saw an officer sitting in the front room, writing busily by a table. He looked up as they entered, startled by the vision of childish beauty before him. Roberta’s scarlet hood, edged with swansdown, was pushed back, and her hair lay in fluffy golden rings on her white forehead. Her cloak, the color of her hood, was bordered with the same snowy, feathery trimming. She carried in her hand a tiny, swansdown muff. The rich blood of health mantled her cheek. Her eyes were like stars. Where had he seen them before, those wondrously beautiful eyes?

In person and manner Roberta was like her mother, but her features were her father’s. A little aristocrat she was, from the poise of her golden head to the tip of her prunella boots.

“Well,” said the officer, laying down his pen, “what can I do for you, little lady?”

The child turned to Squire, who came forward and stood in embarrassed silence, uneasily shifting his position from one foot to the other. He had been advised by saucy Polly “not ter skeer fo’ks ter def by de way he dun his face,” and he was a little out of his moorings. But finally he managed to say:

“It’s Mars Robert Marsden, sah, dat me and Lil Missus wan’er see.”

“Well, who is Lil Missus? and what is she to Colonel Marsden?”

His admiring gaze was directed again to the child.

“Shee’s his own flesh en blood, sah; nuffin’ shorter; hees lil gal dat wuz born’d arfter he wen’ back ter N’ark.”

“Whew,” whistled the officer; “I didn’t know Colonel Marsden was a family man. That accounts for many things, I have always thought peculiar in a man of his attractive personality. Well, I am sure I envy him his newly found daughter. Wait here a little, and I will see if the Colonel is awake. He is convalescent now, and will doubtless be glad to see you both.”

He returned in a moment and said, “Colonel Marsden is asleep, and I thought best not to awaken him; but you shall see him,” he said to Roberta, “just as soon as he awakes.”

The child could not repress her eagerness.



“I can’t wait,” she cried; “I want to see him so bad. Let me go in and look at him while he is asleep. I won’t make any noise. That’s the way I do mamma when she has headache.”

“Well,” said the officer, smiling, “go right in.”

Squire started to follow.

“No; you wait outside. Two at once might make him a little nervous. He has been a very sick man.”

Roberta crept softly in on tiptoe. The room was darkened, and there was no light save the reflection of the fire. Colonel Marsden was, in health, a superbly handsome man. But, as he lay there in the dim light, emaciated and pallid, there was something almost touching in the droop of his shoulders and the look of helpless weakness about the mouth. It was not long before he stirred uneasily and opened his eyes. His gaze fell directly on the child sitting beside him and looking at him with her whole heart in her eyes.



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"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Roberta Marsden. My papa's name is Robert, and my mamma called me Roberta after him."

[Illustration: "My Papa's name was Robert, and my Mamma named me Roberta, after him."]

He raised himself upon one elbow. A flush burned in his cheeks. It was like a flame through alabaster.

"I don't understand," he said; "what does it all mean?"

Right there old Squire put in an appearance.

"Don't you know me, Mars Robert? It's Squire dat useter 'long ter you."

"Yes; I know you. How are you, Squire? But this child, who is she?"

"Your own flesh an' blood, Mars Robert, born'd after you went away an' left Miss July."

Colonel Marsden sank back on the pillow with a groan and covered his eyes with his hands.

"O, Uncle Squire!" cried Roberta, "you have hurt his feelings. But she isn't mad at you, Papa, not a bit. She told me to tell you, that for ten long years the string has been on the outside of the latch for you. She did indeed, Papa."

"She is an angel," said Colonel Marsden. There was moisture in his fine eyes.

"That's what Mam' Sarah says. She says she is afraid every morning that she will find mamma's wings sprouting."

"But why was I not written to? Why was I not told I had a child?" Again a groan escaped him. "My God!" he cried, "I forgot I had no right to expect that. Like a self-willed child I wantonly threw away life's choicest blessings, was unmindful of its most sacred obligations."

His lips moved for an instant in silent prayer, and then he stretched out his arms yearningly toward the child and asked almost humbly:

"Will my little daughter give me a kiss?"

The child crept to him and kissed him again and again.

"I do not deserve this blessing from Heaven; I do not deserve this darling little daughter."



“And you have the darlindest and most beautiful wife in all the world!” cried the child.

“Lawd, honey!” said old Squire—he was in a broad grin—“he know’d her long fo’ you did.”

“Is she like this?” asked Colonel Marsden.

He reached under his pillow and drew thence a small square case and handed it to Roberta.

Roberta fairly screamed: “It’s my mamma; it’s my own darling mamma! Now I know how much you love her, or you wouldn’t carry her picture about with you.”

“It has never been away from me an instant, never one instant.”

“Why did you stay away from her so long if you loved her so dearly?” Her great brown eyes were lifted in wonder to his face. “I can’t stay away from her a single day. Sometimes, even when I’m just out in the yard playing, I have to come back and peep at mamma, to be sure she is there.”

A red flush mounted to Colonel Marsden’s temples.

“I must tell her first, little daughter; and if she forgives me, will not you?”



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“O yes!” cried the child delightedly. “I won’t wait for you to tell me. I’ll forgive you right now, before I know, and so will mamma. Mam’ Sarah says it makes you feel good all over to forgive people, ‘sho’ ‘nuff.” Then, her tender heart touched by the appealing look in Colonel Marsden’s eyes, she added: “Mamma says we must have faith in people and not blame ’em, but believe that nearly everybody does the very best they can. And we don’t know, even when they do *wrong*, what makes ’em. You know, Papa,” continued the little theologian gravely, “nobody ever does *exactly* right in this world.”

When old Squire and Roberta returned home they found Aunt Betsy very sick, and Mrs. Marsden entirely occupied at her bed-side. It was a great disappointment to the child, she was so eager to bring father and mother together, but Mrs. Marsden was firm.

“Your father does not need me, darling; but she does. And it is right always to take up the duty that is nearest.”

It was an anxious night; but when morning came the sick woman was better, and resting easily. Soon after breakfast, as Mrs. Marsden and Roberta were standing by the window in the sitting-room, and looking out at the yard, bathed in light and sparkling with dew, an ambulance appeared in the avenue. It stopped in front of the porch; two officers descended from it and assisted a third one down the steps, then they supported him to the door.

“It’s papa,” cried Roberta; “he is like me, he couldn’t wait.”

She ran to meet him, beaming with joy, and led him to the sitting-room, opened the door for him, and, with strange tact in a child so young, left father and mother alone together. Robert Marsden was once more in the quaint old room where he first courted his wife. He was ready to do the courting all over again, glad of the opportunity and thankful for the familiar associations that would naturally appeal to both. The room was very little changed. The wear is less in the country, and then Dame Fashion, our capricious queen, is not so absolute there. When he last saw it, ’twas in the early morning. He remembered so well what took him there. The night before they had one of their heated discussions about selling the negroes, selling the old place, and moving north. When his wife turned to leave the room there was something in her figure and bearing that stirred him strangely. Before he retired, feeling that he had a strong additional claim upon her, as one would reasonably have, upon whom rested the responsibility of providing for a family, he wrote to her, and of course in his masterful way urged her to accede to his request. “Sleep on it,” he wrote, “and let me know before I leave in the morning” (he was going north on business). “Send your reply to the sitting-room, only a line, telling me I am free to make my business arrangements in New York, and return for you.”



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As he recalled the way in which he expressed himself, a qualm of shame crossed his heart. "A selfish brute!" he groaned in spirit: "never occurring to *him* to yield, always trying to bend *her*." Well, there was nothing for him that morning, and he had gone off with a hot heart, feeling that any thing was better than the life of disinclination he was forced to lead, if he remained. Yes, the room was as little changed as she, there, coming toward him with outstretched hands.

Although her eyes fell beneath his searching glances, and hot blushes suffused her cheeks, she, the mother of his child and many years gone his wife, he did not move one step to meet her advances. O, her pitiable confusion!

"Our child," he said, "the beautiful little daughter you have given me, tells me you still care for me, though, God knows, I don't see how you could, except that it is your nature and you can't help it. But what I want to know is this, has the outrage I put upon you caused the fire, that once burned in your heart for me, to smoulder to ashes, where only a pleasant warmth remains, or is there still fire there that I can rekindle to the old-time blaze, no matter what the effort required? What I want, Julia, is my old place in your heart, if I can have it. I was never a man that could do things in moderation; and, God help me, undeserving as I am, that and that alone will satisfy me."

"The fire still burns, my husband; O, how can you doubt it?"

And then the hungry arms closed about her. After a little, when she had fixed him cosily on the couch and was kneeling beside him, he said:

"I am not by nature an humble man, nor one glib at confession; but there is one thing I will say, my love, this choleric temperament of mine has been to me severer flagellation than was ever administered by priestly hands in expiation of heinous offenses. But I will *down* it yet, my love; God helping me, I will down it yet."

The door opened and a golden head was visible.

"May I come in, dear Mamma?"

Colonel Marsden stretched forth his disengaged hand and drew the child to him.

"She is like you, love," he said fondly.

"Her eyes are yours, Robert. I remember, when she was a baby, how I used to hang over her, longing for her to awaken, that I might see her eyes."

Colonel Marsden's grasp tightened on his wife's slender white fingers.

"Mam' Sarah was afraid I would make her nervous. She would steal her away, carry her down to the loom-house, and rock her to sleep on her lap."

“I remember it perfectly, Mamma,” said Roberta, grave as an owl. “I wore the same robe and cloak and cap that I dressed the gun in that time.”

Colonel Marsden laughed heartily; her diverting words, coming just at that moment, were a relief to both. The negroes had talked to the child so much about her birth and babyhood, she had come to believe that she remembered them herself. Every date of late years went back to the time “fo’ Lil Missus wuz born’d,” or the time “sence she was born’d,” or the time “when she was born’d.” Old Squire especially humored the conceit:



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“Lemme see, Lil Missus; what room?”

“The front room up stairs, Uncle Squire, with the sweet-brier roses climbing in the window, and the beautiful red and black rag carpet Mam’ Sarah made.”

“Jes’ so, Lil Missus; what bed?”

“The great high bed, with the posts and tester and muslin ruffle, I remember Aunt Betsy put a little Bible in my hand as soon as I was born, and shut my fingers down tight on it, because she wanted me to love the Bible first, before every thing.”

“Jes’ so, Lil Missus; jes’ so. I allers sed you wuzer sharp one. But who’d s’poze, now, you cud rikerlec so fur back? He-he-he.”

Roberta cuddled down, like a kitten, on the rug before the blazing fire, and looked delightedly at her mother and father.

“Real papas are so much nicer than make-believe papas. I don’t think I can play that way again; it makes me hungry to see the difference. O, I wish Uncle Charlie was here, too, and that other one.”

“I would like to see Uncle Charlie, too” (Colonel Marsden turned laughingly to his wife), “but I don’t wish he was here. I remember what a pet he was of yours in the old days, love—the curly-haired scamp. He could wheedle you and Aunt Betsy out of any thing he wanted. Such a tender heart he had—mad as fire one minute, and tears in his eyes the next—but withal so fearless and high-minded and lovable.”

“God bless and watch over him,” Mrs. Marsden softly added, “and bring him back safely to us all, my dear, my only brother.”

“Amen,” responded Colonel Marsden.

Good-bye to Roberta Marsden’s child-life on the old farm! Good-bye to the child mind that thought no evil; to the child-heart that reached out to all other hearts, and drew them within a charmed circle of affection! Good-bye to the kindly black faces that the child loved, and the simple, homely lives she saw so much beauty in! Good-bye to the old house that she loved, with Carlo, the watchdog, dozing on the porch in the sunshine; and the peafowl close by, spreading his wondrous-hued tail and strutting; to the old parlor, with its quaint papering and quaint furnishing suggesting dead and gone generations!

Good-bye to the old farm, with its peaceful, busy days; its glad days and its sad days; its merry songsters and its whip-poor-wills; its old-time industries and its hearty hospitalities! Good-bye!



[Illustration]

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