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The House By The Roadside

McKENZIE BAKER.

All day it had been pouring; but Henry Wiman had ridden farther and had made his noon-day rest shorter even than usual. It was his wish to reach, for the night, a town where he knew that he could find accommodations superior to those he had endured so far on his lonely out-of-a-horseback. Now, in the mid-afternoon, he was yet a long way from his destination. As his horse came to a walk, however, Wiman did not urge him at once to renewed effort. As he looked about him, he was able to recall the incidents and joys of that long-ago summer as though it had been of the year before. In thought and fancy he again lived in that long past summer, and Mary was again his companion. She had been a handsome and lovely girl, well-fitted for better things than were comprised in what he had chosen to regard as the narrow lives of her neighbors and friends. They had a great many interests in common; her mind was as cultivated as his own, and they had found unusual pleasure in their discussions of the books and authors they liked, and in general interchange of thought; but Wiman had found a greater, if a selfish, pleasure in her enjoyment of his descriptions of a life she had never known. She had been strong and fair and sweet to know, and now, as he recalled her from the past, he felt that her influence upon him for good—an influence unconsciously exerted and not promptly appreciated—had been greater than that of anyone else. Yet he had left her. He was not too old for regret, and a sigh escaped him as he reflected that his own fickleness had lost to him a companion who would have helped him to make the most of all that was good in him.

Absorbed in his reflection, Wiman had paid but little attention to his horse. The animal had been manifesting increasing restlessness and had, at first, moved on slowly; but now at an outbreak of laughter from the field beyond the hedge which here lined the road jumped quickly to one side and then started to run. He soon had his horse under control, and again he surrendered himself to his reminiscent mood. He remembered a man who had been devoted to Mary, a man of about his own age, of huge frame and corresponding physical strength. He remembered the young man's obvious suffering when Mary had found himself so attractive that most of her days were given to him. The suffering had been very real, no doubt, but Wiman did not permit himself any regretful meditations. He had believed, indeed, that the man was not endowed with ordinary intellect; and, at all events he had been certain that Mary had not needed the protection of such a man, however devoted.

Again there was an outbreak of laughter from someone in the field he could not see. Again his horse jumped, and again he started into a run. As they emerged from a little wood bordering the road, Wiman saw that the sky had become overcast with clouds. He rode hurriedly to a small house that stood a few rods from the road.

Tying the bridle of his horse to a near-by post he knocked at the door; but receiving no response he entered. The rain now fell in earnest. Fully to gratify his curiosity, but mainly that he might in some occupation be less mindful of the storm and its effect upon him he began an exploration of the house. There was only one floor and the rooms, of which there were many, were so arranged that he could pass from one to another without retracing his steps; but in none of the rooms except the one he had entered at first did he find any evidence of past or present occupation. In that room, however, a strip of carpet remained upon the floor, there were a few pieces of old and sadly worn furniture, and in one corner there was a litter of old clothes and old bedding. The inner doors throughout were fallen from their hinges, the windows that were still intact were nailed fast, while the others were replaced and the apertures closed by heavy and fastened shutters. As Wiman was in the furthestmost of the rooms he heard a noise in the first he had entered, as though something heavy were being moved; he heard the same weird laughter that he had heard from the fields and beyond the hedge and he stopped in dismay. He felt a dreadful fear of being afraid. He stood trembling; but presently he heard shuffling and stealthy footsteps advancing. He retreated as noiselessly as possible toward the farther doorway of the room in which he stood and waited. But as the footsteps came nearer Wiman turned and fled. The shuffling footsteps followed him as now, from room to room, he ran and soon felt rather than knew that his pursuer was close behind him. Wiman hoped that when they should reach the room of the entrance he would be able to make his escape. As they reached the room he saw at once that before the door had been heaped the various pieces of old furniture the room contained. There was no time to pause, and now from room to room the mad race continued. Occasionally there would be an outbreak of the same wild laughter that earlier had so disturbed and frightened him. As he ran on Wiman could feel the hot breath of the other upon his neck, and from time to time, with an access of fear, his hand upon his shoulder. At length he appreciated that his little remaining strength would soon be gone. Then in desperation he turned; but at once he was caught and flung headlong upon the floor. Then there came a knock upon the door and a gentle voice called "Milton!" Wiman felt that no woman should be permitted to enter into that company. Helpless, he listened to the removal of the barricade of furniture from before the door and helplessly he heard it opened. He heard again the weird laughter of the man as he welcomed the woman who he thought in his poor way was to be his partner in Wiman's punishment.

"I trust, sir, he has not hurt you," the woman went on gently to Wiman. "He—he—we have to be a little careful; but he has never been so violent; I trust he has not hurt you," she repeated and then as Wiman turned a smile lighted her face. She extended her hands in glad welcome and cried, "Ah, you have come! I knew, I knew you have come at last!"

Amazed at his silence Mary Warne looked at him as he stood with his knees trembling beneath him, his breath coming thick and fast, his eyes wandering from one to the other. He was almost speechless; but Mary Warne saw more than the manifestation of his face. Her extended hand dropped, the smile faded, and her face became set and pallid. She became suddenly another mourner at the death of hope. "My God!" she murmured. "Mary—Mary—Miss Warne—" Wiman began; but at the sound of his voice the man at her side moved as though he would spring upon him; but Mary with a gentle word or two soothed and quieted him. "I have waited and waited for your coming," she said then to Wiman. "And now you have come back, idly riding past. Here you sought shelter from a summer shower?" "Yes," Wiman returned. "They told me you would not come." "Mary went on resolutely; 'but I would not believe them. I have waited and hoped for your coming. I was so sure that you would come! I was certain that you were kept away by something I could not know—something you could not help. Now you have come back and in your face I see—Oh, may God help me—I loved you and have everything else I wished to leave in you—I loved you, and I did believe.'"

"You can admit so much?" Wiman asked.

"Yes, it may be that I should be too proud to let you know that I have cared even; but no, I am far too proud to deceive you. I have cared. I have suffered. I never was deceitful, or foolish, or false. Until now I had confidence and hope. They sustained me; they never abandoned me. Until now, I believed that you would keep your promise to me."

"I—I did not know," Wiman stammered helplessly. Mary Warne looked at him and she could not prevent the look of contempt that would show itself in her clear eyes and the slight upturning of her lip.

"You won my love," she went on, unwilling to compromise with him or with herself. "You gave me your love; at least you told me so. You led me to confess my own. Confidence and faith go with a woman's love. You had all mine."

Mary Warne spoke very gently. Her manner indicated very plainly that she was impelled to speak by her own love of candor and truth rather than by any wish to upbraid or rebuke Wiman. Her musical voice, the present gentleness of her manner and memory of the past quite overcame Wiman. He took a step toward her.

"Mary, Mary," he began and went on impetuously. "I did not know. I know now. I was foolish, insane if you like. It is not too late for me to keep my promise. Let me come back to you. Let me come."

"No, no, no!" Mary Warne answered, but her voice was gentle no longer. Clapping Milton by the arm she fell back from Wiman. "No, no, no," she repeated. "Enlightenment has come, bitter enlightenment. It has come through you; it could have come through no one else. But see," she added as for a moment her glance passed out of doors, "the storm has passed."

"But you are not afraid?" Wiman

asked, thus dismissed. "Of Milton?" she returned with a sad smile. "No. Poor Milton! There is nothing a woman needs to fear so much—" She checked herself; but Wiman knew as well as though the cutting word had been uttered that there was nothing Mary Warne feared, so much as she feared a coward.

The storm had ended. As Wiman passed from the house the rain was dripping from the leaves of the trees, but overhead the sky was blue and cloudless; in the west the sun was sinking amid light clouds of glorious color, but in the east whither his road was to lead him, all was dark and threatening. Wiman mounted his horse, slowly and wearily, and turned upon his way.

The Tragedy of Peppermint Alley

LOUISE PIKE

It was the dinner hour in the phosphate mines of southern Florida. The negro hands had swarmed up out of the sickly hole at the sound of the mid-day whistle, and after a hasty wash in the uninviting waters of a nearby white sulphur spring, sat about on the piles of gray rock or lounged in the scanty shade of the rickety shafting, smoking vile "nigger-beel" tobacco and chaffing each other as noisily as only a gang of negroes can. The sun shone down on these black men most ardently, causing their faces and half-clothed bodies to shine like polished iron, and rivulets of perspiration to stream over their countenances, dripping into the chunks of soggy cornbread or into the gleaming tin pails of thick black molasses and water from which they were making their noonday meal.

One pick hand, a burly, black fellow, sat apart on a lump of the quarried rock munching his corn pone and drinking his "sweeten water" in dogged silence. He took no part in the talk, and presently his silence drew the attention of his fellow workmen to him.

"What de matter wid Pete?" asked a burrow hand grinning. "He ain't say nuthin' yit." The others laughed loudly.

"He gal done gone back on he," volunteered one between puffs of his rank pipe. Renewed laughter greeted this explanation and another man across the shaft sang out:

"If she done gone back on yer, Pete, git another. Plenty gals, an if one quits yer git another."

"Dat's so," assented a little, old, weazened negro popping his dried, wrinkled face above the shafting, looking very like the jack in a Christmas box, "Oman lak dawg. She gwine stay wid one dat feed'er best, any how. If yer ain't dar ter beat her she's gwine back on yer, an' if yer is dar ter beat her she's gwine back on yer anyhow. So dar." His hearers greeted this piece of equivocal wisdom with nods of assent, but the man for whose consolation it was intended remained silent.

The rough chat of his fellow workmen had come nearer the cause of his moodiness than they knew. Up in the country he had left a wife, a big yellow woman with great bovine-like eyes and two rows of flashing white

teeth. Pete was very black, and his wife had often laughed at his ugliness, but she had hitherto been a good wife to him, "sending him word" constantly by every messenger that she knew passing between the town and the mines. But now, for several weeks she had neglected to send him any message, and Pete, who was naturally a jealous man began to get uneasy. His restless, dissatisfied mind began to picture his wife taking up with some other gay young buck, and goaded almost to madness by the bare idea, he became more gloomy and silent than ever, determining to go home on the first opportunity. Pete kept his intention secret, for were the mine boss to become aware of it he would be sure to thwart it. Able-bodied miners are not easily had, the work is laborious and extremely unpleasant, the situation of the mines remote and division of any kind exceedingly scarce. The terms of Pete's contract of labor not being near out he was forced to act very secretly in carrying out his plans.

"I'll jest slip up to town an' see Silvy, drapping in when she ain't spectin' me. I gwine kotch her if she's gwine back on meh!" he told himself with jealous savagery.

Without confiding his intentions to any man Pete stole out of camp under cover of night, and when day dawned and the "hands" were roused from their uneasy beds to the day's labor he was many miles on his homeward journey.

All night he walked, hiding by day in the leafy fastnesses of swamp or wood, until a safe distance precluded the possibility of capture, then he finished his journey easily in the light of day.

It was late evening when he reached town, and without any warning stood in the doorway of his wife's cabin.

Silvy was sitting before the fireplace over a few smoking knots, her elbows on her knees in an attitude of deep thought. She sat for several moments unconscious of his presence until startled by his voice.

"What yuh studyin' 'bout, Silvy?" he asked, striding into the room.

The woman started up with a half cry, her yellow face turning to an opaque whiteness.

"Lord-amighty, nigger, you done skeer meh sho!" she exclaimed, sinking back into her hide bottomed chair weakly.

Pete was not half satisfied with such a welcome. "How come I skeer yuh so bad?" he asked grinning suspiciously.

"Kase I 'lowed yuh was at de mines," she answered. "How come yuh ain't sent word yuh was a-comin'?"

"I 'lowed I gwine 'sprise yuh."

"Well, yuh done done hit." Then after a moment she looked squarely at him and asked: "What make yuh quit de mines?"

"I ain't done quit. I see gwine back 'fore long. I 'low I wanted ter see yuh an' I jest sloped out an' come."

"Huh!" Silvy grunted, but whether in approval or not Pete could not tell, and then fell to thinking intently as she had done before he had surprised her over the fire.

Pete was not satisfied, although his sharp eyes had discovered no sign of another man about the house, nor did any man come about with any undue

familiarity during the time he remained at home. He was preparing to journey back again to the mines with a mind at rest in a degree, when his wife startled him by revealing the cause of several actions that had puzzled him on more than one occasion. I have said she startled him, but rather or he was electrified by the tale which his wife unfolded to him in the simplest language. Sitting for a long time gazing in on the fire she at last made up her mind, and gazing at Pete steadily in the face she began by observing abruptly:

"I done hit a man in de haid." Pete started. "What yuh 'low?" he asked, and Silvy repeated her assertion, "I done hit a man in de haid."

"What for yuh do dat, woman?" "Hits disser way," began Silvy, pulling her chair up closer. "I'm troubled in my mind an' I'm gwine tote yuh 'bout hit. Yuh know Ike Posey? He came here when yuh was at de mines an' like he brung another man from high about Savannah. Dat man name Jared Green, an when he done see meh he 'low if I wanted a man he gwine stop long with me."

Pete reached over and seized her arm, holding it in a tight grasp, and when she remained silent after her last sentence he shook her roughly, but in silence.

"He stop long till Hannah Battey come here an' fool 'round, an' then he 'low he gwine stop wid Hannah. I 'low ter him if he quit meh fer dat gal I gwine kill him sho, but he laff an' 'low he gwine quit anyhow, an' come Sat'dy he quit an' went ter stay yonder. Den yuh sent money, an' I tek hit an' went out ter de fo' mile hill ter ol' Jack, an' ax 'im. I say: 'Jack, yer want ten dollahs?' and Jack he 'low: 'Yas I does; yuh gwine give hit toe meh?'"

"I 'low I'm gwine gib hit toe yuh if yuh does what I say, an' Jack say: 'What dat?' an' I 'low 'kill a nigger.' Den I tote Jack 'bout hit an' he 'low he gwine do hit sho, but when I gits Green out dar, Jack he not dar. He done gone wid dat money an' I ain't seed him since."

Den Hannah she 'low she's gwine on a 'scursion, an' I done tote Green. I got some mighty nice chicken fer dinner, an' he 'low he gwine help meh eat hit, an' when he come in an' sot ter de table I done slip up an' hit him in de haid."

She stopped and sat looking into the fire, and Pete, his eyes starting from their sockets with horror and rage exclaimed:

"Whar he, 'oman?"

Silvy did not answer in words, but pointed with the gesture of a tragedy queen to the floor in a corner of the room.

"Dar," she said briefly, "I put him dar."

It was a most awful story which the police acting on Pete's information unearthed in Peppermint Alley. Just as Silvy had told it. In a fit of jealous rage she had beguiled the man to her cabin and while in the act of eating food prepared for him by her had cleft his skull with one awful blow. Then the consequences of her deed coming home to her she had sought to hide the evidence of her crime.

With the axe that had dealt the blow she worked, dismembering the big

body, hiding the various pieces in separate places of concealment; and it was many days ere the entire body was found and placed together.

"I 'lowed I gwine kill 'im ef he quit meh, an' I done hit"—going through the motion of felling with an axe—"I Jess tap 'im in de haid wid de axe."

Again and again she went over the story relating it with unvarying detail whether she had an audience or not, dwelling on each ghastly particular until a few days before the trial it was discovered that the woman's reason had fled.

Perhaps few people realize that one day's income of Mr. Andrew Carnegie would pay the president's salary for one whole year. Henry C. Frick, who was a partner of Mr. Carnegie and knows whereof he speaks, says in his suit against Mr. Carnegie that his share of the profits of the Carnegie Steel company last year, was \$12,285,000 and his share of the earnings this year will be \$24,867,500. His income for one day is \$88,130.13, more than the salary of the president of the United States for one year. His annual income is equal to wages of 12,000,000 of working men at \$2 per day.



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