

"Sef-Seffy-my Seffy. No-not ex. | things in small lives. actly-not to say sick. I like him so wrong wiss him. He can't live long the Poison spring-wiss the witcheschust kem away-trying to cheer him up a little. Well, so good night."

He passed on, for he was a merciful old man, and Sally hurried away to the Poison spring. And Old Baumgartner laughed through his gnarled hands behind the cover of the next turn in the road, though even to him laughter was no more gay, as of yore.

Seffy was there, on his back, with his hands under his head, staring up at the moon. He looked pitifully alone. A great lump surged in Sally's throat, and if she had obeyed only her heart she would have flung her arms around him. But another of those qualities which go with red hair, pride, prevented this. She coughed a little and Seffy flew around.

"I-was just taking a walk," she said.

"Yes," said Seffy humbly. "The Poison spring is-on my prop-

erty-"I'll go away!" said Seffy, rising. He looked gaunt as he stood on his feet in the moonlight.

"Seffy-I didn't mean-" began the really unhappy girl, her head quitgiving way to her heart now

"I got nowheres else to go now," excused Seffy. "I can't go to the store-Sam's got the tombstone there-or anywhere where there's people-account everybody knows. Sam's got a notice of it hung up in the store. It's all they talk about. He got it printed in the paper, too! I'd go away, out west, but pappy don't want me to go. I come here, account no one else ever comes-it's unhealthy. I didn't know that you owned-" He was shambling off. The last words came from a distance. "Good night."

He did not know that Sally was following him. When she spoke it was close behind him. He veered so suddenly as to catch the pain in her face. But he was dull, Seffy.

"Seffy," she said, close upon him, "Seffy, I was at home."

Seffy said nothing. "Seffy-I am unhappy-and a fool!"

Still Seffy did not move nor speak. "Don't you care that I am unhap-

Still silence. "And don't you never forgive no

one?"

At the end was a sob. Ah! Seffy could not harbor ill against a dog that had bit him. And



"MENT DID HE SHY?" DETUNDED SALDY SAUKIETY

Sally sobbed. The hands he had kissed before, he kissed again-in that fashion, you will remember, which must have survived from some cavalier ancestor.

"Seffy," she said a little later, "you know I got an awful temper?"

"Pappy says so," sighed Seffy. "He's right, and you know! But, Seffy-you can help me to cure it-

will you?" Joy leaped back into her life and it was very sweet. And would he? He left her no doubt-not the least. She hovered about him bewitchingly. What the peering moon saw-I shall not tell. And when the watchful old man saw them coming out of the cotton woods together he went singing home and

slept. Oh, it was not entirely the pasturefield now. He did not forget that, But Seffy whom he adored-perhaps for the very gentleness and sweetness which constantly vanguished his happiness-Seffy was going away from happiness which sought him-and, for this farmer, and this time and place, where was little joy and much labor, it seemed wanton-it was wanton! Do you think it was a slight thing that kept Sephenijah P. Baumgartner, Senfor, awake for five nights? For, let me tell you here, all this had become serious business to the old man-if we do treat it lightly. For he loved his son-adored Sally-and valued the pasture-field. Therefore, in striving to bring them all into his keeping together, he was dealing with the things (little things to you) he loved most on earth. You, of course, have greater things. But you must, now and then,

I shall tell you of their conversation -he's all I got-and it's somesing as they came from the Poison spring, the radiance of the moon in Seffy's this way. Efery night he's down by wan face, the very joy of the starry heavens in that of the girl-I must tell often all night. He's there now. I you what their talk was of. And I beg you again to remember that these small things, which you despise, were all they had there and then. I have wondered whether the wanton sacrifice of a child's toy when he is three is not as dreadful as the sacrifice of his love when he is 20. Do you know?

"Seffy," said Sally, with his hand held so close under her beating heart that it registered each avid pulsation, "I am most to blame and you have forgiven me. But you are to blame, too, and I hope you won't forgive yourself too soon."

"For why?" queried the dull Seffy with attention only for that wildly beating thing-for, alas, that was his bane as hers was something else-forgetting future perils in present happi ness.

"Then you'll fix it before you do!" "Fix what?" asked the astonished

"You let yourself be fooled. And that raises my temper more than anything else. I don't want no beau that every one laughs at. You got to have more backbone. When I am mean to you-I can't help it when my temper's up-and it's hard to get it down, mighty hard, when it's up-when I am mean to you-curse me!

Seffy stared aghast. He would as soon have heaped maledictions upon the head of an archangel! "Or hit me!"

Another stare-another conviction of the utter impossibility of such a thing!

"Yes! With a club! A flat-iron! A potato masher! A poker!" Seffy could laugh now. She was be-

coming absurd. Had he only known that she-poor futile woman!-was trying to secure in advance their happiness in the turmoil which she knew would come!

"Yes! That is the way for such as The only way! And I'm used me! to It!"

Now Seffy was shocked! "My father-or mother-or granny-

or"-she hesitated-"Sam-have, at one time or another, used all these things on me. I need the snaffle! You need the whip!"

And she laughed a little herself, and that was Seffy's excuse for joining

"You have no temper and I have a see how that will work. And, Seffy, you got a bad reputation about here now, and I wouldn't like you to have it always. So you must brace up and do things to make people like you again. I want you to be able to face any one at the store-and do it in front of Sam."

The dull Seffy answered:

"But what can I do?" The whole case seemed quite hope-

"I don't know. But there is some thing. Ask your pappy. Whatever it is, I will help you. You know it makes me foolish, too. And I hate that more than anything - being laughed at. If I was you, I'd lick Sam. But I know you won't. I expect he's too big for you. But there are other things."

And Seffy left her at her door that night, determined to do some great thing to set himself properly before the little community once more. Because—once more—she had let him

He and his father held a star-chamber session that night yet-Seffy waking him up for it.

"Take her home from church, be goshens!" adjudged his father.

Now this seems small advice upon a small matter. But it was very great advice upon a very great matter, as you will see.

VIII.

The White Signal Which Might as Well Have Been Black.

No suitor in German-Pennsylvania, though it be in Maryland, has entirely established his right to the maiden of his choice, either before the public or in her sight or his own, until he has escorted her offhand from church on a Sunday night. And this he must accomplish at the church door, out ofsometimes-a savage rivalry challenging disaster.

For by this simple, primitive, heroic process the status of contestants for a maid's favor is fixed. He whose arm is taken can face his little world on Monday. He whose arm is rejected is, on Monday, a social exile. For the small world of the vicinage is always there and this is the maiden's public election of him she chooses to honor, and her public rebake to his too presumptuous rival. And, after that, she is a poor thing indeed who will be seen in public with the latter. For nothing is more sweet and cruel than

Seffy was not a publicly-acknowledged suitor. He could not be. It was impossible! There was that tombtry to feel the imperiousness of small stone still up in the store. Sam had

the awful question-there was a recogput it further and further off! Indeed. he shuddered when he thought of it even then, after that understanding with Sally!-and contemplated getting his father to do it for him.

It had become known, in the wireless way such things spread in the country, that there had been a tentative making-up between Seffy and Sally. But Seffy was still not received in public. Nor did he appear with Sally! Nor might he call upon her! There must be some open defiance and victory which all could see and understand before these things might happen. The right hand of renewed fellowship would not be extended to Seffy until he had met and vanquished his rival in public. It was the primitive right of the strongest, proved physically here as in the Roman circus. Seffy



'MY YOU GOT A STEET SOME.

had never shown himself a master of material prowess. He demurred a bit at such a plunge into the arena. But there was no other way. "Why, Sef," advised his father,

'after that it's a dead open and shut game. You better do the biggest sing you ken-and that's the end of it. If I had Sally on my side, I wouldn't keer who the hell was on the other! You take her home from church! Yas, right afore their dam' noses! Then they'll run after you and send you presents. It ain't no guess-work for you! You know that Sally will be waiting for you wiss her arm all ready to take yourn. Gosh! I nefer had no such sure sing. I had to take my chances wiss you' mammy! And it was three other fellers wiss their arms out-and the right side yet! But your daddy was close up against the church door. And when she come out he didn't waste no time a saying polite. 'Miss Hengler, ken I haf the pleasure to see you home this evening?" 'a' lost the game if I had waited to git off all that dictionary stuff! Yassir! For right opposite me was Bill Eisenkrout-Sam's uncle-and I knowed his arm'd shoot out like a patent cornhusker the minute you' mammy come.

polite! I knowed he'd say that foolhome. Well, she come out and I chust | let of love. One—two—three—four her that it was a nice efening, I could her home. Nancy says, says she: 'Sank you, Mr. Eisenkrout, I'm suited;' and I laughed like hell! And, begoshens, Nancy laughed too! And that nossing like a laugh at the right time to kill a man off! Bill left town the next day. He had too. And he didn't show up tell the next fall! Sef, you got a sure sing. And, begoshens, you might just as well finish Sam up in the same job-put him out of town. Next Sunday you watch Sam. Keep right opposite him. Then git your arm in action about a second sooner. Left side, you know, her right! Sally 'll be on the lookout. Don't stop to say any fool sings about the pleasure of seeing her home. Do it. And, when Sam gits his work in, laugh! Laugh like a bull! And git Sally to laugh. I bet you two dollars and ten cents that Sam won't be in town the

Like a campaign speech was the effect of this!

Seffy objected no longer. He said he would do it all! Perhaps this, too, got about. At all events, before the next Sunday, the interest created by their rivalry was more than equal to the voice of the Gospel. All the township would be at church!

Sam would not be dislodged. He invented the most diabolical schemes for sequestrating Sally to himself durwhich guileless Sally often fell-and which seemed to proclaim her suitor to be himself. Sam, you remember, had access to Sally, but Seffy had not. Selfy confessed that this looked sinister. True, he remembered all that had of it. passed between them. But once before he had been in error.

So that Seffy, before the week's end, began once more-and more strongly-to deprecate the necessity for this public demonstration of his status. His father demanded it as a diplomatic necessity, inasmuch as Sally still retained Sam on a basis so: much like his own as to make the situation extremely embarrassing to even Old Baumgartner, who had let it be known that he was the active coadjutor of his son. To vanquish Seffy was to vanquish him, and he, if not Seffy himself, screwed Seffy's courage to the sticking point. After this, Seffy weakened no more, but proclaimed his purpose: It was generally conceded that the one who failed now would have to leave town.

So here was retiring little Seffy not yet been dislodged. And Seffy had forced by circumstances into a public

not yet arrived where he might put rivalry which are detested, and, it may as well be confessed-feared. It nized period for this, and events had must, also, be explained that Sally's course in maintaining these two strings to her bow until the breaking moment was not only universally commended, but was the unswerving custom of the vicinage for girls so fortunate as to have two strings. It was held likely to force one or the other to the point -and this was the purpose of rustic coquetry! And Sally's coquetry was not only acknowledged; it was tolerated, and, I fear, encouraged. And, alas, it had been as sweet to her as vinous dissipation to men. But now it had made not only her own, but Seffy's position tremendously more difficult.

> IX. It Was Beffy Who Was "Sacked."

So they three went to church on a certain Sunday. Sally sat on the 'women's side" and Seffy and Sam on the "men's side" in full view of the "audience"-which perceived and understood and was ready at the proper time to applaud, from the preacher to the sexton-to raise or lower its thumbs upon the combatants.

When the benediction had been said Seffy hastened out and found himself a place-close to the door, according to his father's word-in one of the lines of young men which stretched on either side of the path from the church door to the road beyond, at least a quarter of a mile. But he did not see Sam. Some one pushed in front of him. And, instead of combating for his position, he yielded it and found one further down, still seeking the location of his rival. He was crwded from this one, too, and he let it go and sought another one because he had not seen Sam. And it was necessary to his father's scheme, he remembered, that Sam and he should be about opposite. Of course, all this was error. His place was right by the church door. That was where Sally had a right to expect to find him. It had become a public matter, too. The public had its rights. It expected him there, even if he had to shed the blood of noses to stay there. This had often happened. But he was bewildered in the contradictory courses advised by his father, and, finally, seeking that which seemed best, found that which was worst. Dull Seffy!

He at last discovered Sam and found a lodgment for himself opposite and away down near the gate, where only the married men were-such as still waited for their wives-who amiably smoked until they came along. No unmarried maiden ever expects to be matched there. And, had Seffy been as wise as he was not, he would not have halted there. But he was deluded by Sam. There he was in the opposite line, the wrong one, indifferently chatting, and even smoking, with Hilary Groff-a married man. Seffy was now so sure of his conquest, that Sam's indifference vexed him. Evidently he did not mean to contend with him for Sally's arm, and it was to be a cheap and bloodless victory. For Seffy was one of those who grow brave "He was mighty quick, but mighty as opposition diminishes.

And now they were slowly coming ishness about being pleased to see her down-the maidens running the gantgrabbed. And while I was marching five-a dozen happy matings were on like a conquering hero, informing made. Seffy was counting. One poor chap was "sacked." He crushed his hear Bill on the off side, gitting out hat over his eyes and charged back that stuff 'bout pleasure and seeing through the lines and across the fields -no matter where. And then came Saily!-in a trim little hat with a fluttering ribbon that looked for all the world like the white signal, bearing settled Bill for efer more! Oh, it's | straight down upon him! But there was something in her eyes-expectant -militant-that made them starry. On she came with her head in the airlooking neither to the right nor to the left, as if she expected to walk home alone, nearly three miles!

"Oh, no!" thought Seffy-and Sam. But a bit of terror smote her face pale when she had passed the dooralone-and showed more and more as she went on. Some one laughed-then there was an unmistakable titter along the line. Still Sally passed on, keeping her temper as never before. Was not the old man right about the effect of laughter?

But now the temper loosed itself slowly-her face was scarlet. She had nearly reached the married men. Some one whispered:

"Gosh! He's gitting even by sacking

her! This was repeated. There was more laughter and more tittering. The crowd deserted the lines nearest the church and followed Sally down on either side in huge tumultuous phalanxes to see what would happen-if it were possible that she would have to go home alone. Several young men who had never dared to approach her ing the week which followed-into began to think of it. They knew that rather than not be taken at all she would take any one of them! There was more tumult now than laughter. And Sally's face grew so white that her eyes blazed like stars in the midst

Seffy qualled. He recognized the temper-only he had never seen it as terrible as this. He had forgotten Sam. It was only Sally he saw, as one sees as it leaps upon him.

And the unlookers, crowding at the and say so." sides, thought it a great and terrible hand to hand battle-to wait that way till the last moment and then to spring like tigers-or a piece of tremendous foolishness.

Both of you must be absolute sure " fools! Ain't you got no pity on the girl?

watch. I'm calculating on him made himself her legal guardian! leaving town to-morrow. That is my game. And I'm playing for the pot."

forgotten him. ... stepped noiselessly three paces toward Sally, crossed in front of Seffy and took her arm. There was a laugh almost ribald. Seffy could not see clearly-he could, least of all, think clearly-he did not know what had happened. He saw only the little white signal before him and blindly put out his arm.

It did not reach Sally at all, but Sam who turned and said with an imitation of girlish politeness:

"Thank you, Mr. Baumgartner, I'm sulted."

And, Sally, her face flaming with vengeance, took the trouble to turn back and cry-not into his ear, but into his very heart:

"Thank you, I'm suited." There are some people to whom no punishment seems sufficient, while any remains to be administered. One of the onlookers was of such a sort. He oried out as poor Seffy slunk away: "Give her back her dollar!"

And another:

"Or ninety-nine cents, anyhow!" Seffy quailed and drew back from the line-it was the instant that makes or mars-and he had lost. He might still have knocked Sam down and won-this would have been perfectly proper-but he followed the man who had but a moment before crushed through the line, and wild jeers followed him.

The Huge Fist of the Farmer. From that day Seffy avoided all public places-and all men. He was nobody-nothing. He fell rapidly into that kind of disrepute which is common to persons with falling reputations. It was to his discredit that he did not leave town, but this his father prevented. Again he took to the colton woods and the Poison springs, with, perhaps, the dim hope that Sally might again find him there, and that the peeping moon might again interfere on his behalf.

But the moon went through all her phases and then slowly turned her back on him-and Sally never came. In their casual meetings she was ice. Once they passed on the road to the store. She was in precisely the dear garments he remembered so well-of that first day-and as gay as then. He trembled, and then looked up like a mortally wounded animal. She was looking calmly over his head. To the rest of the world she was gaver than ever, though that Sunday night laugh still echoed in her head-kept her maddened. After all, it wasn't worth while to care for even Seffy with such a little spirit. Why didn't he fightkill Sam or somebody? And the cunning Sam set the story more widely going that for revenge Seffy had deserted her at the church door and that he had first laughed-Seffy. This was too piquant to be passed over, and it was heard far and wide.

To Seffy's father, who, even in this dire strait, strove for happiness for them both-and, of course, the pasturefield-she said with more abandoned disrespect than she had ever addressed to any one:

"You ought to be glad that I do not take revenge on him! If he wasn't so little I would. But he's not worth bothering about. Sacked me, did he? I'll show him!" "Why, Sally! What would you do?"

"Put him over my knee and spank him and then pen him in the cellar! "Sally, don't talk like that," pleaded the old man. "It sp'lles your voice."

And Sally gave him then and there a rude specimen of how her voice was being spoiled-which I may not reproduce. But it was expressed in anathema. Indeed, others had noticed that her voice, somehow, had lost its soft richness. She was particularly kind to the young storekeeper now, and he was particularly reckless and drunken. And rumor presently had it that she was known to be drunk with him sometimes!

"Sally-" said Seffy timorously, one day, (he had waited to tell her this) 'you don't think-you don't believethat I-said-

"I know," said Sally in voice that froze him, "that you are a fool-and I am not fond of fools. Go away! Be glad I don't lick you!"

And then rumor had it that she and Sam were to be married-"for spite." But, curiously enough, the person most affected by all this was not Sally, nor Seffy, nor Sam. It was Seffy's father, whose sufferings were nearing agony. Nothing could be done with Seffy. And course of the love between them, which had never been ruffled since Seffy was born, was often ruffled now. The old man, as their relations grew strained, became more and more exasperated at Seffy's lack of initia-

'Gosh-a'mighty! You goin' to let that molasses-tapper set right down on you and nefer git off? Can't you see that she wants you? It don't matter what she says! Don't you know it's a dare? Air you going to take a dare? Why, you usen't to when you was a When you year that durned new laugh of Sally's can't you see that somesing's wrong? She's drinking! That's what! You think she'd laugh so and drink if she wass happy? You with fear-stalled nerves the locomotive | was a fool-yas, a durn fool. It's your fault. Go right up to her like a man

"I did," said Seffy. "Hah, you did? An' what she says? She said she knowed it!"

"Well-begoshens! She's a worse fool. Gather her in and make a fool off of her and git efen! Turning her said Hilary Groff to Sam, "or absolute | back on an ol' man that harms no one -and her guardeen yit!'

Alas, this was another thing he had "Shut up!" answered Sam, "and done to secure the pasture-field-

"I'll gife it up-the guardeen. Yassir. She ken take keer herself. Fool You see that Sam had not forgotten -of course. Bose fools! You wait Seffy for a more -t, even if Seffy had tell she marries that durn molasses-

tapper if you want to see fun!" There was such real agony in the old man's voice that Seffy suffered,

"Pappy, I'm sorry-I ain't no good, I expect. I guess I'll go away before

the wedding." "Wedding-wedding! You goin' to let that wedding go on? And him git the pasture-field? Put him between

us and the railroad!" "How can I stop it, pappy?" "By marrying her yourself!"

"I got enough, pappy," said Seffy hopelessly. "They'd lynch me if I tried it again. I guess I'd better go away."

Quick anger flamed in his father's face at this invertebrate submission. And his voice, when he spoke, was harsher than Seffy had ever heard it.

"Got enough-got enough-that's all you know! And go away! That's all you ken say, you bull-headed idjiot! Go and apologize and git her back. Don't run. Then marry her next day. That'll settle the molasses-tapper, I expect, and show that you got an inch or two of backbone! Choke herchloroform her and carry her off!"

Seffy laughed at the absurdity of the thing. But it was unmirthful.

"Gosh-a'mighty! On a time like this you ken laugh! You right, you ain't no good-no, begoshens! You air an idjiot and fool! You no man! No, nor nefer will be! I'm sorry I'm you' daddy. I am, begoshens!"

Then, as his wrath mounted, he raised his huge fist and threatened

"Git away from me, or I'll break your head! I can't stand you no more! You not worth a dam'-not a dam'-to nobody. You look like you' mammy's relatifes-and they was all no good—git away, I tell you!"

He roared ominously; for Seffy, amazed at this from his gentle old father, was looking straight up at him out of a child's round eyes, his ligs parted, his throat exposed. Slowly, as his parent heaped contumely upon him, his sensitive young face whitened, and the light left it. Only, when his father mentioned his mother's name, he said with infinite softness: "Why, pappy!"

But he stood without fear under the great fist—as he had often done.

"You hear! I told you to git away or I'll smash your face in! I don't want you no more. Go to your mammy's relatifes out west"-he laughed horridly-"and see what they'll do for you! You'll live on bread and water



-they ain't got nossing else! You'll work all day and all night-and you'll haf no fun-they don't know no better

"Yes," said Seffy, turning dumbly

away. There was no doubt that he meant to go now. His dumb acquiescence in his sentence raised his father's wrath

"Yes-go, and be mighty quick about it. I'm chust itching to smash you. I'll nefer send for you if you rot in the poorhouse. I'll nefer mention you' name as long as I lif-no! I disown you! Never let me see you' dam' face again-go!"

It was all so utterly unbelievable that Seffy turned back. This raving madman his jolly old father, who had reverenced the memory of his mother and had taught him to do so-to mention her every time he prayed? The old man had turned, but Seffy came close and touched him gently. The caress only maddened him. Seffy cowed at the passion on the face of his father. He raised his fist.

"Git out-dam' you!" he shouted. "If you don't-" But the boy could not, now.

The huge fist trembled on high a moment, some instinct of sanity struggling to control it-then it fell on Seffy's upturned face,

He dropped among the clods-his pale hair mingling with the dust-his hands inertly outlying-terror still quivering in his lips and nostrils. Blood slowly oozed from his mouth and nose, and a livid red mark began to grow upon the depression in his forhead which the blow had made.

One moment-two-the old man looked down at this. Then he understood that he had done it, and with a savage animal-cry he swept the boy into his arms. Seffy doubled inertly upon him, as the dead do. His father raced frenziedly home with him, leaping fences like a hound. He put him upon the pretty white bed the boy had seen wont to make with such care for himself. It was dainty and smooth now. The blood dripped from Soffy's face and from his own beard and stained the white coverings. The sight was full of horror! He staggered drunkenly away. He looked hastily for his gnn-meaning, perhaps, to kill himself. But then it seemed to him that Seffy sighed. He fell on his knees and agonized for the life he thought he had taken. Then he felt a pulsebeat. With a hoarse cry he rushed out into the road, calling for