

ered wagon reached the little town of Greenwood and began to creak slowly down the main street. The man and woman were still in the same position on the seat. The horses walked with swinging heads and dragging feet, rolling up on either side thick clouds of dust, which shone with velvety softness in the moonlight. They were passing the first houses when Jess suddenly sat up and laid a hand on her husband's arm.

"Stop a minute, John; I want to look in here."

They were in front of a small cottage. The blinds were not drawn, and within they could see the family: an old man, who was dancing a baby on his knee, and the father and mother who were bending over the two. MacGregor pulled up his horses and sat watching, while the old man tickled the baby with his whiskers, and the parents laughed with their heads together.

"Having a purty nice time, ain't they?" he ventured. His wife made no response as he waited some time in silence.

"Well," he asked at length, "had enough?"

She turned her face toward him and he uttered an exclamation. By the moonlight he could see that her cheeks were wet with tears.

"Why, Jess—"

"There," she replied, quietly, "I couldn't help it, John. It made me think of Pa and the baby and—There, John, I'm awful sorry. I'm foolish, I suppose. Let's go on."

They rode in silence for another half-block. Then John turned the horses' heads into what seemed to be a picnic grove.

"We'll camp here," he said in a low voice.

He climbed down and began unhitching the horses.

"You just sit there till I come back, Jess," he said. "I'm going to water the horses down here, and then I'll get the supper myself. Don't you stir a finger."

She watched him quietly enough as he moved away in the moonlight which sifted through the trees, but when he came back he found her standing by the wagon. She raised her hand warningly as he tied the horses at the feed box and came around to her.

"Sh-sh," she said, "do you hear that singing?"

He stopped and listened.

"Why, yes, they're having prayer-meeting over there across the road. That's a church. You ain't forgot about the prayer-meeting, have you?"

"No," she replied, "I ain't."

"Yes, and, by golly, I believe that's 'Old Hundred,' too. Do you remember how I used to take you to prayer-meeting, Jess, when I was your steady? And how old Deacon Trumbull used to sit behind us and roar that same old song out? I used to wish he would keep still so's I could hear you."

She nodded. "John," she exclaimed, suddenly, "let's go over."

"Let's what?"

"Let's go over. I want to. We ain't been since we left home."

"But we ain't had any supper."

"That's all right. I don't want any anyway. Go on, now, and put your coat on, and I'll fix up a little."

When she came back he noticed that she had laid aside her sunbonnet and wore a belt. She took him by the arm and with a little laugh pulled him toward the road.

"Come on," she said, "didn't I tell you we were respectable. We're going to meeting just like we used to. Come on, now, we're just as good as anybody.

I guess we're not—movers, quite yet. Why, we might settle down right in this place."

"In the grove," he suggested.

She laughed again, and hummed to herself softly as they crossed the road. In the lighted vestibule she stopped suddenly and put her hand to her head.

"Is my hair all right?" she asked, anxiously.

He stopped and looked down at her. "Guess it's all right," he replied, "come on."

The singing had ceased when they entered. Up at the front an old man was praying in a high, droning voice, and the flickering light from the oil lamps shone on rows of bowed heads. They slid into a creaking back seat and sat there while the droning voice went on, and the lights flickered and shook in the night breeze. At length John leaned toward his wife.

"Don't he pray just like old Deacon Trumbull, though—and about as long. Look at the clock," he whispered.

She nodded. He straightened up for a moment, and then leaned over again.

"Say," in a tense whisper, "do you see the m'boys in the corner eatin' peanuts. Remember when the minister put St. Johnson's kids out for doin' that. Gosh!"

Jess laughed in spite of herself, and then punched him severely.

"Sh-sh," she said, "they're done."

It was the closing prayer. When the benediction which followed was over John turned and looked at Jess.

"Well, we had lots of prayer-meeting for our trouble, didn't we?"

"I don't care," she replied. She was looking hungrily at a laughing crowd of young people which had collected in the aisle. "I'd like to talk to some of them girls. They look real nice. We used to shake hands with strangers back home. And do you see that white haired old lady with the gold eye-glasses—don't she look like Miss Fletcher? Why, John, I feel almost at home. I wonder if they'll speak to us."

People began to go out in twos and threes. None of them offered to shake hands with the lonely couple in the back pew nor speak to them; but all gazed with a certain curiosity. A slight frown gathered on Jess' brow.

"John, what do they look at us that way for? Why, they look as though we didn't belong here—as though they were sorry for us."

He glanced down at his rough clothing with a laugh.

"Well, I guess they ain't any sorer than I am. I guess they don't see anything quite this tough in church very often. Did it ever strike you, Jess, that we don't look as if we really belonged here?"

She gave him a startled glance, and then looked down instinctively at her own dust-stained dress. The smile died from her face.

"O," she said, in a low voice, "I didn't know we looked like that."

The people were nearly all gone now. At the other end of the room an old man began to walk heavily from one pew to another, blowing out the lamps along the wall, and leaving a trail of darkness in his rear.

Suddenly Jess' face lightened; the aristocratic matron in the gold eye-glasses was coming straight toward them, with an unmistakable smile upon her lips. She shook hands with each of them graciously.

"I beg your pardon," she began sweetly, "but aren't you movers? Well," without waiting for a reply, "do you know, I have a curiosity to see how you people live. We've been read-

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ing you up in our club lately. And—would it hurt your feelings if I should ask to see your wagon?"

John looked uncertainly at Jess, whose lips were quivering dangerously. The woman misinterpreted.

"Of course," she said, opening her pocketbook. "I should expect to pay you for your trouble. You must need it—"

Jess had raised her hand impetuously; her dark eyes flashed.

"Don't you dare!" she said in a low voice, "O don't—"

She turned suddenly and walked away toward the door. She did not stop, and when John overtook her in the grove she was crying. He regarded her in awkward silence for a time, as she leaned against the wagon with covered face.

"See here, Jess," he broke out at last. "I know what's the matter. But that old lady don't mean anything, and they don't any of them. And you look at it this way: if we ain't movers what are we? That's what I want to know—what are we?"

There was another silence. At length she turned with a decided movement.

"You're right, John," in a steady voice, "I'm going back. No, you stay here. I'm going alone."

The old lady was just descending the church steps when Jess reached them. She walked straight to her.

"I just wanted to say that I'm sorry—and if you'd like to come over to the wagon now you can. We won't be here tomorrow."

"O, certainly, I should be delighted. And of course," hesitatingly, "you must take something."

She fumbled a moment in her purse, then drew forth a coin which Jess put out her hand and took.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

Early the next morning a canvas-covered wagon drawn by two lean horses creaked protestingly out of the grove and started briskly down the road. In the clear morning air the dry wheels shrieked with a certain cross-grained cheerfulness and an old pail hung beneath the wagon rattled a subdued undertone. On the driver's seat two figures were quite still—a man who sat slouched forward listlessly, and beside him a woman, upright and angular, gazing fixedly into the distance of the morning. W. J. F.

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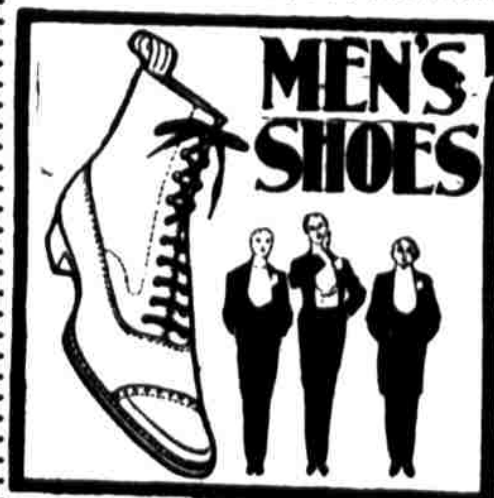
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