

ALICE MACGOWAN

THE WIVING OF
LANCE
CLEAVERAGE

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CHAPTER I. A PAIR OF HAGGARDS

NOON of summer in the highlands of Tennessee; the Cumberlands, robed in the mid-season's green, flashed here and there with banding and gemming of waters. The two Turkey Track Mountains, Big and Little, lying side by side and one running so evenly from the other that only the dweller upon them knew where to differentiate, basked in the full glow of a Sabbath morning radiance.

A young fellow of twenty-three, crossing the crown of a higher hill, tonsured years ago by the axe of some settler, but offering half way up its side resistance of undergrowth and saplings, paused a moment in the open to look down. Below him the first church bell had just rung in the little gray structure across the creek. Shining above the ocean of woods and the cabin homes that, like islets, dotted the forest at wide intervals, the Sabbath sun caught and lightened upon something bright, swung upon the newcomer's back. Himself as yet unseen, he gazed down upon this his world, spread map-like below him. He could pick out everybody's home. Each one of those cabins wore to-day, from porch floors hollowed with much scouring to inner cupboard niche, an air of Sunday expectancy that lacked little of being sanctimonious. Only the house-mother remained in charge of each, preparing the Sunday company dinner with even more outlay of energy than the preceding six had required. The men had, by common consent, adjourned to spring, barn, the shelter of big trees in the yard; he caught glimpses of the young folks below him on the woods-paths, attired in their brightest frocks and shirts, and whatever finery they could command, sauntering by twos and threes toward preaching. His smiling, impersonal gaze was aware of Callista Gentry sitting on a rock above the spring, holding a sort of woodland state like a rustic queen. The time of roses was past in this southern land, but every dooryard in the Turkey Tracks was painted gay with hollyhocks, while in ravine and thicket flamed the late azaleas, ranging from clear pale yellow, through buff and orange, to crimson. These lay piled in a sheaf beside the big gray rock, and the girl who sat there was showing her mates how to trim their hats with them, while several boys looked on and presumably admired.

The curious feature of Callista Gentry's following was, that it included as many young women as young men, and the chariot wheels of her mates looked robbed always, because, inferentially, the man who courted any other would rather have Callista Gentry if he might.

Coached and forwarded, exploited and made the most of ever since she could remember; a bright, pretty child, and a dutiful student, during her brief days of country schooling; her mother had from infancy enforced all the rural arts of beauty culture to make her what she was. Long home-knitted yarn gloves were worn to protect the shapely hands and whiten them. The grand big mane of ashen-blond hair was washed in fresh-caught rainwater, clipped in the dark of the moon, combed and tended and kept as no one else's hair was. Her sunbonnets were never the long-caped ungainly affairs commonly seen; they took on, whether by accident or design one could hardly say, the coquetry of a wood violet half-blown; and when these were not in use, a broad hat shaded the exquisite fairness of the oval cheek. Callista had grown up a delicate court lady, smooth and fine to look upon, pink and white and golden, like one of those rare orchids, marvelously veined and featured, known only to the bees of the wood, whose loveliness is always ashiver with peculiar vitality. This Sunday morning the lepidopteral flutter of gay calicoes, and the bee-like murmur of

young male voices in her court of youths and maidens, carried out well the figure of the rare, moth-bewitching blossom.

"I wish't Lance Cleaverage'd come – then we'd see fun!" cried Buck Fuson, rising to his knees and gazing across the slope. "I'd ruther hear him and Callista fuss as to eat my dinner. Them two has the masterest arguments I ever heard outside of a law-court."

Brown little Ola Derf, sitting slightly apart from the others braiding pine needles into a ring, looked up suddenly. A woman at the spring below scooping a drink for a fat child, lifted a long drab face and sighted in the same direction. This was the Widow Griever, elder sister of Lance Cleaverage. Sour censor of public morals that she was, Roxy Griever considered eighteen-year-old Callista the young woman perfect, and found her own brother quite unworthy of the paragon. Only the central figure of the group appeared to take no notice, while the girls about her, at the mere mention of Lance, all fluttered and resettled themselves with a certain vague air of expectancy.

"You boys ought to be ashamed of yo'se'fs," Roxy Griever reproved. Then apart to young Fuson, "Callista's got more sense than to pay any attention to such a light-headed somebody as that fool brother o' mine. Let me tell you, Callista Gentry has more sense than any of you men persons give her credit for. She's a serious-minded gal. You Mary Ann Marthy, you quit treadin' over yo' Sunday shoes." And she raised her small daughter a bit from the pathway and set her down sharply, as though to indicate the correct manner of walking in Sunday foot-gear.

The infant of the triple name – her Uncle Lance said she sounded like twins if she didn't look it – put up a mutinous red mouth and lowered from under flaxen brows.

"Me wants to hear 'em fuss," she muttered as she progressed reluctantly toward the little church on the hill-side.

"Well, you ain't goin' to hear 'em fuss, and they ain't goin' to fuss, and you couldn't hear 'em if they did," admonished her mother lucidly, accelerating the infant's pace from the rear. "The big spring ain't no place for chillen like you, and old women like me. Let the light-minded and the ungodly do about in such ef they will. You and me is goin' into the church house and set thar till preachin'."

Fathers and mothers were herding their broods of lesser children in, but boys and girls of older growth, young men and women of an age to be thinking of mating, strolled by twos or sat on the bank above the big spring that supplied the baptismal pool of Brush Arbor church. Callista Gentry was wearing a new print frock – and looking quite unconscious of the fact.

"That ain't no five cent lawn," whispered Ola Derf enviously, as she eyed it from afar. The Derf girl was an outsider at most gatherings, and particularly so at church affairs. Everybody knew she came to Brush Arbor only on a chance of seeing Lance Cleaverage.

"Thar comes Lance now!" announced Fuson, and then winked at his companions.

Callista never raised her glance, nor did the even tenor of her speech falter, though something told the onlooker that she was aware. A swift slight contraction of plumage like that of a hawk suddenly on the alert, a richer glow on the softly oval cheek, a light in the down-dropped eyes which she jealously hid, a rearrangement, subtle and minute, of her attitude toward the world, showed that she needed no sight nor hearing to advise her of the coming of the lithe young fellow who approached from the ragged second growth of the abandoned hillside clearing. He came straight through, paying no attention to paths – that was Lance Cleaverage. His step was light and sure, yet it rent and crushed what was in his way. On his back swung the banjo; his soft felt hat was off in his hand; as he moved, the sleeves of his blue hickory shirt fluttered in the breeze that stirred his hair, and he sang to himself as he came. What he sang was not a hymn. His hazel eyes were almost as golden as the tan of his cheek, and there was a spark in the depths of them that matched the audacious carriage of his head. At his advent the Widow Griever turned and let the fat child find her way alone.

"You Lance," she began in a scandalized tone, "don't you bring that sinful and ungodly thing into the house of the Lord. You know mighty well and good the preacher is about to name you out in meetin'; and here you go on seekin' the ways of the Evil One. Pack that banjo straight back home this minute."

She evidently had as little expectation of Lance obeying her as he had of doing so. Her words were plainly intended merely to set forth her own position – to clear her skirts of reproach. The young folks about her giggled and looked with open admiration at the youth who dared to bring such a worldly object to Sunday preaching.

"Banjo'll let the preacher alone, if the preacher'll let it alone," smiled Lance, unconcernedly pulling the instrument around to get at the strings, and touching them lightly. "You go 'long into the church and get your soul saved for Heaven, Sis' Roxy. I reckon they need representatives of the Cleaverage family in both places."

"Well, that's whar you're a-goin' – er more so," asserted the widow with dignity, as she turned her back once more on the young folks and moved away.

Lance took the ribbon of his banjo from his neck and flung it over a blossoming azalea bush.

"I'll hang my harp on a willer tree,

And away to the wars again,"

he hummed softly just above his breath.

"I don't aim to hurt the preacher's feelings. I won't take my banjo into his church – sech doctrine as Drumright's is apt to be mighty hard on banjo strings. Don't you-all want to have a little dance after the meeting's out – on the Threshin'-floor Rock up the branch?"

The girls looked duly horrified, all but Ola Derf, who spoke up promptly,

"Yes – or come a-past our house. Pap don't mind a Sunday dance. You will come, won't you, Lance?" pleadingly.

Callista Gentry did not dance. She had always, in the nature of things, belonged to the class of young people in the mountains who might be expected at any time to "profess" and join the church. The musician laughed teasingly.

"I reckon we'd better not," he said finally. "Callista's scared. She begged me into bringing my banjo to-day (you don't any of you know the gal like I do), and now she's scared to listen to it."

Callista barely raised her eyes at this speech, and spared to make any denial.

"You-all that wants to dance on a Sunday better go 'long there," she said indifferently. "It's mighty near time for preaching to begin, and you've got a right smart walk over to the Derf place." Dismissing them thus coolly from her world, she addressed herself once more to pinning a bunch of ochre and crimson azaleas into the trimming of her broad hat.

"Lance," drawled Buck Fuson, "I hear you' cuttin' timber on yo' land. Aimin' to put up a cabin – fixin' to wed?"

The newcomer shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply.

"When I hearded it, I 'lowed Callista had named the day," persisted Fuson.

"Have ye, Callista?" Rilly Trigg put in daringly, as neither of the principals seemed disposed to speak.

"The names that the days have already got suits me well enough," Callista observed drily. "I don't know why I should go namin' ary one of 'em over again."

There was a great laugh at this, of which Cleaverage appeared entirely oblivious.

"Yes," he began quietly, when it had subsided, "I'm about to put me up a house – I like to be a-buildin' – a man might as well improve his property. There's one gal that wants me mighty bad, and has wanted me for a long while; sometimes I'm scared she'll get me. Reckon I might as well be ready."

"Ye hear that, Callisty?" crowed little Rilly Trigg. "Ye hear that! Have ye told him adzackly the kind of house ye want? I 'low ye ort."

"Put a little yellow side o' that red," advised Callista composedly, busying herself wholly with the hat Rilly was trimming. "There – don't you think that looks better?"

Rilly made a face at Fuson and Cleaverage, and laughed.

"No need to ask her which nor whether," said Lance nonchalantly. "Any place I am is bound to suit Callista. I intend that my house shall be the best in the Turkey Tracks; but if it wasn't she'd never find it out, long as *I* was there."

Again there was a chorus of appreciative laughter.

"How's that, Callista – is it so for a fact?" inquired Fuson, eager to see the game go on.

Callista opened her beautiful eyes wide, and smiled with lazy scorn.

"Truly, I'm suited with whatever Lance Cleaverage builds, and wherever and whenever he builds. Let it be what it may, it's nothing to me."

"You Rilly!" called a shrill feminine voice from the direction of the church. "Bring the basket."

"Help me with it, Buck," said Aurilla, and the two started down the slope together.

"Now," suggested Lance, with an affectation of reluctance, "if the rest of you-all don't mind giving us the place here, I reckon Callista's got a heap that she wants to say to me, and she's ashamed to speak out before folks."

The mad project of a Sunday dance, which nobody but Ola Derf had entertained for a moment, was thus tacitly dropped. There was a general snickering at Lance's impudent assumption. Again Callista seemed too placidly contemptuous to care to make denial. Boys got up from their lounging positions on the grass, girls shook out their skirts, and two and two the young folks began to straggle toward the gray little church.

"You're a mighty accommodatin' somebody," observed Lance, dropping lightly on the grass at Callista's feet. "I have been told by some that you'd make a contentious wife; but looks to me like you're settin' out to be powerful easy goin'. Ain't got a word to say about how many rooms in the house, nor whar the shelves is to be, nor nothin' – eh?"

Reckless of time or place he reached up, put a finger under her chin, and turned her face toward him, puckering his lips meditatively as though he meant to kiss her – or to whistle. He got a swift, stinging slap for his pains, and Callista faced around on the rock where she sat to put herself as far from him as might be.

"Who said anything about wives and husbands?" she demanded. "I was talking about you building on yo' land. Hit's nothin' to me. I never expect to live in the houses you build, nor so much as set foot in 'em. When you named that girl that was tryin' to wed you, I shorely thought you must have been meanin' Ola Derf. As for me, if you heard me talkin' of the house I expected to *live* in, you'd hear a plenty – because I'm particular. I ain't a-going to put up with no puncheon floor in my best room. Hit's got to be boards, and planed at that. I ain't a-goin' to break my back scouring puncheons for no man."

Lance nodded, with half closed eyes. It was plain he got her message. One guessed that the house would be made to please her, and, too, that he liked her the better for being fastidious.

The two were apparently alone together; but neither Ola Derf nor Flenton Hands was among the young people moving away down the further slope. Lance gazed after their retreating friends and heaved a lugubrious sigh.

"Well, looks like they've all started off and left me for you and you for me," he commented sadly.

"Have they?" inquired Callista without interest. "They show mighty poor judgment."

"Same sort of judgment I'm showing, settin' here talking to you, when I might as well spend my time with a good-lookin' gal," retorted Lance promptly.

"The Lord knows you waste yo' time talking to me," Callista sent back to him with a musing, unruffled smile on her finely cut lips. "Your settin' up to me would sure be foolishness."

"Settin' up to you?" – Lance took his knees into an embrace and looked quizzically at her as she reclined above him, milk-white and pink, blue-eyed and flaxen-haired, a creature to cuddle and kiss one would have said, yet with a gall-bag under her tongue for him always. "Me settin' up to you?" He repeated the words with a bubble of apparently unsubduable amusement in his tone. "I reckon you're a-doin' the settin' up; everybody seems to understand it so. I just mentioned that the rest of the folks had left you and me alone together, and I was goin' on to say that I began to suffer in the prospect of offerin' you my company up to the church-house. Lord, some gals will make courtin' out of anything!"

A subdued snicker sounded from the screen of leafage behind the spring. Several young people lingered there for the fun of hearing Lance Cleaverage and Callista Gentry fuss. The red began to show itself in the girl's smooth, fair cheeks. She caught her wide hat by its strings and got suddenly to her feet.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Lance Cleaverage," she said coldly, "I never took enough notice of you to see was you courtin' me or some other girl; and I'll thank you now to step yourself out of my way and let me get on to the church-house. I've got to lead the tribble, come service time. I can't stand fooling here with you, nor worry my-self to notice are you courting me or somebody else."

She held her graceful head very high. If she swung the hat by its strings a thought too rapidly, it was the only sign she gave of any excitement as she gained the path.

Cleaverage ranged himself beside her, leaving the banjo in the bushes. "All right – all right," he remarked in a pacifying tone. "I'm willin' to walk up to the door with you, if that's what's troublin' you so greatly; but I don't want to go in and sit alongside of you on the middle seats. You take your place on the women's side, like a good gal, and let me have some peace, settin' over with the men."

For a moment she was dumb. Half a dozen had pushed into view, and were listening to them now. They all understood that Lance knew well enough she must sit with the singers, yet his open refusal to accompany her to the middle seats, where the courting couples generally found place, was not the less galling.

"Tell him you won't never step yo' foot in church beside him, Callista," prompted a man's voice, and Flenton Hands stepped out on the path, twisting a bit of sassafras in his fingers and looking from one to the other with quick shiftings of his gray eyes.

Lance laughed radiantly but soundlessly, his face and eyes shining with mirthful defiance. The girl looked down and trifled with her hat ribbons.

"Why don't you say it?" inquired Cleaverage at length. Hands leaned forward and stared eagerly at her, his mouth a little open and his breath coming quick. He had always been the most pertinacious of Callista's followers; an older man than any of the others, he brought to bear on his wooing the persistence and determination of his years.

Callista just glanced at the younger man, and let her gaze rest on Hands.

"What's the use of telling him what he already knows mighty well and good?" she said finally.

"Give me the pleasure of walking up with you this morning, then," Hands encroached eagerly.

With negligent composure Callista looked about her. She was not willing to walk with Lance – she doubted if he would ask her again. She was not willing to discredit him and go with Hands. She was determined that Cleaverage should not walk with another girl.

"Come on, Ola," she coolly addressed the figure plainly to be seen behind Hands. "Let's you and me hurry over and see what hymns Brother Drumright is going to use. You sing mighty good counter, and I'd like to have you next to me."

Ola Derf could not refuse. It was almost equal to social rehabilitation to be allowed to walk with Callista Gentry from the spring to the church, to sit beside her in the singing seats; yet the brown girl cast uneasy glances backward till she saw Lance, whistling melodiously, turn to the

blooming azalea bush and catch up his banjo from it. She stopped in her tracks, holding Callista back.

"Whar – whar ye gwine, Lance?" she inquired anxiously. If Cleavage was not coming to church it would scarcely be worth while for her to torture herself with an hour of old Preacher Drumright's holding forth. "Whar ye gwine?" she reiterated, as the other girl pulled her sleeve and attempted to hurry on.

"Whar you and Callista ca'n't come," returned Lance, speaking over his shoulder unceremoniously.

"Ain't ye gwine to stay to preachin'?" persisted the brown girl. "I – I thought ye was, or I – ain't ye gwine to stay?"

"No," drawled Cleavage. "I just brought the banjo to please Callista – because I promised her I would, when she begged me to. I had no notion of staying to listen to Drumright."

"Come on – if you're a-coming," Callista admonished the Derf girl with a little flash of temper which Lance did not fail to observe, any more than she missed the chuckle with which he received it.

"Well, I'm a-goin' with ye," announced Ola. She let go Callista's arm, and turned back to where Lance was taking a shadowy path into the forest.

"I told you, gals couldn't come," Cleavage bantered her. But Ola persisted.

"I can go wherever you can go. Lance – wait! Wait for me – I'm a-comin'."

"Callista'll be mad," objected Cleavage. "She begged and begged me, and I wouldn't leave her come along of me; now if I take you, she'll be mad."

"Like I cared where you went or who went with you!" Callista retorted, eyes shining blue fire, head crested. "Come on, Mr. Hands, it's time we were stepping, if we want to get in to go through the hymns."

"And you will sit alongside of me?" Hands's voice pleaded close to her ear.

Ola and Lance were of the same age; the blond girl, lingering half indignant, could remember how hardy, free little Ola Derf used to play with the boys, always singling Lance Cleavage out as the companion for her truant expeditions. Now in mute denial of Hands's petition, Callista shook her head, and in doing so managed to glance round and get a tormenting glimpse of Ola and Lance disappearing together between the trees. Under the green domes of oak and liriodendron, the latter starred all over now with orange-tawny tulips, she saw them pass. Wine of summer was in the veins of the forest. Even the sober oaks, wreathed like bacchanals, overflowed with sweetness from their wrappings of wild grape. The two with the banjo took their way down a steep path toward a jade-green pool, a still reach of water arched over by fantastic tangles of laurel and rhododendron, black as the tents of Kedar, lighted only by the flash of a water-fall that caught the sun. This was the baptismal place.

The daughter of the house of Gentry turned her face resolutely toward respectability and the church, albeit there was no joy in the countenance. Strung out over a quarter of a mile were courting couples bent toward the same destination. To these young hearts it seemed well worth while to have lain under the heel of winter to attain this marvelous summer morning with its green-clothed forest, its wreathing of blossoms where they passed. Clean and cool as a bell's note, the song of a thrush deep in the wood spilled jeweled drops of sound through the trembling branches overhead. A catbird's sonata rippled boldly out upon the very path. A canopy of bloom was woven and flung over the spring by the black, knotty fingers of the laurel. Bees tumbled happily in the bosom of the fairest drooping clusters, their hum nearly drowned by the heavy gurgle of the creek water.

Callista drew in her breath sharply. Summer and sun and light and love everywhere – and she was walking up to the church-house with Flenton Hands, while back on some forest by-path, with music at his finger ends and Ola Derf beside him, Lance Cleavage forgot her with a laugh.

CHAPTER II. THE UP-SITTING

GRANNY YEARWOOD – the grandmother of Flenton Hands and his sisters – was dead. The work-hardened old body had parted with its flame of life reluctantly; for nearly a year she had been declining toward the end; and during the last months the family had cared for her almost day and night. They were worn out with the toil of it before she herself wore out. But now it was all over. The first outburst of noisy lamentation, which is fairly conventional in the Southern mountains, was past. The corpse had been decently composed on a rude plank scaffold, while Octavia Gentry and Roxy Griever took charge of the household and began to order things in that curious half-ecclesiastical fashion which follows the footsteps of death.

It was near noon, and Octavia dished up the dinner, while Roxy paid more attention to the impending funeral arrangements. Before the meal was over, young people began to come in, though none could quite say how they had received word. The girls made proffer of assistance, and swiftly the table was cleared away, the dishes washed, and the house and surroundings put in immaculate order. Work in the fields was stopped, that messengers might be sent, one on horseback to notify distant-dwelling kin, another with a wagon to buy the coffin down in Hepzibah, a third afoot to arrange with the strong young men of the family connection about helping to dig the grave. All the flowers in the dooryard were gathered and laid round the corpse. The withered old face was covered with a damp cloth, and then a borrowed sheet was drawn smoothly over the whole mound. The Widow Griever was so deeply versed in the etiquette of such occasions, and so satisfyingly exacting on all points, as to make an undertaker even more highly superfluous than he would usually have been among those simple folk. What with garments and accessories she had brought from her own scant widow's wardrobe, and articles hastily borrowed from the nearer neighbors, she managed inside of two hours to have Little Liza and her two sisters – the mother of the family was dead some years ago – clad in black and seated in state inferior only to that of the dead.

More flowers were brought by girls and small boys from the neighbors' yards – yellow and purple and red were the colors mostly in bloom now, and those which would have been favored for this occasion. Roxy gravely arranged them and set them in place. She had veiled the looking-glass and stopped the clock as soon as she came into the house.

"A body cain't be too careful about all these here things," she said with a solemn sniff. "Hit's easy at a time like this for something to be did that crosses the luck."

Women came and went through the open doors, silent almost as the little breeze that played between. Everybody wore the same expression of mournful acquiescence in the natural order of things. Greetings were exchanged in low tones. Callista, carrying a basket of garden asters, came up the front walk, looking openly for her mother, guarding a little warily against Flenton Hands's approach. Some girls hurrying out to seek ferns in the low places of the wood met her, and she turned back with them, joining her activities to theirs and making a wreath of the flowers she had brought.

Flenton Hands was thirty years old. To have arrived at this age unmarried is, in the mountains, in some measure a reproach. True, he aligned himself sharply with the religious element of the community, and this, when youthful masculinity is ever apt to choose the broad way where there is more company, bespoke for him a certain indulgence or toleration that would have been denied a typical old bachelor.

He was cantankerous old Preacher Drumright's right hand at all times, and Drumright was safe always to approve him. He was the kind of man who seeks the acquaintance and company of those well-to-do and older than himself, paying a sober court to respectability and money, and thus

coming eventually to be rated as one of the elders, while he yet held the dubious position of an unmarried male who shilly-shallied in the matter of wedding.

No actual scandal ever attached to Flenton Hands. If there were improprieties to be debited against him, he kept such matters out of the sight of Turkey Track people, and only a vague rumor of something discreditable associated itself with his Valley connections to warrant young girls in pouting their lips and referring to him as "that old Flenton Hands"; while their mothers reproved and told them that he was one of the best young men, as well as one of the best matches, in the neighborhood.

So far as personal appearance went, he was well enough, yet with a curious suggestion of solidity as though his flesh might have been of oak or iron. The countenance, too, with its round, high cheek-bones, had an unpleasing immobility, resting always in a somewhat slyish cast of expression which the odd slant of the light gray eyes gave to it. For the rest, he was thin-lipped, with thick, straight, dark hair, and an almost urban air of gentlemanliness, an effort at gentility which, in a shorter and more cheerful individual, would have been smug.

"Flenton's gone for the coffin," Sallie Blevins said. "He always tends to it when there's anything to do that calls for money to be spent."

"I reckon he's got a plenty," supplied little Rilly Trigg; "but someway I never could like his looks greatly. There, I oughtn't to have said that – and his granny laying dead in the house that-a-way."

Callista did not add her opinion to this discussion, but finding that she was in no danger of meeting Flenton, hurried the others promptly up to the house. As soon as she came in sight, Little Liza, six feet tall, with a jimber-jaw and bass voice, came and fell upon her neck and wept. Little Liza Hands got her descriptive adjective from being the third of the name. To-day she was especially prominent, because Granny Yearwood, the first Eliza, ninety pounds of fiery energy and ambition, had at last laid down the burden of her days. Her daughter, Eliza the second, had lain beside her husband, Eliphalet Hands, in churchyard mold these twenty years; and *her* big daughter, with the bovine profile, the great voice, and the timid, fluttered soul of a small child, remained in the world, the only Eliza Hands – yet still Little Liza to those about her. And for her name's sake, Little Liza was chief mourner.

The Hands girls all had a sort of adoring attitude toward Callista Gentry. Flenton wanted her, and they had been trying to get Flenton everything he wanted since he was small enough to cry for the moon, and strike at the hand which failed to pluck it down for him. Callista had not intended to stay. She was to be over later in the day – or the same night, rather – with the young people who sat up. But Little Liza managed to detain her on one pretext or another until the coffin arrived and Granny was finally placed therein.

"Just look at them thar shiny trimmin's on that thar coffin," admired Little Liza, jogging Callista's elbow. "That's Flent. That's my brother Flent. They ain't a thing he grudges to them he loves."

Callista uttered a soothing and satisfactory reply, and was making her escape, when Hands himself overtook her at the door. His features were drawn to an expression of great solemnity, one which suited them ill, for he had the upslanting brow, the pointed face and the narrow eye that, lightened by mirth, may be antic, but without the touch of humor is forbidding and even sinister.

"You're not going to leave us, air you?" he inquired in a carefully muffled tone, as though indeed Granny was sleeping lightly and might be easily wakened.

"Mother's going to stay now, and I'm coming back to-night," Callista hastened to say.

"I'm mighty glad you air," returned Flenton, with a heavy sigh. "In these times of affliction, hit's a powerful comfort to me to have you in sight."

Callista edged closer to the others. She was not unwilling to be seen standing whispering with Flenton. He was a good match, a creditable captive of any girl's bow and spear; yet she did not enjoy his love-making, least of all now that it was mingled with this ill-sorted solemnity.

"Flenton, have they sent word to your Uncle Billy's folks?" asked Octavia Gentry, making her appearance in the doorway behind the two.

"Yes'm," returned Flenton, not pleased to be interrupted, yet necessarily civil to the woman whom he hoped to have for a mother-in-law.

"And does the Bushareses and Adam Venable and his wife know hit? Is Mary a-comin'?" she pursued the catalog. "What about the Aspel Yearwoods out in Big Buck Gap – has anyone went out there? And Faithful Yearwood, that married Preacher Crowley – ain't they livin' down in the Tatum neighborhood?"

"Yes'm, they air," confirmed Flenton. "Cousin Ladd 'lowed to send one o' his chaps on a nag to Faithful Crowley's folks; and Ab Straley was to let them at Big Buck Gap know." Though impatient, he made a decent end. When he looked around, Callista had quietly moved away.

The day's work was over; men and boys began to arrive at the Hands place, some carrying lanterns. From early candle lighting till near the turn of the night the house would be full; then the elders, men and women on whose day labor a family must depend, would begin to slip away, except a few old widowers and bachelors who might remain smoking on the steps outside; and a circle of young folks who would be left sitting in the lamplight and fireshine of the main room. Flenton knew of old experience just how the night would go. He longed inexpressibly to be one of those up-sitting young people that he might push his chair close to Callista Gentry's and whisper to her in the privilege of the hour. Yet he was held back by a consideration for his dignity as one of the bereaved.

"Miz. Gentry," said Roxy Griever, "will you stay and he'p with the supper – they aim to have a reg'lar meal put on the table at about midnight – settin' up with the dead is mighty wearin'."

"I 'low the gals would rather tend to that theirselves," deprecated Octavia, mildly. "I mind how it was when I was a gal. I never did want some old women pesterin' around at sech a time."

She cast a swift glance to where Callista sat, her fair head bent, the lamplight upon its bright burden of corn-colored braids, Lance Cleaverage, his hands in his pockets, standing before the girl regarding her, and evidently about to say something.

The Widow Griever's look followed Octavia's to the front room in which half-a-dozen couples had paired off, whispering, giggling a bit if the truth must be told, with an occasional undernote of hysteria in the giggles.

"That's jest the reason," she announced, straightening up from the hearth where she had been stirring a vast boiler full of very strong coffee. "The gals that lets tham men have their way is foolish. They'll rue the day they done so. Men persons would always have the old folks leave, and the young folks run things to suit theirselves; but I don't believe in sech."

On the mental horizon of the Widow Griever there hovered ever a vast, dun, evil-promising cloud known as "tham men." She never alluded to the opposite sex in any way other than collectively, and named them in this manner, which held in it all of reproach. Her father – gentle soul – presented himself to her under the name of Poppy, as somewhat set apart from the raging mass of predatory males addressed more or less openly and directly to destruction. Poppy and a young brother, Sylvanus, though belonging to the vicious sex and thereby under suspicion, were possible; but Lance, the lawless and debonair, was not only one of the enemy – he was Roxy Griever's horrible example. The church-house where "tham men" were kept on the one side so that the gentler half of creation might sit peacefully on the other, was to her thinking the only safe and proper place of public gathering.

"I tell you, Miz. Gentry," she now pursued, her reprehending eye going past the person she answered to fasten itself on Lance's lounging figure and note the careless, upward fling of his head, "I tell you that I ain't never been back to the Settlement sence I left it a widder. What would I

be doin' down thar amongst all tham men? But Lance, he goes down, and every time he goes, I think he gits more of the Old Boy in him, 'caze evil is a-walkin' around at noonday down in tham settlements, and you cain't be safe anywhars."

"Might just as well quit being scared then," drawled Lance's soft voice. He had stepped noiselessly to the door, at Callista's suggestion to see if the coffee were ready.

"You Lance Cleaverage!" returned his sister in a carefully suppressed tone that was sufficiently acid to make up for its lack of volume, "I ain't a-goin' to quit bein' scared for yo' say-so. You ought to be ashamed to name such – in the house with the dead this a-way. No, the coffee'll not be ready for somewhile yet. When hit is, you'ns can fetch cheers and he'p yourselves to it. I'm a-goin' to show Miz. Gentry my gospel quilt that I brung with me to lay over Granny."

Roxanna Cleaverage had married rather late in life. Girlhood had been but an unsatisfactory season to her; young women in a primitive society are not given much prominence, and Roxy had neither beauty nor charm to command what was to be had. Lacking these, she made a great point of religion, which led incidentally to her marriage with John Griever, an itinerant preacher, and brought her two blissful years and Mary Ann Martha. As the wife of a preacher she had been able to assume some dignity, to instruct, to lay down the law, to keep herself measurably in the public eye.

When she was widowed, it was bitter to her to go back to Kimbro Cleaverage's poor home and drop once more into obscurity. She yearned desperately to wear some mark of distinction, to have at least some semblance of social power. And in direct response to this longing, there came a vision in the night, and Roxy rose up and took her bits of quilt pieces and began to fashion a new thing. Other women might have the Rising Sun, the Log Cabin, the Piney-blow, the Basket of Posies; she had conceived and would execute a master work in the way of quilts, quite outside the line of these. Roxy lacked entirely that crude art sense which finds its expression in the mountain woman's beautifully pieced quilt; she only burned to startle admiration, to command respectful attention by some means. The big square of muslin was bought at the expense of considerable pinching and saving, and she began to set upon it those figures which had occupied her mind, her time and her fingers through the years since. Clumsily done, with no feeling whatever for form, proportion, or color, she poured into it a passion of desirous energy which yet produced its effect. The quilt was always at hand for such occasions as this, or when the Presiding Elder came on one of his rare visits. And it was useful to bring out if there were trouble, if someone needed to be overawed or to be threeped down. But that member of the Cleaverage Clan who in her eyes most needed threeping was proof against the gospel quilt. She had never put it forth for Lance's confusion since the day he took such an expressive interest in the undertaking, and advised – in the presence of Preacher Drumright – the adding of a sightly little border of devils around the semi-sacred square.

"A fine row o' davils would help the looks of it mightily, Sis' Roxy," he had argued. "They're named frequent in the Bible, and I'd cut 'em out for you. I would sure enough," he laughed, as she looked heavy reproach at him. "You give me a sharp pair o' shears and I can cut out as fine a lookin' devil as you or anybody need wish for!"

After that she let him alone, aware that his more gifted eye criticized her failures, even when he did not seek the circle about the exhibited quilt and wilfully mistake her angels for turkey buzzards.

The two older women now passed into that cool, shaded little chamber where lay the dead. The windows were open, and the white curtains blew gustily in the night breeze, making the candle Roxy carried flicker. She set it on a high shelf, and got out a thick roll of stuff, unwrapping and spreading forth her contribution to the solemnity of the occasion.

"Hit's jest the top on it," she communicated in a hoarse whisper. "I hain't got the heart to put it in frames and quilt it, 'caze I keep thinkin' of something else that ort to go on it, time I say I'm done. Cur'us that I ain't never showed it to you before." (This was a common formula with the widow, and nobody ever disputed it). "See, that's Adam and Eve, to begin on," and she indicated a pair of

small, archaic figures cut from blue checked gingham, their edges turned neatly in and whipped to the white domestic background – when one thinks of it, a domestic background is fairly proper for Adam and Eve. "That ginghams they' cut out'n was a piece o' John's shirt – the last one I made him."

"Tut, tut," responded Octavia, making that little clicking sound with the tongue which does duty variously to express sympathy, reprehension, surprise, or deprecation. She regarded the artistic achievement before her with attention and respect. One could readily distinguish Eve from Adam, because Eve was endowed with petticoats, while Adam rejoiced in legs. Of course Eve had feet; but it would have taken someone less well acquainted with the moral character of the Widow Griever than was Octavia Gentry to deduce legs from those feet.

"What's that thar?" she made the customary inquiry, putting her finger on a twisty bit of polka-dotted calico. "That must be the serpent."

"Hit air." Roxy returned the expected answer solemnly.

The Ancient Evil was represented as standing sociably on his tail, facing the tempted pair.

"My! Don't he look feisty?" commented Octavia, with courteous admiration. "Watch him jest a-lickin' out his tongue in Eve's face. Lord," she sighed conventionally, "how prone women air to sin!"

"Women? Huh!" snorted Mrs. Griever. "Not nigh so prone as tham men. Look-a-here," turning the quilt to get at the Tree of Good and Evil; "look at them thar apples. Now I made some of 'em out of red calico, and some out of yellow. Do you think I ort to have a few green, Miz. Gentry? Look like green apples is mighty sinful and trouble makin'."

"I don't know," Octavia debated, as she ran her fingers over a brave attempt at one of the Beasts of Revelation. "You might add a few green ones. Hit does stand to reason that the Old Boy is in green apples more than in ripe ones; but ef them that Eve tempted Adam with had been green – do you reckon he'd 'a' bit?"

The scandal was such an old one, that Roxy was evidently a little irritated at its revival.

"Well, o' course," she said with some asperity, "a body can't gainsay what's in the Bible; but I have my doubts about that thar apple fuss. Hit's men that prints the Good Book, and does about with it – not women; an' I've always had a feelin' that mo' likely hit was Adam got into that apple business first."

"Well, I don't know," repeated Octavia doubtfully. "I always 'lowed the Bible was the Bible. But what's a-goin' to be here?" pointing to a sizable blank space.

"Why, that's a part that I ain't got to finish yet," explained Roxy. "Miz. Abner Dowst given me the prettiest piece o' goods last time I was at her house, and I been studyin' whether to use hit a-depicturin' the Queen of Sheba or Phar'oh's daughter; and then I thought I'd do better to show up Joseph a-dreamin', and the sun and the moon and eleven stars jist over his head – see, they'd set around sorter biassin' this-a-way, betwixt Adam-an'-Eve and this golden harp. Hit's a piece of that dress her gals all had on a-Sunday – you know Dows the always gits a bolt, and time her and the gals all has a dress out of hit, and him a shirt and the boys a shirt apiece, why the bolt's about gone. Well, this time that The'dory May, she axed for something bright, and he was bent on pleasin' her, so he picked for the brightest thing in the store. Hit looked sort o' gay a-comin' into church, one behind another; but now hit'll do fine for Joseph's coat. Ah, law, Miz. Gentry, hit'll be right here in my quilt long after their dresses is wore out and forgot about."

"Yes, indeed, hit will that, Sister Griever," her listener assented, a good deal impressed. "Is these sorter round things –"

"Them's the loaves an' fishes," Roxy hastened to elucidate. "They ain't so very well done, ye see. I was a-workin' on them when I hearn that Granny Yearwood was about to go, an' I hurried 'em up, 'caze I'd promised her that I'd spread the quilt over her when she was laid out. You he'p me with it now, Miz. Gentry, and we'll fold it back this-a-way so as not to show the part that ain't done."

"Laws, Miz. Griever," said Octavia, as the great square, with its many small, gaily colored figures, whipped laboriously into place, was spread out between their hands, "I don't see how you ever did think of all them things."

"I reckon it comes from havin' a preacher for a mate," returned Roxy. "Mr. Griever, he was always a cotin' scriptur' round the house, and now he's gone I remember his words – and put 'em down on the quilt, as a body may say. I love to have it by me to work on in time of trouble, an' I love to put it on the bed if a preacher sleeps the night at our house. Looks like a body ought to have good dreams un'neath the gospel that-a-way. Thar, ain't that fixed all right now? Cain't we leave here? I 'low them young folks out in the other room might need attention."

Octavia glanced through the slightly open door and saw that Lance and Callista had gone into the kitchen alone to look after the supper. They were talking together, and the mother noted hopefully that neither of them was laughing, and that the girl's color had risen, while her eyes looked troubled.

"Law honey," she said smiling, "sho'ly they can manage for theirselves one while. I'm plumb tired, an' I know good an' well you air. Le's sit here a spell whar it's cool an' quiet, an' have a little visit."

This was a sort of invitation which Roxy Griever could not refuse, and the courting couples were spared her surveillance for a little longer.

"Callista," Lance began abruptly, when they were out of earshot of those in the front room, "I raised the roof-beams of my cabin to-day – two big rooms and a porch between, with a cooking place for summer. Ain't that about right?"

Callista looked toward the other room uneasily. She had no audience now – how should she act, how demean herself so as to seem indifferent? Lance's undecipherable, clear hazel eyes were on her; they rested carelessly in what seemed a passing glance; yet at the back of that regard looked out a demand which she could scarcely comprehend.

"I – I don't know," she faltered. "Lance, won't you please lift that there coffee off o' the fire? It's boiled enough."

Lance bent lithely to the hearth and did her bidding.

"I've got me two horses now," he said in the same even undertone. "I matched Satan with a little black filly that Derf brought over from the Far Cove neighborhood. They're jest of a size, and they step together like a couple of gals with their arms around each other's waists. Derf said the filly was named Cindy; but I call her Sin – how do you like that? – Satan and Sin?"

"Well, I think it sounds right wicked, if you ask me," Callista plucked up courage to say. "But I don't reckon you care whether I like it or not."

Lance shook his head and smiled.

"Nope," he agreed easily. Then he added, "Havin' two horses helps out a good deal. I've been doing haulin' on Derf's contract. I'll have a right smart of money left, even after my house is all done. There'll be a-plenty laid up by next spring; and I'm goin' to put in the winter clearing land. I reckon we'll be good ready by April."

By April! A sweet perturbation took possession of Callista's breast. She dared not raise her eyes lest he should read in them what she yet jealously sought to conceal. He was not like the other boys; with all the raillery and badinage that went on between them – famous in their circle; with all the unusual parade, in the open play of courtship, he had never really approached her as a lover, never laid his hand on her in tenderness, nor offered her a caress, save as a public, saucy threat. Nor had he asked for her, as the mountain phrase goes; but surely now he meant her to understand that he expected to be married in the spring. If only he would ask her – if only! She had always meant – if she dared – to refuse him – at least the first time; to reluctantly give in under repeated importunities – but that was past. With her heart beating in her throat, she made shift to say,

"I hope you'll be better to your horses than most of the men that hauls. I do love a good horse."

"You goin' to ride with me to the buryin' tomorrow?" Lance inquired casually. "If you want to, we could leave the buryin' ground after the funeral's over and go up Lance's Laurel, to my place, and on round to your home the long way. I could show you whether I was good to my horses or not."

The color glowed softly in Callista's cheeks and her veiled eyes were bright. But before she could say yes or no, the Widow Griever came in.

"Good land, Lance Cleaverage!" she began on her usual formula. "Why hain't you bidden out all them folks in thar? This here coffee's done, an' a-gittin' cold. The biscuits ain't no better. They got to eat now, 'caze I want 'em to sing a good wake of hymns – I promised Granny I'd tend to pickin' 'em out."

With a grimace of good-natured acquiescence, Lance went to execute his sister's orders. Out on the porch a half-dozen young boys had succumbed to drowsiness, one by one, stretched on the boards, taking elbow or saddle for a pillow. The crickets and katydids were loud in the grove. Lance passed through the front rooms, speaking to the couples there, and called in those outside. The supper of good warm food, and hot, strong coffee was eaten gratefully. Then all went into the front room and the hymns were sung. Finally the up-sitting was over, and Callista had made no opportunity for further speech with Lance. He had not sought one, and chance had not offered it. She regretted a little that she really wanted so much to ride at his side to-morrow. If she did not, she would quite enjoy treating that cavalier invitation as though she had never heard it. But the very thought brought a quick apprehension of failure, and she resolved to be ready and waiting, so that she might seem to be carelessly picked up at the last moment, lest Lance himself anticipate her in this game of indifference.

CHAPTER III. THE BURYING

DAWN was gray in the sky, a livid light beginning to make itself felt rather than seen above the mountains, while vast gulfs of shadows lingered in their folds, when Callista climbed the stairs to a loft room, set apart for the Hands girls, and, partially undressing, lay down for a few hours of sleep. Her mother and Roxy Griever had gone home shortly after midnight. Coming and going increased with the rising day. Roxy Griever had now returned, bringing with her a hastily ruffled cap of cheap lace.

"Sylvane," she called, coming out to the porch where the men were standing about conversing in undertones, "you got to ride over to Miz. Gentry's and git a black veil and a belt for Jane. Little Liza ain't a-goin' to be able to go to the buryin' at all, and Jane has obliged to have a veil and belt, her bein' a mourner that-a-way."

Already, along the fence there was a string of dingy, unkempt teams and wagons; while in the horse lot were more, those who had come earlier having unhitched. Granny Yearwood was near ninety – Eliza Hands had been her youngest – and she was known to the whole region around. Roxy stood in the door shading her eyes, picking out this one and that among those in attendance. The gathering looked much like any other, except that one missed the shouts of hail and farewell, the effusive welcoming and hearty speeding of guests.

The stir outside waxed. By some subjective movement, Callista, sleeping in the loft room, was aware of it, wakened, rose, dressed and made ready herself.

"I don't know what we-all ever would a' done without you, honey," Little Liza told her, gazing across from the bed on which she lay. "Looks like to me some folks is born comforters."

The pale eyes of the big woman took in Callista's sweet, significant beauty, with an appreciation that was hardly vicarious. She did love Callista for her brother's sake; and much, too, for her own.

"You come up and tell me jest how Granny looked before you-all go, won't you?" she urged. "I want to see you before you start, anyhow."

Callista promised and hurried downstairs. Those who had remained over night were standing about a table, eating a hasty breakfast. By eight o'clock the gathering was ready, and the hitching up began. After a great deal of consultation and argument as to where each one should ride, the procession began to arrange itself. There were to be no services at the house, but it was hoped that Preacher Drumright would be able to meet the funeral party at the burying ground and conduct the ceremonies there – the funeral sermon would be at the church on some later Sunday.

"Who you goin' to ride with, Callista?" inquired the Widow Griever, a weighty frown on her brow. "We got to git this thing all straightened out so the family an' friends won't be scrouged from they' places, like is mighty apt to happen at a funeral. There is them that's bound to have a ride, whoever gits to go."

Roxy's quilt had been removed from the coffin and draped over a near-by stand. Six bronzed, heavy-breathing, embarrassed looking men were marshalled in by the widow, and instructed how to lift the black-painted pine box, carry it to the waiting buckboard, and place it safely there with one end wedged under the seat. Then Roxy turned to Flenton.

"Go git Ellen and Jane," she prompted.

He hastened to the house and up stairs, and soon returned with a sister on each arm, black-draped and wailing, clinging to him. He helped them into their seats in his own vehicle. But when Ellen made room for him, he drew back and motioned Kimbro Cleaverage forward.

"Couldn't you drive, Mr. Cleaverage?" he said in an undertone. "Sylvane can take yo' team, with Miz. Griever and the chillen; and I've got to go in – " he reddened with embarrassment – "in another place."

The crowd was pretty much all in the yard now, clambering into ox-carts and board-seated wagons. Roxy Griever, with Mary Ann Martha and Sylvane, were waiting in Kimbro Cleaverage's small wagon drawn by an old mule, while half-a-dozen undesired additions were offered to their party. Callista looked about her vainly for Lance. She had already defended herself two or three times from being thrust into some vehicle and carried away from the possibility of riding with him, when she finally saw him approaching down the road. He was on one black horse and leading another. She could not know that he had been over to Derf's that morning to get the filly.

"Callista," said Flenton Hands's voice at her shoulder, "Little Liza sent me down to see would you come up to her right quick. She's mighty bad off."

With one last, furtive glance toward the black horse and his rider, Callista turned and hurried up to Liza.

"Air they gittin' off," inquired the ailing woman, eagerly lifting her head with its camphor-drenched cloths. "Did Ellen and Jane cry much? Looks to me like they wasn't much takin' on – I never heard much. There wasn't nigh the fuss that they was at old Enoch Dease's buryin'. I wish't to the land I could have been down there – the Lord knows I'd 'a' cried. Granny ought to be wept for. Think o' livin' to be ninety years old – and then havin' to die at last! Oh, ain't it awful, Callista? How did she look, honey? Was Vander Blackshears here? Set right down there on my bed and tell me."

One might almost have guessed that the lengthened inquiries were dictated by someone who wanted Callista detained. The girl answered them hastily, with her heart galloping, her ears alert for sounds from below.

"Don't you be uneasy," Little Liza soothed her. "Flenton said he'd wait and take you in his new buggy that he bought when he got the coffin a-yesterday. You'll be the first one to ride in it – ain't that fine? Flent's jest that-a-way. He don't grudge anything to them he loves. You hadn't promised somebody else to ride with 'em, had ye, Callisty?"

She brought the point-blank question out after a little halt, reddening a bit at the boldness of it. Plainly this was at another's dictation. Callista shook her head. Words were beyond her at the moment; for, looking down from the tiny window of the loft room, she saw the procession getting underway, one clumsy vehicle after another falling into line behind the buckboard that was now slowly disappearing beyond the bend of the road. And at the fence. Lance Cleaverage was helping awkward little Ola Derf to mount the black filly!

"I said Granny deserved to be wept for," Little Liza intoned, as she saw the tears that slipped down Callista's pink cheeks. "I didn't know you cared so much about her, honey, but I know you've got a mighty tender heart."

"Is that all, now, Liza? Are you all right till the folks get back?" questioned Callista. "Well, then I'll leave you – they're a-going," and with an effort for composure, she turned and made her way down to Flenton Hands and the new buggy. Her mother was staying to get dinner for everybody – a piece of genuine self-sacrifice, this – and as Callista passed her in the kitchen, she made a half-hearted offer to change places.

"No, honey," said Octavia, resolutely. "You go right along. I don't mind this. I" – she lowered her tone to a whisper of furtive pleasure – "I seen Lance bringing up the prettiest little black mare for you to ride." With unwonted demonstrativeness she bent forward and kissed the young, smooth, oval cheek. "We ain't got each other for always," she said gently. "Let's be kind and lovin' while we have. Go 'long, honey, an' ride with Lance. Granny Yearwood wouldn't begrudge it to ye."

Flenton met the girl at the door, and walked with her down to the gate. It was an almost shocking breach of etiquette for him to let the entire procession get away without him, yet neither

mentioned it. Callista's eyes were on two mounted figures that closed the train, and she scarcely spoke as she seated herself in the new vehicle.

The graveyard was a stony, briery patch of ground, as desolate a spot as could well be found. In a country where the houses were so scattered that the word "neighborhood" had scarcely any meaning, there was no public sentiment concerning the care of the abandoned God's acre; but each, when a grave was dug in it for one of his clan, resolved on making some effort toward its improvement, and, in the struggle for existence, promptly forgot. It was guarded partly by a rail fence that Derf's Old Piedy, a notorious rogue, could lay down with practised horns any time she liked; and partly by a crooked, crumbling wall of stones, picked up off the land itself and laid there by hands which had long been dust. A wide place it was, for its scanty tenantry, with hollows hidden in liana-woven thickets and straggling knolls yellowed with sedge-grass. As is usual where a hard-wood forest has been cleared, young pines were springing up all over the waste; one could see, between their dark points, the blue rim of the world; for this land lay high, on a sort of divide or shed, where nothing would grow.

The unmended road was full of vehicles, the graveyard filling with people, as Callista and Flenton came up. The ride had been one of discomfort to the girl. She liked to have her conquests to display before others; but she always shrank from being alone with Flenton Hands, and to-day his insistent love-making had filled her with cold distaste.

"And you are certainly the sweetest comforter ever a man had in time of affliction," he told her over and over again, with sanctimonious inflections. "If I had you always by my side, looks like to me the world's sorrows wouldn't have no power on me."

It was a relief to her when they reached the fence, and he stepped out to help her down and tie his horse. There had been some uncertainty up to the last as to whether Preacher Drumright could be got for the occasion, but the sound of his voice from the press of calico-clad and jeans-covered shoulders and backs, reassured Flenton.

"I'm mighty glad Drumright's thar," he said to Callista, as he lifted her down. "He'll preach Granny's funeral come Sunday, he said; but thar ain't anyone can pray like he can. I do love a good servigorous prayer."

Callista's anxious eyes were searching the animals tethered about for sight of the two black horses that stepped together "like a couple of gals with their arms around each other's waists." At last she found them in the grove, and hastily turned with her escort to go through the gap in the fence to where the preacher was, where yawned the open grave, and stood the coffin. A tangle of dewberry vines, with withering fruit on them, here and there, and beginning even in their mid-summer greenness to show russet and reddened leaves, scrambled all over the poor soil. Most of the graves were unmarked, some had a slab or block of wood; only here and there gleamed a small stone.

Callista passed that of her father, good-looking, ne'er-do-well Race Gentry, whom the romantic young Octavia Luster had run away to marry. A honeysuckle vine covered it with a tangle of green, offering now its bunches of fawn and white, heavy-scented blossoms from a closely compacted mound.

"I'm a-goin' to have a real monument put up for Granny," Flenton whispered to her as they went forward together. "I wish't she'd lived to be a hundred, so I could have put that on the stone; but we're mighty proud of her holdin' out to ninety."

Quite against her will, Callista found herself taken up to the front of the gathering, placed between Ellen and Flenton Hands beside the coffin. Preacher Drumright was speaking with closed eyes; he had embarked on one of those servigorous prayers which Hands admired. The two girls, Ellen and Jane, were sobbing in long, dry gasps. After the prayer came a hymn, the lulls in the service being filled in by the sobs of the Hands girls, little responsive moans from some woman in

the assembly, and the purr of the wind in the young pines, where scared rabbits were hiding; and by the far, melodious jangle of Old Piedy's bell – Old Piedy, dispossessed and driven away.

With the appearance of Callista and her escort on the scene, a young fellow who had been lying full length on the top of the ruining stone wall tilted his hat quite over his eyes and relaxed a certain watchfulness of demeanor which had till then been apparent in him. When the girl was finally ensconced in the middle of the lamenting Hands family, this person leaned down and whispered to Ola Derf, whose square little back was resting against the wall close beside him,

"Come on, let's go. Haven't you had about enough of this?"

"Uh-huh," agreed Ola in a whisper, "but we mustn't git our horses till the preacher quits prayin'. Hit'll make too much noise."

Again Lance relaxed into his quiescent attitude, and had to be roused when the hymn began, with,

"He's done finished, Lance. Do you want to go now?"

The wind soothed its world-old, sighing monody in the young pines overhead; beneath the waxing warmth of the morning sun faint whiffs, resinous, pungent, came down from their boughs, to mingle with the perfume from the vagrant honeysuckle that flung a long green arm toward the trunk of one of them. Suddenly a woman's tenor, wild and sweet, rose like a winged thing and led all the other voices.

"Huh-uh," grunted Lance, from his sun-warmed couch. "Let's wait awhile now."

After the hymn, Drumright read from the Scripture. Even his rasping voice could not disguise the immemorial beauty of the sombre Hebrew imagery, "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken."

Lance drew a long quivering breath. Something in the sounds, the hour and the occasion, had appealed to that real Lance Cleaverage, of which the man Ola Derf knew was only custodian, to whose imperious needs the obvious Lance must always bend.

Yet, long before poor Callista could be released and allowed to ride home, by her own earnest petition, in the buckboard with Jane and Ellen, the two by the stone wall had found their way across to the black horses in the grove, and were scurrying down the dusty summer road, racing as soon as they were out of sight of the graveyard.

CHAPTER IV. A DANCE AND A SERENADE

THE Derfs occupied a peculiar position among their Turkey Track neighbors. They had a considerable tincture of Cherokee Indian blood, no discredit in the Tennessee mountains, or elsewhere for that matter. One branch of the family had received money compensation for their holdings from the Government. Leola's father had at that time taken possession of an allotment of land in the Indian Territory. The eldest daughter, Iley, married out there, and brought back her Indian husband when Granny Derf, pining for her native mountains, had to be carried home to Big Turkey Track.

It was not the blood of another race that set the Derfs apart; but it may have been traits which came with the wild strain. There was a good deal of money going among the clan. Old man Derf was a general trader; also he engaged in tanbark hauling in the season, and some other contracting enterprises such as required the use of ready cash. In the back room of the main house there was quite a miscellaneous stock of provisions, goods, and oddments for sale. Derf was more than suspected of being a moonshiner or of dealing with moonshiners. He gave dances or frolics of some sort at his house very frequently, and there was always plenty of whisky. At one time or another the family had lived in the Settlement a good deal, and come off rather smudged from their residence in that place. Indeed, your true mountaineer believes that sin is of the valley, and looks for no good thing to come out of the low ground. In a simple society, like that of the mountains, the line is drawn with such savage sharpness that the censors hesitate to draw it at all. Yet a palpable cloud hung over the Derfs. While not completely outcast, they were of so little standing that their house was scarcely a respectable place for a young, unmarried woman to be seen frequently. Ola, Garrett Derf's second daughter, a girl of twenty, and a homely, high-couraged, hard muscled little creature, was permitted in the neighborhood circle of young girls rather on sufferance; but she did not trouble them greatly with her presence, preferring as a rule her own enterprises.

Lance Cleaverage, a free, unfettered spirit, trammled by no social prejudices, came often to the frolics at Derf's. He seldom danced himself, whisky he never touched; but he loved to play for the others, and he got all the stimulation which his temperament and his mood asked out of the crowd, the lights, the music, and some indefinable element into which these fused for him.

It was nearly two months after the incident at the church and the funeral of Granny Yearwood, that Ola was redding up and putting to rights for a dance. She had hurried through an early supper; the house was cleared, like the deck of a ship for action, of all furniture that could not be sat upon. What remained – a few chairs and boxes, and the long benches on which, between table and wall, the small fry of the family crowded at meal time – were arranged along the sides of the room out of the way. The girl herself was wearing a deep pink calico dress and a string of imitation coral beads. Generally, she gave little thought to her appearance; but everybody believed now that the time was set for the marriage of Lance Cleaverage and Callista Gentry; neither of the young people denied it, Callista only laughing scornfully, and Lance lightly admitting that there was a mighty poor chance for a fellow to get away when a girl like Callista made up her mind to wed him. In the face of these things, the little brown girl clad her carefully, laboring with the conscienceless assiduity of Nature's self to do her utmost to get her chosen man away from the other woman – to get him for herself. She went out past the wood-pile to view the evening sky anxiously, and seeing only a few cloud-roses blooming in the late light over the hills, came back with satisfaction to attempt once more putting her small brothers and sisters out of the way.

A little after dark her guests began to arrive, coming in by ones and twos and threes, some of the boys in mud-splashed working clothes, some in more holiday attire. About moonrise

Lance strolled down the road, and by way of defending himself from the importunities of Ola's conversation, if one might guess, kept his banjo twanging persistently. There was a certain solemnity over the early comers, although Derf roared a hearty greeting from his door of the cabin, and occasionally some of the men adjourned to his special room and came out wiping their mouths.

"Ain't nobody never goin' to dance?" inquired Ola impatiently. "Here's Lance a-playin' and a-playin', and nobody makin' any manner of use of the music."

There was nearly ten minutes of hitching and halting, proposals and counter propositions, before a quadrille was started. It was gone through rather perfunctorily, then they all sat down on the boxes and benches and stared into the empty middle of the room.

"Good land!" cried Ola, coming from the other side of the house, "play 'Greenbacks', Lance – let's dance 'Stealing partners'."

The new amusement – half dance, half play – proved, as she had guessed, a leaven to the heaviness of the occasion. People began to laugh a little, and speak above their breath. Two awkward boys, trying to "shoot dominickers" at the same moment, collided under the arch and went sprawling to the floor. The mishap was greeted with a roar of mirth in which all chill and diffidence were drowned.

And now the arrivals from the far cabins were on hand. Small children who had been allowed to sit up and look on nodded in corners, or stretched themselves across their fathers' knees and were tumbled just as they were upon a pallet in the loft. The usual contingent of bad little boys collected outside the door and began to shout at the dancers by name, calling out comments on personal peculiarities, or throwing small chips and stones under foot to trip up the unwary. These were finally put down by the strong hand.

Clapping and stamping increased as the dancers moved more rapidly; calls were shouted; the laughter was continuous. Lance Cleaverage leaned forward in his place, striking the humming strings with sure, tense fingers, his eyes aglow, and on his mouth a half smile. The fun waxed furious; the figures whirled faster and faster, gathering, disparting, interweaving, swinging and eddying before his eyes. Coats were thrown off, the feet thudded out the measure heavily. This was his dissipation, the draught that the mirth of others brewed for him. Its fumes were beginning to mount to his brain, when Ola's hard brown little hand came down across his strings and stopped the music. There was an instant and indignant outcry and protest.

"Consarn yo' time, Ola! What did you want to do that for?" demanded a tall young fellow who had broken down in the midst of a pigeon wing, as though he drew his inspiration from the banjo and could not move without its sound.

"I want to hear Buck play on his accordion – and I want Lance to dance with me," Ola said petulantly. "What's the use of him settin' here all the time playin' for you-all to have fun, and him never gettin' any? Come on, Lance."

Ola Derf was not used to the consideration generally accorded young women. When she made a request, she deemed it well to see that her requirements were complied with. Deftly she lifted the banjo from Lance's lap and passed it to someone behind her, who put it on the fireboard. Then laying hold of the young man himself, she pulled him out into the middle of the room.

"Play, Buck, play," she admonished Fuson, who had his accordion. "You made yo' brags about what fine music you could get out of that thar box, – now give us a sample."

Buck played. When a dance has swung so far as this one had, nothing can check its rhythmic movement. The notes dragged wheezily from the old accordion answered as well to the gathering's warm, free, fluent mood as the truer harmonies of Lance's banjo. Hand clasping hand, Ola and Lance whirled among the others, essaying a simple sort of polka. She was a tireless dancer, and he as light footed as a panther. The two of them began to feel that intoxication of swift movement timed to music which nothing else in life can quite furnish, intensified in the girl by a gripping conviction that this was her hour, and she must make the most of it. She was aflame with it. When

Buck broke down she instantly proposed a game of Thimble. Boldly, almost openly, she let herself forfeit a kiss to Lance.

There was a babble of tongues and laughter, a hubbub of mirth, a crossfiring and confusion of sound and movement which wrought upon the nerves like broken chords, subtle dissonances, in music. Buck was trying to play again, some of the boys were patting and stamping, others remonstrating, jeering, making ironic suggestions, when Lance, a bit flushed and bright of eye, dropped his arm around the brown girl's waist to take his forfeit. As in duty bound she pulled away from him. He sprang after, caught her by the shoulders, turned her broad little face up to his and kissed her full on the laughing, red mouth.

Then a miracle! Kissing Ola Derf was not a serious matter; indeed common gossip hinted that it was a thing all too easily accomplished. But tonight the girl was wrought beyond herself – a magnet. And Lance's sleeping spirit felt the shock of that kiss. But alas for Ola, it was for her rival's behoof the miracle was worked; it was in her rival's cause she had labored, enlisting all her primitive arts, all her ingenuity and resolution! The lights, the music, the movement, the gayety of others, these had, so far, pleased and stimulated Lance as they always did. But the unaccustomed warmth and contact of the dance; the daring and abandon of the kissing game afterward; finally the sudden ravisher's clasp and snatched kiss – these set free in him an impulse which had slumbered till now. To this bold, aggressive, wilful nature it was always the high mountain, the long dubious road, the deep waters – never the easy way, the thing at hand; it was ever his own trail – not the path suggested to his feet. And so, in this sudden awakening, he took no account of Ola Derf, and his whole soul turned toward Callista – Callista the scornful, whose profile, or the side of whose cheek, he was always seeing; Callista who refused to lift her lashes to look at him, and who was ever saying coolly exasperating things in a tone of gentle weariness. If Callista would look at him as Ola Derf had done – if he might catch her thus in his arms – if those lips of hers were offered to his kiss – !

Without a word of excuse or explanation he dropped the girl's hand as he stood in the ring of players, caught his banjo down from the shelf, and leaving open mouths and staring eyes behind him, strode through the door. A moment later he was footing it out in the moonlight road, walking straight and fast toward the church where protracted meeting was going on, and where he guessed Callista would be with her family. A javelin, flame-tipped, had touched him. Something new and fiery danced in his veins. He would see her home. They would walk together, far behind the family group, in this wonderful white moonlight.

When he reached Brush Arbor church he avoided the young fellows lounging about the entrance waiting to beau the girls. He moved lightly to a window at the back of the building and looked in. There sat Octavia Gentry on the women's side, and old Ajax, her father-in-law, on the men's. Callista he could not find from his coign of vantage. An itinerant exhorter was on his feet, preaching loud, pounding the pulpit, addressing himself now and again to the mourners who knelt about the front bench. Lance cautiously put his head in and looked further. Somehow he knew, all in a moment, that this was what he had expected – what he had hoped for; Callista was at home waiting for him. Yet none the less he carefully examined the middle seats where might be found the courting couples. He would not put it beyond his Callista to go to church with some other swain and sit there publicly advertising her favor to the interloper.

When he was at last satisfied that she was not in the building, he turned as he had turned from Ola Derf, and made a straight path for himself from Brush Arbor to the Gentry place. Scorning the beaten highway of other men's feet, he struck directly into the forest, and through a little grove of second-growth chestnut, with its bunches of silver-gray stems rising slim and white in the light of the moon. Moonshine sifting through the leaves changed his work-a-day clothing to the garb of a troubadour. The banjo hung within easy reach of his fingers; he took off his old hat and tucked it under his arm, striking now and again as he went a twanging chord.

It was an old story to him, this walking the moonlit wild with his banjo for company. Many a time in the year's release, the cool, fragrant, summer-deep forest had called him by its delicate silver nocturnes, its caverns of shadow and milky pools of light, bidden him to a wild spring-running. On such nights his heart could not sleep for song. Sometimes, intoxicated with the rhythm, he had swung on and on, crashing through the dew-drenched huckleberry tangles, rocking a little, with eyes half closed, and interspersing the barbaric jangle of his banjo with quaint jodeling and long, falsetto-broken whoops, the heritage that the Cherokee left behind him in this land. But now it was no mere physical elation of youth and summer and moonlight. It was the supreme urge of his nature that sent his feet forward steadily, swiftly, as toward a purpose that might not be let or stayed. Speed – to Callista – that was all. He fell into silence, even the banjo's thrumming hushed to an intense quivering call of broken chords, hardly to be distinguished from the insect cries of love that filled the summer wood about him.

All the fathomless gulf of the sky was poured full of the blue-green splendors that flooded the night world of the mountains. Drops of dew spilled from leaf to leaf; down in the spring hollow he was spattered to the knees by the thousand soft, reaching fronds of cinnamon fern. Wild fragrances splashed him with great waves of sweetness. So the lords of the wild, under pelt and antler, have ever been wont to rove to their wooing; so restless are the wings that flutter among summer branches and under summer moons.

Between the banjo's murmuring chords, as he neared the Gentry clearing, once more a melody began to stray, like smoke which smoulders fitfully and must presently burst into flame. – Thrum-dum, thrum-dum, and then the tune's low call. It was a gypsy music, that lured with vistas of unknown road, the glint of water, and the sparkle of the hunter's fire; a wildly sweet note that asked, "How many miles?" – and again, out of colorless drumming, "How many years?.. how many miles?".. a song shadow-like in its come-and-go, rising at intervals to the cry of a passion no mortality has power to tame, and then, ere the ear had fairly caught its message, falling again into dim harmonies as of rain blown through the dark; – a question, and the wordless, haunting refrain for all answer. Just above his breath Lance voiced the words:

"How many years, how many miles,
Far from the door where my darling smiles?
How many miles, how many years.
Divide our hearts by pain and fears?"

The melody sank and trailed, drowned in a cadence of minors that sobbed like the rush of storm. Out of this, wild, as the wind's pleading, it rose again;

"It may be far, it may be near,
The water's wide and the forest drear,
But somewhere awaiting, surely I
Shall find my true love by and bye."

The lithe limbs threshed through the dew-drenched, scented undergrowth. The trees grew more openly now; clearing was at hand.

" – My true love – by and bye,"
hummed the light, sweet baritone.

Callista had petulantly refused to go to church with her mother and grandfather. For no reason which she could assign, she wanted to be alone. Then when they were all gone, she wished she had accompanied them. An indefinable disquiet possessed her. She could not stay in the house. Candle in hand she sought an outside cabin where stood the loom. Climbing to the loft room of this she set her light down and began to search out some quilt pieces, which she figured to herself as the object of her present excursion. Though she would have denied it with scorn, the idea of Lance Cleaverage filled her completely; Lance, the man who was preparing to marry her, yet upon whom – of all those who had come near her, in the free, fortuitous commerce of marriageable youth in the

mountains – she had, it seemed to her, been able to lay no charm, to exert no influence. He met her; he exchanged cut and thrust with her, and he went his ways after their encounters, neither more nor less than he had been before. He came back seemingly at the dictates of time and chance only, and never hotter nor colder, never hastening to nor avoiding her. A bitterness tinged all her thought... She wondered if she would have seen him had she gone to meeting.. She reflected jealously that he was much more likely to be at the frolic at Derf's... She wished she knew how to dance.

All at once, on the vague introspection of her mood, she became aware of the recurrent stroke of a soft musical note – the humming of Lance's banjo. Crouching rigidly by the little chest that held her quilt scraps, she listened. It was a trick of the imagination – she had thought so much about him that she fancied him near. Then, with a sudden heavy beating of the heart, she realized that if he had been at the dance and gone home early he might be passing now on the big road. She smiled at her own folly; this tremulous low call could never be heard across two fields and the door-yard.

And it was a banjo.. it was Lance's banjo.. he was playing whisperingly, too, as he loved to do.

Then the strings ceased to whisper. Clearer came their voice and louder. Without thinking to extinguish her candle, she ran to the window and knelt hearkening. She looked down on the moonlit yard. All was silent and homely.. but that was Lance's banjo. Even as she came to this decision. Lance himself broke through the greenery at the edge of the near field, vaulted a low fence, and emerged into the open. He came on in the soft light, singing a little, apparently to himself.

Spellbound she listened, gripping the window ledge hard, holding her breath, choking, wondering what this new thing was that had come to her. Above him she was set like a saint enshrined, with the moonlight to silver her rapt, shining face, and the glow of the candle behind making a nimbus of her fair hair. Yet never at all (or she thought so) did Lance look up. Light footed, careless of mien, he circled the house once, still humming under his breath, and striking those odd, tentative chords on the banjo. Then, abruptly, when she had realized her position and would have hidden herself, or put out the candle which betrayed her, he stopped under her window and with upflung head was smiling straight into her eyes. She rallied her forces and prepared for the duel which always ensued when she and Lance met. She would give him as good as he sent. She would tell him that she had stayed away from church for fear she should see him. If he hinted that she had expected this visit, she would – she would say —

But this was a new Lance Cleaverage looking into her eyes – a man Callista had never seen before. Subtly she knew it, yet scarcely dared trust the knowledge. The young fellow below in the moonlight sent up no challenge to a trial of wits; he offered her no opportunity for sarcastic retort. Tossing aside his hat, making ready his banjo, he lifted his head so that the lean, dark young face with its luminous eyes was raised fully to her in the soft radiance, and struck some chords – strange, thrilling, importunate chords – then began to sing.

The serenade is a cherished courtship custom of primitive societies. Lance Cleaverage, the best banjo player in the Turkey Tracks, with a flexible, vibrant, colorful baritone voice, had often gone serenading with the other boys; but this – tonight – was different. He felt like singing, and singing to Callista; for the moment it was his form of expression. What he sang was his own version of an old-world ballad, with his love's name in place of the Scottish girl's to whom it was addressed three hundred years ago in the highlands of another hemisphere. Unashamed, unafraid – would anything ever make Lance either ashamed or afraid? – he stood in the white moonlight and sent forth his passionate, masterful call of love on the wings of song.

Callista's heart beat wildly against her arms where she rested on the window sill. Her lips were apart, and the breath came through them quick and uneven. Despite herself, she leaned forward and looked back into the eyes that gazed up at her. Was this Lance, the indifferent, taunting, insouciant, here under her window alone, looking up so at her – playing, singing, to her? Oh, yes, it was Lance. He wanted her, said the swift importunate notes of the banjo, the pleading tones of his voice, the bold yet loverlike attitude of the man. He wanted her. Well – a flood of tender warmth rose in her

– she wanted him! For the first time probably in her life – misshapen, twisted to the expression of the coquette, the high and mighty, scornful miss who finds no lover to her taste – Callista was all a woman. The fires of her nature flamed to answer the kindred fire of his. The last, teasing note of the banjo quavered into silence. Lance pulled the ribbon over his head, laid the instrument by – without ever taking his eyes from her face – and said, hardly above a whisper,

"Callista, honey, come down."

No retort was ready for him.

"I – oh, I can't, Lance," was all Callista could utter.

With a "Well, I'm a-comin' up there, then," he sprang into the muscadine vine whose rope-like trunks ran up around the doorway below her. She only caught her breath and watched in desperate anxiety the reckless venture. And when he reached the level of her window, when, swinging insecurely in a loop of the vine, he stretched his arms to her, ready arms answered him and went round his neck. A face passion pale was raised to him, and eager, tremulous lips met his.

They drew apart an instant, then Callista – overwhelmed, frightened at herself – with a swift movement hid her face on his breast. He bent over her, and laid his dark cheek against hers, that was like a pearl. His arms drew her closer, closer; the two young hearts beat plungingly against each other. The arms that strained Callista so hard to Lance's breast trembled, and her slender body trembled within them. Lance's shining eyes closed.

67 "Callista – honey – darlin'," he whispered brokenly, "you do love me."

"Oh, Lance – Oh, Lance!" she breathed back.

And then his lips went seeking hers once more. She lifted them to him, and the lovers clung long so. The world swung meaninglessly on in space. The two clasped close in each other's arms were so newly, so intensely, blindingly, electrically awake to themselves and to each other, that they were utterly insensible to all else.

Finally Lance raised his head a bit. He drew a long, sobbing breath, and laying his face once more against the girl's murmured with tender fierceness,

"An' we ain't going to wait for no spring, neither. You'll wed me to-morrow – well, next week, anyway" – as he felt her start and struggle feebly.

"Oh, Lance – honey – no," she began. But he cut her short with vehement protestations and demands. He covered her face, her hair, her neck with kisses, and then declared again and again, in a voice broken with feeling, that they would be wedded the next week – they wouldn't wait – they wouldn't wait.

Shaken, amazed by her own emotions, terrified at the rush of his, Callista began to plead with him; and when that availed nothing, save to inflame his ardor, her cry was,

"Yes, Lance. Yes – all right – we will. We will, Lance – whenever you say. But go now, honey, won't you – please? Oh, Lance! They'll be coming home any minute now. If they was to find you here. Lance – Won't you go now, please, honey? Lance, darlin', please. I'll do just like you say – next week – any time, Lance. Only go now."

There was no sense of denying, or drawing herself back, in Callista's utterance. It was only the pleading of maiden terror. When Lance acquiesced, when he crushed her to him in farewell, her arms went round him once more, almost convulsively; with an equal ardor, her lips met the fierce, dominating kiss of his.

He got down from the window, his head whirling. Mechanically he found his banjo, flung the ribbon over his neck and turned the instrument around so that it hung across his shoulders. Thus, and with his hat again tucked under his arm, without ever looking back toward the house, he walked swiftly and unsteadily away, once more through the young chestnut wood, with its dappplings of shadow and moonlight. He dipped into the hollow where the spring branch talked to itself all night long in the silence and the darkness under the twisted laurel and rhododendrons; once more he stood on the little tonsured hill above the church. The lights were out; they had all gone home.

Below him was spread his world; the practised eye of this free night rover could have located every farm and cabin, as it all lay swimming in this wonderful, bewitched half-light. Those were his kindred and his people; but he had always been a lonely soul among them. The outposts of levity which he had set about the citadel of his heart had never been passed by any. Tonight, with an upheaval like birth or death, he had broken down the barriers and swept another soul in beside him; close – close. He would never be alone again – never again. There would always be Callista. In the intoxication, the ravishment of the moment, he made no reckoning with the Callista he had heretofore known, the Lance that had been; they should be always as now on this night of magic.

CHAPTER V. THE ASKING

ON the comb of a tall ridge back of the Cleaverage place, Ola Derf caught up with Lance at last.

"I got to set down awhile till I can ketch my breath," the girl said jerkily. "I reckon I run half a mile hollerin' yo' name every step. Lance Cleaverage – and you never turned yo' head. I believe in my soul you heared me the first time I called."

Cleaverage did not take the trouble to affirm or deny. He flung himself back on the fern and pine needles with his hat over his face, and remarking, "Wake me up when you get your breath," affected to go to sleep. Ola Derf was as comfortable a companion as a dog, in that you could talk to her or let her alone, as the humor ran.

A cicada's whirl overhead swelled to a pulsating screech and died away. The woods here opened into calm and lofty spaces which at a little distance began to be dimmed as with vaporized sapphire – the blue that melted the hills into the sky. His eyes were caught by an indigo-bird in the branches – a drop of color apparently precipitated by this marvel of azure held in solution by the summer air.

It was the morning after Lance had sung to Callista under her window, and his mind was yet swimming in dreams of her. He was roused from these by Ola's voice.

"Lance," she began and broke off. "Oh, Lance, I want to talk to you about – about – " Again her voice lapsed. She could see nothing of his face. His chest rose and fell rhythmically. "Lance – air you asleep?"

"Huh-uh. But if you keep on talkin' right good maybe I'll get to sleep."

She paid no attention to the snub, but addressed herself once more to what seemed a difficult bit of conversational tactics.

"Lance," came the plaint for the third time, "I wanted to name Callista Gentry to you. I – I – that thar gal don't care the rappin' o' her finger about you, nor any man."

Cleaverage, with the memory of last night warm at his heart, smiled under his hat brim and made no answer, save a little derisive sound which might have meant denial, indifference, or mere good-humored contempt of Ola herself.

"Oh, yes, I know," Ola nodded to her own thought, "they's a heap of 'em lets on not to like the boys; but with Callista Gentry hit goes to the bone. She don't care for nary soul in this round world but her own pretty self. She 'minds me of a snake – a white snake, if ever there was such a thing. You look at her. You ain't never seen her change color, whatever came or went."

The picture evoked of Callista's flushed, tender face lying upon his breast made the pulses of the man on the warm pine needles leap.

"Well," he prompted finally, "what's the trouble? Are you a true friend, that doesn't want me to get snake bit?"

Ola laughed out a short laugh.

"No," she said, drearily, "I'm just a fool that's got yo' good at heart, and don't like to see you get a wife that cares nothin' for you. Thar – I've said my say. Thar's no love in her, and thar's no heart in her. But if a pretty face and high and mighty ways is what takes you, of course you can follow yo' ruthers."

"Uh-huh," agreed Lance, pushing his hat back and sitting up. He cast a laughing, sidelong glance in her direction. "Ola," he said softly, "I'm a goin' to let you into a secret. The gals has pestered me all my life long with too much lovin', and my great reason for bein' willin' to have Callista Gentry is that she seems like you say, sorter offish."

To his intense surprise (he had been wont to jest much more hardily with her than this), Ola's face flushed suddenly a dark, burning red. She jumped to her feet like a boy.

"All right," she said in a throaty tone, her countenance turned away from him. "If that's so, I'm sorry I spoke. Tell Miz. Cleavage all about it – and all about me and the other gals that run after you so turrible. I don't care."

But half way down the ridge her swift, angry, steps began to lag, and a little further on Lance overtook her.

"They's a-goin' to be a dance at our house a-Wednesday," she said in a penitent voice. "You're a-comin', ain't you, Lance?"

"Nope," returned the invited guest briefly.

He volunteered no excuse or explanation; and so, when the parting of their ways was reached, she demanded with imploring eyes on his face,

"Ye ain't mad with me, air ye. Lance? Why won't you come to my party?"

"Got somethin' else to do," Cleavage returned nonchalantly. "Callista and me is goin' to be married a-Wednesday night."

Ola fell back a step, and clutched the sunbonnet which she carried rolled in her hands.

"You're a – w'y, Lance – you're jest a foolin'," she faltered.

Lance shook his head lightly, without a word.

"But – why, I was over at Gentry's this morning," she exclaimed finally. "Nobody thar said anything about it." She still watched his face incredulously. "They shorely would have said somethin', if Callista had named the day."

"She never named it," said Lance easily. "I named it myself, back there on the ridge whilst you was catchin' your breath – or wastin' it. We had allowed that a week from yesterday would do us, but it sort of come over me that Wednesday was the right time, and I'm goin' along by there right now to settle it all. Reckon if you folks are givin' a dance you won't heed a invite? Good-bye," and he turned away on his own trail.

Swift, unsmiling, preoccupied as a wild thing on its foreordained errand – the hart to the spring, the homing bird – Cleavage made his way to the Gentry place. Callista felt him coming before he turned into the big road; she saw him while yet the leafage of the door maples would have confused any view less keen. She longed to flee. Then in a blissful tremor she could do nothing but remain. Octavia Gentry, carrying hanks of carpet chain to the dye-pot in the yard, caught sight of him and called out a greeting.

"Is Mr. Gentry about the place?" Lance asked her, as he lingered a moment with Callista's eyes on him from the doorway.

"Yes, Pappy's makin' ready to go down to the Settlement, and he ain't been to the field to-day. He's in the house somewhar's. Did you want to see him special, Lance?"

Cleavage made no direct reply; and the widow added,

"Thar he is, right now," as Ajax Gentry stepped out into the open passage with a bit of harness in his hand which he was mending. A certain gravity fell on her manner as the two walked toward the house. It went through her mind that Cleavage had never formally asked for Callista, and that now he was about to do so. She lifted her head proudly and glanced round at him. Lance Cleavage was not only the best match in the whole Turkey Track region, but he had been the least oncoming of all "Sis's love-yers." You never could be sure whether Lance wanted the girl or was merely amusing himself; and Octavia had always been strongly set upon the match. When they came to the porch edge, Lance seated himself upon it and looked past the old man to where Callista's flower face was dimly discernible in the entry beyond.

"Good morning," he said impersonally. "I'm glad to find you at home, Mr. Gentry. I stopped a-past to name it to you-all that Callista and me has made up our minds to be wed a-Wednesday evening."

There was a soft exclamation from within; but mother and grandfather remained dumb with astonishment. Cleaverage glanced round at them with a slight impatience in his hazel eyes that held always the fiery, tawny glint in their depths. He detested having people receive his announcements as though they were astonishing – that is, unless it was his humor to astonish.

"Well," Grandfather Gentry began after a time, "ain't this ruther sudden?"

"Marryin' has to be done all of a sudden," Lance remarked without rancor. "I never yet have heard of gettin' married gradual."

"Why, Lance, honey," said the widow in a coaxing tone, "you ain't rightly ready for a wife, air ye? Ef you two young folks had named this to me – well, six months ago – I'd 'a' had Callista's settin' out in good order. Looks like Pappy 's right, and it is sorter suddent."

"What do you say, Callista?" inquired the postulant bridegroom without looking up.

In the soft dusk of the interior the girl's face was crimson. Here came the time when she could no longer pretend to be urged into the marriage by her mother, her grandfather, the course of events; but must say "yes" or "no" openly of her own motion. Last night's startling accost yet shook her young heart; the glamour of that hour came back upon her senses.

"I say whatever you say, Lance," she uttered, scarcely above a whisper.

Ajax Gentry laughed out.

"Well – I reckon that settles it," he said, jingling his harness and turning to leave.

"No – it don't settle nothin'," broke in Octavia anxiously. "Lance ain't got any land cleared to speak of over on his place, and he ain't put in any crop; how air the both of 'em to live? They'll just about have obliged to stay here with us. You can find work for Lance on the farm, cain't ye, Pappy?"

Old Ajax measured his prospective grand-son-in-law with a steady eye, and assured himself that there was not room on the farm nor in the house for two masters. He read mastery in every line of face and figure. Lance got to his feet so suddenly that he might have been said to leap up.

"I've built me a good cabin, and it's all ready. Callista and me are goin' into no house but our own," he said brusquely. "Ain't that so, Callista?"

Again the girl within the doorway answered in that hushed, almost reluctant voice,

"Just as you say, Lance."

And though grandfather laughed, and Mother Gentry objected and even scolded, that ended the argument.

"I'll stop a-past and leave the word at Hands's," Lance told them as he turned to go. "Is there anyone else you'd wish me to bid, mother?"

That "mother," uttered in Lance's golden tones, went right to the widow's sentimental heart. She would have acceded to anything he had proposed in such a way. Old Ajax smiled, realizing that Lance meant to triumph once for all over Flenton Hands.

As Cleaverage walked away, the mother prompted, almost indignantly.

"Why didn't ye go down to the draw-bars with him, Callista? I don't think that's no way to say farewell to a young man when you've just been promised."

Gentry looked at his daughter-in-law through narrowed eyes, then at Callista; his glance followed Lance Cleaverage's light-footed departure a moment, and then he delivered himself.

"I ain't got nothing agin your marryin' Lance Cleaverage Wednesday evening," he said concisely to Callista. "I ain't been axed; but ef I had been, my say would still be the same. All I've got to tell you is that thar was never yet a house built of logs or boards or stones that was big enough to hold two families."

"Why, Pap Gentry!" exclaimed Octavia in a scandalized tone. "This house is certainly Callista's home, and I'm sure I love Lance as well as I ever could a own son. If they thought well to live here along of us this winter, I know you wouldn't hold to that talk."

"I reckon you don't know me so well as ye 'lowed ye did," observed Gentry; "for I would – and do. Lance Cleaverage has took up with the crazy notion of marryin' all in haste. He ain't got

no provision for livin' on that place of his. Well, I tell you right now, he cain't come and live in my house. No, nor you cain't pack victuals over to 'em to keep 'em up."

A coquette according to mountain ideals, carrying her head high with the boys, famous for her bickerings with Lance, Callista Gentry had always been a model at home, quiet, tractable, obedient. But the face she now turned upon her grandfather was that of a young fury. All her cold pride was up in arms. That secret, still spirit of hers, haughty, unbent, unbroken, reared itself to give the old man to understand that she wanted nothing of him from this on. She – Lance's wife – the idea of her begging food from Grandfather Gentry!

"If you two'll hush and let me speak," she said in an even tone, "I reckon I'll be able to set grandpappy's mind at rest. You can give me the wedding – I reckon you want to do so much as that for your own good name. But bite or sup I'll never take afterwards in this house. No, I won't. So far from carryin' victuals out of it, you'll see when I come in I'll have somethin' in my hand, grandpap. I invite you and mother right now to take yo' Sunday dinners with me when you want to ride as far as the Blue Spring church. But," – she went back to it bitterly – "bite or sup in this house neither me nor Lance will ever take." Then, her eyes bright, her usually pale cheeks flaming, she turned and ran up the steep little stairs to her own room. Octavia looked reproach at her father-in-law; but Ajax Gentry spat scornfully toward the vacant fireplace, and demanded,

"Now she's a pretty somebody for a man to wed and carry to his home, ain't she? I say, Sunday dinners with her! Can she mix a decent pone o' corn bread, and bake it without burnin' half her fingers off? She cain't. Can she cut out a hickory shirt and make it? She cain't. Could she kill a chicken and pick and clean it and cook it – could she do it ef she was a starvin'? She could not. She cain't so much as bile water without burnin' it. She don't know nothin' – nothin' but the road. She's shore a fine bargain for a man to git. To have a passel o' fool boys follerin' after her and co'tin' her, that's all Callisty's ever studied about, or all you ever studied about for her."

"Well, pappy," Octavia bridled, considerably stung, "I don't think you' got much room to talk. In yo' young days, from all I ever heared – either from you or from others – you was about as flighty with the gals, and had about as many of 'em follerin' after you, as Sis is with the boys."

She looked up at her father-in-law where he lounged against the fire-board. Grandly tall was old Ajax Gentry, carrying his seventy years and his crown of silver like an added grace. His blue eye had the cold fire of Callista's, and his lean sinewy body, like hers, showed the long, flowing curves of running water.

"O-o-o-oh!" he rejoined, with an indescribable lengthened circumflex on the vowel that lent it a world of meaning. "O-o-o-oh!.. a man! Well – that's mighty different. If a feller's got the looks – and the ways – he can fly 'round amongst the gals for a spell whilst he's young and gaily, and it don't do him no harm. There's some that the women still foller after, even when he's wedded and settled down" (Ajax smiled reminiscently). "But when a man marries a gal, he wants a *womern* – a womern that'll keep his house, and cook his meals, and raise his chillen right. The kind o' tricks Callisty's always pinned her faith to ain't worth shucks in wedded life. Ef I was a young feller to-morrow, I wouldn't give a chaw o' tobaccer for a whole church-house full o' gals like Callisty, an' I've told you so a-many's the time. Yo' Maw Gentry wasn't none o' that sort – yo' mighty right she wasn't! She could cook and weave and tend a truck patch and raise chickens to beat any womern in the Turkey Tracks, Big *and* Little. I say, Sunday dinner with Callisty!" he repeated. "Them that goes to her for a dinner had better pack their victuals with 'em."

Octavia gathered up her hanks of carpet-warp and started for the door.

"All right, Pappy," she said angrily. "All right. I raised the gal best I knowed how. I reckon *you* think the fault – sence you see so much fault in her – comes from my raisin'; but I know mighty well an' good that the only trouble *I* ever had with Sis, was 'count o' her Gentry blood. How you can expect the cookin' o' corn pones and makin' o' hickory shirts from a gal that's always got every man in reach plumb distracted over her, is more'n I can see." Octavia went out hastily before her

father-in-law could make the ironic reply which she knew to expect; and after a moment or two, Ajax himself moved away toward the log stable to begin his harnessing.

Callista had hurried to her bedroom, slammed the door, and was alone with her own heart. As for Lance, walking beneath the chestnuts, he had no wish to have her beside him under the old man's humorous, semi-sarcastic gaze and his prospective mother-in-law's sentimental, examining eye. He wanted her to himself. He thought with a mighty surge of rapture of the approaching time when they could shut out all the world and find once more that island of delight where they should dwell the only created beings. He, to share his honeymoon with the Gentry family! He laughed shortly at the thought.

It was Little Liza that opened the Hands door to him, and her light eyes softened unwillingly as they beheld his alert figure on the step. Little Liza was tormented with an incongruously soft heart, painfully accessible to the demands of beauty and charm.

"Howdy," she said. She had not seen Lance Cleaverage since the day of the funeral; but she had heard from her brother and her sisters that his behavior on that occasion was unseemly, if not positively disrespectful.

Lance barely returned her greeting, then he broached his errand.

"Jane! Ellen! Oh, Flent!" she called distressfully, when she had his news, "Come on out. Lance Cleaverage is here, waitin' to invite you to his weddin'."

The two sisters came out on the porch, but Flenton did not make his appearance.

"Howdy, Lance. Who is it?" inquired Ellen Hands. "Callista Gentry hasn't took you, has she?"

"Well," drawled Lance, lifting a laughing eye to the line of big, gray-faced women on the rude, puncheon-floored gallery, "you can make it out best way you find. The weddin' is to be held at the Gentry place. If it ain't Callista, it's somebody mighty like her."

Little Liza's lip trembled.

"You Lance Cleaverage," she said huskily, "you're a-gettin' the sweetest prettiest thing that ever walked this earth. I do know that there ain't the man livin' that's fit for Callisty. I hope to the Lord you'll be good to her."

Again Lance regarded the doleful visages before him and laughed.

"You-all look like I'd bid you to a funeral rather than to a weddin'," he said, lingering a bit to see if Flenton would show himself.

Hands was just inside the window. He knew well what had been said. Nothing could have been less to his taste than the going out to receive such an invitation.

"Thar – you see now, Flent," said Little Liza tragically, as she encountered her brother when they turned from watching Lance away. "You've lost her. Oh, law! I always thought if I could call Callisty Gentry sister, it would make me the happiest critter in the world."

"You may have a chance so to call her yet," said Hands, who showed any emotion the announcement may have roused in him only by an added tightening of lip and eye. "Wednesday ain't come yet – and hit ain't gone."

"Well, hit'll come and hit'll go," said Ellen heavily. "Lance Cleaverage gits what he starts after, and that's the fact."

"Yes," agreed Little Liza, "he shore does. I don't reckon I could have said no to him myself."

"Lance Cleaverage!" echoed her brother. "Well, he's born – but he ain't buried. I never did yet give up a thing that I'd set my mind on. I ain't said I've given up Callista Gentry."

The three looked at him rather wildly. Talk of this sort is unknown among the mountain people. Yet they could but feel the woman's admiration for his masculine high-handedness of speech.

At the Cleaverage place they were making ready for the noonday meal when Lance brought his news home. The table, with its cloth of six flour-sacks sewed end to end, was set in the cool entry. The Dutch oven, half buried in ashes, was full of buttermilk-dodgers, keeping hot. At the

other side of the broad hearthstone, Roxy Griever bent above a dinner-pot dishing up white beans and dumplings. Beside her Mary Ann Martha held a small yellow bowl and made futile dabs with a spoon she had herself whittled from a bit of shingle, trying to get beans into it. Her mother's reproofs dropped upon her tousled and incorrigible head with the regularity of clockwork.

"You, Mary Ann Marthy, I do know in my soul you' the worst child the Lord ever made: Where do you expect to go to when you die? Look at that thar good victuals all splattered out in the ashes. That's yo' doin'. You' jest adzackly like yo' uncle Lance."

Then Sylvane, who was shaping an axe-helve in the doorway, looked up and said, "Here comes Lance himself." And Kimbro Cleaverage pushed another chair towards the table.

"Well," said the bridegroom expectant, looking about on the shadowed interior of the cabin, dim to his eyes after the glare outside, "I've got a invite for you-all to a weddin'."

"Not you and Callista?" exclaimed Sylvane, his boyish face glowing. "Oh, Lance – she ain't said yes, has she?"

"No, Buddy," Lance flung over his shoulder, and you saw by his smile the strong affection there was between them, "she ain't said yes – but I have. I've set the time for Wednesday, and the Gentry place is all uptore right now getting ready for it. I reckon" – his eye gleamed with the mischievous afterthought – "I reckon they'll clear the big barn for dancing."

As though the word had been a catch released in her mechanism, Roxy Griever straightened up, spoon in hand, with a snort.

"You Lance Cleaverage – you sinful soul!" she began, pointing her bean spoon at him and thus shedding delightful dribblings of the stew which Mary Ann Martha instantly scraped up, "you air a-gettin' the best girl in the two Turkey Tracks – and here you take the name of dancin' on yo' sinful lips at the same time!"

"I reckon you'll not come if there's goin' to be dancin'," remarked Lance, hanging up his hat and seating himself at the table. "I hadn't thought of that. Well – we'll have to get along without you."

Roxy snorted inarticulate reprobation. Suddenly she demanded.

"Sylvane, whar's that branch of leaves I sent you after?"

With the words, Mary Ann Martha, unnoticed by her mother, abruptly dropped her shingle spoon, scrambled across Sylvane's long legs, and galloped wildly out into the bit of orchard beside the house, her mass of almost white curling hair flying comically about her bobbing head, a picture of energetic terror. Her young uncle looked after her, smiling tolerantly, and said nothing.

"The flies'll git more of this dinner than we'uns, if we don't have something. Why'n't you git me that branch o' leaves, Sylvane?" persisted his sister.

"Well, Sis' Roxy, I wanted to finish my axe-helve, so I sub-contracted that order o' yourn," answered Sylvane, deprecatingly. "Sent Ma'-An'-Marth' out to git a small limb."

"For the land's sake! An' her not taller than – " began Roxy querulously. But her father put in, with pacific intention,

"Here's the chap now with her peach-tree branch. Come on, Pretty; let Gran'pappy put it up 'side o' him at the table. Now sons, now daughter, air ye ready? This is a bountiful meal; and Roxy's cooked it fine as the best; we're mightily favored. We'll ax God's blessing on the food."

CHAPTER VI. THE WEDDING

WEDNESDAY came, a glamorous day in early September. A breath of autumn had blown upon the mountains in the night, leaving the air inspiring – tingling cool in the shade, tingling hot in the sun. The white clouds were vagabonds of May time, though the birds were already getting together in flocks, chattering, restless for migration. Now at night instead of the bright come-and-go of fireflies there was a mild and steady lamping of glowworms in the evening grass. The katydids' chorus had dwindled, giving place to the soft chirr of ground and tree-crickets. There was a pleasant, high-pitched rustle in the stiffening leaves; the dew was heavy in the hollows, gray under the moon.

All day the woods were silent, except for the mocking whirr of grasshoppers rising into the sunshine, and an occasional squabble of crows in pursuit of a hawk.

Wild grapes were ripe – delicious, tart, keen-flavored things. In the pasture hollow a fleece of goldenrod, painted on the purple distance along with the scarlet globes of orchard fruit, was stripped by laughing girls for Callista's wedding decorations. Yes, summer was definitely departed; a new presence was here, an autumn wind in the treetops, an autumn light on the meadow, an autumn haze on the hills – a fine luminous purple, flecked with lights of rose and gold.

The Gentry place, with its central house of some pretensions and its numerous outlying cabins, presented on Wednesday afternoon something the appearance of a village undergoing sack. Open doors and windows, heaps of stuff, or bundles of household gear, or sheaves of garments being carried from place to place, suggested this impression, which seemed further warranted by the female figures emerging suddenly now and again from one cabin or another and fleeing with disheveled hair, wild gestures and incoherent babblings as of terror, to some other refuge. The girls had not come in yet from the pasture with their armloads of goldenrod and wild aster; but all three of the Hands sisters – good, faithful souls, neighborhood dependences for extra help at weddings and funerals – were hard at work in the very heart of the turmoil.

"Liza, have you seed Callista anywhar's?" panted Octavia Gentry, appearing in the main house, laden with a promiscuous assortment of clothing.

"Yes, I did," rumbled Little Liza from the chair on which she stood adjusting the top of a window curtain.

"I thought I heard Lance's banjo awhile ago," added the widow as she folded and disposed of the garments she had brought in, "and then I didn't hear it any more. I have obliged to get hold of Callista to tell me whar she wants these things put at."

"Yes, and you did hear Lance Cleaverage's banjo," confirmed Little Liza sadly. "Callisty heard it, too. She come a-steppin' down from her room like as if he'd called her, and she's walked herself out of the front door and up the road alongside o' him, and that's why you don't hear the banjo no more."

"Good land!" cried the mother-in-law that was to be. "I don't know what young folks is thinkin' of – no, I don't. It ain't respectable for a bride and groom to walk side by side on their weddin' day. Everybody knows that much. And I've got to have Callista here. Roxy Griever's sent word that she cain't come to the weddin' because its been given out to each and every that they'd be dancin'. I want Callista to see Lance and have that stopped. Hit's jest some o' Lance's foolishness. You know in reason its got to be stopped. Oh, Sylvane!" as a boyish figure appeared in the doorway. "Won't you go hunt up Callista and tell her I want her? And you tell yo' sister Roxy when you go home that there ain't goin' to be any dancin' here tonight. And just carry these here pans out to the springhouse whilst you're about it, Sylvane. And if you find Ellen Hands there tell her to come on

in to me, please. I vow, nobody's been for the cows! Sylvane, whilst you're out you go up to the milk gap and see are they waitin' thar. Let down the draw-bars for 'em if they are."

Fifteen-year-old Sylvalnus Cleaverage laughed and turned quickly, lest further directions be given him.

"All right," he called back. "I'll 'tend to most of those things – as many of 'em as I can remember."

A privileged character, especially among the women, Sylvane made willing haste to do Octavia's errands. The boy was like his brother Lance with the wild tang left out, and feminine eyes followed his young figure as he hurried from spring-house to pasture lot. When he found Lance and Callista walking hand in hand at the meadow's edge he gave them warning, so that the girl might slip in through the back door, innocently unconscious of any offence against the etiquette of the occasion, and the bridegroom pass on down the big road, undiscovered.

"I reckon it's jest as well as 'tis," commented old Ajax from the security of the front doorway, to which he had been swept out and cleaned out in the course of the preparations. "Ef Octavy had been give a year's warnin', she would have been jest about tearin' up Jack this-a-way for the whole time."

As evening fell, teams began to arrive, and the nearer neighbors came in on foot, with a bustle of talk and a settling of the children. Old Kimbro Cleaverage brought his daughter, Roxy Griever, with little Polly Griever, a relative of Roxy's deceased husband, and Mary Ann Martha.

"I knowed in reason you wouldn't have dancin' on yo' place," the widow shrilled, as she approached. Then as she climbed out over the wheel, she added in a lower tone to Little Liza Hands, who had come out to help her down, "But that thar sinful Lance is so pestered by the davil that you never know whar he'll come up next, and I sont Miz. Gentry the word I did as a warnin'. Them men has to be watched."

Callista was ready, dressed in a certain white lawn frock – not for worlds would she have admitted that she had made it with secret hopes of this occasion. The helpers were still rushing to and fro, getting the wedding supper on the long tables, contrived by boards over trestles, on the porch and in the big kitchen, when Preacher Drumright rode sourly up.

It was Octavia Gentry who had been instrumental in bespeaking Drumright's services for the marriage, and indeed he was the only preacher in the Turkey Track neighborhoods at the moment or anywhere nearer than the Settlement itself. The church-going element of the region stood before this somewhat cantankerous old man in the attitude of confessed offenders. He was famous for raking the young people over the coals, and he arrogated to himself always the patriarch's privilege of scolding, admonishing, or denouncing, whenever the occasion might seem to him fit. For ten years Drumright had longed to get a fair chance at Lance Cleaverage. Ever since the boy – and he was the youngest in the crowd – joined with a half dozen others to break up a brush meeting which Drumright was holding, the preacher's grudge had grown. And it did not thrive without food; Lance was active in the matter of providing sustenance for the ill opinion of the church party, and he had capped his iniquities by taking his banjo as near the church as the big spring on that Sunday in mid-July. Drumright had prepared the castigating he meant to administer to Lance almost as carefully as he would have gotten ready a sermon.

With the advent of the preacher the last frantic preparations were dropped, and it was suddenly discovered that they were not absolutely necessary for the occasion. The guests gathered into the big front room, where the marriage was to be. Drumright took his stand behind a small table at its further end; Callista came down the stairs, joined Lance in the entry, and the two stepped into the room hand in hand.

That was a daunting front to address with reproof. People said that they were the handsomest couple that ever stood up together in the two Turkey Tracks. But after all, it was something more than physical beauty that arrested the eye in that countenance. Lance's face was lifted, and his

eyes apparently saw not the room, the preacher, nor even the girl whose hand he held. He moved a thing apart, his light, swift step timed to unheard rhythms, a creature swayed by springs which those about him knew not of, addressed to some end which they could not understand. And Callista seemed to look only to him, to live only in him. Her fair face reflected the strange radiance that was on his dark, intense young visage.

It was Drumright's custom to make a little talk when about to perform the marriage ceremony, so there was neither surprise nor apprehension as he began to speak.

"Befo' I can say the words that shall make this here man and this here woman one flesh, I've got a matter to bring up that I think needs namin'."

The old voice rasped aggressively, and a little flutter of concern passed over Drumright's hearers.

"The Gentry family air religious, church-goin' people. Why Callista Gentry ain't a perfessin' member in the church this day is more than I can tell you-all here and now. Like enough some will say hit is the influence of the man a-standin' beside her; and supposin' this to be so, hit cain't be too soon named out to 'em."

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