

## *The Asbestos Box*

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE MURDER IN THE GLEN ROSS."  
[Rebecca Harding Davis]

### CHAPTER I

I REMEMBER an odd story about a will, which, I believe, I have never told before. It is not long, though it covers a good many years.

One winter evening I was entertaining a few friends at dinner. Some Parisian notoriety was among them, and my housekeeper, intent on upholding the *cuisine* of old Virginia against all France, outdid herself. The truffle-sauce was as delicate as Fouillet's own, the Perigord—pardon me—but I *am* fond of good eating. What wise man since Soloman is not?

Just as the Clicquot was beginning to fire the eyes and mellow the laughs about the table, Pine, who had been playing major-domo in the servant's hall, came behind my chair and slipped a note under my plate. "Pierse's Jake fetched it. From his young mistress."

I saw Bob Johns, who was sitting a little way down the table, prick up his ears at this. The clatter of voices and glasses was loud enough for Pine to continue his whisper, unheard, as I furtively glanced at the note. "Jake says the old man's bent on makin' his will, right off. Fur de Lord's sake go, Mars' John. It's de debbil of a night, though." And he slipped off to get overcoat and wrappings.

Pine, a portly dignitary of forty, knew my business about as well as I did myself. Far better than that lazy, handsome scamp, Bob Johns, who had been loitering out four years in my office, becoming a rare critic of hock and champagne, and the last *pas seul* at the theatre. Yet, though Bob's knowledge of the law was of the flimiest, he was relished even among the old limbs of the courts about my table for his keen wit and hearty good feeling. "A sad dog, Bob!" they would say, "just like his father." True enough! like his father in the flushed genial face, the open hand, the big foolish heart, whose weakness every beggar in Richmond knew how to swindle; to end like his father, too, it might be; life and hope wrecked in drink; to be remembered, years after, as "poor Bob," with censure and tenderness such as no faultless morality would have earned. For reasons that I had, I handed him the note when I had read it, in answer to his eager look. I ought to go; that was certain; so, with a mournful glance at the jolly faces around the cloth, I pushed old Tom Berkley into my chair, and excused myself for an hour.

When I came down into the hall, a few minutes after, I found Bob Johns ready booted and spurred. I laughed inwardly. "Well, Bob, does old Pierse want to consult you about his will?"

He stammered, and grew red. "I thought, sir——"

"You thought little Hester might need consolation, so mean to offer your ghostly aid? Well, boys will be boys. Help me on with this shawl here, and get along with you."

We rode off together. A dull, drizzly night. Bob's thoughts of little Hester may have kept him warm, but I found it decidedly uncomfortable, and just like old Pierse to choose such a night for his preparation for the next world. A word of explanation, that you may understand the exigences of the case as well as Bob and I did.

Some five years before, this same reputable old Pierse had married a widow from Loudon county: a certain Mrs. Wray with one daughter, Hester. The widow was rich, had been an heiress in her girlhood, when, by-the-way, she had known and loved this man Pierse, but had been forced to marry Wray by her father. She never cared for him, nor his daughter; in less than a year after his death, met and married her old flame Pierse. She was one of these whey-skinned, pale-eyed women, whose loves and hates go down into the grave with them. She did love old Pierse enough to make me doubt her sanity. It was a perpetual miracle to me: but there never was a Bottom yet who could not find a Titania to "stroke his amiable ears." Well, the woman died at last, and then one would have hoped there would be an end of her lunatic coddling. Far from it. She was a native of Baton Rouge, and her property doubly ensured to her by settlement, and the laws of Louisiana, where women have more "rights" than ever Abby Kelly claimed. To justify the title of her sex to an inherent sense of justice, the woman devised her property entire to her husband, leaving Hester utterly dependent on his good will. I don't say old Pierse was a scoundrel. I only quote Shakespeare, and say Titania had been "enamored of an ass." A pompous, fat animal—perpetual high grand of braggarts—if any seeds of brain or feeling were in the man originally, turtle and brandy had choked them out. Like all braggarts, the man could be led by a child with flattery. Now Hester was no flatterer. A little girl with a low, loving voice, it is true, but a most decisive way of putting down her small foot, and a hearty contempt of all humbug. The two were not colleagues—how could they be? Besides Pierse knew how thoroughly public indignation had been roused on behalf of the girl, and disliked her accordingly; submitted her to numberless vexations—not the least of which was the introduction into the house of a mulatto slave as housekeeper, a woman whom the girl had every reason to fear and shrink from. Some two years back Pierse had made a will, leaving the property to his brother, then in Cuba. I knew of it, and for Hester's sake had brought every influence to bear on the wretch to induce him to alter it, but vainly. In the last year gout had rendered him helpless. Hester had nursed him for the memory of her dead mother; whatever kindly feeling was buried in the mass of flesh had kindled into life, and day after day I hoped he would do her a late justice. You comprehend now why I hurried to obey his summons? Bob Johns' interest in the house perhaps you can guess at. Poor little downtrodden Hester was a favorite of mine, and for her sake as well as his own, I wished Bob would turn into a slower, surer path through life; but talking, as usual in such cases, did no good.

The girl came out to meet me on the steps, her blue eyes swelled with crying; the old fellow had been kind to her since he thought himself dying, and a few words of kindness are enough to melt hearts like Hester's. However, when she saw Bob, her grief abated in a series of intense blushes and shy dimples about her mouth. That gallant young fellow, whom half the girls in Henrico county were in love with, was quite awkward and silent, which made me believe him entirely in earnest, and think all the better of him. I left them in the parlor, and went up to the chamber, where old Pierse was growling and swearing to the confusion of spirit of half a dozen blacks.

Pierse, his growls, or his oaths have nothing to do with my story; so suffice it to say that the will was made, leaving the property, as was just, to Hester, with the exception of some legacies, and was duly witnessed by the doctor and Jones, the overseer. I heard Jones, rough old rowdy as he was, mutter a thank God as he scrawled down his name. I kissed Hester's thin cheek heartily as I came down, and marched Master Bob off with me. The fellow was so lost in rapture or sulkiness that he said nothing the whole way into town. Never once thought of the will, I honestly believe. One thing annoyed me. Pierse kept the will himself, "To have a hold on the girl," he said, and there was no calculating on his moody fits.

He lived four weeks after this. All negrodom was alive with tales of his whims and "debblishness," which Pine occasionally forgot his high-breeding enough to repeat, when the younger servants were out of hearing, coupled with sympathy for "dat chile lef' to such a 'God-forsaken' wretch." At last one morning, as Jim was shaving me, Pine came in fresh from the morning paper, announcing that, "Bress de Lord, old Pierse was done gone at last."

I glanced over the notice of the "the lamented death of our highly respected fellow-citizen" while at breakfast, and then drove out to the Pierse planation. There was a crowd before me; undertakers, negroes downstairs, Hester's friends (she had true ones of her own, and the heiress of two plantations and eight hundred slaves was likely to have enough). Pierse's first attorney, up in the drawing rooms, and bustling women everywhere. I sent for uncle Joe, who had been the constant attendant of the dead man, and was his only mourner, I fancy.

"Is the will safe, uncle?" I asked.

"Tink so, massa," he said, anxiously. "Mars' kep it in dat black box um had under his bed, but um were cranky—beyond belief at de lass. Lord knows what um's done."

I saw something weighed on Joe's mind and beckoned him aside. He drew something mysteriously from his pocket.

"When old mars' died, dis key wor in his trousers' pocket. It opens dat curious box—an I tought twos best to make sure—ef de will's dar, which um good Lord grant!"

The box was curious, as Joe said, a black casket lined with asbestos, fastened by a peculiar lock. I remembered the old man had put the will in it, looking at some bank bills it contained with a chuckle. Brady, the lawyer Pierse had formerly employed, joined me in the library, where a funereal lamp burned dimly.

"Rumor says you have a will made lately, Mr. Page," he said. "I'm glad to hear it. A more diabolical piece of injustice than the one I drew up it would be hard to find. The whole property went to his brother. I mention this, *sub rosa*, of course. Though it matters little, as the deed is null."

I confess Brady and I, however, grew a little impatient for the funeral to be over. Pierse, in the imbecility of his last hours, had gabbled incessantly of the will to the blacks about him, one hour threatening to burn it, the next praying maudlin blessings on Hester's head.

The funeral was over at last, and with Brady and Dr. Folke, who was appointed administrator, I proceeded to search for the will. Hester had been removed to the house of an old Quaker lady the day before. The demure Friend Cox, however, had left “the maiden Hester” asleep, and driven over to see if “justice had been done by that ungodly man.” The good old lady checked herself at this unwonted outburst, and smoothed her forehead and lavender silk at the same time, seating herself placidly in the sunniest corner of the drawing room. Just as we were beginning our search, a buggy drove up to the door, and Mr. Sholter was announced. Now Sholter was one of the wiriest, wiliest, lowest pettifoggers in Richmond. Brady drew himself back into his iciest politeness, when this intruder bustled in with outstretched hand: and my own welcome was hardly more genial.

“A sad loss! Sad loss!” he said, summoning a face of woe to cover his embarrassment.

Nobody spoke.

“Have you claims against the personal property, Mr. Sholter?” I asked, seeing that the others waited for me to speak. “Otherwise—our business at present is urgent, and——”  
“Pre-cisely,” with an ill-concealed smirk. “My business is yours, I am proud to say. I am commissioned by Mr. Samuel Pierse, brother of the deceased, now in Cuba, to attend to his interests in the matter. A will in his favor, I am led to believe, is held by Mr. Brady.” Brady bowed haughtily. “I am also informed that suspicions are entertained that the deceased made a later disposition of his property. Eh! Correct? Well, well, we’ll see to that! Unless the testator altered his mind and burned it. Our departed friend was not a rock in his intentions. Ha! ha! More like St. Reuben than St. Peter; d’ye take, gentlemen? I must have my little joke,” rubbing his hands. “Come, let’s to business. Most happy to be associated with the first members of the Richmond bar,” etc., etc.

“Never mind!” I laughed to Brady, who was chafing up to his usual exploding point; “we’ll have done with him presently!” and so led them to the old man’s chamber, going directly to the corner where the box always had stood.

*It was not there.*

Let me cut my story short. The box was gone; neither chamber nor house held it. There is no need to tire you with our dismay nor rage, nor Sholter’s triumph hidden under a condoling face. Well, poor wretch! no wonder he rejoiced! The agency falling into his hands was a good, fat living to him. The box was gone.

Uncle Joe said that the old man had examined the papers it contained two nights before his death, and then hid the casket carefully under the mattress of the bed; since then he had not seen it. We resolved to keep the loss quiet for a day or two, until a thorough search was made. Meanwhile, Brady, in obedience to the power of attorney held by Sholter, delivered to him and the administrators named therein the former will.

“I will grant you, Mr. Page,” said Sholter, condescendingly, “a day’s grace to produce the document before I proceed to record the will.”

I could have gnashed my teeth at the fellow; but I only bowed and answered, “All right. The document will be forthcoming. I do not believe it is burned.”

“There I differ with you, sir,” he said, with his detestable smirk.

We passed out on the portico. The house servants crowded about me. “Is it all safe, Marster Page?” said uncle Joe, acting as spokesman. “Who’d we belong to, marster?” The old negro’s voice was husky.

“It will be all safe, uncle,” I said, cheerfully.

“You are sanguine, Mr. Page,” sneered Sholter. “If the estate becomes the property of Mr. Pierse, I doubt not these hands will be transferred to the Georgia market.”

Uncle Joe’s face grew livid. “De good Lord help us!” he muttered, turning away.

I watched Sholter bowling down the park, whistling as he went. I suspected almost to certainty that he had been employed by Pierse in Cuba to obtain possession of the box by clandestine means. But how to prove it? I turned with Brady and entered the drawing room, where the old Quaker lady was pacing the floor, trying to look calm.

“I hope, friend John, thee brings good tidings?” she said, stopping short.

“We will hope for the best,” I said, evasively. She looked keenly at us; then began slowly to pin on her shawl and bonnet. “I must return to Hester,” dropping the subject instantly; though I saw her anxious eyes.

As I went out to help her into the old-fashioned coach, she leaned forward out of the door, her smooth cheek coloring like a girl’s of sixteen. “Friend John, is the young man, Robert Johns, betrothed to Hester? I ask not for idle curiosity.”

I smiled. “I have suggested such a thing to be possible, Friend Cox.” She looked more anxious. “You do not like the idea? He is a clever boy—generous, talented.” She shook her head.

“A noble young man, as God made him; but as he has made himself—the wine-cup, thee knows?— ‘at the last, it stingeth like an adder.’” I was silent. I knew the page in her own story that made her cheek grow pale now and her gray eyes fill with tears.

“I think better of Robert,” I said. “His worst fault is indolence. Remember the education the sons of our well-blooded, poor families receive. Besides, as the husband of Hester Wray, he will have enough to do to control the plantations.”

“When he cannot control himself? Oh! friend John, thee had ever a weak side for the follies of the young!” And the old lady drove away.

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## CHAPTER II

TWO days after this, late in the evening, I mounted my old hack and rode out to Friend Cox’s plantation. Slowly, reluctantly; for I was the bearer of ill tidings. A bright fire burned in the library, flashing jets of light on the gray silken curtains, the plain rich furniture and books, the group of faces gathered about it. The mild eyes of the old Quaker were the only ones that had any tinge of sadness. Bob Johns’ face, with the brown hair pushed back, fairly lit up the room with its hearty glee. Why should it not? Life had always been pleasant—opened brighter and warmer now. No day had thwarted him of all these years gone. And Bob’s heart and brain were steeped in the most crimson flush of love just then, sitting on a low footstool at Hester’s feet. She had been singing—she had a low, chirping voice, Hester, very pleasant to hear—singing some quaint old Scotch song about the “Land o’ the leal.” Melancholy enough! yet its sadness deepened the joy, somehow, for the two young hearts. It touched the old one, too, if I mistake not, notwithstanding the “testimony” of her sect against music; for the face was flushed coming to meet me. A quiet, happy breath pervaded the room. I settled down in it among them, uncertain how to break my news.

Perhaps Friend Cox saw it on my face and thought it had better be broken abruptly.

“Thee comes to say that the will is lost, Friend John?” she said.

“I came to say it,” looking in the fire, avoiding all eyes. “Gone. Sholter, as proxy for Samuel Pierse, takes possession of the plantations tomorrow.”

“And the people?” cried Hester, starting up.

“They are all to be transferred to the place in Georgia.”

“Sold?”

“No; not immediately.”

The girl burst into tears, pacing the floor. “My own people! They were kind to me when no one else was kind—not even my own mother! Old Maumer! that nursed me in her arms! They shall not go! They shall not!”

“Can nothing be done?” said Friend Cox, half-crying.

“Nothing! I proposed taking the house servants off Sholter’s hands; but he would not.”

“Hester forgets her own loss,” she said, in a whisper.

“I do not,” the girl stopped. “It is unjust. God knows I feel that! I am no meek saint. But I can help myself. What can *they* do—my poor people? You think me silly, perhaps; but they were all I had to love for years!” her face growing crimson as she looked at Bob.

A silence followed. Bob leaned his head on the windowpane. The girl paced to and fro, controlling herself.

“Hester,” said the Quaker, at last, “I see but one hope for thy house people. It may be that, in time, this man Pierse will relent, and dispose of them to me or friend John here. Then it will be all right. Thou art my child now, thee knows?”

“Except my share in her,” I said.

Hester was near the old lady. She turned impulsively and threw her arms about her. “You know I thank you both!” Her voice was clear enough now. “But listen to me. I have made up my mind. My father, nor his daughter, ever took back a promise and I have made one in my heart to my people. I cannot be dependent on you—on anyone. I will earn my own bread, Friend Cox, and, after a time, I’ll buy them back.” Friend Cox smiled and smoothed her hair. But I saw the fashion in which the girl’s lips closed, and know she would keep her word.

Bob Johns pushed away the curtain and came up to the hearth. I don’t think he remembered that I or the old lady were there: he saw, spoke to Hester only.

“Do you know what I think of myself, Hetty?” he said, in a tone whose bitterness seemed to some scalding out of his heart. “Do you see me standing here—a man of twenty-five ignorant, penniless years, and chances squandered, when I ought to have been strong to help you and these wretched souls? Squandered! God help me!” He covered his face with his hands. She put hers trembling on his shoulder. “I’ve a strong arm yet, and a strong will!” he broke out, catching the little hand. “*You* work! Never! if there’s any trace of manhood left in me! I can dig, if nothing better! Hetty! Hetty! Give yourself to me now! You shall see me other than the idle wretch I have been. Only believe in me—believe in me!”

“I do—I always did, Robert. You shall work for me. But not together. Let us each try our strength first. Let me do something for my people.” The girl’s strength was giving way. She grew pale, trembling.

“Come, child,” said Friend Cox, “thee has borne enough. Tomorrow we will talk this matter over,” and led her from the room.

Bob Johns and I soon after took our leave. Friend Cox had upbraided me with too lax a manner in dealing with young people. I thought this a good time to reform. So as we rode down the avenue, I began in a tone calculated in itself to carry conviction.

“Young man, you might have been prepared for this. I have warned you of the helpless, inefficient thing you were making of yourself, time and again, but to no purpose. A more stiff-

necked, hardened youth in following his own idle fancies never fell under my control. What can I do now?"

"Well, uncle John," said Bob, turning his face with a miserable smile, "you might as well just call me 'Bob' again, and let me work out my own salvation. Little Hetty's tears have preached more to me tonight than all your counsel."

"Bob, you're a reprobate," I answered. "However, we'll try and have you admitted next month, and I can throw a good deal in your way the first term."

Somehow I had no doubt of Bob's earnestness and perseverance, nor was I disappointed. He "took hold," as the Pennsylvanians say, of work and study, gave up wine and cards with scarcely an effort. After all, a man must have stimulant. Bob had found the purest earthly strength-giver; the hope of working for a heart that loved him.

She did love him, little Hetty. Loved him enough to work at *her* task cheerfully, trustfully. She worked hard, no shrinking, or shirking, or make believe. She was employed as a teacher in Richmond, and a good thorough little teacher she made by-the-way. Friend Cox would not give her up altogether, so kept her with her; and every dollar the girl owned was laid up for the one great purpose, to bring back her "people" to their old home.

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### CHAPTER III

YEARS passed. Strange enough, you think, that two true, honestly loving hearts should be kept apart for years by the want of dollars and cents. Yet I have known such things happen more than once in novels, if not in real life.

Now comes the unusual part of my story. Immediately after the property passed into the hands of Samuel Pierse and his agent, the negroes were sent, as I before stated, to Georgia, and the house offered for rent. An Alabamian planter and his family took it, who were spending the winter in Richmond. He leased it, he informed me, for two years. I was surprised, therefore, when I met him in the reading-room of one of the hotels a month after and learned that he had removed to town. "The house was unpleasant." Very soon after another tenant occupied it; but only for a few weeks. Another followed, and another. Strange stories began to be bruited about of noises and lights unnatural, and not to be accounted for by any rational theory. The negroes talked; the white tenants themselves, half-ashamed, whispered mysteriously, said it was nothing, but presently decamped. Sholter was in despair. Satan himself was in the house, he said. Other people said it was only the ghost of old Pierse. To make a long story short, things went from bad to worse, until the house was utterly deserted a year after Pierse's death.

So it stood for about five years. In the meantime Bob Johns had been gradually taking his place among the reliable thorough members of the Virginia bar. I helped him to practice, of course; so did Brady; so did everybody. But he helped himself most. Earnest, eager, throwing himself into every cause as if the cause were his own, and gaining every day a deeper, more subtle knowledge of the science of jurisprudence, Bob Johns bade fair to rank among our highest jurists. He came



to me one day, as I was leaving the office, and leaned over the back of my chair in his old boyish way. "Uncle Page, wish me joy!"

I looked up, and said, "Hester has relented?"

"Not altogether. She will be my wife; but she will persist in helping me bring back the servants. God knows when we will accomplish it. Hetty had a scrawl from uncle Joe last week, that would touch your heart. We'll have to struggle hard enough, but we'll get on, I don't fear." Neither did I, looking in his face.

The wedding I learned was to be in a month. It so happened, that very night, that I was riding out past the Pierse plantation. I called Pine up to me as we reached the house.

"I thought, Pine," I said, "that house was vacant now?"

"So 'tis, Mars' John. Lord save us, see dat light in dem winders?"

"Certainly. Sholter must have a tenant in it."

"Not a tenant. De house am haunted, dem ignorant niggers say. No truf in dat, ov course."

"Very well, Pine, suppose you ride up and see about the light. It only would be right to give Sholter notice if the house is tenanted by vagrants. The furniture is there just as Pierse left it."

Pine turned a sickly yellow.

"Mars' Sholter's no friend of mine. Guess I'll not go if marster'll 'xcuse me."

There never was a more arrant coward, I well knew, than Pine. His horse kept in advance of mine a few paces out to the country house where I was going to dine. Coming home, I was joined by Brady. We jogged along together, slowly, for the road was muddy. Arriving near the Pierse house, I perceived the light again, and pointed it out to him. Brady was a young man, reckless, and to be honest, excited by our host's champagne.

"They say that house is haunted, Mr. Page," he said; "did you know? May I never die if I don't go up and have a bout with old Pierse's ghost!"

He turned his horse to the roadside, hitched him to the fence and began to cross the field.

"Come back, Fred," I cried. But he would not. "Well then, I'm with you," I said, and followed, determined to see it out.

What would the junior members of my law school have said if they had seen me lumbering over a stubble field at midnight in search of a ghost? However, they did not see it, and impelled by some boyish whim breaking out under my gray hairs, I pushed on, followed by Pine, his teeth

chattering. “Gor-a-mighty,” he said, “old mars’ is done cracked! Hope he’ll pay for dis in his gouty toe!”

We reached the house at last. Brady scrambled up the porch and peeped in the windows.

“Old Pierse has met with congenial company, if his ghost is about,” he whispered, coming down. “Though I thought the woman led him such a termagant dance as he wouldn’t care to repeat.”

“What woman, Brady?”

“The mulatto—don’t you recollect?—that he kept as a housekeeper, and who ruled the old wretch with a rod of iron.”

“Impossible. He sold her a year before he died to a Louisiana trader.”

“Ef he did, Mars’ John,” said Pine, taking courage, when he sound the conversation was reasonably un-diabolic, “she comed back. Ole Kit you mean? Fore old Pierse died she was hangin round the swamps, they say, an I heard got in an saw him once when none knowed it but Jake. After the rumpus bout dat box he wor feared to tell.”

The same thought struck us all. Pine, forgetting his fears and rheumatism, climbed up and peeped in. “It’s Kit,” he said, descending. “She’s sittin’ in style there.”

“Mr. Page,” said Brady, “will you ride into town and bring out a couple of policemen? I will be better able to keep watch if she have any accomplices.”

An hour after Kit and a big strapping boy, her son, were safe in custody. The boy was recognized as Beefsteak Jim, a notorious thief in the neighborhood. Under cover of the reputation of the house as haunted, the woman had now occupied it for years unharmed.

While the magistrate was committing them to jail, Brady and I held a consultation in my office, determining on what course to pursue with the woman, to ascertain if she were an accomplice of Sholter in destroying the will.

Early the next morning we went to her cell. She was an old negro, with high cheek bones and sallow eyes, denoting Indian blood, and more than Indian craftiness.

“Before the death of your Master Pierse,” I said, (assuming the assertant scheme for extracting evidence), “you got into his chamber alone, and terrified him into confessing that his will was made and hid in a box under the matr[e]ss. You carried the box off and concealed yourself and it somewhere in the house, until after the funeral was over.” I saw by the woman’s face I had guessed correctly, and despite her oaths and curses persisted, threatening her with the utmost punishment of the law if she refused to confess. Aided by Brady and the magistrate, I succeeded in eliciting the truth. She had not acted as Sholter’s agent. We had wronged him there. Partly to revenge herself on Hester for having caused her dismissal, partly to ensure the house as her own hiding place, she had devised and carried out the plan. Under the granaries there was a secret

cellar, communicating with the house by a passage in the wall. In this cellar, of which she only was cognizant, she had concealed her self, and by means of the hidden passage had produced the unnatural lights and noises that had brought upon the house the name of “uncanny.”

“But the box?” said I, eagerly.

“What will you give me if I tell you?” she demanded, her beady eyes sharpening.

“Liberty, and a pass to Ohio,” I replied.

“I couldn’t burn or break it,” she said, moodily. “I tried, Lord knows. It’s there in the cellar.”

It was there safe enough; and when we opened the rusty lock with the key which I had always retained, there lay the yellow paper that gave Hester Wray her own again.

For reasons that we had, our discovery was kept a secret from every one but Sholter, and Friend Cox, who, for the first time in her life, I suppose, became a partner in a conspiracy. It was a busy month for Brady and Pine, and me. However, our work was accomplished in time. The wedding night arrived, clear and starlit. A quiet wedding, being at the house of a friend, yet full of deep content. Little Hester’s cheeks were paler, it might be, than five years before: but the grave smile in her eyes was more constant and pure. As for Bob, he had worked long years for his Rachel, you saw the marks of that on his face; but you saw, too, that Rachel satisfied the innermost want of his soul. So we had a happy, holy wedding; one which, I doubted not, the God of the orphan girl could smile on and bless.

When it was over, when the tears and good wishes were past, and the supper table (ah! what cooks these Friends have!) attended to, I joined the group where the bride and groom stood.

“You are going to the North for your bridal tour?” I asked.

“To Canada. Yes, Uncle Page,” said Hester, blushingly claiming share in Bob’s relationship.

“I have a favor to ask you. It’s ten o’clock now, and the train you travel in leaves at twelve. Let me carry you off to pay a visit.”

“Isn’t it a little unreasonable?” said Bob, glancing at the wondering faces.

“Not a bit. Thee must go—thee must go,” hurried out Friend Cox.

She and Brady entered the carriage with us, leaving her husband to explain. When we drove in the gates of the Pierse plantation, little Hetty began to tremble. “Why do we come here?” she asked. “It hurts me to remember my people, and tonight——”

I hurried her out of the carriage as it stopped. “Only some friends,” I said, “who want to wish you joy, Hester.”

She stopped; some quick thought flashed over her face, and, in her old impetuous way, she sprang up the steps and opened the door.

The lighted hall was crowded with black faces bright with joy. We heard a tumult of laughter, and shouts, and weeping.

“Uncle Page, this is your doing,” said Bob. “No Canada now; this is better.”

I pointed to the hall table where lay the asbestos box. Hester heeded it but little. “Oh! Maumer—all of you,” she sobbed, “thank God! You are all here tonight.”

Old Uncle Joe held her by the hand. “Hush!” he said, in a husky voice, kneeling down. “Let us give thanks unto de name ob de Lord!”

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