

"That's right, my boy; of course, we're glad to have 'em. Here you, Pedro, harness up and go down to the road. Bring up all the passengers on the coach. How many is there of them, Bob?"

"Five in all. There's the prettiest girl, father, you ever saw, an old lady who kept looking at me, and three gentlemen."

"Well, my boy, we'll try and make them comfortable. You better go and see about rooms being got ready for 'em, and I'll ride down to bring 'em up."

Bob dismounted, and throwing the bridle-rein over the hitching post, walked into the house.

Sandy looked after him, and muttered to himself, as he prepared to ride down to the rescue of the passengers:

"I decla' that boy gets better every day."

It was not very long before the whole party reached the house, glad enough for the chance of staying there until they could go on with their journey. It consisted of Mrs. Barnston and Mr. Barnston, his niece, Miss Edith Hovey, and two friends of theirs, Messrs. James and Flynn. Sandy's welcome was so cordial, and he was so unaffectedly glad to see them, that all idea of formality vanished, and before supper time the whole party had become as familiar as old friends. Bob seemed to get along very well with Miss Edith, and while Sandy and the other gentlemen chatted together, the young people talked about anything and everything that could furnish a topic of conversation.

Both Sandy and Bob noticed that Mrs. Barnston was very silent, and that she did not seem to be able to keep her eyes off the young man's face. She would look at him with a half puzzled and anxious expression until she saw that she was noticed by the others, when, with an effort, she would join in the general conversation.

After supper the whole party went out upon the piazza, when the men lit their cigars and talked. At length Sandy, who never missed a chance of showing his boy off, called upon Bob to sing, and he at once began, in a beautiful tenor voice, some simple melody. As he sang Mrs. Barnston became more nervous, until suddenly starting up, she hastily left the piazza. Her husband followed her, and after a short absence returned. Turning to Sandy, he said:

"You must excuse my wife, Mr. McGovern; but she lost her first husband and her boy many years ago under peculiarly distressing circumstances, and your son's singing has reminded her so of her first husband's voice that she was unable to stay with us any longer."

Sandy paused for a minute before replying, and then in a deep tone said:

"Bob ain't my son."

"Not your son! Why, I thought—but I beg your pardon," said Mr. Barnston.

"Pardon's granted," said Sandy, sententiously. "What I mean is, I ain't Bob's real father. He's my son in affection and in love, but he ain't my natural son."

"Well, if you'll excuse my curiosity, where did you get him?"

"It's sixteen years ago now," said Sandy, slowly,

"that I was riding along the South Platte. One day I came across a place whar the red devils had been fightin' a train. When I come thar ther' weren't no man alive nor no horses nor nothing. I rode along and I hearn a kind o' wail, feeble like. I stopped and listened, an' then I looked whar the sound come from, and I found Bob thar, nothing but a kid he were then, in a—"

"You found him in the wagon box! Oh, for God's sake, say you found him there!" and Mrs. Barnston fairly ran from the door in which she was standing and threw her arms about Bob's neck, turning her head toward Sandy as she spoke.

Sandy started and half rose from his chair. Then looking at Bob with an eye full of affection for a moment, he allowed his gaze to rest upon the eager, questioning face of the woman. Then he said slowly:

"Thar wer' something as I found alongside o' the little one."

"I know," said Mrs. Barnston; "the half of a bracelet."

Sandy nodded, and with a wild, inarticulate cry of delight Mrs. Barnston fell fainting on the floor. The spectators of this intensely dramatic scene hastened to her assistance, and when she recovered, it was to find the arms of her son around her. She hugged him, kissed him, laughed and cried at the same time over him. She called him her boy, her Willie, her darling—every term of endearment ever heard she lavished upon him.

Bob, or Willie Thorndike, as his name really was, behaved very well. While it was impossible for him to realize that he had found a new name and a mother, he yet showed a great deal of affection. He was the first to realize, however, that Sandy had left them.

"Mother," he said, "father must be told that this makes no difference. Come with me."

Mrs. Barnston got up, and holding her son's arm tightly went with him. They found Sandy walking to and fro outside the house.

"Mother," said Will, "you must speak to father. He has been a true father to me."

At the sound of the title he had so long been accustomed to, Sandy turned toward them.

"Father," continued Will, "I have found a mother, but I have not lost you."

"I do not know what to say to you," began Mrs. Barnston; "words would be poor and weak. God bless you, Mr. McGovern, and He will bless you for what you have done. I cannot thank you, but I can pray to Him that He will. Do not think that I wish to take Will away from you. You have been a father to him, and it is right that he should be your son. But he is my boy, my darling—"

"Wa'al, marm," said Sandy, as his face softened into a smile as full of pleasantness as a May morning, grasping, as he spoke, Will's hand, "thar ain't no reason, as I knows, why we can't both love this youngster. He's a good boy, as good as they make 'em, and I reckon we can 'range things so as to suit all parties. You and your husband had better stay on the ranch for a month or two,