

THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING

A TALE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY
IN THE TIME OF SILAS WRIGHT

By
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"EMER HOLTEN, D.D. AND I, BARREL OF THE BLESSED KISS,
KEEPING UP WITH LUZZIE, ETC., ETC."

We were nearing the village. She wiped the mud from her prodigious nose and I wet her handkerchief in a pool of water and helped her to wash it. Soon we saw two men approaching us in the road. In a moment I observed that one was Mr. Horace Dunkelberg; the other a stranger and a remarkably handsome young man he was, about twenty-two years of age and dressed in the height of fashion. I remember so well his tall, athletic figure, his gray eyes, his small dark mustache and his admirable manners. Both were appalled at the look of Sally.

"Why, girl, what has happened to you?" her father asked.

Then I saw what a playful soul was Sally. The girl was a born actress. "Been riding in the country," said she. "Is this Mr. Latour?"

"This is Mr. Latour, Sally," said her father.

They shook hands.

"I am glad to see you," said the stranger.

"They say I am worth seeing," said Sally. "This is my friend, Mr. Daynes. When you are tired of seeing me, look at him."

I shook the hand he offered me.

"Of course, we can't all be good looking," Sally remarked with a sigh, as if her misfortune were permanent.

Mr. Horace Dunkelberg and I laughed heartily—for I had told him in a whisper what had happened to Sally—while Mr. Latour looked a little embarrassed.

"My face is not beautiful, but they say that I have a good heart," Sally assured the stranger.

They started on. I excused myself and took a trail through the woods to another road. Just there, with Sally waving her hand to me as I stood for a moment in the edge of the woods, the curtain falls on this highly romantic period of my life.

Uncle Peabody came for me that evening. It was about the middle of the next week that I received this letter from Sally:

"Dear Bart: Mr. Latour gave up and drove to Potadam in the evening. So I had to meet Mr. Parish. I think he had seen enough of me."

I began to hope he would stay—he was so good looking, but mother to very glad that he went, and so am I, for our minister told us that he is one of the wickedest young men in the state. He is very rich and very bad, they say. I wonder if old Kate knew about him. Her charm worked well anyway—didn't it? My nose was all right in the morning. Sorry that I can't meet you Saturday. Mother and I are packing up to go away for the summer. Don't forget me. I shall be thinking every day of those lovely things you said to me. I don't know what they will try to do with me, and I don't care. I really think as you do, Bart, that God has married us to each other.

"Yours forever,
"SALLY DUNKELBERG."

How often I read those words—so like all the careless words of the young!

CHAPTER XIII.

The Bolt Falls.

Three times that winter I had seen Benjamin Grimshaw followed by the Silent Woman clothed in rags and pointing with her finger.

The trial of Amos came on. He had had "blood on his feet," as they used to say, all the way from Lickitysplit to Lewis county in his flight, having attacked and slightly wounded two men with a bowie knife who had tried to detain him at Rainy Lake. He had also shot at an officer in the vicinity of Lowville, where his arrest was effected. He had been identified by all these men, and so his character as a desperate man had been established. This in connection with the scar on his face and the tracks, which the boots of Amos fitted, and the broken gun stock convinced the jury of his guilt.

I remember well the look of the venerable Judge Cady as he pronounced the sentence of death upon Amos Grimshaw. A ray of sunlight slanting through a window in the late afternoon fell upon his gracious countenance, shining also, with the softer light of his spirit. Slowly, solemnly, kindly, he spoke the words of doom.

It was his way of saying them that first made me feel the dignity and majesty of the law. The kind and fatherly tone of his voice put me in mind of that supreme court which is above all question and which was swiftly to enter judgment in this matter and in others related to it.

Slowly the crowd moved out of the courtroom. Benjamin Grimshaw rose and calmly whispered to his lawyer. He had not spoken to his son or seemed to notice him since the trial had begun, nor did he now. Many had shed tears that day, but not he. Mr. Grimshaw never showed but one emotion—that of anger. He was angry now. His face was hard and stern. He muttered as he walked out of the courtroom, his cane briskly beating the floor.

The Silent Woman—as ragged as ever—was waiting on the steps. Out went her bony finger as he came down. He turned and struck at her with his cane and shouted in a shrill voice that rang out like a trumpet in his frenzy: "Go 'way from me. Take her away, somebody. I can't stan' it. She's killin' me."



"Go 'Way From Me. Take Her Away," he said.

me. Take her away. Take her away. Take her away."

His face turned purple and then white. He reeled and fell headlong, like a tree severed from its roots, and lay still on the hard, stone pavement. It seemed as if snow were falling on his face—it grew so white. The Silent Woman stood as still as he, pointing at him with her finger, her look unchanged. People came running toward us. I lifted the head of Mr. Grimshaw and laid it on my knee. It felt like the head of the stranger in Rattleroad. Old Kate bent over and looked at the eyelids of the man which fluttered faintly and were still.

"Dead!" she muttered.

Then, as if her work were finished, she turned and made her way through the crowd and walked slowly down the street. Men stood aside to let her pass, as if they felt the power of her spirit and feared the touch of her garments.

Two or three men had run to the house of the nearest doctor. The crowd thickened. As I sat looking down at the dead face in my lap, a lawyer who had come out of the courtroom pressed near me and bent over and looked at the set eyes of Benjamin Grimshaw and said:

"She floored him at last. I knew she would. He tried not to see her, but I tell ye that bony old finger of hers burnt a hole in him. He couldn't stand it. I knew he'd blow up some day under the strain. She got him at last."

"Who got him?" another asked.

"Rovin' Kate. She killed him pointin' her finger at him—so."

"She's got an evil eye. Everybody's afraid o' the crazy o' trollope."

"Nonsense! She isn't half as crazy as the most of us," said the lawyer. "In my opinion she had a good reason for pointin' her finger at that man. She came from the same town he did over in Vermont. Ye don't know what happened there."

The doctor arrived. The crowd made way for him. He knelt beside the still figure and made the tests. He rose and shook his head, saying: "It's all over. Let one o' these boys go down and bring the undertaker."

Benjamin Grimshaw, the richest man in the township, was dead, and I have yet to hear of any mourners.

Three days later I saw his body lowered into its grave. The little, broken-spirited wife stood there with the same sad smile on her face that I had noted when I first saw her in the hills. Rovin' Kate was there in the clothes she had worn Christmas day. She was greatly changed. Her hair was neatly combed. The wild look had left her eyes. She was like one whose back is relieved of a heavy burden. Her lips moved as she scattered little red quares of paper into the grave. I suppose they thought it a crazy whim of hers—they who saw her do it. I thought that I understood the curious bit of symbolism and so did the schoolmaster, who stood beside me. Doubtless the pieces of paper numbered her curses.

"The scarlet sins of his youth are lying down with him in the dust," flasket whispered as we walked away together.

(END OF BOOK TWO.)

BOOK THREE

Which Is the Story of the Chosen Ways.

CHAPTER XIV.

Uncle Peabody's Way and Mine. It is a bad thing to be under a heavy obligation to one's self of which, thank God, I am now acquitted. I have known men who were their own worst creditors. Everything they earned went swiftly to satisfy the demands of vanity or pride or appetite. I have seen them literally put out of house and home, thrown neck and crop into the street, as it were, by one or the other of these heartless creditors—such a grasping usurer with unjust claims.

I remember that Rodney Barnes called for my chest and me that fine morning in early June when I was to go back to the hills, my year's work in school being ended. I elected to walk, and the schoolmaster went with me five miles or more across the flats to the slope of the high country.

"Soon the senator will be coming," he remarked. "I have a long letter from him and he asks about you and your aunt and uncle. I think that he's fond o' you, boy."

"I wish you would let me know when he comes," I said.

"I am sure he will let you know, and, by the way, I have heard from another friend o' yours, my lad. Ye're a lucky one to have so many friends—sure ye are. Here, I'll show ye the letter. There's no reason why I shouldn't. Ye will know its writer, probably. I do not."

So saying he handed me this letter:

"Canterbury, Vt.,
"June 1.

"Dear Sir—I am interested in the boy Barton Baynes. Good words about him have been flying around like pigeons. When school is out I would like to hear from you, what is the record? What do you think of the soul in him? What kind of work is best for it? If you will let me maybe I can help the plans of God a little. That is my business and yours. Thanking you for reading this, I am, as ever,
"God's humble servant,
"KATE FULLERTON."

"Why, this is the writing of the Silent Woman," I said before I had read the letter half through.

"Rovin' Kate?"

"Roving Kate; I never knew her other name, but I saw her handwriting long ago."

"But look—this is a neatly written, well-ordered letter and the sheet is as white and clean as the new snow. Uncanny woman! They say she carries the power o' God in her right hand. So do all the wronged."

"I wonder why Kate is asking about me," I said.

"Never mind the reason. She is your friend and let us thank God for it. Think how she came to yer help in the old barn an' say a thousand prayers, my lad."

Having come to the first flight of the uplands, he left me with many a kind word—how much they mean to a boy who is choosing his way with a growing sense of loneliness!

I reached the warm welcome of our little home just in time for dinner. They were expecting me and it was a regular company dinner—chicken pie and strawberry shortcake.

How well I remember that hour with the doors open and the sun shining brightly on the blossoming fields and the joy of man and bird and beast in the return of summer and the talk about the late visit of Alma Jones and Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln!

While we were eating I told them about the letter of old Kate.

"Fullerton!" Aunt Deel exclaimed. "Are ye sure that was the name, Bart?"

"Yes."

"Goodness gracious sakes alive!"

She and Uncle Peabody gave each other looks of surprised inquiry.

"Do you know anybody by that name?" I asked.

"We used to," said Aunt Deel as she resumed her eating. "Can't be she's one o' the Sam Fullertons, can it?"

"Oh, prob'ly not," said Uncle Peabody. "Back East they's more Fullertons 'han ye could shake a stick at."

A week later we had our raising. Uncle Peabody did not want a public raising, but Aunt Deel had had her way. We had hewed and mortised and bored the timbers for our new home. The neighbors came with pikes and helped to raise and stay and cover them. A great amount of human kindness went into the beams and rafters of that home and of others like it. I knew that The Thing was still alive in the neighborhood, but even that could not paralyze the helpful hands of those people. Indeed, what was said of my Uncle Peabody was nothing more or less than a kind of conversational firewood. I cannot think that any one really believed it.

We had a cheerful day. A barrel of hard cider had been set up in the doorway, and I remember that some drank it too freely. The hee-hee of the men as they lifted on the pikes and the sound of the hammer and beetle rang in the air from morning until night. Mrs. Rodney Barnes and Mrs. Dorothy came to help Aunt Deel with the cooking and a great dinner was served on an improvised table in the doorway, where the stove was set up. The shingles and sheathes and clapboard were on before the day ended.

Uncle Peabody and I put in the floors and stairway and partitions. More than once in the days we were working together I tried to tell him what Sally had told me, but my courage failed.

The day came, shortly, when I had to speak out, and I spoke the straight way of my duty as a needle of the compass pointed. It was the end of a summer day and we had watched the dusk fill the valley and come creeping up the slant, sinking the bowlders and thorn tops in its flood, one by one. As we sat looking out of the open door that evening I told them what Sally had told me of the evil report which had traveled through the two towns.

"Damn, little souled, barrer contracted—" Uncle Peabody, speaking in a low, sad tone, but with deep feeling, cut off this highly promising opinion before it was half expressed, and rose and went to the water pail and drank. "As long as we're honest we don't care what they say," he remarked as he returned to his chair.

"If they won't believe us, we ought to show 'em the papers—ayes," said Aunt Deel.

"Thunder an' Jehu! I wouldn't go 'round the town tryin' to prove that I ain't a thief," said Uncle Peabody. "It wouldn't make no difference. They've got to have somethin' to play with. If they want to use my name for a bean bag let 'em as long as they do it when I ain't lookin'. I wouldn't wonder if they got sore hands by an' by."

I never heard him speak of it again. Indeed, although I knew the topic was often in our thoughts it was never mentioned in our home but once after that, to my knowledge.

We sat for a long time thinking as the night came on.

That week a letter came to me from the senator, announcing the day of Mrs. Wright's arrival in Canton and asking me to meet and assist her in getting the house to rights. I did so. She was a pleasant-faced, amiable woman and a most enterprising house

The schoolmaster and his family were fishing and camping upon the river, and so I lived at the senator's house with Mrs. Wright and her mother until he arrived. What a wonderful house it was, in my view! I was awed by its size and splendor, its soft carpets and shiny brass and mahogany. Yet it was very simple.

I hoed the garden and cleaned its paths and mowed the dooryard and did some painting in the house.

The senator returned to Canton that evening on the Watertown stage. He greeted me with a fatherly warmth. Again I felt that strong appeal to my eye in his broadcloth and fine linen and beaver hat and in the splendid dignity and courtesy of his manners.

"I've had good reports of you, Bart, and I'm very glad to see you," he said.

"I believe your own marks have been excellent in the last year," I ventured.

"Poorer than I could wish. The teacher has been very kind to me," he laughed. "What have you been studying?"

"Latin (I always mentioned the Latin first), algebra, arithmetic, grammar, geography and history."

He asked about my aunt and uncle and I told him of all that had befallen us, save the one thing of which I had spoken only with him and Sally.

"I shall go up to see them soon," he said.

The people of the little village had learned that he preferred to be let alone when he had just returned over the long, wearisome way from the scene of his labors. So we had the evening to ourselves.

Mrs. Wright, being weary after the day's work, went to bed early and, at his request, I sat with the senator by the fire for an hour or so. I have always thought it a lucky circumstance, for he asked me to tell of my plans and gave me advice and encouragement which have had a marked effect upon my career.

I remember telling him that I wished to be a lawyer and my reasons for it. He told me that a lawyer was either a pest or a servant of justice and that his chief aim should be the promotion of peace and good will in his community. He promised to try and arrange for my accommodation in his office in the autumn and meanwhile to lend me some books to read while I was at home.

"Before we go to bed let us have a settlement," said the senator. "Will you kindly sit down at the table there and make up a statement of all the time you have given me?"

I made out the statement very neatly and carefully and put it in his hands.

"That is well done," said he. "I shall wish you to stay until the day after tomorrow, if you will. So you will please add another day."

I amended the statement and he paid me the handsome sum of seven dollars. I remember that after I went to my room that night I stitched up the opening in my jacket pocket, which contained my wealth, with the needle and thread which Aunt Deel had put in my bundle, and slept with the jacket under my mattress.

CHAPTER XV.

I Use My Own Compass at a Fork in the Road.

Swiftly now I move across the border into manhood—a serious, eager, restless manhood. It was the fashion of the young those days.

Mr. Wright came up for a day's fishing in July. My uncle and I took him up the river.

While we ate our luncheon he described Jackson and spoke of the famous cheese which he had kept on a table in the vestibule of the White House for his callers. He described his fellow senators—Webster, Clay, Rives, Calhoun and Benton. I remember that Webster was, in his view, the least of them, although at his best the greatest orator. We had a delightful day, and when I drove back to the village with him that night he told me that I could go into the office of Wright & Baldwin after harvesting.

"It will do for a start," he said. "A little later I shall try to find a better place for you."

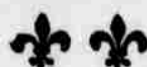
My life went on with little in it worth recording until the letter came. I speak of it as "the letter," because of its effect upon my career. It was from Sally, and it said:

"Dear Bart: It's all over for a long time, perhaps forever—that will depend on you. I shall be true to you, if you really love me, even if I have to wait many, many years. Mother and father saw and read your letter. They say we are too young to be thinking about love and that we have got to stop it. How can I stop it? I guess I would have to stop living. But we shall have to depend upon our memories now. I hope that yours is as good as mine. Father says no more letters without his permission, and he stamped his foot so hard that I think he must have made a dent in the floor. Talk about slavery—what do you think of that? Mother says that we must wait—that it would make father a great deal of trouble if it were known that I allowed you to write. I guess the soul of old Grimshaw is still following you. Well, we must stretch out that lovely day as far as we can. On the third of June, 1844, we shall both be twenty-one—and I suppose that we can do as we please then. The day is a long way off, but I will agree to meet you that day at eleven in the morning under the old pine on the river where I met you that day and you told me that you loved me. If either or both should die our souls will know where to find each other. If you will solemnly promise, write these words and only these to my mother—Amour omnia vincit, but do not sign your name."

"SALLY."

Continued next week

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I Remember My First Task Was Mending the Wheelbarrow.

cleaner. I remember that my first task was mending the wheelbarrow. "I don't know what Silas would do if he were to get home and find his wheelbarrow broken," said she. "It is almost an inseparable companion of his."