

The Light in the Clearing

A Tale of the North Country in the Time of Silas Wright

By IRVING BACHELLER

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I am near the end. I rode back to Baltimore that forenoon. They had nominated Mr. Polk of Tennessee for president and Silas Wright for vice president, the latter by acclamation. I knew that Wright would decline the honor, as he did.

I hurried northward to keep my appointment with Sally. The boats were slowed by fog. At Albany I was a day behind my schedule. I should have only an hour's leeway if the boats on the upper lakes and the stage from Plattsburg were on time. I feared to trust them. So I caught the west-bound train and reached Utica three hours late. There I bought a good

break and put out for a rest of two hours. I could take it easy then. At seven o'clock the mare and I started again, well fed and eager to go on.

It was a summer morning that shortens the road—even that of the young lover. Its air was sweet with the breath of the meadows. The daisies and the clover and the cornflowers and the wild roses seemed to be waving a welcome to me, and the thorn trees—shapely ornament of my native hills—were in blossom. A cloud of pigeons swept across the blue deep above my head. The great choir of the fields sang to me—bobolinks, song-sparrows, meadowlarks, bluebirds, warblers, wrens, and far away in the edge of a spruce thicket I heard the flute of the white-throated sparrow.

I bathed at a brook in the woods and put on a clean silk shirt and tie out of my saddlebags. I rode slowly then to the edge of the village of Canton and turned at the bridge and took the river road, although I had time to spare. How my heart was beating as I neared the familiar scene! The river slowed its pace there, like a discerning traveler, to enjoy the beauty of the scene and his saddle and bridle and hurried up the north road. When he was near spent I traded him for a well-knit Morgan mare up in the little village of Sandy Creek. Oh, I knew a good horse as well as the next man and a better one than she I never owned—never. I was back in my saddle at six in the afternoon and stopped for feed and an hour's rest at nine and rode on through the night. I reached the hamlet of Richville soon after day-

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"Then You May Help Me Ashore, If You Please."

slippers and you are to be very careful."

Beautiful! She was the spirit of the fields of June then and always.

I helped her ashore and held her in my arms and, you know, the lips have a way of speaking then in the old, convincing, final argument of love. They left no doubt in our hearts, my son.

"When do you wish to marry me?" she whispered.

"As soon as possible, but my pay is only sixty dollars a month now."

"We shall make it do," she answered. "My mother and father and your aunt and uncle and the Hackets and the minister and a number of our friends are coming in a fleet of boats."

"We are prepared either for a picnic or a wedding," was the whisper of Kate.

"Let's make it both," I proposed to Sally.

"Surely there couldn't be a better place than here under the big pine—it's so smooth and soft and shady," said she.

"Nor could there be a better day or better company," I urged, for I was not sure that she would agree.

The boats came along. Sally and I waved a welcome from the bank and she merrily proclaimed:

"It's to be a wedding."

Then a cheer from the boats, in which I joined.

I shall never forget how, when the company had landed and the greetings were over, Uncle Peabody approached your mother and said:

"Say, Sally, I'm goin' to plant a kiss on both o' them red cheeks o' yours, an' do it deliberate, too."

He did it and so did Aunt Deel and old Kate, and I think that, next to your mother and me, they were the happiest people at the wedding.

There is a lonely grave up in the hills—that of the stranger who died long ago on Rattleroad. One day I found old Kate sitting beside it and on a stone lately erected there was the name, Enoch Bone.

"It is very sorrowful," she whispered. "He was trying to find me when he died."

We walked on in silence while I recalled the circumstances. How strange that those tales of blood and lawless daring which Kate had given to Aunt Grimshaw had led to the slaying her own son! Yet, so it happened, and the old wives will tell you the story up there in the hills.

The play ends just as the night is falling with Kate and me entering the little home, so familiar now, where she lives and is ever welcome with Aunt Deel and Uncle Peabody. The latter meets us at the door and is saying in a cheerful voice:

"Come in to supper, you rovers. How solemn ye look! Say, if you expect Sally and me to do all the laughing here you're mistaken. There's a lot of it to be done right now, an' it's time you joined in. We ain't done nothin' but laugh since we got up, an' we're in need o' help. What's the matter, Kate? Look up at the light in God's window. How bright it shines tonight! When I feel bad I always look at the stars."

(THE END.)

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