



The village blacksmith is usually considered the type of good health. Even he sickens and dies frequently in early youth. No man, not even the most robust, can afford to neglect his health, which is his most precious endowment. The man who does so will sooner or later pay penalty in some serious or fatal malady. When a man finds that he is losing his appetite, that he passes restless nights, that he awakens in the morning unrefreshed and without ambition of mental or bodily vigor, when he is troubled with headaches, nervousness or biliousness, it is time for him to take serious thought for his health.

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NECK OR NOTHING.
 AN EPIC STORY OF ANTE BELLUM DAYS,
 BY JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH

CHAPTER IX.
 A sharp reverberating report, following almost immediately on a zigzag line of light that seemed fairly to cleave the heavens in twain, completed her dismay. Blinded, bewildered, terrified, she glanced wildly about her and recognized the extremity of her foolish daring. She was lost on the cliffs and knew not which direction to give her next steps.

Like a veritable babe in the woods she sat down on the nearest tree root, lifted up her voice and wept.
 A gentle, ineffectual protest against fate's malicious treatment of her was that wail, mingling with the ominous cracking of dead limbs suddenly parting with the parent stem, pealing thunder and the impetuous rush of countless rivulets dashing headlong down the cliff to pay tribute to the black pond at its base. But that human cry was most unexpectedly answered in human fashion. At her very feet, apparently, a question was asked in a wondering, sympathizing voice:
 "Gord-a-mity! What you doin here? Is you los', little mistis?"
 "Oh, Abram, lost and frightened to death!"

Then she recoiled in a greater terror than any that had gone before, but only a fleeting distrust seized upon her and it left her full of remorse.
 "You ketch your deff uv col settin on dem wet roots. I gwine git you out or here, little mistis, in a hurry, even ef dey bags me fur it."
 From a hollow in the trunk of an immense tree, a leaf strewn and capacious cave, the tattered shoulders were first thrust, then the agile limbs, and French Abe, already a degree less wolfish about the eyes, stood fully revealed.

"You ain't skeered to follow Abe, is you, little mistis?"
 The negative he waited for so anxiously did not come readily. Liza's dry tongue refused to shape it.
 "You ben good to Abe, an Abe don't never forgit. Mars Ran good to Abe, too, and Abe ain't never run 'way tell Mars Ran go 'way and lef' him. He a gentleman's body sarvint. That w'at this nigger is. I gwine git you outer here ef you'll follow me. Abe knows dese woods tollhle well by dis time."
 Liza rose with trust in her eyes and in her voice. After all, why should he not be as good as his promise? Was she not getting back the bread—Strong's bread—which she had cast upon the waters with unexpected promptness? Now she could speak that word of comfort:

"Abram, you need not be afraid to pilot me out of these woods. Mr. Randal Dell has come back. You can go to Laurel Dell this morning, if you want to, without fear of punishment."
 "Mars Ran come back? Den dis nigger gwine quit his foolishness. I done tole myself I gwine stay in de cane tell Mars Ran sen me word to come back. He didn't b'leve me, dat good fur nothin po' w'ite trash uv a overseer, w'en I say I couldn' pick cotton. He ain' w'ith a nigger, nary nigger uv his own. I don't teach him a less'n."
 This in monologue he rapidly wound his way unwaveringly through the wet green maze about them, closely followed by Liza. So, even this poor starveling, this tattered fugitive slave, could afford to despise her father—an overseer! The very abject of the earth could fearlessly spit upon the name of Martin! And there was no man among them all ready to wipe out the smirch!
 "I gwine tek you to Unc' Scip's home. Unc' Scip live right on top the cliff. Is you tired, little mistis? Hit's the fus' house we come to."
 "No, go on—straight on. I am not tired. I will pay you for guiding me out of this."

She was conscious of a lifting of the clouds—"of a brightening in the skies." The thunderstorm was passing as it had come, with magical suddenness. They were winning their upward way rapidly. The trees were thinner, but the underbrush more dense as they gained the uplands. The briars caught her soft serge skirts and held them with thorny, devastating fingers; cold, wet limbs sprinkled her with their surplus moisture. Abram's bare feet bore him over the rough ground much more rapidly than she could possibly follow him. But she was not taking note of any one of her many physical discomforts. The social degradation of the Martins had never been presented to her so clearly. Abram had pressed upon a sore spot. Overseers had none so poor as to do them reverence.
 "Thar, now. I tole you I was gwine to fetch you bang up to Unc' Scip's front do'. Dare he, makin baskets on de back gallery. Gord-a-mity! Look a-yander!"

Abram had deserted her and was taking a succession of kangaroo leaps in the direction of two men who were standing on Scipio's gallery indolently watching the old man's rapid basket

weaving. Even before they had turned at sound of Abe's excited voice Liza had grasped the meaning of their presence. It was Strong and Randal Chambliss, who had taken shelter in old Scipio's cabin, evidently in pursuit of Abram. It was his master he was greeting tumultuously:
 "Howdy, Mars Ran? Howdy, marster? Yher's me! Yher's your nigger! I tole dat triffin Foulkis I were cumin home w'en you git back. Who ben black your shoes, Mars Ran? Dey look mity rusty." Panting, laughing, questioning, he stood before his adored owner.
 Liza's appearance simultaneously with Abram's caused a diversion of astonishment in her direction. Strong was regarding her darkly; Chambliss with perplexed, impersonal curiosity.
 Strong scarcely waited for her to reach his side.
 "What is the meaning of this, Liza? Why did you not stay at my house? You are drenched."
 "Yes, drenched. If it had not been for Abe there, I should have been dead with fright by this time; so a drenching seems slight by comparison. I got lost trying to find my way back to poor little Fancy. Abram found me, and—here I am."
 She was composure shaking the rain-drops from her hat. Its removal had brought to view a charming disarray of moist brown waves curling tightly about her blue veined temples. Randal Chambliss was regarding her with that inscrutable smile that had set her cheeks to tingling with wrath the day before.
 "Caliban and Miranda," he said musingly. Then, conventionally, "I am sure I ought to be very much obliged to you, Miss Martin."
 "For what?"
 "For restoring this ragamuffin to my arms. Life is barren without Abe."
 "I assure you I had nothing to do with your boy's restoration. He has done me a great service, and I did tell him you had got home. I hope you will keep your word about punishing him."
 "I believe I have contracted a bad habit of keeping my word always. As for punishing Abe, he inflicts punishment much oftener than he receives it. Don't you, Abe? Speak, you buff colored tatterdemalion!"

(To be Continued.)
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