(Centinued from last week.) She folded her arms on the table and he went the people watched him curidropped her head on them and began to sob. Sim stood watching her, a sick- them showed an unmistakable disposiening dread stealing over him. Uncertainly be besitated for a moment, then went to her and put out his hand | he approached a group of them and unand began to stroke her hair. She drew | dertook to show them the social side of sway from him, and a cold shudder ran | his nature they immediately began to over her. He stood aloof and looked exchange furtive glances and presenton her, his face painfully white and drawn and a hard, tense sensation | was left alone. clutching at his heart.

"Loueesy," he said presently, "what does this mean? Why do you treat me | ger, for it made him feel that he was like that?"

and placed it gently on her head, and again she shrank from him as though his touch were poison. Her action cut him deep, and a pain, sharp and poignant, passed through his soul. When out, and any little peculiarity in the he spoke again, his voice was low and conduct of those about him is sure to

"Loueesy," he said, "is it true, as him a feeling of uneasiness.

speak. In her eyes he only too plainly last fortune favored him. read her answer to his question. Slowby, as one in a dream, he turned to leave the room. There was a queer sensation of emptiness about his head, strange air of unreality. At the door be stopped and put his hand up to his forehead and for a full minute stood like one dazed. Then, turning his eyes once more on his wife, he said:

"My God, Loueesy, you are killin me! at last!" You have broken my heart. Oh, please, please tell me it is not true, that look I maw in your eyes, and that you do love

She did not raise her head, but between her sobs he heard her murmur:

"I can't, I can't, for I don't love you!" Without another word he passed from the room and went staggering uncertainly down the walk to the street. He felt that he had received a deathblow, and in reality he had received that which was far worse, for death would have brought an end to pain and suffering, and this brought pain and suffering only.

At the yard gate he stopped, and, leaning heavily against a post, he look-



"For God's sake, don't say that!" ed back at the house. Through the window he saw his wife sitting as he had left her, and a great yearning came over him to take her in his arms and hold her to his bosom and kiss her. But the next moment he remembered the words she had spoken and the look she had given him, and, laying his head against his arm, he said sadly:

"But she is not mine! She is not

CHAPTER IX.

A DANGEROUS MEETING.

Although a couple of weeks had passed since James Melvin arrived on Pospum Ridge, the public had by no means lost interest in him, and neither had its curiosity regarding him been in any degree satisfied. He was still an object of wonder, and speculation concerning him-his past life and character and his purpose in coming to the Ridgewas as rife as it had ever been.

Of course his statement to old man Turner that he had come there to prospect for mineral had spread abroad among the people, but there were very few who believed for a moment that there was a word of truth in it. There were no mineral developments in that section and, so far as any one knew, no indications of mineral deposits. In view of these things, what likelihood was there of a company of capitalists sending a man there on any such mis-

Pap Sampson, so boastful of his ability to judge people at first sight, had been compelled to admit, though he did it reluctantly enough, that for once he had made a mistake when he so confidently asserted that Melvin was a preacher and that his object in coming to Possum Ridge was to hold some "meetin's" at the Coon Run "meetin house." Jason Roberts, still having an excuse for holding to his first formed ppinion, continued to argue that he was

there for the purpose of buying some-

thing. But Jason was alone, or very

mearly so, in his opinion, and both he

and Pap had the satisfaction of seeing

21m Thorn, a mere upstart, holding the

lead in public opinion for once.

ously and that the great majority of tion to avoid him. He could engage but few of them in conversation, and if ly, one by one, dropped away until he Of course this conduct on the part of

Melvin soon observed that wherever

the people was unpleasant to a strannot welcome and that his company She made no reply, but continued to | was less preferable than his absence. Bob. He reached out his hand again To Melvin it was more. It not only annoyed but it disturbed him. A man who is carrying in his bosom a dread secret is always under an apprehension that he is going to be found

Mary Mann says, that you don't love | Several times during the two weeks Melvin had made visits to Beckett's She did not answer, and when he had Mill, ostensibly to make trifling purwaited a moment he repeated his ques- chases at the store, but in reality for a Bon. This time she looked slowly up far different purpose. Each time, how-Butil her eyes met his. From that mo- ever, he had come back as he had gone, ment there was no need for her to his purpose unaccomplished. But at

excite his suspicions and awaken in

One evening he had left the village to return to Turner's, where he was still stopping, when in passing through a thick wood he came suddenly face to and everything around him bore a face with Mrs. Banks. Both started back in surprise, but Melvin recovered himself quickly, and, grasping her hands in his, he looked full into her face and cried:

"Thank God, Louisa, I have met you

Then he caressed her hands, his mind in such a tumult that he could find no further words to speak, and when after a moment she would have drawn her hands away he held them fast. "Don't, please don't!" she said in

tones of soft remonstrance, looking anxiously around. "I- Please let me

"No, no!" he replied. "Don't ask me to do that. It would be cruel after I have hungered and starved for a sight of you all this long time. Oh, Louisa, you don't know how I love you and how I have missed you and yearned for you! Oh, my darling!"

He made a movement to put his arm about her, but she tore herself from his grasp and, staggering back, stood leaning against a tree. She was trembling

all over, her face red and white by turns and an uneasy, scared expression in her eyes. ed toward her, but she held up her

hand to stop him. "You forget," she said in low tones. "Forget what?" he asked, his eyes

fixed eagerly on her. "That-that I am married."

He hesitated an instant, then said slowly:

"No: I don't forget that. I wish to heaven I could and that you could forget it too. But I love you, Louisa, and if you were married a thousand times I'd love you. It may be wrong, but I don't believe it is; but, right or wrong, I love you, and I'll always love you. I

A light of heavenly bliss swept over her features, then quickly died away. "Don't say that," she pleaded. "You

have no right." "But I have," he replied. "I have more right than any one else, for I love you more, and you love me. Isn't that true, Louisa? Don't you love me?" She made no reply, but hid her face

in her hands. Presently he repeated: "Don't you love me, Louisa?" appealingly.

"You are cruel, cruel!" she cried. "If you were not, you'd spare me. You have no right to ask me that."

"Then it is true," he cried joyfully, "and you do love me."

She looked up into his face and said quietly:

"God knows I do! It is wicked, but it is true, and I cannot help it. I love you with all my heart and all my soul." "It is not wicked" be replied. "We learned to love when we had a right, before you married that man. It is not as though we had begun to love now. You were mine-your heart and your soul-before you became his. We loved each other then, and it is not wicked in us that our love will not die."

don't know," she answered thoughtfully. "It seems like all happiness is wrong and that we can't do right without being miserable. Oh, I don't know why we should ever have

"Say rather that you don't know why we should ever have parted." he said. "Oh, Louisa, why did you go away from me when you knew I loved you and wanted you to be my wife? Why did you leave me when you loved me?"

"I didn't know then." "Didn't know what?"

"That I loved you."

"Didn't you know it then?" "No. I knew I liked you, and I

thought of you sometimes in a different way from what I ever thought of any one else, but I was young, and I didn't know what love was." "Why did you marry-that other?"

"My parents urged me, and I liked him. I even thought I loved him. Aft- to women she guessed the truth at erward there was an awakening, and then I knew the truth. That awaken- even to himself. She drew a little ing was bitter and cruel."

"And you suffered," he said softly. placing his hand on her head. "My truth. What have you done?"

poor little girl!" "les; I suffered," she replied wearily. "and God alone knows how much I suf-

"I know," he said, again taking her hands in his. "But there is the fu-

She shook her head slowly. "It will be the same as the past and the present. I shall go on suffering to the end."

"But you need not."

"I must." He was thoughtfully silent for a little

while. Then he said: "Louisa, you have no right to sacrifice your life and happiness, and not only your life and happiness, but mine. It would be a sin, a far greater sin than -the other."

She knew his meaning, and she drew away from him. When she spoke, there was resentment in her voice.

"I don't think I have given you any excuse for saying that," she said. "If I have, I didn't mean it. You must let

"Have you nothing more to say to me after all our long separation?" he asked in hurt tones.

me go."

"I did not mean to say anything to

hurt you, and I humbly and sincerely

"Don't, please don't!" beg your forgiveness. Loving you as I do, I would not hurt a hair of your head. Won't you believe me, Louisa?" "I-yes; I believe you. Now let me

"No, no, not yet! Think how long it has been since I saw you! Don't go Just yet."

"I must." "You are cruel, Louisa." "It is you who are cruel." "1? Elow?"

keeping me here means?" "I can understand that it means taste of heaven to me."

"Can't you understand what your

"And more pain and suffering for

"Why should it do that?" "Do you think I have no conscience?"

"No, but"-"Do you think it costs an honest woman nothing to keep a thing like 's a

secret from her husband?" "I don't know. But, there, I will not After a momentary pause he advanc- | keep you, though it is hard to let you go. When shall I see you again?"

"No; don't say that! I must see you!" "It is best that we should never meet

"Never?" "Never in this world! We should never have met this time."

again, best for both of us."

"Do you regret our meeting?" "Nothing good can come of it, nothing but more pain and more misery. Why did you come here at all?"

"I couldn't help it. You were here, and I couldn't stay away." "When you knew I was married. You which caused Pap to straighten up and are weak-weaker than I, and you are

"No: I love more. If you loved me

one-half as much as I love you, you would not be so cold and exacting." She looked at him a moment with an incredulous smile on her lips.

"Listen," she said. "I have told you that I love you, and now I may as well tell you this. I love you so much that I worship your very shadow, while one drop of your blood, one atom of your She waited a moment, then looked up flesh, is more precious to me than all the millions of human beings on this earth. Is your love greater than that?" "No. But yet you drive me from

> "I do, because I know it is best and because I am strong enough to resist temptation. You must leave here, and we must never meet again. Goodby." "Wait a moment. Did you receive

my note that first day I came?" "I am glad of it. I was afraid the

boy I sent it by might lose it or get it misplaced. You knew who it was

"Of course." "And I presume you wondered what it meant?"

"Naturally. I could not understand why you should be so anxious to keep your name a secret." "Shall I tell you?"

"Just as you please." "I think I would better. I am in hid-"In hiding! From what?"

"From the law." She started back with a little cry of surprise and pain and placed her hand on her heart.

"Oh, Frank!" she cried. "You have not committed a crime? Don't tell me you have!"

"Louisa," he said in all seriousness, "I have done something dreadful, something I would give all the world to undo. But it was not my fault. I did it because I could not help it."

She looked up at him wonderingly, while a terrible sensation of fear and dread tugged at her heart. With that keen, unaccountable intuition peculiar once, but she would not accuse him nearer to him and spoke in low tones. "Frank," she said, "tell me the

"Are you sure," he asked, "that I had better tell you?"

"Yes; I must know." "But it is dreadful, Louisa." "Yes; I expect the worst." "The very worst?"

"The very worst." "And you do not shrink from me?" "No, because you say you were not to

blame and that you couldn't help it." "But I tremble to tell you." "Have no fear for me. I believe what you have said. You have"-

CHAPTER X.

"Taken the life of a fellow man!"

NEIGHBORLY GOSSIP. "You uns may say what you please, an you uns may say it jest as long as you uns please; but, as I have said before an as I'll continer to say, thar's somethin pow'ful heavy a-weighin on Sim Banks' mind."

"Lord, Pap Sampson, you've been a-sayin them words till we uns have all done learnt 'em by heart, an you can keep on a-sayin 'em till you've wore 'em plumb out, if you want to, but I tell you right now you're barkin up the "I have said too much already," she wrong tree. I've said before, an I say ag'in, that all on earth's the matter with Sim Banks is that he's fixin to have a spell of fever."

"You have said that, Jason Roberts, an mebby you have said somethin you know, an mebby you hain't. My notion is you hain't. But if you'll allow me I jest want to ask you one ques-

"You jest go ahead, Pap Sampson, an ask all the questions you please. I'll answer all I kin of 'em, an when you ask one I can't scrape up no answer for I'll holler."

"Very well. Now, then, Jason Roberts, can you tell me why a feller fixin to have a spell of fever would go mopin round for two long weeks, not a-feelin sick nor nothin, but jest actin for all the world like he'd lost ever' cent he owned an ever' friend he had to his back? Can you jest tell me that?" "Couldn't a feller fixin to have the

fever act that a-way?" "Mebby he could, Jason, but he don't.

You hain't answered my question,

though." "My notion is, Pap, that thar ain't no need of him answerin it, for I reckon you an Jason's both got the wrong pig by the tail."

don't you retch into the pen an git a hold of the tail of the right pig?" "I have." "Then you jest show that pig to us an

"If you're so smart, Jim Thorn, why

let us see its color, will you?" "I will. All on earth's the matter with Sim Banks is jest this. He's in love with the Widder Mann, an he's moonin round 'cause he can't have her." "That's the color of the pig you got by the tail, is it?"

"It are." "Then, Jim Thorn, all I got to say is that you didn't even git your pig outen the right pen. The one you got's a plumb stray."

"That's jest your notion, Pap Sampson, but you jest wait an you'll see." Pap thumped his cane down almost viciously.

"Jim Thorn," he said, "you'll never make me believe no sich a thing as that of Sim Banks, not if you preach it till your head's as bald as a pumpkin. I've knowed Sim since he wa'n't no bigger than a cat, an I can say, an say it open an aboveboard, that I ain't never yet knowed him to do ary a single thing that he had any call to be ashamed of."

"My land, Pap, do you think bein in love with Mis'us Mann is anything to

be ashamed of?" "It would be for a man that's already got a woman shorely, an I don't know, Jim Thorn, but what I'd be ashamed of it even if I didn't have no woman."

There was a general laugh at this, look important

"That's a putty hard knock on the widder," Hicks observed presently, "but if Pap was a widower I bet he wouldn't that tree an fell in a pile on the ground, talk no sich a way."

"Nary time he wouldn't," Jason agreed. "Lord! If Pap was single, he'd be cuttin round after the women wuss'n a hungry cat after cream."

"That's all right, Jason," Pap said, "an I reckon you ain't talkin so moughty much out of your head as some folks mought think. Lord a-massy. it's a pow'ful good thing for these young chaps round here that I hain't single. Lord, I'd soon have all their noses out of joint even if I am risin on

"You 'low you could cut 'em all out, Pap?" Hicks asked. "Jest as easy as fallin down a well. Why, shucks, Jake, don't you know I'd have the pick and ch'ice among the

women?" "Mebby you wouldn't, Pap," some one said, "if that Mr. Melvin were to turn loose an take to sparkin round." "Reckon Sim Banks' wife is the only woman Melvin keers 'bout sparkin."

young Sam Morgan observed. Pap Sampson brought his cane down emphatically. "Sam Morgan," he said, "do you mind how Sim Banks done Jim Thorn

thar, right here on this platform, the other night?" "I guess I do," Sam replied. "Then let me tell you that if you ain" achin to be done the same way you'd

better tighten the reins on your hosses a little an be sorter keerful whar you "I hain't afeard of Sim Banks." "You better be if you git to lettin

your tongue run on Loueesy." "I hain't said nary a word about Loueesy, have I?" "Waal, mebby not exactly."

"But I will say this, Pap Sampson. I wouldn't want no wife of mine meetin that feller out in the woods an standin a-talkin to him, with him a-holt of her "You mean to say, Sam Morgan, that

Loueesy Banks done that?" "I ain't callin no names. Pap Samuson, but I reckon most anybody ort to see through a board if it's got a auger hole in it."

The men exchanged a surprised glance, but for a little while no one

spoke. Finally, however, Hicks broke "Sam," he said, "have you been seein

that Melvin an some woman dein like you said?" "Thout mentionin no names, Jake, I'm bound to say I have."

"When was it, an whar?" "Yisteddy evenin, right down here in Sim Banks' own piece of timber land." "Tell us all 'bout it, won't you?"

There was a concerted hitching of chairs up closer around Sam, and a hush almost as still as death fell over the little group. There was little, very little, of excitement or interest in the lives of the citizens of Possum Ridge, and when anything strange or out of the common did happen they liked to make the most of it and enjoy it to the fullest possible extent.

Then, too, in this instance, they scented something in the way of scandal, and that made them all the more eager listeners. Uns phisticated and simple as they were, they possessed that insatiable curiosity and that morbid love of the unsavory which are not altogether things apart from the lives of many of the more cultured.

Sam Morgan, finding himself the center of an eager group who waited with open mouths for him to speak, felt his Importance, and it was excusable in him that he remained silent for a little while to enjoy the situation. It was not every day he could occupy a position like that, and it was very natural that he should desire to make the most

"Tell us all about it, won't you!"

But glorying in a triumph, even such a triumph as that, cannot last forever. So finally Sam condescended to speak. "I'd been out a-huntin," he began "an, comin 'long up across Sim Banks' timber land, I felt sorter tired an 'lowed I mought's well set down an rest a bit. So I turned out of the path an went a few steps out to that big tree what Pap Sampson told us he shot six squirrels out of at one time when he was a young feller. You all mind 'bout that tree, I reckon."

They all nodded assent. Then Pap

"It was seven squirrels, Sam, 'stid of "You said six last time you told 'bout it," Sam replied. "I mind that most

"An five time before that," Jason Roberts added. "Lord, I reckon it'll be eight next time Pap tells that story." "Waal, don't squirrels nat'rally multiply an increase?" Pap asked.

"Not dead uns don't," Jason replied. "Waal, thar was seven squirrels if thar was one-I mind I counted 'em both before I killed 'em afterwardseven squirrels settin 'long on a limb all in a row, with all their heads turned the same way. I drawed up my old rifle an tuck aim at the head of the nighdest to me an banged away. Imagine my surprise when all seven of them squirrels come a-tumblin out of that bullet havin gone clean through

ever' one of their heads." "An then gone on an killed a wild turkey over in another tree," Jason added.

"Waal, yes, that's allus been my opinion," Pap admitted, "but thar was another feller shot his gun off at the same time, an he 'lowed he killed the turkey. But, as you was a-sayin, Sam, you tuck a few steps out to that tree"-"An sot down behind it in the shade." Sam resumed. "I'd been a-settin thar bout ten minutes, I guess-don't 'low it could 'a' been more'n 10 minutes an not more'n 15 nohow-an I'd begun to git sleepy an doze off like when all to oncet I heard voices a-talkin. I peeped round the tree kinder cautiouslike, an then I see that Mr. Melvin an a woman -I ain't mentionin no names-a-stand-

in thar a-talkin, pow'ful interested, him a-holdin both of her han's in his'n." "What was they a-sayin?" Hicks asked eagerly.

"Waal, they talked kinder low most of the time," Sam replied, "so couldn't hear much they said, but what I did bear was moughty int'restin, I can tell you." "What was it?" Hicks asked, and the

others all leaned forward in breathless

eagerness to listen for the reply. "Waal, in the first place," Sam said, "I heard Melvin say, 'It may be wrong, but I don't b'lieve it is; but, right or wrong. I love you."

gittin sweet, wa'n't he? But what did she say then?" "She says: 'Don't say that. You ain't no right.' Then he says, 'I have more

"Lord!" Jason exclaimed. "He was

right than anybody else, 'cause I love you more an 'cause you love me,' an he says, 'Don't you love me?" "Then what did she say?"

"She didn't say nothin." "Jest stood thar an never opened her

when he had crowded her a right smart an had said to ber, 'You do love me, don't you? she up an says: 'God knows I do. It's wicked, but I can't belp it. I love you with all my beart an soul."

(To be Continued)

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