

to my way of thinking. You wouldn't go away and you wouldn't come any nearer—you just stood there and watched everything that I was doing."

He broke off, taking one of his restless turns down the long room. Then he drew up a chair beside her, and dropped into it with a great sigh.

"At first, you know, I hated it most awfully. I wanted to be let alone and to work out my own theory of things. If you'd said a word—if you'd tried to influence me—the spell would have been broken. But, just because the actual *you* kept apart, and didn't meddle or pry, the other, the you in my heart, seemed to get a tighter hold on me. I don't know how to tell you—it's all mixed up in my head—but old things you'd said and done kept coming back to me, crowding between me and what

I was trying for, looking at me without speaking, like old friends I'd gone back on, till I simply couldn't stand it any longer. I fought it off till to-night, but when I came back to finish the work there you were again—and suddenly, I don't know how, you weren't an obstacle any longer but a refuge—and I crawled into your arms as I used to when things went against me at school."

His hands stole back into hers, and he leaned his head against her shoulder like a boy.

"I'm an abysmally weak fool, you know," he ended; "I'm not worth the fight you've put up for me. But I want you to know that it's your doing—that if you had let go an instant I should have gone under—and that if I'd gone under I should never have come up again alive"

THE END.

"GED"

By Elia W. Peattie

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FLORENCE WYMAN

I



THE place seems pleasant enough, Anita," said Ralph Stoddard to his wife. "And of course we are visiting it tentatively. If we don't like it we can leave."

"We've surely got beyond a consideration of these matters now," replied Mrs. Stoddard. "Everything is done. The horses and trap have gone. Jane and Beulah and Watkins are ready—the last trunk is packed. There has been nothing tentative about my preparations."

"No, I dare say not," ventured Mr. Stoddard. He leaned back in his Morris chair in an attitude of irritating indifference.

"And now I've a few notes to answer," continued his wife. "The morning mail brought some letters that must be attended to. That is the last thing to be done."

"I haven't a doubt," sighed Mr. Stod-

dard, "that all is perfectly arranged, Anita." A faint accent of acerbity was discernible, and Mrs. Stoddard paused for a moment in the doorway, as if reflecting upon the unaccountable irritability of the masculine sex, and fixed a superior and patient smile upon her husband. He regarded it carefully in what seemed to be the spirit of investigation, and he reflected that he was certainly looking at a fine specimen of womanhood. Tall, stately, dignified, with calm gray eyes and a beautiful brow, she conveyed to the mind a wholesome suggestion of integrity and distinction. "Here," the observer might say, "is one who understands the etiquette of her time. Here is one who neglects nothing—neither the fashions nor the creeds; she reflects upon her time—she is abreast of it. She is Rectitude personified, and she certainly has an irreproachable dress-maker." Her husband regarded her with an expression almost as detached as might this hypothetical observer, but he

found her, as the observer would have done, above criticism. She had always seemed that way to him, and the time had been when he shrined her in a white and mystic place and cast before that altar the flowers of his ardor. Now—but here thought blurred into reverie, and Stoddard smiled back at his wife inanely, and lit a cigar.

Mrs. Stoddard acknowledged the smile graciously, and swept up the stairs, her garments making a rather important rustling about her. Stoddard, released from her benevolent gaze, let his eyes fall languidly, and began the aimless occupation of tapping the desk with his paper-knife. To him, a moment later, came Watkins, the coachman, attired for his journey.

"Have you any further orders, sir?" asked the young man. Stoddard looked at him quizzically. Watkins knew as well as he did that the mistress neglected nothing, and if there had been an imaginable order left to give, she would have forestalled all others in the giving of it. It caused him some amusement—a sort of pained amusement—to observe that Watkins also was perfect; the irreproachable man of an irreproachable mistress.

Stoddard rolled up a wad of paper as he had used to do when he was a boy at school, and he almost debated throwing it at Watkins—almost, but not quite. It requires a monstrous deal of bravado to take liberties with a man like the Tsar of Russia—or Watkins.

"There are no orders, Watkins," he said slowly, "but there is—an inquiry."

"Yessir," said Watkins, quickly on his guard. The man must look closely who would find him delinquent. These were Watkins's reflections, and in the vocabulary of his thoughts. There was nothing meagre about Watkins, educationally speaking. He subscribed to a circulating library and had his own ideas upon several subjects; the historical novel among others.

"Did you ever," asked Stoddard, very much devoted to the paper-knife, "chance to drive a comfortable old mule, blind in one eye, in front of an easy buggy with a broken dash-board and a top sagged at one side?" He looked up as if for information.

"I did not, sir," replied Watkins, with an accent of respectful resentment. He

did not care to be made light of. "A man's a man for a' that." Watkins could have completed the quotation. Indeed he did so, mentally.

"Well, I thought you never did," said Stoddard, pensively. "And I suppose you wouldn't care to, eh?"

"It would lose me my reputation, sir," said Watkins with firmness. He was a willing man, but he said to himself that he had his dignity to preserve.

"Well, no doubt we all have reputations of one sort and another. I know I have, but I don't care to preserve it particularly. As to your experience, I didn't know, of course. I myself never rode in such a vehicle as I just described, but I've half a notion that I'd enjoy it. It seems to me to offer possibilities. But I infer that you do not agree with me?"

"Nossir," gasped Watkins, and he touched his forehead quite solemnly and withdrew.

"My household is not a humorous one," reflected Stoddard. "Ah, there come Beulah and Elizabeth. I suppose if I were to be facetious with them, Beulah would give warning and Elizabeth would tell her mother."

Beulah came of a dusky and cheerful race, but she more than made up for these facts by the whiteness of her linen and the solemnity of her deportment. And she looked with restrained pride upon her young charge, Elizabeth Stoddard, aged eight, who, in a speckless French frock of pale-blue linen, delicately embroidered, entered, holding Stevenson's "A Child's Garden of Verses" for reading upon the train.

Elizabeth said: "Good morning, papa," very sweetly, and took a seat upon the enshrouded sofa, spreading out her little frock carefully. Beulah stood at the door, uncomfortable but erect.

"Sit down, Beulah," said Stoddard. "You've a long journey before you."

"Yes, sah. Thank you, sah," said Beulah—but she stood. Mrs. Stoddard had trained her for seven years.

Stoddard looked her over disgustingly.

"Did you hear me invite you to sit down, Beulah?" he asked.

"Yes, sah," said Beulah, blinking hard.

"May I ask why you do not accept my invitation?"

"Ah'm not allowed to sit down in this room, sah—an' befoah you, sah."

"Excuse me, you are allowed. You are a human creature, I suppose, Beulah. You get tired sometimes, don't you, though your linen is so stiff? This room—there's nothing sacred about it, I assure you. I'm quite honest in saying that I'm no ogre. You can be proper at the proper time, but you're not intimidated so you can't use sense, are you, girl? I say you have a long journey before you and I ask you to sit down."

"Yes, sah," murmured Beulah, her eyes suffused with tears of embarrassment. She took a chair, gingerly. Elizabeth averted her face, striving to remain oblivious to the weakness of her ill-trained elders. Her father stared at her for a minute, noting her scrupulous manners. Her wide hat with its huge bunch of pale-blue ribbon half hid the delicate face—a high-bred face with a sensitive mouth and a well-cared-for complexion. The small hands in their white silk gloves lay clasped upon her lap. The "Child's Garden" was beside her. The little legs hung down from the settee in beautifully worked hose and shining ties.

"My soul!" said Stoddard, with unmistakable irascibility, and he went out and paced the corridor.

Beulah, hearing a firm step on the stairs, glanced about uneasily, and then sidled out of her chair and stood grimly erect. Mrs. Stoddard came into the room followed by Jane, the cook, bearing hand luggage.

Little Elizabeth arose at once.

"Mamma dear," she said, with ineffable sweetness, "will you have this seat?"

Stoddard placed himself in the doorway.

"Elizabeth," he said, sharply, "don't you know we are going to the station? Do you think it is good manners to talk like a parrot? Do you think anyone but a parrot could be excused for repeating a sentence taught it, when there was no occasion for it? Why do you ask your mother to sit down when you know she's going to leave the house? You don't speak by rote, do you?"

"Excuse me, papa," said Elizabeth. Her lips trembled, but she was careful to speak without vexation.

Then all went out together, and Amanda Schaur, the second girl, stood ready to lock the door after them. She was to stay in the city house and watch it during vacation. Mrs. Stoddard gave her a few parting admonitions.

"I hope you will keep well, Amanda," she said. "And that you will be very careful about setting the burglar alarm at night."

Stoddard lifted his hat to her.

"Have a good time, Amanda," he cried. "Ask in a few friends now and then, and be sure to cook good square meals for yourself. This eating alone is dreary business, at best. Suppose you ask that little cousin of yours down to spend a few weeks with you. She'll have better air here than she can get at home, and you can feed her up and get her a few toys. Charge 'em to me."

He helped his wife on the street-car, placed Elizabeth beside her, and went back to the smokers' seats.

The Stoddard party seemed singularly depressed for persons bent on pleasuring, and they achieved the journey to the station without a word. But Mrs. Stoddard smiled throughout like one who understands forbearance.

II

TO SAY that the woods were wild would be to apply too unkind an epithet to them. They were merely unspoiled woods, with plenty of underbrush, some fallen logs, a slope that rose happily to the sunset, and a pellucid stream, creeping secretively into a green maze, and mingling indistinguishably with the shadows. And it was as quiet as the dawn of creation.

The house which Stoddard had purchased—tentatively, as he had pointed out—had belonged to a man who, worn out with the Roar of town, had gone in search of peace. He found it, but at the fourth week of his seclusion spelled incarceration out of peace, and had gone back to the Roar and died in it, quite happy, and hopeful of urban joys in the world to come. The furniture in the house was simple, but in good taste, and when Mrs. Stoddard had applied her scrupulous and decorative housekeeping, the house became almost as oppressively perfect as if it had been in civilized parts.

The programme of life was, however, quite bucolic. Breakfast was early, and after that the usual thing was a drive to the village along the pleasant country road. They got home in time to refresh themselves before luncheon, and after that they took naps, and then the grown-up persons read while Elizabeth played with her dolls. They had an early dinner—Elizabeth did not dine with her parents—and afterward Stoddard and Anita spent the evening in somewhat constrained sociability. Sometimes Anita played on the piano, and now and then Stoddard sang to her accompaniment. If there was moonlight they walked about the little garden or they conversed with each other rather elaborately. Then they ate a little luncheon and their day was concluded.

For almost a fortnight Stoddard made no effort to break through the quickly established rules of the house. There was an impeccable propriety about his deportment—even Elizabeth could have found nothing in him to criticise. Little Elizabeth had not ventured much beyond the gateway, though she sometimes looked down the silent wood paths with something of awe in her eyes. These paths were indeed full of moving shadows, and it almost seemed at moments as if tiny creatures bounded out of the fern-jungles and scampered across the gold blotches on the trodden way. But that, of course, must have been a mistake. Elizabeth mentioning nothing of it to her elders, was yet quite sure what their verdict would have been. She knew positively that there was nothing eldritch in the strange, strange woodland. And yet—

Stoddard coming out of the house one fair morning found her peering through the gateway in this fashion. Her gray eyes were large with wonder; there was a soft pallor about her delicate face. Stoddard's heart gave a sort of leap when he saw her there.

"Bess," he said, "what do you say to running away with me into the woods? Come on! We will go away and no one will be able to find us. Very likely we may meet with a—a—I don't know what exactly, but almost certainly we shall meet with something. Shall we go?"

"Then mamma would have to drive alone to the village," said Elizabeth gravely. "I think we'd better not go, papa."

"Mamma might come with us," ventured Stoddard, somewhat lamely. Elizabeth smiled.

"Mamma doesn't like walking all among the briers and bushes," she said. "Besides, there is the marketing to do."

The child knew all about the bounden duties of life, undeniably. Her father looked at her half in anger and half in pity.

"Poor little baby!" he said at last. "Here, kiss me, Bess, and run in and tell your mamma that I shall not join her in her drive this morning. Perhaps I shall not be back at lunch, either."

"Yes, papa," said Elizabeth, with quick obedience. Then she added: "But where shall I say you have gone, papa?"

"Gone?" Stoddard frowned and shook his head darkly. "I haven't an idea what you are to say, Bess. I can't even imagine where I am going, and the only way for you to find out is to come along."

He meant to put a suggestion of mystery into his voice, and perhaps succeeded in doing so; but it had no effect on the little maid. She ventured no further remarks, but went dutifully on her errand.

Stoddard, with a sort of fury in his air, made his way to the stable.

"Give me my fishing-rods, Watkins," he said. Watkins complied, and Stoddard made his selection carelessly.

"At one o'clock, Watkins, if I'm not home, bring me out a little lunch, will you?"

"Yessir. Where'll you be, sir?"

"Along the river-bank somewhere. Whistle through your fingers, Watkins. I say, you know how, don't you? Well, I'm glad of that. You were a boy once, I see, in spite of evidences to the contrary."

"Sir?" said Watkins, with dignity.

"Bring enough lunch for yourself," said Watkins's master. "Put in a liberal allowance. My fishing appetite is not my usual appetite. And—you might bring along a rod if you were so minded."

"Thank you, sir."

It was an impersonal tone, and conveyed no anticipation. Watkins was too well mannered to permit himself anticipation. Such things were for his betters, no doubt. He was, however, somewhat surprised to notice that his master went off swearing under his breath. There did

not, to Watkins's well-ordered mind, appear to be anything in the present circumstances to provoke profanity.

He went on down the road and into the forest, but the mood in which he had addressed himself to his daughter had left him. He walked hastily now, and impatiently, and in his face, frankly confessed, was discontent. Whether the expression was that of a hurt man or an angry one the casual observer would have had difficulty in determining. But there was, apparently, no observer, casual or otherwise. The paths of the forest were secret; the ways of the squirrel through the trees were ultra private affairs—as much so as the underground passage of a king to the escape in the murk river-way. The birds knew the paths of the air, no doubt, but none others did. Here might a man walk unmasked, and this one, young, but mask-accustomed, dropped his for once, and was homesick without reserve—homesick for——

But that was where the mischief came in. He had not the least idea why he was wretched.

Man, employing that term, not in its generic, but the specific sense, is not an analytical creature, at least when it comes to a question of self. Like a babe, he feels his pain, but cannot locate it. Ralph Stoddard, striding through the woods, involuntarily drew a sponge over the slate of memory and wiped from it all recent events and contemporary personages; and he sketched upon it with lightning-swift strokes of the heart certain scenes and persons out of the vanished years. A wood-colored house, hospitable and simple, a walk between poplars, a gate with a stone weight, a hundred details of a comfortable, old-fashioned farm; a mother who laughed as she worked; a father who kept his boys out of the fields till they had their growth; a dog that barked a welcome from a faithful heart; a boy with bare legs—a boy whose will was "the wind's will." Yet sometimes the boy wept—he involuntarily recalled some of these occasions, and the reasons for them. He remembered, too, how he had been consoled; with what low laughter and broken words and impulsive caressings. For—O, yes, quite undeniably—the boy had been himself, as he was in the large, fair days! Life had

held no distinctions then. All men were equal, differing in his estimation merely according to their degree of friendliness toward him. And almost every one had been friendly. It was curious, all things considered, how he had slipped out of that friendly world, little by little, into a formal, arranged, and stultified one, where he moved by direction, and was expected to feel according to recipe! Now little Elizabeth, poor child——

But what was that rustling in the bushes? Not a fox, surely? Was not the wild too little a wild for that? Besides, the rustling seemed an accompaniment of his steps. He noticed, then, that his steps had grown slower. Thinking of that boy who used to trail his way through the forest like a serpent, for very love of solitude and the green earth, he had involuntarily slackened his pace. He had been congratulating himself upon being beyond the reach of observers, yet, mysteriously, he felt himself under surveillance. And there, surely, a figure crouched!

Well, it was a simple matter to find out what that meant!

Stoddard wheeled suddenly and reached into the bushes. He encountered something which came off in his hand—a boy's straw hat, all but brimless.

"The dickens!" said Stoddard. He felt as if he recognized it—as if it had been the faded past that he had reached into, and recovered this much from oblivion. For surely this was the same hat he had worn in those unforgotten days. But that head, reaching up, alert as a turtle's! Was that also the head of the boy of the other days? Not at all—not at all, for by the hues of the rainbow no head that ever he had beheld before, in the mirror or out of it, could match in brilliancy the head now rising from the bushes. It was the purple head of the ancients, the carrot locks of the moderns. But neither ancient nor modern ever had such a tangle of it before, surely! It seemed, in general design, to resemble a patch of pusley with its twistings and knottings and intricate loopings.

"Come on," said Stoddard eagerly, "come out here. Let's see who you are!"

The head lifted higher. It revealed a

broad, low brow, then heavy red lashes lifting from brown eyes in which the sunlight, percolating between the translucent leaves in precious drops, revealed a glint of red; next came sunburned cheeks, prodigally freckled, a nose with wide and sensitive nostrils, gently up-tilted, a mouth prettily curved and revealing an hiatus in its row of irregular teeth, a chin firm and cleft in the middle, and a sinewy little neck lost in a faded gingham shirt. For the rest, there was a gangling boy, eight or more by the dial of years, with jean trousers and scratched ankles, warmly tanned.

Moreover, in one hand was a fishing-rod. And now, grinning apologetically, he held it up for Stoddard to behold. It marked him of the brotherhood of anglers—for remember that Stoddard carried his complicated and expensive rod in his inert hand. Now, for the first time, he became actively conscious of that rod. He smiled back at the boy.

"We're going to the same place, I see," he said. The boy nodded and held out his hand for his hat. Stoddard clapped it on the red head. Then they went on together down the path, the boy leading the way. Neither of them spoke. It was, indeed, quite unnecessary that they should. The boy set a good pace, and after a time Stoddard began to remember that it always took a long time to get to a good fishing place. He felt very thirsty—thirstier than he had all summer. Somehow, he liked it, too. About this time the boy turned and looked at Stoddard.

"Ain't you dry?" he asked.

"I am," admitted Stoddard. "Ar'n't you?"

"Well, you bet! But I allus drink when I git down here a bit."

"Good," said Stoddard, and knew better than to ask questions.

The boy turned, presently, into a small side-path, and Stoddard followed. Some young beeches were growing there, and their leaves were all but transparent, which caused a vernal glow to suffuse itself round about. Presently the boy stopped.

"Git down on the groun'," he said, hospitably, as if he were bidding Stoddard welcome to a place where he was host, "an' drink all yuh want!"

"Thanks," said Stoddard, and he got down on his knees. He sank into ferny

lushness and heard a ripple as soft as a fairy's song. A rock arose, lichen-covered and embroidered with vines and air-plants; and out of its base, well hidden by the summer's luxuriance, purled a stream.

Stoddard laid avid lips to it, and drank and drank. It was deliciously cool, but not with the uncongenial chill of artificially cooled water.

When he arose, the boy took his place. He lay flat on his stomach, lifted his heels in the air, and drank like a colt. Then he got up, and the two marched on again.

Sometimes the boy peered into the forest sharply, and whenever he did this, Stoddard peered too. He was jealous lest the boy should see something he did not—not actual things, which are of comparatively little account, but those witching things of the invisible world which wait for children in the wood. For when one is eight all forests are enchanted. The shadows had, indeed, a strange purple depth; and now and then they hung like curtains before the bower of a wild-wood princess. But, after all, was it of such hackneyed things that the boy with the torn hat amused himself? Children are not hackneyed. Stoddard knew, after some reflection, that it would be futile for him to try to summon the dreams of boyhood out of that rustling solitude. They were hidden in the uttermost purple recesses, and could be called forth only by the summons of another child. For dreams know their masters, and will not come at the bidding of those who have lost their right to call.

They got to the river, and were matter-of-fact and business-like in the extreme. The boy had a Laocoon writhe of worms in a tin can, and he offered them to Stoddard with as much grace as if he had been a gentleman of the old school extending his gold snuff-box. Stoddard accepted the attention with no less courtesy, and selected his wriggling victim with care. It was a fat one, and he regarded it with appreciation.

"Yuh got a bully one," congratulated the boy.

Stoddard grunted sociably. They began to fish. After a time, and very casually, Stoddard asked the boy his name. He said it was Ged Angel.

"I guess you think I look it," he snickered.

"Look what?"

"An angel!" He was ready with his self-scorn and enjoyed it.

"I don't know much about angels. I don't believe I'd like to go fishing with one."

"Well," said the boy consolingly, "you ain't doing it, so don't fret."

Stoddard ventured to tell a little about himself—just enough to serve as cement for friendship.

"Huh," said the boy, contemptuously, "I know all that. I know who you be. I've seen you goin' an' comin'. I like hour hosses."

"I'm glad you like them. I do too."

"Yes," said the boy, somewhat patronizingly, "them's good hosses. Onct I thought I wus goin' to hev a hoss. Pa said when it wus born I could call it mine. But he sold it when it wus two years ole."

"I see. That was a great pity."

"Yep." He returned to his fishing, but he was pensive. At eleven o'clock he took two sandwiches with hard fried ham between them from out the inside of his shirt, where they had reposed in the slack of the cloth.

"Have one?" he said to Stoddard.

"Thank you, but I'm expecting my own lunch at one."

"One!" Ged actually gasped. "You couldn't stand it till then, could you?"

"Perhaps not," said Stoddard, tickled with unaccountable mirth. He took the sandwich out of its paper wrapping, and ate it to the last crumb.

"I'll give you half of mine when it comes," he promised.

They landed some good fish, and they said very little. The boy exuded a warm, sunny odor, and he seemed intensely human. It seemed to Stoddard that he had not for years been in intimate association with anything so riotously human. They sat rather close together and radiated companionship.

At last a distant halloo disturbed the slumberous air.

"Watkins!" cried Stoddard joyfully, and he yodelled at the top of his lungs. So out of the purple chambers of the wood there came presently the respectable form of Watkins, hamper-laden. Stoddard gave him a hearty greeting.

"Glad to see you brought a pole, my boy. It's tolerably good catching, isn't it,

sir?" he addressed Ged. Ged nodded, and kept hungry eyes on the hamper. Stoddard undid it, and revealed a feast.

"By gum!" said Ged.

"It *is* moving," admitted Stoddard. He felt shaken again with that senseless, infantile mirth. Ged began to roll over and over on the bank in sheer delight at prospect of the banquet, and Stoddard would have given a great deal to have imitated it. Instead, he helped Watkins spread the repast.

"Come, fill up!" he called joyously to Ged. The boy rolled over and over till he reached the Elysian fare. Then he ate, and a silence fell on the world.

Afterward they lazed on the bank—that is, Ged and Stoddard did. Watkins, politely reticent, fished. Stoddard took a notion to tell a story. It had to do with a by-gone day, a dog, and himself. Ged followed with a frog story; and Watkins, much emboldened, and almost willing to smile, rounded up with a story about a horse he knew once. It was a good story, as mysterious and interesting as if it had not been true. Then shadows began slanting. Birds bestirred themselves from their quietude. They seemed to be announcing some event—perhaps it was the close of day.

"I'm afraid we'll be late for dinner, sir," said Watkins.

Stoddard ran his bared arm deep into the amber stream. The water rippled about him with exquisite delicacy, singing softly.

"Why, we never had a swim, Ged!" he cried.

"Well," said Ged, apologetically, "I didn't know as you'd——"

"Did you take me for an Egyptian mummy?" queried Stoddard with boyish anger.

"I didn't know," said Ged. To have a quarrel was even more of intimacy than he had hoped for.

They walked homeward together, but Ged had to pass Stoddard's gate and go on up the hill and over it.

"If I should chanc't to be hangin' 'round to-morrow 'bout nine," he said, "do yeh think yeh might catch up with me somewheres?"

"I should think," said Stoddard, subtly, "that there was a good chance that I might."

They looked straight in each other's eyes. Ged opened and shut his mouth as if he were trying to say something. Stoddard perceived telepathically that the boy was wishing to express his enjoyment of the day. He anticipated him.

"I've had a bully time," he said to Ged. He lifted his hat. Ged did the same, in spite of the flopping rim. They smiled once more and parted; and then, with a straightening of the shoulders, Stoddard turned toward the house.

Twenty minutes later he was out of his tub and in white linens. Mrs. Stoddard and Elizabeth were awaiting him in the dining-room. They were quiet, but courteous. He could see they felt his desertion of them. Mrs. Stoddard kept the conversation on the safe topic of the summer magazines. Elizabeth took her bread and milk and left in charge of her nurse. The dinner was served silently, and it was delicious; and Stoddard smiled, remembering the sandwich the boy had taken from within his shirt. What would Anita think of such fare? He dare not incur her disgust by telling the story. He tried to make amends by reading aloud to her that evening, but they retired early. And that night he dreamed he had a son. He was not a beautiful child like little Elizabeth. He had thick red hair, amazingly tangled, and he was standing away down on a valley of earth and looking up at Elizabeth, who sat on the edge of a golden cloud, quoting from "A Child's Garden":

I woke before the morning, I was happy all the day;
I never said an ugly word, but smiled and stuck to play.
And now at last the sun is going down behind the wood,
And I am very happy, for I know that I've been good.

Then the boy, who had a chain of angle-worms about his neck, tried to climb up a golden ladder to sit beside Elizabeth, but he slipped on the rungs, and fell back in a mud puddle, and lay there laughing, while a whole company of frogs shouted with hoarse, batrachian laughter.

Stoddard awoke with a sense of grief, but at what he could not tell; and having a haunting fear that something might have happened to little Elizabeth, he stole into her room. She was sleeping with one white

hand under her softly rounded cheek, and beside her, on an embroidered pillow, lay a doll in a night-dress with fluted ruffles. He looked at his dainty babe for a moment, and then, sighing gently, went back to his bed.

III

THE next week was a strange one. It is not easy to explain why a young man in possession of his health, his faculties, a beautiful and capable wife, a sweet and obedient daughter, should find a most extraordinary and spontaneous happiness in wandering the woods with a vagrant and red-headed boy. Nor is it to the point to dilate upon the manner in which the boy made his confrere acquainted with certain of the neighbors; nor how the man sat in farm kitchens and laughed and talked with more vivacity than he had shown in any drawing-room for many and many a month; nor how the introductions extended to dogs, hens, rabbits, pigeons, and even included a brown-eyed steer. It is enough to say that Elizabeth Stoddard, pining in her immaculate frocks, wandered her garden in the severe company of Beulah, and wondered why no little girls grew in those woods; and that Anita Stoddard took to keeping a diary—a piece of sentimentality of which her husband would have supposed her incapable—and forgot to specify the sort of soup she wished for dinner, or to oversee the trimming of the lawn.

A gulf of good manners yawned between the different members of this little family; and three persons with everything in the world to make them happy went their miserable ways. Only Ralph Stoddard had his clandestine joy.

In the midst of all this, a summons from town reached him. He left quite suddenly, and with no opportunity to say farewell to the red-headed partner of his innocuous escapades.

The business which had demanded his presence in the city was soon completed, and, quite unexpectedly, Stoddard found himself able to return the next day. He might have wired his wife to meet him, but he did not. He crept into a corner of the car, and sat there for five hours, staring at nothing in particular, and

wrapped in a reverie. As figures may be seen moving, shadow-like, behind a curtain of gauze, so the characters in his particular little drama moved behind the blur of his reverie—the stately figure of his wife, whom he had won and somehow lost; the piquant and proper Elizabeth, demure, and also remote; the laughing lad with red hair, lips berry-stained, the joy of life in his twinkling eyes, the grace of a young cat in his movements, and the glowing heart of a boy in his little sweaty breast! From the dissatisfaction of things in general Stoddard turned to this grotesque and merry vision, and dwelt apart with it, as a girl does with the dreams of her heart's love—but all semi-consciously, all as in a dream of the night.

The train drew in at the station, and he got out and made his way toward a dilapidated 'bus which waited there for the infrequent visitor. It was his intention to ride in this to the village, and there to hire some sort of a conveyance to take him out to his place. But he saw, with a leap of the heart, that his wife was awaiting him. He hastened toward her.

"All is well at home?"

"Yes," she said, "I came down because I had a feeling that you might come home on this train."

"Oh!" said Stoddard significantly. His heart felt singularly light. He leaped into the trap and took the reins from Anita. "I am so glad you had the notion!" he cried.

"It looks as if we were going to have a bad storm," Anita remarked. "There have been little cold gusts blowing for the past hour, and now I can feel the rain in the air."

"You are getting to be quite a country woman," laughed Stoddard. "Next thing you'll be talking about crops."

"Crops are rather interesting," Anita said. "They have already become a topic of conversation with me."

"Have they, indeed? I hadn't noticed it."

Anita looked at her husband in a side-long fashion, like a timid girl. "You haven't heard very much of my conversation recently, have you?" she asked.

A twinge of remorse struck Stoddard sharply. It occurred to him for the first time that he might have his share of re-

sponsibility for the low barometric condition of his domestic atmosphere. He was searching about for an honest and adequate answer when a sharp blast of air struck them, and over the top of the long hill came rushing a battalion of cloud. It reminded the observers of a desperate battle onslaught—a strategic triumph, culminating in that reckless and irresistible charge. A few seconds more and the roar of the strife was about them. The world was darkened, but there were horrible saffron lights through the murk. The trees beat the air like gigantic lunatics. Flying branches and leaves, swirls of dust, the bitter air beating back the sultriness of the day, the lightning darting like devils' lances, the sharp thunder, the deep diapason of the storm underneath, transformed the world.

The horse Stoddard was driving became all but unmanageable, and, hardly able to see the road before him, with the bending forest on one side and the long hill on the other, he bent forward, grasping the reins with tense and determined arms. Anita said not a word. Stoddard could feel her trembling, but she was silent. When a tree crashed down across the road just behind them, she did not even exclaim. Once Stoddard shouted:

"Where's Elizabeth?"

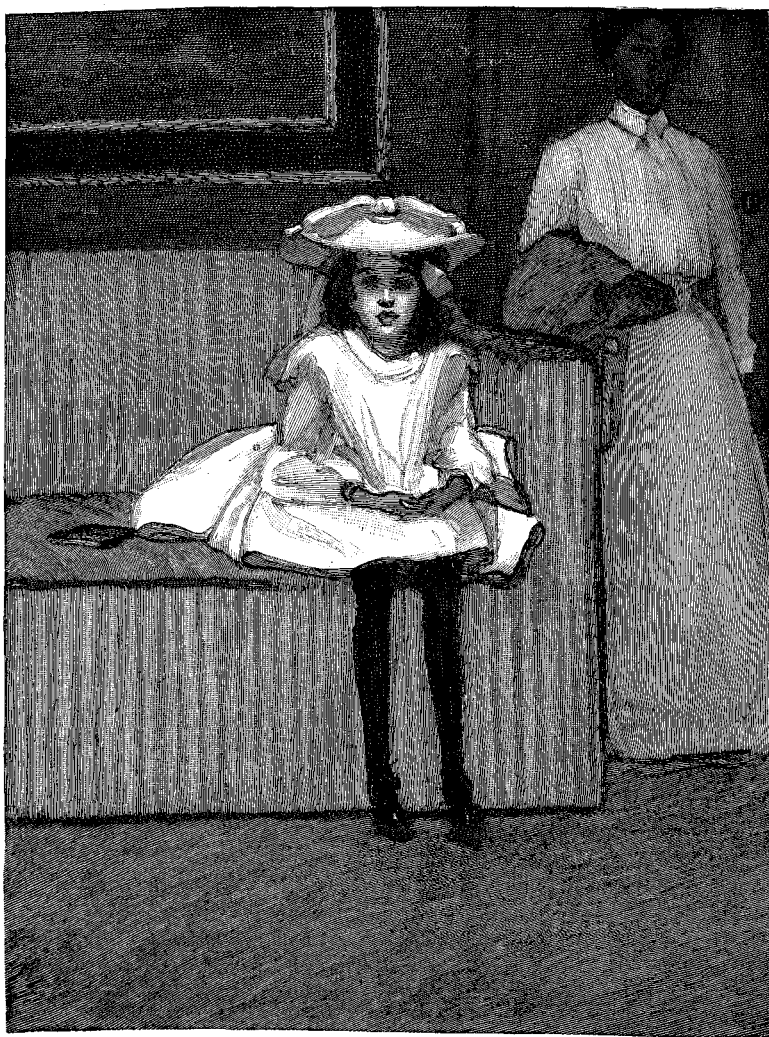
"I don't know," Anita shouted back.

"Wasn't she at home when you left?"

"No."

Neither said more. They were stricken by the same apprehension. Stoddard understood then why she had evinced no fear for herself; he also ceased to feel it now. He had one absorbing curiosity, one unspeakable apprehension. If little Elizabeth were out in this storm, she would be beaten down like a butterfly. It would crush her down, stifle her, submerge her in its windy torrents, till all her delicate loveliness was obliterated!

The horse went on, wild-eyed, mastered, but quivering. A ball of fire fell all but before his eyes, and he staggered and groaned, and went on. He seemed not to be able to keep the road after that; and Stoddard himself felt half stunned, but not enough so to mitigate the poignancy of his apprehension. He only felt the more infuriated at the confusion of his faculties; for the world seemed to have found a voice



Took a seat upon the enshrouded sofa.—Page 581.

and was bellowing for the lost sun, and there was a fearsome twilight everywhere. Then the rain began to fall—or rather a torrent of water swept down from the hill. It choked them, blinded them, and they gasped as a young babe does in the wind. Then, when they thought in the torment of their fear that they were still far from home, the lightning revealed to them the fact that they had passed their own gate. Stoddard got out and backed the horse, and led him into the stable; and once there, the animal fell in his shafts. Stoddard left him there whinnying with fright, and ran to help Anita out, but she was already speed-

ing toward the house. He followed her. They burst open the kitchen door and called, but no one answered. They ran from room to room, but the place was deserted. The windows had been closed against the storm, but nowhere, not even in the cellar, was anyone to be found.

"I know!" cried Anita. "I know! Elizabeth was out when the storm came, and they have all gone to look for her."

They stood in the dusk of the cellar with earthy, heavy smells creeping up around them, and stared at each other grim and fearful as spectres. They saw visions of dread grow in each other's eyes. They

each conjured a tragedy and beheld its enactment, each in the face of the other. Then Anita stretched out her arms toward her husband.

"Oh, our baby! Our baby!" she sobbed.

Stoddard drew her to him with protecting tenderness. He felt his arms and his heart strengthen to shield her from sorrows present and potential. The head on his breast seemed pitiful, and he kissed it passionately. He drew her closer and closer, that she might feel the beating of his heart; and that their torment might be as one torment, not as the sorrow of two who dwelt together. Then he comforted her with inarticulate words not heard for the crash of the storm, but felt by her in her soul and welcomed even in the midst of misery.

It was only for a moment that they paused. Anita tore herself away from her husband's arms and ran up the stair. As they entered the dining-room, a blast of light confounded them; the house gave a shudder like a stricken ship, and a great locust tree which grew by the side of the hill crashed through the roof of the porch and shattered the glass in the wide window. The wind swept in and seemed to run snarling about the house like a wild animal.

Anita had leaped back, and she stood regarding the catastrophe with eyes that pictured a disaster which minimized this one infinitely.

"We must go out," she cried to her husband. "Even if it does no good, we'd better go. I can't stand the waiting."

"We'll not go out," said Stoddard, with command in his tones. "Come into the kitchen, Anita. Shut the doors. I'll build a fire. We'll have hot water ready. Put some coffee in the pot, and find the liquor and some blankets—soft, warm ones."

He made the suggestions to occupy her, and, in a way, the plan worked. When their preparations were finished, the storm really began to abate. The air lightened, and once more objects became clearly defined. Then the torrent ceased, and the rain fell moderately.

"Now we will go out," said Stoddard, and he found his wife's mackintosh and wrapped it about her, and brought her rubber shoes. He was very tender with her, and she looked at him hungrily.

"Our poor baby," she whispered.

"We'll find her! We'll find her!" he said over and over. When he went for his own coat she followed him, and as they stepped out into the chilled fateful air, with the cloud-wrack scurrying southward and the trees torn and broken, they involuntarily clasped hands. They started for the gate together that way, but a second later they stopped, for a procession advanced toward them.

First came Ged Angel's dog, important but wet; then Ged Angel himself, rather shamefaced but not particularly wet; then Watkins, carrying Elizabeth; lastly, Beulah, waving reassuringly to the Stoddards, and finally Jane, who had been weeping.

Upon nearer view it appeared that little Elizabeth must have been seeing the world. Her frock was torn with briars and stained with berries; she was minus shoes and stockings; her soft brown braids having become unruly had been tied together with a wisp of grass; her face bore evidences of a woodland feast.

"Ah didn't choose fo' to wash heh, ma'am," Beulah said, half laughing and half crying, "twell you-alls hed seen heh jus' as she was."

Just as she was she was good enough for Anita Stoddard. Just as she was she did perfectly well for Ralph Stoddard.

Watkins started to relate the adventure—a man knows his privileges—but Stoddard cut him short.

"Go to the barn, Watkins," he commanded. "The horse—I left him in a bad way." Watkins started toward the stables, but from the nature of his ejaculations and commands it appeared that nothing serious had occurred. Watkins's voice had to make itself heard over several other voices, for Jane was telling how the storm came up suddenner than any she ever see, and how the clouds dipped right down to the chimbley top, and how she thought of that blessed child out somewhere or other gadding with Beulah, and how she closed up the house and ran out—'thout a hat nor nothing—an' ranged an' ranged 'round, and the wind tore her apron off—that new one with the cross-stitching—and carried it mercy knows where, and—and—

And Beulah said she was jus' slumbahin', ma'am, a minute on the ground



He ate it to the last crumb.—Page 586.

undah the trees, and Miss Elizabeth was playin' jus' as fine as fine, an' the yowling of the stohm woke heh like the angel Gabriel shoutin' in heh eah, and Miss Elizabeth wasn't to be seen no moah than's if she'd gone off on a broom-stick, and—

And Elizabeth said, hugging her mother in tenacious and rather tremulous arms, that Beulah read "A Child's Garden of Verse" to her till she fell asleep, and that she—Elizabeth—just walked a little way down the road, and she wished and wished she had some one to play with, and while she was wishing she saw a boy, and she spoke to him and he spoke to her, and they went off a little way, so they wouldn't wake Beulah. And they picked some blackberries, and he showed her a place

to wade, and she was sorry, but she tore her dress, and then the storm came up and she forgot her shoes, and perhaps Beulah could find them if she would run back and—

And Gerald Angel, vulgarly denominated Ged, twisted his toes in the dust and said when it began to get so dark, by ginger! he thought they'd better run, and they went to Sally Greison's house, and she giv' 'em coffee cake, and whin they saw Beulah running like a chicken with its head off, they called her in; and then they see Jane, and they called *her* in; and whin the storm was all over and they set out for home, they met Mr. Watkins, sir, and he had hid in a barn, and he wasn't wet neither, and he took Elizabeth out of Beulah's arms and carried her, and he

guessed *he* could find the little girl's shoes, but he thought they'd be some soaked.

Stoddard said nothing. He laughed, though—a strange laugh, down deep in his throat—and he took Ged's hand and led him into the house.

Anita sat down with Elizabeth in her arms and looked her over—looked at the scratched ankles, the berry-stained face, and the grass-bound hair.

"Isn't she the dearest!" she cried, ecstatically.

"Nicer than she ever was before," acquiesced Stoddard, amazed at the concurrence of his wife's opinion with his own.

"And the boy!" exclaimed Anita. She stared at the triumphant specimen of boyhood with the glorious topknot. He blushed, and wriggled around behind Stoddard.

"Send them into the nursery to play," said Stoddard gently. "Ask Beulah to feed them. I wish to tell you a little story, Anita. It's quite curious, and I thought you wouldn't understand or I'd have told it sooner."

So the young ones went away, Elizabeth like a princess in rags; Gerald Angel feigning reluctance, with admiration shining from his red-brown eyes.

Stoddard went out again in the open air, taking Anita with him, and there, in the clearing of the storm, with the evidences of the convulsion all about them, he told all the story—he stripped his heart before the woman he had stood in awe of, and he told her the truth as he had never thought to speak it to any living ear.

A wonderful sunset of amber and green began to gather in the west. The whole world shone with a kind of crystalline beauty, and in a glow of pale golden light Anita, transfigured and tender, confessed what Stoddard had never expected to hear from her lips.

"You seemed tired, to me," she said half whispering, "and I took every burden from you that I could. If anything went wrong, no matter whether I was responsible for it or not, I *felt* responsible. I was in a torment all the time lest you should be troubled. I knew how you disliked ill-bred children, and I determined that Elizabeth should never annoy or mortify you. I repressed the child all the time, and when I saw her getting too exuberant,

I managed to take her away out of your hearing. I tried to have her always tidy when you were about—and I—I meant you should never find me wanting in anything. I wanted to have the house perfect, and never to let down myself from——"

"And all the time," cried Stoddard, "I was wanting you, my dear, wanting you and my little girl! Not your clothes, not your manners, not your accomplishments, but you, you, you!"

"But we were here!" responded Anita, and Stoddard had never seen anything so near anger in her eyes. "We were here, and hurt, and lonely—O horrors, so lonely! You never looked our way, really. You never said what you thought. We met like creatures on a stage—like strangers on the road, I might almost say. Such chagrin, Ralph, as I have felt! A woman as proud as I am, to lose my husband's love! If you knew the way that cancer of an idea had eaten into me!"

Stoddard leaped to his feet and hurled his chair down the length of the veranda.

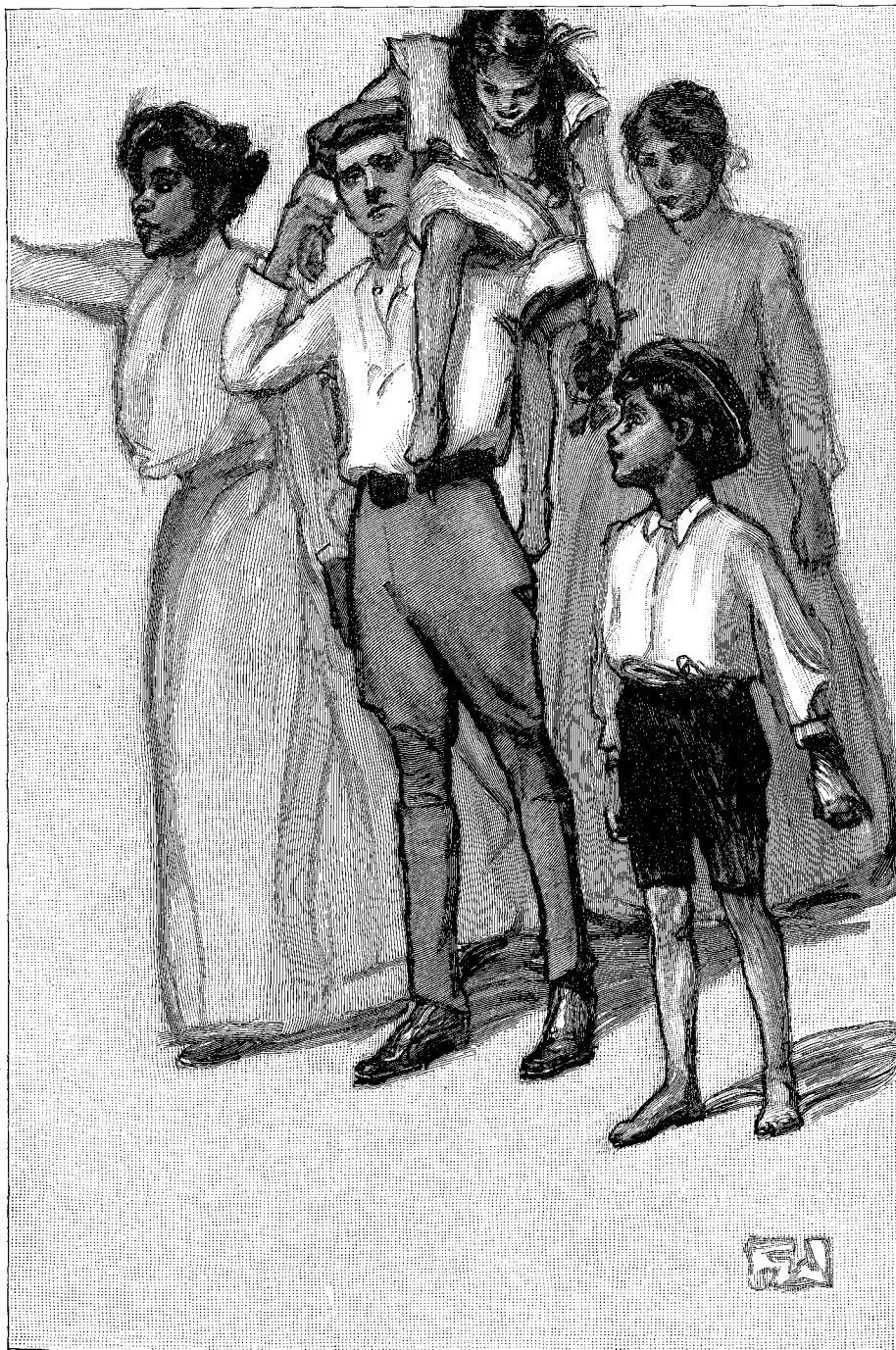
"Never mind how miserable we were!" he cried, with the impatience a man feels for pain. "A man may be a fool and outgrow it; don't you think so, my dear—my very dear dear?"

He stooped to kiss her, but a vision appeared at the door. Two children, freshly washed and quite seraphic, stood there side by side. Their eyes were shining, and they were both quiet from sheer content.

Anita Stoddard looked at the red-headed boy with an affectionate eye.

"I don't wonder you coveted him," she said. "He certainly does look about as invitingly human as anyone I have ever seen." She held out her hand to him, and the boy, grinning, and no longer abashed, came and stood by her, waiting, as children will, for a caress. She ran her white, jewelled hand in his astonishing crop of hair, and tilted back his head.

"What a boy!" she cried, a maternal hunger leaping into her eyes. "What a—*an extremely boy boy!*" She converted the word into an adjective. Then she leaned forward and kissed him—where the sun kissed him every day, where sleep and health and joy and youth kissed him—on the full curve of his lips.



Drawn by Florence Wyman.

A procession advanced toward them.—Page 590.

"Let's be good friends, Ged," she said. Her eyes were soft with a gentle mist.

Stoddard stood watching her as one who awakes from a dream and beholds disaster melt before his saner vision.

"Come," he said, "we will go to dinner. The children shall eat with us, and afterward we'll walk home with Ged."

"Very well," said Anita, and Stoddard, as he lifted little Elizabeth in his arms, saw his wife take the boy's hand in hers and walk before him into the dining-room.

The broken tree was visible through the window, and the glass was in fragments, but these indications of danger past troubled no one.



"What a—an extremely *boy* boy!"—Page 592

THEIR COUNTRYMEN

By James Barnes

ILLUSTRATION BY GORDON H. GRANT



MISS MADELINE HARRISON stood leaning against a post of the vine-covered stoep. She was looking far out across the well-kept little garden, bordered by its stone walls and line of grape-arbors, to the wide-stretching, open veldt and the blue tops of some distant kopjes that rose against the sky. It was so beautiful, so peaceful, that it was hard to think this was a land that lay cursed and writhing in the red grasp of war. The shadows of the tall gum-trees stretched across the neatly kept walks, and the breeze made the air, that shimmered out on the plain, seem cool and inviting in the shade. It was hard for Miss Harrison to reconcile her present state of mind with the quiet scene. Her fingers were working nervously, her lower lip was quivering, and her eyes betrayed the fact that she had been weeping.

There was a curious fluttering sound in the air. Madeline raised her head. A large white flag, made of a bed-sheet, whipped and snapped in the wind from a tall pole at the gable end of the house. Although it meant a plea for mercy and protection, to her it seemed to be flying a grim and hidden challenge. She looked away again, and her eyes saw beyond the hills and the line of sky, beyond far beyond, over the miles of land and sea, to a little stone cottage standing back of an English hedge-row. She could see her father in his long black coat, with his sermon tucked under his arm, on his way to hold service in the little church. She almost could scent the cool mustiness of the choir-stalls; she could hear her own voice rising with the voices of the choir-boys. In the service she reinforced the singing from a little nook on the side of the cantoris, and from this little nook she could look out into the congregation and see the Squire and his family seated in the old Winwood family pew. There were the straight-backed young ladies, who were very nice and patronizing, when she and her father attended any function at the

park, and the tall, good-looking heir to the estate, who came up from town and left his onerous duties in the Guards for the fall shooting. And another figure she could see distinctly, that of the younger son, whose eyes constantly sought the hiding-place at the end of the row of little white-robed figures. Should she ever forget the day when the squire, riding down through the woods back of the park had found her, and Master Cecil walking (Oh, well she remembered it!), hand and hand along the path by the trout-pond. She still had the letters somewhere that Master Cecil had written when they bundled him off to that post in India; at this she smiled a little sadly.

The Squire's family had been very kind to her, however, when her father had died, leaving her penniless to look out for herself—in a world that cared little how well, or how ill, she did it. She was an English governess now; she had been one for the last six years—three with an American family, wealthy people in Capetown, and thence to Johannesburg as companion to the invalid daughter of a wealthy German mine-owner, and then she had taken the position that she now held, in the family of Dirk Van Houten, Veldt-cornet and prominent burgher of the Transvaal Republic. That was the whole of her life, summed up in a few short words, except—but of that later. She was soon brought back to the present.

A Kaffir who had been working down in the corner of the garden raised his head, and, shading his eyes, looked out to the northward and then up into the air above him. A dark brown cloud was hanging above the tops of the distant kopjes, yet it was not still, but moved and undulated, rose and fell in a long-stretching line to east and west. Miss Harrison moved a little, and looked up at the clear blue sky through a partition in the tree-tops, for the farm stood, a crowded and compact oasis, rising like a green island out of the gray dun of the veldt. High above were myriads of little glittering atoms fol-