

A HALF-LIFE AND HALF A LIFE.

A Story That is Based on Big Sandy Experience and Was First Published Half A Century Ago

AND now we neared the city. I stood on the guards and looked, wondering at the steamboats that lined the river-bank, at the long rows of houses that stretched before me, the tall chimneys vomiting smoke which obscured the surrounding hills, at the crowd of men and drays on the landing through which I was to make my way; but my courage rose with the occasion, and, stepping resolutely from the plank, I walked up the hill and stood among the ware-houses. I had been told to "turn to the right and take the first street, I could not miss my way;" but somehow I did miss my way again and again, and wandered weary and bewildered, not daring at first to ask for directions, gathering strength from my very weariness, I at last saw before me the welcome sign. It was something like home to see it; the familiar names cheered me while they moved me. I entered the office trembling with a wild dread lest I should meet Mr. Hammond there, but the sight of a stranger's face at his desk gave me courage to ask for Tom Salyers.

"He is in the yard now. Here, Jim, tell Salyers there's a person—be he's a lady wants to see him."

I sat down in a chair which was luckily near me, for my knees trembled so that I could not stand, and as the door opened and Tom's familiar face was before me, my whole composure gave way and I burst into a violent fit of crying.

"Janet! Is it you? For Heaven's sake, what is the matter?"

But I could only sob in answer.

"Has anything happened up Sandy? Did you come for me?"

The poor fellow leaned over me. His face pale with surprise and agitation.

"Take me out of here," was all I could muster composure enough to say.

He opened the door, and I escaped into the open air. We walked side by side through the streets, he silently respecting my agitation with a delicacy for which I had not given him credit, and I struggling to grow calm. At last he opened a little side-gate.

"Come in here, Janet; we shall be quiet here."

And I entered a sort of garden; the grounds belonging to the city water-works I have since known them to be. We sat down on a bench that overlooked the Kentucky hills. I love the seat now. I think the sight of the familiar fields and trees calm-

ed me, and I was able at last to answer Tom's anxious questions.

"It is nothing; indeed, it is nothing. I am a foolish coward, and I was frightened walking through the city, and then the sight of a home-face upset me."

But, Janet, why are you here? Is anything wrong about the works, the men? Did Mr. Hammond send you down?"

"No, indeed, no! It was only a fancy of mine to see the world, I am tired of that lonely life, and you know I am not needed there. My mother can get along without me, and I am only a burden to my father."

"Not needed? Why, Janet, what will the Sandy country be without you?"

My eyes filled up with tears again.

"Don't ask me any more questions, dear Tom; only help me for a little while, till I can help myself. I want to earn my living somehow, but I have money enough to live upon till I can find something to do. Only find me a place to stay quietly in while I am looking for work. You are the only person I know in this great city; and who will help me, if you do not?"

"You know I will help you with my whole heart and soul, Janet," he said, his voice faltering.

I looked up, and in one moment rushed back upon me the remembrance of his words that day in the boat, and I stood aghast at the new trouble that seemed to rise before me. My voice must have changed as I said,—

"I only want you to find me a place to live in; I can take care of myself; for his countenance fell, and he sat silent for some moments.

At last he spoke:—

"I know I cannot do much, Janet, but what I can, I will. And, first, I will take you to the house of a widow woman who has a room to let; one of our men wanted me to take it, but it was too far from my work. I went to see the place, though, and it is quiet and respectable; the woman looks kind, too. Would you walk slowly down the street, while I go to the office and get my coat?"—he was in his working-dress,—and then I'll join you."

I got up, feeling that I had chilled him in some way, and reproaching myself for it. When he rejoined me, we walked silently on, till, after many turnings, we found ourselves in a narrow, quiet street, before a small house, with a tiny yard in front. I did not know how the matter was arranged; he did it all for me. There

was the introducing me to a motherly-looking person, as a friend of his from the country; the going up a narrow staircase to look at a small room of which all that could be said was that it was neat and clean; the bargaining for my board, in which I was obliged to answer "Yes" or "No" as I could best follow his lead; and then Tom left me with a shake of the hand, and the advice that I lie down and rest after my tedious journey; he would see me again in the evening.

The quiet dinner with my landlady, the afternoon rest, the fresh toilet, the sort of home-feeling that my room already gave me, all did their part towards bringing back my usual composure before Tom came in the evening; and then, sitting by the window in the little parlor, I could talk rationally of my plans for the future.

I had money enough for twelve weeks' board, even if I reserved ten dollars for other expenses. Surely, in that time I could find something to do. And as to what I should do, I had thought that all over before I left home. I might find some sewing, or tend in a store, or, perhaps,—did I think I could?—I might keep school.

Tom would not hear of my sewing. He knew poor girls that worked their lives out at that. I might tend in a store, if I pleased, but still he did not believe I would like to be tied to one place for twelve hours in the day. Why shouldn't I keep school? he was sure I knew enough, I was so smart, and had read so many books.

I shook my head. I did not believe the books I had read were the kind that school-mistresses studied. Still, I could learn, and certainly I might begin by teaching little children. But where was I to begin?

"If only we knew some gentleman, Janet, some city-man, who knew what to do about such things."

Suddenly a thought struck me.

"Tom, do you remember those gentlemen who came up to look at the coal mines when they were first opened? One of them stayed at our house two nights, and saw my books, and talked to me about them. Mr. Kendall was his name."

"That's the very man; and a kind-hearted gentleman he seemed, not stuck up or proud. I'll find him out for you, Janet, tomorrow; but there's no need of your hurrying yourself about going to work. You must see the city and the sights."

And Tom grew enthusiastic in describing to me all that was to be seen in this wonderful place.

Tom had altered, had improved in appearance and manners, since he had known something of city-life. I could not tell wherein the change lay, but I felt it. He told me of himself,—of his rising to be head-man, a sort of overseer, in the coal-yard,—of his good wages,—of some investments that he had made which had brought him in good returns.

"So you see, Janet, that, even if you were not so rich yourself, I have

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I thanked him most heartily, and roused myself to show some interest in all that concerned him.

So passed the rest of the week,—quiet days with my landlady, or in my room, where I busied myself in putting my wardrobe into better shape under the direction of Mrs. Barnum, and quiet walks and talks in the evening with Tom Salyers. It was evident that he was not satisfied with my alleged motives for leaving home, but I so steadily avoided all conversation on this point that he learned to respect my silence. On Sunday he told me he had found out who Mr. Kendall was.

"One of the stockholders of the Company, and a good man, they say. I'll go to him to-morrow, if you say so, Janet, and ask him anything you want to know."

"No, Tom, I shall go myself. It is my business, and I must not let you do so much for me. If you will go with me, though,—I added.

And so the next morning saw us at Mr. Kendall's counting-room. It was before business-hours; we had cared for that. We found Mr. Kendall sitting leisurely over his papers, his feet up and his spectacles pushed back. I had been nervous enough during the walk, but a glance at his face reassured me. It was a good, a fatherly face, full of bonhomie, but showing, without a spice of business-shrewdness, I left Tom standing at the counting-room door, and, taking my fate in my own hands, walked forward and made myself known.

"O yes! the little girl that Hammond thought so much of, that he talks about so often when he is down here. He thinks a school or two would part bring the Sandy people out and holds you up as an example; but, for my part, I think you are an exception. There are not many of them that one could do much with."

I turned quickly.

"This is Tom Salyers, sir, head-workman, overseer, at your coal-yard, and he is a Sandy man."

Mr. Kendall laughed.

"I see I must not say anything against the Sandy country; nor need I just now. Walk in, Mr. Salyers. So, Miss Janet, you have come down to seek your fortune, earn your living, you say. I suppose Hammond sent you to me. Did you bring me a letter from him?"

I hesitated.

"No, sir, Mr. Hammond was so much occupied when I came away that I had not seen him for a day or two. He has friends staying with him."

"True enough Mr. Worthington has gone up there with his pretty daughter to see whether he can allow her to bury herself in the country. You saw Miss Worthington? Will she be popular among your people when she is Mrs. Hammond?"

I caught a glimpse of Tom's face, and felt myself turning pale as I answered, with a composure that did not seem to come from my own strength.

"Miss Worthington is a very pleasant-spoken young lady. The people will like her, because she seems to care for them, just as Mr. Hammond does. But do you think, sir, that you could put me in the way of teaching school? Could I learn how to do it?"

"Well, I am just the right person to come to, Miss Janet, for the people have put me on the School Board, and—yes, we shall want some teachers next month in two of the primary departments. Could you wait a month? You might be studying up for your examination; it's not much, but it'll not hurt you to go over their arithmetics and grammars. And I must write Hammond to-day about some business of the Company. I'll ask him about your qualifications, and what he thinks of it, and we'll see what can be done. I should not wonder if I could get you a place."

Mr. Kendall shook hands with us both; and, bidding him good-morning, with many thanks for his kindness, we went out. We walked a square silently. Suddenly Tom turned to me.—

"You did not tell me, Janet, of this young lady."

"No."

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"And is Mr. Hammond going to marry her?"

The blood rushed to my face till it was crimson to the very hair, while I stammered,—

"I do not know,—you heard Mr. Kendall."

Tom's voice was as gentle as a mother's in answer, but his words had little to do with the subject, they were almost as incoherent as mine,—something about his hoping I would like living in Cincinnati, that teaching would not be too tiresome for me. But from that moment Geo. Hammond's name was never mentioned between us.

I wrote that day to my step-mother, telling her of my plans and prospects, and that evening Tom brought me the needed school-books. He had found them by asking some of the men at the yard whose children went to the public schools, and to the study of them I sat down with a determination that no slight difficulty could subdue. The next week brought a long, kind letter from Mr. Hammond, scolding me for going as I did, and declaring that he missed me every day.

"But more than all shall I miss you, Janet, when I bring Miss Worthington back as my wife; I had depended so upon you as a companion for her. But still it is a good thing for you to see something of the world, and you are bright enough to do anything you set out to do. I have written to Mr. Kendall to do all he can for you, and with Tom to take care of you I am sure you will get along. I begin to suspect that your going away was a thing contrived between Tom and yourself. Who knows how soon he may bring you back among us to show the Sandy farmers' wives how to live more comfortably than some of them do? Tom has a very pretty place below the mouth of Blackberry, if you would only show him how to take care of it."

There was comfort in this letter, in spite of the tears it caused me. My secret was safe. Miss Hammond had not been so cruel, so traitorous to her sex, as to betray it. If she had not told it now, she never would tell it, and Tom, if he suspected it, was too good, too noble, to whisper it even to himself. So I laid away my letter, and with a lighter heart turned again to my tasks.

And now three months have passed, for two of which I have been teaching. There are difficulties, yes, and there is hard work; but I can manage the children. I have the tact, the character, the gift, that nameless something which gives one person control over others; and for the students, they are as yet a pleasure to me. I see how they will learn on to other knowledge, how may bring into form and make available my desultory reading, and there is a great pleasure in the very study itself. And for the rest, if my great grief is never out of mind if it is always present to me, at least

I can put it back, behind my daily occupations and interests. I begin, too, to see dimly that there are other things in life for a woman to whom the light of life is denied. My heart will always be lonely; but how much there is to live for in my mind, my tastes, my love for the beautiful!

My little room has taken another aspect. I have so few wants that I can readily devote part of my earnings to gratifying myself with books, pictures. Such lovely prints as I find in the printshops! and the flowers,—Tom Salyers, who is as kind as a brother, brings me them from the market. And then everything is so new to me; there is so much in life to see, to know. No, I will not be unhappy; happy I suppose I can never be, but I have strength and courage, and a will to rise above this sorrow which once crushed me to the ground. When I wrote the bitter words with which this record begins, I wronged the kind hearts that are around me. I lacked faith in that world wherein I have found help and comfort.

(THE END.)

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