

NE lazy summer day I sauntered over to the law office of my old friend, Judge Howard, hoping to hear a bit of gossip and perhaps a good story as only here I could find it. I have written it from memory: I've been practicing law for 40 years here in Blue River town, with considerable energy, and have all the more zest compatible with success, so quite naturally a great many curious phases of human nature have come my way.

A priest, a politician, a man, a physician, a woman, but all the different sorts of men, women and children that have ever been created flock to a lawyer's shop with their tales of joy and woe.

"Now that I am getting old and easing up a bit in my work, the phantoms of many bygone comedies, tragedies and romances crowd in upon me, and I look through my idle brain. Some of them are grotesque as the antics of Harlequin, some of them as dark and gruesome as any medieval tale, and some are as fragrant as the flowers of the sweet alyssum, the flower god of the honey bee, the shrine of the butterfly. All of them are redolent of human nature.

Speaking of sweet alyssum, and you ever hear the story of Sweet Alyssum, the Old Queen of Roger township? No? Well, it has all sorts of human nature in it, so I'll tell you about her. She brought out and sold millions of dollars of Roger township. Of course, I did not see and hear all that I shall tell you, but I'll go ahead and give you the story without stopping to explain just how I learned it.

I suppose there never was on earth, nor any place else, anything or any person as beautiful as Sweet Alyssum Brooks. Her hair was a golden brown, but her father, out of a heart full of love, coined the diminutive "Lissem," and later another man, also out of a heart full of love, called her "Lissem," and so it remained, officially, to this day. And aside from a million beautiful, Lissem was also a masochist.

Three or four years after the war, Roanoke Brooks, a splendid type of primitive manhood, came up from Kentucky and rented a small farm in Roger township, an "outlying" district some 10 or 12 miles north of here. Roanoke, himself, is authority for the statement that he was not a masochist, but that his ill fortune had continued to grow in virulence until Sweet Alyssum was born. At any rate, after he had settled in Roger township, he was a very good man against him. He and his wife were sick most of the time, and his crops were poor all of the time. If by chance he managed to save a little money, he had to pay it out for a doctor, although a gentle, kindly man by nature, he would fight if any one called him a "d—d rebel." And some enthusiastic patriot was always ready to give him a dollar whenever Roanoke got a few dollars ahead.

"Blamed if they don't seem to smell my money," Lissem said, one day, when he said, complacently, to me, one day, when seeking my services. "And then some fool ups and holla's 'Dem'd rebel' when he gets licked and I go broke payin' my debts."

Usually when Roanoke visited my office it was with a sad face, but one day he came in radiant. "My lad had led me, Judge," said he. "We've got a mascot at our house. Come last night. The cutest, sweetest little girl baby you ever see. Huh, real little girl baby, you know, call her Lissem. No mo' fight, no mo' fight, fo' me. She brought us good luck, sho' yo' bo'n."

And she did bring good luck, not only to Roanoke, but to the entire "outlying" township. By the time Lissem was 12 years old Roanoke had prospered to the extent that he had a large, two-story, log house, all cozy and comfortable, and as picturesque as Roanoke himself, which is saying a high word for a log house. Of course, a mortgage on his farm which he said he "had only been able to left, not to lift clean off." In after years Lissem loved to tell me how she had histed the pecky thing to the next alyssum clean o'vah into the next county 'i' facks."

I first saw Lissem—and fell in love with her—when I was a young man, and I've been falling in love with her ever since. From babyhood to womanhood she had changed, save in stature, and that had been a glossier black and the glow of her eyes became gentler and softer. If that were possible, while the part of himself which God had given her—the life of her, so to speak—remained until, as womanhood approached, she fairly shone with vital lustre. A woman, you know, who retains her childhood, always has mankind at her feet.

During Lissem's unlucky thirteenth year her mother died, leaving her the sole possessor of her father's love, and him the object of her mother's love, and care. In certain ways her mother's death made a woman of Lissem, and she was a woman from that time she was a baby.

lover could have been. He knew that over to this time she had never had a lover, nor had ever looked upon a man as other than a mere male of the human family, but he also knew that she had never before seen a man of Wyatt's class. So, when he noticed the stranger's glances, Lissem's eyes rose up to do battle with Kentucky hospitality, and he resolved first that the new teacher should not remain a permanent guest in his house, and second that Lissem's education was complete.

"Lissem, I reckon yo' bettah go to bed, 's' the teacher's here," said he. "All right, daddy," answered the girl, wholly unconscious of the attention and jealousy she had aroused, and with "good night" which was intended to include the stranger, she went upstairs.

As Lissem was leaving the room, Wyatt rose, by force of habit in such cases, and by force of an irresistible attraction, involuntarily watched her till the door was closed. Roanoke in turn watched Wyatt. Hospitality had been shown to the stranger, but Wyatt sat down again triumphant. Jealousy spoke with all the restraint Roanoke could muster, which was not much. "Thought yo' was goin' to follo' 'uh."

"Why?" asked Wyatt in natural surprise. "Yo' got up as if yo' war." "A gentleman usually rises when a lady leaves the room," answered Wyatt, instantly recognizing his host's jealousy. "Lissem ain't no lady. She's a child," answered Roanoke in low tones. "Yo' must 'a' thought 'uh' pow'ful pretty, yo' watched 'uh' so close."

"I did not know I was watching her," answered Wyatt, truthfully. "And if I did so offensively I beg your pardon." "That's all right," mumbled Roanoke sulkily. "But after that reception, hospitality, though still somewhat groggy, got on to his feet again and made his devotee ashamed of himself.

In the wakeful hours of the night Roanoke's conscience smote him hip and thigh and he resolved that the sacred laws of hospitality should never again be broken by him because of the probable fact that he was "a dem'd fool 'bout Lissem."

Roanoke had chosen Roger township as his home because it contained a small, every-day, country church, church edifice devoted to the doctrines of the Southern Methodist Episcopal church. For intensity of devotion and strenuousness of brotherly love give him a small, half-storied, shanty congregation belonging to a sect hated by its neighbors and despised by the rest of the world as this church was at that time in the entire South. Such a faith is a thing to conjure with.

Earlier in the day Wyatt had noticed on the mantel shelf a book of discipline of the S. M. E. church, and he knew that he would have to read it one day, when seeking my services. "And then some fool ups and holla's 'Dem'd rebel' when he gets licked and I go broke payin' my debts."

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er part of her color, "and I want to tell you something." The color all came back, then, in a flash and a flood. Wyatt asked: "What do you want to tell me?" After a long pause, she answered: "One thing I want to tell you is that I'm no child. I'm a woman, inside and out—short paws and a rare smile—'especially inside.'" "Since when?" asked Wyatt, laughing, though half regretful that the Latin had been resumed, for he could not help feeling that her beauty was more irresistible than it had ever been before.

"Since our last Latin lesson," answered the girl, hanging her head. "What had the last lesson to do with the changes?" inquired Wyatt, still greatly puzzled, for he had forgotten the incident of his arm and the girl's waist, if, indeed, he had been conscious of it at the time.

"I'm not sure that I should tell you," she answered, smiling and hanging her head. "Do—do you suppose I should?" she asked, looking at him with a smile. "I might tell you what it is, and then if you say I must not tell you, why—'I won't.'"

"I don't know, Lissem, I haven't a hint of what she was saying. You may trust me, I—I believe. But—here he paused and took her hand as he had done hundreds of times before—his right hand. There might be some things you should not tell me."

She gripped his fingers tightly, drew a deep breath and answered: "I'm not sure that I should tell you," she answered, smiling and hanging her head. "Do—do you suppose I should?" she asked, looking at him with a smile. "I might tell you what it is, and then if you say I must not tell you, why—'I won't.'"

Wyatt was helpless. Her love seemed to pervade the entire span of his life and to condense all the years into one little moment of ecstasy. Wyatt, as I have said, was not a masochist, and he was the only proper treatment of the ensuing scene.

hasn't imagination there are many things one can't understand. Well, I want daddy to borrow \$600 and sink a deep well. You know we have a mortgage now and he doesn't like to put another on the place, but I say we'll lift them both and spare if he ventures the security. Who do you think I am? "I think I should try it," I answered. So I put them in the way to borrow money, and Lissem proved a true prophet, for shortly after her eighteenth birthday Roanoke Brooks struck oil and soon was a rich man along with many of his neighbors. Roger township was no longer an "outlying" place, and Lissem had brought it within the pale. Then it was that Wyatt crowned her "Sweet Alyssum," the old queen of Roger township.

Wealth made little change in Roanoke and his surroundings, and as he told me in speaking of Lissem: "It didn't stick him up but that any one should notice. A few comforts and luxuries were added, but Roanoke, Lissem and Wyatt continued to live modestly. Lissem had brought it within the pale, and it was that Wyatt crowned her "Sweet Alyssum," the old queen of Roger township.

Wyatt could have changed all this modest way of life by a word to Lissem, for now she was truly the oil queen and her work was law in the household, but he opposed rather than encouraged innovations.

"I never saw a marble hall such as this," said Lissem one evening, while sitting on the edge of the porch with Wyatt, "but I wouldn't exchange this house for any other place. I like the way you are content to remain. If you wanted to live in a balloon—she paused, laughed softly and took his hand. "Another long pause followed, during which she pressed his hand to her heart and sighed gently three or four times. Then she looked at him and the dark cheeks took a rosier hue as she continued almost inaudibly: "I'm past 18 now—going on 19, and that's pretty old."

Wyatt gently withdrew his hand from her grasp, rose, stooped over her and kissed her on the forehead. She smiled and a word he left her sitting in the dark and fairly ran to his room. The night was one of struggle and anguish for poor Wyatt, but his antagonist was love.

The next evening after dark, much to Lissem's joy and surprise, Wyatt asked her to walk down the path with him, and when they returned they went straight to daddy.

"My Gawd!" exclaimed Roanoke, and lapsed into silence. It looked ominous, but Lissem knelt beside her father's chair and said pleadingly, "I don't want to marry Mr. Wyatt if you object, for we can go on living happily just as we are, but I know God has sent him to me and I'm afraid I should die if I were to lose him. I'm getting pretty old, you know, daddy—almost 19. You don't want me to be an old maid, daddy, and never know the joy of a mother. When I was born, do you, daddy?"

Tears came to the old man's eyes as he answered: "I knew it would come this way. I don't fault with Mr. Wyatt. He's all I could ask a man to be—honest, upright and a Southern Methodist, but he'll take yo' away from me, and then I'll die. Here he broke down and covered his face with his hands.

"No, he won't, daddy," pleaded Lissem. "Will you, Mr. Wyatt?" "Never," I answered Wyatt, placing his hand on the old man's shoulder.

After a long minute of burrowing pain, Roanoke took Wyatt's hand, and to gain strength for the final effort, slowly brought Lissem's hand down from his neck and joined the two in holy clasp over his aching heart. And, as it was in the beginning and ever shall be, Age gave it all to Youth and groaned and gloried in its own sorrow.

One day, while driving past Roanoke's house, I stopped and experienced a distinct shock of jealousy when he told me that Lissem had left home a fortnight before to be married and was expected back that evening with her husband.

"Who is the lucky man?" I asked. "His name is Wyatt," answered Roanoke. "He's a mighty fine gentleman. I reckon you-all don't know him. He's our school teacher—'ben livin' head with us nigh on five vech and hasn't been a mile from the house in all that time."

I did not remember the name nor the man, but when I stopped on my way home that evening I was rendered almost speechless on recognizing the stranger who had spent a week in Blue River four or five years before.

I stayed for supper, and while driving home that night I could not help saying to myself, "Poor Lissem! Poor Lissem!" though I could have given no reason for my forebodings, as Wyatt had made a good impression.

There is always a beaten path to gold, so Roger township soon had many visitors, brought there by Lissem's dream. As has been intimated, however, a mascot does not always bring good luck to herself.

She just came after Lissem's marriage I again saw Wyatt. He came to my office in the custody of the sheriff and asked for a private interview. I took him to my study, and he offered him a chair. "Poor devil!" I pitied him, but my heart was sorest for Sweet Alyssum.

"What can I do for you?" I asked. "I've been arrested," he answered, leaning his elbows on his knees and burying his face in his hands.

"On what charge?" I inquired. "That's only a penitentiary offense," I retorted. "You ought to be hung."

"I know it," he replied. "Do you want to hear my case, or shall I go elsewhere?" "I'll hear you," I answered, after a moment's consideration.

He waited fully three minutes, and began: "My name is Wyatt. I'm Garlan. I was cashier of a New York bank. A hundred thousand dollars was lost, through no criminal fault of mine, for I lost my key to the safe in the same investment. I was sentenced to Sing Sing. I escaped, and in an unlucky hour came here. While in the toms in New York I was served with notice of divorce proceedings, and I married my wife. When I married Lissem I thought—I thought I was divorced. I was wrong."

"That changes the case!" I responded, joyfully. "If you had good reason to believe that your wife had procured a divorce, it is at least a palatable circumstance." "After a long silence he continued: "I lied when I said that I believed my wife had obtained a divorce. A few days after my escape I saw in a New York paper that the case was dismissed. I was madly in love with Lissem. I fought desperately for five years. I tried to run away, but she clung to me so plausibly and so true a time came when I could not leave her. I thought I could remain hidden by her side all the rest of my days. You know Lissem and how she was tempted. But the oil drove visitors. I was recognized by one of them and here I am. A pitiful story of man's weakness! What contempt a lawyer must have for humanity!"

"You are honestly married to Lissem?" I asked. "Yes, it was all regular. I am not rich enough to have a second wife. Lissem has the certificate all blurred by her kisses," he answered, turning his face from me for a moment.

"You are not so much to blame as one might suppose," I remarked. "I'll procure bail for you and then we'll prepare for the defense." "If we defeat this charge, there is the old sentence in New York, and I am gloomily, 'I see no way of escape. I understand that representatives of the bank are here now arranging for extradition."

"They can't extradite you so long as this charge is pending," I suggested. "We'll take one at a time." Early that afternoon Wyatt was at liberty on bail, and it was arranged that Lissem should accompany him and take the awful task of telling Lissem and Roanoke, who knew of the arrest, but not of the nature of the charge.

Wyatt wanted to go with me, but at my suggestion consented to follow in a short time. When I reached the big log house I found Roanoke on the porch in a rustic gown, and Lissem sitting on the lowest of the three front steps holding a sweet little copy of herself, perhaps a year old. The baby was cooing in Lissem's arms, and she was looking at me with a smile and cooing in sweet forgiveness of his unnatural mother. Lissem, though unconscious of my presence, tossed the baby to the sod, where it lay smiling and cooing in sweet forgiveness of its unnatural mother. Lissem, though unconscious of my presence, tossed the baby to the sod, where it lay smiling and cooing in sweet forgiveness of its unnatural mother.

"Why did the sheriff take him?" I asked. "A bad story is better told quickly, so I said: 'Mr. Wyatt has been arrested on a charge of bigamy—another wife in New York. His son on bail and will be here soon.' Lissem turned and resumed her seat on the step, lifting her baby from the grass and holding it in her arms. She looked at me for a moment, went into the house and presently returned with his old long barreled rifle, which he leaned against the porch post.

"I'm right on the edge of the wall," said he, calmly resuming his chair. "I have told you all," I answered. "He has another wife in New York and you are going to prison for having married Lissem."

Lissem looked up quickly at me, then back to the baby. "Roanoke never goes to prison," remarked Roanoke, leaning toward his rifle. "A long silence ensued, Lissem watching her baby and kissing it softly now and then as it cooed and smiled up into his face. Lissem made only for the purpose of holding Wyatt until extradition papers could be procured to take him back to New York, where he was convicted several years ago for looting a bank. He returned to Blue River, New York bank are in Blue River now. It seems that they had reason to believe that Wyatt did not know his wife had obtained a divorce. My opinion is that if the money lost, which was only \$100,000, or such a matter, were paid back, the whole thing would be dropped. I believe it is all a scheme to collect the money from Brooks, which is able to pay it. Wyatt's New York wife obtained a divorce shortly after his conviction, so there would have been no bigamy even had he married this girl."

"Don't come in," I whispered. "Roanoke will shoot you." "I don't care," he returned, evidently meaning just what he said. "How does Lissem take it? Does she hate me?" "No, she could not hate you if she were a try, and she doesn't want to try. She seems to be stunned, but she has shown no emotion of any sort except a cry or two when I first came. She just came after Lissem's marriage I again saw Wyatt. He came to my office in the custody of the sheriff and asked for a private interview. I took him to my study, and he offered him a chair. "Poor devil!" I pitied him, but my heart was sorest for Sweet Alyssum.

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