

heard a man say that has been up the bayou that they was a clean cut pair of hounds, but I give out they ain't outrunnin' them dogs of mine to day," said Bill proudly.

"I dunno," said 'Nervy as she hesitated between a pink and white, and a blue and white calico. "I dunno nothin' about a dog noway, but them bounds of his'n hev got another look about them from our'n. Pa and Lode just took on over 'em till I was worried, fur it did look like they grudged him ov them."

'Nervy had, after much deliberation, finished her purchases, which were so much more than Bill was accustomed to sell to the Dixon family, that his curiosity was piqued. What could 'Nervy Dixon want of two dresses at once, and ribbon, surely she had never indulged in such extravagance before, and he ventured on a personal remark with a knowing wink.

"I should judge you and Bob was about to make it." 'Nervy blushed, but passed over the insinuation in silence, and the storekeeper continued, "Bob, he's been a gitten out boards fur the longest and Lijah Moses was er tellin' me thet he and er lot er the boys had been asked over to a house coverin', and they do say Bob's ma is er fixin' up powerful fer her new darter," he laughed at the joke, "and aims to hev a quiltin' the same day ez the house coverin', so the young folks 'round the settlement will have a good time, sho'."

Bob Mason, who had been of the hunting party that had stated from 'Nervy's home that morning, had brought a message from his mother to the girl bidding her come and spend the day in the absence of the "men folks." Starting early in the day, she finished her "tradin'" and reached Mrs. Mason's by 10 o'clock. Mrs. Mason was on the porch carding cotton in anticipation of the quilting. She greeted 'Nervy in a quiet undemonstrative way, as is the custom of settlers in remote localities, then went on with her carding, the soft rolls falling like snow drifts into a large basket beside her. 'Nervy sat down fanning herself with her bonnet.

"I think it's goin' to rain, it's so warm," she said.

"I ain't carin' if it would, an' sorter cool off things. The sun riz hot this mornin'."

The intense brilliancy of the day made the shadows cast by the althea and peach trees appear as if sketched with crayon upon the white, sandy year. The sky was so light a blue that it looked silver. Against it the pine trees of the hills and the growth

of the swamps blackened as the sun blazed through the August day. Mrs. Mason said:

"I aimed to git a couple of quilts put up next week some time, and layed off to hav' a quiltin'."

'Nervy's face brightened and her gray eyes lighted up with pleasure at the prospect. She pushed back her hair from her forehead, where it clung damply. It was a gesture habitual to her.

Her hair was almost a golden in a strong light, and deepened into a rich brown shadow, waving slightly over a forehead, white by nature but tanned to a rich warm color.

The shadows were too darkly accented for beauty, that lay under her eyes, which were of that peculiar shade that flash with blue lights, under emotions, and are pure gray when in a quiescent state, and perhaps had been black with intense feeling, but there had been no intense moments in 'Nervy's life. There had been no passion gusts, no hopes and no heights of emotion to gauge, nothing but a dead level of monotonous existence.

Her mother died when she was eight years old, and that one grief had left no scar. In the eleven years that had followed she had lived with her father and Lode, in one cabin or another, in a sort of migratory way until they settled at their present home four years ago. Mrs. Mason had been her mother's friend, and had befriended 'Nervy in many ways, even to offering no objection when her only son Bob fell in love with her and by assiduous "keepin' company" had won the girl's consent to marry him. Mrs. Mason had proved a valuable coadjutor to her son, for when 'Nervy had said she could not leave her father and Lode with no "wimmin kin to do for them," Bob's mother replied, "Shaw, yer pa ez likely to git some one to look after him, ef he didn't have you, and Jerry Dixon ain't no bad sort ef he does look fur easy places," and so 'Nervy had been brought to see it was best for her to marry Bob Mason, and Jerry Dixon looked with favor on the match.

"I lowed," continued 'Nervy's hostess, as she plied her cotton cards, "I'd hev you come over and help 'I'd hev you come over the day before and help me cook up a sight of things," 'Nervy assented, "that is ef you ain't too busy yerself. Bob sez ez how'd you fixed the day between you the second Monday in September."

'Nervy looked out across the sandy yard, so blinding hot and white, and then, as if to rest her eyes, upon the dark green distance of the pines.

Mrs. Mason waited a moment, and seeing no responsive gesture, went on:

"Bob said as how it was the most convenient time, for Bro. Jones comes through on his circuit on the second Sunday, and would stay over to marry you all. Bob said you didn't set no store on a justice of the peace a marryin' of yer."

'Nervy felt no shyness in discussing the matter with her prospective mother-in-law. It had been under consideration many times, but somehow that morning she felt a strange reluctance in talking about her wedding day. Mrs. Mason was a widow, her two daughters were married and settled up in what is known as the "Rabbit Walk" neighborhood near the Arkansas line, and only paid visits to their mother at long intervals. She welcomed the idea of 'Nervy's companionship, as her son's wife, and her mind recurred constantly to the theme, and as they cleared up the dinned dishes she said:

"Hev you been sewin', Nervy?"

"Never had nothin' to sew till today for a good while, not since pa sold the yearlin' to Mr. Hudson. Change has been scarce at our house, but I did some tradin' today," and the blue and white calico, a white lawn dress, the ribbon and thread, a bit of lace, a handkerchief with printed border, and a pair of shoes were proudly exhibited. "I allus lowed to get me a white dress and the blue and white one will do for the quiltin' down here."

"Bob he sed, fer me to hev a quiltin' and it would save trouble, the same day as the coverin' come off, and then as the gals wer' a quiltin' and the boys a coverin' all day, it 'pear like to hev a sort of gatherin' at night would be ther thing."

Mrs. Mason was not averse to a "gatherin'," and 'Nervy entered into the scheme of hospitality eagerly, of course; the quilts had to be quilted and the shed room and the new barn covered. It was the custom in many settlements for neighbors to assist each other in work of this kind, and the young men enjoyed the prospect of a "log rollin'" or "house raisin'," or "house coverin'," for it meant a bounteous repast of baked pork, chicken pie, homemade sausage, boiled custard and blackberry pie. It meant that a number of the settlement belles would wait on them at table, and then to end up the day's labors with a dance in the house that was raised, or the barn that was covered, was enjoyment indeed.

It was growing late when 'Nervy made her way homeward, through great aisles of the forest, where the

pine swing censors of sweet incense and the air was filled with the melody of the orchestra that plays unceasingly in the woods made up of the buzz of insects, the tapping of the crimson headed woodpecker, the sudden flatter of hawk, the rasping of locusts, the staccato call of the cardinal bird, the croak of the wood frogs, the whirring of wings and rustling of leaves. This woodland symphony falls unheeded on 'Nervy's ears, so accustomed were they to these sounds. She had no thought of the arches of leafy silver overhead, a ceiling beyond the conception of the most skilled artisan. Her eyes found no beauty in the tree trunks crusted with enamel, the fallen logs that have borrowed the sheen and shades of costly things, the glow of bronze, the glitter of emerald, the fretted gold of the sunlight falling through the foliage upon the path she trod. A great snowy fungi stood in the way, smooth like polished ivory on the outside, with soft brown velvety lining 'Nervy crushed it under foot, its very existence was objectionable to her. "Toad stools is rank pizen" she said, as if in explanation to herself. The sound of a hunting horn in the distance fell upon her ears, she paused and listened. Again it sounded, clearer, louder, a prolonged note, sweet and resonant, beyond the woods. She still waited; again it came, low, tremulous, then swelling louder until it reached its full volume, to die away into echoes that seemed like elfin voices starting up all around her.

"They've killed a deer, certain," she exclaimed; "they allus blows three times when they gits near home. She hastened her steps a trifle and was soon in sight of the cabin, which the hunters had reached but a few moments before. She was greeted by a loud baying of the hounds. Old "Deal" and "Fashion," elated by the day's successful hunt, led the charge upon her, followed by the yelping pack.

"Down Rally! Down Roebuck!" called Morrison to his dogs, that turned at the sound of his voice and fawned apologetically at his feet.

The onset on 'Nervy changed to demonstrations of affection at her nearer approach on the part of her father's dogs, while those of Bill Hudson's seeing their leaders' defection became silent and wagged their tails in a manner that was meant to indicate they saw their mistake and were sorry for it.

"Who killed it?" she asked of the men.

"He shot it at 60 yards," her father said, pointing to Morrison, who looked rather proud of his prowess, as he exhibited a great pair of antlers. A division had been made of the venison and Bob Mason was on his horse ready to leave, with his part of the spoils, and Bill Hudson's also, for as the latter was represented by his dogs he was entitled to equal share.

"You take Bill his venison," said 'Nervy's father, who was master of ceremonies, "ez you're pasin that way, and tell him, Bob, thet Mr. Morrison's dogs was half an hour ahead of our dogs. Tell him it ain't in no pot licker stock to jine yokes with his'n. You tell Bill jest how that black and white spotted hound trailed and jumped thet deer. Pshaw! I don't know ez I'd hev the heart to hunt any more 'thout them dogs of Mr. Morrison's," he said.

"I'll tell him," said Bob, giving glances at 'Nervy that were full of bashful admiration, and had none of that air of proud certainty one finds in an accepted lover. Morrison was looking at her also, and by some occult reasoning, it seems that somehow or somewhere he had seen her or some one that resembled her at that moment—perhaps it was some picture of which she reminded him, standing there tall and straight, the dogs leap-

ing around her. He had not noticed her particularly before, but now she seemed to contrast strongly with the group of men, the horses, the dogs. There was a sense of reserve force, and a strong contained manner that made her different from the father and brother. She calmly surveyed the scene, unabashed, observant, until her eyes for a moment met Morrison's. Then self-consciousness returned under his gaze and a faint color came into her face; she turned toward Bob Mason and said in her even, drawling monotone, "Why yer stay to supper?"

Bob looked as if the temptation was strong, but he remembered the evening chores at home, and said, "I must git home; ain't no one ter do the feedin' but me, and ma she'd like ter bite some of the venison fur supper herself. It's a gittin' late, so I'll ride," and suited the action to the word.

"Lode, yer git some lightard and start a fire, fur you all mus' be cravin' hungry by now."

Morrison had accepted the invitation to stay for supper, laughingly saying that the cooks at camp would spoil the venison, and it had been long since he had had the opportunity of enjoying any, for venison was a luxury in the towns, he explained.

(To be continued.)

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