JOHN FOX JR.

CHARACTERS OF SOUTHERN APPALACHIA

ESSENTIAL NOVELISTS

TACET BOOKS

ESSENTIAL NOVELISTS

John Fox Jr.

EDITED BY

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The Author

John Fox Jr. (December 16, 1862 – July 8, 1919) was an American journalist, novelist, and short story writer.

Born in Stony Point, Kentucky, to John William Fox Sr. and Minerva Worth Carr, Fox studied English at Harvard University. He graduated in 1883 before becoming a reporter in New York City. After working for both New York Times and the New York Sun, he published a successful serialization of his first novel, A Mountain Europa, in Century magazine in 1892. Two moderately successful short story collections followed, as well as his first conventional novel, The Kentuckians in 1898. Fox gained a following as a war correspondent, working for Harper's Weekly in Cuba during the Spanish–American War of 1898, where he served with the "Rough Riders." Six years later he traveled to Asia to report on the Russo-Japanese War for Scribner's magazine.

Though he occasionally wrote for periodicals, after 1904, Fox dedicated much of his attention to fiction. The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come (published in 1903) and The Trail of the Lonesome Pine (published in 1908) are arguably his most well known and successful works, entering the New York Times top ten list of bestselling novels for 1903, 1904, 1908, and 1909 respectively. In The Trail of the Lonesome Pine, the character Devil Judd Tolliver was based on the real life of "Devil John" Wesley Wright, the sheriff of Wise County, Virginia. Many of his works reflected the naturalist style, his childhood in Kentucky's Bluegrass region, and his life among the coal miners of Big Stone Gap, Virginia. Many of his novels were historical romances or period dramas set in that region.

John Fox Jr. died in 1919 of pneumonia in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, and was buried in the family plot in Paris, Kentucky. His marriage to Austrian opera singer Fritzi Scheff in 1908 lasted just over four years. He had no children.

The John Fox Jr. House in Big Stone Gap was turned into a museum after the death of John's sister in 1970. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

The Trail of the Lonesome Pine

I

She sat at the base of the big tree—her little sunbonnet pushed back, her arms locked about her knees, her bare feet gathered under her crimson gown and her deep eyes fixed on the smoke in the valley below. Her breath was still coming fast between her parted lips. There were tiny drops along the roots of her shining hair, for the climb had been steep, and now the shadow of disappointment darkened her eyes. The mountains ran in limitless blue waves towards the mounting sun—but at birth her eyes had opened on them as on the white mists trailing up the steeps below her. Beyond them was a gap in the next mountain chain and down in the little valley, just visible through it, were trailing blue mists as well, and she knew that they were smoke. Where was the great glare of yellow light that the “circuit rider” had told about—and the leaping tongues of fire? Where was the shrieking monster that ran without horses like the wind and tossed back rolling black plumes all streaked with fire? For many days now she had heard stories of the “furriners” who had come into those hills and were doing strange things down there, and so at last she had climbed up through the dewy morning from the cove on the other side to see the wonders for herself. She had never been up there before. She had no business there now, and, if she were found out when she got back, she would get a scolding and maybe something worse from her step-mother—and all that trouble and risk for nothing but smoke. So, she lay back and rested—her little mouth tightening fiercely. It was a big world, though, that was spread before her and a vague awe of it seized her straightway and held her motionless and dreaming. Beyond those white mists trailing up the hills,

beyond the blue smoke drifting in the valley, those limitless blue waves must run under the sun on and on to the end of the world! Her dead sister had gone into that far silence and had brought back wonderful stories of that outer world: and she began to wonder more than ever before whether she would ever go into it and see for herself what was there. With the thought, she rose slowly to her feet, moved slowly to the cliff that dropped sheer ten feet aside from the trail, and stood there like a great scarlet flower in still air. There was the way at her feet—that path that coiled under the cliff and ran down loop by loop through majestic oak and poplar and masses of rhododendron. She drew a long breath and stirred uneasily—she'd better go home now—but the path had a snake-like charm for her and still she stood, following it as far down as she could with her eyes. Down it went, writhing this way and that to a spur that had been swept bare by forest fires. Along this spur it travelled straight for a while and, as her eyes eagerly followed it to where it sank sharply into a covert of maples, the little creature dropped of a sudden to the ground and, like something wild, lay flat.

A human figure had filled the leafy mouth that swallowed up the trail and it was coming towards her. With a thumping heart she pushed slowly forward through the brush until her face, fox-like with cunning and screened by a blueberry bush, hung just over the edge of the cliff, and there she lay, like a crouched panther-cub, looking down. For a moment, all that was human seemed gone from her eyes, but, as she watched, all that was lost came back to them, and something more. She had seen that it was a man, but she had dropped so quickly that she did not see the big, black horse that, unled, was following him. Now both man and horse had stopped. The stranger had taken off his gray slouched hat and he was wiping his face with something white. Something blue was tied loosely about his throat. She had never seen a man like that before. His face was smooth

and looked different, as did his throat and his hands. His breeches were tight and on his feet were strange boots that were the colour of his saddle, which was deep in seat, high both in front and behind and had strange long-hooded stirrups. Starting to mount, the man stopped with one foot in the stirrup and raised his eyes towards her so suddenly that she shrank back again with a quicker throbbing at her heart and pressed closer to the earth. Still, seen or not seen, flight was easy for her, so she could not forbear to look again. Apparently, he had seen nothing—only that the next turn of the trail was too steep to ride, and so he started walking again, and his walk, as he strode along the path, was new to her, as was the erect way with which he held his head and his shoulders.

In her wonder over him, she almost forgot herself, forgot to wonder where he was going and why he was coming into those lonely hills until, as his horse turned a bend of the trail, she saw hanging from the other side of the saddle something that looked like a gun. He was a “raider”—that man: so, cautiously and swiftly then, she pushed herself back from the edge of the cliff, sprang to her feet, dashed past the big tree and, winged with fear, sped down the mountain—leaving in a spot of sunlight at the base of the pine the print of one bare foot in the black earth.

II

He had seen the big pine when he first came to those hills—one morning, at daybreak, when the valley was a sea of mist that threw soft clinging spray to the very mountain tops: for even above the mists, that morning, its mighty head arose—sole visible proof that the earth still slept beneath. Straightway, he wondered how it had ever got

there, so far above the few of its kind that haunted the green dark ravines far below. Some whirlwind, doubtless, had sent a tiny cone circling heavenward and dropped it there. It had sent others, too, no doubt, but how had this tree faced wind and storm alone and alone lived to defy both so proudly? Some day he would learn. Thereafter, he had seen it, at noon—but little less majestic among the oaks that stood about it; had seen it catching the last light at sunset, clean-cut against the after-glow, and like a dark, silent, mysterious sentinel guarding the mountain pass under the moon. He had seen it giving place with sombre dignity to the passing burst of spring—had seen it green among dying autumn leaves, green in the gray of winter trees and still green in a shroud of snow—a changeless promise that the earth must wake to life again. The Lonesome Pine, the mountaineers called it, and the Lonesome Pine it always looked to be. From the beginning it had a curious fascination for him, and straightway within him—half exile that he was—there sprang up a sympathy for it as for something that was human and a brother. And now he was on the trail of it at last. From every point that morning it had seemed almost to nod down to him as he climbed and, when he reached the ledge that gave him sight of it from base to crown, the winds murmured among its needles like a welcoming voice. At once, he saw the secret of its life. On each side rose a cliff that had sheltered it from storms until its trunk had shot upwards so far and so straight and so strong that its green crown could lift itself on and on and bend—blow what might—as proudly and securely as a lily on its stalk in a morning breeze. Dropping his bridle rein he put one hand against it as though on the shoulder of a friend.

“Old Man,” he said, “You must be pretty lonesome up here, and I'm glad to meet you.”

For a while he sat against it—resting. He had no particular purpose that day—no particular destination. His saddle-bags were across the cantle of his cow-boy saddle. His fishing rod was tied under one flap. He was young and his own master. Time was hanging heavy on his hands that day and he loved the woods and the nooks and crannies of them where his own kind rarely made its way. Beyond, the cove looked dark, forbidding, mysterious, and what was beyond he did not know. So down there he would go. As he bent his head forward to rise, his eye caught the spot of sunlight, and he leaned over it with a smile. In the black earth was a human foot-print—too small and slender for the foot of a man, a boy or a woman. Beyond, the same prints were visible—wider apart—and he smiled again. A girl had been there. She was the crimson flash that he saw as he started up the steep and mistook for a flaming bush of sumach. She had seen him coming and she had fled. Still smiling, he rose to his feet.

III

On one side he had left the earth yellow with the coming noon, but it was still morning as he went down on the other side. The laurel and rhododendron still reeked with dew in the deep, ever-shaded ravine. The ferns drenched his stirrups, as he brushed through them, and each dripping tree-top broke the sunlight and let it drop in tent-like beams through the shimmering undermist. A bird flashed here and there through the green gloom, but there was no sound in the air but the footfalls of his horse and the easy creaking of leather under him, the drip of dew overhead and the running of water below. Now and then he could see the same slender foot-prints in the rich loam and he saw them in the sand where the first tiny brook tinkled across the path from a gloomy ravine. There the little creature had taken a

flying leap across it and, beyond, he could see the prints no more. He little guessed that while he halted to let his horse drink, the girl lay on a rock above him, looking down. She was nearer home now and was less afraid; so she had slipped from the trail and climbed above it there to watch him pass. As he went on, she slid from her perch and with cat-footed quiet followed him. When he reached the river she saw him pull in his horse and eagerly bend forward, looking into a pool just below the crossing. There was a bass down there in the clear water—a big one—and the man whistled cheerily and dismounted, tying his horse to a sassafras bush and unbuckling a tin bucket and a curious looking net from his saddle. With the net in one hand and the bucket in the other, he turned back up the creek and passed so close to where she had slipped aside into the bushes that she came near shrieking, but his eyes were fixed on a pool of the creek above and, to her wonder, he strolled straight into the water, with his boots on, pushing the net in front of him.

He was a “raider” sure, she thought now, and he was looking for a “moonshine” still, and the wild little thing in the bushes smiled cunningly—there was no still up that creek—and as he had left his horse below and his gun, she waited for him to come back, which he did, by and by, dripping and soaked to his knees. Then she saw him untie the queer “gun” on his saddle, pull it out of a case and—her eyes got big with wonder—take it to pieces and make it into a long limber rod. In a moment he had cast a minnow into the pool and waded out into the water up to his hips. She had never seen so queer a fishing-pole—so queer a fisherman. How could he get a fish out with that little switch, she thought contemptuously? By and by something hummed queerly, the man gave a slight jerk and a shining fish flopped two feet into the air. It was surely very queer, for the man didn't put his rod over his shoulder and walk

ashore, as did the mountaineers, but stood still, winding something with one hand, and again the fish would flash into the air and then that humming would start again while the fisherman would stand quiet and waiting for a while—and then he would begin to wind again. In her wonder, she rose unconsciously to her feet and a stone rolled down to the ledge below her. The fisherman turned his head and she started to run, but without a word he turned again to the fish he was playing. Moreover, he was too far out in the water to catch her, so she advanced slowly—even to the edge of the stream, watching the fish cut half circles about the man. If he saw her, he gave no notice, and it was well that he did not. He was pulling the bass to and fro now through the water, tiring him out—drowning him—stepping backward at the same time, and, a moment later, the fish slid easily out of the edge of the water, gasping along the edge of a low sand-bank, and the fisherman reaching down with one hand caught him in the gills. Then he looked up and smiled—and she had seen no smile like that before.

“Howdye, Little Girl?”

One bare toe went burrowing suddenly into the sand, one finger went to her red mouth—and that was all. She merely stared him straight in the eye and he smiled again.

“Cat got your tongue?”

Her eyes fell at the ancient banter, but she lifted them straightway and stared again.

“You live around here?”

She stared on.

“Where?”

No answer.

“What's your name, little girl?”

And still she stared.

“Oh, well, of course, you can't talk, if the cat's got your tongue.”

The steady eyes leaped angrily, but there was still no answer, and he bent to take the fish off his hook, put on a fresh minnow, turned his back and tossed it into the pool.

“Hit hain't!”

He looked up again. She surely was a pretty little thing—and more, now that she was angry.

“I should say not,” he said teasingly. “What did you say your name was?”

“What's YO' name?”

The fisherman laughed. He was just becoming accustomed to the mountain etiquette that commands a stranger to divulge himself first.

“My name's—Jack.”

“An' mine's—Jill.” She laughed now, and it was his time for surprise—where could she have heard of Jack and Jill?

His line rang suddenly.

“Jack,” she cried, “you got a bite!”

He pulled, missed the strike, and wound in. The minnow was all right, so he tossed it back again.

“That isn't your name,” he said.

“If 'tain't, then that ain't your'n?”

“Yes 'tis,” he said, shaking his head affirmatively.

A long cry came down the ravine:

“J-u-n-e! eh—oh—J-u-n-e!” That was a queer name for the mountains, and the fisherman wondered if he had heard aright—June.

The little girl gave a shrill answering cry, but she did not move.

“Thar now!” she said.

“Who's that—your Mammy?”

“No, 'tain't—hit's my step-mammy. I'm a goin' to ketch hell now.” Her innocent eyes turned sullen and her baby mouth tightened.

“Good Lord!” said the fisherman, startled, and then he stopped—the words were as innocent on her lips as a benediction.

“Have you got a father?” Like a flash, her whole face changed.

“I reckon I have.”

“Where is he?”

“Hyeh he is!” drawled a voice from the bushes, and it had a tone that made the fisherman whirl suddenly. A giant mountaineer stood on the bank above him, with a Winchester in the hollow of his arm.

“How are you?” The giant's heavy eyes lifted quickly, but he spoke to the girl.

“You go on home—what you doin' hyeh gassin' with furriners!”

The girl shrank to the bushes, but she cried sharply back:

“Don't you hurt him now, Dad. He ain't even got a pistol. He ain't no—”

“Shet up!” The little creature vanished and the mountaineer turned to the fisherman, who had just put on a fresh minnow and tossed it into the river.

“Purty well, thank you,” he said shortly. “How are you?”

“Fine!” was the nonchalant answer. For a moment there was silence and a puzzled frown gathered on the mountaineer's face.

“That's a bright little girl of yours—What did she mean by telling you not to hurt me?”

“You haven't been long in these mountains, have ye?”

“No—not in THESE mountains—why?” The fisherman looked around and was almost startled by the fierce gaze of his questioner.

“Stop that, please,” he said, with a humourous smile. “You make me nervous.”

The mountaineer's bushy brows came together across the bridge of his nose and his voice rumbled like distant thunder.

“What's yo' name, stranger, an' what's yo' business over hyeh?”

“Dear me, there you go! You can see I'm fishing, but why does everybody in these mountains want to know my name?”

“You heerd me!”

“Yes.” The fisherman turned again and saw the giant's rugged face stern and pale with open anger now, and he, too, grew suddenly serious.

“Suppose I don't tell you,” he said gravely. “What—”

“Git!” said the mountaineer, with a move of one huge hairy hand up the mountain. “An' git quick!”

The fisherman never moved and there was the click of a shell thrown into place in the Winchester and a guttural oath from the mountaineer's beard.

“Damn ye,” he said hoarsely, raising the rifle. “I'll give ye—”

“Don't, Dad!” shrieked a voice from the bushes. “I know his name, hit's Jack—” the rest of the name was unintelligible. The mountaineer dropped the butt of his gun to the ground and laughed.

“Oh, air YOU the engineer?”

The fisherman was angry now. He had not moved hand or foot and he said nothing, but his mouth was set hard and his bewildered blue eyes had a glint in them that the mountaineer did not at the moment see. He was leaning with one arm on the muzzle of his Winchester, his face had suddenly become suave and shrewd and now he laughed again:

“So you're Jack Hale, air ye?”

The fisherman spoke. “JOHN Hale, except to my friends.” He looked hard at the old man.

“Do you know that's a pretty dangerous joke of yours, my friend—I might have a gun myself sometimes. Did you think you could scare me?” The mountaineer stared in genuine surprise.

“Twusn't no joke,” he said shortly. “An' I don't waste time skeering folks. I reckon you don't know who I be?”

“I don't care who you are.” Again the mountaineer stared.

“No use gittin' mad, young feller,” he said coolly. “I mistaken ye fer somebody else an' I axe yer pardon. When you git through fishin' come up to the house right up the creek thar an' I'll give ye a dram.”

“Thank you,” said the fisherman stiffly, and the mountaineer turned silently away. At the edge of the bushes, he looked back; the stranger was still fishing, and the old man went on with a shake of his head.

“He'll come,” he said to himself. “Oh, he'll come!”

That very point Hale was debating with himself as he unavailingly cast his minnow into the swift water and slowly wound it in again. How did that old man know his name? And would the old savage really have hurt him had he not found out who he was? The little girl was a wonder: evidently she had muffled his last name on purpose—not knowing it herself—and it was a quick and cunning ruse. He owed her something for that—why did she try to protect him? Wonderful eyes, too, the little thing had—deep and dark—and how the flame did dart from them when she got angry! He smiled, remembering—he liked that. And her hair—it was exactly like the gold-bronze on the wing of a wild turkey that he had shot the day before. Well, it was noon now, the fish had stopped biting after the wayward fashion of bass, he was hungry and thirsty and he would go up and see the little girl and the giant again and get that promised dram. Once more, however, he let his minnow float down into the shadow of a big rock, and while he was winding in, he looked up to see in the road two people on a gray horse, a man with a woman behind him—both old and spectacled—

all three motionless on the bank and looking at him: and he wondered if all three had stopped to ask his name and his business. No, they had just come down to the creek and both they must know already.

“Ketching any?” called out the old man, cheerily.

“Only one,” answered Hale with equal cheer. The old woman pushed back her bonnet as he waded through the water towards them and he saw that she was puffing a clay pipe. She looked at the fisherman and his tackle with the naive wonder of a child, and then she said in a commanding undertone.

“Go on, Billy.”

“Now, ole Hon, I wish ye'd jes' wait a minute.” Hale smiled. He loved old people, and two kinder faces he had never seen—two gentler voices he had never heard.

“I reckon you got the only green pyerch up hyeh,” said the old man, chuckling, “but thar's a sight of 'em down thar below my old mill.” Quietly the old woman hit the horse with a stripped branch of elm and the old gray, with a switch of his tail, started.

“Wait a minute, Hon,” he said again, appealingly, “won't ye?” but calmly she hit the horse again and the old man called back over his shoulder:

“You come on down to the mill an' I'll show ye whar you can ketch a mess.”

“All right,” shouted Hale, holding back his laughter, and on they went, the old man remonstrating in the kindliest way—the old woman silently puffing her pipe and making no answer except to flay gently the rump of the lazy old gray.

Hesitating hardly a moment, Hale unjointed his pole, left his minnow bucket where it was, mounted his horse and rode up the path. About him, the beech leaves gave back the gold of the autumn sunlight, and a little ravine, high under the crest of the mottled mountain, was on fire with the scarlet of maple. Not even yet had the morning chill left the densely shaded path. When he got to the bare crest of a little rise, he could see up the creek a spiral of blue rising swiftly from a stone chimney. Geese and ducks were hunting crawfish in the little creek that ran from a milk-house of logs, half hidden by willows at the edge of the forest, and a turn in the path brought into view a log-cabin well chinked with stones and plaster, and with a well-built porch. A fence ran around the yard and there was a meat house near a little orchard of apple-trees, under which were many hives of bee-gums. This man had things “hung up” and was well-to-do. Down the rise and through a thicket he went, and as he approached the creek that came down past the cabin there was a shrill cry ahead of him.

“Whoa thar, Buck! Gee-haw, I tell ye!” An ox-wagon evidently was coming on, and the road was so narrow that he turned his horse into the bushes to let it pass.

“Whoa—Haw!—Gee—Gee—Buck, Gee, I tell ye! I'll knock yo' fool head off the fust thing you know!”

Still there was no sound of ox or wagon and the voice sounded like a child's. So he went on at a walk in the thick sand, and when he turned the bushes he pulled up again with a low laugh. In the road across the creek was a chubby, tow-haired boy with a long switch in his right hand, and a pine dagger and a string in his left. Attached to the string and tied by one hind leg was a frog. The boy was using the switch as a goad and driving the frog as an ox, and he was as earnest as though both were real.

“I give ye a little rest now, Buck,” he said, shaking his head earnestly. “Hit's a purty hard pull hyeh, but I know, by Gum, you can make hit—if you hain't too durn lazy. Now, git up, Buck!” he yelled suddenly, flaying the sand with his switch. “Git up—Whoa—Haw—Gee, Gee!” The frog hopped several times.

“Whoa, now!” said the little fellow, panting in sympathy. “I knowed you could do it.” Then he looked up. For an instant he seemed terrified but he did not run. Instead he stealthily shifted the pine dagger over to his right hand and the string to his left.

“Here, boy,” said the fisherman with affected sternness: “What are you doing with that dagger?”

The boy's breast heaved and his dirty fingers clenched tight around the whittled stick.

“Don't you talk to me that-a-way,” he said with an ominous shake of his head. “I'll gut ye!”

The fisherman threw back his head, and his peal of laughter did what his sternness failed to do. The little fellow wheeled suddenly, and his feet spurned the sand around the bushes for home—the astonished frog dragged bumping after him. “Well!” said the fisherman.

IV

Even the geese in the creek seemed to know that he was a stranger and to distrust him, for they cackled and, spreading their wings, fled cackling up the stream. As he neared the house, the little girl ran around the stone chimney, stopped short, shaded her eyes with one hand for

a moment and ran excitedly into the house. A moment later, the bearded giant slouched out, stooping his head as he came through the door.

“Hitch that 'ar post to yo' hoss and come right in,” he thundered cheerily. “I'm waitin' fer ye.”

The little girl came to the door, pushed one brown slender hand through her tangled hair, caught one bare foot behind a deer-like ankle and stood motionless. Behind her was the boy—his dagger still in hand.

“Come right in!” said the old man, “we are purty pore folks, but you're welcome to what we have.”

The fisherman, too, had to stoop as he came in, for he, too, was tall. The interior was dark, in spite of the wood fire in the big stone fireplace. Strings of herbs and red-pepper pods and twisted tobacco hung from the ceiling and down the wall on either side of the fire; and in one corner, near the two beds in the room, hand-made quilts of many colours were piled several feet high. On wooden pegs above the door where ten years before would have been buck antlers and an old-fashioned rifle, lay a Winchester; on either side of the door were auger holes through the logs (he did not understand that they were port-holes) and another Winchester stood in the corner. From the mantel the butt of a big 44-Colt's revolver protruded ominously. On one of the beds in the corner he could see the outlines of a figure lying under a brilliantly figured quilt, and at the foot of it the boy with the pine dagger had retreated for refuge. From the moment he stooped at the door something in the room had made him vaguely uneasy, and when his eyes in swift survey came back to the fire, they passed the blaze swiftly and met on the edge of the light another pair of eyes burning on him.

“Howdye!” said Hale.

“Howdye!” was the low, unpropitiating answer.

The owner of the eyes was nothing but a boy, in spite of his length: so much of a boy that a slight crack in his voice showed that it was just past the throes of “changing,” but those black eyes burned on without swerving—except once when they flashed at the little girl who, with her chin in her hand and one foot on the top rung of her chair, was gazing at the stranger with equal steadiness. She saw the boy's glance, she shifted her knees impatiently and her little face grew sullen. Hale smiled inwardly, for he thought he could already see the lay of the land, and he wondered that, at such an age, such fierceness could be: so every now and then he looked at the boy, and every time he looked, the black eyes were on him. The mountain youth must have been almost six feet tall, young as he was, and while he was lanky in limb he was well knit. His jean trousers were stuffed in the top of his boots and were tight over his knees which were well-moulded, and that is rare with a mountaineer. A loop of black hair curved over his forehead, down almost to his left eye. His nose was straight and almost delicate and his mouth was small, but extraordinarily resolute. Somewhere he had seen that face before, and he turned suddenly, but he did not startle the lad with his abruptness, nor make him turn his gaze.

“Why, haven't I—?” he said. And then he suddenly remembered. He had seen that boy not long since on the other side of the mountains, riding his horse at a gallop down the county road with his reins in his teeth, and shooting a pistol alternately at the sun and the earth with either hand. Perhaps it was as well not to recall the incident. He turned to the old mountaineer.

“Do you mean to tell me that a man can't go through these mountains without telling everybody who asks him what his name is?”

The effect of his question was singular. The old man spat into the fire and put his hand to his beard. The boy crossed his legs suddenly and shoved his muscular fingers deep into his pockets. The figure shifted position on the bed and the infant at the foot of it seemed to clench his toy-dagger a little more tightly. Only the little girl was motionless—she still looked at him, unwinking. What sort of wild animals had he fallen among?

“No, he can't—an' keep healthy.” The giant spoke shortly.

“Why not?”

“Well, if a man hain't up to some devilment, what reason's he got fer not tellin' his name?”

“That's his business.”

“Tain't over hyeh. Hit's mine. Ef a man don't want to tell his name over hyeh, he's a spy or a raider or a officer looking fer somebody or,” he added carelessly, but with a quick covert look at his visitor—“he's got some kind o' business that he don't want nobody to know about.”

“Well, I came over here—just to—well, I hardly know why I did come.”

“Jess so,” said the old man dryly. “An' if ye ain't looking fer trouble, you'd better tell your name in these mountains, whenever you're axed. Ef enough people air backin' a custom anywhar hit goes, don't hit?”

His logic was good—and Hale said nothing. Presently the old man rose with a smile on his face that looked cynical, picked up a black lump and threw it into the fire. It caught fire,

crackled, blazed, almost oozed with oil, and Hale leaned forward and leaned back.

“Pretty good coal!”

“Hain't it, though?” The old man picked up a sliver that had flown to the hearth and held a match to it. The piece blazed and burned in his hand.

“I never seed no coal in these mountains like that—did you?”

“Not often—find it around here?”

“Right hyeh on this farm—about five feet thick!”

“What?”

“An' no partin'.”

“No partin'”—it was not often that he found a mountaineer who knew what a parting in a coal bed was.

“A friend o' mine on t'other side,”—a light dawned for the engineer.

“Oh,” he said quickly. “That's how you knew my name.”

“Right you air, stranger. He tol' me you was a—expert.”

The old man laughed loudly. “An' that's why you come over hyeh.”

“No, it isn't.”

“Co'se not,”—the old fellow laughed again. Hale shifted the talk.

“Well, now that you know my name, suppose you tell me what yours is?”

“Tolliver—Judd Tolliver.” Hale started.

“Not Devil Judd!”

“That's what some evil folks calls me.” Again he spoke shortly. The mountaineers do not like to talk about their feuds. Hale knew this—and the subject was dropped. But he watched the huge mountaineer with interest. There was no more famous character in all those hills than the giant before him—yet his face was kind and was good-humoured, but the nose and eyes were the beak and eyes of some bird of prey. The little girl had disappeared for a moment. She came back with a blue-backed spelling-book, a second reader and a worn copy of “Mother Goose,” and she opened first one and then the other until the attention of the visitor was caught—the black-haired youth watching her meanwhile with lowering brows.

“Where did you learn to read?” Hale asked. The old man answered:

“A preacher come by our house over on the Nawth Fork 'bout three year ago, and afore I knowed it he made me promise to send her sister Sally to some school up thar on the edge of the settlements. And after she come home, Sal larned that little gal to read and spell. Sal died 'bout a year ago.”

Hale reached over and got the spelling-book, and the old man grinned at the quick, unerring responses of the little girl, and the engineer looked surprised. She read, too, with unusual facility, and her pronunciation was very precise and not at all like her speech.

“You ought to send her to the same place,” he said, but the old fellow shook his head.

“I couldn't git along without her.”

The little girl's eyes began to dance suddenly, and, without opening “Mother Goose,” she began:

“Jack and Jill went up a hill,” and then she broke into a laugh and Hale laughed with her.

Abruptly, the boy opposite rose to his great length.

“I reckon I better be goin'.” That was all he said as he caught up a Winchester, which stood unseen by his side, and out he stalked. There was not a word of good-by, not a glance at anybody. A few minutes later Hale heard the creak of a barn door on wooden hinges, a cursing command to a horse, and four feet going in a gallop down the path, and he knew there went an enemy.

“That's a good-looking boy—who is he?”

The old man spat into the fire. It seemed that he was not going to answer and the little girl broke in:

“Hit's my cousin Dave—he lives over on the Nawth Fork.”

That was the seat of the Tolliver-Falin feud. Of that feud, too, Hale had heard, and so no more along that line of inquiry. He, too, soon rose to go.

“Why, ain't ye goin' to have something to eat?”

“Oh, no, I've got something in my saddlebags and I must be getting back to the Gap.”

“Well, I reckon you ain't. You're jes' goin' to take a snack right here.” Hale hesitated, but the little girl was looking at him with such unconscious eagerness in her dark eyes that he sat down again.

“All right, I will, thank you.” At once she ran to the kitchen and the old man rose and pulled a bottle of white liquid from

under the quilts.

“I reckon I can trust ye,” he said. The liquor burned Hale like fire, and the old man, with a laugh at the face the stranger made, tossed off a tumblerful.

“Gracious!” said Hale, “can you do that often?”

“Afore breakfast, dinner and supper,” said the old man —“but I don't.” Hale felt a plucking at his sleeve. It was the boy with the dagger at his elbow.

“Less see you laugh that-a-way agin,” said Bub with such deadly seriousness that Hale unconsciously broke into the same peal.

“Now,” said Bub, unwinking, “I ain't afeard o' you no more.”

V

Awaiting dinner, the mountaineer and the “furriner” sat on the porch while Bub carved away at another pine dagger on the stoop. As Hale passed out the door, a querulous voice said “Howdye” from the bed in the corner and he knew it was the step-mother from whom the little girl expected some nether-world punishment for an offence of which he was ignorant. He had heard of the feud that had been going on between the red Falins and the black Tollivers for a quarter of a century, and this was Devil Judd, who had earned his nickname when he was the leader of his clan by his terrible strength, his marksmanship, his cunning and his courage. Some years since the old man had retired from the leadership, because he was tired of fighting or because he had quarrelled with his brother Dave and his foster-brother, Bad Rufe—known as the terror of the Tollivers—or from

some unknown reason, and in consequence there had been peace for a long time—the Falins fearing that Devil Judd would be led into the feud again, the Tollivers wary of starting hostilities without his aid. After the last trouble, Bad Rufe Tolliver had gone West and old Judd had moved his family as far away as possible. Hale looked around him: this, then, was the home of Devil Judd Tolliver; the little creature inside was his daughter and her name was June. All around the cabin the wooded mountains towered except where, straight before his eyes, Lonesome Creek slipped through them to the river, and the old man had certainly picked out the very heart of silence for his home. There was no neighbour within two leagues, Judd said, except old Squire Billy Beams, who ran a mill a mile down the river. No wonder the spot was called Lonesome Cove.

“You must ha' seed Uncle Billy and ole Hon passin',” he said.

“I did.” Devil Judd laughed and Hale made out that “Hon” was short for Honey.

“Uncle Billy used to drink right smart. Ole Hon broke him. She followed him down to the grocery one day and walked in. 'Come on, boys—let's have a drink'; and she set 'em up an' set 'em up until Uncle Billy most went crazy. He had hard work gittin' her home, an' Uncle Billy hain't teched a drap since.” And the old mountaineer chuckled again.

All the time Hale could hear noises from the kitchen inside. The old step-mother was abed, he had seen no other woman about the house and he wondered if the child could be cooking dinner. Her flushed face answered when she opened the kitchen door and called them in. She had not only cooked but now she served as well, and when he thanked her, as he did every time she passed something to him, she would colour faintly. Once or twice her hand seemed to tremble, and he never looked at her but her

questioning dark eyes were full upon him, and always she kept one hand busy pushing her thick hair back from her forehead. He had not asked her if it was her footprints he had seen coming down the mountain for fear that he might betray her, but apparently she had told on herself, for Bub, after a while, burst out suddenly:

“June, thar, thought you was a raider.” The little girl flushed and the old man laughed.

“So'd you, pap,” she said quietly.

“That's right,” he said. “So'd anybody. I reckon you're the first man that ever come over hyeh jus' to go a-fishin',” and he laughed again. The stress on the last words showed that he believed no man had yet come just for that purpose, and Hale merely laughed with him. The old fellow gulped his food, pushed his chair back, and when Hale was through, he wasted no more time.

“Want to see that coal?”

“Yes, I do,” said Hale.

“All right, I'll be ready in a minute.”

The little girl followed Hale out on the porch and stood with her back against the railing.

“Did you catch it?” he asked. She nodded, unsmiling.

“I'm sorry. What were you doing up there?” She showed no surprise that he knew that she had been up there, and while she answered his question, he could see that she was thinking of something else.

“I'd heerd so much about what you furriners was a-doin' over thar.”