


***HAROLD BELL  
WRIGHT***



***THE RE-  
CREATION  
OF BRIAN  
KENT***

**Harold Bell Wright**

# **The Re-Creation of Brian Kent**

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# CHAPTER I.

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## A REMARKABLE WOMAN.

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I remember as well as though it were yesterday the first time I met Auntie Sue.

It happened during my first roaming visit to the Ozarks, when I had wandered by chance, one day, into the Elbow Rock neighborhood. Twenty years it was, at least, before the time of this story. She was standing in the door of her little schoolhouse, the ruins of which you may still see, halfway up the long hill from the log house by the river, where the most of this story was lived.

It was that season of the year when the gold and brown of our Ozark Hills is overlaid with a filmy veil of delicate blue haze and the world is hushed with the solemn sweetness of the passing of the summer. And as the old gentlewoman stood there in the open door of that rustic temple of learning, with the deep-shadowed, wooded hillside in the background, and, in front, the rude clearing with its crooked rail fence along which the scarlet sumac flamed, I thought,—as I still think, after all these years,—that I had never before seen such a woman.

Fifty years had gone into the making of that sterling character which was builded upon a foundation of many generations of noble ancestors. Without home or children of her own, the life strength of her splendid womanhood had been given to the teaching of boys and girls. An old-maid

schoolteacher? Yes,—if you will. But, as I saw her standing there that day,—tall and slender, dressed in a simple gown that was fitting to her work,—there was a queenly dignity, a stately sweetness, in her bearing that made me feel, somehow, as if I had come unexpectedly into the presence of royalty. Not the royalty of caste and court and station with their glittering pretenses of superiority and their superficial claims to distinction,—I do not mean that; I mean that true royalty which needs no caste or court or station but makes itself felt because it IS.

She did not notice me at first, for the noise of the children at play in the yard covered the sound of my approach, and she was looking far, far away, over the river which lay below at the foot of the hill; over the forest-clad mountains in the glory of their brown and gold; over the vast sweep of the tree-crowned Ozark ridges that receded wave after wave into the blue haze until, in the vastness of the distant sky, they were lost. And something made me know that, in the moment's respite from her task, the woman was looking even beyond the sky itself.

Her profile, clean-chiselled, but daintily formed, was beautiful in its gentle strength. Her hair was soft and silvery like the gray mist of the river in the morning. Then she turned to greet me, and I saw her eyes. Boy that I was then, and not given overmuch to serious thought, I knew that the high, unwavering purpose, the loving sympathy, and tender understanding that shone in the calm depth of those eyes could belong only to one who habitually looks unafraid beyond all earthly scenes. Only those who have learned thus to look beyond the material horizon of our little day

have that beautiful inner light which shone in the eyes of Auntie Sue—the teacher of a backwoods school.

Auntie Sue had come to the Elbow Rock neighborhood the summer preceding that fall when I first met her. She had grown too old, she said, with her delightful little laugh, to be of much use in the larger schools of the more thickly populated sections of the country. But she was still far too young, she stoutly maintained, to be altogether useless.

Tom Warden, who lived just over the ridge from the schoolhouse, and who was blessed with the largest wife, the largest family, and the most pretentious farm in the county, had kinsfolk somewhere in Illinois. Through these relatives of the Ozark farmer Miss Susan Wakefield had learned of the needs of the Elbow Rock school, and so, finally, had come into the hills. It was the influential Tom who secured for her the modest position. It was the motherly Mrs. Tom who made her at home in the Warden household. It was the Warden boys and girls who first called her “Auntie Sue.” But it was Auntie Sue herself who won so large a place in the hearts of the simple mountain folk of the district that she held her position year after year, until she finally gave up teaching altogether.

Not one of her Ozark friends ever came to know in detail the history of this remarkable woman's life. It was known in a general way that she was born in Connecticut; that she had a brother somewhere in some South-American country; that two other brothers had been killed in the Civil War; that she had taught in the lower and intermediate grades of public schools in various places all the years of her womanhood. Also, it was known that she had never married.

“And that,” said Uncle Lige Potter, voicing the unanimous opinion, of the countryside, “is a doggone funny thing and plumb unnatural, considerin' the kind of woman she is.”

To which Lem Jordan,—who was then living with his fourth wife, and might therefore be held to speak with a degree of authority,—added: “Hit sure is a dad burned shame, an' a plumb disgrace to the men of this here country, when you come to look at the sort of wimmen most of 'em are a marryin' most of the time.”

Another matter of universal and never-failing interest to the mountain folk was the unprecedented number of letters that Auntie Sue received and wrote. That some of these letters written by their backwoods teacher were addressed to men and women of such prominence in the world that their names were known even to that remote Ozark district was a source of no little pride to Auntie Sue's immediate neighbors, and served to mark her in their eyes with no small distinction.

It was during the fourth year of her life amid the scenes of this story,—as I recall time,—that Auntie Sue invested the small savings of her working years in the little log house by the river and the eighty acres of land known as the “Old Bill Wilson place.”

The house was a substantial building of three rooms, a lean-to kitchen, and a porch overlooking the river. The log barn, with “Prince,” a gentle old horse, and “Bess,” a mild-mannered, brindle cow, completed the modest establishment. About thirty acres of the land were cleared and under cultivation of a sort. The remaining acreage was in timber. The price, under the kindly and expert supervision



of Tom Warden, was fifteen dollars an acre. But Auntie Sue always laughingly insisted that she really paid fifty cents an acre for the land and fourteen dollars and a half an acre for the sunsets.

The tillable land, except for the garden, she “let out on shares,” always under the friendly guardianship of neighbor Tom; while Tom's boys cared for the little garden in season, and saw to it that the woodpile was always ample and ready for the stove. And, in addition to these fixed and regular homely services, there were many offerings of helpful hands whenever other needs arose; for, as time passed, there came to be in all the Elbow Rock district scarce a man, young or old, who did not now and then honor himself by doing some little job for Auntie Sue; while the women and girls, in the same neighborly spirit, brought from their own humble households many tokens of their loving thoughtfulness. And never did one visit that little log house by the river without the consciousness of something received from the silvery-haired old teacher—a something intangible, perhaps, which they could not have expressed in words, but which, nevertheless, enriched the lives of those simple mountain people with a very real joy and a very tangible happiness.

For six years, Auntie Sue continued teaching the Elbow Rock school;—climbing the hill in the morning from her log house by the river to the cabin schoolhouse in the clearing on the mountain-side above; returning in the late afternoon, when her day's work was over, down the winding road to her little home, there to watch, from the porch that overlooked the river, the sunset in the evening. And every

year the daily climb grew a little harder; the days of work grew a little longer; she went down the hill in the afternoon a little slower. And every year the sunsets were to her eyes more beautiful; the evening skies to her understanding glowed with richer meaning; the twilight hours filled her heart with a deeper peace.

And so, at last, her teaching days were over; that is, she taught no more in the log schoolhouse in the clearing on the mountain-side. But in her little home beside the river she continued her work; not from text-books, indeed, but as all such souls must continue to teach, until the sun sets for the last time upon their mortal days.

Work-worn, toil-hardened mountaineer mothers, whose narrow world denied them so many of the finer thoughts and things, came to counsel with this childless woman, and to learn from her a little of the art of contentment and happiness. Strong men, of rude dress and speech, whose lives were as rough as the hills in which they were reared, and whose thoughts were often as crude as their half-savage and sometimes lawless customs, came to sit at the feet of this gentle one, who received them all with such kindly interest and instinctive understanding. And young men and girls came, drawn by the magic that was hers, to confide in this woman who listened with such rare tact and loving sympathy to their troubles and their dreams, and who, in the deepest things of their young lives, was mother to them all.

Nor were the mountain folk her only disciples. Always there were the letters she continued to write, addressed to almost every corner of the land. And every year there would

come, for a week or a month, at different times during the summer, men and women from the great world of larger affairs who had need of the strength and courage and patience and hope they never failed to find in that little log house by the river. And so, in time, it came to be known that those letters written by Auntie Sue went to men and women who, in their childhood school days, had received from her their first lessons in writing; and that her visitors, many of them distinguished in the world of railroads and cities, were of that large circle of busy souls who had never ceased to be her pupils.

Thus it came that the garden was made a little larger, and two rooms were added to the house, with other modest improvements, to accommodate Auntie Sue's grown-up boys and girls when they came to visit her. But never was there a hired servant, so that her guests must do their own household tasks, because, Auntie Sue said, that was good for them and mostly what they needed.

It should also be said here that among her many pupils who lived beyond the sky-line of the far, blue hills, not one knew more of the real secret of Auntie Sue's life and character than did the Ozark mountaineers of the Elbow Rock district, among whom she had chosen to pass the evening of her day.

Then came one who learned the secret. He learned—but that is my story. I must not tell the secret here.

## **CHAPTER II.**

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### **THE MAN IN THE DARK.**

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A man stood at a window, looking out into the night. There was no light in the room. The stars were hidden behind a thick curtain of sullen clouds.

The house was a wretchedly constructed, long-neglected building of a type common to those old river towns that in their many years of uselessness have lost all civic pride, and in their own resultant squalor and filth have buried their self-respect. A dingy, scarcely legible sign over the treacherous board walk, in front, by the sickly light of a smoke-grimed kerosene lantern, announced that the place was a hotel.

Dark as it was, the man at the window could see the river. The trees that lined the bank opposite the town were mere ghostly shadows against the gloomy masses of the low hills that rose from the water's edge, indistinct, mysterious, and unreal, into the threatening sky. The higher mountains that reared their crests beyond the hills were invisible. The stream itself swept sullenly through the night,—a resistless flood of dismal power, as if, turbid with wrecked souls, with the lost hopes and ruined dreams of men, it was fit only to bear vessels freighted with sorrow, misfortune, and despair.

The manner of the man at the window was as if some woeful spirit of the melancholy scene were calling him. With head bowed, and face turned a little to one side, he listened

intently as one listens to voices that are muffled and indistinct. He pressed his face close to the glass, and with straining eyes tried to see more clearly the ghostly trees, the sombre hills, and the gloomy river. Three times he turned from the window to pace to and fro in the darkened room, and every time his steps brought him again to the casement, as if in obedience to some insistent voice that summoned him. The fourth time, he turned from the window more quickly, with a gesture of assenting decision.

The crackling snap of a match broke the dead stillness. The sudden flare of light stabbed the darkness. As he applied the tiny, wavering flame to the wick of a lamp that stood on the cheap, old-fashioned bureau, the man's hand shook until the chimney rattled against the wire standards of the burner. Turning quickly from the lighted lamp, the man sprang again to the window to jerk down the tattered, old shade. Facing about, he stood with his back to the wall, searching the room with wide, fearful eyes. His fists were clenched. His chest rose and fell heavily with his labored breathing. His face worked with emotion. With trembling limbs and twitching muscles, he crouched like some desperate creature at bay.

But, save for the wretched man himself, there was in that shabby, dingy-papered, dirty-carpeted, poorly furnished apartment no living thing.

Suddenly, the man laughed;—and it was the reckless, despairing laughter of a soul that feels itself slipping over the brink of an abyss.

With hurried step and outstretched hands, he crossed the room to snatch a bottle of whisky from its place beside the

lamp on the bureau. With trembling eagerness, he poured a water tumbler half-full of the red liquor. As one dying of thirst, he drank. Drawing a deep breath, and shaking his head with a wry smile, he spoke in hoarse confidence to the image of himself in the dingy mirror: "They nearly had me, that time." Again, he poured, and drank.

The whisky steadied him for the moment, and with bottle and glass still in hand, he regarded himself in the mirror with critical interest.

Had he stood erect, with the vigor that should have been his by right of his years, the man would have measured just short of six feet; but his shoulders—naturally well set—sagged with the weariness of excessive physical indulgence; while the sunken chest, the emaciated limbs, and the dejected posture of his misused body made him in appearance, at least, a wretched weakling. His clothing—of good material and well tailored—was disgustingly soiled and neglected;—the shoes thickly coated with dried mud, and the once-white shirt, slovenly unfastened at the throat, without collar or tie. The face which looked back from the mirror to the man was, without question, the countenance of a gentleman; but the broad forehead under the unkempt red-brown hair was furrowed with anxiety; the unshaven cheeks were lined and sunken; the finely shaped, sensitive mouth drooped with nervous weakness; and the blue, well-placed eyes were bloodshot and glittering with the light of near-insanity.

The poor creature looked at the hideous image of his ruined self as if fascinated with the horror of that which had been somehow wrought. Slowly, as one in a trance, he went

closer, and, without moving his gaze from the mirror, placed the bottle and tumbler upon the bureau. As if compelled by those burning eyes that stared so fixedly at him, he leaned forward still closer to the glass. Then, as he looked, the distorted features twitched and worked grotesquely with uncontrollable emotions, while the quivering lips formed words that were not even whispered. With trembling fingers he felt the unshaven cheeks and touched the unkempt hair questioningly. Suddenly, as if to shut out the horror of that which he saw in the mirror, the man hid his face in his hands, and with a sobbing, inarticulate cry sank to the floor.

Silently, with pitiless force, the river swept onward through the night, following its ordained way to the mighty sea.

As if summoned again by some dark spirit that brooded over the sombre, rushing flood, the man rose heavily to his feet. His face turned once more toward the window. A moment he stood there, listening, listening; then wheeling back to the whisky bottle and the glass on the bureau, he quickly poured, and drank again.

Nodding his head in the manner of one reaching a conclusion, he looked slowly about the room, while a frightful grin of hopeless, despairing triumph twisted his features, and his lips moved as if he breathed reckless defiance to an invisible ghostly company.

Moving, now, with a decision and purpose that suggested a native strength of character, the man quickly packed a suit-case with various articles of clothing from the bureau drawers and the closet. He was in the act of closing the suit-case when he stopped suddenly, and, with a shrug of his

shoulders, turned away. Then, as if struck by another thought, he stooped again over his baggage, and drew forth a fresh, untouched bottle of whisky.

“I guess you are the only baggage I'll need where I am going,” he said, whimsically; and, leaving the open suit-case where it lay, he crossed the room, and extinguished the light. Cautiously, he unlocked and opened the door. For a moment, he stood listening. Then, with the bottle hidden under his coat, he stole softly from the room.

A few minutes later, the man stood out there in the night, on the bank of the river. Behind him the outlines of the scattered houses that made the little town were lost against the dusk of the hillside. From the ghostly tree-shadows that marked the opposite bank, the solemn hills rose out of the deeper darkness of the lowlands that edged the stream in sombre mystery. There was no break in the heavy clouds to permit the gleam of a friendly star. There was no sound save the soft swish of the water against the bank where he stood, the chirping of a bird in the near-by willows, and the occasional splash of a leaping fish or water animal. But to the man there was a feeling of sound. To the lonely human wreck standing there in the darkness, the river called—called with fearful, insistent power.

From under the black wall of the night the dreadful flood swept out of the Somewhere of its beginning. Past the man the river poured its mighty strength with resistless, smoothly flowing, terrible force. Into the darkness it swept on its awful way to the Nowhere of its ending. For uncounted ages, the river had poured itself thus between those walls of hills. For untold ages to come, until the end of time itself,



the stream would continue to pour its strength past that spot where the man stood.

Out of the night, the voice of the river had called to the man, as he stood at the window of his darkened room. And the man had come, now, to answer the call. Cautiously, he went down the bank toward the edge of the dark, swirling water. His purpose was unmistakable. Nor was there any hint of faltering, now, in his manner. He had reached his decision. He knew what he had come to do.

The man's feet were feeling the mud at the margin of the stream when his legs touched something, and a low, rattling sound startled him. Then he remembered. A skiff was moored there, and he had brushed against the chain that led from the bow of the boat to the stump of a willow higher up on the bank. The man had seen the skiff,—a rude, flat-bottomed little craft, known to the Ozark natives as a John-boat,—just before sunset that evening. But there had been no boat in his thoughts when he had come to answer the call of the river, and in the preoccupation of his mind, as he stood there in the night beside the stream, he had not noticed it, as it lay so nearly invisible in the darkness. Mechanically, he stooped to feel the chain with his free hand. A moment later, he had placed his bottle of whisky carefully in the boat, and was loosing the chain painter from the willow stump.

“Why not?” he said to himself. “It will be easier in midstream,—and more certain.”

Carefully, so that no sound should break the stillness, he stowed the chain in the bow, and then worked the skiff around until it pointed out into the stream. Then, with his

hands grasping the sides of the little craft, and the weight of his body on one knee in the stern, he pushed vigorously with his free foot against the bank and so was carried well out from the shore. As the boat lost its momentum, the strong current caught it and whirled it away down the river.

Groping in the darkness, the man found his bottle of whisky, and working the cork out with his pocketknife, drank long and deep.

Already, save for a single light, the town was lost in the night. As the man watched that red spot on the black wall, the stream swung his drifting boat around a bend, and the light vanished. The dreadful mystery of the river drew close. The world of men was far, very far away. Centuries ago, the man had faced himself in the mirror, and had obeyed the voice that summoned him into the darkness. In fancy, now, he saw his empty boat swept on and on. Through what varied scenes would it drift? To what port would the mysterious will of the river carry it? To what end would it at last come in its helplessness?

And the man himself,—the human soul-craft,—what of him? As he had pushed his material boat out into the stream to drift, unguided and helpless, so, presently, he would push himself out from the shore of all that men call life. Through what scenes would he drift? To what port would the will of an awful invisible stream carry him? To what end would he finally come, in his helplessness?

Again the man drank—and again.

And then, with face upturned to the leaden clouds, he laughed aloud—laughed until the ghostly shores gave back

his laughter, and the voices of the night were hushed and still.

The laughter ended with a wild, reckless, defiant yell.

Springing to his feet in the drifting boat, the man shook his clenched fist at the darkness, and with insane fury cursed the life he had left behind.

The current whirled the boat around, and the man faced down the stream. He laughed again; and, lifting his bottle high, uttered a reckless, profane toast to the unknown toward which he was being carried by the river in the night.

## **CHAPTER III.**

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### **A MISSING LETTER.**

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Auntie Sue's little log house by the river was placed some five hundred yards back from the stream, on a bench of land at the foot of Schoolhouse Hill. From this bench, the ground slopes gently to the river-bank, which, at this point, is sheer and high enough to be well above the water at flood periods. The road, winding down the hill, turns to the right at the foot of the steep grade, and leads away up the river; and between the road and the river, on the up-stream side of the house, was the garden.

At the lower corner of the garden, farthest from the house, the strong current had cut a deep inward curve in the high shore-line, forming thus an eddy, which was margined on one side, at a normal stage of water, by a narrow shelf of land between the water's edge and the foot of the main bank. A flight of rude steps led down from the garden above to this natural landing, which, for three miles up and down the river, was the only point, on Auntie Sue's side of the stream, where one could go ashore from a skiff.

From the porch of the house, one, facing up the river, looked over the gently sloping garden, over the eddy lying under the high bank, and away over a beautiful reach of water known as The Bend,—a wide, sweeping curve which, a mile distant, is lost behind a wooded bluff where, at times, during the vacation or hunting season, one might see the

smoke from the stone chimney of a clubhouse which was built and used by people who lived in the big, noisy city many miles from the peaceful Ozark scene. From the shore of The Bend, opposite and above Auntie Sue's place, beyond the willows that fringe the water's edge, the low bottomlands extend back three-quarters of a mile to the foot of a heavily timbered ridge, beyond which rise the higher hills. But directly across from Auntie Sue's house, this ridge curves sharply toward the stream; while less than a quarter of a mile below, a mighty mountain-arm is thrust out from a shoulder of Schoolhouse Hill, as if to bar the river's way. The high bluff thus formed is known to the natives throughout all that region as Elbow Rock.

The quiet waters of The Bend move so gently on their broad course that from the porch, looking up the stream, the eye could scarcely mark the current. But in front of the little log house, where the restraining banks of the river draw closer together, the lazy current awakens to quickening movement. Looking down the stream, one could see the waters leaving the broad and quiet reaches of The Bend above and rushing away with fast increasing speed between the narrowing banks until, in all their vicious might, they dashed full against the Elbow Rock cliff, where, boiling and tossing in mad fury, they roared away at a right angle and so around the point and on to another quiet stretch below. And many were the tales of stirring adventure and tragic accident at this dangerous point of the river's journey to the far-away sea. Skilled rivermen, by holding their John-boats and canoes close to the far shore, might run the rapids with safety. But no boat, once caught in the vicious

grip of the main current between the comparatively still waters of The Bend and that wild, roaring tumult at Elbow Rock, had ever survived.

It was nearing the close of a late summer day, and Auntie Sue, as was her custom, stood on the porch watching the sunset. In the vast field of sky that arched above the softly rounded hills there was not a cloud. No wind stirred the leaves of the far-reaching forests, or marred the bright waters of the quiet Bend that mirrored back the green, tree-fringed banks and blue-shadowed mountains. Faintly, through the hush, from beyond the bottom-lands on the other side of the stream, came the long-drawn "Wh-o-e-e! Wh-o-e-e!" of farmer Jackson calling his hogs. From the hillside, back of the house, sounded the deep, mellow tones of a cowbell, telling Auntie Sue that neighbor Tom's cattle were going home from their woodland pastures. A company of crows crossed the river on leisure wing, toward some evening rendezvous. A waterfowl flapped slowly up the stream. And here and there the swallows wheeled in graceful circles above the gleaming Bend, or dipped, flashlike, to break the silvery surface. As the blue of the mountains deepened to purple, and the rosy light from below the western hills flushed the sky, the silver sheen of the quiet water changed with the changing tints above, and the shadows of the trees along the bank deepened until the shore-line was lost in the dusk of the coming night.

And even as the river gave back the light of the sky and the color of the mountains, so the gentle face of the gray-haired woman, who watched with such loving reverence, reflected the beauty of the scene. The peace and quiet of

the evening of her life was as the still loveliness of that twilight hour.

And, yet, there was a suggestion of pathos in the loneliness of the slender figure standing there. Now and again, she clasped her delicate hands to her breast as if moved by emotions of a too-poignant sweetness, while in her eyes shone the soft light of fondest memories and dearest dreams. Several times she turned her head to look about, as if wishing for some one to share with her the beauty that moved her so. At last, she called; and her voice, low and pure-toned, had in it the quality that was in the light of her eyes.

“Judy! Judy, dear! Do come and see this wonderful, wonderful sky!”

From within the house, a shrill, querulous, drawling voice, so characteristic of the Southern “poor-white” mountaineer, answered: “Wha-a-t?”

A quick little smile deepened the crows'-feet at the corners of Auntie Sue's eyes, as she called again with gentle patience: “Do come and see the sunset, Judy, dear! It is so beautiful!” And, this time, in answer, Judy appeared in the doorway.

From appearances, the poor creature's age might have been anywhere from fifteen to thirty-five; for the twisted and misshapen body, angular and hard; the scrawny, wry neck; the old-young face, thin and sallow, with furtive, beady-black eyes, gave no hint of her years. As a matter of fact, I happened to know that Judith Taylor, daughter of the notorious Ozark moonshiner, Jap Taylor, was just past twenty the year she went to live with Auntie Sue.

Looking obliquely at the old gentlewoman, with a curious expression of mingled defiance, suspicion, and affection on her almost vicious face, Judy drawled, "Was you-all a-yellin' for me?"

"Yes, Judy; I want you to help me watch the sunset," Auntie Sue answered, with bright animation; and, turning, she pointed toward the glowing west,—“Look!”

Judy's sly, evasive eyes did not cease to regard the illumined face of her old companion as she returned, in her dry, high-pitched monotone: "I don't reckon as how you-all are a-needin' much help, seein' as how you are allus a-watchin' hit. A body'd think you-all was mighty nigh old 'nough, by now, ter look at hit alone."

Auntie Sue laughed, a low, musical, chuckling laugh, and, with a hint of loving impatience in her gentle voice, replied to Judy's observation: "But, don't you understand, child? It adds so to one's happiness to share lovely scenes like this. It makes it all so much—so much—well,—BIGGER, to have some one enjoy it with you. Come, dear!" And she held out her hand with a gesture of entreaty, and a look of yearning upon her dear old face that no human being could have withstood.

Judy, still slyly watchful, went cautiously nearer; and Auntie Sue, putting an arm lovingly about the crooked shoulders of the mountain girl, pointed again toward the west as she said, in a low voice that vibrated with emotion, "Look, Judy! Look!"

The black eyes shifted, and the old-young, expressionless face turned toward the landscape, which lay before them in all its wondrous beauty of glowing sky and tinted mountain



and gleaming river. And there might have been a faint touch of softness, now, in the querulous monotone as Judy said: "I can't see as how hit could be ary bigger. Hain't ary reason, as I kin see, why hit should be ary bigger if hit could. Lord knows there's 'nough of hit as 't is; rough 'nough, too, as you-all 'd sure know if you-all had ter trapse over them there hills all yer life like I've had ter."

"But, isn't it wonderful to-night, Judy? It seems to me I have never seen it so perfect."

"Hit's just like hit's allus been, so far as I kin see, 'ceptin' that the river's higher in the spring an' more muddier," returned the mountain girl. "I was borned over there on yon side that there flat-topped mountain, nigh the mouth of Red Creek. I growed up on the river, mostly;—learned ter swim an' paddle er John-boat 'fore I kin remember. Red Creek, hit heads over there behind that there long ridge, in Injin Holler. There's a still—"

She checked herself suddenly, and shot a fearful sidewise look at Auntie Sue; then turned and pointed in the opposite direction with a pretense of excited interest. "Look down there, ma'm! See how black the old river is where she smashes inter Elbow Rock, an' how white them waves be where the water biles an' throws hitself. Hit'd sure git you if you was ter git ketched in there with er John-boat, wouldn't hit? Listen, ma'm! You kin hear hit a-roarin' like hit was mad, can't you?"

But the older woman turned to face, again, the quiet reaches of The Bend.

"I think I like The Bend best, though, Judy. See how perfectly those trees and hills are mirrored in the river; and