ZOE ANDERSON NORRIS

THE WAY
of
THE WIND

BY

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DRAWINGS BY

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PROLOGUE

And as the sturdy Pilgrim Fathers cut their perilous way through the dense and dangerous depths of the Forest Primeval for the setting up of their hearthstones, so the courageous pioneers of the desolate and treeless West were forced to fight the fury of the winds.

The graves of them lie mounded here and there in the uncultivated corners of the fields, though more often one wanders across the level country, looking for them in the places where they should be and are not, because of the tall and waving corn that covers the length and breadth of the land.

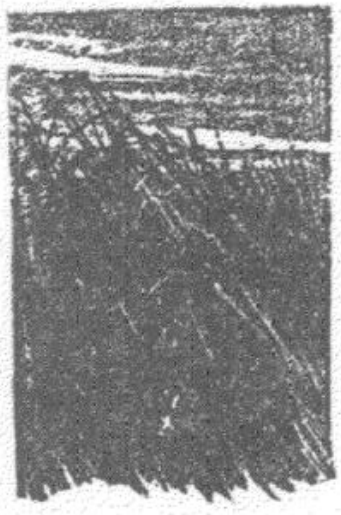
And yet the dead are not without memorial. Each steady stalk is a plumed standard of pioneer conquest, and through its palmy leaves the chastened wind remorsefully sighs requiems, chanting, whispering, moaning and sighing from balmy springtime on through the heat of the long summer days, until in

the frost the farmers cutting the stalks and stacking them evenly about in the semblance of long departed tepees, leave no dangling blades to sigh through, nor tassels to flout.

THE AUTHOR.

The Way of the Wind

CHAPTER I.



Looking back upon it, the little Kentucky town seemed to blossom for Celia like the rose, one broad expanse of sloping lawns bordered with flower beds and shaded by quiet trees, elms and maples, brightly green with young leaflets and dark with cedars and pines, as it was on the day when she stood on the vine-covered veranda of her mother's home, surrounded by friends come to say good-by.

Jane Whitcomb kissed her cheek as she tied the strings of her big poke bonnet under her chin.

"I hope you will be happy out theah, Celia," she said; "but if it was me and I had to go, I wouldn't. You couldn't get me to take such risks. Wild horses couldn't. All them whut wants to go

West to grow up with the country can go, but the South is plenty good enough fo' me."

"Fo' me, too," sighed Celia, homesickness full upon her with the parting hour. "It's Seth makes me go. Accordin' to him, the West is the futuah country. He has found a place wheah they ah goin' to build a Magic City, he says. He's goin' to maik a fortune fo' me out theah, he says, in the West."

"Growin' up with the country," interrupted Sarah Simpson, tying a bouquet of flowers she had brought for Celia with a narrow ribbon of delicate blue.

"Yes," admitted Celia, "growing up with the country."

Sarah handed her the flowers.

"It's my opinion," concluded she, "that it's the fools, beggin' youah pahdon, whut's goin' out theah to grow up with the country, and the wise peepul whut's stayin' at home and advisin' of 'em to go."

Celia shuddered.

"I'm ha'f afraid to go," she said. "They say the wind blows all the time out theah. They say it nevah quits blowin'."

" 'Taint laik as if you wus goin' to be alone out theah," comforted Mansy

Storm, who was busy putting away a little cake she had made with her own hands for Celia's lunch basket. "Youah husband will be out theah."

She closed the lid down and raised her head brightly.

"Whut diffunce does it maik?" she asked, "how ha'd the wind blows if you've got youah husband?"

Lucy Brown flipped a speck of dust from the hem of Celia's travelling dress.

"Yes," said she, "and such a husband!"

Celia looked wistfully out over the calm and quiet street, basking in the sunlight, peacefully minus a ripple of breeze to break the beauty of it, her large eyes sad.

"I'm afraid of the wind," she complained. "Sto'ms scah me."

And she reiterated:

"I'm afraid of the wind!"

Sarah suddenly ran down the walk on either side of which blossomed old fashioned flowers, Marsh Marigolds, Johnny-Jump-Ups and Brown-Eyed Susans. She stood at the front gate, which swung on its hinges, leaning over it, looking down the road.

"I thoat I heahd the stage," she called back. "Yes. Suah enuf. Heah it is, comin'."

At that Celia's mother, hurrying fearfully out the door, threw her arms around her.

Celia fell to sobbing.

"It's so fah away," she stammered brokenly, between her sobs. "I'm afraid . . . to . . . go . . . It's so fah . . . away!"

"Theah! theah!" comforted her mother, lifting up her face and kissing it. "It's not so fah but you can come back again. The same road comes that goes, deah one. Theah! Theah!"

"Miss Celia," cried a reproachful voice from the door. "Is you gwine away, chile, widout tellin' youah black Mammy good-by?"

Celia unclasped her mother's arms, fell upon the bosom of her black Mammy and wept anew.

"De Lawd be wid you, chile," cooed the voice of the negress, musical with tenderness, "an' bring you back home safe an' soun' in His own time."

The stage rolled up with clash and clatter and flap of curtain.

It stopped at the gate. There ensued the rush of departure, the driver, after hoisting the baggage of his one passenger thereto, looking stolidly down on the

heartbreak from the height of his perch, his long whip poised in midair.

Celia's friends swarmed about her. They kissed her. They essayed to comfort her. They thrust upon her gifts of fruit and flowers and dainties for her lunch.

They bore her wraps out to the cumbersome vehicle which was to convey her to Lexington, the nearest town which at that time boasted of a railroad. They placed her comfortably, turning again and again to give her another kiss and to bid her good-by and God-speed.

It was as if her heartstrings wrenched asunder at the jerk of the wheels that started the huge stage onward.

"Good-by, good-by!" she cried out, her pale face at the window.

"Good-by," they answered, and Mansy Storm, running alongside, said to her:

"You give my love to Seth, Celia. Don't you fo'get."

Then breathlessly as the stage moved faster:

"If evah the Good Lawd made a man a mighty little lowah than the angels," she added, "that man's Seth."

The old stage rumbled along the broad white Lexington pike, past houses of

other friends, who stood at gates to wave her farewell.

It rumbled past little front yards abloom with flowers, back of which white cottages blinked sleepily, one eye of a shuttered window open, one shut, past big stone gates which gave upon mansions of more grandeur, past smaller farms, until at length it drew up at the tollgate.

Here a girl with hair of sunshine, coming out, untied the pole and raised it slowly.

"You goin' away, Miss Celia?" she asked in her soft Southern brogue, tuneful as the ripple of water. "I heah sumbody say you was goin' away."

Celia smothered a sob.

"Yes," she answered, "I am goin' away."

"It's a long, long way out theah to the West," commented the girl wistfully as she counted out the change for the driver, "a long, long way!"

As if the way had not seemed long enough!

Celia sobbed outright.

"Yes," she assented, "it is a long, long way!"

"I am sawy you ah goin', Miss Celia,"

said the girl. "Good-by. Good luck to you!" And the stage moved on, Celia staring back at her with wide sad eyes. The girl leaned forward, let the pole carefully down and fastened it. As she did so a ray of sunshine made a halo of her hair.

Celia flung herself back into the dimness of the corner and wept out her heart. It seemed to her that, with the letting down of that pole, she had been shut out of heaven.

CHAPTER II.

In all her life Celia had not travelled further from her native town than Lexington, which was thirty miles away. It was not necessary. She lived in the garden spot of the world, an Eden with all things sufficient for a simple life.

As she stood at the station, waiting for her train, an old negro shuffled by. He hummed the refrain of "Old Kentucky Home," "Fare you well, my lady!" It seemed meant for her. The longing was strong within her to fly back to the old town she loved so well; but the train, roaring in just then, intimidated her by its unaccustomed turmoil and she allowed herself to be hauled on board by the brakeman and placed in the car.

Passing into the open country, the speed of the train increased. The smoke and cinders poured into the open window. Timid because of her strange surroundings, she silently accepted the infliction,

cowering into her seat without attempting to put the window down. When a man in the opposite seat leaned forward and pulled it down for her, she was too abashed to thank him, but retained her crouching position and began silently to weep.

A terrible night of travel began. It was a day car. Celia crouched into her seat, trying to sleep, afraid of everything, of the staring eyes of the porter, of the strange faces about her, of the jet black of the night that gloomed portentously through the window.

Then came the dawn and with it the long gray bridge spanning the drab and sullen Mississippi, then St. Louis, with its bustle and rush and more and more strange faces, a sea of strange faces through which she must pass.

After another weary day of travel through which she dozed, too tired to think, too tired to move, at twilight she reached Kansas City, a little town on the edge of the desert. Here, worn out mentally and physically, she was forced to stop and rest a night and sleep in a bed.

And the next day the wind!

A little way out from the town she

could see it beginning, bending the pliant prairie grasses to earth, flinging them fiercely upward, crushing them flat again and pressing them there, whistling, whistling, whistling!

The car moved fairly fast for a car of that day, but the wind moved faster. It shook the windows with terrific force. It blew small grains of sand under the sill to sting Celia, moaning, moaning, moaning in its mad and unimpeded march across the country straight to the skies.

She looked out in dismay.

Back of her, on either side of her and beyond, stretched this vast prairie country, desolate of shrub, undergrowth, or tree, a barren waste, different from the beautiful, still, green garden spot that she called home, a spot redolent of flowers, sweet with the odor of new-mown grass, and pungent with whiff of pine and cedar, different as night is from day.

Her heart sank within her as she looked.

It was late in the afternoon when she came to her station, a collection of frame shanties dignified by that name, and Seth, tall, tanned and radiant, clasped her in

his arms, and man though he was, shed tears of pure rapture.

His joy served to thrill her momentarily to the extent of forgetting the wind, but with his departure for the vehicle which was to convey her to their home, the discomfort of it returned to her.

The madness of it! The fury of it! Its fiendish joy! It tore at her skirts. It wrapped them about her. It snatched them away again, flapping them flaglike.

It was with difficulty that she kept her hat on her head. She held it with both hands.

The wind seemed to make sport of her, to laugh at her. It treated her as it would a tenderfoot. It tried to frighten her. It blew the shutters of the shanties open and slammed them to with a noise like guns. It shrieked maniacally as if rejoicing in her discomfort. At times it seemed to hoot at her.

Added to this, when Seth returned for her with the vehicle, it proved to be a common two-wheeled cart drawn by a mule, a tall, ungainly cart of dull and faded blue.

She kept back the tears as Seth helped her in.

Then she sat silently by him throughout their jolting journey over the prairie country into what seemed to her to be the Nowhere, listening to the wind chant, now requiems, now dirges, listening to its shriek and whistle, listening to it cry aloud and moan, die down to a whisper, then rise once more and wail like a living thing in unendurable pain.

Seth, too, by and by fell into silence, but from a different cause. The wind failed to distress him. He had become accustomed to it in the months spent in preparing her home. It was like an old friend that sometimes whispered in his tired ears words of infinite sweetness. He forgave the wanton shrieks of it because of this sweetness, the sweetness of a capricious woman, all the more sweet because of her capriciousness.

He was silent from pure happiness at having Celia there beside him, going over the same road with him in the old blue cart.

From time to time he glanced at her timidly as if half afraid if he looked too hard the wind might blow her away.

And, indeed, there did appear to be some danger; for the wind that had loved Seth from the first was apparently jeal-

ous of Celia. It tore at her as though to toss her to unreachable distances in the way it ripped the tumbleweeds from their small brittle stems and tossed them away.

Seth looked at her profile, white from the fatigue of the journey, but beautiful as alabaster; at the blue of her eyes; at the delicate taper of her small white hands that from her birth had done only the daintiest of service; at the small feet that had never once walked the rough and sordid pathway of toil.

Beautiful! Beautiful!

His eyes caressed her. Except that he must hold the reins both arms would have encircled her. As it was, she rested in the strong and tender half-circle of one.

All at once the wind became frantic. It blew and blew!

Finding it impossible to tear Celia from the tender circling of that arm, it wreaked its vengeance upon the tumbleweeds, broke them fiercely from their stems, and sent them pell-mell over the prairie before the tall blue cart, about it, at the sides of it, a fantastic cortege, airily tumbling, tumbling, tumbling!

Yes. The wind was jealous of Celia.

Strong as it was, it failed of accom-

plishing its will, which would have been to snatch her from the cart and toss her to the horizon in company with the tumbleweeds. It shrieked its despair, the despair of a jealous woman balked of her vengeance, tumultuously wild.

At last at about twilight, at the time of day when the prairie skies are mellow with tints fit for a Turner and the prairie winds sough with the tenderness of lullabies, resting for a period, in order to prepare for the fury of the night, they came upon the forks of the two rivers, sparsely sheltered by a few straggling and wind-blown trees.

Seth reined in the animal, sprang down over the high wheel of the cart and helped Celia out.

"Darling," he said, "let me welcome you home!"

"Home," she repeated. "Where is it?"

For she saw before her only a slight elevation in the earth's surface, a mound enlarged.

Going down a few steps, Seth opened wide the door of their dugout, looking gladly up at her, standing stilly there, a picture daintily silhouetted by the pearl pink of the twilit sky.

"Heah!" he smiled.

Celia stared down into the darkness of it as into a grave.

"A hole in the ground," she cried.

Then, as the beflowered home she had left rose mirage-like in the window of her memory, she sobbingly re-stammered the words:

"A . . hole . . in . . the . . ground!"

CHAPTER III.

It was not yet June, but the winds blow cold on the prairie later than June at nightfall. The moment the sun goes down, up come the chill winds.

Sick at heart, Seth coaxed the shuddering Celia down the steps into the cellar-like habitation dimly lighted by a single half window dug out mansard fashion at the side.

He was silent, hurt in every fibre of his being. His manner was one of profound apology. She was right. It was only a hole in the ground; but he, accustomed to dugouts during the months he had spent on the prairie preparing for the joy of her coming, had overlooked its deficiencies and learned to think of it as home.

There were two chairs. He was glad of that. For a long time there had been only one.

He placed her in the new one, bought in honor of her coming, seating her def-

erentially as if she had been a Queen, and went hurriedly about, building a fire of little dry twigs he had torn from shrubs along the river that the gay crackle of them might cheer her.

As she sat looking on, she saw in this humble service not his devotion, but his humiliation, not his great love for her which glorified all service humble or exalted, but the fact that he had so descended in the scale of life as to put his hand to work that she had been used to see done only by negroes.

Her pride, her only inheritance from haughty slave-holding ancestors, was wounded. Not all Seth's devotion, not all his labor in her behalf could salve that wound.

As he knelt before the blazing twigs, apparently doing their best to aid him in his effort to cheer her, something of this feeling penetrated to his inner consciousness.

Nevertheless, he piled on twig after twig until the refreshing flames brilliantly illumined the dugout.

From dirt floor to dirt roof they filled it with light.

The poor little twigs, eagerly flashing into flame to help him!

Better far if, wet and soggy, they had burned dimly or not at all; for their blaze only served to exhibit every deficiency Seth should have endeavored to hide. The thatch of the roof, the sod, the carpetless floor, the lack of furniture, the plain wooden bedstead in the corner with its mattress of straw, the crazy window fashioned by his own rude carpentry, the shapeless door which was like a slap in the face with its raw and unpainted color of new wood.

After the first wild glance about her, Celia buried her face in her hands, resolutely shutting out the view for fear of bursting into uncontrollable tears.

Seth, seeing this, rose from his knees slowly, lamely, as if suddenly very tired, and went about his preparations for their evening meal.

Men with less courage than it required to perform this simple duty have stood up to be shot at.

Knowing full well that with each act of humble servitude he sank lower and lower in the estimation of the one living creature in whose estimation he wished to stand high, he once more knelt on the hearth, placed potatoes in the

ashes, raked a little pile of coals together and set the coffee pot on them.

He drew the small deal table out and put upon it two cups and saucers, plates and forks for two. There was but one knife. That was for Celia. A pocket knife was to serve for himself.

It had been his pleasure throughout his lonely days of waiting to picture this first meal which Celia and he should eat together.

Never once had he dreamed that the realization could come so near breaking a strong man's heart,—that things seemingly of small import could stab with a thrust so knife-like.

He felt the color leave his cheek at the thought that he had failed to provide a cloth for the table, not even a napkin. He fumbled at his bandana, then hopelessly replaced it in his pocket. He grew cold at the realization that every luxury to which she had been accustomed, almost every necessity, was absent from that plain board.

He had counted on her love to overlook much.

It had overlooked nothing.

When all was in readiness he drew up a chair and begged her to be seated.

He took the opposite chair and the meal proceeded in silence, broken only by the wail of the wind and the crackle of the little dry twigs that burned on the hearth.

"I am afraid of it," sighed Celia.

"Of what, sweet?" he asked, and she answered:

"I am afraid of the wind."

"There is nothing to be afraid of," he explained quickly. "It is only the ordinary wind of the prairies. It ain't a cyclone. Cyclones nevah come this way, neah to the forks of two rivers wheah we ah," and waxing eloquent on this, his hobby, he began telling her of the great and beautiful and prosperous city which was sometime to be built on this spot; perhaps the very dugout in which they sat would form its center. He talked enthusiastically of the tall steepled temples that would be erected, of the schools and colleges, of the gay people beautifully dressed who would drive about in their carriages under the shade of tall trees that would line the avenues, of the smiling men and women and children whose home the Magic City would be, and how he was confident they would build it here because, in the land of terrible winds,

when people commenced to erect their metropolis, they must put it where no deadly breath of cyclone or tornado could tear at it or overturn it.

With that he went on to describe the destructive power of the cyclones, telling how one in a neighboring country had licked up a stream that lay in its course, showering the water and mud down fifty miles away.

"But no cyclone will ever come here," he added and explained why.

Because it was the place of the forks of two rivers, the Big Arkansas and the Little Arkansas. A cyclone will go out of its way, he told her, rather than tackle the forks of two rivers. The Indians knew that. They had pitched their tents here before they had been driven into the Territory and that was what they had said. And they were very wise about some things, those red men, though not about many.

But Celia could not help putting silent questions to herself. Why should a cyclone that could snatch up a river and toss it to the clouds, fight shy of the forks of two?

Looking fearfully around at the shadows, she interrupted him:

"I am afraid," she whispered. "I am afraid!"

Seth left his place at the table and took her in his arms.

"Po' little gurl," he said. "Afraid, and tiahd, too. Travelin' so fah. Of cose, she's tiahd!"

And with loving hands, tender as a mother's, he helped her undress and laid her on the rough bed of straw, covered with sheets of the coarsest, wishing it might be a bed of down covered with silks, wishing they were back in the days of enchantment that he might change it into a couch fit for a Princess by the wave of a wand.

Then he left her a moment, and walking out under the wind-blown stars he looked up at them reverently and said aloud:

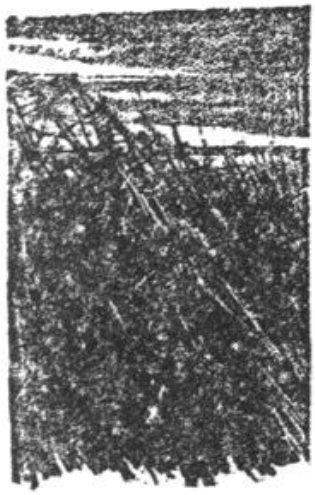
(For in the dreary deserts of loneliness one often learns to talk aloud very openly and confidentially to God, since people are so scarce and far away:)

"Tempah the wind to this po' shiverin' lam, deah Fathah!"

Then with a fanatic devotion, he added:

"And build the Magic City!"

CHAPTER IV.



Upon each trip to the station for provision or grain Seth met with tail ends of cyclones, or heard of rumors of those that had just passed through, or were in process of passing, strange enough stories of capers cut by the fantastic winds.

He told these tales to Celia with a vein of humor meant to cheer her, but which had an opposite effect. Love blinded, he failed to see that the nervous laughs with which she greeted them were a sign of terror rather than amusement.

One night, he related, after a day whose sultriness had been almost unendurable, a girl had stood at the door to her dugout, bidding her sweetheart good night. She opened the door, he stepped outside, and a cyclone happening to pass that way, facetiously caught him into the atmosphere and carried him away somewhere, she never knew where.

Strewn in the path of that cyclone were window-sashes, doors, shingles, hair mattresses, remnants of chimneys, old iron, bones, rags, rice, old shoes and dead bodies; but not the body of her blue-eyed sweetheart.

For many months she grieved for him, dismally garbed in crape, which was extremely foolish of her, some said, for all she knew he might still be in the land of the living. Possibly the cyclone had only dropped him into another county where, likely as not, he was by this time making love to another girl.

But though she mourned and mourned and waited and waited for the wild winds to bring him back, or another in his place, none came.

"They've got to tie strings to their sweethearts in this part of the country," the old gray-haired man at the corner grocery had said, "if they want to keep them."

Another playful cyclone had snatched up a farmer who wore red and white striped socks. The cyclone had blown all the red out of the socks, the story teller had said, so that when they found the farmer flattened against a barn door as if he had been pasted there, his socks

were white as if they had never contained a suspicion of red. They had turned white, no doubt, through fright.

Evidently knives had flown promiscuously about in another cyclone, he said. Hogs had been cut in two and chickens carved, ready for the table.

There were demons at work as well as knives.

A girl was engaged to be married. All her wedding finery had been made. Dainty, it was, too; so dainty that she laid it carefully away in a big closet in a distant wing of the house, far from the profane stare of strange eyes. She made discreet pilgrimages to look at those dainty things so dear to her, lingerie white and soft and fine, satin slippers, fans, gloves and a wedding gown of dazzling snowiness.

The day was set for the wedding. Unfortunately—how could she know that? —the same day was set for a cyclone.

The girl could almost hear the peal of the wedding bells; when along came the tornado, rushing, roaring, shrieking like mad, and grasping that wing of the house, that special and precious wing containing her trousseau, bore it triumphantly off.

A silk waist was found in one county, but the skirt to match it lay in another, many miles away. Her beplumed hat floated in a pool of disfiguring water, her longe suede gloves lay in a ditch and her white satin wedding slippers, alas, hung by their tiny heels at the top of a tree in a neighboring township, the only tree in the entire surrounding county, put there, in all probability, to catch and hold them for her.

Naturally, the wedding was postponed until new wedding finery could be prepared, but alas! A man's will is the wind's will!

By the time the second trousseau was well on the way, the affections of the girl's sweetheart had wafted away and wound themselves about another girl.

Here and there the prairie farmers had planted out trees in rows and clumps, taking tree claims from the Government for that purpose.

In many instances cyclones had bent these prospective forests double in their extreme youth, leaving them to grow that way, leaning heavily forward in the attitude of old men running.

Of course, there were demons. God could have nothing to do with their dev-

ilments, Seth said. Seth had great belief in God.

One had maliciously torn up all the churches in a town by the roots, turned them upside down and stuck their steeples in the ground as if in mockery of religion.

"Why do you call them cyclones?" the old man at the corner grocery had asked. "They are not cyclones. They are tornadoes."

And this old man who had once been a doctor of medicine in an Eastern village and who was therefore learned, though he had been persuaded by some Wise men to go West and grow up with the Fools, went on to explain the difference.

"A cyclone," he said, "is miles and miles in width. It sweeps across the prairie screeching and screaming, but doing not so very much damage as it might do, just getting on the nerves of the people and helping to drive them insane. That is all.

"Then along comes a hailstone. It drops into the southeast corner of this cyclone and there you are! It generates a tornado and That is the Thing that rends the Universe."

Seth had listened to these stories undismayed; for what had they to do with his ranch and the Magic City upon which it was to be built?

A cyclone would never come to the forks of two rivers. The Indians had said so.

Tradition had it that an old squaw whose name was Wichita had bewitched the spot with her incantations, defying the wind to touch the ground on which she had lived and died.

It must have been that this old squaw still occupied the spot, that her phantom still stooped over seething kettles, or stalked abroad in the darkness, or chanted dirges to the slap and pat of the grim war dance of the Indians; for the winds, growing frightened, had let the forks of the river alone.

Seth was very careful to relate this to Celia, to reiterate it to this fearful Celia who started up so wildly out of her sleep at the maniacal shriek of the wind. Very tenderly he whispered the reassurance and promise of protection against every blast that blew, thus soothing her softly back to slumber, after which he lay awake, watching her lest she wake again

and wishing he might still the Universe while she slept.

He redoubled his care of her by night and by day, doing the work of the dugout before he began the work of the fields, not only bending over the tubs early in the morning for fear such bending might hurt her, but hanging out the clothes on the line for fear the fierce and vengeful wind might tan her beautiful complexion and tangle the fine soft yellow of her hair.

For the same reason, he brought in the clothes after the day's labor was over, and ironed them. He also did the simple cooking in order to protect her beauty from blaze of log and twinkle of twig.

If he could he would have hushed the noise of the world for love of her.

And yet, day after day, coming home from his work in the fields, he found her at the door of their dugout, peering after the east-bound train, trailing so far away as to seem a toy train, with a look of longing that struck cold to his heart.

His affection counted as nothing. His care was wasted. In spite of which he was full of apologies for her.

Other women, making these crude caves into homes for themselves and their

children, had found contentment, but they were women of a different fibre.

He would not have her of a different and coarser fibre, this exquisite Southern creature, charming, delicate, set like a rare exotic in the humble window of his hut.

It was not her fault. It was his. It was his place to turn the hut into a palace for his Queen; and so he would, when the Wise Men came out of the East and built the Magic City.

When the Fools had made the plains a fit place for human beings to inhabit, planting trees to draw down the reluctant rain from the clouds, sowing seed and raising crops sometimes, to their surprise and the amazement of those who heard of it, the Wise Men would appear and buy the land, and the building of great cities would begin.

Already they had reared a town that dared approach in size to a city on the edge of the desert, but what had happened?

An angry cyclone, hearing of it, had come along and snatched it into the clouds.

Furious at sight of its spick and span newness, its yellow frame shanties and

shining shingles, it had carried it off as if it had been a hen coop and set it down somewhere in Texas, a state that had been longer settled and was therefore a better place for houses and fences, and left it there.

Then the Wise Men, growing discouraged, had gone away.

But they would come again, he promised himself. They would come again. They must. Not to pass through in long vestibule trains whose sparks out of pure fiendishness lighted the furious prairie fires that were so hard to put out, smothering the innocent occupants of the dugouts in their sleep and burning their grain. Not to gaze wild-eyed through the shining windows of these splendid cars as they passed on and on to some more promising unwind-blown country, to build there their beautiful cities of marble and of stone.

They would come to stay.

When?

Why, when they should find a spot unvisited by cyclones, and that spot would be in the place of their dugout at the forks of these two rivers, the Big Arkansas and the Little Arkansas, the little river that had real water trickling

along its shallow bed year in and year out, and the Big river whose bed was dry as a bone all the year round until June, when the melting snows of the Rockies sent the water down in floods.

In fierce, uncontrollable and pitiless floods to drown the crops that had been spared by the chinch bugs, the grasshoppers and the Hot Winds.

All this Seth told Celia, finishing with his old rapturous picture of the glory of the Magic City, which he called after the old witch who had driven the winds from the forks of the rivers, Wichita.

He talked on, trying hard not to let her listless air of incredulity freeze the marrow of his bones and the blood in his veins, or cut him so deeply as to destroy his enrooted hope in their splendid future.

Taking her in his arms, partly to hide her cold face from his view and partly to comfort her, he offered every possible apology for her unbelief, wrapping her about with his love and tenderness as with a mantle.

He thought by day of the coming of the child, and dreamed of it by night, trusting that, whether or not she shared his belief in the Magic City, when she

held it warmly in her arms, that little baby, his and hers, the homesick look would give place to a look of content, and the hole in the ground would become to her a home.

CHAPTER V.

Seth was toiling slowly along a furrow back of his plow, bending sidewise with the force of the wind, not resentfully that it persisted in making it so difficult for him to earn his bread, for resentment was not in his nature, besides which, Seth loved the wind,—but humming a little tune, something soft and reminiscent about his old Kentucky home, with its chorus of "Fare you well, my lady," when a broncho, first a mere speck on the horizon ahead of him, then larger and larger, rushed out of the wind from across the prairie with flashing eyes and distended nostrils, and lunged toward him.

At first he thought it was a wild broncho, untamed and riderless; but as his eyes became accustomed to dust and sunlight, he discovered that the saddle held a girl.

For the moment she had bent herself

to the broncho's mane, which had the effect, together with the haze produced by the wind-blown dust, of rendering the animal apparently riderless.

Seth drew up his mule and halted.

At the same time the broncho was jerked with a sudden rein that sent him back on his haunches, his front feet pawing the air.

His rider, apparently accustomed to this pose, clung to him with the persistency of a fly to fly paper, righted him, swung herself from the saddle and stood before Seth, a tall, slim girl of twelve, a girl of complexion brown as berries, of dark eyes heavily fringed with thick lashes and dusky hair tinged redly with sunburn. Her hair, one of her beauties, blew about her ears in tangled curls that were unconfined by hat or bonnet.

She smiled at him, showing rows of rice-like teeth, of an exaggerated white in contrast with the sunburn of her face.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," said Seth in return.

Then, in the outspoken manner of the prairie folk he asked:

"Who ah you?"

"I am Cyclona," she answered.

"Cyclona what?"

"Just Cyclona. I ain't got no other name."

Seth smiled back at her, she seemed so timidly wild, like those little prairie dogs that stand on their haunches and bark, and yet are ever mindful of the safety of their near-by lairs, waiting for them in case of molestation.

"Wheah did you come frum?" he queried.

"Two or three hundred miles from here," she answered, "where we had a claim."

"Who is we?" asked Seth.

"My father and me. He ain't my real father. He's the man what adopted me."

Always courteous, Seth stood, hand on plough, waiting for her to state her errand or move on.

She did neither.

"There be'n't many neighbors hereabout, be there?" she ventured presently, toying with her broncho's mane.

"No," said Seth. "They ah mighty scarce. One about every eighteen miles or so."

Cyclona looked straight at him out of her big dark eyes framed by their heavy lashes.

"I am a neighbor of yourn," she said.

"I'm glad of that," responded Seth with ready Southern cordiality. "Wheah do you live?"

Cyclona turned and pointed to the horizon.

"About ten or twelve miles away," she explained. "There!"

"Been theah long?" asked Seth.

"Come down last week," said Cyclona, adding lightly by way of explanation, "we blew down. Father and his wife and me. Never had no mother. A cyclone blew her away. That's why they call me Cyclona."

She drew her sleeve across her eyes.

"It's mighty lonesome in these parts," she sighed, "without no neighbors. Neighbors was nearer where we came from."

"What made you move, then?" Seth queried.

"We didn't move," said Cyclona. "We was moved. Father likes it here, but I get awful lonesome without no neighbors."

The plaint struck an answering chord.

"Look heah," said Seth. "You see that little dugout 'way ovah theah? That's wheah I live. My wife's theah all by herself. She's lonesome, too. Maybe

she'd laik to have you come and visit her and keep her company. Will you?"

Cyclona nodded a delighted assent, caught the mane of her broncho, and swung herself into her saddle with the ease and grace of a cowboy.

Seth was suddenly engrossed with the fear that Celia, seeing the girl come out of the Nowhere, as she had come upon him, might be frightened into the ungraciousness of unsociability.

"Wait," he cried. "I will go with you."

So he took Cyclona's rein and led her broncho over the prairie to Celia's door, the girl, laughing at the idea of being led, chattering from her saddle like any magpie.

He knocked at Celia's door and soon her face, white, Southern, aristocratic, in sharp contrast with the sunburned cheek and wild eye of Cyclona, appeared.

He waved a rough hand toward Cyclona, sitting astride her broncho, a child of the desert, untamed as a coyote, an animated bronze of the untrammelled West emphasized by the highlights of sunshine glimmering on curl and dimple, on broncho mane and hoof, and backed by the brilliancy of sky, the far away

line of the horizon and the howl of the wind.

"Look!" he called to her exultantly, in the voice of the prairies, necessarily elevated in defiance of the wind, "I have brought a little girl to keep you company."

CHAPTER VI.

It was in this way that Cyclona blew into their lives and came to be something of a companion to Celia, though, realizing that the girl was a distinct outgrowth of the country she so detested, she never came to care for her with that affection which she had felt for her Southern girl friends. The kindly interest which most women, settled in life, feel for the uncertain destiny of every girl child bashfully budding into womanhood was absent.

It is to be doubted if Celia possessed a kindly heart to begin with, added to which there was nothing of the self-conscious bud about Cyclona. She was ignorant of her beauty as a prairie rose. Strange as her life had been, encompassed about by cyclones, the episode of her moving as told by the gray-haired doctor at the corner grocery was stranger.

"The house was little," the doctor commenced, "or it might not have happened. There was only one room. It was built of boards and weighed next to nothing, which may have helped to account for it.

"On that particular day the house was situated in the northern part of the State."

He swapped legs.

"But the next day," he resumed. "Well, you can't tell exactly where any house will be the next day in Kansas.

"It was about noon and Cyclona's foster father was out in the cornfield, plowing. The wind, as usual, was blowing a gale. It was a mild gale, sixty miles an hour, so Jonathan did not permit it to interfere with his plowing. The rows were a little uneven because the wind blew the horse sidewise and that naturally dragged the plow out of the furrows, but as one rarely sees a straight row of corn in Kansas, Jonathan was not worried. If he took pains to sow the corn straight, in trim and systematic rows, like as not the wind would blow the seed out of the ground into his neighbor's cornfield, so what was the use?

"Like the horse and plough, Jonathan was walking crooked, bent in the direc-

tion of the wind. He seldom walks straight or talks straight for that matter, the wind has had such an effect on him.

"At any rate, leaving out the question of his reasoning which pursues a devious and zigzag course, varying according to the way the wind blows—and he is not alone in this peculiarity in Kansas, as I say—Jonathan steadily toiled against the wind, he stopped altogether, and taking out his lunch basket, he removed a pie and sat down on a log to eat it, while his horse, moving a little further along, propped himself against a cottonwood tree to keep from being entirely blown away, and also rested."

He swapped tobacco wads from one cheek to the other and continued:

"The pie was made of custard, Jonathan said, with meringue on the top. The meringue blew away, but Jonathan contentedly ate the custard, thankful that the hungry wind had not taken that.

"Mrs. Jonathan had been going about all morning with a dust rag in her hand, wiping the dust from the sills and the furniture.

"So, tired out at last, she had flung

herself on the bed and was quietly napping when the cyclone came along.

"Of course, the house and the bed she was lying on were shaken, but Mrs. Jonathan had lived so long in Kansas she couldn't sleep unless the wind rocked the bed.

"She slept all the sounder, therefore, lulled by its whistling and moaning and sobbing, not waking even when Cyclona, this girl they had adopted, opened the door and shut it suddenly with herself on the inside, and a fortunate thing, too, that was for Cyclona, or the cyclone might have left her behind.

"Cyclona, standing by the window, saw it all, the swiftly passing landscape, the trees, the cows, as one would look from an observation car on a train.

"The house was at last deposited rather roughly on terra firma and the jar awoke Mrs. Jonathan. She sat up and rubbed her eyes open. Then she looked about her in some alarm.

"The furniture was tumbled together in one corner all in a heap, Jonathan says, and the pictures were topsy turvy. Pictures are never on a level on Kansas walls on account of the winds, so Mrs. Jonathan thought little of this, but the

ceiling puzzled her. Instead of arching in the old way, it pointed at her. It was full of shingles, moreover, like a roof, and the point reached nearly to her head when she sat up in the bed, staring about her.

"'What on earth is the matter?' she asked of Cyclona.

"Cyclona turned away from the window.

"'We have moved,' said she.

"Mrs. Jonathan arose then, and going to the door, opened it and found that what Cyclona had said was true. The scenery was quite different. It is much further south here, you know, than in the northern part of the State. The grass was green and the trees, hardly budded at all where she came from, here had full grown leaves.

"There was little or no debris in the path of the cyclone, nearly everything, with the exception of the house, having been dropped before it arrived at that point.

"A few stray cows hung from the branches of the large cottonwood trees, Jonathan says. . . ."

Here the Doctor was interrupted by a

man who took his pipe out of his mouth and coughed.

"But they presently dropped on all fours," he continued, "and began to munch on the nice green grass growing all about them.

"The landscape thus losing all indications of the tornado's effect, assumed a sylvan aspect which was tranquil in the extreme.

"Not far off stood the horse still hitched to the plough, Jonathan said. The horse had a dazed look, but the plough seemed to be in fit enough condition. One handle, slightly bent, had evidently struck against something on the journey, which gave it a rakish aspect, but that was all."

"Did the horse have its hide on?" asked the man who had coughed.

"So far's I know," the Doctor replied. "Why?"

"Because there's a story goin' the rounds," answered the cougher, "to the effec' that a horse was blown a hundred miles in a cyclone and when they found him he was hitched to a tree and skinned."

There was a period of thoughtful

silence before the Doctor went on with his story.

"As Mrs. Jonathan looked out the door," he said, "she saw Jonathan walking down the road in her direction. His slice of pie, which he had not had time to finish, was still in his hand.

" 'Where are we at?' he asked her, curiously.

" 'I am sure I don't know,' answered Mrs. Jonathan, beginning, woman-like, to cry, now that the danger was over.

"Jonathan began to finish his pie, which the cyclone had interrupted. Between mouthfuls he gave quick glances of surprise at the house.

" 'What on earth!' he exclaimed, 'is the matter with the roof?'

"Mrs. Jonathan ran out to look.

"The tornado had been busy with the roof. It had blown it skyward and then, upon second thoughts, had brought it back again and deposited it not right side up, but upside down.

"The extreme suction caused by this sudden reversal of things had caught every rag of clothing in the house into the atmosphere where, adhering to the roof, they had been brought down with it, so that they hung in festoons all

around the outside, the roof, fastening onto the walls with a tremendous jerk, securing all the different articles with the clinch of a massive and giant clothes-pin.

" 'It was a strange sight,' Jonathan said.

"Mrs. Jonathan's and Cyclona's skirts, stockings, shirt waists, night dresses and handkerchiefs were strung along indiscriminately with Jonathan's trousers, coats, waistcoats and socks. Here and there, in between, prismatic quilts, red bordered tablecloths and fringed napkins varied the monotony.

" 'How are we ever going to get them down?' asked Mrs. Jonathan, the floodgate of her tears loosed once more at sight of her household and wearing apparel hung, as it were, from the housetop.

"Jonathan said his wife didn't seem to think of the kindness of the cyclone in bringing her husband along with the house when it might so easily have divorced them by dropping him into the house of some plump widow. All she seemed to think of was those clothes.

" 'Don't you worry,' he told her. 'We will just wait till another cyclone comes

along and turns the roof right side up again.'

"For one becomes philosophical, you know, living in Kansas. One must, or live somewhere else. . . .

"Jonathan looked delightedly about him.

"The green prairies sloped away to the skies; there was a clump of cottonwood trees near by and a little creek, the same that gurgles by Seth's claim, gurgled by his between twin rows of low green bushes.

"He admired this scenery, Jonathan did. He smiled a smile which stretched from one ear to the other when he discovered that his faithful and trusted horse had followed him down and was standing conveniently near by, ready for work.

" 'I like this part of the country,' he declared, 'better than the part we came from. We'll just stake off this claim and take possession.'

"After a moment of thought, however, he added provisionally:

" 'That is, until another cyclone takes a notion to move us.' "

CHAPTER VII.

Across the purple prairie, the wondering stars blinking down upon him, the wind tearing at him to know what the matter was, the tumbleweeds tumbling at the heels of his broncho, his heart in his mouth, Seth madly rode in the wild midnight to fetch the weazened old woman who tended the women of the desert, rode as madly back again, leaving the midwife to follow.

After an age, it seemed to him, she came, and the child was born.

Seth knelt and listened to the breathing of the little creature in the rapture felt by most mothers of newborn babes and by more fathers than is supposed.

Now and again this feeling, which more than any other goes to make us akin to the angels, is lacking in a mother.

Seth saw with a sadness he could not uproot that Celia was one of these. His belief, therefore, in the efficacy of the child to comfort her went the way of

other beliefs he had been forced one by one to relinquish. When, after some weeks of tending her, the old woman was gone, and Celia was able to be about, it was he who took charge of the child, while she, in her weakness, gave herself up to an increased disgust for her surroundings and an even deeper longing to go back home.

It was in vain that he showed her the broad green of the wheat fields, smiling in the sunlight, waving in the wind.

Some blight would come to them.

Fruitlessly he pictured to her the little house he would build for her when the crop was sold.

She listened incredulously.

. . . . . .

And then came the grasshoppers.

For miles over the vastness of the desert they rushed in swarms, blackening the earth, eclipsing the sun.

Having accomplished their mission of destruction, they disappeared as quickly as they had come, leaving desolation in their wake. The prairie farms had been reduced to wastes, no leaves, no trees, no prairie flowers, no grasses, no weeds.

One old woman had planted a garden near her dugout, trim, neat, flourishing,

with its rows of onions, potatoes and peas in the pod. It was utterly demolished. She covered her head with her apron and wept old disconsolate tears at the sight of it.

Another was hanging her clothes on the line. When the grasshoppers were gone there were no clothes and no line.

As for the beautiful wheat fields that had shone in the sun, that had waved in the wind, they lay before Seth's tearless eyes, a blackened ruin.

Was it against God's wish that they make their feeble effort to cultivate the plains, those poor pioneer people, that He must send a scourge of such horror upon them?

Or had He forsaken the people and the country, as Celia had said?

Seth walked late along the ruin of the fields, not talking aloud to God as was his wont when troubled, silent rather as a child upon whom some sore punishment has been inflicted for he knows not what, silent, brooding, heartsick with wondering, and above all, afraid to go back and face the chill of Celia's look and the scorn of her eye.

But what one must do one must do, and back he went finally, opened the

badly hung door and stood within, his back to it, with the air of a culprit, responsible alike for the terror of the winds, the scourge of the grasshoppers and the harshness of God.

"As a man," she said slowly, her blue eyes shining with their clear cold look of cut steel through slits of half-shut white lids, the words dropping distinctly, clearly, relentlessly, that he might not forget them, that he might remember them well throughout the endless years of desert life that were to follow, "you ah a failuah."

He hung his head.

"You ah right," he said.

For though he had not actually gone after the grasshoppers and brought them in a deadly swarm to destroy his harvest, he had enticed her to the plains it seemed for the purpose of witnessing the destruction.

"You ah right," he reiterated.

In the night Celia dreamed of home and the blue-grass hills and the whip-poor-wills and the mocking birds that sang through the moonlight from twilight till dawn.

Sobbing in her sleep, she waked to hear the demoniacal shriek of the tire-

less wind and the howl of a coyote, and wept, refusing to be comforted.

The next day she said to Seth firmly and conclusively:

"I am goin' home."

CHAPTER VIII.

To do her justice, Celia would have taken the child with her; but young as he was, Seth refused to give him up. He would buy a little goat, he said, feed the baby on its milk and look after him.

At heart he said to himself that he would hold the child as ransom. Surely, if love for him failed, love for the little one would draw the mother back to the hole in the ground.

He found Cyclona and implored her to keep the child while he hitched up the cart and drove the mother away over the same road she had come to the station.

It was a silent drive; each occupied with individual thoughts running in separate channels; she glad that her eyes were looking their last on the wind-lashed prairies blackened by the scourge; he casting about in his mind for some bait with which to entice her to return.

"You will come back to the child?" he faltered.

But she made no answer.

"If the crops succeed," he ventured, "and I build you a beautiful house, then will you come back?"

For answer, she gave a scornful glance at the blackened plains, flowerless, grainless, grassless.

"If the Wise Men come out of the East," it was his last plea, "and build the Magic City, then you will come back?"

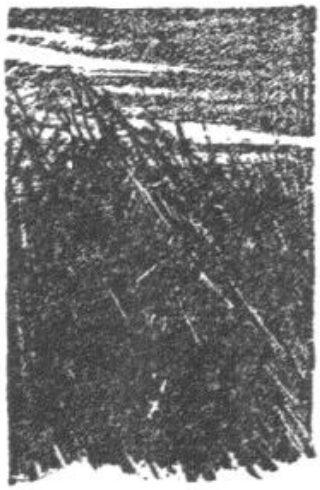
At that she laughed aloud and the wind, to spare him the sound of it, tossed the laugh quickly out and away with the jeer of its cruel mockery.

"The Magic City!" she repeated.

She laughed in derision of such violence that she fell to coughing.

"The Magic City!" she reiterated. "The Magic City!"

CHAPTER IX.



For one mad moment, such as comes to the bravest, Seth's impulse was to throw himself beneath the wheels of the car that was taking Celia away from him.

In another he would have lain a crushed and shapeless mass in their wake; but as he shut his eyes for the leap there came to him distinctly, pitifully, wailingly, the cry of the child.

Perhaps it came to him in reality across the intervening miles of wind-blown prairie. Perhaps the wind blew it to him. Who knows? Our Mother Earth often sends us help in our sorest need in her own way, a way which oftentimes partakes of mystery.

Perhaps it came only in memory.

However, it served.

He opened his eyes, and the madness had passed.

He pulled himself together dazedly,

unfastened the hitch rein of the mule, mounted awkwardly into the high and ungainly blue cart and started off in the direction of the cry.

The wind which on the coming trip had appeared to take fiendish delight in trying to tear Celia's garments to ribbons, now suddenly died down, for the wind loved Seth.

It had done with Celia. She was gone. But not by one breath would it add to the grief of Seth. On the contrary, it spent its most dulcet music in the effort to soothe him. Tenderly as the cooing of a dove it whispered in his ear, reminding him of the child.

He answered aloud.

"I know," he said. "I had forgotten him. The po' little mothahless chile!"

And the wind kissed his cheek, its breath sweet as a girl's, caressing him, urging him over the vastness of the prairie to the child.

On the road to the station, Seth's mind had been filled with Celia to the exclusion of all else. He had not observed the devastation of the prairie.

Unlike her, his heart held no hatred for the wayward winds. They were of heaven. He loved them. Fierce they

were at times, it was true, claws that clutched at his heart; but at other times they were gentle fingers running through his hair.

Their natures were opposite as the poles, his and hers.

The prairies were her detestation. He loved them.

He inherited the traits of his ancestors, the sturdy Kentucky pioneers who had lived in log huts and felled the forests in settling the country. Something not yet tamed within him loved the little wild things that had their homes in the prairie grasses:

The riotous birds, the bright-colored insects, the prairie dogs in their curious towns, sitting on their haunches at the doors of their little dugouts, so similar to his own, and barking, then running at whistle or crack of whip into the holes to their odd companions, the owls and the rattlesnakes; the herds of antelope emerging from the skyline and brought down to equally diminutive size by the infinite distance, disappearing into the skyline mysteriously as they had come.

But now he looked out on the prairie with a sigh.

It was like a familiar face disfigured

by a burn, scarred and almost unrecognizable.

The prairie in loneliness is similar to the sea.

In one wide circle it stretches from horizon to horizon.

It stretched about him far as the eye could reach, scorched and hideous as the ruin of his life.

He shut his eyes. He dared not look out on the ruin of his life. What if the ghastly spectacle should turn his brain?

That had been known to happen among the prairie folk time out of number. Many a brain stupefied by the lonely life of the dugout, the solemn, often portentous grandeur of the great blue dome, under which the pioneers crawled so helplessly, had been blown zigzag by the wild buffetings of the wayward, wanton winds, punctuating the dread loneliness so insistently, so incessantly, so diabolically by its staccato preludes, by its innuendoes of interludes prestissimo, by its finales frantically furious and fiendishly calculated to frighten the soul and tear the bewildered and weakened brain from its pedestal.

The reproach of the thought held

something of injustice, the wind blew with such gentleness, kissing his cheek.

His mind ran dangerously on in the current of insanity. He endeavored to quiet it.

The thought of his mother came to him.

Once he had heard her crying in the night, waiting for his father to come home, not knowing where he was, wondering as women will, and fearfully crying.

Then he heard her begin to count aloud in the dark:

"One, two. One, two, three," she had counted, to quiet her brain.

He fell mechanically to counting as she had done:

"One, two. One, two, three."

He must preserve his sanity, he said to himself, for the sake of the child. Otherwise it would be good to lose all remembrance, to forget, to dream, to lapse into the nothingness of the vacant eye, the down-drooping lid and the drivel.

"One, two. One, two, three," he counted, the wind listening.

In spite of the counting, with his eyes fixed on the desolation of the prairie, his thoughts on Celia, suddenly he felt

himself seized by gusts of violent rage. The desire to dash out his brains against the unyielding wall of his relentless destiny tore him like the fingers of a giant hand.

"One, two. One, two, three," he counted, and between the words came the cry of the child.

If he could only render his mind a blank until it recovered its equilibrium, a ray of sunshine must leak in somewhere.

It must for the sake of the child.

But how was it possible for him to go back to the ghastliness of the dugout, the bereft house, where it was as if the most precious inmate had suddenly died —to the place that had held Celia but would hold her no more!

It was necessary to count very steadily here, to strangle an outcry of despair.

"One, two, three. One, two, three. One, two, three, four, five."

He could count no further.

The wind, seeing his distress, soughed with a weird sweet sound like aeolian harps in the effort to comfort him, but he dropped the reins and laid his face in the hollow of his arm.

It was the attitude of a woman, grief-stricken.

He had evidently fallen into a lethargy of grief from which he must be aroused.

So thought the wind. It blew a great blast. It whistled loudly as if calling, calling, calling!

Was it the wind or his heart? Was it his Mother Nature, his Guardian Angel, or God?

Again pitifully, distinctly, wailingly, came the cry of the child.

He raised his head, grasped the reins and hurried.

On he went, on and on, faster and faster, until at last he came to the door of the tomb.

He descended into it. He took the child from the arms of Cyclona, who sat by the fire cuddling it, and held it close to his heart.

"He has been crying," she told him, "every single minute since you have been gone. Crying! Crying! No matter what I did, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't quiet him."

CHAPTER X.

On the following day Cyclona sat in the low rocking chair, rocking the baby, singing to it, crooning a lullaby, a memory of her own baby days when some self-imposed mother, taking the place of her own, had crooned to her.

"Sleep, baby, sleep,
The big stars are the sheep.
The little stars are the lambs, I guess,
The moon is the shepherdess,
Sleep,
Baby,
Sleep."

But the baby sobbed, looking in bewilderment up at the dark gypsy face above it in search of the pale and beautiful face of his mother.

Finding it not, he hid his eyes upon her shoulder, and sobbed.

The wind sobbed with him. Outside the window it wailed in eerie lamenta-

tion. It dashed a near-by shrub, a ragged rosetree that Seth had planted, against the window. The twigs tapped at the pane like human fingers.

"There, there!" soothed Cyclona, and she changed the baby's position, so that his little body curled warmly about her and his face was upturned to hers to coax him into the belief that she was Celia.

Once more she drifted into the lullaby, crooning it very softly in her lilting young voice:

"Sleep, baby, sleep.
The big stars are the sheep,
The little stars are the lambs, I guess,
The moon is the shepherdess,
Sleep,
Baby,
Sleep."

But the wind seemed to oppose her efforts at soothing the child whose startled eyes stared at the window against which tapped the attenuated fingers of the twigs. The wind shrieked at him. His sobs turned into cries.

Cyclona got up and going to the bed laid him on it, talking cooing baby talk

to him. She prepared his food. She warmed the milk and crumbled bread into it.

Taking him up again, she fed it to him spoonful by spoonful, awkwardly, yet in a motherly way.

Then she patted him on her shoulder, and tried to rock him to sleep, singing, patting him on the back cooingly when the howl of the wind startled him out of momentary slumber.

The wind appeared to be extraordinarily perverse. It was almost as if, knowing this was Celia's child, that Celia whose hatred it had felt from the first, it took pleasure in punctuating his attempt to sleep with shrieks and wailings, with piercing and unearthly cries.

Once it tossed a tumbleweed at the window. The great round human-like head looked in and the child, opening his eyes upon it, broke into piteous moaning.

The wind laughed, snatched the tumbleweed and tossed it on.

"The wind seems to be tryin' itself," complained Cyclona, getting up once more and walking about with the child in her arms, singing as she walked:

"Sleep, baby, sleep,
The big stars are the sheep,
The little stars are the lambs, I guess,
The wind is the shepherdess,
Sleep,
Baby,
Sleep."

The wind grew furious.

With a wild yell it burst the door of the dugout open.

Cyclona put the baby back on the bed, faced the fury of the wind a moment, then cried out to it:

"Why can't you behave?"

Then she shut the door and placed a chair against it, taking the baby up and again walking it back and forth, up and down and back and forth.

"It's just tryin' itself," she repeated.

Again she endeavored with the coo of the lullaby to entice the child into forgetting the wind.

But the wind was not to be forgotten. It turned into a tornado. Failing of its effort to tear off the roof of the dugout, it stormed tempestuously, fretfully; it raved, it grumbled, it groaned.

It screamed aloud with a fury not to be appeased or assuaged.

Cyclona had taken her seat in the rock-

ing chair near the hearth. She had laid the crying child in every possible position, across her knee face down, sitting on one of her knees, her hand to his back with gentle pats, and over her shoulder.

All to no avail. It seemed as if the child would never quit sobbing. The sense of her helplessness joined with pity for his distress saddened her to tears.

She was very tired. She had had charge of the child since early morning, when Seth, compelled to attend to his work in the fields, had left him to her.

She bent forward and looked out the window where the long fingers of the ragged rosebush, torn by the wind, tapped ceaselessly at the pane.

"Wind," she implored. "Stop blowing. Don't you know the little baby's mother has gone away? Don't you know the little baby hasn't any mother now; that she's left him and gone away?"

It seemed that the wind had not thought of it in this way. Occupied only with Celia's departure, it had not considered the desolation it had caused.

The long lithe fingers of the twigs ceased their tapping.

The wind sobbed fitfully a moment, lit-

tle sad remorseful penitential sobs, and died away softly across the prairie as a breath of May.

The stillness which ensued was so deep and restful that the eyes of the child involuntarily closed. Cyclona pressed his little body close to her, his head in the hollow of her arm. She rocked him back and forth gently, singing:

"Sleep, baby, sleep," the words coming slowly, she was so tired.

"The big stars are the sheep,
The little...stars...are...the lambs, I guess.
The moon...is...the...shepher...dess,
Sleep,
Baby...
Sleep..."

Her eyes closed. She nodded, still rocking gently back and forth.

After a long time Seth pushed open the door and looked in.

He set back the chair and came tiptoeing forward.

Cyclona raised her head and looked at him dreamily.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Be very quiet...He has gone to sleep."

CHAPTER XI.

"Brumniagen" is a name given to those wares which, having no use for them at home, England ships to other countries. The term, however, is not applied to one leading export of this sort: the scores of younger sons of impoverished Noblemen who are packed off to the wilds of Australia or to the Great Desert of America, to finish sowing their wild oats in remote places, where such agriculture is not so overdone as it is in England.

This economic movement resulted in a neighbor for Jonathan and Seth, a young, blue-eyed, well-built Englishman, whose name was Hugh Walsingham.

Jonathan walked out of his topsy turvy house one day to find the claim just north of his pre-empted by the young man who was evidently a tenderfoot, since his fair complexion had not yet become tanned by the ceaseless winds.

Walsingham had staked out the claim,

and was busily engaged in excavating a cave in which he purposed to dwell.

Jonathan, never busy himself, lent a helping hand, and he and Walsingham at once became friends.

The outdoor life of the prairie pleased Walsingham, the abundance of game rejoiced him. An excellent shot, his dugout was soon filled with heads of antelope, while the hide of a buffalo constituted the covering for his floor.

Surrounded by an atmosphere of sobriety, for even at that early date the fad of temperance had fastened itself upon Kansas, he became by and by of necessity a hard working farmer, tilling the soil from morning till night in the struggle to earn his salt.

There are not many women on the prairies now. Then they were even more scarce. It was not long before his admiring eyes centered themselves upon Cyclona. He fell to wondering why it was that she appeared to consider her own home so excellent a place to stay away from.

Personally he would consider the topsy turvy house a good and sufficient reason for continued absence, but according to his English ideas a girl should love her

own roof whether it was right side up or inverted.

The thought of this brown-skinned girl of the rapt and steadfast gaze remained with him. It was, he explained to himself, the look one finds in the eyes of sailors accustomed to the limitless reach of the monotonous seas; it came from the constant contemplation of desert wastes ending only in skylines, of sunlit domes dust-besprinkled, of night skies scattered thick with dusty stars.

His interest grew to the extent that he issued from his dugout early of mornings in order to see her depart for her mysterious destination.

He waited at unseemly hours in the vicinity of Jonathan's curious dwelling to behold her as she came back home.

On one of these occasions, when he was turning to go, after watching her throw the saddle on her broncho, fasten the straps, leap into the saddle and speed away, to be swallowed up by the distances, Jonathan came out of the topsy turvy house and found him.

"Walk with me awhile," implored Walsingham, a sudden sense of the loneliness of the prairie having come upon him with the vanishing of the girl.

Jonathan, always ready to idle, filled his pipe and walked with him.

"Who is the girl?" asked Hugh.

"She is a little girl we adopted," explained Jonathan. "I don't know who she is or where she came from. Her mother blew away in a cyclone. That is all I know about her."

"A pretty girl," commented Hugh.

"And a mighty good girl," added Jonathan. "I don't know what we'd do without her."

"You seem to do without her a good deal," said Hugh, relighting his pipe which the wind had blown out. "She is away from home most of the time."

"Cyclona's playing nurse," said Jonathan. "She's taking care of a child whose mother has deserted him. He is a good big boy now, but Cyclona's taken care of that child ever since he come into the world putty near," and he recited the story of Celia's heartlessness.

"What sort of man is the father?" queried Hugh with a manner of exaggerated indifference.

"Seth? Why, Seth's one of the finest men you ever saw. And he's good-looking, too. Sunburnt and tall and kind of lank, but good-lookin'. He's got some

crazy notion, Seth has, of buildin' a Magic City on his claim some time or other, but aside from that there ain't no fault to find with Seth. He's a mighty fine man."

. . . . . .

On the plains all waited for letters. Walsingham was no exception to the rule. Few came. He was too far away. Younger sons of impoverished noblemen are sent to far-off places purposely to be forgotten. He employed the intervals between such stray notes as he received in studying Cyclona.

He wondered what his aristocratic sisters would do if they were obliged to saddle their own ponies. He wondered what they would do if they were obliged to wear such gowns as Cyclona wore. And yet Cyclona was charming in those old gowns, blue and pink cotton in the summer and a heavy blue one for winter wear.

Constantly in the open she possessed the beauty of perfect health. Her brown cheeks glowed like old gold from the pulsing of rich blood. An athletic poise of her shoulders and carriage of head added grace to her beauty.

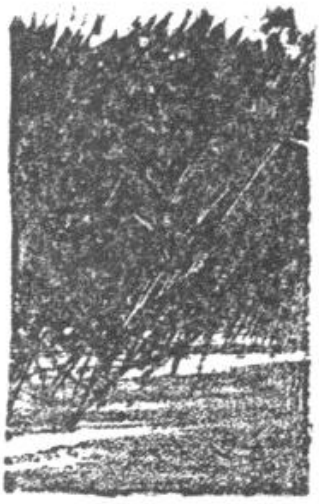
But her chief charm for the young

Englishman, surfeited with the affectation of English girls, lay in her natural simplicity.

Except for her association with Seth, whose innate culture could not but communicate itself, Cyclona was totally untutored. She knew nothing of coyness, caprice or mannerisms. Singleness of purpose and unselfishness shone in her tranquil and steadfast gaze which Hugh was fortunate enough now and then to encounter.

Walsingham found himself passing restless hours in the endeavor to devise means by which he might turn her frank gaze upon himself. In fancy he imaged her clothed in fitting garments, walking with that free, beautiful, lithe and swinging gait into the splendor of his mother's English home.

CHAPTER XII.



As the boy, whom Seth called Charlie, grew older, Seth cast about in his mind for some story to tell him which should serve to protect both Celia and himself.

Celia was not to blame for leaving him. He had long ago come to that conclusion. He was a failure, as she had said. Women as a rule do not care for failures, though there are some few who do.

They love men who succeed.

In personal appearance, aside from some angularities, considerable gauntness, and much sunburn, Seth told himself that he was not different from other men. It was not palpable to the casual observer that as men went he was a failure, but Seth realized the truth of Celia's judgment.

He had failed doubly. In the effort to provide her a home, and to imbue her with his belief in the Magic City. Since she had gone home he had sent her next

to no money. He had none to send. Perhaps that was why she did not write. He never knew. Putting himself in her place, he concluded she was right. A delicate little woman, far away from a great failure of a husband who could not provide for her, ought to let him go without letters.

And so thinking, he seldom hung about the post-office waiting for the mail. He trained himself to expect nothing.

Yes. It had been impossible for him to send her money.

Disaster had followed disaster and he had been barely able to keep himself and the boy alive.

He was a failure of the most deplorable sort, but the boy did not know it. He did not even guess it. The standing monument of his failure in life to Celia was the dugout. In the eyes of the boy it was no failure at all. Born in it he had no idea of the luxury of a house and the luxuries we wot not of we miss not.

He was used to lizards on the roof, to say nothing of other creeping things within the house which are generally regarded as obnoxious, roaches, ants, mice.

He rather liked them than otherwise, regarding them as his private possessions.

Besides, hadn't he Cyclona?

And as for the winds of which Celia complained so bitterly, he loved them. His ears had never been out of the sound of them and they were very gentle winds sometimes, tender and loving with their own child born on the desert. They lulled him. They cradled him. They were sweet as Cyclona's voice singing him to sleep.

In another State, where they failed to blow, it would in all probability have been necessary to entice a cyclone into his neighborhood to induce him to slumber.

Accustomed to the infinite tenderness of his father's care from the first, the boy loved him. Seth determined that if it were possible, this state of affairs should continue. If it were necessary to invent a story to fit the case, he would be as other men, or even better in the eyes of the child, until there came a time when he must learn the truth.

Perhaps the time would never come. If he could by any manner of means keep up the delusion until the Wise Men came out of the East and built the Magic City,

he would be a failure no longer. He would be an instantaneous success.

Also, though he fully pardoned Celia for her desertion of himself, he had never quite come to understand or fully forgive her desertion of the boy, her staying away as she had done month after month, year after year, missing all the beauty of his babyhood.

He therefore found it impossible to tell the boy that his mother had heartlessly deserted him, as impossible as to tell him that his father was a failure.

Yet the child, like every other, insisted upon knowing something of his origin. To satisfy him, Seth evolved a story, adding to it from time to time. He told it sitting in the firelight, the boy in his arms.

It was the story of the Flying Peccary.

"Tell me how I came in the cyclone," Charlie would insist, nestling into the comfortable curve of his arm.

"The cyclone brought you paht of the way," corrected Seth, jealous of his theory that cyclones never touched the place of his dugout, the forks of the two rivers, "and the flyin' peccary brought you the rest. You've heard me tell about these little Mexican hawgs, the wildest,

woolliest, measliest little hawgs that evah breathed the breath of life and how they ate up the cyclone?"

"Yes," nodded Charlie.

"Well, this was the first time, I reckon, that a cyclone evah met its match, becawse a cyclone was nevah known befo' to stop at anything until it had cleaned up the earth and just stopped then on account of its bein' out of breath and tiahd. But it met its match that time.

"You see, Texas is full of those measly little peccaries. You can hahdly live, they say, down theah for them. They eat up the rail fences, the wagon beds, the bahns and the sheep and the cows. They don't stop at women and children, I heah, if they get a good chance at them. And grit! They've got plenty of that, I tell you, and to spah, those little bad measly Mexican hawgs.

"Well, one day a herd of peccaries wah a gruntin' and squealin' around the prairie, huntin' for something to eat as usual, when a cyclone come lumberin' along.

"It come bringin' everything with it it could bring; houses, bahns, chicken coops and a plentiful sprinklin' of human bein's, to liven up things a little. A cy-

clone ain't very particular, any more than a peccary. It snatches up anything that comes handy. Sometimes it picks up a few knives and whacks things with them as it goes along. You know that, don't you, Cyclona?"

Cyclona nodded. She always lingered at the fireside to hear this story of the flying peccary which was her favorite as well as the child's.

"It brought me," she said.

The boy raised himself in Seth's arms.

"Maybe you are my sister!" he cried.

"Maybe I am," smiled Cyclona.

"At that theah Towanda cyclone," recommenced Seth, "that little Kansas town the cyclone got mad at and made way with, theah must have been a hundred knives or mo' flyin' around loose. They cut hogs half in two. You would have thought a butchah had done it. And the chickens were carved ready to be put on the table. It was wonderful the things that cyclone did."

"And the peccaries," Charlie reminded him.

"That cyclone," began Seth all over again, "came flyin' along black as night and thunderin' laik mad and caught up the whole herd of peccaries.

"Those peccaries ain't even-tempahd animals.

"They've got tempahs laik greased lightnin'. It made them firin' mad fo' a cyclone to take such liberties with them, and they got up and slammed back at it right and left. Well, they didn't do a thing to that cyclone. In the first place the whole herd of peccaries began to snap and grunt laik fury till the noise of the cyclone simmahd down into a sort of pitiful whine, laik the whine of a whipped dog. Imagine a cyclone comin' to that! Then, they tell me, you couldn't heah anything but the squealin' and gruntin' of those pesky little peccaries.

"Between squeals they bit into that theah cyclone fo' all it was wuth, takin' great chunks out of it, swallowin' lightnin' and eatin' big mouthfuls of thundah just as if they laiked it. All the stuff the cyclone was bringin' along with it wa'n't anything to them. They swallowed it whole and pretty soon, you'd hahdly believe it, but theah wa'n't anything lef' of that cyclone at all.

"They had eaten up ever' single bit of it except a tiny breeze they had fohgotten that died away mournful laik across the prairies, sighin' becawse it had

stahted out so brash and come to such a sudden untimely and unexpected end.

"Then, theah was the herd of peccaries about five miles from wheah they had stahted, sittin' down, resting, a-smilin' at each othah and congratulatin' each othah, I reckon, on the way they had knocked the stuffin' out of that theah ole cyclone fo' good and all.

"They must have scahd the res' of the cyclones off, too, becawse with them and the forks of the rivahs, they haven't been seen or heahd of aroun' these paths since."

"Exceptin' the tail end of that one that moved me," Cyclona reminded him.

"And what about me?" questioned Charlie.

"Oh, yes. One of these heah peccaries, a good-natured peccary, too, with a laikin' fo' little children, found you in the cyclone. You were a pretty little baby with big blue eyes the same's you've got now. I don't know exactly wheah the cyclone found you. Anyway, the peccary picked you up in his mouth. When he had rested as long as he wanted to with the other peccaries, he flew along and flew along—they had all got to be flying peccaries, you know, on account

of swallowin' so much wind, until he came to the door of my dugout, this same dugout we are in now, and he laid you very carefully down by the door. Then I went out in the mawnin' and brought you in."

Charlie invariably at this point reached up his arms and put them around Seth's neck.

It was very kind of him, he thought, to go out and bring him in. What if the wolves had come along and eaten him! Or the little hungry coyotes they heard barking in the nights. Ugh!

"And then the peccary flew away again?" he asked. "Didn't he?"

"Yes," answered Seth. "He flew away with the rest of the flyin' peccaries."

"And haven't you ever seen them since?" asked Charlie, "or him?"

"Sometimes you can see them 'way up in the air," replied Seth, running his fingers through his hair, "but they ah so fah away and little, you can't tell them from birds."

Cyclona nodded again.

"Yes," she corroborated, "they are so far away and little you can't tell them from birds."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Post Mistress at the station tapped her thimble on the window-pane at the chickens floundering in the flower-bed outside.

They turned, looked at her, then, rising, staggered off with a ruffled and uppish air, due partly to their indignation and partly to the fact that the wind blew their feathers straight up, and a trifle forward over their heads.

"It's bad enough," she said, "to try and raise flowers in Kansas, fighting the wind, without having to fight the chickens. It's a fight for existence all the way round, this living in Kansas."

Her companion was a man with iron-gray hair, a professor of an Eastern college who had come West, planted what money he had in real estate and lost it. He, however, still retained part of the real estate.

He frequently lounged about the office for an hour or two during the day, wait-

ing for the mail, good enough company except that he occasionally interfered with the reading of the postal cards.

He looked up from a New York newspaper, three days old.

"Pioneer people," he observed laconically, "must expect to fight everything from real estate agents to buffaloes."

The Post Mistress laid down her sewing. Her official duties were not arduous. They left her between trains ample time to attend to those of her household, sewing and all, also to embroider upon bits of gossip caught here and there in regard to her scattered neighbors whose lights of nights were like so many stars dotting the horizon.

She looked out the window to where a tall lank farmer was tying a mule to the hitching post. Over the high wheel of the old blue cart he turned big hollow eyes her way.

"I hope he won't come before the train gets in," she sighed. "There ain't no letter for him. I hope he won't come. Sometimes I feel like I just can't tell him there ain't no letter for him."

"Who is it?" asked the Professor.

"Seth Lawson," she answered.

The Professor elevated his eyebrows.

"The man who owns the ground on which they are to build the Magic City?" he asked laughingly.

"It may happen," declared the Post Mistress tartly. "Anything is liable to happen in Kansas, the things you least expect."

"Everything in the way of cyclones, you mean," put in the Professor.

"Cyclones and everything else," affirmed the Post Mistress. "No matter what it is, Kansas goes other States one better. She raises the tallest corn—they have to climb stepladders to reach the ears—and the biggest watermelons in the world."

"When she raises any at all," the Professor inserted.

"They say," began the Post Mistress, "that in the Eastern part of the State, where they are beginning to be civilized, when a farmer plants his watermelon seed, he hitches up his fastest team and drives into the next county for the watermelon, it grows so fast. Even then, unless he has a pretty fast team somebody else gets it. If you find one on your claim, you know, it's yours."

"I've heard that story," the Professor politely reminded her.

"They do say," remembered the Post Mistress, "that the Indians tell that yarn, that a cyclone never came to Seth's ranch. It may be a fool notion and it may not. . . . Look at him," leaning forward and gazing out the window. "See how gaunt and haggard and wistful he looks. I don't believe he gets enough to eat. There ain't a sadder sight on these prairies than Seth Lawson. How many months has she been away from him now? May, June, July, August, September, November," counting on her fingers. "Seven months and one little letter from her to say she got home safe. A dozen from him to her. More. You could almost see the love and sadness through the envelope. And none from her in answer.

"Look at him now. Walkin' up and down, up and down, to pass away the time till the train comes. Waitin' for a letter. It won't come. It never will come. And him waitin' and waitin'. He'd as well wait for the dead to come to life or for that wife of his to leave her Kentucky home she's so much fonder of than she is of him or the baby or anything else in the world, to come back to him. What sort of woman can she be

anyway to leave a little nursing baby?"

"Some cats leave their kittens before their eyes are open," the Professor said.

"But a woman isn't a cat," objected the Post Mistress. "At least she oughtn't to be. Do you know I've always said the worst woman was too good for the best man, but that woman has made me change my mind. She's gone for good. She don't have to stand the wind any longer or the sleet or the rain. She's gone for good. Then why couldn't she write him a little letter to keep the heart warm in him. What harm would that do her. How much time would it take?

"It don't seem so bad somehow for a woman to have the heartache. She's used to it, mostly. Some women ain't happy unless they do have it. Heartaches and tears make up their lives, they furnish excitement. But a man is different. You see a man holding a baby in long clothes. It's awkward, ain't it? Somehow it don't seem natural. If you have got any sort of mother's heart in your bosom, you want to go and take it out of his arms and cuddle it.

"It's the same with a man with the heartache. You want to go and take it

away from him, even if you have to keep it yourself. It don't seem right for him to have it no more than it seems right for him to have to take care of a child.

"That man's got both. The little baby and the heartache. But what can you do for him? There's nothing goin' to cure him but a letter from her, and you can't get that. If ever a man deserved a good wife it's that man, Seth, and what did he get? A Southern woman!"

"Those Southern women make good wives," asserted the Professor, "if you give them plenty of servants and money. None better."

"Good fair-weather wives," nodded the Post Mistress, "but look out for storms. That's when they desert."

"It's a sweeping assertion," mused the Professor, "and not quite fair. It is impossible to judge them all by this weak creature, Celia Lawson. Many a woman in Kentucky braved dangers, cold, hunger and wild animals, living in log huts as these women live in their dugouts, before that State was settled and civilized."

"Some won't give in that it is civil-

ized," objected the Post Mistress, "they're so given down there to killin' people."

"The only difference," went on the Professor, "was in the animals. They had bears. We have buffaloes. But sometimes you come across a woman who isn't cut out for a pioneer woman, and all the training in the world won't make her one. It's the way with Seth's wife."

"She's not only weak and incapable," vowed the Post Mistress, "but soulless and heartless."

"How these women love each other," the Professor commented.

" 'Tain't that," flared the Post Mistress. "I'm as good a friend to a woman as another woman can be. . . ."

"Just so," the Professor smiled.

"It's my theory," frowned the Post Mistress, "that women should stand by women and men by men. . . ."

"Your Theory," mused the Professor.

"And I practice it," declared the Post Mistress. "Only in this case I can't. Nobody could. What sort of woman is she, anyway? I can't understand her. She's rid of him and the child and the wind and the weather. She's back there where they say it's cool in the summer-

time and warm in the winter, where the cold blasts don't blow, and the hot winds don't blister, and still she can't take time to sit down and write a little note to the father of her child."

She looked away from the window and Seth to the Professor, who wondered why it was he had never before observed the beauty of her humid eyes.

"I can't bear to see him walking up and down," she complained, "waitin' and waitin'. It disgusts you with womankind."

The wind blew the shutter to with a bang. It flung it open again. Some twigs of a tree outside tapped at the pane. A whistle sounded.

Seth turned glad eyes in the direction of the sound. The train!

There was the usual bustle. A man brought in a bag of letters, flung it down, sped out and made a flying leap for the train, which was beginning to move on. The Post Mistress busied herself with distributing the mail and Seth walked back and forth, waiting.

Presently he came in at the door, stood at the grated window back of which she sorted out the letters and then went out again.

After a time he drove slowly by the house in the high blue cart.

"Was there anything for him?" asked the Professor.

The Post Mistress looked after the cart receding into a cloud of dust blown up by the wind and brushed her fingers across her eyes.

"There was nothing for him," she said.

CHAPTER XIV.

On the winter following Celia's departure, Seth fared ill.

It was all he could do to keep warmth in the boy's body and his own, to get food for their nourishment.

And as for homesickness!

There were nights when he looked at the silver moon, half effaced by wind-blown clouds, and fought back the tears, thinking how that same moon was shining down on home and her.

Nights when he fell into very pleasant dreams of that tranquil beauteous and pleasant country where the wind did not blow. Dreams in which he beheld flowers, not ragged wind-torn flowers of a parched and ragged prairie, odorless, colorless flowers and tumbleweeds tossing weirdly over dusty plains, but flowers of his youth, Four o'Clocks, Marguerites and Daffy-Down-Dillies, nodding bloomily on either side of an old brick walk

leading from door to gate, Jasmine hanging redolently from lattice, Virginia Creeper and Pumpkin-vine.

And oh!

A radiant dream! Celia, walking out through vine and flower in all her fresh young beauty to meet him as in the old days, to open wide the door and welcome him.

Then as she had done, he waked sobbing, man though he was, but he hushed his sobs for fear of waking the child.

Homesickness!

He dared not dwell on the word lest his few ideas, scattered already by the sough of the wind, the incessant moan and sob and wail of the wind, might blow away altogether; lest he throw to those winds his pride of independence, his resolute determination to make a home for her and himself and their child in the West, and go back to her.

This, whatever dreams assailed him, he resolved not to do.

And yet there was one dream which he thrust from him fiercely, afraid of it, turning pale at the remembrance of it. A dream of a night on that winter when he had gone to bed hungry.

It was a strange dream and terrible.

He thought it was night, he was out on the prairie, and the wolves were following him.

They had caught him.

Ravenously they were tearing the flesh from his body in shreds.

He waked in terror to hear the bark of a pack at his door, for in that winter of bitter cold the wolves also suffered.

"Was that to be his fate?" he asked himself.

Was he to strive and strive, to spend his life in striving, and then in the working out of destiny, in the survival of the fittest, of the stronger over the weaker, of those who are able to devour over those destined to be devoured, fall prey to the fangs of animals hungrier than he and stronger?

There were times when he was very tired. When almost he was ready to fold his arms, to give up the fight and say—

"So be it."

But what of the boy then?

Raising himself out of the slough of despond, he resolutely re-fed his soul with hope.

Those Wise Men! If only they could come! If only they could be made to

see and understand that this was the place for their Magic City and be persuaded to build it here!

Then all would be well. He would take the boy to Celia, show her how beautiful he was beginning to be and win her back again.

Then they would all three come and live in a palace in the Magic City, a beautiful house. Live happy ever after.

CHAPTER XV.

The wind lulled the child to sleep, the wind wakened him, the wind sang to him all day long, dashed playful raindrops in his upturned face and whispered to him.

Perhaps it was the wind, then, that was his mother. This variable, coquettish wind of tones so infinitely tender, of shrieks so blusteringly loud.

He listened to it in the dawn. He listened to it in the sombre darkness of the night. Early and late it seemed to call to him to come out and away to his mother.

The restlessness that sometimes encompasses the soul of a boy took possession of him. He was filled with the passion of wander-lust. The darkened walls of the dugout restricted him, those grim, gray earth walls that duskily, grave-like, enclosed the body of him.

He must be up and away.

He would go to the heart of the wind and find his mother.

Seth had gone to the town for feed for his cattle. Cyclona was at home. He took advantage of their absence to start on his journey.

Outside the dugout the wind enveloped him softly, enticingly, kissing his curls, kissing the rosy sunburn, the tender down of his cheek which still retained the kissable outline of babyhood.

It was day when he started, broad day, bright with the light of the red sun high in the heavens, surrounded by the brilliant hue of cloudless skies.

The boy ran.

The wind tossed him like a plaything as it tossed the big round tumbleweeds, making the pace for him a little beyond.

Now and again, broad day though it was, the wind blew blasts that frightened him, dying down immediately again into piping Pan-like whispers that lured him on and on until he became a mere speck on the trackless prairie, blown by alternate blasts and zephyrs, hurrying, hurrying, hurrying to the heart of the wind to find his mother.

But by and by the sun sank, dropping suddenly into the Nowhere behind the

darkling line of the mysterious horizon.

Then the twilight seeped softly over the prairie, like a drop of ink spilt over a blotter.

A little while later and the prairie became obscurely shadowy, peopled all at once by frightful things, familiar everyday things changed to hideous hobgoblins by the chrism of the dark.

Grasses with long human fingers beckoned him to the Unknown, which is always terrible, while great ever-moving tumbleweeds sprang up at him as if from underground, like enormous heads of resurrected giants.

And the voice of the wind!

As he neared the heart of it, it, too, took on an unknown quantity more terrible than the bugaboo of the shadows and the dark.

It howled with the howl of wolves.

The child began to be afraid. Pantingly, wildly afraid!

He stood still, looking breathlessly ahead of him to where the prairie stretched indefinitely to the rim of the starlit dome, billowy with long gray grasses blown into the semblance of fingers by the bellowing blasts of the fearsome wind.

He sobbed, he was now so far from home, and the voice of the wind had taken on a menacing note of such deep subtleness.

Which way was home? He had forgotten. The way the wind blew?

But the wind had turned to a whirlwind, blowing gales in every direction to mislead him, now that he wanted to go home.

True, there were the stars, blinking high above the stress and turmoil of the tireless wind, but he was too young yet to understand the way they pointed.

As he stood irresolutely sobbing, one ache of loneliness and homesickness and fear, he heard the call of a human voice and his name, the voice coming to him high above the wind, with its own note of terrorized anguish.

His father's voice!

The voice sounded nearer and nearer, calling, calling!

The child ran toward the sound of it, the loneliness of the prairie swallowed up in a sob of gladness, and he was in Seth's arms.

As for Seth, he could only articulate one word:

"Why? Why?"

Celia had deserted him, but the Boy!

"I was looking for my mother," sobbed the child in answer, safe in the tender hollow of his arm.

After a moment's hesitation:

"Mother will come to you some day," Seth breathed over him. "Won't Cyclona and father do till then?"

And in the close clasp of the longing man the child felt the unmistakable throb of paternity penetrate his heart and was satisfied.

CHAPTER XVI.

The winter had been too long and cold, or the child, however tender Seth's care of him, had been insufficiently clothed and fed.

He lay ill, alternately shaking with chills and burning with fever.

It was March now and the winds blew with the fierceness of tornadoes.

But the laughter of Charlie's delirium outvoiced the winds.

Now he moaned with them and sighed.

Cyclona took up her abode at the dug-out now, nursing him tirelessly, while Seth walked the floor, back and forth, back and forth like some caged and helpless animal writhing in pain; for from the first he had read death in the face of the child.

The wind lulled and Seth knelt by his bedside, his ear against Charlie's heart, listening for his breathing, Cyclona standing fearfully by, her face white as the coverings.

After a long time Seth raised beseeching eyes to her in an unspoken question:

"Does he breathe?"

As if he had heard, Charlie suddenly opened his eyes and looked smilingly first at one and then at the other of these two who had encompassed his short life about with such loving care.

"Listen," he whispered, "to the wind."

The wind had risen. It howled like some mad thing. It blew great blasts, ferocious blasts and deafening.

It was as if it, too, were hurt. It was as if it, too, suffered the agony of mortal pain in sympathy with the child.

Soon the child began to lisp and they bent their heads to listen.

"I am . . . going . . . out . . . in . . . the wind . . . again," he said, "to find . . . my . . . mother."

"Charlie!" cried Seth, in a voice whose anguish sounded high above the winds. "Stay! It is we who love you, Cyclona and I. Stay with us!"

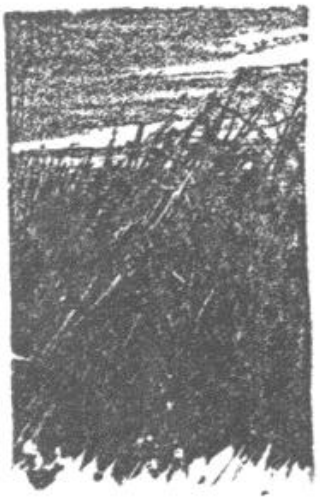
Cyclona knelt and laid her brown hand across the beautiful eyelids of the child for a little while.

Then she took Seth's head and pillowing it upon her bosom, rocked gently

back and forth as they knelt alone on the hard cold earth of the dugout floor.

"It doesn't matter now," she whispered to him; "he knows."

CHAPTER XVII.



The days are long in the desert. Sometimes they seem to be endless. When the wind would permit, Seth endeavored to find comfort in digging in the soil into which we must all descend, in getting near to it, in ploughing it, often with apparent aimlessness, never being able to count upon the harvest, but buoying up his soul with hope of the yield.

But there were days of wind and rain and sleet and cold stormy weather when all animals of the desert, whether human or four-footed, were glad to seek their holes in the ground and stay there.

These days Seth spent in building the beautiful house.

He sat before the dim half window, drawing the plan, Cyclona beside him, watching him.

Sometimes he called her Cyclona, and then again he called her Charlie; for

what with his grief and the wail of the wind, his mind had become momentarily dazed.

Full well Cyclona knew the story of the Magic City, having heard it again and again, but it was only of late when Seth had given up all hope of Celia's returning to the dugout that he commenced to plan the beautiful house.

"When the Wise Men come out of the East," Seth told her, "and buy up ouah land fo' the Magic City, we shall be rich. It is then that I shall build this beautiful house, so beautiful that she must come and live in it with us."

Cyclona leaned over the table on her elbows, looking at the plan. Her dark eyes were sad, for she knew that by "us," Seth meant Charlie and himself.

He ran his pencil over the plan, showing how the beautiful house was to be built. Somewhat after the fashion of a Southern house modernized. A Southern woman, he explained, must live in a house which would remind her of her home and still be so beautiful that not for one instant would she regret that home or the land of her birth which she had left for it.

"A species of insanity it is," he mut-

tered, "to bring such a woman to a hole in the ground." He bit his lip and frowned, "fo' theah ah women in whom the love of home, of country, is pa'amount. Above all human things, above husband, above children, she loves her home. Child! Celia has no child. Cyclona, has no one written to Celia that she has no child?"

This wildly, his eyes insanely bright.

"It is just as well," soothed Cyclona. "It doesn't matter. She never knew him."

It seemed to Cyclona that she could see the lonely resting place of the child reflected in Seth's eyes, so firmly was his mind fixed upon it.

"You ah right, Cyclona," he said by and by. "You ah right. It is just as well. It might grieve her, altho' it is as you say, she nevah knew him."

Cyclona traced a line of the plan of the beautiful house.

"Tell me about it," she said.

"It is her natuah," insisted Seth almost fiercely, "and we can no mo' change ouah natuah, the instinct that is bawn in us, that is inherited, than we can change the place of ouah birth. Can we teach the fish to fly or the bird to

swim, or the blind mole to live above the cool sof' earth in which centuries of ancestral moles have delighted to burrow? Then no mo' can you teach a woman in whom the love of country is pa'amount to love anothah country. Only by the gentlest mesauahs may you wean her from it. Only by givin' her in this strange new country something mo' beautiful than any othah thing she has evah known. And that," he finished, "is why I am goin' to build the beautiful house."

He fell to dreaming audibly.

"All these were of costly stones, accordin' to the measuah of hewed stones, sawed with saws within and without," he muttered, "even from the foundation unto the copin', and so on the outside toward the great court."

Cyclona reaching up took down from a shelf a well-thumbed Book, which, since books are scarce on the desert, both knew by heart, and opened it at the Book of Kings.

"Seth," she said, presently, touching him on the shoulder, "aren't you getting this house mixed up with the House of the Lord?"

"No," smiled Seth, "with the house

that Solomon built fo' Pharaoh's daughter whom he had taken to wife."

He went on softly:

"And the foundation was of cos'ly stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits. And above were cos'ly stone, aftah the measuah of hewed stones, and cedars."

"Seth," said Cyclona, to whom no dream was too fanciful, "are you goin' to build this house just like that one?"

"If I could, I would," Seth made reply, and then went on dreaming his dream aloud. "And he made the pillahs and the two rows around about upon the network, to covah the chapiters that were upon the top, with pomegranates; and so did he fo' the othah chapiter. And the chapiters that were upon the tip of the pillahs were of lily work in the porch, fo' cubits. Lily work," he lingered over the words, smiling at their musical poetry.

After awhile he began again to talk of the beautiful house which should have every improvement, a marble bath. . . .

"And it was an hand-breadth thick," interrupted Cyclona, "and the brim thereof was wrought like the brim of a cup, with flowers, of lilies; it contained

two thousand baths. If you could, would you build her a bath like that, Seth?" she questioned.

"I would," replied Seth, "and as fo' the lights!"

"There were windows in three rows," read Cyclona, "and light was against light in three ranks."

"Lights!" exclaimed Seth, "little electric lights tricked out with fancy globes of rose colah matching the roses in her cheeks."

He dropped his pencil and gazed ahead of him.

"Do you know?" he asked dreamily, "how I shall match that rose color of her cheek, not havin' her by? I shall taik the innah petal of a rose and maik the little lights the color of that."

Cyclona arose and walked over to a bit of glass that hung on the wall. She frowned at the reflection of her brown cheek there. A tender and delicate rose underlay the brown, but her eyes saw no beauty in it. She sighed as she came back and once more sat down.

"I shall have the beautiful house agleam with lights," went on Seth, who had failed to notice the interruption. "Lights at the sight of which Solomon

would have stood aghast, that splendid ole aristocrat whose mos' magnificent temples were dimly lit by candles. . . . Windows in three rows! Windows in a dozen rows out of which her blue eyes shall look on smooth green swahds and flowahs.

"The house shall gleam alight with windows. Theah shall be no da'k spot in it. Windowless houses ah fo' creatuahs of a clay less fine than hers," repeating tenderly, "of less fine clay. She is a bein' created to bask in the sunshine. She shall bask in it. These windows shall be thrown wide open to the sun, upstaiahs and down. Not a speck nor spot shall mah their cleanliness, lest a ray of light escape. Those who live in da'kness wilt within and without. She shall not live in da'kness. Nevah again. Nevah again shall she live in a hole in the ground."

After a time:

"Is it possible?" he mused, half to himself, half to Cyclona, "to build a house without a cellah?"

"I don't know," said Cyclona, whose knowledge of houses was limited to her own whose roof was still upside down, and dugouts.

"If I could build this house without a cellah," said Seth, "I would."

Cyclona again read from the Book.

"It stood upon twelve oxen," she read, "three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west and three looking toward the south and three looking toward the east. Why not stand it on oxen like that, Seth?" she questioned.

Seth laughed.

"That wasn't the house," said he. "That was the molten sea."

"Oh!" exclaimed Cyclona. "I know now. The foundation was of stone made ready before they were brought hither, costly stones, great stones. It must have a foundation of some sort," she argued, keeping her finger on the place as she looked up, "or it will blow away."

"Of co'se," assented Seth, "or it will blow away. Well, if it must it must; but we will put half-windows into that cellah so it won't be da'k, so it won't be like this, a hole in the ground. We will light it with electrics. But we won't talk of the cellah. That saddens me. I am tiahd of livin' in the hole in the ground myself sometimes. We will talk of the beautiful rooms above ground that we will build fo' her.

"Look. You entah a wide door whose threshold her little feet will press. She will trail up this staiahway," and he let his pencil linger lovingly over the place, "in her silks and velvets, followed by her maids, and theah on the second landing she will find palms and the flowahs she loves best, and her own white room with its bed of gold covahd with lace so delicate, delicate as she is. Soft, filmy lace fit fo' a Princess, fo' that is what she is. Theah will be bits of spindle-legged golden furniture about in this white bed-room of hers and pier-glasses that will maik a dozen of her, that will maik twenty of her, we will arrange it so; for theah cannot be too many reflections, can theah, of so gracious and lovely a Princess?"

Once more Cyclona tapped him on the shoulder.

"Seth," said she, "where is the room for the Prince?"

Seth looked up at her vacantly. It was some time before he answered. Then his answer showed vagueness; for what with the howl of the wind and the eternal presence in the closet of his soul of the skeleton of despair, his mind had become a little erratic at times.

"When the Prince has proven himself worthy to be the Prince Consort of so wonderful a Princess," he replied, "then he, too, may come and live in the beautiful house, but not until then."

His thoughts harked back to the cellar. Staring ahead of him he saw the slight figure of a woman silhouetted against the tender pearl of the evening sky, eyes staring affrightedly into the darkened door of a dugout, a fluff of yellow hair like a halo about the beautiful face.

"A cellah is a hole in the ground," he sighed. "A cellah is a hole in the ground. Theah shall be nothing about this house I shall build fo' the Princess in any way resemblin' a hole in the ground. Holes in the ground are fo' wolves and prairie dogs and . . ."

"And us," Cyclona finished grimly, then smiled.

Seth, drawing himself up, gazed at her.

In her own wild way Cyclona had grown to be beautiful, still brown as a Gypsy, but large of eye and red of lip. She might have passed for a type of Creole or a study in bronze as she faced him with that little smile of defiance on her

red lips. Too beautiful she was for a dugout, true, and yet the dusky brownish gray of the earth-colored walls served in a way to set off her rich dark coloring.

Seth returned to the plan.

"And for us," he assented, humbly.

"We must build it of stone," he continued. "White stone. Stone never blows away. It will be finished, too, with the finest of wood, covahd . . ."

"Wait," cried Cyclona, turning over the leaves of the Book, "and he built the walls of the house with boards of cedar, both the floor of the house and the walls of the ceiling. And he covered them on the inside with wood and covered the floor of the house with planks of fir."

"Cedah," nodded Seth. "It would be well to build it of cedah. The cedah is a Southern tree. It would remind her of home.

"We will finish it, then, with cedah and polish it so well that laik the mirrors it will reflect her face as she walks about. Heah will be the music room. It shall have a piano made of the same rich wood. It will look as if it were built in the house. Theah shall be guitahs and mandolins. She plays the guitah a

little, Cyclona, the Princess. You should see her small white hands as she fingahs the strings. I will have a low divan of many cushions heah by the window of the music room. She shall sit heah in her beautiful gown of silk. White silk, fo' white becomes her best, her beauty is so dainty. She shall sit heah in her white silk gown and play and play and sing those Southern songs of hers that ah so full of music. . . ."

He dropped his pencil and sat very still for a space, looking ahead of him out of the window.

The panorama, framed by its limited sash of wilful winds playing havoc with the clouds, became obliterated by the picture of her, sitting by a wide and sunny window, backed by those gay pillows, thrumming with slim white fingers on the guitar and singing.

Again Cyclona waked him from his day dream with a touch. He ran his fingers through his hair, staring at her.

"Is that you, Charlie," he asked her.

"Not Charlie," she answered. "Cyclona."

"I beg yoah pahdon," he said. "Ve'y often now you seem to me to be Charlie. I don't know why."

"Tell me more about the Princess," soothed Cyclona, "is she so beautiful?"

"Beautiful," echoed Seth. "She is fit fo' any palace, she is so beautiful. And when the Wise Men come out of the East we will build it fo' her. It shall have gold do'knobs and jewelled ornaments and rare birds of gay plumage to sing and keep her company, and painted ceilings and little cupids carved in mahble, and theah shall be graven images set on onyx pedestals and some curious Hindoo gods squatting, and a Turkish room of red lights dimmed by little carved lanterns and rich, rare rugs and pictuahs by great mastahs in gilded frames, and walls lined with the books she loves best in royal bindings. . . . And she shall have servants to wait upon her and do her bidding and we will send to Paris fo' her gowns and her bonnets and her wraps. And she shall have carriages and coachmen and footmen. A Victoria, I think I shall odah fo' her, ve'y elegant, lined with blue to match her eyes. . . . No—that would be too light. Her eyes are beautiful, Cyclona. Don't think fo' a moment that they are not, but can you undahstan', I wondah, how eyes can be ve'y beautiful and yet

of a cold and steely blue that sometimes freezes the blood in youah veins? A little too light, perhaps, and that gives them the look of cleah cold cut steel.

"I shall have the linings of her Victoria light, but not quite so light, a little dahkah and wahmah, perhaps, the footmen with a livery to match. That goes without sayin'. And she shall have outridahs, too, if she likes, as in the olden time back theah at home in the South. No grand dame of the ole and splendid South she loves so well shall be so grand as she, shall be so splendid as she when we shall have finished the beautiful house fo' her.

"Cyclona," wildly, "how could we expect a little delicate frail Southern woman to come and live in a hole in the ground. How could we? Why shouldn't she hate the wind? Ah! We must still the winds! We must still the winds! But how?"

At this Seth was wont to rise, to walk the circumscribed length of his miserable dwelling and to worry his soul.

"How shall we still the winds?" he would moan. "How shall we still the winds that the soun' of them shall not disturb her?"

After a long time of thinking:

"Cyclona," he concluded, "in some countries they move forests. Don't they? Have I read that or dreamed it? If only we could move a forest or two onto these vast prairies, that would still the winds. Tall trees penetratin' the skies would be impassable barriers to the terrible winds that have full sweep as it is. They would still the winds, those forests, if we could move them!"

Cyclona's heart was full at this; for Seth was far from sane, alas! when he talked of moving forests of trees to the barren prairies. The idea at last struck him as preposterous.

"We will build tall trees," he continued quickly, as if to cover the tracks of his mistakes. "We will build trees that will taik root in the night and spring up before morning. Trees that will grow and grow and grow. Magic trees growing so quickly in the lush black soil of the prairie once we get them started, the soil so neah the undahground streams by the rivahs heah, that the angels would look down in wondahment.

"They would, to see how quickly they would grow. Such trees would tempah

the winds that blow so now because they have full sweep, because there is nothin' to stop them. Winds, laik everything else, are amenable to control, if you only know how to control them. These tall trees will not only break the force of the winds, but they will shade her beautiful face as she drives about. They will shut off the too ardent sun that would wish to kiss her."

Now and again Cyclona grew a trifle impatient of this beautiful creature whose character she knew, whose child she had cared for and helped to bury, grew a trifle tired of hearing hymns sung in her praise.

"Where is she now?" she asked listlessly, knowing full well, merely to continue if the talk pleased him, tired as she was.

"Charlie," smiled Seth, and never once did Cyclona correct him when he called her Charlie, reasoning that perhaps the spirit of the child was near him, since there were those who believed that and it was comforting. "She is laik the flowahs, that beautiful one. She knows bettah than to bloom in this God-fo'saken country—that was what she called it—wheah you cain't get the flowahs to

bloom because of the wind that is fo'evah blowin'. She lives now wheah the flowahs bloom and the wind nevah blows."

Cyclona lifted her head to listen to the moan and the sough of the wind.

"I love it," she said.

"So do I," said Seth, "though sometimes I am half afraid of it, thinkin' it is getting into my brain, but she hated it. But nevah mind. When we grow tall trees that will break the force of the wind and shade her from the sun and build the beautiful house fo' her, she will come back home and live in it with us and we shall be happy! Happy! We shall fo'get all ouah sorrow, we shall be so happy!"

At that moment, the moment of the going down of the sun, the wind dropped and the passing clouds let in the gleam of the sunset at the window. It rested goldenly on Seth's face. It illumined it. It glorified it.

Cyclona looked at him long and earnestly, at the strong, fine lines of sadness brought beautifully out by this unexpected high-light of the skies, accentuated Rembrandt-like, against the darkness of the earth-colored hole in the ground.

Then she bent her sunburnt head and a tear fell on her hand outstretched upon the table.

At sight of the tear Seth was like a man who is all at once drunk with new wine. There is truth in the wine. There are times when it clears the brain for the moment and reveals things as they are.

He looked at Cyclona with new eyes. It was as if he had never before seen her. She differed from Celia as the wild rose differs from the rose that blooms in hothouses, and yet how beautiful she was! He realized for the first time her wonderful beauty. So olive of complexion with the delicate tinge of rose showing through, so bronze of hair in close-cut sun-kissed curls!

The little curls that gave her a boyish look in spite of the fact that she had blossomed into radiant womanhood. The big brown eyes. The curve of the neck, the little tip-tilted chin!

Seth had been hardly human if the thought of forgetting Celia and her indifference in Cyclona's arms had not more than once presented itself.

It presented itself now with the strength of strong winds.

Without home or kindred, without tie or connection, she was a flower in his pathway. He had only to reach out and pluck her and wear her on his heart. There were none to gainsay him. No mortal lived who dared defend her or say nay.

Why waste his life, then, in dreams and fantasies, in regrets, and hopings, when here lay a glowing, breathing, living reality?

He reached out his hand and caught hers in a firm, compelling grasp. A splendid creature sent to comfort him. A creature blown by the winds of heaven to his threshold. A dear defenceless thing without home or kindred, unprotected, uncared of, weak and in need of affection, in dire need of love.

Helpless, unshielded, unguarded. . . . unprotected . . . unguarded . . . uncared for. . . .

Seth frowned. The wind had wafted itself into his brain again. He was growing dazed.

He caught his hand away from Cyclona's. He thrust his fingers through his hair. He pressed them over his eyes.

These strange words persisted in piling themselves solidly between him and his

desire. They formed a barrier stronger than walls of brick or mortar.

Unprotected, defenceless, unguarded, uncared for, this girl who had rocked his child and Celia's in her arms, who had held him close to the warmth of her young bosom. This beautiful unprotected girl who had tenderly closed the eyes of his child!

The fragile barrier built by unseen hands was cloud-high now.

If the wraith of Cyclona had occupied the chair there by his side she could scarcely have been further removed from his embrace.

Humbly Seth bent over the small brown hand.

Reverently he kissed away the tear.

CHAPTER XVIII.

But the moons waxed and waned and the months lapsed into years and Seth grew hopeless, more and more hopeless, so hopeless that at last he began to lose faith in the Magic City, and to fear for the realization of his fantastic will-o'-the-wisp of a beautiful house.

Would the Wise Men never come out of the East to buy up his land and build that magnificent city of his dreams at the forks of the river where the cyclones never came, so that he could build his beautiful house for Celia? Or would they always stop just short of it?

Already that little town on the edge of the State called Kansas City because it was in Missouri, had boomed itself into a city and, being just outside the cyclone belt, had not been blown away. In spite of the fact that it had been set high on a hill it had not been blown away.

The Wise Men had built that town.

Also, there was another town they had built within the belt which promised to thrive, a town where the people had so arranged it that the coming of a cyclone could be telegraphed to them, where signs like this were posted, "A cyclone due at three o'clock," and they had ample time to shut up shop and school and prepare for it, going down into their cyclone cellars, shutting fast the doors and staying there until it was over.

True, a cyclone or two had grazed this town.

One had even taken off a wing. But, though a trifle disabled by each, it had continued to thrive, showing such evident and robust signs of life and strength that the cyclones, presently giving up in despair of making a wreck of it, had gone on by as Seth has said they would do once they found their master.

Then this town had been by way of premium for stanchness and courage made the capital of this State of tornadoes and whirlwinds.

But this was as far as it went or seemed to intend to go. Further south and west an attempt or two had been made to plant towns, but their cellars

had not been dug deep enough or their foundations had not been sufficiently firm, or the cyclones had not yet become reconciled to the sight of them. At any rate, the cyclones had come along and swept them away without a word of warning, and they had not been heard of since, neither cyclone nor town.

And so, altogether, Seth lost heart and came to the conclusion that his Magic City, if it was ever to be built would be built after his time and he would never have the happiness of gazing upon it. The hope of seeing it was all that had kept him in the West. Now that he had lost it, an uncontrollable longing came over him to go back home, to see the wife who had deserted him, throw himself at her feet and beg her forgiveness for his madness which had resulted in their separation.

From dreaming dreams of the Magic City he took to dreaming dreams of her.

It was years since he had seen her, but the absent, like the dead, remain unchanged to us. To him she was the same as when last he saw her.

How beautiful she had been with her great blue eyes and her hair the color of Charlie's, tawny, like sunshine! And

right, too. in her scorn of his visions. And how foolish he had been to dream of training the wind-blown West into a fit place for human beings to inhabit, or for great cities to be built! It would take a stronger hand than his to do that, he had come to believe. It would take the hand of God.

He had tried to find a tree that would grow so swiftly that the wind could have no effect upon it. He had planted slim switches of one kind after another and the wind had blown each to leaflessness, until now there stood a slim row of cottonwoods that he had tried as a last resort, but the same thing would happen to them, perhaps. He had lost faith in trees. But he would not say yet that he had lost faith in God.

He watched the same train trailing so far away as to seem a toy train and longed as she had done to take it and go back home.

At last he understood the look in her eyes as she watched it and the thoughts that enthralled her.

Sometimes when we strive for a thing and set our hearts on it, it holds itself aloof from us. When we cease to strive, it comes.

But that is among the many strange ways of Providence which seems to rule us blindly, but which is not so blind, perhaps, after all, as it seems.

Another of its ways most incomprehensible is to bring us what we have longed for a little too late sometimes.

But this is the story of Seth, and this is the way of its happening:

It was early in a mild and beautiful spring when the corn was young. It stood shoulder high, lusty and strong and green. What with the unwonted mildness of the weather and the absence of the usual storms and the proneness of the clouds to deposit themselves about in gentle showers, the crop promised fair to rival any crop that Seth had ever raised on the Kansas prairies.

He hoed and toiled and smiled and listened to the rustling of the corn, for he had made up his mind.

When the harvest was at an end he would sell the crop and the place for what it would bring, and go back home. He would go back to his wife and home!

The rustling of the corn was music in his ears. It was more. It was like the glad hand of young Love; for with the crops so fine and the harvest so rich,

when he went back home to her, he would not go empty-handed and unwelcome.

He was going back once more to his Kentucky home.

No hills seemed so green as those Kentucky hills and no skies so blue as those skies that vaulted above the green, green hills of his native land.

It had been longer than he cared to count since he had seen the blue grass waving about in the wind there, not such wind as swept the Kansas prairies, but gentle zephyrs almost breathless that rustled softly and musically through the little blades of grass just as the wind was rustling through the stalks now as he walked slowly with the heavy stride of the clumsy farmer, hoeing the corn.

And he had not heard the whip-poor-will, nor sat under the shade of the wide spreading oaks, nor listened to the soft Southern talk of his and her people, not since he had come to Kansas with those other foolish folk to brave the dangers of the strange new country in the search of homes.

Homes!

He could point out the graves of some of them here and there about the vast-

ness of the level prairies, though more often he wandered across the vast level wastes, looking for the places where they should be and found them not, because of the buffaloes that had long ago trampled out the shape of them, or because of the corn that had been planted in furrows above their mounds, the serried ranks through which the wind sang requiems, chanting, whispering, moaning and sighing in the balmy springtime and through the heat of the long summer days until in the chill of the autumn the farmers cut the stalks and stacked them evenly, leaving no dangling leaves to sigh through nor tassels to flout.

Now that he had made up his mind, the roughness of his life bore in upon him.

He thought with Celia that it would be good to live again in a land where people led soft, easy lives. She was not to be blamed. She was right with that strange animal instinct which leads some women blindly to the truth, and he had wasted the best years of his life and all of the boy's in this terrible land of whirlwinds and coyotes and wide, thirsty plains stretching to meet the blazing

skies of noonday or the star-gemmed dome of the purple night.

For the plains in some strange and mysterious way took vengeance upon many of those who dared upturn with hoe and plough the fresh new malarial soil, inserting germs of disease and death which soon stretched them beneath.

Some lives must invariably be sacrificed to the upbuilding of any new country, but why so many? And, sadder still, minds had been sacrificed. The asylums, such as they were, were filled with those whose minds in the ghastly loneliness of the desert had been torn and turned and twisted by the incessant whirl and shirr and swish and force of the pitiless winds.

He himself loved the wind, but there were times when he was afraid of it, when it got in his brain and whirled and caused him to see things in strange lights and weird, things fantastically colored, kaleidoscopic and upside down.

When the day's work was done he sat outside the dugout talking sometimes to himself, sometimes to Cyclona, telling of how when the harvest was over and gathered he would go back home.

His plan must succeed, he sighed, to

himself sometimes, sometimes to Cyclona, who would sit listening, her great eyes on the limit of the horizon, deep, dark, troubled as she brooded upon what her life would be when he was gone; and as he talked he panted in the deep earnestness of his insistence that the crops must succeed.

Other plans had failed, but not this. Not this! It must not! Resolutely he put away from him all thought of failure. It must succeed. He must go home!

He must ease this longing for the sight of Celia and her people which had come to him of late to stay with him through seed-time and harvest, through the early spring when the corn was young, and later when it rose to heights unheard of, and later still through those bitter days of grasshoppers and chinch bugs and hot winds and other blightful things that haunt the Kansas cornfield to their ruin.

He must go home.

CHAPTER XIX.

Since Seth had braved everything and dared everything, going so far even as to hire harvest hands to help him, taking every possible chance upon the yield of this harvest, as a gambler stakes his all upon the last throw of the dice, fortune seemed at last to come his way, and it promised a yield which eclipsed his wildest dreaming.

His heart grew light as he listened to the rustling of the corn and into his tired eyes, beginning to be old, there crept so warm a glow that the farm hands stood and stared at him as they came trooping in hot and dusty from the fields.

They wondered what could have come over him to give to his worn and faded face so nearly the look of youth.

"The corn is fine, John, isn't it?" he asked of a gray-haired man who sat at one corner of the rough table, mopping

his forehead with a large bandana handkerchief, not too clean.

John put the handkerchief back into his pocket and fell upon the meal Seth set before him.

"It's fine enough," said he, "it'll be the finest crop ever raised in these here parts if the hot winds don't come."

After a little while he said again:

"If the hot winds don't come."

Seth set a plate of bread down by him with a crash.

"The hot winds!" he cried. "The hot winds!"

Man as he was he clasped his hands together and caught them apart, wringing them.

"I had forgotten all about the hot winds!" he moaned. "I had forgotten all about the hot winds!"

. . . . . .

The softness of the spring air gave place to heat, to extreme heat, sudden and blighting. A copper sun blazed in a copper sky.

The cooling breezes under the influence of the heat changed to scorching winds. These winds blew menacingly through the rustling stalks of the strong green corn.

For one long day they laughed defiance, holding firmly erect their brave heads upon which the yellow tassels were beginning to thrust themselves aloft in silken beauty; and Seth, watching, braced himself with the hope that they would somehow stand the ordeal, that the heat might abate, that in some way, by the special finger of Providence, perhaps, the threatened ruin might be warded off, that a cooling breeze might come blowing up from the Gulf or a shower might fall and he could still go back home.

On the second day the heat had not abated. It had rather increased. The burning winds blew stronger. They raged with a sudden fury, died down to a whisper, and raged again.

John, when he led the field hands in, shook his head and took his place at the table in silence.

Seth, setting their meal before them, crept to the door and looked out.

He turned faint and sick at heart at the sight of the fields, for the tassels had drooped and the broad green leaves were slowly changing to a parched and withered brown, parched and withered as his face, which had been bared to the

heat of the Kansas prairies for so many years, parched and withered as his heart which had borne the brunt of sadness and sorrow and separation until the climax was reached and it could bear no more.

On the third day the hot winds grew vengeful. They swept across the prairies with a hissing sound as of flames sizzling through the heat of a furnace. The tassels, burnt now to a dingy brown, hung in wisps. The leaves drooped like tired arms. They no longer sang in the wind. They rattled, a hoarse, harsh rattle premonitory of death.

Far and near the fields lay scorched, withered, burnt to a crisp as if by the fast and furious blast of a raging prairie fire.

There was no longer need of harvest hands.

The harvest, gathered by the hot winds, was ended. The ruin was complete.

Their mission accomplished, the winds died down suddenly as they had risen and passed away across the barren prairies in a sigh.

Then up came the cooling breezes from the Gulf, light, zephyry clouds gathered,

shut off the brazen sunlight and burst into a grateful shower, which descended upon the parched and deadened fields of corn.

But Seth!

Flung on his knees by the side of the bed in the corner of the hole in the ground, his face buried in his arms, he listened to the patter of those raindrops on the corn.

His eyes were dry; but a spring had broken somewhere near the region of his heart.

He owned himself defeated.

He gave up the fight.

CHAPTER XX.

Cyclona had gone to Seth's dugout and found a note from him on the table. It contained few words, but they held a world of meaning. Simple words and few, tolling her knell of doom.

"I have gone to Celia," it read.

Cyclona crushed the paper, flung it to the floor and ran from the hole in the ground, afraid of she knew not what, engulfed in the awful fear which encompasses the hopeless,—the fear of herself.

She sprang to her saddle and urged her broncho on with heel and whip, upright as an Indian in her saddle, her face set, expressionless in its marble-like immobility.

She scarcely heeded the direction she took. She left that to her broncho, who sped into the heat of the dusty daylight, following hard in the footsteps of the wind.

What she wished to do was to go

straight to God, to stand before Him and ask him questions.

If within us earthworms there is the Divine Spark of the Deity, if we are in truth His sons and daughters, she reasoned, then we have some rights that this Deity is bound to respect.

What earthly father would knowingly permit his children to stumble blindly along dangerous pathways into dangerous places?

What earthly father would demand that his children rush headlong into danger unquestioningly?

What earthly father would create hearts only to crush them?

Why had He thrust human beings onto this earth against their will, without their volition, to suffer the tortures of the damned?

Why had He created this huge joke of an animal, part body, part soul, all nerves keen to catch at suffering, only to laugh at it?

Why had He taken the pains to fashion this Opera Bouffe of a world at all? Why had He made of it a slate upon which to draw lines of human beings, then wipe them aimlessly off as would any child?

For mere amusement after the manner of children?

If not, then why? Why? Why?

She could have screamed out this "Why" into the way of the wind.

She wanted to ask Him why he whirled body-clad souls out of the Nowhere, dragged them by the hair of their heads through ways thronged with thorns, then thrust them back again into the Nowhere, to lie stone still in their chill damp graves, in their straight grave clothes, awaiting His pleasure?

Why had He seen fit to fashion some all body and no soul?

Why had He made others all soul?

Why had He created the Seths to weary for love of the Celias and the Cyclonas to eat out their hearts for love of the Seths?

Some of these questions she had been wont to put to Seth, who had answered them as best he could in his patient way.

There was a hidden meaning in it all, he had said, meaningless as it often seemed. Some meaning that would show itself in God's good time.

We are uncut diamonds, was one of his explanations. We had much need of polishing before we could attain suffi-

cient brilliancy to adorn a crown. We must have faith and hope, he had said. Much faith and hope and patience. And above all we must have the belief that it would all come out in the Great White Wash of Eternity, in God's good time.

But there were those who succumbed before God's good time, who would never know the explanation until they had passed into the Beyond, where they would cease to care.

She rode on and on, asking herself these questions and finding no answer in the whirl and eddy of dust blown at her by the wind, in the limitless stretch of prairie, in the suffocating thickness of heat which enveloped the way of the wind.

Intense heat. Sultry, parching, enervating, sure precursor, if she had thought to remember, if she had been less engrossed in the bitterness of her questionings, of a storm.

Soon, aroused by the intensity of this heat, which burned like the blast from an oven, she whirled about and turned her broncho's head the other way.

It was time, for that way lay her home and danger threatened it.

At the moment of her turning a blast

blew with trumpet-like warning into the day, blazing redly like a fire of logs quickened by panting breaths.

A lurid light, like the light of Judgment Day or the wrath of God spread while she looked.

It enveloped her.

It was as if she gazed upon earth and sky through a bit of bright red stained glass.

In the southern skies, in the direction of her home, clouds piled high, black, threatening.

Then she heard a rushing sound of wind, wailing, moaning, threshing, roaring sullenly in the distance.

She spurred her broncho into the darkness lit by flashes of this lurid light.

A flash of light.

Then darkness, thick as purple velvet.

Furiously she urged the animal forward into this horrible unknown which had the look of the wrath of God come upon her for her doubting, pressed on by an innate feeling of affection for those two who had befriended her, hurrying to their aid, spurred by an instinctive foreboding of impending evil in this awful roaring, whirling, murder-

ous sound of the wild winds gone suddenly stark mad.

As she sped on, something swept past her with a great hoarse roar, distinguishable above the deafening roar of the wind.

It was Seth's herd, stampeding, running with the wind and bellowing with fear.

She winged her way into the terror of the darkness.

Ready an hour before for death in any form, she now all at once found herself panting with fear of it, gasping with a deadly fear of a ghastly fate, of being crushed and mangled, of dying by inches beneath some horrible weight, but this did not deter her.

Afraid to breathe a prayer to the God whom she had dared to question, she winged her way breathlessly on and on.

Then sheets of water, as if the skies had opened and emptied themselves,—and a vivid flash of lightning revealing the wind's wet wings, its wild whirling fingers dripping.

Cyclona saw it coming in that flash, a fiendish thing apparently alive, copper-colored, funnel-shaped, ghastly. She threw herself forward on the neck of her

broncho, grasping his mane. Then a blow from a great unseen hand out of the darkness struck them both, felling them.

During the next few minutes of inky blackness, of indescribable terror, of flying missiles armed with death, Cyclona lay unconscious. When she opened her eyes a calm light of the evenness of twilight had spread over the track of the cyclone, and her head lay pillowed on Hugh Walsingham's shoulder. Close beside her was a ragged bough and her broncho lay dead near by. The bough was the hand that had struck them out of the darkness, had thrown her to the sod and killed her animal.

"I came very near," she sighed, "to standing before God."

By and by with Walsingham's help she stood.

"Where is the house?" she asked, bewildered by the barrenness of the spot on which the topsy turvy house had stood for so many years.

"It is gone," said he.

Cyclona pressed both hands to her face and rocked back and forth, sobbing.

God had spared her, true, but He had

offered her this delicate irony of leaving her homeless.

Hugh looked moodily out over the place of the topsy turvy house, his own mind awhirl with the maddening force of the furious winds through which he had passed.

"In Kansas," said he, grimly, "it is the wind that giveth and the wind that taketh away."

Then, looking tenderly at the girl in his arms, he added softly: "Blessed be the name of the wind!"

CHAPTER XXI.

Thereafter at station after station, a tall, gaunt man may have been seen handling baggage, running errands, caring for the cattle, doing any sort of work, no matter how humble, that lay to his hand, making his way slowly, wearily but steadily on toward the South.

Seth, working his way home to Celia.

He slept in baggage cars, on cattle trains. He swung to steps of trains moved off and clung there between brief stations. He stopped over at small towns and earned his bread at odd jobs, bread and sufficient money sometimes to move on steadily for a day or two.

Strange weathers burned and bit him. He walked heavily in the path of the wind overhung by pale clouds. He slept under the stars out in the open.

It was days before he passed the plains, the place of the sleepless winds where

wan white skies bent above the grass of the hot dry pulse, the lifeless grass that wailed into the ceaseless wind its dirge of death and decay.

It was weeks before he reached Kansas City, the city of hills, with lights hung high and lights hung low. Here he found a place as brakeman and worked his way into Missouri.

Here it was as if an ocean steamer had suddenly stopped the whir of its wheels at the approach of the pilot come out from shore to tug it in.

The wind had stopped blowing.

The position was only temporary. Another brakeman taking his place, Seth walked.

He was not sorry to walk in this quiet land. How tenderly green the shrubbery was, how beautiful! Mingled with the darker green of the cedar and pine, the brown green of the cone.

How sweet the slow green trees! Not windswept! Not torn by the wild, wet fingers of the wind, not lashed with hot and scathing fingers gone dry with drought, but still and peaceful.

A sleepy world of streams it was, a sleepy world of streams and sweet green trees among whose leaflets gentle zephyrs

breathed scarcely perceptible sighs of pure contentment.

Patiently, contentedly, he walked mile after mile through this beautiful Missouri which was so like home, among these tall, sighing trees, under the protection of their great still umbrella-like heads, thinking of his dream Celia, whom he was so soon to see.

The absence of the wind had left his brain clear. Since it was so short a time until his dream was to become a reality, no longing or heartache served to set his brain afire with the agony of despair. Calmly he walked in the white straight rain among the tender trees, his tired brain clear, thinking of her.

How would she receive him?

Surely, in spite of his empty-handedness, she would greet him lovingly because of their long separation and the death of the child. Surely she would receive him lovingly because of the endless days that had divided them. Those days! Those days! But he refused to let his mind dwell on the deadly length of them. It might sadden again.

In the world, he reasoned, there were those two only, Celia and himself. Should they not cling together?

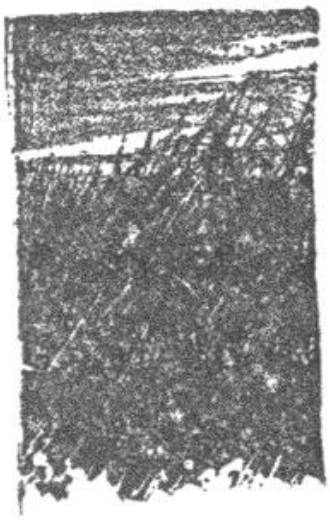
True, he would arrive empty-handed, but he could make a living for her and himself in the old town. He was not without friends there. There were those who had loved him in the olden time. They would give him work. They would help him build up his lost fortunes. He would spend his life in retrieving, in compensating to Celia for the foolish years that he had spent dreaming dreams.

In St. Louis he remained for weeks, working about the station in the effort to earn enough for his ride to Cincinnati. At length he succeeded, but on an emigrant train.

He rode for a day, looking out the window at the landscape swimming by rather than at his wild-eyed companions, crowded together like sheep. At the end of the day he arrived at Cincinnati.

And then Seth came into—into God's country.

CHAPTER XXII.



For some months after Celia's return to her native town, her friends gathered gladly about her. A little visit! That was natural enough. They welcomed her with open arms.

As the visit lengthened, questions ensued.

The child. What of him. Was he not very young to leave for such a length of time? Was not that a strange mother who could thus separate herself from a babe in arms; who could deprive him of the warmth and comfort of her embrace?

And Seth? What of him? For Seth had many friends among them who knew his great heart and his worth.

How was it possible for her to remain apart from her husband and child so long?

Contented in the soft and balmy clime, in the land of her birth, she told them

of the terror of the winds, of the sun-baked prairie, of the plague of the grasshoppers, of the hot winds that blistered, of the scorch of the simoons, of the withering blasts of summer and the freezing storms of winter, and thought that sufficient explanation until she beheld herself reflected in the coldness of their glances as in a mirror, set aloof outside their lives as a thing abnormal, as a worthless instrument whose leading string is somehow out of tune, which has snapped with a discordant twang.

However, this did not greatly distress her. She turned to her mother for companionship. The mother filled what small need she had of love until she died. She was soon followed, this mother of hers, into the land of shadows by the loving shadow of herself, Celia's black Mammy. Then Celia was left alone in the old house, which, for lack of funds, was fast falling into ruin, the wrinkled shingles of the roof letting in the rain in dismal drops to flood the cellar and the kitchen, the grass growing desolately up between the bricks of the pavement that led from door to gate for lack of the tread of neighborly feet.

Life, which is never the same, which

is ever changing, changes by degrees. Not all at once did Celia's soul shrivel but gradually. Now and again in the early days following upon her return to her home, at the cry of a child in the street, she would start to her feet, then remember and shrug her shoulders and forget. And there were some nights that were filled for her with the remembered moan of the prairie winds. She heard them shriek and howl and whistle with all their old time force and terror. She sprang wildly out of bed and ran to the window to look out on the slumbrous quiet of the Southern night, to clasp her hand and thank her good fortune that she looked not out on the wide weird waste of the trackless prairie.

Gradually, too, she descended to poverty and that without complaint.

To poverty dire as that from which she had fled, except that it was unaccompanied by the horror of simoon and blizzard, of hot winds and cold.

For her this sufficed.

Too proud to ask for help of those who passed her by in coldness as a soulless creature of a nature impossible to understand and therefore to be shunned, she toiled and delved alone, a recluse and

outcast in the home of her birth. She delved in the patch of a garden for the wherewithal to keep the poor roof over her head. She hoed and dug and drove hard bargains with the grocers to whom she sold her meagre products. She washed and ironed and mended and darned and cooked, coming at length perforce to the drudgery which throughout her brief life in the hole in the ground she had scornfully disdained.

Not once did the thought of asking help of Seth or of returning to him present itself.

And yet there were tardy times when the memory of the winds remained with her day in and day out, when at twilight she sat on the steps of her vine-covered, crumbling portico and communed with herself.

When, placing herself apart, she reviewed her life and observed herself with the critical eye of an uninterested outsider.

Invariably then she would say to herself, remembering the wail and shriek and moan of the hideous winds:

"I would leave them again, the winds and the child and him. If it happened a second time, and I again had the

choice, I would leave them exactly the same."

Then aloud, in apology for what had the look to her own biased eyes of utter heartlessness:

"It was the fault of the winds," she would mutter, "it was the fault of the winds!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

Kentucky! God's country!

It was as if Seth had dropped out of a wind-blown cloud into a quiet garden, sweetly fenced about and away from the jar and fret of the world.

Placid, content, tranquil, standing stock-still in the delicacy of its old-fashioned beauty, as if the world outside and beyond had never progressed.

He wandered by old and rich plantations, carved by necessity into smaller farms, past big white stone gates opening to wide avenues which led up to them, looking wistfully in, still content to wander a space before he should experience the rapture of seeing Celia's face, loitering, the white happiness of that within his reach, half fearing to hold out his hand for it, fearing it might vanish, escape phantasmagorically, turn out to be a will-o'-the-wisp.

Whip-poor-wills accompanied him in his wanderings, Bob Whites, Nightingales; and lazy ebon negroes, musical as birds, sang lilting Southern songs on the way to the tinkle of banjo and guitar.

The negroes were not so kind as the birds. From them he suffered humiliation.

More than once he was dubbed "Po' white!" by some haughty ebon creature from whose mouth he was supposedly taking the bread.

But here, as in Missouri, he looked for consolation to the wet woods, to the still, soft, straight rain, to the sighing trees that softly soughed him welcome.

After weary days and nights, working by day on rock-pile or in field, sleeping by night in the corner of a friendly fence of worm-eaten rails, fanned by the delicate hair of the pale blue grasses, he came to Burgin.

The driver of the bus that conveyed passengers to Harrodsburg looked down upon him from the height of his perch. He was strange to Seth, but he recognized a something of the kinship of country in his face and manner.

"Have a lif'?" he asked.

Seth refused. It was bright daylight.

He wished to steal into his old home under the covering of the twilight, he was so footsore and bedraggled.

"I'll walk," he smiled, "but thank you just the same."

Four miles, then, over hill, down dale, past dusty undergrowth, the brilliant blue of the skies above him, passing negroes who looked strangely at him out of rolling eyes, who jerked black thumbs in his direction over shoulders, saying:

"See de po' white trash man, walkin' home!"

But there were some Bob Whites singing in the bushes over the rail fences, singing, singing!

A bird at the side of the road rested momentarily on a long, keen switch of a blackberry bush, the switch bent earthward, the bird flew off and the twig bent back again.

At sight of him ground squirrels sped into the underbrush.

Somewhere on the other side of the rail fences little negroes sang. They were too young yet to jerk their thumbs at him and say:

"Po' white!"

Now that he was so near to Celia his heart misgave him. How would she re-

ceive him, coming home to her a tramp, a dusty, tired, footsore tramp, wet, chilled to the bone, footsore and tired! So tired!

He forged ahead, trying hard to throw off these thoughts. It was the scornful negroes who had engendered them.

A mile from Harrodsburg he came to the toll gate. A woman whose yellow hair showed streaks of gray, raised the pole for him, smiling at him.

"That man had eyes like Seth Lawsons," she said to her husband, who smoked his pipe on the porch while she raised and lowered the poles and so supported the family.

She was the girl who had called goodby after Celia years before, when she left for her journey to the West and the Magic City.

. . . . . .

It was twilight when Seth came to Celia's gate.

A woman sat alone on the step of the portico, looking out down the pike.

Seth paused, his hand on the latch, seeing which the woman shook her head negatively.

Seth raised the latch, whereupon she suddenly stood, frowning.

"I have nothing for you," she called out raspingly. "There is not a thing in the house to eat. Go away! Go away!"

"Celia!" Seth cried out, stabbed to the heart. "I am not a beggar for bread, but give me a crust of kindness for the love of God! I am Seth."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Seen from afar off by the loving eyes of memory, the cows' horns are longer than they are close by.

The kitchen was old and smoky. Once on a time it had been regularly calcimined, twice a year, or three times, but it had been many years now since it had undergone this cleanly process.

Celia's welcome of Seth had been according to her nature, all the more hardened now by seclusion and poverty. She heard without emotion of the death of the child. It mattered little to her. She had never known him. Seth, come back to her a failure, a tramp, was deserving of scant courtesy. She meted it out to him as it seemed to her he deserved.

The miles he had travelled counted little. Since he had proven himself too great a failure to travel as men do, it was only just that he should work his

way, sleep in fence corners, live on crusts and walk.

It was one of her theories that, given sufficient time, all men and animals sink to their level.

Who was Seth that he should be exempt from this law?

The thought occurred to her that he had come to her as a last recourse. That, unable to make his own living, he had come to share hers.

That thought scarcely served to add warmth to her welcome.

Seth sat on a chair against the blackened wall in the position of the tramp who has covered weary distances, whose every bone aches with the extreme intensity of fatigue.

He was like a rag that had been thrown there.

As Celia had watched him get their first supper in the dugout, so he now watched her. As she had sat bitterly disillusioned in the darkness of the hole in the ground, so he sat within the four close walls of the smoke-begrimed kitchen of her old Kentucky home, disillusioned beyond compare.

In the once sunny hair there were streaks of gray, but it was not that.

There were wrinkles beneath the blue eyes that had not lost their sternness, the cold blue of their intensity, the chill and penetrating frost of their gaze. Somehow, too, those large and beautiful eyes had appeared to grow smaller with the passing of the years, not with tears, for there are tears that wash out all else but beauty in some women's eyes, but with the barren drought of feeling which goes to sap the very fount of loveliness.

And it was this barren drought of feeling which at last served to disillusion him, whose existence he at last realized in this creature who had been his cherished idol. He realized it in her apathy upon hearing of the death of the child. He realized it in the look she turned upon him in which he saw her stern suspicion that he had come homeless to her in the hope of a home.

Formerly, in the days of her mother and her old black Mammy, they had taken tea in the dining-room, which had looked out on a green sward brightened by flowers.

Gay and cheerful teas these were, enlivened by guests.

In the absence of guests, Celia had fallen into the slack habit of eating in

the kitchen of the smoke-begrimed ceiling and the dark bare walls. There was a small deal table against the window. It was covered with an abbreviated cloth.

Celia walked about setting this table for Seth and herself, laying with palpable reluctance the extra plate, cup, saucer, knife and fork. Her movements were no longer girlish. They were heavy and slow.

When tea was ready she bade Seth draw up his chair. They then ate their supper, Seth too tired to talk and Celia busy with the problem of this added mouth destined to consume the contents of her scant larder.

When supper was over Seth left her to clear the table, went out in the dark on the front porch away from the cold steel blue of her eye and sat down on the step.

Men seldom shed tears, or he would have found it in his heart to weep.

CHAPTER XXV.

Not many moons after the wreck wrought by the withering winds, which, while they had not touched the place of the forks of the two rivers, lacked little of it, the Wise Men came out of the East and found Cyclona alone in the Kansas dug-out there by the Big Arkansas and the Little Arkansas.

"Is this the place where the Indians pitched their tents?" they asked, "because no cyclones come here?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Then this," said they, "is where we will build our city."

"The Magic City," repeated Cyclona, without surprise.

"When we have finished it," they smiled, "it will be a Magic City."

Cyclona looked wistfully out along the weary track of the wind.

"Buth Seth," said she, "will never see it maybe. He has given up and gone back home."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Few there are who have not heard of the Magic City, the Windy Wonder of the West, the Peerless Princess of the Plains, and how it sprung up mushroom-like in a night there at the forks of the Big Arkansas and the Little Arkansas, where the Indians had pitched their tents and Seth had lived and hoped and despaired, and how men went wild erecting Colleges and Palaces and Temples and Watch Factories and buying up town lots so far from the town that if the city had been built on all of them it would have surpassed the marvellous tales of it written in the newspapers, reached half way to Denver and become, instead of the Magic City of the West, the Magic City of the World.

Seth had been a dreamer of dreams, but his vision of the Magic City was not half so marvellous as the city itself.

Fortunes were made in a day and lost before midnight.

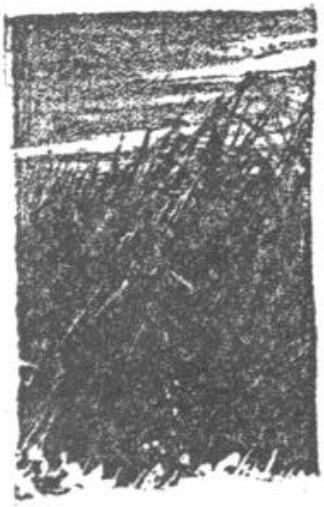
Men came from far and near, many from the other side of the water, and bought town lots and sold them, bought still others and built tall houses and planted great avenues of trees, cottonwood trees, the trees of Seth's imaginings, trees that seemed also to spring up in a night, they grew so magically, thrusting deep roots into the moist black soil and greedily sucking up its moisture in a very madness of growing, and laid off parks and sent flashing electric cars out into the large farms and dangled big soft balls of electricity in the middle of the streets that twinkled at eventide like big pale blinking fireflies.

Those who had formerly eked out a precarious enough existence in dugouts, now lived in palaces, had their raiment fashioned by hands Parisian, and gave receptions on a scale of such grandeur that the flowers offered as souvenirs thereat would have kept many a wolf from a dugout door for years, and a few Wise Men it was said lost their heads in the mad whirl of speculation, but as that often happens in the building up of any great city, not necessarily in the West,

it was not so surprising as it might have been.

Indeed, the World stood still a moment, agape at the wonder of the Magic City, and there were those who, now that Seth had passed out of the way of the wind into a country strange to them, spoke of him reverently as Prophet and Seer, going so far as to express regret that while within the sound of their voices they had carelessly dubbed him a foolish dreamer of mad, fantastic and impossible dreams, yet comforting themselves withal with the thought that they were not alone in denying a Prophet honor in his own country, since so wagged the world.

CHAPTER XXVII



The Magic City, stretching itself far and near, had not failed to include the little station.

Common walls of plank no longer enshrined the person of the Post Mistress. She no longer looked out from the limited space of a narrow window onto ragged flower beds in whose soft, loose earth floundered wind-blown chickens.

She dwelt in the wide, white marble halls of a lofty new Post Office. Bell boys, porters and stenographers surrounded her.

It was five o'clock. The Professor stood near while she sorted out some letters and placed them in pigeon-holes. He was clad in the latest fashion as laid down by the London Tailors who, at the first sound of the Boom, had hastened on the wings of the wind to the Magic City. His frock coat radiated newness, his patent leathers shone, and a portion of the brim of a tall silk hat rested daintily be-

tween thumb and fingers of a well-gloved hand.

As a matter of fact, since he had proved himself her friend through thick and thin, through storms and adversity, through high winds and blizzards, the Post Mistress had at last, after much persuasion, awarded him the privilege of standing by her throughout the rest of her natural existence.

A dapper youth in livery approached the window, asked for letters and withdrew.

There was about him a certain air of elegance which yet had somehow the subtle effect of having been reflected.

"Will Low's valet," explained the Post Mistress. "Sometimes it seems to be a dream, all this. These men who sat around my big blazing stove spinning cyclone yarns while they waited for the brakeman to fling in the mailbag, sending their valets for their mail! It seems like magic, doesn't it?"

"It does," assented the Professor.

"There's Zed Jones," continued the Post Mistress, "with his new drag, his Queen Anne cottage built of gray stone, his Irish setters. And Mrs. Zed sending to Paris for all her clothes, and the little

Zeds fine as fiddles with their ponies and their pony carts."

"And Hezekiah Smith," reminded the Professor.

"Who used to sleep on a pile of newspapers in his old newsstand on the corner, driving his tandem now. And Howard Evans and Roger Ganes and a dozen others, all poor as church mice then, and rich as cream now. It is like fairy land. You, too," with an admiring glance at the frock coat, "worth fifty thousand. And my bit of land bringing me a small fortune. I think after," with another smile in his direction, "we'll let some other lone single woman have this job who needs the money. We won't keep the Post Office any longer."

The Professor smiled a silent assent.

"But the most wonderful thing of all," went on the Post Mistress, "is that girl Cyclona. All of twenty-seven or eight, but she looks like a girl. It was pretty cute of her, wasn't it, to jump Seth's claim?"

"She didn't exactly jump it," said the Professor. "She was taking care of it after Seth went away, when her own topsy turvy house blew off somewhere.

She had no other home. I wouldn't exactly call it jumping Seth's claim."

"Call it what you please," said the Post Mistress, "but it amounts to the same thing. She got all the money the Wise Men paid for the claim, and it went into the millions. Why, Seth's claim takes up the very heart of the city. That girl's worth her weight in gold, that Cyclona, and she deserves it, taking care of the baby first, then watching after Seth. I believe she's in love with Seth. I believe she lives in hopes that he'll come back again. I know. She is seen everywhere with Hugh Walsingham, drivin' with him in her stylish little trap, a good driver she is, too, after ridin' fiery bronchos, herdin' Seth's cattle and livin' wild-like on the prairies. She's a splendid whip, afraid of nothin'.

"But you can see in her big, stretchy faraway eyes that she ain't thinkin' about Hugh Walsingham, that she's always thinkin' about Seth and wishin' it was him a drivin' with her in that stylish little trap of hers."

She stopped to read a postal card.

"Cyclona's a fine young woman," she resumed, "and a beautiful young woman, if she is brown as a gypsy, but the wind

has left a wheel in her head. She has never been right since that storm that blew away the topsy turvy house. Another shock and her mind will go entirely. I've heard a doctor say so, a man who knows. She deserves all she's got and a happy life with that handsome Englishman, but here she is with some fool idea that the money, all these riches she's fallen heiress to, that make her the belle of the Magic City, ain't hers. That they are held in trust for Seth and Celia, that heartless Celia, who deserted her husband and baby to go back to her home in the South.

"What right has that Celia got to any money that comes out of the West she hated so, out of this wind-blown place she wouldn't live in? None at all. No more right than I have. Leaving Seth out here on the plains all by himself, grievin' for her, breakin' his heart for her, nearly losin' his mind with grief about her.

"The money's Cyclona's. She worked for it, never thinkin' of the reward. She took care of the child and looked after Seth. She deserves all the good that can come to her, that girl does."

"She does," assented the Professor.

"Hugh Walsingham's in a good fix, too," continued the Post Mistress, "sold his claim for a whole lot of money. Able now, he is, to help his poor relations back there in England, who sent him to the plains to get rid of him. Funny how things turn out sometimes.

"Cyclona coming out of Nowhere, and he packed off out of England, both outcasts, both rich now and ready to live happy ever after, if Cyclona would only get rid of this fool notion of hers that she's only holdin' the riches in trust for Celia and Seth.

"Have you heard the news? It's this: You know Nancy Lewis, the dish-washer in the restaurant before the Boom, the girl who happened to save her earnings and buy a bit of land that turned into a gold nugget? Well, a millionaire who made his money here, fell in love with her. She accepted him, but he made a slight mistake. He failed to keep an engagement with her one night and sent a waiter with a note. She got huffy and went off and married the waiter.

"We can't rise all at once from our station in life, can we? Like as not, when we get into our new house and put on style ourselves with our drags

and our dogs, I'll be sortin' out letters in my dreams and handin' them through a dream window to the people. This girl is a born dish-washer. She clung to her station. Her children may rise from the position of dish-washers, if they have enough money and education, but not she.

"Wait a minute. Here's a postcard I haven't read yet. It looks like it's been through a cyclone. Land sakes alive! Guess who it's from!"

"Can't," said the Professor, beginning to be hungry.

The Post Mistress turned the card over and over.

"It's from Jonathan, Cyclona's father," she chuckled. "Of all the people in the world! It is post-marked Texas.

"So that's where they blew to! It's to Cyclona, but everybody will be dying to know what it says. Listen:

" 'Dear Cyclona:—

" 'I think you will be glad to hear that this cyclone was good to us, blowin' us 'way down here in Texas, where the weather is so fine. It saved me the trouble, too, of bothering with the roof.

It blew it right side up and the clothes are all down in the room now.

" 'Your affectionate father,

" 'Jonathan.

" 'P. S.—I like this part of the country better than I did Kansas. I think we will stay here, Cyclona.' "

"Until another cyclone comes along," the Professor commented, "and blows him into the Gulf."

"I wonder," mused the Post Mistress, "if the cyclone put the clothes away in the presses when it took them down from the walls."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was as the Post Mistress had said. Cyclona was the heiress of the Magic City. As Seth had predicted, she sold his land in its heart for more money than she knew what to do with. Cyclona was not only the most beautiful young woman in the Magic City, but she was the most beautifully gowned and exquisite, what with her well-filled purse with its attendant luxuries of maids, mantua-makers and milliners. She was new to look at, but old thoughts clung to her, old dreams, old fancies.

Cyclona dreamed a dream one night. She thought that she was in the old dugout at the little deal table before the dim half-window, outside which the wind sang fitfully, blowing the tumbleweeds hither and thither, near and far, with moans and sighs, and Seth sat by her side. And as of old he talked to her of the beautiful house.

"All these were of costly stones, according to the measures of hewed stones," she heard him say in the dream, "sawed with saws within and without. Even from the foundation unto the coping, and so on the outside toward the great court."

Cyclona sat up in her bed with a start and slept no more.

So it was the beautiful house that she was to build, of course. Wondering how it was she had not thought before of carrying out Seth's dearest wish without waiting to be reminded of it in a dream, reproaching herself, condemning her selfishness, marvelling how she could for a moment have considered this money her own which she simply held in trust for Celia and Seth.

Thereafter, Hugh, in spite of his deep affection for her, became occasionally somewhat exasperated with Cyclona, who all at once developed such peculiar ideas in regard to the building of the house, ideas gathered from an old and yellow plan resurrected from the leaves of a well-thumbed Bible brought from the dugout.

"Cedar!" he cried. "Must we bring cedar all the way from the South? It

will cost a fortune. Why not use some other wood? There are others as beautiful."

"We will use cedar," determined Cyclona without further explanation, and cedar they used, carved curiously in pomegranate and lily work, very beautiful, Hugh had to acknowledge, though the expense was more than it should have been, no matter how much money a young woman had to throw to the birds.

"Shall we have so many windows?" he asked as Cyclona ordered window after window, according to the old yellow plan.

"There must be no dark spot in all this house," decided Cyclona, and when it was finished there was not. Built of stone brought from great distances, stone of delicate pink from Tennessee, carved, wide of door, alight with windows, it was a marvel to those who came and stood by, watching the building of it.

"A beautiful house," they called it. "A beautiful house!"

There was no word of Seth in regard to the beautiful house that Cyclona failed to remember.

"This is the stairway," she heard him say, "up which Celia shall trail in her

silks and her velvets. This is the threshold her little feet shall press, and here is the low divan before a wide and sunny window where she shall sit and thrum on her guitar."

Cyclona fashioned the threshold of marble, she built the stairway spacious, she had the low divan carved in cedar and placed it before a wide and sunny window in the music room. She placed there mandolins and guitars. She ordered a piano made of cedar for the music room. She had antique and gorgeous pillows embroidered by deft fingers for the low divan, then went on to the bedroom of white and gold, of which Seth had delighted to dream. She ordered pier-glasses, so many that Hugh began to fear indeed for her sanity. She bought spindle-legged furniture of gold and scattered it about. She covered the gold bedstead with lace of the rarest. She hung curtains at the sunny window, but curtains of so lacey a web that no possible ray of light could they exclude.

"Exquisite!" exclaimed Hugh, "but must you have gold door knobs?"

"We must," answered Cyclona; and people came in wonder to look at the

beautiful house whose gold door knobs passed into one of the many traditions of the excess of insanity displayed by the very rich of that marvellous boom in their expenditure of money.

Cyclona caused the cellar to be lighted, according to Seth's directions, until there was no dark spot in it. Light gleamed throughout, if not the light of day, the light of electrics.

"I never in my life," declared Hugh, "saw so light a cellar. It is like a conservatory."

By the time the house was finished, it was the wonder of the Magic City, which itself was the wonder of the West for its beautiful houses.

Then, when carpenter, painter, woodcarver and decorator had departed, and the house stood in the sunshine, a gem of a house, surpassing, if possible, in beauty, the house of Seth's imaginings, he came to Cyclona for the last time in a dream. He stood in the dimness of a low-roofed room, looking out of a window. His face was inexpressibly sad. He stood there stilly for a long time, looking out of the window.

Then there rushed through Cyclona's

dream the heavy whirring roar of the wind, the moan of the wind, the wail of the wind.

Cyclona started out of the dream with a cry.

What had happened? What was it? What was it?

It was as if her life had gone out all at once like the flame of a candle. It was as if her heart-strings had snapped asunder.

What was it? What was it?

She lay back among her pillows, trembling in the dark, afraid of she knew not what, her wide eyes agaze at the ceiling's shadows.

And then after a long while she fell asleep again and once more dreamed.

The wind soughed through her dream again, pitifully, wailingly, as it had often soughed outside the dugout. Presently it dropped to a whisper and the passing gleam of clouds let in a slab of sunlight through the window.

Was Seth in the dugout then, or in that other room?

Whichever it was, the sunlight rested goldenly on the calmness of his face. It glorified it.

In her dream, Cyclona looked long and

lovingly at the strong, fine lines of it brought out by this unexpected high light of the skies, accentuated Rembrandt-like against the darkness of the hole in the ground.

Yes. It was in the hole in the ground and not that other room of the Beautiful House.

As she looked the calm dream face of Seth turned to her with a smile of ineffable content.

On the following day Hugh said to her:

"Now that the beautiful house is finished, be mine. Be mine!"

She shook her head and looked at him with eyes that turned the heart of him cold. The pupils that had once been large and full and black had shrunk to the size of pin heads.

"No," she said. "I will wait and keep the house beautiful for Seth. Last night I saw him in a dream. He'll be coming home soon now to the beautiful house."

She walked to the window and looked out. She sank into a chair there, folded her hands and smiled contentedly, looking out through the leaves of the trees down the sunlit road.

"I will wait here for Seth," she re-

peated. "He won't be long now. He'll be coming home soon. I saw his face last night in a dream, and he smiled at me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

The whittlers of the little sticks sitting on dry goods boxes which surrounded the corner grocery looked up as a wagon came lumberingly down the Lexington Pike, rounded the corner and made its way up Main Street to Tom Coleman's livery stable.

They watched a man get out, lift an enormous trunk and carry it into the stable on his shoulders. They saw the man bend earthward beneath the weight of the trunk.

"Seth Lawson," they explained to some newcomers. "He's got a place at last. Drivin' the baggage wagon from Burgin to Harrodsburg and back again."

Tom Grums, the grocer, puffed a few whiffs of his pipe.

"That's the man," he explained succinctly, "whut was goin' to conquer the West. That's the man whut said he was

goin' to build the Magic City at the forks of two rivahs wheah the wind didn't blow."

By and by, when he had unhitched and fed his horse Seth came down the street, passed the whittlers of the little sticks and went on up the Lexington Pike to his home and Celia's.

He walked laggingly. There has something that he must tell Celia and he was afraid. It was impossible for him to keep the place.

He was not young enough. He was not sufficiently nimble. They wanted a younger man, they told him, to lift the trunks. He had been months getting the place and now he had lost it. He had lost it within a week.

He walked slowly through the hall to the kitchen where Celia stood at the old stove, cooking their supper. He sat by the window presently, watching her.

No. He wouldn't tell her. He could not. He hadn't the courage to face the scorn of her eye, to face the cold steely blue of it.

He ate the supper she set silently before him slowly. It had the taste to sawdust.

After supper he went out on the porch

awhile and sat looking into the dusk, looking over the fine soft green of the dim grass on the opposite lawns, his mind going back to the scorched and parched grasses of the prairie.

How quiet it was! How windless. There came to him the memory of the wind as it soothed him that day of Celia's home coming. He had not hated the wind. He had loved it. There came also the memory of the wind as it soughed around the dugout on those lonely nights, when he and Cyclona had planned the beautiful house for Celia. In a flash of light he seemed to see Cyclona.

With this rose by his side, he had gone sighing after the roses of memory.

He arose and began to walk up and down, up and down to the gate and back, to the gate and back, thinking of Cyclona and the wind. A restlessness began to possess him, a longing for the sound of the wind, for the sound of the voice of Cyclona which had mingled from the first, from first to last, with the sound of the wind. The windless stillness oppressed him. He stopped at the gate and looked again across at the quiet grass of the still, dim lawns, then he

walked back into the house, along the hall and up into the low-roofed garret, which had been set apart for him by Celia.

He closed the door of the garret very carefully behind him. He walked to the window and looked out. The stillness weighed upon him. If only he could run into the wind! If only he could hear again its wail, its sob, its grief, its moaning.

Oh, no. It was impossible to tell Celia that he no longer had work. He had no courage to face the steel blue of her eye.

Impossible, too, to face the sarcastic whittlers of the little sticks who sat around the corner grocery in the morning, he who was to have conquered the West and build the Magic City. They were total strangers to him. All his old friends in the town seemed to be dead.

He took a pistol down from the shelf and looked at it. He turned it around and around, the dim light coming in at the window playing on it. Since the first night of his arrival he had had it ready.

"A man who cannot earn his salt," he said softly, "encumbers the earth."

He held the thing, playing with it. He smiled as he played with it. He went to the window and stood for a long while, looking out, thinking of Cyclona, thinking very lovingly of Cyclona, that beautiful girl who had cared for him and the child. He would like to see Cyclona once more before,—but that was impossible. In the other world, perhaps.

God was not to blame. How could He look after so many? If he put them here with all their faculties, was it His fault if they failed?

He was very tired. His fingers rested lovingly upon the weapon that was to send him to the other world. He was very tired. He was very tired.

By and by he placed the weapon to his temple, taking careful aim.

In a blinding flash of light he saw Cyclona.

There was the heavy roar of the wind, the wild and woeful wind of the prairies, —and stillness.

CHAPTER XXX.

Some visitors from the East to the Magic City, whose fame was now widespread, were driving gaily by the beautiful house, which was one of the choice show places of the town.

Cyclona, sitting by the window, turned her wide, soft eyes their way.

"How beautiful she is," sighed one of the girls, "but how strange her eyes are! How vacant they are! There is no expression in her eyes," she said and sighed again.

"She has built the house," explained the guide, "for someone she says who ought to own it. She sits there waiting for him, taking care of the house, keeping it beautiful for him.

"She is very gentle and mild," he added, as they passed out of sight of the beautiful house, "and so they let her live

there instead of locking her up in an asylum with all those other pioneer prairie people whose minds went the way of the wind."