

MRS. BRANDT'S BOARDER.

A TOUCHING STORY.

HE CAME up the mountain road at nightfall, urging his lean mustang forward wearily, and coughing now and then a heavy, hollow cough that told its own story.

There were only two houses on the mesa, stretching shaggy and sombre with grease-wood from the base of the mountain to the valley below. Two unpainted red-wood dwellings, with their clumps of trailing pepper trees and tattered bananas, mere specks of civilization against a stern back ground of mountain side. The traveler halted before one of them, bowing awkwardly as the master of the house came out.

"Mr. Brandt, I reckon." Joel Brandt looked keenly into the stranger's face. Not a bad face, certainly; sallow and drawn with suffering; one of those hopelessly pathetic faces barely saved from the grotesque by a pair of dull wistful eyes.

Not that Joel Brandt saw anything grotesque or pathetic about the man. "Another sickly-looking stranger outside, Barbara, wants to try the air up here. Can you keep him? Or maybe the Foxes'll give him a berth."

Mrs. Brandt shook her head in housewifely meditation.

"No, Mrs. Fox can't; that's certain. She has an asthma and two bronchitises there now. What is the matter with him, Joel?"

The stranger's harsh, resonant cough answered.

"Keep him? To be sure. You might know I'd keep him, Joel. The night air's no place for a man with a cough like that. Bring him into the kitchen right away."

The new comer spread his bony hands over Mrs. Brandt's cheery fire, and the soft, dull eyes followed her movements wistfully.

"The fire feels kind o' honey, ma'am; California ain't much of a place for fires, it 'pears."

"Been long on the coast, stranger?" Joel squared himself interrogatively.

"'Bout a week. I'm from Indianny. Brice's my name—Posey Brice, the boys in the glass mill called me. I was blowed up in a glass mill once." The speaker turned to show an ugly scar on his neck. "Didn't know where I wuz for weeks—thought I hadn't lit. When I come to there wuz Loisy potterin' over me; but I ain't been rugged sence."

"Married?"

The man's answer broke through the patient homeliness of his face at once.—He fumbled in his pocket silently, like one who had no common disclosure to make.

"What d'ye think o' them, stranger?" Joel took the little black case in his hands reverently. A woman's face—not grand nor fair even—some bits of tawdry finery making its plainness plainer—and beside it a round-eyed boy plumped into a high chair, and two little feet sturdily out in Joel's face.

"Mrs. Brandt looked over her husband's shoulder with kindly curiosity.

"The boy favors you amazingly about the mouth; but he's got his mother's eyes, and they are sharp, knowing eyes, too. He's a bright one, I'll be bound.—Yours, I reckon."

"Yes, that's Loisy an' the boy," fighting the conscious pride in his voice like one who tried to wear honors meekly.

He took the well-worn case again, gazing into the two faces an instant with helpless yearning, and returned it to its place. The very way he handled it was a caress, fastening the little brass hook with scrupulous care.

"I'll be sendin' fur 'em when I get red o' this pesterin' cough."

A very quiet, unobtrusive guest Mrs. Brandt found the man Brice, talking little save in a sudden gush of confidence—and always of his wife and child; choosing a quiet corner of the kitchen in the chill California nights, where he watched his hostess' deft movements with wistful admiration.

"Try huntin', Brice; the doctors mostly says it's healthy."

And Brice tried hunting, as Joel advertised. Taking the gun from its crotch over the door, after breakfast, and wandering for hours in the yellow wine-like air of the mesa, he came in at noon and nightfall empty-handed, yet no one derided his failure. There was something about the man that smothered derision.

"A sort o' thunderin' patience that knocks a fellow," Bert Fox put in. Mrs. Brandt had always an encouraging word for the hunter.

"Grease-wood's bad for huntin', Joel says it don't pay to look for quail in the brush when he does fetch 'em down."

"Like enough. I dunno, ma'am.—Reckon I've had a good many shots at the little critters, but they allus turn their heads so kind o' innocent like. A man as has been blowed up once hisself ain't much at separatin' fami-

lies. But I s'pose it ain't the shootin' that's healthy, mebbe."

And so the hunting came to an end without bloodshed. Whether the doctors were right or whether it was the mingled resin and honey of the sage and chapparel, no one cared to ask. Certain it is that the "pesterin' cough" yielded a little, and the bent form grew a trifle more erect.

"I think likely it's the lookin' up, ma'am. Mountains seems to straighten a fellow some way. 'Pears to me somebody writ onct uv liftin' his eyes to the hills for help. Mebbe not, though. I ain't much at recollectin' verses.—Loisy's a powerful hand that way."

Perhaps the man was right. It was the looking up.

He followed Joel from the table one morning. Ef there's odd jobs you could gi' me; I'd be slow, mebbe, but seems like most anything 'ud be better 'n sittin' round."

Joel scratched his head reflectively.—The big, brawny-handed fellow felt no disposition to smile at his weaker brother.

"Fox and I was sayin' yesterday, we'd like to put another man on the ditch; it'll be easy work for a week, till we strike rock again. Then there is the grease-wood. It is always on hand.—You might take it slow, grubbin' when you was able. I guess we'll find you jobs enough, man."

The scared, colorless face brightened up.

"Thank, ye neighbor. Ef you'll be as kind, there's another little matter. I will hev a trifle over when I've paid your woman for her trouble. I wuz thinkin' like enough you'd let me run up a shanty on your place here. Loisy wouldn't mind about style—just a roof to bring 'em to. It's for her and the boy, you know," watching Joel's face eagerly.

"Yes," said Brandt, "we'll make it all right. Just take things kind o' easy. I'll be goin' in with wood next week, and I'll fetch you a load of lumber. We will make a day of it after 'while, and put up your house in a jiffy."

And so Brice went to work on the ditch gently at first, spared from the heaviest work by strong arms and rough kindness. And so, ere long, another rude dwelling went up on the mesa, the smoke from its fires curling slowly toward the pine-plumed mountain tops.

The building fund, scanty enough at best, was unexpectedly swelled by a sudden and obstinate attack of forgetfulness which seized good Mrs. Brandt.

"No, Brice, you haven't made me a spark o' trouble, not a spark. I'm sure you've paid your way twice over bringin' in wood, and grinding coffee and the like. Many a man'd asked wages for the half you've done, so I'm gettin' off easy to call it square." And the good lady stood her ground unflinchingly.

"You've been powerful good to me, ma'am. We'll be watchin' our chance to make it up to you.—Loisy and me.—I'll be sending for Loisy directly now."

"Yes, yes, man, and there'll be the bits o' furniture and things to get.—Spread your money thin, and Mrs. Fox and I'll come in and put you to rights when your looking for her."

He brought the money to Joel at last, a motley collection of silver pieces.

"Ef ye'll be so kind as to send in to her neighbor—Mrs. Loisy Brice, Plattsville, Indianny—I've writ the letter tellin' her how to come. That's enough fur the ticket and a trifle to spare. The boy's a master hand at scuffin' out shoes and things. You'll not make any mistake sending it, will you?"

"No, no, Brice, it'll go straight as a rocket. Let me see, now. This letter'll be a week, then, 'lowin' 'em a week to start—"

"Loisy won't be a week startin', neighbor."

"Never mind, man. 'Lowin' 'em a week to get off, that's two weeks; then them emigrant trains is slow, say thirteen days on the road—that's another fourteen—four weeks; this is the fifth, ain't it? Twenty-eight and three's thirty-three; that'll be the third of next month, say. Now mind what I tell you, Brice—don't look for 'em a minute before the third—not a minute."

"'Pears like a long spell to wait, neighbor."

"I know it, man; but it will seem a thunderin' sight longer after you begin to look for 'em."

"I reckon you'r right. Say four weeks from to-day, then. Like enough you'll be goin' in."

"Yes, we'll hitch up and meet 'em at the train—you and me. The women'll have things kind o' snug again we get home. Four weeks'll soon slide along, man."

Joel went into the house, smiling softly.

"I had to be almost savage with the fellow, Barbara. The anxious seat's no place for a chap like him; it'd wear him to a toothpick in a week."

"But she might get here before that, you know, Joel."

"I'll fix that with the men at the depot. If she comes sooner we'll have her out here in a hurry. Wish to goodness she would."

The southern winter blossomed royally. Bees held high carnival in the nodding spikes of the white sage, and now and then a breath of perfume from the orange groves in the valley came up to mingle with the wild mountain odors. Brice worked every moment with feverish earnestness, and the pile of gnarled roots on the clearing grew steadily larger. With all her loveliness, nature failed to woo him. What was the exquisite languor of those days to him, but so many hours of patient waiting? The dull, hungry eyes saw nothing of the lavish beauty around them, looking through it all with restless yearning to where an emigrant train, with its dust and dirt and noisome breath crawled over miles of a alkali, or hung from dizzy heights.

"To-morrow's the 3rd, neighbor. I reckon she'll be 'long now direkly."

"That's a fact. What a rattler time is." The days had not been long to Joel. "We'll go in to-morrow, and if they don't come, you can stay and watch the trains awhile. She won't know you, Brice; you picked up amazingly."

"I think likely Loisy 'll know me if she comes."

But she did not come. Joel returned the following night alone, having left Brice at cheap lodgings near the station. Numberless passers-by must have noticed the patient watcher at the incoming trains the homely pathos of his face deepening day by day. The dull eyes growing a shade duller, and the awkward form a trifle more stooped with each succeeding disappointment. It was two weeks before he appeared on the mesa, walking wearily like a man under a load.

"I reckon there's something wrong, ma'am. I come out to see if your man 'ud write me a letter. I hadn't been long in Plattsville, but I worked a spell for a man named Yarnell; like enough he'd look it up a little. I ain't much at writin', an' I'd want it all writ out carefully like, you know." The man's voice had the old uncomplaining monotony.

Joel wrote the letter at once, making the most minute inquiry regarding Mrs. Brice, and giving every possible direction concerning her residence. Then Brice fell back into his old groove, working feverishly, in spite of Mrs. Brandt's kindly warning.

"I can't stop, ma'am; the setting round 'ud kill me."

The answer came at last, a business-like epistle, addressed to Joel. Mrs. Brice had left Plattsville about the time designated. Several of her neighbors remembered that a stranger, a well dressed man, had been at the house for nearly a week before her departure, and the two had gone away together, taking the western train. The writer regretted his inability to give further information, and closed with kindly inquiries concerning his former employee's health, and earnest commendation of him to Mr. Brandt.

Joel read the letter aloud, something—some sturdy uprightness of his own no doubt—blinding him to its significance.

"Will you read it again, neighbor, for I'm not over quick?"

The man's voice was a revelation full of an unutterable hurt, like the cry of some dumb, wounded thing.

Joel read it again, choking with indignation at every word.

"Thank ye, neighbor. I'll trouble you to write a line thankin' him; that's all."

He got up heavily, staggering a little as he crossed the floor, and went out into the yellow sunlight. There was the long, sun-kissed slope, the huge pile of twisted roots, the rude shanty with its clambering vines. The humming of the bees in the sage went on drowsily. Life, infinitely shrunken, was still life. A more cultured grief might have swooned or cried out. This man knew no such refuge; even the relief of indignation was denied him. None of the thousand wild impulses that come to men smitten like him flitted across his clouded brain. He only knew to take up his burden humbly and go on. If he had been wiser would he have known more?

No one spoke of the blow that had fallen upon him. The sympathy that met him came in the warmer clasp of hard hands and the softening of rough voices, none the worse certainly for its quietness. Alone with her husband, however, good Mrs. Brandt's wrath bubbled incessantly.

"It's a crying, burning, blistering shame, Joel, that's what it is! I suppose it's the Lord's doings, but I can't see through it."

"If the Lord's up to that kind of business, Barbara, I don't see no further use for the devil," was the dry response.—Joel's religion was as free from any theological timidity as a child's, and quite as simple.

These plain, honest folks never once

dreamed of intruding upon their neighbor's grief with poor suggestions of re-quit. Away in the city across the mountains men babbled of remedies at law. But this man's hurt was beyond the jurisdiction of any court. Day by day the hollow cough grew more frequent and the awkward step slower.—Nobody asked him to quit his work now. Even Mrs. Brandt shrank from the patient misery of his face when idle. He came into the kitchen one evening, choosing the old quiet corner, and following her with his eyes silently.

"Is there anything lacking, Brice?"

The woman came and stood beside him, the great wave of pity in her heart welling up to her voice and eyes.

"Nothin' ma'am, thank ye. I've been thinkin'," he went on speaking more rapidly than was his wont, "an' I dunno. You've know'n uv people gettin' wrong in their minds, I s'pose. They wuz mostly smart, knowin' chaps, wuzn't they?" the low monotonous voice growing almost sharp with earnestness. "I reckon you never knowed of any one not over bright gittin' out of his head?"

"I wouldn't think o' them things, Brice. Just go on, and do the best, and if there's any good, or any right, or any justice, you'll come out ahead; that's about all we know, but it's enough if we stick to it."

"I reckon you're right, ma'am. 'Pears sometimes tho' as if anything 'ud be better than the thinkin'."

Happily, it all came to an end one afternoon. Brice was at work on the ditch again, preferring the cheerful companionship of Joel and Bert Fox to his own thoughts, and Mrs. Brandt was alone in her kitchen. Two shadows fell across the worn threshold, and a weak, questioning voice brought the good woman to her door instantly.

"Good day to you, ma'am. Is there a man named Brice livin' nigh here anywhere?"

It was a woman's voice, a woman with some bits of tawdry ornament about her, and a round-eyed boy clinging to her skirts.

Mrs. Brandt brought them into the house, urging the stranger to rest a bit and get her breath.

"Thank you, ma'am; I'd like to be movin' on. Do you know if he's well. We're his wife and boy."

The woman told her story presently, when Mrs. Brandt had induced her to wait until the men came home—told it with no unnecessary words, and her listener made no comment.

"My brother come a week afore we was leavin' an' he helped us off and came as far as Omaha. He'd done well out in Nebraska, and he give me right smart o' money when we left. I took ill on the road—I disremember jest where—an' they left me at a town with a woman named Dixon. She took care o' me. I was out o' my head a long time an' when I come to, I told 'em to write to Brice, an' they writ, an' I reckon they took the name uv the place from the ticket. I was weak like fur a long spell, and they kept a writin and no word come, an' then I recollected about the town, it was Los Angeles on the ticket; and then I couldn't think of the place I'd sent the letters to before, and the thinkin' worried me, and the doctor said I must not try. So I jest waited, an' when I got to Los Angeles I kep' a asking for a man named Brandt, 'pears to me there's a Brandt way over beyond the Mission. An' then it came to me all at once that the place I'd writ to was San Gabriel Mission. An' I went there and they showed me your house. Then a man give us a lift on his team part o' the way, and we walked the rest. It didn't look very fur, but they say that mountains in deceivin'. There's somethin' kind o' grand about them. I reckon, it makes everything 'pear sort o' small."

Mrs. Brandt told Joel about it that evening.

"I just took the two o' 'em up to the shanty and opened the door, and you'd cried to see how pleased she was with everything. And I told her to kindle a fire and I'd fetch up a bite of supper.—And when I'd carried it up and left it, I just came back and stood on the step till I saw Brice comin' home. He was walking slow as if his feet was a dead weight, when he took hold o' the door he stopped a minute, looking over the valley kind of wistful and hopeless. I guess she heard him come, for she opened the door, and I turned around and come in, saying to myself:

"Barbara Brandt, you seeen your see. If Gods wants to look at that, he may, I suppose. He has a right to; nobody else has, that's certain."

Never Return.

It is said that one out of every four real invalids who go to Denver, Col., to recover health, never return to the East or South except as a corpse. The undertakers, next to the hotel keepers, have the most profitable business. This excessive mortality may be prevented and patients saved and cured under the care of friends and loved ones at home, if they will but use Hop Bitters in time. This we know. See other column.

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ASSIGNEE'S ACCOUNT.

The following Assignees accounts have been filed in the Prothonotary's of Perry county, and will be presented to the Court for confirmation on WEDNESDAY, the 30th day of October, 1878:

1. The account of Dr. D. B. Milliken, Assignee under deed of voluntary assignment for benefit of creditors of W. B. Diven, of the borough of Landisburg.
 2. The account of E. B. Wise, Assignee under deed of voluntary assignment for benefit of creditors of John C. Leonard, of Newport borough.
- D. MCKEY, Prothonotary.
Prothonotary's Office, New Bloomfield, September 30, 1878.

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All persons indebted to said estate are requested to make immediate payment and those having claims to present them duly authenticated for settlement to

I. J. HOLLAND, Executor.

July 26, 1878—6tpd.

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